

Divided Loyalties, Misplaced Hopes

“Put Not Your Trust in Princes”

by Aaron D. Wolf

“By their fruits, ye shall know them,” our Lord once warned. Too often, however, when it comes to the promise of power or the allure of success, Christians are easily swayed to align themselves with those who cry, “Lord, Lord,” yet are, in Jesus’ words, the “workers of iniquity.” “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” Maybe, some might answer, if the briar bush uses such words as “pro-life,” “compassionate,” and “God bless”—he must be one of us. No, answers Jesus, “a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit,” and, no matter how many shibboleths are dropped, no matter how many platforms are affirmed, no matter how many endorsements from “our side” are proffered, we must witness the fruit.

Protestants have always affirmed that God places the sword in the hands of the king, who “beareth it not in vain,” and, thus, we are bound to obey our leaders, to pray for them, and to render them service as unto God. The mistake comes, however, when we transform this obedience into blind loyalty to a regime or a party, resting our hopes for moral or spiritual renewal on men rather than on Christ and His Church.

The early English Reformers made this mistake, placing their trust in a man who, time and again, deceived them into thinking that he was on their side. When Henry VIII publicly eschewed the authority of the Roman pontiff—quite obviously to serve his own quest for power—pious men such as Robert Barnes and Thomas Cranmer, who had reached a similar conclusion on theological grounds, bet the success of the English Reformation on their hopes that the Holy Ghost was bound to be leading Henry to accept the other great theological affirmation of Protestantism, justification by faith alone.

After searching the Scriptures, Protestants in both Germany and England concluded that the pope had no jurisdiction over things temporal or spiritual outside of the diocese of Rome. They believed that the Church should be governed by local bishops. In matters temporal, however, local bishops were subservient to the king, who derived his authority from God Himself, according to Romans 13: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For . . . the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Cranmer’s replacement of papal supremacy (which placed the two swords of spiritual and temporal rule into the hands of the bishop of Rome) with *royal* supremacy was self-defeating and contradictory. The Augustinian separation of the earthly and heavenly cities, reiterated in Luther’s “two kingdoms” doctrine, was distorted and even perverted in Cranmer’s conception of royal supremacy, which took supreme power from one “vicar of Christ” and placed it into the hands of another.

To increase the power of the Tudor regime, Henry VII had arranged for his son Arthur to marry the daughter of Ferdinand

and Isabella, Catherine of Aragon. Shortly after their formal wedding, however, Arthur had died, leaving the alliance with Spain in jeopardy. Henry VII’s solution was to seek an annulment for the brief marriage from the pope, in order that he might marry off his second son, Henry, to the young widow. Despite the constitution of a general council, Pope Julius II granted the dispensation from canon law.

Prince Henry had worried considerably about the legitimacy of the papal dispensation, and, at age 14, he registered an official protest. His fears would be realized when, by 1514, Queen Catherine had produced a stillborn daughter, a short-lived son, a stillborn son, and a premature son who also died. Henry believed that he had been cursed by God after the manner of Herod for marrying his brother’s wife. Despite the birth of Princess Mary in 1516, Henry persisted in his tortured belief because of Catherine’s repeated miscarriages and her inability to produce a male heir.

Henry had been devoted to Catholic orthodoxy as well as to the pope. One of his chief concerns during the early years of his reign had been the persecution of the Lollards, the followers of John Wycliffe (1330-84). The motive for reform in Wycliffe had been an austere sense of personal piety and obedience to God’s Law. He rejected Roman sacerdotalism, transubstantiation, and papal supremacy. Eager to impress the papacy, Henry VIII ratcheted up the persecutions of anyone who could be judged guilty of Lollardy. Three of Henry’s bishops, John Longland of Lincoln, Richard Fitzjames of London, and William Warham, the archbishop of Canterbury, became Henry’s instruments of terror. Dozens were burned, and hundreds publicly abjured the teachings of Wycliffe when threatened with the stake. Cardinal Wolsey kept Rome informed of the king’s efforts, and the pope was ready to consider conferring a title on Henry that would elevate him among his rivals, the “Catholic King of Spain” and the “Most Christian King of France.”

