

8-1-1936

King Henry VIII Courts Luther

W. Dallmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dallmann, W. (1936) "King Henry VIII Courts Luther," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 7 , Article 64.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol7/iss1/64>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

King Henry VIII Courts Luther.

When the Bund of Schmalkalden was formed in 1531, Philip of Hessen tried to get the king of England to join.

In January, 1532, Paget and Cranmer were sent to assure the Lutheran princes, Henry and Francis I would help them against the kaiser. They, however, helped the kaiser against the Turk.

At Nuernberg Cranmer married Osiander's niece Margaret. In August he was called home to be made Archbishop of Canterbury. For this he had to thank Queen Anne Boleyn, as Henry said.

Early in 1533 Henry would not join the Bund unless the German cities also did so. Later Christopher Mont, L. L. D. of Koeln, naturalized in England since 1531, and Vaughan had no success, for Henry was hurting Christian III of Denmark by helping Luebeck. In 1534 Legh, Paget, Heath, and Mont also failed.

On March 11, 1535, Dr. Barnes, "the king's chaplain and professor of theology," was again in Wittenberg, "treating only of the second marriage of the king," and trying very hard to get Melancthon to go to England. Of course, he did not win the Lutherans to approve of the divorce. Encouraged by "Doctor Antonius, my good friend," Melancthon lettered the king. After a lengthened and fulsome eulogy he advises "a sure and simple form of doctrine" and to have a care that "cruelty be not used against the good."

To this letter Archbishop Laurence attributes the *Articles of Faith* published during Henry's reign.

On June 4 Bishop Edward Fox of Hereford wrote Cromwell that George Joy was lodging with him at Calais.

On the return of Barnes he was again returned to Wittenberg in great haste to keep Melancthon from going to France, the credence being dated July 8.

In August Barnes got Melancthon to dedicate the second edition of his *Locci*, an explanation of Paul's Letter to the Romans, to Henry, not as a patron, but as a censor, and asked him to study and criticize the book! For this dedication Philip had to defend himself the next year. The work was taken to England by Alesius, whom John Stigelius "pursued with an elegy."

On July 11, 1535, Chapuys tells Karl if the traitors "loitered longer, the modern preachers and prelates would corrupt the people, and all would be lost" — to the Pope. Again, on September 25: The Catholic religion is going daily to destruction. Lord Hussey could remain no longer in a country where all ranks and classes were being driven into heresy.

In September, 1535, Vaughan gets the king's "hertie and condigne thanks" for good service in Germany and 5,000 pounds to spend in Denmark.

The spread of Lutheranism was creating more exasperation than even the divorce. The heretical preachers were more violent than ever, and the king was believed to have encouraged them. Dr. Brown, an Augustinian friar and General of the Mendicant Order, who, as some believed, had married Henry and Anne, preached the bishops' "sacred chrism would avail them nothing while they obeyed the idol of Rome, who was a limb of the devil."

The Kaiser "saw that the intellect and energy of England was running upon the German lines. . . . The King himself, if he wished it, might not be able to check the torrent, and the opinion of his vassals and his own imperious disposition might carry him to the extreme lengths of Luther."

On the 30th Pope Paul III thundered forth his curse of excommunication against Henry, who now surely needed the help of the German Lutherans more than ever.

On September 11 Dean Luther presided at a disputation when Jerome Weller and Nicholas Medler were to be made doctors of divinity. The promotion took place on the 14th under Cruciger, Justus Jonas being the promoter. On account of the plague the university had been sent to Jena, but Melancthon, Cruciger, Myconius, and Menius came over for the ceremony. In addition, there were present Bugenhagen, Amsdorf, Roerer, Hausmann, Jerome, and Augustine Schurf, and of course the ambassador from England, Dr. Robert Barnes.

In honor of her house-friend Weller, Kate Luther cooked the "splendid banquet," for which Jonas had to get all kinds of fowl from Jena and Luther begged the Elector to send venison from his residence at Lochau. The guests filled seven or eight tables.

Next day Luther, Jonas, Cruciger, and Bugenhagen wrote the Elector to grant a private audience to the English ambassador.

On the 18th Barnes found the Elector at Jena starting to visit King Ferdinand at Vienna and received permission to confer with the Wittenbergers and a promise to have Henry's proposals considered by the Bund of Schmalkalden, to be called in special session in December. On the same day John Frederick also wrote King Henry, urging him to keep on reforming the Church, such zeal being the best sacrifice wherewith he could serve God, the whole Church, and all posterity.

