

# **Thomas More, Thomas Cranmer and the King's Great Matter**

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# Abstract

The determination of King Henry VIII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon began a campaign that would culminate in the England's jurisdictional separation from the Pope and the Catholic Church. The catalyst for this determination was Henry's desire to secure the Tudor dynasty by producing a legitimate male heir to the throne, and while Henry's quest for an annulment may not have begun as an intentional challenge to papal authority, it was not long before it became an essential aspect of the annulment campaign.

This thesis assesses the contrasting responses of Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer to that campaign and analyses the extent to which their responses were shaped by their respective theologies. More and Cranmer had different paradigms of where authority lay within the church, which was a major factor in shaping their responses to the annulment campaign and the challenge to papal authority it entailed. More believed that papal authority was an essential aspect of the church and that kingly authority was not above the Pope's. Conversely, Cranmer believed that the Pope was an aspect of the corrupt nature of the Catholic Church and that the jurisdiction of Kingly authority included the spiritual as well as the temporal.

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# Introduction

Henry's campaign to secure a royal annulment from Catherine of Aragon had profound ramifications the English church, ramifications that are still felt today. Although Henry's campaign did not begin as an intentional challenge to the authority of the Pope or his ecclesiastical jurisdiction, it was not long before that challenge became a vital part of the campaign. As attempts to secure the annulment through traditional means failed, the idea of royal supremacy as a substitute for papal supremacy in matters of religion gradually developed. This not only culminated in the king replacing the Pope as the head of the church but, vitally for the English Reformation, provided Evangelicals with a foothold of power for their preachers and doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

On a professional level, Henry's campaign would prove to be the making or breaking of many careers. This is especially true for two men who were immensely affected by the annulment campaign: Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer. Their opposing responses meant that their lives and career trajectories played out very differently. At first, More gained a major promotion from Henry's campaign, but his response to Henry's escalating challenge to papal authority would derail his career and eventually lead to his martyrdom. Conversely, Cranmer's avid support for Henry and his campaign would propel his career forward, from Cambridge don to Archbishop of Canterbury.

Given their contrasting responses, it is easy to focus only on what separates them, but they did share some attributes. They were both learned, pious men with humanist backgrounds who had a strong loyalty towards their King. And for both Cranmer and More, theology was a primal influence in shaping their responses, as it did in other areas of their lives. So much so that they would both eventually become martyrs for their faith. That two reasonable educated

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 6.

men could look at the same information (the church councils, scripture, church tradition, Luther's writings) and form theologies that contradicted each other in many ways hints at the complex nature of theological beliefs.

For Cranmer and More, a major factor in shaping their responses would be their different ecclesiologies, specifically with regards to where authority lay within the church. These ecclesiologies were shaped not only by what evidence they considered to be doctrinally authoritative but their different understandings of kingship.

While there has been considerable research by historians into the lives and theology of More and Cranmer, these investigations have tended to deal with each man individually. This thesis seeks to understand the reasons for the differing responses of Cranmer and More, not merely on their own terms but also with reference to each other. While assessing the extent to which their respective theologies shaped their responses. This will be done through the examination and analysis of pertinent primary and secondary sources.

But before this can be done it is essential to explore the wider historical context in which Henry's annulment campaign occurred in order to understand the nature of its challenge to papal and church authority, beginning with the early Continental Reformation.

## **The Early Continental Reformation**

The sixteenth-century Reformation was a time of major religious and social upheaval throughout Europe that led to the permanent division of the Western Church. When Reformers began to question fundamental church doctrines, especially the nature of doctrinal and papal authority, this increasingly led to religious upheaval. And with that religious upheaval came social upheaval. The inter-dependent relationship that existed between the

governing systems of society and the church meant that when the authority of one was brought into question it easily led to the authority of the other being questioned as well, something that was demonstrated by the German Peasants' War of 1524-25. In this way debates between reformers and their opponents on theological issues had important implications for the authority of the church and secular rulers.

Before the Reformation papal authority had faced challenges but there had never before been a serious rival to its claims in the West. In earlier centuries there had been dissenting movements, some even sought to separate themselves from the Catholic Church, but none had been able to gather widespread support or maintain their resistance long-term. But as the decades went on, the Reformation continued to spread and take root throughout Europe. Soon the Catholic Church found itself faced with an unprecedented threat: for the first time in the West, there was a major religious rival to Catholic Church.

In the thirteenth century a movement of dualists known as the Cathars rose to prominence; rejecting monotheism, they believed that there existed two gods, one good and one evil.<sup>2</sup> While they attempted to form a counter-church, they experienced only limited success. The movement achieved its greatest popularity in southern France but by the mid-thirteenth century it had been crushed through intense persecution.<sup>3</sup>

In the fifteenth century there were two significant dissenting movements on the European continent: the Hussites and the Waldensians. Like the Cathars, the Hussites sought to form a counter-church but they subscribed to more orthodox doctrine. The beliefs they propagated included freedom in preaching, the cessation of churchmen wielding "worldly power," harsher punishments for clerics, and that the laity should receive communion in both kinds.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> G. R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 123-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-2.

<sup>4</sup> Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 72.

Although the Hussites experienced some success the movement remained geographically confined within the boundaries of Bohemia and at best represented only a “nagging problem” for the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup>

The Waldensians differed from both the Cathars and the Hussites in that they never succeeded in separating themselves from the Catholic Church. The Waldensians rejected various aspects of “official Church dogma and usual religious practice”; still, “while they condemned it in theory” they remained dependent on the Church in practice.<sup>6</sup> While they did, technically, spread over a much wider area than the Hussites, their impact was limited to small pockets of influence in certain areas.

None of these movements had a significant impact on papal authority, yet on the eve of the Reformation the authority had been relatively weakened by ecclesiastical and political developments. Ecclesiastically, the doctrinal authority of the Pope had been brought in to question as a consequence of the Great Schism.<sup>7</sup> During 1378-1417 there were two simultaneously elected Popes, and at one point there were three. The situation was eventually resolved with the Council of Constance, 1414, but still raised the question of whether ultimate authority on matters of doctrine resided with the Pope or the general council.<sup>8</sup> Alongside this, the political authority of the papacy was also in a state of relative decline, in part due to the increased independence secular rulers displayed in papal affairs.<sup>9</sup> There was a rising sense of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *The Division of Christendom: Christianity in the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron, *European Reformation*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

nationalism that was undermining the idea of a universal Christendom under the Pope.<sup>10</sup> This, among other effects, hampered the ability of Popes to suppress heresy.

Nonetheless, all of this does not mean that as Europe entered the sixteenth-century the religious authority of the Catholic Church was being widely questioned. The debate over ultimate authority was far more a debate about governing structures of the church than it was, if it was at all, a debate over whether or not the Catholic Church itself had supreme religious authority in the West. Similarly, secular rulers asserting political independence does not mean that they were also seeking religious independence from the Pope or the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, secular rulers were not seeking to establish a church of their own separate from Catholicism. Catholicism was clearly not at its strongest but it was not necessarily the case, as Protestants would later argue, that the religious situation was one primed for change.

### **The Nine-Five Theses**

The beginning of the Reformation is usually associated with Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg church door on 31 October 1517.<sup>12</sup> But this action in itself was not his way of laying down the gauntlet against the Pope or the Catholic Church. The catalyst for the controversy was not that Luther posted his theses on the church door but that he sent the theses to Archbishop Albrecht, who had a vested interest in promoting the Pope's indulgences.<sup>13</sup> The ninety-five theses were chiefly a summary of popular arguments against

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<sup>10</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Although political and religious affairs were so intertwined that it is difficult, or even unhelpful, to attempt to distinguish between the two.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron, *European Reformation*, 459.

<sup>13</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 72; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 121; Carl Truman, "Luther and the Reformation in Germany," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2000), 78; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 33. Albrecht relied on the indulgences as a source of revenue to repay the debt he had acquired when he had

the sale of papal indulgences and a call for an academic disputation to take place in order to clarify the theology of the practice of indulgences.<sup>14</sup>

In general, scholars argue that the theses were not of a revolutionary nature, emphasizing that the form of the document was normal for academic disputations.<sup>15</sup> Carter Lindberg underlines the pastoral motivation behind the theses: Luther was operating within his legitimate authority, to “which he was entitled under this doctoral oath,” to call for an academic disputation on indulgences.<sup>16</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch highlights the theological continuity of the theses with Catholic theology, as it assumed “the existence of Purgatory, works of merit and the value of penance to a priest.”<sup>17</sup> He argues that “sharp terms” were appropriate polemics designed to promote academic debate.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Hans Hillerbrand points out that, unusually, there was no indication of when or where the proposed disputation would occur.<sup>19</sup> He argues that the disputation was a secondary concern for Luther and his intent was to “fire a shot across the bow” about what he viewed as a practice that “endangered the souls of simple believers.”<sup>20</sup> However, that does not mean that Luther’s intention was to attack papal authority. While some “sounded shrill tones about the church and hierarchy,

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purchased papal permission to increase the number of sees that he possessed. Although Luther also sent copies of his theses to friends outside Wittenberg, which enlarged the circle of people who knew about them, it was the transmission of the theses to Albrecht that led Rome to commence official heresy proceedings against Luther.

<sup>14</sup> Cameron, *European Reformation*, 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 69-70; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 33; MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 73-74.

<sup>17</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 124.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

including the Pope,” other theses were essentially supportive of the papacy.<sup>21</sup> Still, as Patrick Collinson points out, Luther’s initial motivation soon became irrelevant as they were passed to the printers and reached the “public domain all over Germany” both in Latin and in German.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of Luther’s initial intentions in posting the theses they soon began to affect society in a way which was beyond his control.

The response of Pope Leo X was initially low-key.<sup>23</sup> Viewing the controversy as merely another “squabble among monks,” he ordered the Augustinian order to deal with Luther at their meeting in Heidelberg.<sup>24</sup> However, one of the chief targets against whom Luther wrote his theses, Johannes Tetzel, was a Dominican, meaning that from the beginning the “squabble” was not limited to one order, a fact that contributed to the matter going beyond the meeting in Heidelberg and leading to official heresy proceedings.

When Luther was summoned to appear in Rome for a trial within 60 days the controversy dramatically escalated from an issue within the religious orders to a “major confrontation over national and church authority.”<sup>25</sup> The reason for the issue of church authority occupying such a central role was, in part, due to the efforts of some of Luther’s opponents. In their attempts to prove that Luther’s theses were heretical, the question of the Pope’s authority as “defender of the church’s rule of faith” was introduced, specifically by Sylvester Prierias and Tetzel.<sup>26</sup> Thus “questions of papal power came to dominate” the controversy, not primarily because Luther’s theses attacked papal power directly but because they “queried a practice of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 50-51.

<sup>23</sup> Truman, "Reformation in Germany," 80.

<sup>24</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 269.

<sup>25</sup> Truman, "Reformation in Germany," 81.

<sup>26</sup> David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 27.

church,” and Prierias and Tetzel viewed an attack on practices that were under papal patronage as constituting an attack on the Pope himself.<sup>27</sup> The final result of the controversy was, of course, Luther being officially declared a heretic and excommunicated in the bull *Exsurge Domine*, issued in December 1520.

The Catholic response to Luther was not limited to the trial proceedings but also involved a polemical attack on Luther, with his opponents attempting to refute his theology and, with the exception of Johann Eck, attempting to secure his condemnation.<sup>28</sup> Initially his main literary opponents were Konrad Wimpina, Tetzel, Prierias and Eck. Though they diverged widely on why they believed Luther was in error in his attack on indulgences, they were unified in their perception and arguments against Luther’s limiting of papal jurisdiction in his theses.<sup>29</sup> As the controversy reached wider audiences the number of Luther’s literary opponents increased. An important aspect of this battle was the literary battle between Eck and Andreas Karlstadt and Luther that led to a debate being held at Leipzig.

Luther was disappointed with the event and described the debate as a “tragedy” in his letter to Spalatin, chaplain to Frederick the Wise.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the event proved significant because of the effect that it had on the development of his theology. It was during this debate that, for the first time, Luther publicly announced that “in the last analysis his sole authority in matters of faith was the Word of God” and that some councils and the Pope were capable of error.<sup>31</sup> Here, Luther was taking a significant step outside traditional views of doctrinal authority and he was no longer questioning the orthodoxy of a church practice but the fundamental

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20 and 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, "Letter from Luther to Spalatin Concerning the Leipzig Debate," in *Career of the Reformer I*, vol. 31, *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 325.

<sup>31</sup> Harold Grimm, *Career of the Reformer I*, 311.

authorities that were used to establish orthodoxy. The debate also resulted in the transference of Luther's attention from being primarily engaged with "questions of justification" to a "concern with authority in the Church."<sup>32</sup>

Over this time Luther's view of papal authority changed drastically. The supportive attitude implied in the theses changed to an attitude of hostility and rejection. For example, Thesis 51 states that "Christians are to be taught that if the Pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bone of his sheep."<sup>33</sup> Before the debate in Leipzig in 1519, Luther claimed that papal primacy had not been established by God, although it could still be argued that it was in "accordance with God's will, because the Pope is the de facto head of the church and the powers that be are ordained of God."<sup>34</sup> But a year later he was willing to directly attack papal authority: "the Christian nobility should set itself against the Pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom."<sup>35</sup> In the beginning Luther saw the problem as being the abuses of certain individuals but soon he came to see the source of the problem as lying with the head of the church and he had begun zealously to challenge the authority of that head.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> G. R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 106.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, "Ninety Five Theses," in *Career of the Reformer I*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the German Estate," in *The Christian in Society I*, vol., 44, *Luther's Works*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 158.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 232-3.

Aside from his challenge to papal authority Luther also challenged the superiority and authority of the priesthood. The key example of this was in his treatise *The Babylonian Captivity*. It provoked an intense reaction from his opponents.<sup>37</sup> This was, in part, caused by Luther's theology of the "priesthood of all believers" that was contained in the treatise and which united the issue of the "sacramental office of the ordained priest" with the issue of "hierarchical order."<sup>38</sup> Part of the central issue was how spiritual power or authority was distributed.<sup>39</sup> Luther's opponents argued for a more monarchical distribution of power.<sup>40</sup> They claimed the Pope was needed in order to preserve both unity of faith and pure doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, Luther argued for a more egalitarian distribution of power, his doctrine of priesthood-of-all-believers removed the traditional distinction between laity and clergy, stating that the clergy were not a privileged elite. Luther argued that through union with Christ all Christians are priests and that the ordained ministry did not have an exclusive power, merely a license to utilise a power "which belongs to all Christians equally."<sup>42</sup> Catholics claimed that only an ordained priest was capable of transmitting sacramental grace; thus in removing the traditional distinction between the laity and the clergy Luther was jeopardising people's means of attaining salvation.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike his opponents, Luther believed that an educated laity were capable of understanding and making their own decisions regarding theology.<sup>44</sup> His opponents, viewing the laity as

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<sup>37</sup> Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 145-6.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 218.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>44</sup> Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 27, 43 and 87-88.

inferior as a whole, did not distinguish between the educated and the uneducated members of the laity; both were “unqualified” to make their own decisions in theological matters and to encourage them to do so was to encourage them to believe things that were outside of orthodox doctrine.<sup>45</sup> Luther, therefore, was seen as dangerous not only because he challenged papal and church authority but that he did so in the public sphere. The wide distribution of his writings meant that he was leading many people astray from the “true faith.” In doing so, he was seen as committing a seditious act that not only undermined the church’s authority but placed people’s salvation at risk.<sup>46</sup>

With the invention of the printing press, Luther’s message was able to spread quickly throughout Europe in a relatively short period of time. It found a place not only within the clergy and academic circles, but also with the general population, who saw a strong social message within it. His message brought some unexpected results when people saw implications in his writings that he had not anticipated. The most notorious example was the Peasants’ War, as “Europe’s most massive and widespread popular uprising before the 1789 French Revolution.”<sup>47</sup> While peasant uprisings were hardly novel, Luther’s message provided the peasants with a new theological basis for their protests, which introduced a new and unstable element into the situation. This theology was a fundamental factor in the uprising in “three different ways: it was a precipitant; it was a binding force; and it provided legitimisation.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, his theology served to enflame the situation and it strengthened the peasants during the uprising by giving them a common ideology and a basis for seeing their cause as justified. This event also shows how the theology of the Reformation

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 42 and 86-87.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 27 and 43.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>48</sup> Collinson, *Reformation*, 146-7.

could become infused into already existing dynamics of a cultural context, intensifying certain elements and complicating situations by adding new ones.

Very soon other centres for reform were established. Alongside Wittenberg, Zurich was a centre for the Evangelical movement and was the first place where the “transition from theological pronouncements to religious and societal change” was undertaken.<sup>49</sup> There Huldrych Zwingli worked with the civil authorities in attempts to reform first Zurich, and then the rest of the Swiss Confederation. Zwingli’s relationship with secular authorities was different from Luther’s. While both had to persuade their respective secular authority, the process for doing so and the dynamics involved in their relationship were different. Luther’s ability to institute reforms was dependent upon a “supportive prince,” while Zwingli’s ability to institute reforms was dependent on his ability to persuade the civil authorities.<sup>50</sup>

From the beginning the Reformation in Zurich involved the civic authorities. The initial step towards reform was the first disputation that occurred in January 1523 and resulted in the Zurich clergy being ordered by the town council to preach only from scripture.<sup>51</sup> What was unusual about the proceeding was what was clearly a theological dispute was judged by the town magistrates rather than by the church. In convening the disputation the civil authorities implied their role as “arbiter in matters of religion,” a role traditionally reserved for church authorities.<sup>52</sup> The disputation was not meant as a decisive break from Rome, with representatives from the Bishop of Constance attending. Still, the representatives acted as “observers rather than participants in the disputation” and the Bishop of Constance himself protested the affair, arguing that if communities could decide for themselves, outside of

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<sup>49</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 165.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-71; MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 145.

<sup>52</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 98.

church authority, what “constituted the authentic Christian faith” the result would be chaos.<sup>53</sup> The civil authorities claimed they were acting to prevent chaos and even ordered, in 1523, the cessation of argumentative preaching for the “sake of liberating the city.”<sup>54</sup> Thus civil authorities justified their adoption of traditional church authority by claiming that it was necessary to order to maintain social order.

The Zurich Reformation began to spread quickly throughout the Swiss Confederation and South Germany with congregations being converted in Berne, Constance, Frankfurt, Ulm, Lindau, Augsburg, Memmingen, and Strasbourg.<sup>55</sup> The expansion of Zwingli’s reform movement led to war with the other, Catholic, cantons of the Swiss Confederation in 1529, which lasted until the armistice in June of that year.<sup>56</sup> Even so, war broke out again when “Zwingli and the Zurich leadership” imposed an “economic blockade on the Catholic Inner States.”<sup>57</sup> The subsequent defeat in 1531 was the “end of any attempt to impose the Reformation by force” in the Swiss Confederation.<sup>58</sup> In Zurich, the Reformation was now taken over by Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli having been killed in battle.

The Evangelical movement did not have a centralised authority; rather, specific regions and people were prominent at certain times. Given this situation it is not surprising that religious diversity soon emerged. During the early Reformation the key authority figures on doctrine were Zwingli and Luther. While both Zwingli and Luther agreed on the doctrinal authority of the Bible and on the principle of salvation through justification by faith alone, they disagreed

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>54</sup> Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 187.

<sup>55</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 171.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 173.

on Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Zwingli saw the Eucharist as being a symbolic, memorial ceremony and Luther, though he rejected the idea of transubstantiation, argued that the sacraments still communicated the "presence and promise of God."<sup>59</sup> This disagreement over the Eucharist became the crucial dividing issue between them. It was the major barrier preventing the Evangelical Reformation from becoming a unified phenomenon and instead it diverged into two different traditions, Lutheran and Reformed. Over time, as attempts to unify the Protestant Reformation failed, the differences between these traditions increased and intensified so that by the end of the sixteenth century members of these different traditions could be as hostile to each other as they were to Catholics.<sup>60</sup>

In England, the experience of the Reformation was very different. Luther's treatises first entered England through the German merchant community in London, but the English printing press market was not only small, but was prodigiously concentrated in the capital city making it easily regulated by official authorities.<sup>61</sup> This meant the Evangelicals were not able to utilise it in spreading their ideas the way they had in Europe. The first step towards the eventual success of the Reformation in England was not made by Evangelicals but by Henry VIII's determination to annul his royal marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This context will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 147; Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 184.

<sup>60</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 274.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 30; Andrew Pettegree, "Printing and the Reformation: The English Exception," in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 167.

## The Historiography of the English Reformation

Any investigation into the history of the English Reformation must include *The English Reformation* by A. G. Dickens. This work represents a watershed in Reformation studies.<sup>62</sup>

Examining the Reformation from the perspective general populace, while still acknowledging the influence of the state, it served to shift the focus away from the English Reformation as an act of state and move it towards the Reformation as a popular movement.<sup>63</sup>

To begin with, there has been a reversal of opinion regarding the state of English Catholicism. As the 1960s came to its end, the history of the Reformation was still been told from the perspective of an instrumental history.<sup>64</sup> Thus, it was thought that on the eve of the Reformation the religious situation in England was one primed for change. The situation could be compared to a “live volcano: a lava-bed of discontent hissing and bubbling with increasing vehemence before erupting with explosive and predictable force.”<sup>65</sup> This theory continued to hold weight with historians until the rise of revisionism.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick Collinson, "The English Reformation, 1945-1955," in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London: Routledge, 1997), 341.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Marshall, "Introduction," in *Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640*, ed. Peter Marshall, Arnold Readers in History (London: Arnold, 1997), 1; Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Changing Historical Perspectives on the English Reformation: The Last Fifty Years," in *The Church on Its Past* ed. Peter D. Clarke and Charlotte Methuen, Studies in Church History (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 292.

<sup>64</sup> "Changing Historical Perspectives " 285. Past events were used to validate the present

<sup>65</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964), 326; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> This is not to suggest that revisionism represents a perspective entirely free from instrumental history. The revisionist perspective of the Reformation has been viewed as a Roman Catholic “backlash against Dickens’ supposed Protestant bias” or even as a “new confessionalist” viewpoint. While it is true that several key revisionist historians, such as Duffy, Scarisbrick and Rex, are practising Catholics, this is not always the case.

In many ways, revisionism stemmed from Dickens' ground-breaking book, *The English Reformation*, and carried on his focus on the Reformation at grass roots level. However, the result of historians conducting specialised studies on a number of localities and topics was a rejection of the previous assessment of English Catholicism.<sup>67</sup> Revisionist historians, such as Haigh, Rex, Scarisbrick and Duffy, not only deny that Catholicism was in a state of decay during this time, they make the case for a strong church with a flourishing religious culture.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the essence of revisionism is epitomised by Scarisbrick's statement that "on the whole, English men and women did not want the Reformation and most of them were slow to accept it when it came."<sup>69</sup> Returning to the geological metaphor, instead of an active volcano, revisionism explains the course that the Reformation took was due to a "set of pre-existing fault-lines, which helped to determine the way the religious landscape would fracture when it was hit by an earthquake, which no one was particularly expecting to happen."<sup>70</sup>

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Haigh has gone out of his way to highlight the fact that he not a Catholic in either belief or practice. But even if it is the case that revisionism has been affected by the confessional identities of its historians, it is naive to suppose that any work of history has not been affected in some way by the historian who wrote it or that it is possible to approach history from a position of utter objectivity. And, as Marshall points out, the "diversity of committed perspectives can enrich our understanding of the religious change that took place in this period." (Collinson, "English Reformation," 347; Marshall, "Impact," 3-4.)