Not long after Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg in 1517, copies of the work began to appear at the London Steelyard. Tract versions soon surfaced at London, Oxford, and Cambridge, and Cardinal Wolsey informed Henry of the danger they posed to the realm. On Henry’s command, Wolsey banned the writings of Luther in England and consigned them to be burned. On March 16, 1521, Pope Leo X praised Henry for his “zeal against Luther and for forbidding the introduction of [Lutheran books] into England.” Nonetheless, the evangelical contraband continued to be trafficked, particularly Luther’s scathing *Babylonian Captivity of the Christian Church* (1520), attacking the scholastic teaching on the Sacraments as contrary to the Gospel.

Henry was genuinely disturbed by Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity*. Under his direction, Wolsey, with several bishops in his train, proceeded to St. Paul’s under a golden canopy where, in

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the presence of 30,000 onlookers, he excommunicated Luther and his followers. Henry's former secretary Richard Pace, dean of St. Paul's, extolled Leo X for "the wisdom he had shown in dealing with Luther," and Bishop John Fisher preached a two-hour sermon condemning the Lutherans. Wolsey ordered the bishops to seize all Lutheran books within two weeks.

Over the summer of 1521, Wolsey began to make arrangements for Rome to accept officially Henry VIII's written denunciation of Luther's *Babylonian Captivity*. By summer's end, Henry's chaplain John Clerk presented Leo X with the *Assertio septem sacramentorum* (*An Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*), bound in gold. It contained a personal dedication written by Henry himself, complete with two poems. He then whispered to the pope that Henry was ready to take up the sword against Saxony. Leo patiently read the king's work, astonished that such a man, "occupied necessarily in other feats," could have the mental acumen to compose such a worthy theological treatise. A deft politician, Leo agreed to regale Henry's work before a full consistory, yet he made sure that the cardinals most likely to report negatively on the affair were absent, after which he issued a bull, bestowing on Henry the title "Defender of the Faith."

Continuing his crusade, Henry wrote to the princes of Saxony (most of whom sympathized with Luther):

No faction was ever so universally pernicious as this Lutheran conspiracy, which profanes sacred things, preaches Christ so as to trample on his sacraments, boasts of the grace of God so as to destroy free will, extols faith so as to give license to sin, and places the inevitable cause of evils in the only good God. The poison is producing dissension in the church, weakening the power of the laws and of the magistrates, exciting the laity against the clergy, and both against the Pope, and has no other end than to instigate the people to make war on the nobles while the enemies of Christ look on with laughter.

Six years later, in 1527, Henry wrote to Luther, urging him to "prostrate himself before God."

At this very time, the Defender of the Faith began petitioning Pope Clement VII for an annulment from his "cursed" marriage. For two years, Clement stalled, hoping to find a solution that would please all parties, and this became the occasion on which Thomas Cranmer, a bookish, inconspicuous scholar, was launched into the arena of politics. In discussing his ideas on the King's Matter with Stephen Gardiner, Cranmer offered his opinion that the issue should be resolved by the universities of Europe rather than by the pope, who, in his opinion, had no mandate from Scripture to meddle in such affairs.

For Cranmer, this was a theological judgment; for Henry, it was a political maneuver. Recommended to Henry by Gardiner, Cranmer explained his thesis before the king in 1529. The king, said Cranmer, is sovereign over everything within his realm. In this, he was in general agreement with the Reformation in Germany. For Cranmer, however, the Church was also part of the king's realm. Thus, the future archbishop of Canterbury confused the City of God and the City of Man and made the Church subservient to the civil magistrate. Furthermore, by elevating the king to such a position of ecclesiastical authority (an authority both Cranmer and Henry despised in the foreign bishop of Rome), Cranmer bound his own conscience to

obey the king in matters theological—even those with which he disagreed. Thus, he obeyed his earthly lord first by becoming chaplain to the Boleyn family, then by pleading the king's case in 1530 before the pope whom he despised. Ironically, Henry also sent Cranmer on a diplomatic mission to Saxony to determine whether the princes who had allowed such freedom to Luther would support Henry's cause. He also hoped that the University of Wittenberg would find in the king's favor, as had the universities of Padua, Bourges, and Bologna. Cranmer's diplomatic mission to Germany failed, so, in 1531, King Henry sent Robert Barnes to Wittenberg to seek the opinion of Luther himself.