"That black Englishman," as Luther calls Barnes, was again in Wittenberg and on October 5 wrote Cromwell that Luther was writing against certain articles spread by King Francis as coming from Luther, Melancthon, and Bugenhagen. On the 6th Barnes reported that there is a great preparing for Master Almener, the English agent, at the Elector's own castle; that the Elector was very glad to have King Henry in the Smalcald League and straightway called

a special meeting for December 6 to consider the admission of England as an ally; that "Langius shal come in al haste to feche phylpe" into "franse, but I have stopyd yt, and by god's grace (yf he and I do lyve) I shal bryng hym with me" into England; "I must have money plenty to pay for phylps costs and all others that he shal bryng wyth hym and to by hym horse and other necessaryse for hys journey."

On Sunday, November 7, Peter Paul Vergerio, the Pope's nuncio, invited Luther and Barnes to the castle. Though the Englishman did not accept, Luther with his characteristic speeches acted as the spokesman for Barnes also, as the Reformer informed Justus Jonas.

On the 15th Barnes left Jena for Leipzig to dispute with Cochlaeus, who had bitterly attacked King Henry for killing Bishop John Fisher and Chancellor Thomas More—canonized in 1935.

On December 9 Bishop Edward Fox of Hereford, Archdeacon Nicholas Heath, and Dr. Barnes conferred with the Elector at Weimar, went with him to Schmalkalden, arrived on the 13th, and delivered the King's message to the Saxon chancellors, Brueck and Burkhart (Burkhardt, Burkhard).

On December 21 Vergerio was told the Bund would have nothing to do with the Pope's Council.

William du Bellay made a brilliant speech for France, but on the 22d the Bund declined to take in King Francis, and du Bellay left soon after.

On the 24th Bishop Fox addressed the Bund for the "head of the Church of England," who would fight for the Christian religion with land and people, his riches and all his war power. He admonished them to unity, warned them against the Anabaptists, discussed the papal pretensions, and insisted on unity of doctrine before entering the Council at last called by the Pope to meet at Mantua on May 23, 1537.

The good Germans rejoiced over Henry's readiness to agree with them in doctrine and on December 25 signed an agreement with the Englishmen to admit their king as the patron and protector of the Bund if he would further the pure Gospel according to the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology* and give 100,000 crowns to defend their faith.

Mont took this petition of thirteen articles to the King. Barnes set out for Wittenberg and on the 28th, from Gotha, wrote jubilantly to Cromwell about the success of Fox and paid him a handsome compliment. As to the divorce, he thinks Martin is more favorable than before; Jonas does not object; Philip seems to be with us; Pomeranus alone resists savagely. "Remember us with more money. . . . I have here at my charge to the kinges honore V horse."

Barnes "adopts a secular habit." The news does not startle us

a little bit, but in those days it was so important that Ambassador Chapuys dispatches it to Kaiser Karl V. Another proof of the man's importance—"sent like an ambassador with ten horse unto the Duke of Saxony, elector, in the matters of the Gospel," and then the learned Bishop of Winchester indulges in the silly sneer that Luther's religion permits a man to travel with ten horses. But Gardiner's religion let him travel with ten times ten horses, "all in gray velvet with gold chains on their necks." And in 1520 Wolsey's religion let him surpass the lavish splendor of the King on the Field of Cloth of Gold, and in 1527 it let him travel to France with 900 horses at the cost of about \$500,000.

Bishop Fox had William Turner for secretary, and Thomas Theobald was with Archdeacon Heath. On January 1 they came to Wittenberg, came in royal state, came with forty horses, befitting the great kingdom of England. Wittenberg had never seen the like.

The English offered to pay their own way, which was declined by the Elector. The expense was very heavy, quite true; but then the winning of England for the Gospel was at stake—and the winning of an ally against the Kaiser.

"Luther lovingly embraces them and is even delighted by their courtesy," writes Melancthon. Luther jokes about the importance attached to him by the King of England. After eleven universities have already given their decision, it seems the world will be lost "unless we poor beggars, the Wittenberg theologians, be heard."

Bishop Fox brought a letter of thanks, dated October 1, from the King to his "very beloved friend" Melancthon for his book on Romans, than which nothing could have more pleased the King and which everybody ought to prize highly for its merits; also three or five hundred crowns.

There were also fifty gulden for Luther.