<sup>67</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 295; Marshall, "Impact," 1-2; Christopher Harper-Bill, "Dean Colet's Convocation Sermon and Pre-Reformation Church in England," in *Impact of the English Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall, Arnold Readers in History (London: Arnold, 1997), 17-18.

<sup>68</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 9; Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 295.

<sup>69</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 249; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1984), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 25.

However, the problem is that the more the strength of English Catholicism among the general populace is asserted, the harder it becomes to explain why the Reformation occurred at all.<sup>71</sup> Although the state is attributed with instigating the Reformation, Tudor monarchy, though strong, is no longer considered capable of imposing its will on an unwilling populace.<sup>72</sup> And it is in answering this conundrum that revisionist historians begin to differ, disagreeing over such factors as the significance of Lollardy or how traditional Catholic piety held up under state disapproval.<sup>73</sup> Still, it is debatable whether revisionism offers a satisfactory answer for the overall success of the Reformation.<sup>74</sup> A fact which suggests there is still more to learn about the intricate facets of this area of research.

The next significant development in historiography pertains to the role that Henry is ascribed in affecting the course of the Reformation. There is a debate that exists among historians regarding whether it was Henry or his chief advisors, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and then Thomas Cromwell, who were the primary forces in shaping the annulment campaign. It was G. R. Elton who first argued that although Henry had the power to create or depose ministers, he did not have total control over his government and was often able to be manipulated by his councillors.<sup>75</sup> Henry may have named the destination, an annulment from Catherine, but it was Cromwell who chose the course the annulment campaign took and was responsible for the break with Rome, while Henry, was from the beginning, reluctant to attack papal

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<sup>71</sup> MacCulloch, "Changing Historical Perspectives " 293; Collinson, *Reformation*, 106-7.

<sup>72</sup> Collinson, *Reformation*, 108-9.

<sup>73</sup> Marshall, "Impact," 2.

<sup>74</sup> Collinson, *Reformation*, 108-9.

<sup>75</sup> Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986), 116-9; Collinson, "English Reformation," 339.

authority.<sup>76</sup> Ives agrees that Henry was vulnerable to manipulation and even relied on those around him for reassurance and ideas, but he stresses that Henry was nobody's puppet and his "will remained dominant."<sup>77</sup> One of the major critics of this view is Scarisbrick who asserts that Henry already held the reins during Wolsey's time and while Cromwell may have worked out the details, it was Henry who chose the overall course to be taken.<sup>78</sup>

This debate was at an impasse until progress was made by Murphy, who used official propaganda to show that from 1527 Henry consistently favoured a tactic that would inevitably result in a confrontation with the papacy.<sup>79</sup> This is a strong argument against Elton's theory that Henry did not hold maintain governmental control. It demonstrates that the instigation of anti-papal tactics did not coincide with the fall of Wolsey and the rise of Cromwell but were present from the beginning. As such, it has been the assumption in this thesis that it was Henry who was the primary force in shaping the course that the annulment campaign took.

Henry is not the only figure who has undergone changes in how he is perceived; Thomas More's image has received quite a battering from historians in the last half century. Ridley considered More to be a "strange, tortured, cruel man" and a "fanatical counter-revolutionary."<sup>80</sup> And investigations into his public career, in particular his role as inquisitor, have led revisionists to conclude that the real Thomas More is far removed from the popular

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<sup>76</sup> O'Day, *Debate* 119-21; Virginia Murphy, "The Literature and Propaganda of Henry's First Divorce," in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 141.

<sup>77</sup> E. W. Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 104.

<sup>78</sup> O'Day, *Debate* 128-31.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 131; Murphy, "Literature and Propaganda," 138 and 58; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 42-43.

<sup>80</sup> Jasper Godwin Ridley, *The Statesman and the Fanatic: Thomas Wolsey and Thomas More* (London: Constable, 1982), 283 and 93.

perception of him as a humanist saint.<sup>81</sup> Central to this negative analysis are More's polemical writings, which are viewed as evidence of More's "inner history" during this time, of his "intellectual, psychological and spiritual odyssey."<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, the apparent dichotomy between the humanist who wrote *Utopia* and the persecutor of heretics is to this day perceived as a schizophrenia by historians, and attempting to resolve it is the main theme behind Ackroyd's biography.<sup>83</sup> Marius argues that More was driven by the inner conflict of his desire for perfection against his enmeshment in the world.<sup>84</sup> While Alistair Fox asserts that More's ideals were damaged by his experiences and maps a growing despair and intellectual deterioration that he sees as being evident throughout his written works<sup>85</sup> However, as Rex points out, such conclusions rely on the risky assumption that a "wordsmith as sensitive and masterful as More was would at any point in a written work not be in overall control of what he was setting down."<sup>86</sup> Conversely, Headley argues that what is needed to make sense of More is a change of focus. Emphasising the importance of the

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<sup>81</sup> Brendan Bradshaw, "The Controversial Sir Thomas More," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 4 (1985): 536.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 546

<sup>83</sup> John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 15 and 124-5

<sup>84</sup> Archibald Young, "Revising the Revisionists: Modern Criticism of Thomas More," *Moreana* 35, no. 133 (1998): 68-69; Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (London: Dent, 1985), XXII-XXIII. Marius goes as far to argue that his martyrdom was an "act of self-validation." While he did everything possible to avoid it, it became his only option if "he was to see any coherence between the course of his life and its end." He adds that as "with all martyrs who are not insane it may be argued that he died not for what he believed but for what he wanted to believe."

<sup>85</sup> Alistair Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 125-7; Young, "Revising the Revisionists," 72; Bradshaw, "Controversial More," 539.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Rex, "Thomas More and the Heretics: Statesman or Fanatic?," in *The Cambridge Companion to More*, ed. George Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102.

spiritual dimension of More, Headley argues that the focus should be on More's devotional writings rather than his humanist or polemical works.<sup>87</sup> Headley's argument is also an example of the final historiographical development is also the most significant for this thesis, the re-emergence of the importance of theology in understanding history.

Although revisionism has enlarged the focus of historical studies from national perspectives to include local and international perspectives, there was still little appreciation for ideas.<sup>88</sup> This was nothing new. Ideological bias against religion finds its roots in Marxist historiography which stressed that theology was merely a "religious cover for the fundamental material and economic causes of the Reformation."<sup>89</sup> In the past Reformation studies have only dealt only lightly with theology, preferring to view the past through the lens of the economy, society or politics.<sup>90</sup> Elton often ignores religion as an important factor and works by revisionists such as Haigh and Sacrisbrick have included little appreciation for the ideas of the Reformation.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, social history views theology as only one factor among the communal social and political goals which "stimulated collective behaviour."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> John Headley, "John Guy's Thomas More: On the Dimensions of Political Biography," *Moreana* 37, no. 143/144 (2000): 91. As Headley highlights, More's devotional writings were completed throughout his life, while his humanist and polemical writings are neatly confined to two distinct periods of his life, 1510 to 1520 and 1523 to 1533 respectively.

<sup>88</sup> MacCulloch, "Changing Historical Perspectives " 292 and 301; O'Day, *Debate* 133-4.

<sup>89</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Alec Ryrie, "Introduction: The European Reformations," in *Palgrave Advances in the European Reformations*, ed. Alec Ryrie (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 5.

<sup>91</sup> O'Day, *Debate* 131-2; MacCulloch, "Changing Historical Perspectives " 292-3. It should be noted that Dickens has been an exception to this trend and can aptly be dubbed as a religious historian.

<sup>92</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 19.

Fortunately, this has begun to change. In the last quarter century there has been a renewed focus on, not only theology, but ideas in general in Reformation histories and martyrologies.<sup>93</sup> Works have begun to give a generous and detailed analysis of theology, emphasising the importance of particular doctrines and the “power of religious belief in this period.”<sup>94</sup> One notable example of this is Gregory’s work where he argues that abstracting social dimensions from religious life or reducing religion to a merely a societal dimension is to “commit an anachronistic blunder foreign to these people’s experience.”<sup>95</sup> This thesis is itself a part of the re-emergence of the importance of religion and theology as it seeks to understand the way in which Cranmer’s and More’s actions were shaped by their theological beliefs.

This thesis required three areas of research: the English Reformation during the first decades of the sixteenth-century, Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer during the pertinent years of their lives. That is to say: More during his later years and Cranmer during the years prior to and surrounding his appointment to Archbishop of Canterbury.

After this, there are several key works by revisionist historians that examine the state of the church and the extent of the challenges it faced. Both Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* and J. J. Scarisbrick’s *The Reformation and the English People* examine the religion of the general populace and how it was affected by the Reformation being imposed on them by the state. Christopher Haigh’s work, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* also does this but goes on to include Henry’s annulment campaign. All these works argue for the strength of Catholicism

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<sup>93</sup> Ryrie, "Introduction," 5; MacCulloch, "Changing Historical Perspectives " 301.

<sup>94</sup> Ryrie, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>95</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 119.

among the poulace and the reluctance to convert to Protestantism. Against this, G. W.

Bernard's *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability before the Break with Rome* examines the same area but, as the title would suggest, argues for the evidence of the weaknesses of Catholicism's hold on the people as well as the evidence of the strength of its hold. While these the former works do, by no means, argue that Catholicism was perfect, Bernard's work is essentially different in its reassertion of the significance of anticlerical feelings among the laity.

Next, Anne Hudson's work, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffe Texts and Lollard History* utilises untapped sources to explore the impact of Lollardy. It represents the "ultimate authority" on the relationship between the textual tradition of Wycliffe and Lollardy that existed during the decades before the Reformation.<sup>96</sup> This work is supplemented by J.A.F Thomson's "Orthodox Religion and the Origins of Lollardy" and Margret Aston's *Lollards and Reformer: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*. Both of these examine the impact that Lollardy had on paving the way for the conversion of early Evangelicals.

Meanwhile, there are also a number of works that examine the place of Henry and the annulment campaign's in the English Reformation. Patrick Collinson does this in the English section on his book, *The Reformation*, attesting to the vital importance of the absence of a legitimate male heir as the catalyst not only for the annulment campaign but the resulting Reformation. G. R. Elton's *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* looks at Cromwell's role in inaugurating the Reformation, arguing that he was the key force behind it, using the annulment campaign to his advantage. Conversely, Scarisbrick's *Henry VIII*; Bernard's *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church*; and, Virginia Murphey's article, "The Literature and Propaganda of

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<sup>96</sup> Collinson, "English Reformation," 344.

Henry's First Divorce," all contest Elton's conclusion, asserting that Henry remained in control of the direction that policies took.

Of course there are other works that deal with specific aspects of the Reformation. J. Duncan M. Derrett's article, "The Affairs of Richard Hunne and Friar Standish," analyses these two court cases and the extent to which they represented a precursor to later events. Andrew Pettegree's work, "Printing and the Reformation: The English Exception," highlights the unique factors of the printing situation in England, particularly London, and demonstrates why this resulted in the printing press not having the impact that it did in other Reformations of other countries. Richard Rex's article, "The Crisis of Obedience: God's Word and Henry's Reformation," examines the role that the political theology of obedience had within Henrican religion and its relationship with William Tyndale's Evangelical work *Obedience of the Christian Man*. E. W. Ives' *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy* includes an assessment of Anne's influence on the annulment campaign and on the Evangelical cause. Finally, Henry Kelly's *The Matrimonial Trials of Henry VIII* provides in-depth analysis of the arguments used during the annulment and the process through which it was finally attained.

While many of these works include pertinent information regarding Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer, other works deal directly with them. More is a rich field of research. Aside from *Moreana*, an entire journal that is devoted to him, he has been the subject of numerous biographies. Of particular note is Richard Marius's *Thomas More: A Biography*, a distinguished work that served to refocus the debate regarding More's work as an inquisitor, from simply ascertaining what More's actions to explaining them as well.<sup>97</sup> The modern ones include Jasper Ridley's *The Statesman and the Fanatic: Thomas Wolsey and Thomas More*; Peter Ackroyd's *The life of Thomas More*; and John Guy's *The Public Career of Thomas More*, a work that was superseded by his next, exemplary, biography, simply titled, *Thomas*

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<sup>97</sup> Guy, *More*, 15 and 113-4.

*More*. Other works regarding More's responses include Elton's article "Sir Thomas More and the Opposition to Henry VIII" that examines More's response in the political sphere and Rex's work "Sir Thomas More and the Heretics: Statesman or Fanatic?" that reevaluates the modern assessment of More's polemical works against heresy.

There are also several works that deal directly with his theology. Brendan Bradshaw, in "The Controversial Sir Thomas More," analyses and uses the theological content of More's polemical works to critique the revisionist assessment of More. Richard Marius, in "Thomas More and the Early Church Fathers," examines how More used the Fathers as a source of theological authority. Also notable is Brad Gregory's *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, that contains a valuable assessment of More's martyrdom.

Brain Grogan's *The Common Corps of Christendom: Ecclesiological Themes in the Writings of Sir Thomas More* argues that the common corps of Christendom served as a key focal point around which More built his ecclesiology, something which was a fundamental aspect of his theology. Further assessments of More's ecclesiology are conducted by Francis Oakley in "Headley, Marius and the Matter of Thomas More's Conciliarism" and Philip Sheldrake in "Authority and Consensus in Thomas More's Doctrine of the Church. Finally, John Headley in "John Guy's Thomas More: On the Dimension of Political Biography" assesses Guy's biography while demonstrating the need for historians to place greater emphasis on the affect of More's theology when attempting to understand his actions.

The final area of research was Cranmer during the early years of his royal service, an area that has received little scholarly attention in comparison to More. The assessment of Cranmer heavily relies on Diarmaid MacCullough's comprehensive and erudite biography, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*. Also extremely helpful was *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar*, a collection of articles edited by Paul Ayris and David Selwn, which offers important insights into Cranmer's theology and his response to the annulment campaign. In particular, an article

by Paul Ayris, “Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince: New Evidence from His Collections of Lawe” is especially useful as it provides in-depth analysis of Cranmer’s beliefs surrounding the papacy and the king. Also useful was John Guy’s work “Thomas Cromwell and the Intellectual Origins of the Henrician Revolution” that explores the work done by theological propagandists for the annulment campaign, and the role that Cranmer had among them. Finally, these works are supplemented by modern biographies such as Geoffrey Bromiley’s *Thomas Cranmer: Theologian*, Jasper Ridley’s *Thomas Cranmer* and Peter Brooks’ *Cranmer in Context: Documents from the English Reformation*.

## **Thesis structure**

All these reviewed works have informed this thesis, which starts by assessing the historical context and nature of Henry’s campaign to annul his first marriage. Chapter One assess the historical precedents of challenges to the authority of English Catholicism before Henry’s annulment campaign. It then proceeds to examine the campaign itself, where challenging papal authority quickly became a central aspect of the campaign, something that is essential to understanding More and Cranmer’s response to it.

After this, attention is turned to towards studying the two central figures of this thesis, More and Cranmer. Chapter Two analyses More’s response to the developments of the annulment campaign, chiefly focusing on the non-theological influences that shaped his actions. It then moves on to focus on More’s theology, assessing his views on papal authority, the royal supremacy, doctrinal authority, ecclesiology and conscience, while attempting to understand his beliefs of where authority lay in the church.

Chapter Three examines Cranmer’s response to the developments of the annulment campaign, again mainly focusing on the non-theological influences that impacted his actions but also compares and contrasts Cranmer’s actions with those of More. Cranmer’s theology is

then analysed, juxtaposing his paradigm on where authority lay within the church against More's. All of this is an attempt to understand how their differing theologies shaped their respective responses to the annulment campaign.

# Chapter One: The English Reformation and the Challenge to Authority

The catalyst for the beginning of the English Reformation was the determination of Henry VIII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.<sup>1</sup> Henry wished to secure the continuance of the Tudor dynasty by producing a male heir, but although Catherine had become pregnant multiple times, only one child, Mary, survived past infancy. By 1527 Henry still did not have a male heir and Catherine was past forty, so further children were but a negligible possibility.<sup>2</sup> This situation was the prime motivation behind Henry's request to Pope Clement VII that he annul his current marriage. If the Pope declared his marriage invalid then Henry would be free to marry another woman who could bear him a legitimate male heir. The particular woman that he had chosen to fill this role was Anne Boleyn.

As attempts to secure the annulment through traditional means failed, the idea of royal supremacy as a substitute for papal supremacy in matters of religion gradually developed. This eventually resulted in the England's jurisdictional separation from the papacy and the beginnings of religious reform. As far as religion was concerned, England became an independent state, with the king replacing the Pope as the head of the church. This did not entail a fully Evangelical Reformation during Henry's reign, however, as the king was often a reluctant reformer. The result was that official religious policy was often in a state of flux between Catholicism and the Evangelical movements of continental Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Though the language used at the time was "divorce," a divorce did not simply entail the termination of a marriage; it was the judgement that the whole marriage itself was illegitimate because it had not been "validly contracted." Richard Rex, *The Tudors* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2002), 54. To avoid confusion with the contemporary meaning of the word, the language of "annulment" is used instead of "divorce."

<sup>2</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 301.

Henry's campaign for an annulment may not have begun as an intentional challenge to papal authority but it was not long before that challenge became a vital part of the annulment campaign. Understanding this challenge is an essential part of understanding Henry's campaign as well as Cranmer and More's response to it.

## **The Extent of Early Challenges to Pre-Reformation Religion**

The state-sanctioned attack against the jurisdictional authority of the English Church in the 1530s was not the first challenge that it had faced. Indeed, the church faced three main challenges in the decades leading up to the English Reformation: anticlericalism, Lollardy, and the continental Reformation. To different degrees, each helped pave the way for the Reformation, as well as Henry's annulment campaign, and they provide necessary context for understanding Cranmer and More's response to that campaign.

Of these challenges, the significance of anticlericalism, is perhaps the most contentious and has attracted much debate among historians. Anticlericalism was once viewed as a major contributor to the Reformation's eventual success among the general populace. This theory, pioneered by A. G. Dickens, argued that the privileges of the clergy and their abuses of power led to a widespread anticlerical feeling among the laity that in turn would play a vital role in the people's acceptance of the Reformation.<sup>3</sup> Dickens attested, "whether the Reformation be envisaged as an act of state or a movement of thought, it was based upon the grudges of laymen against priestly wealth and power, against the daily miracle of transubstantiation from which clerical privilege seemed to derive, against the tyranny of the church courts, against the

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<sup>3</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 326; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 14.

lucrative exploitation of purgatory and pardons, against tithes, the universal and incessant bone of contention.”<sup>4</sup>

This anticlerical feeling often challenged the authority of the church openly through public criticism and courtroom disputes. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this was the Hunne Affair in 1514. The beginnings of the affair trace back to 1511 when a dispute arose between Richard Hunne and Thomas Dryfield over a mortuary payment. Hunne was a wealthy London merchant, seemingly of good reputation, whose baby son, Stephen, had died in Dryfield’s parish of St Mary Matfellow, Whitechapel.<sup>5</sup> The controversy began with Hunne’s refusal to give Dryfield the traditional mortuary payment of the child’s christening robe and ended with Hunne being arrested for heresy.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterward, Hunne was discovered dead in his cell by

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<sup>4</sup> A. G. Dickens, *Reformation Studies* (London: Hambledon Press, 1982), 372.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church : Vitality and Vulnerability before the Break with Rome* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2012), 2; Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 77; Thomas More, "A Dialogue Concerning Heresies," in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, vol. 6 part I, *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Gemain Marc'hadour and Richard Marius Thomas Lawler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 318.

<sup>6</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Affairs of Richard Hunne and Friar Standish," in *The Apology*, vol. 9, *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. J. B. Trapp (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 222-4; Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 2-3; Haigh, *English Reformations*, 77. Initially, it seems that Dryfield did not take any official actions against Hunne but it was not long before Hunne was involved in another quarrel with the church, this time over a tenement property in St Michael Cornhill that had been burnt in a parish fire. It may have been this quarrel that spurred Dryfield to take further measures rather than simply letting the matter go. In April 1512 Dryfield successfully sued Hunne in the church courts for the mortuary, though it appears that Hunne still had no intention of paying it. The matter further escalated in January 1513 when Hunne sued Dryfield’s chaplain, Henry Marshall, for defamation of character, alleging that when he had attended church at St Mary, Whitechapel, Marshall had called him “accursed” and told him to leave, refusing to go on with the service until he had done so. Hunne also charged “Dryfield and several church court officials”

what a London coroner's jury later concluded was murder, with two jailers and the Bishop of London's chancellor, William Horsey, being named as the killers.<sup>7</sup>

The discovery of the apparently murdered Hunne caused outrage among the people of London. There was the wide belief that the churchmen had intentionally murdered a critic in order to safeguard their clerical privileges, a belief that in itself suggests a dimension of animosity and suspicion between the clergy and laity.<sup>8</sup> People were further angered when those suspected of the murder could not be put on trial because of the "benefit of the clergy." Members of the clergy could not be tried in a secular court because they were not under the jurisdiction of laymen.<sup>9</sup> Even though Hunne was posthumously convicted as a heretic and burnt at the stake in December 1514, it seems a lot of sympathy remained towards his family; there was even an attempt in parliament in 1515 to restore Hunne's property to his children, albeit an unsuccessful one.<sup>10</sup>

The people of London's reaction would seem to corroborate Dickens' hypothesis, as does the Bishops of London's belief that if his clerk was sent before a London jury "they would condemn him though he is as innocent as Abel."<sup>11</sup> But when seeing the mass of support for Hunne after his death, it is easy to overlook the lack of support for Hunne leading up to it. Far from being seen as some kind of champion for the laity, Hunne claimed to have lost business

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with praemunire (acting outside the ecclesial jurisdiction of the Church). Hunne was in turn charged with heresy, and in December was brought before the Bishop of London where he was accused of various offences including protection of a condemned heretic and favouring Lollard doctrines.

<sup>7</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 79; Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 1-2; More, "Dialogue," 317-8.

<sup>8</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 80; Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 4 and 15.

<sup>11</sup> Dickens, *Reformation*, 371.

due to Marshall's exclusion of him from St Mary's church.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that dynamics of the situation were more complex.<sup>13</sup> Further doubts about Dickens' interpretation are raised by J. J. Scarisbrick who critiques the use of the affair as evidence that anticlericalism was widely spread, since it is the "only really serious case of its time that the anticlerical lobby could produce and which modern historians have been able to cite."<sup>14</sup> In other words, while the affair does represent an example of lay hostility, its uniqueness suggests that the anticlerical problem may not have been nearly as widespread as historians have believed it was.

Here, Scarisbrick and Haigh are in continuity with other revisionist historians who have strongly contested the significance that Dickens attributes to anticlericalism along with the Whiggish presumption that at this time English Catholicism was in a state of corruption and weakness.<sup>15</sup> Taking a more optimistic stance, revisionism makes the case for a strong church with a flourishing religious culture.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the essence of revisionism is epitomised by Scarisbrick's statement that "on the whole, English men and women did not want the Reformation and most of them were slow to accept it when it came."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 15. When he sued Marshall for defamation of character he claimed that merchants with whom he had previous dealings did not dare to trade with him anymore.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Bernard argues that the people's outrage had more to do with procedures in heresy trials than a general anticlericalism, claiming that the people's ready acceptance of the idea that the church would commit murder also hints at the anxieties regarding heresy trials that would come to the fore in the Supplication against the Ordinaries in 1532.