Jeff Drew

Barnes was the least likely to succeed in such an endeavor. Since 1520, Barnes had been the champion of Protestant theology in England as the leader of a group that became known simply as "Germany"—Cambridge scholars, including Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, John Bale, and Miles Coverdale, who met regularly to discuss the theology of the German Reformation. For safety, they met at a tavern called the White Horse Inn, adjacent to the university. As an Austin friar, Barnes had enjoyed considerable freedom in preaching, as the monastery did not fall under the jurisdiction of the bishops. On Christmas Eve, 1525, however, Barnes forsook this protection by preaching at St. Edwards at Trinity Hall.

Barnes was tried before Wolsey, who, upon pain of death, required him to repent of teaching that "men ought not to plead their own merits before Christ." At the urging of Fisher and Gardiner, Barnes took a plea bargain, heaping faggots on a pile of burning Lutheran books. Ashamed of this concession, Barnes spent six months in prison before fleeing for his life to Wittenberg, where he lived with Luther and his wife, studied at the university, and served as assistant pastor in a Lutheran church.

In Saxony, Barnes drafted a precise treatise imploring Henry to reexamine the teachings of Luther and to reconsider his systematic persecution of the evangelical heresy in England. It was at this time that Wolsey's disciple in matters of the state, Thomas Cromwell, was made a member of the king's Privy Council. Tudor intelligence had revealed that Barnes, believed to have committed suicide in the Thames, was actually living in Saxony under the pseudonym Anglius. Cromwell informed the king, who sent agents to Germany to speak with Barnes regarding the possibility of an alliance with the Lutheran princes. There, they obtained a copy of Barnes' *Supplication to King Henry VIII*, which was brought to the king. Henry chose to ignore his objections to the Lutheran heresy contained therein because Barnes

also argued for royal supremacy. Barnes was ordered to petition Luther regarding the King's Matter and to return to England under a royal safe conduct to report his findings. Chancellor Thomas More, however, made a clandestine attempt to have agents intercept him at Antwerp. Anticipating this, Cromwell hired his own band of highwaymen to escort Barnes.

When Robert Barnes arrived in London, he was greeted with charges of heresy by More, who accused the Austin friar of improper dress. (He was not wearing his habit.) Nonetheless, Barnes appeared before Henry, who was not interested in discussing the theology of the *Supplication*. What, he demanded to know, was the judgment of Luther regarding the divorce?

Barnes' response infuriated Henry: Luther challenged the king's protestation that God had cursed him by denying him a male heir. How did Henry know that God could not or would not yet bless Catherine with a son? And, furthermore, what gave the head of a household the right to besmire the character of his faithful wife and innocent daughter? Luther also argued that the law of Christ forbidding divorce constrained the king; to disobey God would be far greater than to disobey canon law. Barnes was allowed to leave the king's court under his own power, and he quickly returned to Saxony.

Nonetheless, both Barnes and Cranmer continued to place their hopes for a genuine English Reformation on Henry, despite having proved himself an opportunist, willing to use their theological convictions to his political advantage. In this sense, they, too, became opportunists, thinking that to compromise by acknowledging the king as the "head of the Church of England, insofar as the law of Christ allows" was to secure an open door for the Gospel. Cranmer quickly lost control of his own life, being foisted into the position of archbishop of Canterbury for the purpose of declaring Henry's marriage to Catherine null and void. Instead of providing an open door, these actions galvanized the people of England against both Anne Boleyn and Protestant doctrine.

In 1535, Cromwell convinced Henry that, having cut himself off from Rome, the king should pursue a Protestant foreign policy. This appealed to Cranmer, who believed that all Protestants should form a loose confederation based upon their agreement on justification and repudiation of the pope. Barnes, still at Wittenberg, wrote to Cranmer that "the day of our visitation" is at hand. Soon, he was drafted by Henry as an ambassador to the Lutherans, and, on Christmas Day, 1535, England and the Schmalkald League exchanged emissaries. The Lutherans, however, quickly grew impatient with Henry's administrators, who focused nearly all their attention on getting the Germans to accept the king's divorce—a year before Anne Boleyn would lose her head. Still, in 1536, Henry, desperate to form some kind of alliance, loosely agreed to the Ten Articles, drawn up by Cranmer and loosely based on the Schmalkald League's Wittenberg Articles, which formed a defensive alliance with Saxony. Despite Barnes' and Cranmer's elation, this would prove no victory for the Reformation.