<sup>14</sup> Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 295; Marshall, "Impact," 2; Harper-Bill, "Colet's Sermon," 17. The standard Whiggish interpretation was that on the eve of the Reformation the English Catholic Church had become "unseaworthy" and the religious situation was one primed for change.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 9; Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 295.

<sup>17</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 249; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, 15-16. One of the arguments that Scarisbrick uses to evidence his claim is that, "up to the very moment of the Reformation," the

The strongest evidence against the significance of anticlericalism comes from parish records of church refurbishments and parishioners' wills that show high levels of support for the Catholic religious system. There was a remarkable degree of refurbishment to church buildings that took place in the decades before the Reformation. These refurbishments did not merely involve necessary repairs, much of them went beyond that to increase the church's beauty and status.<sup>18</sup> Correspondingly, the vast majority of wills made during this time were at least in continuity with Catholic piety and most had a basic structure, language and detailed provisions that were highly conventional.<sup>19</sup>

Previously, such actions were explained away as being motivated by fear of punishment rather than acts of devotion (the punishment being a lengthy stay in purgatory).<sup>20</sup> And while revisionists do insist on a more positive interpretation, it is important to bear in mind it is not possible to "know the truth about anyone's motives at any time" because "we cannot test motive."<sup>21</sup> People's motivation for refurbishing churches and having orthodox wills may well have been founded on fear of languishing in purgatory rather than religious devotion, but the

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majority of the religious works were orthodox. However, this could be explained by the small size of the English printing press market and its highly centralised nature which allowed it to be easily regulated

<sup>18</sup> *Reformation and the English People*, 13; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 355; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, 11-12. While such consistency may give a basis for the argument that these actions were mere acts of conformity, Duffy argues that this consistency is "not evidence of shallowness, but of overwhelming consensus."

<sup>20</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 7; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, 4 and 13. By attributing the motivation for religious acts to fear of punishment rather than religious devotion, historians of the older view were able to interpret potential evidence for support of the Catholic religious system as evidence of weaknesses of the religious system, and in doing so, demonstrate the subjective nature of evaluating primary evidence.

<sup>21</sup> *Reformation and the English People*, 11.

opposite is also quite possible, that these actions were taken out of genuine religious zeal.

Most likely the reality of the situation was a mixture of motivations.

If this is the case, it is less likely that anticlericalism was a major contributor to the Reformation's eventual success among the general populace. However, anticlericalism was still a cause for concern, especially in London, and should not be dismissed as merely isolated incidents.<sup>22</sup> Criticism arose when the clergy committed abuses or simply did not meet people's expectations, and these clergy-laity disputes left deposits of "irritation and mistrust."<sup>23</sup> Collectively this gave rise to feelings of hostility towards the church that had the potential to be co-opted by individuals seeking to advance their own aims.<sup>24</sup>

The second challenge faced by the English church was Lollardy. The movement was founded in the fourteenth century by a priest and distinguished academic named John Wycliffe.<sup>25</sup> Wycliffe challenged the doctrines of the church: attacking the veneration of images, pilgrimages, and transubstantiation and arguing that scripture should have autonomous authority on doctrinal matters.<sup>26</sup> He also attacked the foundations of authority within the church, arguing that the authority of any church office, including the papacy, was dependent on the "righteousness of the man holding the office" rather than the office itself.<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 249; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 158 and 61; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 15; McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 16. Though it should be noted that much of this criticism arose from within the clergy and that anticlericalism was especially a problem in London

<sup>24</sup> Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1979), 190; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Oakley, *Western Church*, 191-3; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 315.

effectively undermined church and papal authority as it made the authority of an office relative to the uprightness of the particular person holding it and invited people to judge for themselves the nature of the authority held over them. It rendered the nature of general church offices uncertain and cast doubts on papal decrees and edicts of reform that had been issued, as many Popes had been of questionable morality.<sup>28</sup>

The Lollard movement that followed Wycliffe was a diverse one but there were some beliefs that were generally shared: “opposition to images, pilgrimages and prayer to saints, denial of the value of sacraments (especially confession and the mass) [and] a stress on the importance of the Bible.”<sup>29</sup> Lollards met at one another’s houses to read from vernacular scripture as well as other books. Unlike the Hussite movement in Bohemia, the Lollards do not appear to have formed a counter-Church but existed as groups within “orthodox” congregations.<sup>30</sup> Lollardy’s real challenge to English Catholicism was not that it ever posed a real threat to the established religious order, but that its ideas could in time be built upon by reformers. By questioning and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 315-6.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 18. Ascertaining conclusive information regarding Lollardy is difficult because of the nature of the primary sources that are extant. The two key forms of evidence are interrogation records of suspected Lollards and texts left behind by Lollards. The interrogation records can be misleading as their method of questioning “probably imposed a clearer pattern of belief on the records” than was present among those who were brought to trial, most of whom were not theologically trained. The Lollard texts are especially problematic as the majority of them are anonymous, undated, and do not indicate their geographical location. This makes them difficult to attribute to particular people or events, and curtails the depth of conclusions that can be drawn. (J. A. F. Thomson, “Orthodox Religion and the Origins of Lollardy,” *History* 74, no. 240 (1989): 50; Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 10.)

<sup>30</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 17 and 32.

condemning the structure of church, especially papal authority, they were able to “sow fertile seeds of doubt” that would form stronger roots and grow during the English Reformation.<sup>31</sup>

Evangelicals claimed links with Lollardy, asserting that Lollardy represented a righteous remnant that preserved the true teaching of Christ amidst a corrupt medieval church.<sup>32</sup> In Lollardy, Evangelicals found antecedent beliefs such as an emphasis on scriptural authority, on the corruption of the Church by its accumulation of power and wealth, and the call to return to the ways of the primitive church.<sup>33</sup> However, though Lollardy shared some of the ideas of the reformers they were not founded on the “central theological insight ... that people are ‘justified’ solely through their faith in Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, while it remains possible that Lollardy helped to pave the way for the Reformation by introducing similar ideas, because of the vital importance of the doctrine of justification by faith to Evangelical reformers we should be wary about viewing it as an early example of Reformation theology.

The final challenge faced by the church, the influence of the Continental Reformation, is easily the most significant. Early English Evangelicals were influenced by theologians of the Continental Reformation such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius, a Rhineland reformer.<sup>35</sup> These Evangelicals produced treatises that propounded reforming ideas. Among these treatises were Simon Fish’s *Supplication of Beggars* (1528), John Firth’s *Revelation of Antichrist* and, most importantly, William

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 232.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 224. Marshall, *Reformation England*, 33. Still, the role that Lollardy played among the early Evangelicals is debated among historians, with some scholars viewing Lollardy merely as a fragmented and benign movement, while others argue that it had a very strong impact on some of the early Evangelicals.

<sup>33</sup> O’Day, *Debate 8*; Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 222-4.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 119.

Tyndale's *The Obedience of the Christian Man* (1528). This work that argued that kings, as God's anointed ones, should be the ones to reform the church.<sup>36</sup> Tyndale stressed the importance of obedience to kings, something that would become a primary principle of the future Henrican religion.<sup>37</sup> He wrote, "He that judges the king judges God; and he that lays hands on the king lays hand on God; and he that resists the king resists God, and damns God's law and ordinance."<sup>38</sup> Upon reading *Obedience* Henry reputedly said that "This book is for me and all kings to read."<sup>39</sup> It is not that Henry agreed with all the beliefs of the Evangelicals but he was very willing to use their arguments if it would help him attain an annulment.<sup>40</sup> While the challenges that anticlericalism and Lollardy posed to the church may have helped pave the way for the English Reformation, the Continental Reformation influenced English Evangelicals and the challenges to papal authority occurring gave Henry unheard of precedents for his break with Rome.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Rex, "The Crisis of Obedience: God's Word and Henry's Reformation," *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 4 (1996): 894; Guy, *Tudor England*, 121-2. It should be noted that despite Tyndale's emphasis on obedience to the king in this treaty, he would later denounce Henry's annulment in his *Practice of Prelates*, 1530.

<sup>38</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> John Gough Nichols, ed. *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation: Chiefly from the Manuscripts of John Foxe the Martyrologist* (Westminster: Camden Society, 1859), 55; Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 213.

# Henry VIII and the Beginning of the English Reformation

## The Problem of Succession

The challenges to authority experienced by the English Church up to the late 1520s would pale in comparison with the ensuing attacks by the state against the Church's jurisdictional authority. These attacks were a part of the final phase of Henry's campaign to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and would result in England's jurisdictional independence from Rome and give Evangelicals a foothold in reforming the English Church. But in order for this to happen, first Henry had to make the determination to end his marriage with Catherine. Although Catherine blamed Henry Cardinal Thomas Wolsey for the King's doubts regarding the legitimacy of the marriage, it was Henry's need to ensure the continuance of Tudor family reign combined with a sincere conviction that his current marriage was sinful and unlawful that drove him to take actions to replace Catherine as Queen.<sup>42</sup>

The core of the problem was that in order to ensure the continuation of the Tudor dynasty and prevent the chance of civil war, Henry had to sire a legitimate male heir to succeed the throne.<sup>43</sup> During their marriage Catherine had become pregnant several times and actually did give birth to two sons, but neither lived beyond two months.<sup>44</sup> The only child of Henry and Catherine to survive past infancy was Mary, born in 1516. By the 1520s, Catherine had

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<sup>42</sup> 'Spain: May 1527, 11-20,' in 1527-1529, vol. 3 part 2, *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, ed. Pascual de Gayangos (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), 193

<sup>43</sup> J. I. Parker, "Introduction," in *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. G. E. Duffield, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964), 11.

<sup>44</sup> G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), 3-4.

clearly passed her child-bearing years, making it extremely unlikely that a legitimate male heir would be produced within the Aragon marriage.<sup>45</sup>

If Henry wanted to choose a successor from his own blood line then his only two options were Mary or Henry Fitzroy, his illegitimate child. On the one hand, passing the throne to a woman was a worrying prospect. Women were not considered up to the task of ruling a country; it was believed that they were not capable of exercising a vigorous and strong hand.

<sup>46</sup> Before Mary I's reign, the successful transition of the throne to a woman was unprecedented in England and the result of the last, and the only, king's attempt to pass the throne to his daughter had been a civil war that lasted nineteen years.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, Henry Fitzroy, born 1519, was male but he was an illegitimate heir, having been the product of an affair that Henry had had with one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth Blount.<sup>48</sup> It is possible that Henry considered making Fitzroy his heir. In 1525, Fitzroy was made Duke of Richmond and "the premier nobleman of the realm." This publicly connected Fitzroy with the person "through whom the Tudors derived their claim to the throne," Lady Margaret Beaufort, who had also carried the title "Richmond."<sup>49</sup> But passing the throne to an illegitimate heir was at least as problematic as passing the throne to a

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<sup>45</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 54; David Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*, Queens of Henry VIII (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003), 197.

<sup>46</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 219.

<sup>47</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 302. Henry I had attempted to pass the throne to his daughter Matilda

<sup>48</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 7; Starkey, *Six Wives*, 198. Other Royal titles were also bestowed on Fitzroy. He was made Duke of Somerset, Knight of the Garter and Earl of Nottingham.

woman.<sup>50</sup> Only a legitimate male heir could guarantee a smooth succession and the absence of one left the Tudor dynasty in a vulnerable position.

This vulnerability was not aided by the youth of the dynasty. It had only recently been established by Henry's father, Henry VII, after his successful usurpation of the throne from Richard III in 1485. Not only were there people still alive who remembered a time when Richard had reigned but there were Yorkist princes remaining who could "pose as plausible alternative candidates" should Henry fail to produce a legitimate male heir.<sup>51</sup> The vulnerability of the dynasty without a male heir would be the primary catalyst for the annulment and all its ensuing consequences. This is why Henry was willing to go to such extreme lengths to obtain an annulment and why Patrick Collinson can reasonably theorise that there would have been "no Reformation if Henry's first wife ... had borne him several healthy sons, or even just one."<sup>52</sup>

### **Henry's Determination to Obtain an Annulment**

The official reason that given for Henry's annulment campaign were his conscience and concern for succession.<sup>53</sup> In arguments for the King's case directed towards Emperor Charles V (Catherine's nephew) and the Pope, Henry is said to have concluded that his marriage was against the will of God, to which he "attributes the deaths of all his male children," and it is out of fear for the "wrath of God" that he now seeks an annulment.<sup>54</sup> His concern was not a

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<sup>50</sup> *Six Wives*, 199; Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 7. As in the case of passing the throne to a woman, English history offered no successful precedent.

<sup>51</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 36; Rex, *Tudors*, 54. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Henry's campaign for an annulment began only after the last Yorkist prince, or "white rose," had died in 1525.

<sup>52</sup> Collinson, *Reformation*, 110.

<sup>53</sup> J. S. Brewer, ed. *1524-1530*, vol. 4, Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1875), 1634-5 and 2266-8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

passing one but had sprung “some years past” from reading his bible and had been cemented through further investigation and consultation with learned theologians.<sup>55</sup> At the heart of the Henry’s qualms about his marriage was that before Catherine married Henry she had been married to Henry’s older brother, Arthur. Understanding the context of Catherine’s first and second marriage is a critical aspect of comprehending the argument’s surrounding the validity of Henry’s annulment campaign.

In November 1501 Henry VII had cemented a marriage alliance with Spain through the wedding of his eldest son, Arthur Tudor, to the Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. Tragically though their marriage was short-lived as Arthur died the following April. To resolve the situation and preserve the marriage alliance, Catherine was promised to Henry VII’s second son and the new heir to the English throne, Henry.<sup>56</sup> But before Henry and Catherine could be married there were two impediments within the canon law that had been raised by Catherine’s previous marriage to Henry’s brother, affinity and public honesty, which had to be dealt with.<sup>57</sup> In order to overcome this, the necessary papal dispensation was duly obtained by the Spanish and English authorities from Pope Julius II in 1503.<sup>58</sup>

However, the marriage was postponed due to an issue over the last instalment of Catherine’s dowry, and did not occur until after Henry VII’s death.<sup>59</sup> The pair were eventually married in 1509 after Henry VIII’s coronation. Despite a protest that Henry recorded the day before his wedding, asserting that he had been forced into it, it appears that Henry chose to marry

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jasper Godwin Ridley, *Henry VIII*, 1st American ed.. ed. (New York: Viking, 1985), 32-33.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Matrimonial Trials of Henry VIII* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 27.

The impediment of affinity pertained to marriages between in-laws, while public honesty pertained to the marriage contract between Arthur and Catherine.

<sup>58</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 41; Kelly, *Matrimonial Trials*, 5-6 and 103.

<sup>59</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 218.

Catherine because he believed it was the correct action to take.<sup>60</sup> Some even argue for romance playing an important role in the arrangement. Richard Rex asserts that “in the years after 1510, Henry and Catherine were young and in love,” and Suzannah Lipscomb goes as far as to claim the match was “based primarily on affection.”<sup>61</sup> The latter claim was based on a statement made by Henry when writing to his father-in-law that “the love he bears to Katharine is such, that if he were still free he would choose her in preference to all others.”<sup>62</sup> But an official letter from a husband to his father-in-law regarding a political marriage is likely to involve more than a little diplomacy and should not be taken as a straightforward account of the state that the marriage was in. And reports that Henry courted a woman other than his wife as early as 1510 caution against envisaging that these early years were filled with matrimonial bliss.<sup>63</sup>

Over a decade later, when Henry found himself without children (which is how he viewed the situation even though he had a daughter), he concluded that this was God’s punishment for

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<sup>60</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 3; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 218; Starkey, *Six Wives*, 112; *1509-1514*, ed. J. S. Brewer, vol. 1, Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920), 45. It is possible that this decision was also influenced by his father’s wishes on his deathbed. Indeed, if Henry had been marrying Catherine because of his father’s dying wishes that would account for his feeling of being forced into it. Even if Henry had been “forced” into marrying Catherine, this would not have been unusual as arranged marriages were often used as a political tool, especially royal marriages. Later, among the apologetics for Henry’s annulment campaign would be the argument that Henry had originally protested to the marriage. (Records of the Reformation, vol2, #234, 94; Cal. S.P. IV, part ii, 472).

<sup>61</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 54; Suzannah Lipscomb, *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Lion, 2009), 29.

<sup>62</sup> Lipscomb, *1536*, 29; *Letters and Papers, Volume 1*, 1, 59.

<sup>63</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 4. The noblewoman in question was the sister of Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham.

marrying his brother's widow.<sup>64</sup> Biblically, this belief was founded on a literal reading of two passages in Leviticus: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness," (Lev 18:16) and "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless" (Lev 20:21). These verses were made to better suit Henry's case when Robert Wakefield, a Cambridge don and Hebrew expert, reinterpreted the latter passage to specifically mean that the man will not have any sons to carry the family name rather any children at all.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout his annulment campaign Henry would consistently avow that his motivation for seeking the annulment was that his children's deaths showed that God found his marriage to Catherine displeasing, that his marriage was abominable and illegitimate.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to portray him as being solely driven by religious and dynastic concerns. To do so would be to leave out the very important factor that in 1527 Henry was in love his mistress, Anne Boleyn. Of course, there was nothing new about a king having a mistress; even Anne Boleyn's sister, Mary, would occupy that position several years before Anne. But it seems from the start that Anne had loftier aspirations.<sup>67</sup>

There is the common claim that although she was courted by Henry, Anne refused to sleep with him unless he promised to marry her.<sup>68</sup> In this view, rather than settling for simply being another mistress she aimed to replace Catherine as Henry's wife, and only after a "firm

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<sup>64</sup> Starkey, *Six Wives*, 197; Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, 1634-5 and 2266-8.

<sup>65</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 55-56; Murphy, "Literature and Propaganda," 139. That Henry was willing to use a translation from Hebrew, rather than the traditional Latin, is unlikely a sign of humanist or Evangelical sympathies as much as it was an example of Henry choosing the argument that best suited his case. At this point in time, Henry still wanted to obtain an annulment from the Pope

<sup>66</sup> Murphy, "Literature and Propaganda," 139.

<sup>67</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 86-87; Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 4-5.

promise and sure hope of marriage” in 1532 did Anne “surrender to Henry’s advances.”<sup>69</sup> It is also claimed that she was an important “spur” for Henry; an argument based on letters written by Henry to her in 1528 which show that she applied significant pressure on him to obtain the annulment.<sup>70</sup> It has even been claimed that, aside from the developing anxiety over the succession, in the late 1520s Henry’s hostility towards the clergy was not the result of a “developing notion of imperial sovereignty, but because of a developing affection for Anne.”<sup>71</sup> Another possibility, based on evidence from the letters of Reginald Pole and other love letters written by Henry, indicates that it was Henry, not Anne, who refrained from sexual intercourse.<sup>72</sup> It is probable that in the beginning of their relationship they did sleep together until “at some point Henry became convinced that his marriage to Catherine was invalid” and so he ceased sexual relations until Anne could legitimately be made his wife and bear him a legitimate male heir.<sup>73</sup> But even if it was the case that Henry was the one who was holding out for marriage, that does not mean that Anne did not still have an important role to play. In order for Henry to create an heir, he needed not only to annul his marriage to Catherine but he also needed to marry again. Having a potential replacement Queen already in mind could not but spur the process along.

### **The Campaign for an Annulment**

In fact, far from showing signs of Evangelicalism, Henry was a zealous Catholic, who loved theological debates and was on “notably good terms” with the papacy.<sup>74</sup> Pope Innocent VIII

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<sup>69</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 7 and 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 97.

<sup>71</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 51; Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 301; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 1.

had given his blessing when his father, Henry VII, had usurped the kingdom in 1485.<sup>75</sup> When Luther stirred up controversy about the papacy, Henry joined with other European rulers in dutifully burning “Luther’s books just as the Pope wished in spring 1521, even before the Emperor issued his formal condemnations at Worms.”<sup>76</sup> In 1521, he was awarded the title of “Defender of the Faith” by Pope Leo X for the treatise that he had written against Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity of the Christian Church* (1520). In its preface, he expressed his loyalty to the papacy and the “service of Almighty God” and emphasised the importance of religion in “administration of public affairs.”<sup>77</sup> Even though the *Assertion of the Seven Sacraments* “was by no means an unaided effort,” Henry “laboured on it for hours at a time in the first flush of enthusiasm,” leaving behind his own mark on the structure of the book.<sup>78</sup> As time went on Henry’s personal theology would prove to have an exceptionally fluid nature capable of moving between the Catholic and Evangelical end of the spectrum but in 1527 there does not appear to have been any obvious signs of the tempest ahead.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, Henry’s desire for an annulment was not necessarily a trigger for controversy between him and the Pope, and neither was it necessarily a challenge to papal authority. In fact, by going to the Pope to obtain the annulment Henry was acknowledging the Pope’s jurisdictional authority to judge the state of his marriage. Henry was not the first king to seek a papal dispensation to annul his marriage to one wife in order to marry another. Louis XII of France obtained a papal dispensation for an annulment, as did the duke of Suffolk, which was

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<sup>75</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 135.

<sup>77</sup> King of England Henry VIII et al., *An Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, against Martin Luther* (London: Printed by Nath. Thompson, 1688). Part of what is said in the preface will belong to the required diplomacy when two officials converse but it still remains that the entire trend of the preface is one of loyalty and devotion.

<sup>78</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 26.

confirmed by Clement VII.<sup>80</sup> This had been a “familiar solution for the matrimonial problems of royal houses” since the medieval period, and with the complexities of family relationships in the elite class, pretexts could usually be found within canon law.<sup>81</sup> As such, the request itself was not an affront to papal authority.

The problems arose from the state of European affairs at the time Henry made the request and the manner in which he set about to obtain it. In order to prove his marriage was illegitimate and to obtain an annulment, Henry needed to show that the papal dispensation that had allowed the marriage was itself invalid. One way of doing this was to argue that the dispensation was invalid because it went against some technical aspects of canon law. Henry’s case on technical grounds was not strong. The issue of Catherine’s prior marriage was raised when the marriage between her and Henry was being arranged, and Pope Julius II had even issued a second dispensation to cover “certain peripheral uncertainties and ambiguities (for example, whether the marriage between Arthur and Catherine had actually been consummated)” which were left over from the first dispensation.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, this method would probably have had a greater chance for success as it required the papacy to admit that a predecessor “had been wrong about facts” rather than admitting they had made an error in judgement and overstepped their authority.<sup>83</sup> In other words, it was a face-saving tactic: the Pope was not at fault for the dispensation because the facts that he had been given by his advisors, and on which he based his decision, had been wrong. Similarly, the English and Spanish authorities were not to blame, as they had simply believed that the Pope’s

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<sup>80</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 117. While other political factors may have been involved, that Clement VII later confirmed the duke of Suffolk’s papal dispensation for an annulment after the annulment controversy with Henry indicates that he did not morally object to Henry’s request for an annulment.

<sup>81</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 54-5.

<sup>82</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 220.

<sup>83</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 196.

decision was correct and had solemnised the marriage unaware that they were doing anything wrong.

Nevertheless, Henry was not content to confine his attempts to this method; he believed that his marriage was against divine law, something from which even the Pope could not legitimately issue dispensations.<sup>84</sup> At the time, most authorities on the subject argued that the Levitical prohibitions represented a “divine or natural law” that could not be dispensed with, nonetheless there was considered to be an exception to this.<sup>85</sup> This is a passage in Deuteronomy 25:5 that states: “When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her.” The importance of this passage was that it appeared to establish an exception to the Levitical laws that if the brother had died without producing any male heirs, then it was not just acceptable for the man to marry his widow, it was a part of his brotherly duty to do so. Therefore, when the brother had died, it was considered possible for the Pope to give a dispensation for the man to marry his widow. In order for Henry to be successful on these grounds he had to prove through the scriptures or church tradition that the Levitical prohibition represented a divine law under all circumstances. One of the main arguments used was provided by a scholar named Wakefield, who argued that the Deuteronomy passage applied only if the “original marriage had not been consummated.”<sup>86</sup> Whether or not the marriage between Arthur and Catherine had been consummated remained at the crux of the arguments throughout the attempts to gain an annulment.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 196; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 220.

<sup>86</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 9-10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

In order to gain support for his argument, and following on from the suggestion of Thomas Cranmer, Henry applied to the European universities for their opinion on whether the Levitical prohibitions represented natural law, and if so, whether the Pope could issue a dispensation from it.<sup>88</sup> The universities that found in favour of Henry were the universities of Orleans, Paris, Bologna, Angers, Bourges, Padua, and Toulouse.<sup>89</sup> These universities were far from representing a consensus, or even majority, of the European universities, but it still provided polemical support for Henry's case.<sup>90</sup> This was especially so in the instance of the university of Paris, which had a theological authority in Europe that was second only to the Pope's.<sup>91</sup> The opinions of the universities that found in Henry's favour were presented to Parliament on 30 March, 1531, before Henry separated publicly from his wife.<sup>92</sup>

To what extent Henry intended to challenge the authority of the Pope with his request is debatable. Previous arguments emphasised the reluctance of Henry in the use of the divine-law argument because of its challenge to papal authority.<sup>93</sup> But there is a strong argument that from the very beginning Henry's attitude was a challenge to papal authority, that the application to the universities was "in a sense to qualify the plenitude of papal power... and Henry's assertion that the words of Leviticus constituted divine prohibition that nothing could override effectively denied that the Pope possessed any such discretionary powers or that the

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<sup>88</sup> Edward and Virginia Murphy Surtz, ed. *The Divorce Tracts of Henry VIII*, vol. 1988 (Angers: Moreana, 1988), 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-27.

<sup>90</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 100; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 38; Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 49. The university opinions were far from objective being strongly influenced by bribes, whether from Henry VIII or Charles V, and political circumstances.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (London: Dent, 1985), 370.

<sup>92</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Murphy, "Literature and Propaganda," 141.

Pope was the arbiter when the scriptures were unclear.”<sup>94</sup> Whether it was intentional or not, Henry not only challenged the dispensing authority of the papacy but raised the “the fundamental issue of ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>95</sup> Conversely, others argue that because “even the strongest supporters of papal authority agreed that the Pope could not lawfully issue dispensations” from divine law in denying the validity of the previous dispensation, “Henry was in no sense impugning papal authority.”<sup>96</sup> But such a view does not appear to take into account that he was not only claiming that the Pope had misused his authority but that he, a spiritual subordinate, was capable of evaluating a Pope’s competency in the performance of his duties. Though Henry’s main aim was the procurement of an annulment, and not explicitly to challenge papal authority, he knew what he wanted and knew how to get it and he did not appear to mind challenging papal authority in order to do so.

A serious problem with Henry’s request was not just that it challenged papal authority but that it did so at a time when papal authority was already being challenged by Evangelical reformers. At the same time, the Evangelical Reformation on the Continent was gaining ground in both Switzerland and Germany.<sup>97</sup> These reformers were “not only challenging papal authority in principle ... but also impugning it in practice, arguing that its judicial proceedings were corrupted by wealth and power.”<sup>98</sup> To concede that his predecessor had made a false decision would give ground to such accusations.

From a political perspective, Henry’s timing was not much better. Rome had been invaded by Emperor Charles V in May 1527 and the Pope was now essentially being held captive.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>94</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 26.

<sup>95</sup> Guy, *Tudor 117*; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 220.

<sup>96</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 56.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 96.

Emperor's aunt was Catherine of Aragon and he was unlikely ever to support an action that would revoke her marriage and make her daughter, his cousin, an illegitimate heir. The annulment would also insult him in another way as it "would proclaim that Charles V's aunt had been living in incest for nearly twenty years."<sup>100</sup> If the Pope granted Henry his annulment, it would mean provoking a "hostile reaction" from the person whose control he was effectively under.<sup>101</sup>

Although the initial steps to acquire an annulment began in 1527, it was not until 1529 that Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who was the papal legate, managed to arrange for a trial to be held for it in England. This was held at Blackfriars, London, with Wolsey and Cardinal Campeggio (Pope's representative), serving as judges. Shortly after the trial began, Catherine, "challenging the authority of the court, and the competence" of the judges, appealed to the Pope.<sup>102</sup> Although the trial continued despite the appeal, Pope Clement VII acknowledged the appeal and "revoked the case to Rome" in June 1529 after the attempts of the French army to take Rome failed.<sup>103</sup> This "effectively ended the chances of a successful outcome for Henry" and became a turning point in the annulment process.<sup>104</sup> In response to the recall of the case to Rome, Henry wrote to Clement, complaining that he had "often been deceived by the Pope's promises, on which there is no dependence to be placed" and that "his dignity has not been consulted in the treatment he has received."<sup>105</sup> The recall of the case not only led directly to

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<sup>100</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 56.

<sup>101</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 271.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*; MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 198-9.

<sup>105</sup> Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, 2660-1. This comes from a letter from Henry VIII to Pope Clement VII, 30 September, 1529. Here, it is possible that in this later part of Henry's statement he is attempting to remind the Pope of the words of his predecessor, Leo X, in his reply to the Assertion of Sacraments. It states "We, to our

the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, which led to Thomas More becoming his replacement as Lord Chancellor, but also to an attack on the clergy, designed to intimidate the Pope into deciding the case in Henry's favour.<sup>106</sup> More's appointment itself was part of the affront to papal authority as he was the first layman in living memory to be appointed Lord Chancellor.<sup>107</sup> A strange twist, as the same attack on papal and the clergy would eventually led not only to More's resignation but to his eventual execution.

Although this constitutes an attack on papal authority, Henry's initial actions were not as extreme as they may appear. While the fact that king was attempting to annul his queen was a "major political event ... the attempt to put pressure on the papacy for this purpose was within a contemporary frame of expectation."<sup>108</sup> The following years, 1529 to 1532, served as a period of transition for the tactics that were used to obtain the annulment.<sup>109</sup> The focus continued to shift away from the papacy directly and towards pressuring the papacy indirectly through the English clergy alongside the gradual development of the notion of royal supremacy.<sup>110</sup>

The attack on the English clergy began with Wolsey being charged and convicted of praemunire in autumn 1529; in the following year the entire English clergy also found themselves under the same charge.<sup>111</sup> Attacks on the clergy continued in the form of several

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power, by God's alliance, shall not be wanting in the performance of anything that may tend to the honour and *dignity of his majesty, and to his, and his kingdom's glory.*"

<sup>106</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 360-1.

<sup>108</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 36.

<sup>109</sup> Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 224.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*; Rex, *Tudors*, 58.

<sup>111</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 36; Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 224.

statutes designed to nibble “away at the privileges and interests of the clergy.”<sup>112</sup> If Henry was to use the clergy to obtain his annulment, he needed to break the claim made by the clergy that there were “areas of spiritual authority immune from royal or statutory control.”<sup>113</sup> That is to say, he needed to break the claim of papal supremacy over any and all spiritual areas before he could substitute it with royal supremacy over these matters. This he achieved in 1532 with the Submission of Clergy where the “bishops surrendered their independent right to make canon law,” abandoning their “jurisdictional autonomy.”<sup>114</sup> This was followed by several parliamentary acts in the next two years that gradually cut England off from papal influence and firmly established the replacement of papal supremacy with royal supremacy in matters of religion.

Aside from the Act of the Submission of the Clergy there are two other Acts that were important in severing England from papal jurisdiction and for establishing royal supremacy. The Abjuration of the Clergy in June 1534 gave Henry the confidence to “proclaim the abolition of the papal supremacy.”<sup>115</sup> In it the convocations of Canterbury and York declared that the “Bishop of Rome has not, in Scripture, any greater jurisdiction in the kingdom of England than any other foreign bishop.”<sup>116</sup> The other act was the Act of Supremacy, in November 1534, which recognised the right of Henry to be “Supreme Head of the Church of England” and to control Church reform.<sup>117</sup> However, this new authority did have limits to it and was not equal to the previous authority of papal supremacy in the sense that it did not give Henry the “right to preach, ordain or administer the sacraments and rites of the

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<sup>112</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 58.

<sup>113</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 109.

<sup>114</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 39; Haigh, *English Reformations*, 115.

<sup>115</sup> Gerald Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1994), 109.

<sup>116</sup> "The Abjuration of Papal Supremacy by the Clergy, 1534," in *Documents*, 109-10.

<sup>117</sup> "The Act of Supremacy, 1534," in *Documents*, 113-4.

church.”<sup>118</sup> Henry was still considered a layman and required a member of the clergy to do these things.

This “official” process was accompanied by actions that were designed to undermine papal authority. They involved propaganda and changes in the language used to refer to both pope and king. From December 1533 onwards, the Pope was referred to as “the bishop of Rome” and around this time, imperial motifs became “prevalent in Henry’s public documents and official propaganda.”<sup>119</sup> The “traditional descriptions of the king” now included “his majesty” which “was the quality which Roman Law attributed to the person and office of the emperor.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, at the same time Henry was intentionally attempting to reduce the claims of authority that the Pope was perceived to have over England, he was attempting to increase his own claims to authority by associating his kingship with those of the former emperors.

Henry finally succeeded in attaining his annulment in May 1533 and his marriage to Anne was legitimated (they had secretly married previously in the end of January after Anne became pregnant). Anne was crowned queen in June 1533. In the process of attaining this result, Henry had managed to usurp the authority of the Pope in England. He was the first king in Europe to break with the Pope and establish a unique royal supremacy that empowered him to “control all aspects of the Church’s administration and to define its doctrine.”<sup>121</sup> This step was not considered by Evangelical leaders to be in continuity with their reforming movements: Luther and Melanchthon concluded that Henry had simply usurped

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<sup>118</sup> Bray, *Documents*, 113.

<sup>119</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 66.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, 199; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 39.

the powers of the Pope and no other leader “proposed any doctrine like royal supremacy.”<sup>122</sup> Though it had taken him far longer than he desired, Henry had succeeded in annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order to marry someone who would bear him a male heir and help secure the Tudor dynasty for another generation. He had begun by challenging the authority of the Pope by the manner of his request for an annulment and had gone on effectively to replace the Pope with regard to the spiritual jurisdiction of England. But this monumental change affected more than the marital status of Henry and his wives or the religious situation in England. Alone, Henry’s campaign for an annulment cannot account for eventual success of Protestantism, but it played a pivotal role in securing a beachhead for Evangelicals to propagate their ideas.<sup>123</sup> Indeed the very genesis of the reforming measures at the state level were a direct consequence of having to use a means other than the Pope to annul one royal marriage so another could be legitimated, a causality that factors in strongly in understanding the responses to the annulment.

On a professional level, the campaign to attain an annulment would prove to be the making or breaking of many careers, especially for Thomas More and Thomas Cranmer. Like Cranmer, More gained a major promotion from events which occurred during the annulment process but his response to Henry’s escalating challenge to papal authority would become his downfall. It is More’s response, and the theology that informed it to which we now turn.

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<sup>122</sup> Rex, *Henry and the Reformation*, 14.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

## Chapter Two: Thomas More

“Forasmuch as Sir Thomas More, knight, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, a man of singular virtue and of a clear unspotted conscience, as witnesseth Erasmus, more pure and white than the whitest snow, and such an angelical wit, as England, he saith, never had the like before, nor never shall again, universally, as well in the laws of our own realm (a study in effect able to occupy the whole life of a man) as in all other sciences, right well studied, was in his days accounted a man worthy of perpetual famous memory.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the opening statement made by William Roper in his biography of Thomas More’s life. It suggests at the kind of grand, if idealised, impression that More had left on his devoted son-in-law. Roper’s impression is not unique; More left similar impressions on contemporaries and recent generations. More’s legacy was immortalised by his beatification, 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1886, and by his canonisation on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1935, when he was made a saint by Pope Pius XI.

### Primary Sources

In studying the theology of Thomas More and how it shaped his response to the annulment campaign there are several kinds of primary sources available. More produced many theological works including polemical works as a Catholic controversialist and his devotional works that he wrote in the while in prison. These occasionally touch on issues surrounding the annulment campaign giving glimpses into his theology regarding these issues. His works include: *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, *The Supplication of Souls*, *The Confutation of*

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<sup>1</sup> William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More, Knight," in *Lives of Saint Thomas More*, ed. E. E. Reynolds (London: Dent, 1963), 3.

*Tyndale's Answer, The Apology of Sir Thomas More, The Debellation of Salem and Bizance, A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation and A Treatise Upon the Passion of Christ.*

The next key source is the biographies of More written by people who knew him: William Roper, who was More's son-in-law and who lived in his house for some time; and Nicholas Harpsfield, a family friend. Roper wrote his biography of More circa 1557. It was not intended as a full biography but as a source to be used by Nicholas Harpsfield when he wrote his biography.<sup>2</sup> Roper's account is most authoritative for his personal recollections of More but is not always correct in his detailing of events.<sup>3</sup> One obvious example of this is More's trial. Roper himself states that he was not there and that his account is based on eye witnesses who were of "good credit."<sup>4</sup> He incorrectly makes it seem as if More was "tried on indictment for a single offence against the Act of Treasons" when there were actually four offences that were alleged.<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that he was always wrong and some of his accounts which have been able to be corroborated have proven correct.<sup>6</sup> Harpsfield wrote his biography around the same time as Roper finishing by the end of 1557 or 1558.<sup>7</sup> Harpsfield used Roper's biography; the recollections of others who knew More; the writings of Erasmus; and other documents that he had collected, including letters that are no longer extant.<sup>8</sup> His

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<sup>2</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 47.

<sup>5</sup> J. Duncan M. Derret, "The Trial of Sir Thomas More," in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. Richard Standish Sylvester and Germain Marc'hadour (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Guy, *More*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xvi-xvii.; Guy, *More*, 8.

biography his larger than Roper's; he replicates some of Roper's biography within his own, but he also corrects Roper in certain places.<sup>9</sup>

The most significant issue when dealing with these two sources is not the specific detailing of events but the biased way in which they are presented. Both of them view More through "rose-tinted glasses," they continually extol his virtues and place him in the best light possible. Their hagiographical nature means that while they are not fiction, they do not contain "the whole truth."<sup>10</sup> Their purpose is to commemorate More's life and actions, not to write an unbiased assessment of his merits and flaws. As such, while they are both very useful sources they also need to be handled with much care.

In addition, there are contemporary accounts of his activities that are recorded in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, and quite a selection of More's correspondence has remained extant. Particularly useful in this context is the letter that he wrote to Cromwell that details his involvement in the annulment matter and his opinion on the royal supremacy. The letters he wrote in prison to his daughter Margaret, where he recounts the events surrounding the summons to take the oath and his subsequent interrogations, are also particularly useful. These letters offer a straightforward account. Just like the other contemporary accounts, the letters cannot be assumed to be completely accurate. This account will also have been written with the inescapable personal bias; those interviewing More may have recorded his interrogation differently.

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<sup>9</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Guy, *More*, 181.

## Response to the Annulment Campaign

More was born in London on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1477/78 to John and Agnes More, a family of London merchants. Though not a member of the nobility, his family was still one of high status and throughout his life More would move with ease among the wealthiest and most powerful citizens as a peer.<sup>11</sup> He became a lawyer but as a young man More seriously considered entering into the priesthood, going as far as to live in a charterhouse for four years.<sup>12</sup> His first wife was Jane Colt, with whom he had three daughters, Margret, Elizabeth and Cecily, and one son, John. After Jane's death in 1511, he remarried Alice Middleton who outlived him. To say that he had a successful career is an understatement. He held such offices as the undersheriff for London, Speaker of the House of Commons, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He was pressed into entering royal service in 1516, became a member of the King's Privy Council and eventually reached the "highest office in the state" when he became the Lord Chancellor.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 7; Nicholas Harpsfield, "The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More, Knight, Sometime Lord High Chancellor of England," in *Lives of Saint Thomas More*, ed. E. E. Reynolds (London: Dent, 1963), 57-59; J. B. Trapp and Hubertus Herbruggen, *The King's Good Servant' Sir Thomas More, 1477/8-1535* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1978), 10. His father was a Justice on the King's Bench and More himself received an excellent education. First as a page in the Archbishop John Morton's household (who was the Lord Chancellor at the time) and then at Oxford University before being recalled by his father to begin his legal career.

<sup>12</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 4.

<sup>13</sup> Herbruggen, *The King's Good Servant*, 11; Guy, *More*, 148.

## The King's Great Matter

More's first involvement in the annulment campaign came in around October 1527. Upon returning from a diplomatic mission to France, Henry sought his opinion on the subject.<sup>14</sup> After listening to Henry's arguments for the annulment, More evaded giving his own opinion and professed himself incompetent to give his own opinion on such matters.<sup>15</sup> At the king's request he then consulted with "Tunstall and Clark, Bishops of Durham and Bath" and other members of the Privy Council. He eventually returned to the king and diplomatically told him that he disagreed with him.<sup>16</sup> The king accepted his opinion for the time being but did not give up trying to persuade More to come around to his way of thinking.

That Henry wished to discuss the matter with More is not surprising. More had a long-standing friendship with Henry, their first encounter being when More had called on Henry as a child.<sup>17</sup> By 1527, More had also been in royal service for many years and had proven himself a statesman of integrity, making his approval something that Henry highly sought.<sup>18</sup> For although Henry wanted his own way, he also genuinely wished to be in the right while doing so. Having More's approval on the annulment campaign would have helped to validate the supposed integrity of Henry's actions. And although More had disagreed with him, when Cardinal Thomas Wolsey resigned from his position as Lord Chancellor, More was selected

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<sup>14</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 17-18; Herbruggen, *The King's Good Servant*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.; Thomas More, *Letters and Epitaphs* (London: The Digital Library of the Catholic Reformation, 1557), 1426.

<sup>17</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 361.

<sup>18</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 60.

as his replacement. This appointment was both a sign of “royal favour and testimony to More’s willing service to the king.”<sup>19</sup> Evidently, Henry had not yet lost confidence in him.

More’s appointment to the chancellorship was unusual. As Marius points out, aside from the well-known fact that he was not an advocate of the king’s annulment campaign, he was the first Lord Chancellor in living memory who was a member of the laity.<sup>20</sup> Still, the annulment campaign also made More’s appointment favourable in some ways. Giving a post to a layman that was normally occupied by clergy was a way for Henry to assert his authority in the face of the Pope’s refusal to be compliant.<sup>21</sup> As a known supporter of Catherine, having More as his Chancellor served to insulate Henry in public opinion against accusations of falsehood and malice regarding his campaign.<sup>22</sup> It also seems that Henry still hoped that More would come around to his side.

After his appointment, Henry again broached the subject with him. The discussion ended in the much the same way as the others and at the end Henry seemed to accept More’s opinion, at least for now, stating that he did not wish More to act against his conscience and that More should first “look unto God and after God unto him.”<sup>23</sup> More later claimed that Henry had further stated that he would be content for More to serve him in other areas.

Nevertheless, being Lord Chancellor meant that More was not able to remove himself completely from the matter of the annulment. As a “minister of state he had to make serious

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 130.

<sup>20</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 360-1. It says a lot about More’s devotion to religion that he could even be considered for a position normally reserved for the clergy in the first place.

<sup>21</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 282.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 283. Catherine was popular, especially among the people of London.

<sup>23</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1427. The other difference is the people to whom Henry sent More in order to discuss the annulment matter. This time it was the Archbishop of Canterbury and York along with Nicholas, the Italian Friar.

efforts to support the Crown.”<sup>24</sup> On 31 March 1531, More advocated Henry’s cause to both the House of Lords and the House of Commons by presenting the opinions of the universities that supported the attainment of an annulment.<sup>25</sup> He explained to the House of Lords that Henry sought an annulment because of his conscience rather than because he loved another woman, but it was to the House of Commons that he gave his most compromising statement.<sup>26</sup> He stated that the marriage between Catherine and Arthur had been consummated.<sup>27</sup> Catherine’s virginity when she married Henry was vital part of Catherine’s defence of the validity of her marriage; in publicly refuting it, More was dealing a blow against her.<sup>28</sup>

While the earliest biographies of More insist that he loyally served the king in all his actions during his time as Lord Chancellor, there is some evidence to suggest he may have been involved in political opposition against Henry. In a letter to Gregory de Casale, England’s ambassador to Rome, Cromwell justified why Bishop John Fisher and More were executed. Cromwell asserted that they were both involved in an organised group that acted outside parliament, but used information from sources within it in to counter the King’s propaganda and arranged for “its members to speak publicly against the king’s proceedings.”<sup>29</sup> The evidence for the existence of such a group is circumstantial at best and the evidence for More’s involvement is weaker still. The claim that More was involved in it is largely based on

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<sup>24</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 124.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 134.

<sup>26</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 129.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>29</sup> G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 85-86. Elton acknowledges that it was propaganda and therefore not wholly reliable but insists that it should be given more consideration than it currently has been given.

the confession of Sir George Throckmorton, a member of parliament who was outspoken against the divorce and the attack on the clergy. He said More had privately encouraged him to speak his mind in parliament.<sup>30</sup> The other key piece of evidence was a statement that he made to the Emperor's Ambassador to England, Eustace Chapuys.<sup>31</sup> Explaining why he refused a letter of thanks that Charles V had sent him, More stated that it could place him under suspicion of disloyalty to the king and he wanted to preserve the liberty he had to "speak boldly" in matters pertaining to the annulment.<sup>32</sup> However, neither of these instances requires More to be involved in a group that was politically opposed to Henry; he could have been acting simply as an advocate of Catherine without directly encouraging opposition against Henry.

More was close to Catherine and they had a mutual loyalty.<sup>33</sup> While this did not override his duty to the king, he "admired her piety and applauded her learning."<sup>34</sup> In 1527 and 1528, Juan Luis Vives, who was a friend of More, twice "returned to England in order to support and counsel the queen."<sup>35</sup> Chapuys claimed that More secretly encouraged Fisher, who was one of the most outspoken of Catherine's supporters, and privately attempted to convince the king to

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<sup>30</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 413-4; G. R. Elton, "Sir Thomas More and the Opposition to Henry VIII," in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. Richard Standish Sylvester and Germain Marc'hadour (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 87-88. Throckmorton also confessed to be approached by Friar Peto, Fisher, Nicholas Wilson, and Father Reynolds who were all active supporters of Catherine. Still, as Elton admits their contact was different; unlike More, they held "long indoctrination sessions" with Throckmorton.

<sup>31</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 259.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

forget the attempts to gain an annulment.<sup>36</sup> If true, this would represent a form of opposition to Henry's annulment campaign. What this evidence does show is that in his response to Henry's actions he did not remain above the political sphere but used it where he could, without being disloyal to the king, to support Catherine in her cause. But as his speech to parliament regarding the annulment shows, when it came down to it, he would first fulfil his duty to the king.