The dissolution of the monasteries was complete by 1539. With a great deal of newly accumulated wealth, Henry found himself in a position of unprecedented power. Charles V and Francis I had agreed to leave England alone, and he saw this as his opportunity to demonstrate Catholic orthodoxy to Europe, by sending a bill to Parliament "to correct abuses which have sprung from diversity of opinion and disputes over the Scripture, the use of which in England the King has sanctioned . . ."

On June 2, 1539, the Act of Six Articles, reflecting Henry's theological convictions, was passed. The first article affirmed transubstantiation; the second condemned communion under both kinds and affirmed concomitance; the third insisted that priests not be allowed to marry. The fourth observed that monastic vows were to be honored; the fifth reestablished private Masses for the living and the dead; and the sixth demanded that sacramental Confession be reinstituted. Those who violated these articles were to be burned at the stake or imprisoned.

Within two weeks, over 500 indictments for heresy were registered. After a public disputation with Gardiner, Barnes was burned at the stake along with two other Protestants, but, before they were rounded up for execution, the Privy Council insisted that three Catholic theologians imprisoned at the Tower be burned alongside them, so the execution of Barnes would not cause a Protestant backlash.

News of the Six Articles reached Saxony, and the Lutherans mourned the end of all hope for Reformation in England. Nonetheless, in 1543, Cranmer began work on a revision of the liturgy, which would become the Book of Common Prayer, reflecting the evangelicals' disavowal of both transubstantiation and the sacrificial character of the Mass. Cranmer kept it hidden until the death of Henry VIII in 1547 and the accession of Edward VI, the boy king whose keepers granted great freedom to Protestantism.

Cranmer's notion of royal supremacy ultimately led him to his own destruction. At the insistence of Edward's keeper, Northumberland, he participated in the attempt to circumvent Henry VIII's will by placing Lady Jane Grey on the throne in place of the Catholic Mary. Lady Jane ruled for nine days before Mary took her rightful throne. Before Queen Mary, Cranmer appealed to royal supremacy: "Methought it became not me . . . to stand against my prince therein." Cranmer was committed to the Tower for treason, where he remained for two-and-a-half years, before he was formally tried for heresy.

At trial, Cranmer again appealed to royal supremacy. When he asserted that "every king in his own realm and dominion is supreme head of the Church," Dr. Martin asked him if that meant that Nero was head of the Roman Church over Saint Peter. Frustrated and near madness, Cranmer affirmed it and went on to say that "the Turk, too, is head of the church in Turkey."

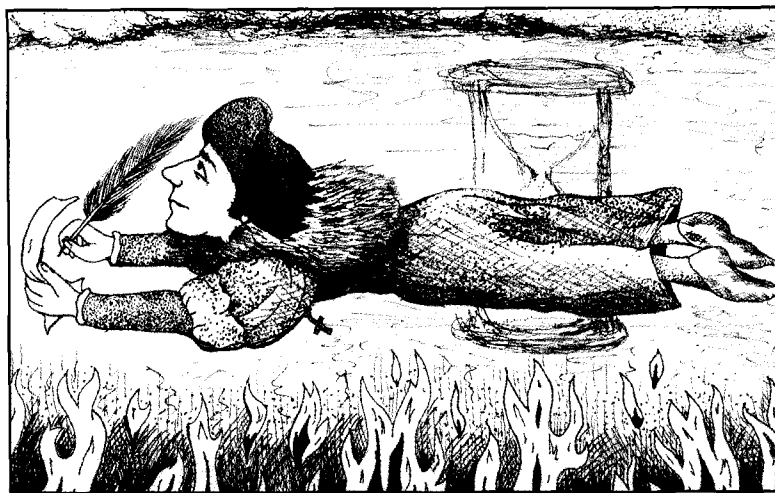
Between sentencing and execution, Cranmer, by his own theory bound to obey his (now Catholic) sovereign, signed six recantations. Before facing the stake, however, he renounced them, declaring that, "forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, . . . my hand shall first be punished: for if I may come to the fire, it shall be first burned. And as for the pope, I refuse him, as Christ's enemy and Antichrist, with all his false doctrine." Cranmer then left the pulpit and walked swiftly to the stake, where he thrust his right hand first into the fire, "crying with a loud voice, 'This hand hath offended.'"