More's chancellorship ended with his resignation on the 16 May 1532. The official reason given was that he had resigned due to ill health and that the king had accepted it only reluctantly.<sup>37</sup> The date of his resignation is the day following the Submission of the Clergy, which alone is enough to question the validity of the given reason, but it is also significant that Henry did not bestow on More any of the honours customarily given upon the resignation of a chief councillor.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the resignation was an enforced one, since "over the past few days" More had been defending the Church in the House of Lords along with the bishops.<sup>39</sup> It is also possible that the point had been reached in the Henry's attack on the clergy that More was "no longer able to reconcile service to the king with his conscience."<sup>40</sup> In the complicated political situation it was probably a mixture of both reasons.

After his resignation More retreated to private life where he continued in his fight against heresy by writing polemical tracts. At this time his key opponent was Christopher St German.

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Iver Kaufman, *Incorrectly Political: Augustine and Thomas More* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 210. It is possible that Fisher asked More to encourage Throckmorton, an action which More could have taken without involving himself in the political opposition group, if it existed, or acting directly against Henry.

<sup>37</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 322.

<sup>38</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 62; Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 305.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 135. Haigh, *English Reformations*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 62.

Though the context of the public debate that occurred between them was the process of investigating and prosecuting suspected heretics, the arguments used had strong political implications.<sup>41</sup> St German does not appear to have been connected with the government or to official propaganda, but his tracts defended the recent government innovations.<sup>42</sup> It could be argued that, in his own way, More was rebutting “propaganda in the same manner in which Bishop Fisher” and others had refuted Henry’s propaganda on the annulment.<sup>43</sup> More’s works asserted the “continuing validity of the independent jurisdiction and law-making powers of the church” and his defence of the rights of the clergy from secular involvement did involve an implicit rejection of the developing royal supremacy.<sup>44</sup> But crucially, unlike Fisher and the others, More did not directly oppose the king or reply to any official works.<sup>45</sup> Still, in his polemical works, More did come close to a kind of opposition through the implications his writings had for the developments occurring at the time.<sup>46</sup>

There are two other instances after his resignation that could be seen as having political involvements: his absence from Anne Boleyn’s coronation and in his dealing with the Nun of Kent. Though not attending Anne’s coronation could hardly be seen as an attempt to incite political opposition it was significant because he was implicitly “refusing to endorse the king’s action.” As such, his actions could also be interpreted “as veiled opposition.”<sup>47</sup> More’s absence is consistent with his actions while he was Lord Chancellor: he would not speak

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<sup>41</sup> Guy, *More*, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Elton, *Policy and Police*, 173-4.

<sup>43</sup> John Guy, "Introduction," in *Debellation of Salem and Bizance*, ed. Ralph Keen John Guy, Clarence Miller and Ruth McGugan, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xxii.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 135-6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-6.

<sup>47</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 304; Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 135.

against the king's actions that he disagreed with but he would also not support them unless absolutely necessary (as in the case of speech before parliament). As More was no longer Lord Chancellor, he was not under obligation to attend and he would not attend just to try to gain the king's favour. More's absence was a clear statement that he did not support the king's marriage but his non-support was not a part of any formal political opposition.

More's involvement with the Nun of Kent was potentially more serious. The Nun of Kent was a woman named Elizabeth Barton who claimed to have the gift of prophecy. She acquired a considerable following and headed a campaign against the annulment.<sup>48</sup> She condemned Henry's actions and prophesied that disaster would befall him if he did not return to Catherine.<sup>49</sup> After the Pope had condemned Henry for separating from Catherine and threatened to excommunicate him, "Elizabeth Barton and her closest associates were arrested."<sup>50</sup> The Pope's threat to excommunicate Henry made the situation delicate and Barton had become a real threat to the public's acceptance of Anne as Queen, making Barton's downfall a "political necessity."<sup>51</sup>

Included in the bill of attainder that was made against her and her associates were the names of both Fisher and More. More had visited her and communicated with her by letter but was able to show that he had limited all conversation to spiritual affairs and firmly refused to engage with her in any matter that involved Henry or politics.<sup>52</sup> Despite Henry's attempts, More succeeded in having his name removed from the attainder.<sup>53</sup> Barton and some of her other associates were not so fortunate; after being convicted of treason they were hung, drawn

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<sup>48</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 137-8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 138-9.

<sup>52</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 30 and 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

and quartered in April 1534. This event does not represent political opposition by More but rather the result of his refusal to be persuaded in the annulment matter. This is evidenced by the fact that when More was examined by the council the time was spent attempting to persuade More to change his mind on the annulment matter, first with pleasantries and then with threats.<sup>54</sup> While it is not accurate to say that More completely retreated from public life, his actions did not represent active political opposition against Henry.

For More, loyal service of the king was not an act of blind obedience or complete servility.<sup>55</sup> Obedience to a king was commanded by Christ, with the only permissible exception being if obedience required setting “God’s law aside.”<sup>56</sup> But if a king’s “private affection towards their own fantasies, happened in anything so far as to mislead their judgement for help of such fortune serve their confessors and counsellors and every man that of good mind would declare his own good advice toward his prince and his country.”<sup>57</sup> Providing that this advice was given in private, not via public criticism.<sup>58</sup> More was under no delusion about the kind of man Henry was. When his son-in-law congratulated him for being highly in the king’s favour, More replied “I may tell thee I have no cause to be proud thereof; for if my head could win him a castle in France’ (for then was there war between France and us) ‘it should not fail to serve his turn.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>55</sup> Fox, *History and Providence*, 164-5.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas More, "The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer," in *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, ed. Richard Marius Loius Schuster, James Lusardi, and Richard Schoeck, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 353.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 8 part II, 591.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 590-1; Fox, *History and Providence*, 164.C8,

<sup>59</sup> Harpsfield, "Life and Death of More," 67.

## The Oath

The climax of More's response to Henry's challenge to papal authority occurred when he was called to swear an oath regarding the Succession Act. This had been passed in 1534, and declared that Henry's successor to the throne would be his heir. More was called to Lambeth to swear the oath on 13 April; he was the only lay person present.<sup>60</sup> After reading the Act of Succession and the oath he was required to take, he refused to swear the oath. More asserted that while he was willing to swear an oath to the succession he could not swear the particular oath that had been given to him without endangering his soul to "perpetual damnation."<sup>61</sup> Beyond this he refused to give his reasons, though he did make a point of saying that he did not blame anyone else for swearing to it.<sup>62</sup>

The problem for More seems to have been with the wording of the oath. The oath included a "clause touching 'all other acts and statutes made in the present Parliament,'" which meant that in swearing the oath to the succession More would have also been swearing an oath to the royal supremacy.<sup>63</sup> That he was willing to swear an oath to the Succession Act is not a reflection of his opinion on the Boleyn marriage but that More accepted that parliament had the legitimate authority to establish officially Henry's successor.<sup>64</sup> When More refused to swear the oath he was not sent directly to the Tower but spent four days in

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<sup>60</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 351; More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 501-2.

<sup>61</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 502.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 503-4. More possibly said this in order to make clear that he was not trying to act against the King by influencing other people not to swear the oath.

<sup>63</sup> Elton, *Policy and Police*, 223-4.

<sup>64</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 118.

the house of the Abbot of Westminster.<sup>65</sup> After this, as his mind remained unchanged, he was imprisoned in the Tower of London.<sup>66</sup> He would remain there for fifteen months.

In May 1535 the government attempted to get More to swear an oath specifically to the supremacy. Again More's response was silence. That is to say, he would not deny the validity of the Act but he refused to swear an oath to it while remaining silent on the reasons behind his refusal beyond appealing to his conscience. More's silence on his reasons was not limited to his interrogators; he would not discuss them with anyone. When asked for advice by Nicholas Wilson, also imprisoned at that time for refusing the oath, or for his reasons by his daughter, More replied that he had resolved to make his reasons known to no one.<sup>67</sup> When charged with obstinacy he replied that he kept silent because speaking his mind would place him in peril. He did however offer to put in writing his reasons as long as it was guaranteed that it would not be used against him.<sup>68</sup> But this did not prevent him from engaging in discussions with his interrogators, though he was extremely careful not to deny outright the royal supremacy or say anything that could be used against him. He had however previously stated his opinions to Cromwell in the form of a letter before his opinion became against the law.<sup>69</sup>

In this manner he was able to make his stand relatively clear to those who interrogated him. It is similar to his response to Henry's attempts to gain an annulment. He refused to discuss the matter with anyone but the King, yet it was well known that his opinion was against the annulment attempts. This was the reason why it was so difficult to convict him. The law was

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<sup>65</sup> Elton, *Policy and Police*, 401.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 504-5 and 1448.

<sup>69</sup> Guy, *More*, 218. It is possible that he slipped up in conversation that he had with Sir Richard.

prepared to handle defiance, but parliament had not anticipated that More would find a loophole in his silence

More's response to the oath makes it clear that although the Act of Succession and the Act of the Royal Supremacy were strongly linked, the larger issue lay with the royal supremacy and not the annulment matter. During the interviews when he was being questioned on the annulment he evaded giving a direct opinion by claiming a "lack of expertise" but when he was questioned about the "breach with the Pope" he changed tactics.<sup>70</sup> He did not defend the primacy of the Pope but he "boldly" defended the "idea of Christendom and the authority of lawful general councils of the church."<sup>71</sup> He may not have agreed with Henry's actions but he was willing to accept that parliament had the right to issue a proclamation regarding succession and that it was no longer his business. But with the royal supremacy, parliament had acted outside its authority and he could not acquiesce in that.

More's response to the oath was the only one that did not compromise his conscience. He could not swear to an oath which he believed was against the theology of Christendom and he could not deny the oath as to do so would be to seek death, which he believed was morally wrong. Therefore he took the only avenue that remained open to him and remained silent. Part of the issue was the oath itself. It reduced the complex issue of papal authority and the royal supremacy to the "yes-or-no level."<sup>72</sup> Like others who died rather than take the oath, he believed it would be violating the very essence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church to deny the authority of the Pope.<sup>73</sup> More's response was an illustration of the dilemma that

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<sup>70</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 255-6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 256.

he was in. He did not wish to be disloyal to his king but, at the same time, he would not be disloyal to God.

All this was the product of two strong natures facing off against one another. Henry's demand for loyalty was unbending; when it came down to it, people either were convinced of his views in this matter, or at least pretended to be, or suffered imprisonment and death. Henry's strong will or stubbornness is well known but in More, Henry's will was matched though in a different way. While Henry demanded that others bend to his will and beliefs, More demanded that he himself must bend only to what he believed was the will of God. This conviction was forged by his theology, particularly with regards where authority lay in the church.

## **The Theology of Thomas More**

Thomas More stood against Henry VIII's campaign to secure a royal annulment from Catherine of Aragon, that much is evident. Ultimately, he chose martyrdom rather than submit to the Supremacy Act, the culmination of that campaign. But the question remains, what were the motivations behind this response? Over the years historians have had different ways of answering this question. Revisionists have often taken a psychoanalytical line of interpretation, particularly with regard to his writing, in understanding the reasons behind More's actions. In doing so, they emphasise the way in which he was driven by uncertainty.<sup>74</sup> Richard Marius, one of More's key biographers, argued that he was driven by the inner conflict of his desire for perfection against his enmeshment in the world.<sup>75</sup> While Alistair Fox

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<sup>74</sup> Young, "Revising the Revisionists," 79-80; Bradshaw, "Controversial More," 546.

<sup>75</sup> Young, "Revising the Revisionists," 68-69; Marius, *Thomas More*, xxii-xxiii. Marius goes as far as to argue that his martyrdom was a "act of self-validation." While he did everything possible to avoid it, it became his only

asserts that More's ideals were damaged by his experiences and maps a growing despair and intellectual deterioration that he sees as being evident throughout his written works.<sup>76</sup> However, what is lacking in these approaches is a proper assessment of the theological motivations behind his actions.<sup>77</sup>

In parliament, the Treason Act was followed by "two Acts of attainder," the second of which was directly aimed at More and "denounced him for 'intending to sow sedition' by refusing the oath of succession."<sup>78</sup> More was indicted on four counts: on 7 May 1535 he had refused to "accept the royal supremacy;" he had been actively involved in a "conspiratorial correspondence with Fisher," a convicted traitor; on 3 June he would not "break his silence" and displayed maliciousness when he referred to the Act as "a two-edged sword"; and, on 12 June he committed verbal treason during his conversation with Richard Riche, the solicitor-general.<sup>79</sup> More made a compelling and earnest effort to refute the charges against him but to no avail. He was convicted of treason under the Treason Act and was beheaded on 15 July.

## **The Papacy**

Twenty years after More's execution Reginald Pole circulated the idea that the papacy was the fundamental doctrine for which More died.<sup>80</sup> In one sense this is correct, it was his refusal

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option if "he was to see any coherence between the course of his life and its end." He adds that as "with all martyrs who are not insane it may be argued that he died not for what he believed but for what he wanted to believe."

<sup>76</sup> Fox, *Thomas More*, 125-7; Young, "Revising the Revisionists," 72; Bradshaw, "Controversial More," 539

<sup>77</sup> Young, "Revising the Revisionists," 80; Headley, "Guy's Thomas More," 91

<sup>78</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 369.

<sup>79</sup> Derret, "Trial of More," 59; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 410.

<sup>80</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 517.

to deny the primacy of the Pope by swearing an oath recognising royal supremacy that resulted in his death. After he had been found guilty, More avowed that the Act of Parliament that his indictment was based on was “directly repugnant to the laws of God and his Holy Church, the supreme government of which or of part whereof, may no temporal Prince presume by any law to take upon him, as rightfully belonging to the See of Rome, a spiritual pre-eminence by the mouth of Our Saviour himself, personally present upon earth, only to St Peter and his successors, Bishops of the same See, by which special prerogative granted.”<sup>81</sup>

Still, simply to say that More died for the papacy oversimplifies the reasons for More’s stand and inaccurately implies that he held a higher view of the papal authority than he did. More was not a papal supremacist.<sup>82</sup> In practice, More viewed the authority of the Pope and the General Council as functioning in an interdependent relationship.<sup>83</sup> Although ultimately it was the Council, not the Pope, which More considered to be the superior authority.<sup>84</sup> A legitimately convened council was capable of admonishing and, if required, deposing an

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<sup>81</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 45; Derret, "Trial of More," 71. More was attacking the Treason Act because though it was the Royal Supremacy Act that refuted papal primacy it was the Treason Act that imposed this theology upon all of England.

<sup>82</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 294; Marius, *Thomas More*, 517.

<sup>83</sup> Guy, *More*, 202; Brian Gogan, *The Common Corps of Christendom: Ecclesiological Themes in the Writings of Sir Thomas More* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 348.

<sup>84</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*; Guy, *More*, 201-3; Bradshaw, "Controversial More," 563; Francis Oakley, "Headley, Marius and the Matter of Thomas More's Conciliarism," *Moreana*, no. 64 (Mar 1980): 84-6. It should be noted that neither general councils nor the papacy acted as More’s organising principle for the construction of his theology. Authority in the church did not rely primarily with any one human institution, even the general councils. Therefore, it would be misleading to label him as a conciliarist. Rather, More’s ecclesiological focus went beyond the constitutional issues of the power dynamics within the papal-council relationship to the larger reality of the common corps of Christendom and its divinely inspired consensus.

errant pope and it gave final approval on doctrinal issues.<sup>85</sup> In a letter he wrote to Cromwell in 1533, More stated “for the general councils assembled lawfully, I never could perceive, but that in the declaration of the truth, it is to be believed and to be standed to, the authority whereof ought to be taken for undoubtable.”<sup>86</sup> Otherwise nothing can be held to be certain and Christendom might descend “from day to day into continual ruffle and confusion.”<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, the papacy held a crucial place within the Church. The Pope may not have held supreme authority but he was still the Church’s “chief spiritual governor and Christ’s vicar in earth.”<sup>88</sup> The Pope’s primacy was vital to preserving the unity of the Church and dealing with the practical realities of Christendom.<sup>89</sup> More considered the Pope to be a part of the definition of the church. In his *Apology* More defined the church as the “common known congregation of all Christian nations under one head the Pope.”<sup>90</sup> Attacking the papacy had serious implications not only for ecclesiastical authority structures but for secular ones as well.<sup>91</sup> In challenging papal jurisdiction over England, Henry was undermining the

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<sup>85</sup> More, "Confutation," 590; Guy, *More*, 202; Gogan, *Ecclesiological Themes*, 353.

<sup>86</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1428. This certainty of doctrinal authority of the council stemmed from the belief that the “Spirit of God,” who “keeps and ever shall keep the corps of his catholic church,” assisted every council that was legitimately convened.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* In this letter More is defending himself against accusations of disloyalty to Henry. This may have been cause for him to down play his belief in papal authority but not to exaggerate his belief in the authority of general councils. Though Henry was directly attacking papal primacy, this implicitly involved an attack of the authority of general councils that had affirmed that primacy.

<sup>88</sup> More, "Confutation," 576.

<sup>89</sup> Philip Sheldrake, "Authority and Consensus in Thomas More's Doctrine of the Church," *Heythrop Journal* 20, no. 2 (1979): 149; More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1428.

<sup>90</sup> More, "Confutation," 576.

<sup>91</sup> Sheldrake, "Authority and Consensus," 149

ecclesiastical catholicity and unity of Christendom and encouraging the spread of heresy in England.<sup>92</sup>

This was of particular importance to More, who had spent many years passionately attempting to stem tide of heresy in England. This campaign involved the writing of several treatises to refute the messages of Evangelicals like William Tyndale and Simon Fish, conducting raids to confiscate prohibited books, interrogating alleged heretics and pronouncing sentence on them using the full severity of the law.<sup>93</sup> Defending the Catholic Church was both a religious and secular obligation, until the break with Rome.<sup>94</sup> The methods that he used were not unusual for his day but More did so with a zealotry far greater than most people.<sup>95</sup>

Heresy was such a serious threat for More because as there was no salvation outside the church, the person who spread heresy was worse than one who committed murder. A murderer could kill the body but heretical works could “infect the reader and corrupt the soul unto everlasting death.”<sup>96</sup> More saw heresy as a disease that led to the “utter loss and

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<sup>92</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1428; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 256; Marshall, *Reformation England*, 39-40.

<sup>93</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 290-3; Guy, *More*, 120-22.

<sup>94</sup> Guy, *More*, 120.

<sup>95</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 290-3; Guy, *More*, 120-22 and 217-22; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 218-9. Guy notes that the seeming dichotomy between More as the author of *Utopia* and More as an inquisitor in heresy cases has resulted in historians arguing for a kind of schizophrenia between these two “Mores.”

<sup>96</sup> More, “Confutation,” 38.

destruction of many a good simple soul.”<sup>97</sup> Heresy was “treason to God” and the worst of all crimes.<sup>98</sup>

As his treatment of heresy shows, More’s focus was much wider than the merely the papacy. Still, the Pope was an essential part of the church, even if it did not hold supreme authority. More believed that denying papal authority would only open the way for heresy to grow. It was not so much the papacy that More died for; rather, he died to preserve the church.

### **Consensus in the Common Corps of Christendom**

The idea of consensus in the corps of Christendom is a fundamental aspect of More’s ecclesiology and served as ultimate locus of authority within the Church.<sup>99</sup> Consensus legitimated the Church and it is what the authority of the papacy and general councils were based on.<sup>100</sup> The idea of common consensus being authoritative was a legal notion that referred to “a collection of habits agreed on by the multitudes, which by long enduring had achieved authority and divine sanction.”<sup>101</sup> But for More, consensus also had a spiritual dimension to it. Consensus holds ultimate authority because the Church is not merely a human congregation but the “Mystical body of Christ, with the living presence of Christ in the midst and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>102</sup> Consensus was not merely the product of a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.; “The Debellation of Salem and Bizance,” in *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance*, ed. Ralph Keen John Guy, Clarence Miller and Ruth McGugan, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 70.

<sup>98</sup> More, “Debellation,” 70; “The Apology,” in *The Apology*, ed. J. B. Trapp, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 45.

<sup>99</sup> Sheldrake, “Authority and Consensus,” 147; Bradshaw, “Controversial More,” 563.

<sup>100</sup> Sheldrake, “Authority and Consensus,” 158.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 156; Marius, *Thomas More*, 284-5.

<sup>102</sup> Sheldrake, “Authority and Consensus,” 157.

long tradition of a majority vote; rather it is the Holy Spirit who inspires individual believers to form the consensus.<sup>103</sup>

Common consensus did not create revelation, rather it authoritatively interpreted the divine revelation that had already occurred.<sup>104</sup> Thus, consensus of the entire Church was capable of existing at any moment in time but it had greater authority when spread throughout the ages.<sup>105</sup> More used consensus to defend church ways, both large and small; from the church practices of pilgrimages and the veneration of images to fundamental church doctrines such as the creed.<sup>106</sup> He also used it in his apologetics for the papacy.

When More justified his stance to Cromwell on papal primacy, he states that when he had investigated the papal primacy he had found that all the Fathers from Ignatius to “our own days, both Latin and Greeks,” were agreed that the primacy of the Pope was instituted by God, and that it had also been affirmed by the general councils.<sup>107</sup> He went on to say “the primacy is at the least wise instituted by the corps of Christendom and for a great cause in avoiding schism and corroborate by continual succession more than the space of a thousand years...And therefore since all Christendom is one corps, I cannot perceive how any member thereof may without the common consent of the body, depart from the common head.”<sup>108</sup> Although More begins by referencing the Church fathers and the general councils, this is merely a prelude to his central argument that primacy is validated by consensus of tradition and cannot be dissented from legitimately without the consensus of Christendom.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Gogan, *Ecclesiological Themes*, 360-1; Sheldrake, "Authority and Consensus," 160.

<sup>105</sup> Gogan, *Ecclesiological Themes*, 369.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>107</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1428.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. This argument was again used by More during his trial.

The doctrine of consensus also contained the denial of several beliefs that were argued by Evangelicals. Contrary to Luther's claim that the true church was an invisible one, More's consensus was based on the tenet that the Church was both visible and known.<sup>109</sup> The Evangelical assertion that the church had become corrupted over time was wrong because Christ had promised to remain with his church and God would not have allowed such corruption to continue for so long, leading countless innocents astray in the process.<sup>110</sup> But principally, authority through consensus directly opposed what More believed was the Evangelical's excessive subjectivism, a subjectivism, that was not in the least demonstrated through their propagation of individual interpretation of scripture.<sup>111</sup>

Evangelicals argued that their beliefs were grounded purely on the literal interpretation of scripture.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, More attested that as God was continually active in creation, God's revelation was not restricted merely to the scriptures.<sup>113</sup> In his polemical tract against Luther, More pointed out "some things in the church have been correctly instituted, some correctly changed, some even correctly abolished, so completely aside from scripture that scripture seems apparently to be rather opposed."<sup>114</sup> The Church did not obscure the meaning of scripture; it is the church that identifies true scripture and provides the essential interpretative lens to understand it.<sup>115</sup> In this way, subjective interpretation was dangerously misleading because it lacked the wisdom of church tradition that was necessary to understand and

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<sup>109</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 516; Sheldrake, "Authority and Consensus," 148.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Marius, "Thomas More and the Early Church Fathers," in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. Richard Standish Sylvester and Germain Marc'hadour (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 411-2.

<sup>111</sup> Sheldrake, "Authority and Consensus," 161; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 417.

<sup>112</sup> Rex, "More and the Heretics."

<sup>113</sup> More, "Confutation," 590; Marius, "More and the Early Fathers," 419; Fox, *History and Providence*, 158.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas More, "Responsio Ad Lutherum," in *Responsio Ad Lutherum*, ed. John Headley, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 703.

<sup>115</sup> "Dialogue," 254; Rex, "More and the Heretics," 97 and 100.

interpret scripture correctly. And as such, individual interpretation of scripture could easily cause even the learned and pious person go led astray.<sup>116</sup>

## Conscience

Throughout the judicial proceedings More consistently justified his refusal to swear the oaths as an act of conscience. Conscience is what motivated both his relative silence during the judicial proceedings and the way in which he did, at times, speak out before his imprisonment. But this evocation of conscience has often been misunderstood to mean that More was standing up for the right of individual judgement.<sup>117</sup> More lived in a society that believed that firmly believed in the notion of universal truth.<sup>118</sup> By invoking his conscience, More was once again referring back to the authority of the consensus of the common corps of Christendom. During his interrogation he distinguished the nature of his conscience from that of heretics by arguing that he was validated by the “whole corps of Christendom.”<sup>119</sup> And in his statement after the guilty verdict, he asserted that he was not bound to “conform my conscience to the Council of one Realm against the General Council of Christendom.”<sup>120</sup> It

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<sup>116</sup> Marius, "More and the Early Fathers," 403.

<sup>117</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 147-8; Guy, *More*, 199.

<sup>118</sup> Rex, "More and the Heretics," 109; Headley, "Guy's Thomas More," 96.

<sup>119</sup> More, *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1454-5; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 417. In this context More is defending his silence against the point made by Thomas Cromwell that in heresy cases suspected heretics were not allowed to remain silent about their belief about the Pope. Elton argues that More's validation of himself by referring to the corps of Christendom is a “really rather shaky” argument as it implies that his “conviction regarding papal primacy rested on a majority vote and no more. In this Elton misses the spiritual dimension to More's agreement and the crucial overriding belief of God's involvement in his church. It is not merely a majority vote that More is referring to but one that is formed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>120</sup> Roper, "Life of More," 46; *1534-1535*. vol. 5 part I, Calendar of State Papers, Spain (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1886), 507ff. While More does speak about the General Council of Christendom, he is not

was that his conscience was in line with established truth as recognised by the Church's consensus that gave him the confidence to die for his beliefs.<sup>121</sup> In referring to his conscience More was not making a stand on freedom of religion, rather he was justifying his action as the only moral one he could take.<sup>122</sup>

More's conscience not only drove him to refuse the oath, it was the cause behind his relative silence. Martyrdom was not something that should be sought; death should be chosen only when the means of escaping it required endangering the soul.<sup>123</sup> More's actions were not those of a fanatic and his relative silence was a part of his struggle to avoid rushing to martyrdom.<sup>124</sup> It was the "obstinate heretics, that endure willing painful death for vain glory."<sup>125</sup> Thus, during his interrogations he would not give the reasons for his refusal as he "could not declare them without peril" and it was not until after the guilty verdict had been given that he spoke directly about his motivations.<sup>126</sup> That he chose death rather than acquiesce was, as with other martyrs, a logical conclusion when temporal suffering was weighed against eternal suffering or gain.<sup>127</sup> He could not deny his conscience lest "in the saving of my body should stand the loss of my soul."

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referring to general councils as such but the collective consensus of Christians, both living and dead. This is far clearer in the Spanish report of the trial.

<sup>121</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 148; Guy, *More*, 117-8; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 417.

<sup>122</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 147.

<sup>123</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 257.

<sup>124</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 517; Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 362-3.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas More, "A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation," in *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, ed. Loius Martz and Frank Manley, The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press), 314.

<sup>126</sup> *Letters and Epitaphs*, 1448.

<sup>127</sup> Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 123.

Some of the aspects of More's response, such as his encouragement of Throckmorton and his polemical tracts after his resignation, can be seen as a kind of limited opposition to Henry's actions. Still, it would be misleading to paint More as a rebel. His actions were intended to be in the interests of Henry in the long run. He attempted to maintain his loyalty to Henry as much as he could. Obviously, though, this did not happen, instead More's theology remained in opposition to Henry's and his agenda.

While More's loyalty to Henry and the fact that he did not desire martyrdom shaped his response to Henry's challenge to papal authority, it was his theology that was the source of his response. It can be said that More died for the "sacral church" or "Christendom," of which the papacy was an essential part.<sup>128</sup> But he did not die for a cause in the sense that he was attempting to begin a movement that would reverse the government's acts. Instead, through his death he bore "witness to his profound conviction of the moral authority of Christendom."<sup>129</sup> It was his theology that marked the direction that his response would take and was his motivation and driving factor throughout.

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<sup>128</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 517; Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 151.

<sup>129</sup> *The King's Reformation*, 151.151.

## Chapter Three: Thomas Cranmer

Until his late thirties, Thomas Cranmer was a respected scholar at Cambridge with a relatively undistinguished career. By the time that he was 45 he had been appointed archbishop of Canterbury and was well on the way to leaving a lasting impact on the formation of the English Church. The catalyst that ignited this rapid rise to power and placed him on the path to lasting fame was Henry VIII's desire for an annulment. Unlike Thomas More, Cranmer was a fervent advocate of the king's cause. From the beginning Cranmer appears to have been sure that there was "but one truth" in the matter, that the king was justified in seeking to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.<sup>1</sup> Cranmer's involvement in the annulment process was substantial. Henry contracted him to write polemical works on the issue; he was sent on two diplomatic missions to aid Henry's cause; he was elected archbishop of Canterbury; and, finally, it was Cranmer who pronounced the official judgement that Henry's marriage to Catherine had been illegitimate and that his marriage to Anne Boleyn was legitimate. In all of this, Cranmer's response to the King's Great Matter stands in stark contrast to More's reluctant support and clear disapproval of the king's actions.

### Primary Source Material

For Catholics, Cranmer would be viewed as an object of scorn; for Evangelicals and later Protestants, he would be an object of esteem. But in doing so both acknowledge the significance of the footprint that Cranmer has left on the history of the English Church. Fortunately for historians the very importance of the role that Cranmer played in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Morice, "Anecdotes and Character of Archbishop Cranmer," in *Narratives of the Reformation*, ed. John Nichols (Westminster: Camden Society, 1859), 242.

formation of the English Church ensured that his works would be preserved and his life recorded by others. The English extant resources include contemporary biographies, letters, treatises, governmental records, and of course, his own considerable works that ranged from an English translation of *Determinations of the Universities* to treatises promoting Evangelical theology to revisions of the Book of Common Prayer and the standard Book of Homilies.

Unfortunately the majority of this source material deals with his life after he became Archbishop, leaving large gaps of knowledge about his life before. There is little information on his upbringing, his time at Cambridge, or his royal service before his appointment. This situation that inevitably limits the kind of conclusions that can be drawn without falling into the trap of speculation. Still, there are some extant sources to work with. In particular, there are three key biographical accounts of Cranmer's life: *Anecdotes and Character of Archbishop Cranmer* by Ralph Morice; *The Life and Death of Archbishop Cranmer* by an anonymous biographer; and, *The Life of Dr. Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury* by John Foxe as recorded in his *Acts and Monuments*.

Ralph Morice wrote his account at the request Archbishop Mathew Parker.<sup>2</sup> He was the obvious man for such a task as he had a long and close relationship with Cranmer. Morice had served as Cranmer's trusted secretary for twenty years and while he was not present during Cranmer's early life it is reasonable to assume that his information about those times came directly from Cranmer.<sup>3</sup> As one would expect, Morice's account is not a neutral one and his

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<sup>2</sup> John Gough Nichols, ed. *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation* (Westminster: Camden Society, 1859), 234.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-5; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 18. It is likely that Cranmer got to know Morice's father, James Morice, during his early years at Cambridge.

esteem for Cranmer is evident in his praise of Cranmer's character.<sup>4</sup> Still, the same close relationship that results in a rose-tinted evaluation of Cranmer, also helps to validate the information given about Cranmer, making Morice's biography a valuable primary source that is often utilised by historians.<sup>5</sup>

The next account, *The Life and Death of Archbishop Cranmer* was written by an unknown but well-informed source.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that its anonymous authorship obscures both the context in which the account was written and the motivations that impelled the author to write it, there are still some conclusions that which can be drawn. Phrases used within the text such as "popery" and referring to the Pope as the "bishop of Rome" clearly show that the writer was an Evangelical.<sup>7</sup> It is also likely that it was written during the reign of Mary I as a means of exalting Cranmer, a fact that would explain the anonymous authorship as Protestants were under persecution at this time.<sup>8</sup> The biography chiefly relates a general description of events such as one would read in a report and offers little personal insight into Cranmer, but it also

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<sup>4</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 245.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Diarmaid MacCulloch links Morice's biography with the anonymous biography, which he describes as the "one of the best sources for Cranmer's life." (MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 633.)

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, *Narratives*, 218; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 36 and 633; Parker, "Introduction," XIII.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, "The Life and Death of Thomas Cranmer, Late Archbishop of Canterbury," in *Narratives of the Reformation*, ed. John Nichols (Westminster: Camden Society, 1859), 221-3. The decision to henceforth refer to the Pope as the 'bishop of Rome' was made by the King's council in December 1533 as part of the propaganda campaign to undermine papal authority in England (Rex, *Tudors*, 66).

<sup>8</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 634-5. MacCulloch offers Dr Stephen Nevinson as a potential author.

Nevinson had a lot of Cranmer's papers after his arrest and subsequent execution and was strongly connected with Reyner Wolfe, not only a printer but Cranmer's publisher. Cranmer was also his first patron, which could have been enough reason in itself for Nevinson to risk composing a piece honouring Cranmer at a time when Cranmer was under attack by the state. Nevinson does represent a possible, perhaps even probable, candidate for the anonymous biographer but there is not enough evidence to know for sure and as such Nevinson is not taken to be the author of the anonymous account in this thesis.

expands on events that Morice's biography skims over. Furthermore, the similarities between that exist between the biographies help to corroborate both accounts.<sup>9</sup>

The last biographer, John Foxe, is by far the most famous, or at times infamous, of the three. In the past, Foxe has been accused of both grossly distorting material and of simply inventing it.<sup>10</sup> While he has been somewhat cleared of these charges he is still considered to be a creative editor, omitting or suppressing evidence that did not suit his specific polemical purpose of glorifying Protestant martyrs.<sup>11</sup> This editing process is evident in his biography of Cranmer. Foxe's account is primarily based on the accounts of the two previous biographers but there is a considerable elaboration on Cranmer's entry into royal service, adorning it with far more of a story-like quality than the other two.<sup>12</sup> There is also the conspicuous absence of any reference to Cranmer's controversial second marriage, something that is also omitted in

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<sup>9</sup> Ridley argues that this source "makes several errors about Cranmer's early life." Specifically that it states that Cranmer achieved his Doctorate of Divinity when he was 34 but he actually achieved it in 1526 (making him 36). However, the actual wording used is that he became a doctor when he "was about 34 of age," signifying that the age given is an approximation rather than a precise figure. The other "mistakes" likely refers to things such as the fact that this account offers a different, though not necessarily contradictory, sequence of events of how Cranmer entered the King's service or that Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, was a closet Catholic (Jasper Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 13; Anonymous, "Thomas Cranmer," 219-20 and 23).

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Collinson, "Truth, Lies and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century Protestant Historiography," in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain : History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800*, ed. Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 46 and 49; John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Nichols, *Narratives*, 219 and 34; John Foxe, *Fox's Original and Complete Book of Martyrs* (Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 2004), 456-7.

the account of the anonymous biographer. Still, Foxe's account offers a useful perspective of Cranmer's life and an essential source of information.<sup>13</sup>

The three key biographies are indispensable for providing information about Cranmer's life; however, they all suffer from the same weakness. That is, they all have been written from a same protestant desire of wishing to celebrate Cranmer's life and as such as all biased in his favour. This bias is somewhat negated by Nicholas Harpsfield's account of Cranmer in *Treatise against the Pretended Divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon* that offers a decidedly negative perspective on Cranmer.<sup>14</sup> Just as the previous accounts seek to glorify and celebrate Cranmer so Harpsfield's account seeks to discredit and defame him. Harpsfield certainly offers different insight into Cranmer and his actions but his account is only a cursory one, merely touching on aspects of Cranmer's early life that aid his wider polemical purpose of discrediting the annulment itself.<sup>15</sup> Any factual information that the account contains must be gleaned from an onslaught of defamatory accusations and sneering remarks, some of which appear to be based more on rumour than anything else.<sup>16</sup> This is a valuable source but as it gives only a cursory account of Cranmer's life, its usefulness chiefly resides in demonstrating the contemporary Catholic perspective of Cranmer as well as the rumours that were evidently circulating about him at the time.

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 177.

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Harpsfield, *A Treatise on the Pretended Divorce between Henry VIII and Catharine of Aragon* (Westminster] : New York: Camden Society, 1878), 289-92.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14 and 289-92.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 275 and 90-1. Harpsfield's claims range from the probable claim that Cranmer was made Archbishop due to his eagerness about the annulment, to the plausible claim that the king informed him of his appointment as a bear baiting, to the ridiculous claim that he sometimes carried his second wife around in a "great chest full of holes."

These biographies of Cranmer are useful in their own way. However, as none of them was written until after Cranmer's death they all recording events that occurred many years earlier. Sources that have the value of not being written in hindsight include Cranmer's translation of *Determinations of the Universities*; governmental records; the transcript of his trial; and contemporary correspondence (written by both himself and others).<sup>17</sup> The correspondence is particularly useful as it offers insider details about the final stages of attaining the annulment.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps most importantly though is a letter by Cranmer to Henry relating two sermons he preached on royal supremacy after his election to archbishop, a letter that offers valuable insight into his theology.<sup>19</sup>

The transcript of Cranmer's examination during his heresy trial in September 1555 is more difficult to deal with. Assuming that the transcript itself is accurate there are still reasons to question the accuracy of the information given by Cranmer. To begin with, at the time of his trial Cranmer was sixty-five and while he may still have been in "full vigour of body and mind," when discussing the annulment he was not only relating events that occurred twenty

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<sup>17</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 55. The *Determinations of the Universities* is a lengthy treatise advocating the cause for the annulment, crucially the doctrine of royal supremacy. Cranmer had been heavily involved in the formation of the original document, *Gravissimae Censurae*, and the way in which he translated this document from Latin to English illustrates his theological beliefs. Translating a document is by no means a straightforward process and involves many interpretative decisions. *Determinations* was a governmental undertaking so the document had to be consistent with the official royal policy not just Cranmer's own theology, but as he most likely completed the translation by himself his own theology would have still filtered through. Meaning that, provided care is taken, the interpretative choices Cranmer made can still be used to shine light on his understanding and assumptions about the doctrine of royal supremacy

<sup>18</sup> Rev. John Edmund Cox, ed. *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr 1556* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1846), 238-45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-7.

years earlier but was doing so in a pressured and highly hostile atmosphere.<sup>20</sup> It is unreasonable to assume that this context would not affect how he answered the questions. Thus, when discussing his first marriage, he was not able to remember whether his wife's maiden name had been "black or brown."<sup>21</sup> And when arguing that he was extremely reluctant to accept the archbishopric he contradicted himself over how long he delayed his journey back to England.<sup>22</sup>

## Response to the Annulment Campaign

Thomas Cranmer was born in Aslocton, Nottinghamshire, on 2 July 1489 and was the son of Thomas Cranmer and Agnes Hatfeld.<sup>23</sup> His family were low-level members of the gentry with connections within the high gentry of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire.<sup>24</sup> But despite attempts by his biographers to accentuate Cranmer's noble lineage not all the family's connections were so illustrious.<sup>25</sup> Both Morice and Foxe asserted that the gentry status of his family could be traced back to the time of William the Conqueror, but their family's heraldic display listed some marital alliances that were "curiously remote" and at Cambridge, at least

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<sup>20</sup> David Loades, "Introduction," in *Cranmer : A Living Influence for 500 Years*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 1; Patrick Collinson, "Thomas Cranmer," in *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (Wantage, Oxfordshire: IKON, 1992), 79; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 219.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 218 and 24. He stated initially that it took seven weeks and later that it took six months.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, "Thomas Cranmer," 218.

<sup>24</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*.

<sup>25</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 238; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455; Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics: Thomas Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner, 1503–1533," *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 01 (1994): 1-2.

one of Cranmer's relatives was an inn landlady.<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising that his biographers would wish to place a man who had become such an important figure in the English Church in the most noble light possible but the evidence indicates that the family that Cranmer was born into was that of a simple esquire with few family connections.<sup>27</sup> A situation that was very different from More's who, although not of a member of the clergy, came from a family with many high connections.

Glimpses into Cranmer's youth are offered by Morice who describes the negative effects of a difficult school master and of his education in gentlemanly exercises.<sup>28</sup> What is known is that at the age of 14 he was sent to Jesus College in Cambridge, where he received the traditional education for a Bachelor of Arts: studies in the Classics, logic and an introduction in Philosophy.<sup>29</sup> After this Cranmer went on to complete his Masters of Arts, receiving a fellowship from the college.<sup>30</sup> During this time in his academic career that a short but dramatic detour occurred: his marriage to a woman named Joan.<sup>31</sup> Although not yet a member

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<sup>26</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 238; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455; MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 1-2. This was the same landlady who would later provide lodgings for his wife.

<sup>27</sup> MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 238-9. Morice informs us that in his youth Cranmer had a difficult schoolmaster whose harsh methods left a negative impact on him, resulting in the permanent reduction of his natural "benefit of memory and audacity." We also learn of his father's desire that Cranmer also be educated in gentlemanly exercises, and so was often allowed to "hunt and hawk and to exercise and to ride rough horses."

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, "The Life and Death of Thomas Cranmer, Late Archbishop of Canterbury," 219; Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 238-9; Peter Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 240; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455.

<sup>31</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 220. Harpsfield, *Pretended Divorce*, 289; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 21-22; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455. Like so much else during this time in Cranmer's life, little is known about Joan or their marriage. Her maiden name was either Black or Brown. She is referred to by Harpsfield as a barmaid and

of the clergy, marrying Joan still meant that he was obliged to give up his fellowship at Jesus College.<sup>32</sup> So he became a reader at Buckingham and found lodgings for his wife at the Dolphin Inn where one of the “woman of the house” was a relation of his.<sup>33</sup>

This set-up gave rise to rumours, which circulated latter in his career, that he was an ostler who had married a barmaid.<sup>34</sup> Morice and Foxe must have considered this to be a significant insult as both pointedly refute it and go out of their way to explain its origins.<sup>35</sup> Harpsfield, and others since, have suggested that the marriage was due to the fact that Joan was pregnant.<sup>36</sup> Considering that she gave birth within a year of the marriage if she was not pregnant before than she must have become pregnant very soon after she was married. But even if the marriage was due to pregnancy, it would necessitate a black mark on Cranmer’s morality as he chose to marry the woman and live in poverty when he might have chosen, as others did, to keep her as his mistress while still retaining his fellowship.<sup>37</sup> The fact that Cranmer was willing to marry, even at some personal cost, may demonstrate esteem for the institution of marriage. If so, his future support for the annulment cannot be attributed to a lack of respect for the institution of marriage.

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by Foxe and Strype as a gentleman’s daughter; however neither claim can be substantiated. The marriage itself is thought to have occurred between 1515 and 1519, probably earlier in that period rather than later.

<sup>32</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 241; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Foxe obviously felt the need to explain why Cranmer placed his wife in an inn instead of living with her as he states that Cranmer did so in order that he “would with more diligence apply himself to his office.”

<sup>34</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 269; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455; Harpsfield, *Pretended Divorce*, 289.

<sup>35</sup> Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455; Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 269. This was could very likely be part of the reason for the emphasis they place on Cranmer’s gentry origins.

<sup>36</sup> Harpsfield, *Pretended Divorce*, 189; Ridley, *Cranmer*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Cranmer*, 18-19.

Tragically, however, within a year of marriage Joan died in childbirth.<sup>38</sup> If she had lived Cranmer would not have been able to return to his studies at Cambridge and he would not have had the same impact on the English Church. As it was, Cranmer returned to his studies, achieved his doctorate in divinity, was appointed a university examiner and sometime around 1520 took orders, becoming a member of the clergy.<sup>39</sup> Though the circumstances and eventual outcome were very different, Cranmer and More both looked to the priesthood before choosing instead to marry.

One other important aspect of his time at Cambridge was his undistinguished career as a scholar. By 1529 Cranmer's career as a scholar was lagging far behind his peers.<sup>40</sup> While he was regarded with respect by those at Cambridge, he had written nothing and did not hold any important position.<sup>41</sup> In the past Catholic historians have viewed this as ineptitude while Protestant historians have argued that it was a result of his extreme humility, but there is sense of complacency about his nearly three decades at Cambridge. Complacency may have been part of the reason why he did not join the rush of Cambridge men to Cardinal College at Oxford when he was head-hunted by Wolsey, he was content to remain at Cambridge and did not desire a change.<sup>42</sup> Ridley uses Cranmer's undistinguished career to suggest that Cranmer's support for the annulment campaign was strongly motivated by ambition: while "Cranmer had resisted the lure of the road to Cardinal's College; he could not resist the lure of the road to Durham House."<sup>43</sup> However, it can be argued that Cranmer's time at Cambridge indicates that the opposite was true. Despite having an aptitude for scholarly work, Cranmer, at this stage,

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<sup>38</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 240.

<sup>39</sup> Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455.

<sup>40</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 4-5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; Ridley, *Cranmer*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Ridley, *Cranmer*, 29.

was not an ambitious man. Thus, ambition was not a key influence in shaping his support for the king's annulment campaign.

### **The Suggestion**

Cranmer's involvement with the King's Great Matter begins with a famous conversation at Waltham during the summer of 1529 with Stephen Gardiner and Edward Fox, two other doctors with whom he had attended Cambridge. After the disappointing trial at Black Friars the king had removed himself to Waltham, with his entourage being lodged with neighbouring gentry.<sup>44</sup> Henry had hoped that this trial would result in the Pope granting him his annulment. But his hopes were dashed when Cardinal Campeggio, the Pope's representative, once more postponed giving a verdict on the matter; adjourning the trial until August and leaving Henry discouraged with his attempts to get the Pope to grant an annulment. All of this resulted in Gardiner and Fox, who were a part of the king's entourage, being lodged with a Mr Cressey with whom Cranmer happened already to be staying to avoid a bout of plague at Cambridge.<sup>45</sup> As they dined together during the evening meal the conversation of the three men turned to discuss the matter of the king's annulment.