Such is the fate of those who put their trust in princes. While royal supremacy seems a relic today, there are still those who think that the success of the Gospel or, at least, of moral renewal lies in the hands of politicians who pretend to be their friends but never seem to deliver on their promises. They must, instead, put their trust in Christ and His Gospel. Those who think that they are furthering the cause of Christ by ignoring the immorality of a tyrannical regime, while holding out hope that their elected king will someday champion their cause, should look at the hand that punched the chad and say with Cranmer, "This hand hath offended."

Thomas More's *Supplication of Souls*

The Prophecy of the Last Medieval Man and the First Modern Martyr

by Hugh Barbour, O.Praem



“*E*’la morte di una civilizzazione.” (“It’s the death of a civilization.”) These were the words of the Vatican official who told me the following sad story at the beginning of September. It seems that, after the heat wave of August, hundreds of the cadavers of the lonely urban old folks of France were being kept in the city morgues. When their vacationing families returned, many of them reacted with amazement and resentment when they learned that they were expected to pay for the burial of their own dead. As the accurate, if historically tardy, judgment of the papal diplomat implied, these “loved ones” had left behind survivors who were, shall we say, the living dead. “*Vive la France*,” indeed. Read on, for the cheerless end of the story given here has a long prologue.

In his informative and consoling masterpiece of historical research *The Stripping of the Altars*, Eamon Duffy drew the conclusion that the most distinctive characteristic of late-medieval English piety on the eve of the 16th-century religious upheaval was the devout remembrance of the dead. There was not a monastery, collegiate chapter, parish church, or cathedral that did not have a daily round of Masses and dirges for the deceased; woe to the cleric who was negligent in this regard, for lay folk were devoutly attentive that not a single candle go unlit or one nocturne of the Psalter go unsung from the list of their endowed observances. Liturgy, however, was not the only expression of piety toward the departed. There were anniversary distributions to the poor, foundations of hostels and schools, pilgrimages, bridge and road building, all in suffrage of the deceased—and indulgences, of course, for all these public works. Moral instruction had the purifying and corrective penalties of Purgatory as a principal illustration, and iconography presented to the eyes of the faithful an intermediate state full of

souls of all sorts and conditions, and even many a tonsure, veil, miter, or coronet could be descried in the fires.

Such “popular religion”—as the concrete charity and piety of Catholic Christians is called by those who do not believe in it or who see it, for the most part, as a necessary crutch for the unprofessional (that is, those not trained in seminaries or universities)—was purified, according to the usual account, by the Catholic and Protestant Reformations. Christian humanists and reformers turned to a practice of religion based on the Bible and the Fathers, freed of wild oriental and Celtic accretions.

St. Thomas More, whose credentials as a reform-minded humanist are beyond dispute, as his ironic *Utopia* bears out, could be expected to have provided a critique of the luxurious cult of the departed that flourished in his time. In any case, his good friend Erasmus could have. More’s writings tell a different tale, however. In *The Supplication of Souls*, published in 1530, More has the robust, graphic, and morally concrete faith of a medieval man, and this perhaps explains best why he had to become a modern martyr. In this work, now felicitously back in print, the attentive reader will find that he was a prophet of both the means and the effects of modernity. His faith in the eschatological world to come infused his judgment with a seer’s insight into the historical world to come that we—and not just the French urban proletariat—are “living” now.

In 1529, a certain Simon Fish (whom, perhaps, I may with some poetic justice claim as an ancestor, since I have some Fish ancestors who made it from England to South Carolina in the 18th century) published a pamphlet in the Low Countries entitled *A Supplication of Beggars*. In this work, intended for mass distribution in England, he speaks in the person of the beggars of England, made so because of the wealth and rapacity of the clergy. The beggars attack devotion for the dead as the source of riches for the friars and as the impoverishment of

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