Unfortunately Cranmer's biographers have not recorded the thoughts of Gardiner or Fox on the annulment; we are left only with Cranmer's opinion on the subject. After Cranmer had professed his ignorance on the subject he put forth his idea to "to bring the matter unto a perfect conclusion and end, especially for the satisfaction of the troubled conscience of the king's highness."<sup>46</sup> He posited that the current strategy of going through the courts not only would continue to drag on but would ultimately be ineffective. A better alternative would be to refer the case to university theologians, as it is "most certain, (said he), that there is but one

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<sup>44</sup> Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 455; Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 241; Loades, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>45</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 240-1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-2.

truth in it, which no men ought or better can discuss than the divines.”<sup>47</sup> Their verdict may be quickly “known and brought so to pass with little industry and charges, that the king’s conscience thereby may be quieted and pacified which we all ought to consider and regard in this question and doubt. And then his highness in conscience quieted may determine with himself that which shall seem good before God, and let this tumultuary process give place unto a certain truth.”<sup>48</sup>

Despite what has been suggested in the past, Cranmer’s suggestion to refer the case to the university theologians was not extreme or revolutionary.<sup>49</sup> In the previous decade it had become a “humanist commonplace” that the theological controversies of Europe could be solved by “referring them to leading universities” and was suggested by people on both sides of the debate of the annulment issue.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Cranmer was not the first person to suggest the idea in this context. Wolsey had been canvassing university opinions two years earlier.<sup>51</sup> What is notable about this statement is that Cranmer’s prime concern appears to be quieting the conscience of the King rather than discussing the reasons for why the King is correct. While the content of the preceding conversation cannot be known, it appears that

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Though in his biography Morice places Cranmer’s statement in quotations and records Cranmer’s opinion in the first person, he clearly states both before and after the statement that this is an approximation of the words that were said to this effect rather than an attempt at a verbatim transcription. Furthermore, it should be noted that what Morice is relating was probably an anecdote used by Cranmer to describe how he became involved in the King’s annulment matter. It should, therefore, not be treated as a historical account per se but as a narrative account.

<sup>49</sup> Ridley, *Cranmer*, 26; Geoffrey Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer: Theologian* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), ix; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 46. It was suggested by Bishop Johann Faber and Dr Johann Eck as well as Erasmus and Zwingli.

<sup>51</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 6.

Cranmer simply assumes that the king is correct and that the university theologians will quickly come to the same opinion. This may simply be the hindsight (assuming that it was Cranmer who relayed this story to Morice) or it could be an early indication for the high esteem that Cranmer would later consistently place on Henry's convictions. Also apparent in this statement is Cranmer's lack of reference to the Pope. The conclusion of the theologians is designed to quiet Henry's conscience, not to convince the Pope to annul the marriage. Again, what was said before and after this statement cannot be known, but, for Cranmer papal authority does not appear to have held any prominent place in settling the King's Great Matter.

The dinner conversation between Cranmer, Fox and Gardiner was a pivotal point in Cranmer's career. Fox and Gardiner clearly saw potential in Cranmer's suggestion because they passed it on to the king, who then sent for Cranmer.<sup>52</sup> While his suggestion was not original, it was timely. When Wolsey had been investigating the idea Henry was still seeking an annulment through the papacy. At the time that Cranmer brought this idea back to fore, Henry had become disillusioned with the papacy and the process was stalled. Cranmer suggested the idea at a time when it was ready to be heard. The meeting between Henry and Cranmer was a fruitful one. At the request of the king, Thomas Boleyn, Anne's uncle and the Earl of Wiltshire, now became a patron of Cranmer's.<sup>53</sup>

In varying degrees Cranmer would now be involved in the process to annul Henry's marriage until its conclusion. To begin with, the King commissioned Cranmer to write a thesis laying out the questions at issue of the annulment campaign, a work he completed from the Boleyns'

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<sup>52</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 242; Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 456.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Durham residence in London.<sup>54</sup> A development that meant he lived and worked among Evangelical circles. He also joined a team of royal scholars (John Stokesley, Edward Lee, Edward Fox and Nicholas Burgo) who worked on the annulment issue.<sup>55</sup> In October 1529, it was this team that Thomas More consulted with, at the request of the king, and who tried to convince him of the justness of the King's cause. Even at this early stage in Cranmer's new career, he and More were already on opposite sides of the annulment issue.

In January 1530 Cranmer went along with Thomas Boleyn (who was to represent the king at the imperial coronation of Charles V), being sent on a mission to Rome to the Pope and to canvas the opinion of the Italian universities.<sup>56</sup> When he returned to England in late October, he returned to the task of writing polemics for the annulment and, along with the other royal scholars compiled *Collectanea satis copiosa*.

*Collectanea* was a collection of source material that evidenced jurisdictional independence from Rome both with regards to England and Henry's personal circumstance and by researching this source material he may also have found reasons to go further than the argument of *Collectanea* and question the papacy itself.<sup>57</sup> While researching the early General Councils findings Cranmer found that some of them contradicted papal authority and that even the first ecumenical church council in Nicaea, 325, could provide evidence against papal supremacy.<sup>58</sup> He may have also been affected by the "historical" sources that were used as

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<sup>54</sup> Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 132; Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 240-5. His polemical works will be discussed in further depth later on.

<sup>55</sup> John Guy, "Thomas Cromwell and the Intellectual Origins of the Henrician Revolution," in *Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics, and Reform, 1500-1550*, ed. John and Alistair Fox Guy (Oxford,: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 154.

<sup>56</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 243; Loades, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>57</sup> Murphy, "Literature and Propaganda," 146-7 and 154.

<sup>58</sup> Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 241; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 59.

evidence to argue for the king's jurisdictional authority in ecclesiastical matters as well as temporal ones.<sup>59</sup>

It is not easy to identify which specific polemical pieces Cranmer was involved in or what exactly his input was but it is certain that he edited and translated the *Determinations of the Universities* from Latin into English, published in November 1531.<sup>60</sup> *Determinations* represented the final result of his suggestion to apply to the universities and will be dealt with in more detail further on. By itself *Determinations* did not achieve much in resolving the annulment matter but it was able to offer polemical support and theological justification for the annulment campaign. It also represents a new step in the escalating attacks on papal authority as it encouraged bishops openly to resist the Pope for his failings in matrimonial cases like the Kings.<sup>61</sup>

It was not long before Cranmer was sent out on another diplomatic mission. In 1531 he was sent to Europe again, this time in a more important capacity. His service to the throne had been rewarded with a promotion to resident Ambassador with the Emperor and he was entrusted with a covert mission to the Lutheran theologians and princes.<sup>62</sup> This mission is especially important when tracing the development of Cranmer's theology as it was during his stay in Germany that Cranmer showed the first conclusive evidence of having Evangelical convictions.

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<sup>59</sup> Ackroyd, *Thomas More*, 307; Bernard, *King's Reformation*, 49; *Ibid.*, 60. These included the Donation of Constantine, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Anglo-Saxon scrolls, and conciliar records.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. It is probable that he completed the entire translation by himself and he was certainly responsible for the alterations which are only in the English document.

<sup>61</sup> *Divorce Tracts*; Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 136.

<sup>62</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 6-7.

Cranmer had first-hand experience of how the papal court operated from his last diplomatic mission; when he was sent to Germany he had the opportunity to see the effects of the Lutheran Reformation in Regensburg and Nuremberg up close and to meet with continental reformers. As early as 1531, through his work for the king, Cranmer had already met with at least one prominent reformer, Simon Grynaeus, and had forged personal contacts with other Continental Evangelical reformers, including Martin Bucer.<sup>63</sup> But meeting with a reformer in person was a far greater opportunity as it meant the chance to discuss theology, or any other subject for that matter, in a way not possible through the slow medium of letter writing.

This mission enabled him to meet with leading Lutheran reformers such as the new Elector of Ernestine Saxony, John Frederick, and Georg Spalatin, his chaplain-secretary.<sup>64</sup> But the most important contact he made was with Andreas Osiander, with whom it seems he formed a deep friendship.<sup>65</sup> It is unlikely to be coincidence that Osiander was the only major Lutheran theologian to come out in favour of Henry in the divorce, arguing against the validity of the papal dispensation that allowed Henry and Catherine's marriage.<sup>66</sup>

That the experience made quite an impact on him is made clear by his second marriage to a woman named Margaret, the niece of the wife of Osiander. Cranmer's willingness to marry demonstrates that he had taken on at least some Evangelical convictions. Clerical marriage was a serious violation of canon law and one that had been committed by many of Luther's

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<sup>63</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 60 and 65. These contacts were formed as a part of Cranmer's work for the king when Henry was seeking support for the annulment from Reformed and Lutheran Evangelicals, so this networking cannot be presumed to be a sign of interest in Evangelical theology.

<sup>64</sup> Brook, *Cranmer in Context*, 10; Hall, "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 19.

<sup>65</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 70-71.; Hall, "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 20-21.

<sup>66</sup>Brooks, *Cranmer in Context*, 10; "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 19; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 71.

followers, along with Luther himself.<sup>67</sup> Cranmer's first marriage, while it had forced him to give up his fellowship at Cambridge, had not violated canon law because he had not yet proceeded to holy orders. The serious nature of the situation is perhaps reflected in the fact that while Foxe records Cranmer's first marriage there is no mention of his second. The situation became more problematic with Archbishop Warham's death, which resulted in Cranmer being recalled to England to replace him as Archbishop of Canterbury.

### **Appointment to Archbishop of Canterbury**

Cranmer's election as Archbishop of Canterbury was a surprise not only to himself but to others in England as well.<sup>68</sup> Cranmer later attested that he had not been pleased with this illustrious promotion, feeling himself inadequate and not wanting to leave his study.<sup>69</sup> Adding to this his recent action against canon law and the oath of loyalty that he knew he would have to swear to the Pope during his consecration, it is not difficult to understand his reaction.<sup>70</sup> He stated "there was never a man came more unwillingly to a bishopric that I did," and that he went as far as to prolong his journey back to England in the hope that Henry would change his mind.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 242; Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 96-97. Martin Luther had married Katherine von Bora, a former nun, in 1525.

<sup>68</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 224; James Gairdner, ed. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Vol. 6, 1533* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1882), 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 224.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. This statement was made by Cranmer when he was defending himself against charges of heresy and disobeying the oath he swore to the Pope; its reliability therefore cannot be taken for granted. Cranmer himself appears to have been unsure as to how long he prolonged his journey, at one time stating that he had prolonged it seven weeks and at another time, half a year.

At the time this appointment was attributed to the influence of the Boleyn faction and this interpretation has continued to hold weight with historians.<sup>72</sup> It is no surprise that they would desire Cranmer to become the archbishop. He had been under the patronage of Thomas Boleyn since 1529 and was a strong advocate for the annulment. As Archbishop of Canterbury he would be placed in the ideal position to annul Henry and Catherine's marriage. The powerful influence of the Boleyns acting on his behalf would explain how Cranmer was chosen when he was only an archdeacon in the church and was in Europe at the time.<sup>73</sup> But the same reasons that made him a good candidate from the Boleyn perspective would also make him a good candidate from Henry's. Henry and the Boleyns both shared the same chief goal but it was Henry who was ultimately responsible for Cranmer's election.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, it was Henry who had initially requested that Thomas Boleyn place Cranmer under his patronage.<sup>75</sup> But there is another reason why Henry would chose Cranmer besides Boleyn influence; that is, his reliability and loyalty.

Though other people, such as John Stokesley, bishop of London; Edward Fox, or Edward Lee of York have been offered as potentially better alternatives to Cranmer, his chief rival for the position appears to have been Stephen Gardiner.<sup>76</sup> Gardiner had risen to prominence earlier

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<sup>72</sup> 1533, 35-36; Ridley, *Cranmer*, 50-51; Paul Ayris, "God's Vicegerent and Christ's Vicar: The Relationship between the Crown and the Archbishopric of Canterbury, 1553-53," in *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar*, ed. Paul Ayris and David Selwyn (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993), 116; Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> Ayris, "Crown and the Archbisopric of Canterbury," 116-7; Ridley, *Cranmer*, 50-51.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Brooks, *Cranmer in Context: Documents from the English Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Morice, "Anecdotes and Character," 242.

<sup>76</sup> Ridley, *Cranmer*, 50; Rex, *Tudors*, 63; MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 19. If Warham had died before Gardiner's act of defiance it is considered most likely that he would have been named archbishop instead of Cranmer.

than Cranmer, having served as the king's principal secretary since 1529; he had also performed well in the tasks he was assigned (he had been rewarded for this in September 1531 with the bishopric of Winchester); and with one exception had also consistently shown himself loyal to Henry's cause.<sup>77</sup> The one exception occurred in 1532 when he took the unexpected action of siding with the ecclesiastical authorities, leading their defence against the attacks on their jurisdictional authority in the events surrounding The Supplication of Ordinaries.<sup>78</sup> Taking such an action against Henry was very serious and, what is more, it had occurred recently, meaning that Gardiner had not yet been able to earn his way back into Henry's good graces.<sup>79</sup>

The occurrence of a supposedly loyal advocate unexpectedly betraying Henry and his cause could have been the decisive factor in Cranmer's election. Not only did it remove a strong rival but it could account for Henry's decision to choose someone who was not a bishop and who was assigned overseas at the time. In the aftermath of Gardiner's temporary shift in loyalties Henry did not wish to take any chances by electing someone who would not go along with his plans, even if they were perhaps more qualified for the position. From Henry's point of view Cranmer had consistently shown himself loyal to Henry's cause and had performed well in the tasks he had been assigned.<sup>80</sup> In this sense, Foxe's claim that Cranmer

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<sup>77</sup> Rex, *Tudors*, 63; MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 17.

<sup>78</sup> MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 19. The Supplication of the Ordinaries was the beginning of the state-sanctioned attacks to the jurisdictional authority of the church. It drew on anticlerical sentiments, such as exhibited in the Hunne affair, and accused the clergy of disloyalty to the Crown (Hillerbrand, *Division of Christendom*, 224).

<sup>79</sup> MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 20. He would eventually earn his way back into favour but he was never able fully to regain Henry's trust

<sup>80</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 9-10.

was elected because he was “worthy, for his good services, of such a promotion” may not have been far from the truth.<sup>81</sup>

The Emperor’s ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, certainly saw Cranmer’s election as dangerous for Queen Catherine’s cause.<sup>82</sup> He warned the Emperor that if the Pope granted the papal bulls enabling the election, then he was sure Cranmer would pronounce sentence on the annulment in favour of Henry. He advised that if the Pope did grant the bulls then “express conditions” should be placed on them that would prohibit Cranmer from pronouncing sentence.

When Cranmer returned to England there was a rush to get through the appointments process, the situation having gained a new urgency upon the discovery of Anne’s pregnancy. Normally the archbishopric remained open for a year so that the king could collect the revenues, but such was Henry’s desire to have the matter settled quickly that he advanced the money required to gain the necessary papal bulls himself.<sup>83</sup> The Pope duly issued the bulls enabling Cranmer’s consecration, either because he anxious to placate Henry where he could or, more likely, because he was powerless to stop the process.<sup>84</sup> Whatever the Pope’s motivation may have been, Henry succeeded in getting the archbishop he wanted.

However, before Cranmer could officially become the new archbishop of Canterbury he had to be consecrated. This event has aroused a good deal of controversy. An unavoidable part of Cranmer consecration was swearing an oath of loyalty to the Pope and his authority. He swore to be “faithful and obedient to Blessed Peter, the Holy Apostolic Roman Church, and to my

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<sup>81</sup> Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 458.

<sup>82</sup> 1533, 65-66.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 8-9; Ayris, "Crown and the Archbishopric of Canterbury," 119. As Ayris points out, the Act in Conditional Restraint of Annates stated that if any Bulls for the consecration of a Bishop were denied or delayed then he would still be consecrated regardless.

Lord Clement VII, and to his canonically appointed successors.”<sup>85</sup> From Henry’s perspective it was important to have a canonical archbishop who was, outwardly at least, in communion with the Pope in order to provide Cranmer’s future judgement on his marriage all the legitimacy it could.<sup>86</sup> However, the oath raised issues for Cranmer’s conscience at the time and has since raised issues with his biographers and historians regarding the ethics of his swearing the oath while having little to no regard for papal authority.<sup>87</sup> It was one of the charges levelled against him at his trial in 1555 that he had committed perjury in swearing an oath that he fully intended to break.<sup>88</sup>

Cranmer consulted with civil lawyers, who had been sent for by the king to find a way around the problem, and a protestation was formed which he swore to before his oath of loyalty to the Pope.<sup>89</sup> The protestation stated that the oath he was about to swear was “an issue of form, rather than one of substance or an obligatory duty.”<sup>90</sup> He declared that it was not his “wish or intention by this oath, or oaths, however the words sound in the same, to be obliged afterwards to say, do or undertake anything which is, or will seem to be, contrary to the law of God or in opposition to our most illustrious King of England, or against the commonweal of this his realm of England, and the laws and prerogatives of the same.”<sup>91</sup> At his consecration,

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<sup>85</sup> “Consecration Oath” in *Cranmer in Context*, 30

<sup>86</sup> Paul Ayris, “Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince,” *Reformation & Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 39.

<sup>87</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 224; Collinson, “Cranmer,” 83.

<sup>88</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 217.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 225; Ayris, “Crown and the Archbishopric of Canterbury,” 120.

<sup>90</sup> “The Record of Thomas Cranmer’s Consecration,” in “Thomas Cranmer and his Godly Prince,” 40

<sup>91</sup> “Thomas Cranmer’s Consecration,” 40

after swearing this protestation before a small group of officials he went on to swear an oath of loyalty to the Pope, reiterating that the oath was qualified by his previous protestation.<sup>92</sup>

Whether the protestation morally absolved him from his oath of loyalty is debatable, the answer relying more on personal ethics than anything else. However, Cranmer's insistence on the protestation was likely his only real say in the matter. Having been enlisted into the king's service, a promotion to archbishop of Canterbury was not something that could be easily turned down, and taking the oath was an essential part of accepting the promotion.<sup>93</sup> If he had refused he would be not fulfilling his duty to the king and defying Henry's wishes. An equivalent situation with More would be the speech he was required to make before parliament in 1532 presenting the arguments for the annulment. Both men were placed in a position of being required to undertake a public action of dubious morality in order to do their duty to the king. Their overall responses, nevertheless, were very different: More would eventually leave the king's service a year later while Cranmer continued on and, in doing so, inevitably encountered this kind of situation again. This event was only one of several times during Cranmer's life where actions he took were morally questionable.<sup>94</sup>

Once Cranmer had been consecrated, the final steps could be taken to resolve the King's Great Matter. In order for Henry's marriage to be annulled, a hearing on the matter had to take place. This was a delicate matter for Cranmer, who had to instigate the process "officially." This meant that he had to write to the king, "informing" him that the issue of his marriage was affecting the kingdom and to request that Henry submit the matter for judgement by

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<sup>92</sup> "Thomas Cranmer's Consecration," 40

<sup>93</sup> Brooks, *Cranmer in Context*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> Collinson, "Cranmer," 83. Other instances include his reactions to the fall of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell and his complacency in the repetitive cycle of having one marriage annulled in order to legitimise another that occurred during Henry's reign.

Cranmer.<sup>95</sup> This is important as it represents a chance to examine Henry and Cranmer's relationship at this early stage of Cranmer's career.

Two letters by Cranmer to Henry record this process. Because of the similarities between the letters, it has been argued that the second letter should be considered as a replacement for the first.<sup>96</sup> That is to say, the first letter was sent to Henry for his approval rather than representing the official request. Henry then sent back his opinion on how the letter should be altered and Cranmer, having complied with these corrections, sent the finished product to Henry as the official request.

Two possible reasons have been put forward to explain this. Because the differences in the second letter increase its subservient nature, antagonists of Cranmer and Henry have "made great play" with the "picture of a cringing archbishop and an arrogant king insisting on amendments because Cranmer was not abasing himself enough to satiate Henry's infamous ego."<sup>97</sup> Another more probable explanation for the changes is that they were motivated by political necessity rather than for personal reasons.<sup>98</sup> In the wake of the challenges to papal authority and the emerging royal supremacy it was important that a request for Henry to submit his marital case to the judgement of one of his subjects be done in such a way that the request did not challenge the superiority of Henry's authority.<sup>99</sup> This reason is more likely as it does not make the presumption that Henry's actions were wholly governed by ego without any consideration for politics. Still, it does not account for the preservation of the first letter

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<sup>95</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 238.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-40; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 90. Both letters were written on the same day (11 April 1533) and their texts are almost entirely the same.

<sup>97</sup> Ridley, *Cranmer*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

along with the second. If the first letter was merely a draft, why was it preserved when other drafts of official correspondence, which there were surely many of, have not been?

MacCullough answers this question in an interesting way. He argues that rather than the second letter superseding the first, both letters were equally valid parts of a correspondence between Henry and Cranmer that worked out the protocol of the new relationship between the state and church.<sup>100</sup> The central evidence that supports this interpretation is that in the second letter the word “eftsoons” is used, meaning “a second time,” which precedes the statement “as prostrate at the feet of your majesty, beseeching the same to pardon me of these bold letters.”<sup>101</sup> This phrase had been used in the first letter, although its wording had been less subservient in the first letter.<sup>102</sup> The key difference in these interpretations is that the former assumes that a superior is completely dictating to a subordinate the new dynamics of the relationship while the later suggests that there was more co-operation involved. Cranmer still firmly remains Henry’s subordinate but there is greater opportunity for him to affect the formation of the dynamics in the relationship in this very specific area. After all, both Henry and Cranmer were treading new ground and it would be reasonable to assume that Henry would allow suggestions as he decided how to proceed.

The trial over the legitimacy of the royal marriage between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon began in May. Cranmer wrote to the king throughout the trial updating him on its progress so his point of view had been preserved. They show Cranmer’s desire to resolve the matter as quickly as possible in favour of Henry.<sup>103</sup> To this end, Catherine’s refusal to appear at the trial seems to be a relief for Cranmer as it allowed the acceleration of the trial process,

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<sup>100</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 90-92.

<sup>101</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 238-9; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 90-91..

<sup>102</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 238-40; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 90.

<sup>103</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 242-3.

though it is unlikely that Cranmer was alone in his relief at Catherine's absence.<sup>104</sup> On the 23 May, Cranmer declared Henry's marriage to be null; five days later he pronounced that the marriage between Henry and Anne Boleyn was lawful. Cranmer crowned her Queen on 1 June, bringing the king's great matter to an official end. Cranmer's response to this issue had served to catapult him from Cambridge academic to the Archbishop of Canterbury in less than a decade. What remains to be examined however, is the extent to which his response was shaped by his theology.

## **The Theology of Thomas Cranmer**

Analysing the influence of Cranmer's theology is far less straightforward than analysing the influence of More's. More's written works show that while his theology did evolve throughout the annulment campaign it did not suffer any pivotal changes. The same cannot be said for Cranmer. His theology was deeply affected by his work on the campaign. He moved from a relatively conservative don to an anti-papalist well on the way to converting to Evangelical theology. These theological developments are important aspect of understanding Cranmer's eventual rejection of the papacy. Both Cranmer and More began with a generally similar humanist outlook but ended up with a theology that drove them down paths so different that when More was put on trial for refusing to swear the supremacy oaths, Cranmer would be among those who stood in judgement over him.

### **Cranmer's Theological Transition**

With the knowledge of who Cranmer would later become, it is easy to see in the anonymous biographer's description of Cranmer at Cambridge someone who showed early signs of Evangelicalism. The anonymous biographer tells of his immersion in scholasticism "until the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 242.

time that Luther began to write” and how through his investigation of the ensuing religious controversies that Cranmer gained his appreciation of scriptural authorities and “gave his mind to good writers both old and new.”<sup>105</sup> From this statement alone it would be a reasonable conclusion that, from the start, Cranmer’s humanism had been tied up with the teachings of Luther. It has been argued that this was the time when Cranmer’s theology turned towards the Evangelicals and a rejection of papal authority.<sup>106</sup>

Cranmer has often been associated with the White House Tavern, a location where it was believed that Cambridge reformists would often meet to discuss ideas.<sup>107</sup> One scholar goes so far as to argue that Cranmer’s engagement with and private evaluation of banned Lutheran books, almost certainly without papal license, reveals him to be already an “incipient heretic.”<sup>108</sup> But this claim makes the contentious assumption that all infractions of canon law were of equal value, as well as having the unrealistic expectation that theological scholars would curb their curiosity about the hottest theological events of their day. The extent to which Cranmer delved into these controversies was a sign of their importance and consistent with his scholarly nature. Cranmer was a very conscientious scholar who would not adopt a

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<sup>105</sup> Anonymous, "Thomas Cranmer," 219. This is unlikely to be an accident. Here the biographer is setting the scene for his main story of Cranmer’s actions as an Evangelical.

<sup>106</sup> Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer*, 20-21; Hall, *Erasmianism and Lutheranism*, 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> MacCullough, *Thomas Cranmer*, 25. The place was supposedly so Lutheran in its outlook that it was nicknamed Little Germany. However, all the roots of this myth have been traced to merely one reference made by Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs*. Moreover, Foxe details the specific colleges from which the tavern’s regulars came and Jesus College is not included.

<sup>108</sup> Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer*, 21. Though it should be noted that he rejects the notion that Cranmer was involved with other famous early Evangelicals such as Robert Barnes and Thomas Bilney or that he was connected with the White Horse tavern.

different stance without good reason but who was also able to see both sides of an argument.<sup>109</sup>

The anonymous biographer's description does indicate that Cranmer's interest in scriptural authority and patristic and humanist writers stemmed from his investigation into current religious controversies but all of these interests are characteristic of a biblical humanist and do not require Evangelical sympathies. Interest in opposing arguments does not necessitate being convinced by them. And humanism was not a necessarily a precursor to Evangelicalism.<sup>110</sup> Thomas More is a clear example of that. A more accurate evaluation is made by another scholar who, pointing out that there is no evidence that Cranmer held unorthodox or heretical views, argues that his commitment to scripture and his reading of Lutheran books clearly places him in the "reforming camp," specifically, the more moderate Catholic Reformation of John Colet and Erasmus.<sup>111</sup>

As to the claim that Cranmer had begun to reject papal authority, this is based on two pieces of evidence. The first is a contentious statement from the bitter witness of a bricklayer in 1543: Cranmer allegedly preached that he had "prayed 7 years before the Bishop of Rome fell that the said Bishop might be expelled from this realm."<sup>112</sup> The other evidence comprises of

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<sup>109</sup> Anonymous, "Thomas Cranmer," 219; Peter Brooks, "The Theology of Thomas Cranmer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155.; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 54.

<sup>110</sup> Marshall, *Reformation England*, 31.

<sup>111</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 4.

<sup>112</sup> Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 10; Basil Hall, "Cranmer's Relations with Erasmianism and Lutheranism," in *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar*, ed. Paul Ayris and David Selwyn (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 12; MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 8. The testimony of someone recalling what was said over eight years ago is questionable, but if statement were accurate it would mean that Cranmer had rejected

annotations made by Cranmer in his 1524 Paris edition of Jacques Merlin's *Quatuor Conciliorum Generalium* ("classic compendium of conciliar decrees and related material") that show hostility to claims made by the papacy.<sup>113</sup>

The problem is the dating the annotations made by Cranmer. If they could be traced back to his time at Cambridge then these annotations would be strong evidence that Cranmer had begun to reject papal authority. Unfortunately, Merlin's work contains annotations made by Cranmer at different times in his career and while some can be traced to his career in the 1540s and 1550s, most defy dating.<sup>114</sup> However, the annotations appear to relate to issues that preoccupied Cranmer throughout his public career, with a particular interest in the duties and rights of metropolitan sees, a fact that suggests they were not written until after Cranmer became Archbishop.<sup>115</sup> It is therefore unlikely that the anti-papal sentiments were written while Cranmer was at Cambridge.<sup>116</sup>

Conversely, other evidence shows that Cranmer's theology was orthodox at this time. His status at Cambridge as a Don and as an approved preacher of the university in itself suggests "orthodoxy and acceptance by the establishment" rather than heretical beliefs.<sup>117</sup> But more significantly, Cranmer demonstrated a pro-papal attitude in his annotations of his copy of Bishop John Fisher's apologetic against Luther, *Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio*, written

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papal authority by 1526 which is contradicted by the much more reliable annotation made by Cranmer himself in *Confutatio*.

<sup>113</sup> MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 8-9; Hall, "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 12-13; Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 14-5.

<sup>114</sup> MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 8-9.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 9; Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 14.

<sup>117</sup> Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 240.

approximately during the mid-fifteen twenties.<sup>118</sup> Though these notes show that Cranmer was critical of Fisher's arguments, what really stands out is "Cranmer's furious and horrified condemnation of Luther's arguments, as liberally quoted in Fisher's text."<sup>119</sup> Surprisingly, considering Cranmer's later attitude, in these notes he is appalled by Luther's arguments against the papacy.<sup>120</sup> Based on Cranmer's reactions to Luther's condemnations of the Pope, MacCullough argues convincingly that Cranmer supported papal authority at this period of his life.<sup>121</sup>

### **Effects of Royal Service**

When Cranmer began his royal service in helping to procure the annulment he was immediately taken from his sheltered life as a Cambridge don and placed into new environments of where his theology would be affected. His patronage by the Boleyns' meant

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<sup>118</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 26-27. Cranmer left annotations throughout the margins of his books. Most of them were for the purpose of recall but his annotations to *Confutio* are usually candid. There are two annotations in two different coloured inks: red and black. The black set were written at an earlier date than the red set. Both were most likely written during the mid-fifteen twenties, which places them in the same time period that the anonymous biographer is describing.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. It is the black set that is being referred to here.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. This is not to suggest that Cranmer was a fervent papalist and the mild criticism also evident in the black annotations for "Fisher's more full-blooded papalism" should be noted.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 27. However, what is less convincing is his statement that these annotations are "no emotional jottings of youth, but the thoughts of a man who is at least thirty four and more probably in his late thirties." What this statement appears to not take into account is that while Cranmer was not a youth he was still engaging with an emotional and highly contentious topic, one which would be capable of creating "knee-jerk" reactions from even older, more experienced scholars. In attacking papal authority, Luther was attacking one of the foundations of Christendom, and being Luther, he was doing so in a very forceful and provocative manner. Therefore, these annotations could well be "emotional jottings" rather than reasoned conclusions, a fact that would explain their unusual candidness. Nevertheless, that fact that Cranmer reacted as he did to Luther shows, at the very least, that MacCullough is right to assert that at this time Cranmer was for papal authority.

that he worked within reformist circles, his polemical work involved investigating the historical and scriptural grounds for papal supremacy, and his diplomatic missions overseas, gave him his first chance to experience the Pope's court and the results of the Reformations in Germany. Ridley goes as far as to argue that this political atmosphere was the reason for Cranmer's royal absolutism rather than Evangelical treatises such as Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man*.<sup>122</sup> While the conclusion that political and religious influences can be neatly separated out is overly simplistic, Ridley's assertion serves to illustrate the significance of Cranmer's environment. It would be extremely difficult to be surrounded by Evangelicals circles for so long and not be affected by them.

The same can also be said for his participation in the team tasked with forming polemical pieces to aid the annulment campaign. Cranmer was already a passionate supporter of the king when he entered into royal service and his work looking into the foundations of papal authority and supremacy could have further impelled him in his adoption of royal supremacy, especially the work he did in compiling *Collectanea satis copiosa*.<sup>123</sup>

However, it is clear that by the time Cranmer came to translate the *The Determinations of the Universities*, published in November 1531, the translational choices that he made in converting the Latin into English give indications that his theology had begun to change.<sup>124</sup> There are several instances where Cranmer chose to translate the text in a manner that reflected an affinity with Evangelical theology.<sup>125</sup> For example, three times Cranmer adapts the words of Thomas Aquinas in a way that emphasises the incapacity of humans "to do good

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<sup>122</sup> Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer*, 65.

<sup>123</sup> MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 59-60.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

without the gifts of God's law and word."<sup>126</sup> Telling of his view of royal authority is when Cranmer twice decides to "spell out with greater emphasis that the King's conscience in the matter [the annulment] represents a 'motion of the Holy Ghost' which is higher than law."<sup>127</sup> Admittedly this evidence is circumstantial, but these indications of a changed theology within *Determinations* would prove to be only the tip of the iceberg by Cranmer's marriage in Germany a year later.

In this context, Cranmer's marriage was not simply a rejection of priestly celibacy but a declaration of Evangelicalism and showed that he had taken on "certain major Lutheran principles."<sup>128</sup> Aside from the act itself, several historians agree that Osiander was not the sort of person to agree to such a marriage within his family if Cranmer had lacked an affinity with Lutheran doctrine.<sup>129</sup> Cranmer's affinity with Lutheran doctrine is also backed up by a statement made by Osiander in 1537 that in the theological discussions at his house, Cranmer was "discussing many things seriously and wisely in an inspired manner concerning Christian doctrine and true religion."<sup>130</sup> However, although Cranmer had clearly taken on some, albeit important, aspects of Lutheran doctrine he still retained some Catholic doctrine. And it would years before he adopted the Evangelical doctrine of Justification by Faith alone.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. This emphasis is consistent with the "renewed Augustinianism of the Evangelicals."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 56. It is also possible that Cranmer's wish to emphasise the authority of Henry's conscience may have been consistent with his views while at Cambridge, rather than indicating a deepening of reverence for the king.

<sup>128</sup> Hall, "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 19.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; Brooks, "Theology of Cranmer," 153; Parker, "Introduction," xv.

<sup>130</sup> Hall, "Erasmianism and Lutheranism," 20-21., 20-21. This was made in the dedication of the Osiander's *Harmony of the Four Gospels*, which he dedicated to Cranmer. While it is tempting to consider such a statement as flattery, that would not be consistent with Osiander's other writings and correspondence.

<sup>131</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 8.

## Authority in the Church: Papal Authority

The church that Cranmer was born into was a monarchical church. Its ties to the crown were much stronger than those with the papacy. A fact that is illustrated by the manner of episcopal appointments: while in theory appointments were made by the Pope, in “practice bishops were chosen by the king, often from among his close counsellors.”<sup>132</sup> So, even before the separation from Rome, papal jurisdiction sat lightly with most English people.<sup>133</sup> This could be part of the reason why Cranmer’s initial solution for solving the annulment issue, as recorded by Morice, does not involve the Pope. It was not that Cranmer had already rejected papal supremacy by 1527; it was that he did not consider the papacy to be the only authority capable of resolving the issue. His annotations to *Confutatio* show that he was for papal authority till at least the mid-fifteen twenties. And a low esteem for papal supremacy would explain Cranmer’s willingness to read banned books without needing to label him a heretic or an Evangelical.

Cranmer’s beliefs about papal and royal supremacy came to fruition during his polemical and diplomatic work for the king, precisely when a low esteem for papal supremacy changed to a complete renunciation of it is uncertain. However, it is clear that by the time of his consecration in 1533 Cranmer had not only repudiated papal supremacy, but all other papal authority as well. The traditional evidence given for Cranmer’s repudiation of papal authority is an off-hand statement made by him in a letter to Henry in 1536 that “these many years I had daily prayed unto God that I might see the power of Rome destroyed”<sup>134</sup> Much stronger

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<sup>132</sup> Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 43.

<sup>133</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 4.

<sup>134</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 327; Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 10; MacCulloch, "Two Dons in Politics," 8. In the letter to Henry, Cranmer was reporting two sermons that he had preached in 1535 on papal authority. This statement is usually mentioned in tandem with the brick layer’s statement, either to bolster the claim that Cranmer had begun to reject papal authority while at Cambridge or to show that Cranmer had

evidence of Cranmer's anti-papal view is the protestation oath that he took on his day of his consecration as archbishop. The oath itself was the solution to the fact that Cranmer felt he neither would nor could accept the office of archbishop from "the Pope's hand."<sup>135</sup> It denied that the following required oath of loyalty to the Pope was anything but "for form's sake rather than reality" and that it was done only as a "necessary condition of receiving consecration."<sup>136</sup> This action not only shows a complete rejection of papal authority but it shows the strength of his convictions. Cranmer was making a stand on something that had the potential to obstruct Henry's annulment plans which, with Anne being pregnant, were in a critical stage.

At this point Cranmer had totally rejected the idea that the Pope was God's vicar on earth.<sup>137</sup> He argued that the grounds for papal supremacy were unsubstantiated and contrary to scripture as well as the early councils of the church.<sup>138</sup> His theology was consistent with other reformers in the belief that papal supremacy over the last three or four hundred years was a corrupt idea that had crept into Christendom and should be abolished.<sup>139</sup> And as his rejection of the claim that the keys of the church were handed down to the present day pope from St Peter and view of popes as corrupt and impious, "being holy in name only."<sup>140</sup> But while his reasons for rejecting papal authority were in line with other Evangelical reformers, Cranmer differed in his fervent conviction of what its replacement should be.

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rejected it by the time of his consecration. While this makes sense to prove the latter, to use this letter as evidence for the former is pushing the bound of credibility, which is why it has not been mentioned until now.

<sup>135</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 324

<sup>136</sup> "Protestation Oath" in *Cranmer in Context*, 29

<sup>137</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 77; Marius, "Church Fathers," 412

<sup>138</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 77-8 and 327; Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 223

<sup>139</sup> Cox, *Writings and Letters*, 327

<sup>140</sup> Marius, *Thomas More*, 217

## **Authority in the Church: Royal Supremacy**

Both papal and royal supremacy relate back to the common belief there are two different types of kingdoms, a temporal one and a spiritual one. The authority to rule in either of these realms was granted by God. Papal supremacy held that while God had given rulers the authority to rule the temporal realms of their individual kingdoms, he had given the authority to govern the spiritual realm, within Christendom, to the papacy.<sup>141</sup> This was a sort of spiritual empire, uniting the temporal kingdoms under the papacy in order to ensure the preservation of the one, true, apostolic faith: Christianity. Royal supremacy was a more nationalistic approach to the doctrine of two kingdoms.<sup>142</sup> It denied that God had granted the Pope any authority to rule over the spiritual realm of nations, other than its own. Instead it asserted that God had granted rulers the authority to rule both realms within their kingdom without interference from foreign rulers, the papacy or otherwise. While for coherency's sake they have been dealt with separately here, Cranmer's rejection of the papacy and his adoption of royal authority are irretrievably intertwined.

Cranmer's belief in royal supremacy was reflected in his reaction when Henry offered him the archbishopric. Cranmer not only said that he could not accept the office by "the Pope's hand" but requested that if the king wished him to become archbishop that he would bestow the office on him himself.<sup>143</sup> For the king was "the supreme governor of this church of England, as well in causes ecclesiastical as temporal, and that the full right hand and donation of all manner of bishoprics and benefices, as well as of any other temporal dignities and promotions, appertained to his grace, and not to any other foreign authority, whatsoever it

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<sup>141</sup> Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 15-16.

<sup>142</sup> Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 46.

<sup>143</sup> Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 223.

was.”<sup>144</sup> Cranmer wanted the king to make him archbishop instead of the Pope because he believed that the king was the only one who truly possessed the authority to do so.

As previously stated, Cranmer did not just believe in royal supremacy but he took this belief to its extreme. He believed that not only was a monarch’s authority bestowed by God but that the king was answerable only to God.<sup>145</sup> So he could aid the king in reaching a decision but once Henry had firmly made up his mind on something, he did not have the right to question or judge it.<sup>146</sup> Not only was this the primary source of his ardent support of Henry’s annulment campaign, it but is what enabled him to continue to serve his king throughout the many twists and turns of royal policy that occurred throughout Henry’s reign.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Brooks, "Thomas Cranmer," 223.

<sup>145</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 12; Ayris, "Thomas Cranmer and His Godly Prince," 16.

<sup>146</sup> Loades, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

# Conclusion

In the big picture, Henry's campaign to annul his royal marriage to Catherine of Aragon was the catalyst for the English Reformation. But from the perspective of those around Henry his campaign created a large wave that brought some of its advocates to new heights of success while crushing its opponents, real or perceived, beneath it. Both Cranmer and More are excellent illustrations of this phenomenon. More's negative reaction led to the destruction of his career and Cranmer's positive reaction led to the beginning of his long and successful career in royal service.

From the very beginning More was against the annulment campaign. He tried to serve Henry loyally as long as his conscience enabled him to, and concentrated on other matters, such as attempting to stem the tide of heresy. However, when faced with swearing an oath that he believed involved denying part of the essence of the church, papal authority, he refused; choosing obedience to God over obedience to his King. Conversely, it seems that from the very beginning Cranmer was an ardent supporter of the King's campaign. To help further its cause he worked with a team of royal scholars to write polemics, took on diplomatic missions and eventually, as Archbishop of Canterbury, pronounced the Aragon marriage to be illegitimate and the Boleyn marriage to be legitimate.

Initially the annulment campaign seemingly served to advance More's career. His promotion to Lord Chancellor, a position that was almost always occupied by the clergy, was in itself a way for Henry to assert his authority in the wake of the Pope's refusal to grant him the annulment. But he was able to hold on to the post for only a few years before he was forced to resign it, ostensibly due to ill health. Conversely, Cranmer's support for the campaign introduced him into royal service, earned him promotions within the church, and led to his

becoming a diplomat, an ambassador and finally the Archbishop of Canterbury, a post he would maintain until shortly before his execution in 1556.

### **The Responses of Cranmer and More**

Traditionally marriage was under the jurisdiction of Church authority. So, from the very outset of Henry's campaign theology would almost inevitably be a factor in shaping anyone's response to the affair. But it became more of a central issue due to Henry's escalating challenge to papal authority and his willingness to utilise English Evangelicals, and some of their arguments, to further his cause. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the responses of Cranmer and More were chiefly shaped by their differing theologies; specifically, the different paradigms that they held of where authority lay in the church both doctrinally and practically.

Cranmer and More's theologies came down to the different views of what they considered to be authoritative. More considered that the ultimate locus of authority within the Church was consensus in the common corps of Christendom. This consensus did not just incorporate the present members of the church but all those who had come before; in other words, church tradition. Consensus was a divinely inspired way of authoritatively interpreting the revelation, and the outworking of Christ's promise to remain with the church. And this consensus showed that the Pope was a part of the essence of the church. More believed that to challenge or deny papal authority was to propagate schism and make the church vulnerable to the spread of heresy, something that he had spent many years zealously combatting.

This doctrine meant that all of church tradition should be considered when deciding matters of theology, something that Cranmer denied. Cranmer, along with other Evangelicals, came to believe that over the past three or four hundred the church had become increasingly weak and corrupted. Papal supremacy was merely an example of church corruption and the later general

councils that supported papal supremacy could not be considered authoritative. While More considered papal authority to be a way of strengthening and protecting the church, Cranmer considered it as the problem.

As evidence for his stance Cranmer referred to the early general councils of the church and to scripture, arguing that they did not substantiate papal supremacy. An argument that More found that unconvincing because it lacked the wisdom of church tradition that was necessary to understand and interpret scripture correctly. Just as early general councils should not be isolated from the context of the later councils, so scriptural interpretation should not be isolated from the context of the church. For More, only the church could provide the right interpretative lens to understand the scriptures; individual interpretation was dangerous because it could lead even the learned and pious astray.

Though Cranmer and More's responses were contradictory, they did share some attributes. They were both well-educated pious men with a background in humanism. Both looked towards the priesthood before deciding to marry, and consistently held a high view of the authority of the early general councils. And, significantly, both men loyally served Henry, though with different understandings of what loyal service to a king entailed.

More's understanding of monarchical service is best described by the advice he gave to Cromwell shortly after his resignation: "in your counsel giving to His Grace, ever tell him what he ought to do, but never what he is able to do; so shall you show yourself a true, faithful servant and a right worthy Councillor; but if a lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him."<sup>1</sup> Here, More is asserting that true service is not a matter of blind obedience or utter servitude. The king may be a superior but he still requires guidance and, at times, reining in, if he is to reign virtuously. This perception of kingship not only explains

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<sup>1</sup> Harpsfield, "Life and Death of More," 135.

More's acts of loyalty towards the king but those of seeming opposition. His privately stated rejection of the annulment campaign; his encouragement of Throckmorton; even his propaganda works that involved implicit rejection of governmental actions, can be understood as ways in which More navigated the delicate line between attempting to keep Henry reigning virtuously and being disloyal to him. Though he may not have always succeeded in keeping to this line, it is important to realise that he attempted to do so until the succession and supremacy oaths. Here, it was no longer an option for More to obey the king as he believed that by doing so he would be rejecting the Church and endangering his immortal soul.

Cranmer's understanding of monarchical service did not include the right to judge Henry's decisions. Cranmer has been described as the "king's man," someone willing to do whatever was necessary to please the King, But this is a somewhat shallow description of his character. It was not simply that Cranmer wished to pander to the king, he was not an ambitious man. Cranmer believed that because a king's authority derived directly from God a king was answerable only to God, not other men. Thus, while he would have agreed with More on the importance of advising the King in making a decision, he believed that once Henry's mind was made up he did not have the right to question or judge it. This means that what for More constituted a necessary act of loyal service to a monarch would have constituted an act of disloyalty for Cranmer.

Aside from the different theology that shaped their understandings of service and kingship, there is another reason why More and Cranmer disagreed on this matter: their personal histories. In 1527 More was a lawyer who had spent his entire career in politics, been in royal service for just over a decade, and not only had More known Henry since Henry was a boy, but More had been close friends with him for many years. Additionally, More had no illusions about the kind of man Henry was. His statement to his son-in-law regarding the possibility of Henry trading his head for a French castle though he was, at that time, in high favour, is in

itself evidence of that. Conversely, Cranmer was a member of the gentry but he spent his entire career in the sheltered life of a Cambridge don. It is possible that More's less idealistic perception of Henry was, in part, shaped by the fact that he had watched Henry grow up as well as his long experience of the power dynamics in the political world. Cranmer, who did not enter royal service until after he was forty, did not have this perspective. The first time he met Henry he was a man with an impressive, charismatic and domineering personality. Such a first impression could easily have contributed to Cranmer's submissive attitude toward him.

It could be said that in Cranmer, Henry found what he had lost in Thomas More, a person who was a very loyal servant to the king, who was earnestly pious and who would be honest to him about his opinions in private. For Henry, Cranmer probably seemed like an improvement given his natural tendency to think that the King's convictions were right.

Examining the extent to which theology shaped Cranmer's response to the annulment campaign is less clear-cut than with More. From the very first conversation with Henry, More gives his opinion from the perspective of theology. After he investigated the matter at the King's request he does not appear to have wavered from his initial conclusion. While More's theology evolved in some ways through his works in polemics, it did not suffer any pivotal changes. His ecclesiastical beliefs were behind his rejection of the King's annulment campaign, his resignation and, finally, his death. Although More was loyal to Henry, this loyalty was superseded by his loyalty to God, and More was unwilling to endanger his immortal soul by denying the essence of God's church.

However, Cranmer's theology was deeply affected by his work on the campaign, moving him from a relatively conservative don to anti-papalist well on the way to fully converting to Evangelicalism. Cranmer's belief in the royal supremacy under Henry meant that he did not have to choose between obedience to God or his King, but as his final actions show, under

Mary I, he did eventually come to a position closer to More's in the sense that here Cranmer's loyalty to God superseded his loyalty to his monarch.

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