Are we awake? We rub our eyes. Yes, there it is, black on white, fifty gulden from the Anglo-Saxon king, Defender of the Faith, to the Saxon monk, Destroyer of the Faith.

The English also brought a book by Dr. Richard Sampson, Henry's dean of the chapel, on the king's supremacy, and a volume of sermons to show how evangelical the King was, who also felt called on to admonish the Lutherans to remain firm against the Antichrist, to whom Henry now would grant no primacy at all, not even of human right. The visitors freely complained of the tyranny of their king and admired the freedom of the German theologians. Barnes told more good of Henry than Luther could readily believe and admitted, "My king does not care for religion," and the others added, "Our king is inconstant."

For about two months the divorce was discussed. On January 19 Luther wrote Chancellor Caspar Mueller at Mansfeld the Pope treated

King Henry so badly, "that I must almost excuse the King's person and still cannot sanction the matter" — of the divorce.

On the same day he wrote Barnes and grieved over the death of Catherine of Aragon on the 7th, forsaken by all but "the poor beggars, the theologians of Wittenberg; gladly would we have kept her and her daughter in their royal honors." When knighthood was in flower!

On January 25 Luther thanks the Elector for a gift of wine and a wild boar. "I had hopes we'd be rid of the English embassy in three days, but they do not think of leaving for a long time." He had done greater and more things in four weeks; in the way they act, they will not finish this one thing in twelve years' quarreling. And the great cost to the Elector is unbearable.

Replying to the invitation to head the Bund, Henry on March 12 declared no religious union could be had without milding the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology*. He also asked, if he were attacked, that the Bund furnish him with 500 horse or with ten ships of war at their own cost for four months and 2,000 horse and 5,000 foot at his expense.

On January 11 Luther had written the Elector John Frederick upholding his verdict against the divorce; in other matters, however, he will not show himself unfriendly in order they may not think we Germans are stone and wood.

The doctrines were discussed on the basis of the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology*. Melancthon complained to Camerarius about the quibbling of the English — "They exercise me so that I can hardly breathe. Archdeacon Nicholas Heath is the only one of our guests who is distinguished by culture and learning. The rest are destitute of our philosophy and sweetness; so I avoid their society as much as I can." Luther, on the other hand, liked his fellow-Augustinian Dr. Barnes and praised his uprightness.

A fine illustration of the friendly intercourse of Barnes with the Wittenbergers, also Melancthon, is given by Paul Eber's letter to the Bremen theologian Hardenberg.

Luther could not hide his surprise at his visitors' confidence in the justice of the divorce. He listened patiently to their arguments and was anything but "stone and wood." Indeed, we are truly amazed to see how far the peace-loving Luther could go to have peace and union with England. "It is indeed true that we ought to have patience, though everything in England cannot so suddenly be put into practise according to the doctrine (as it also has not been done among us)," he wrote on April 20 to Vice-Chancellor Burkhardt, who translated the *Wittenberg Articles*, of 1536, as the doctrinal agreement is known, penned by Melancthon.

On January 14 there was a disputation on justification, not with

the English, but for them. For their special benefit Luther pointedly and repeatedly denied faith itself is a good work.

Before the coming of the English it was rumored they would most firmly defend private Masses. And so Luther as early as October prepared theses for a disputation "Against the Private Mass," which was held on the 29th. Luther spoke of the right manner in which princes were to get "private Mass" from their chaplains, no doubt with a side glance at Barnes, who had been made Henry's chaplain. Bishop Fox quoted a Bible-verse in support of Luther's position. Other speakers were Bugenhagen, Cruciger, Jonas, Weller, Vice-Chancellor Burkhard, and Melancthon, specially called from Jena at the very urgent request of the English. They insisted his presence had been promised.

Speaking to old Chancellor Brueck, Fox was quite sure King Henry would accept the Lutheran teaching in all points. Luther spoke his doubts: his eyes were fitted with Roentgen rays.

The Englishmen wished to take Melancthon to England and, failing in that, thought of Prince George of Anhalt.

They left on April 10; on the 25th Fox and Heath were at the meeting at Regensburg. Writing to the Elector in May, Fox signed himself "Your Electoral Highness's good friend." Strype writes the Germans thought this "without that sense of distance and good manners that became him." On July 4 Fox was in London. They had with them Luther's polite letter to Cromwell and the judgment against Henry's divorce.

In June, 1540, Luther makes the startling statement "The word would have brought me 300 fl., but I did not want to." Did they try to bribe him for the divorce?

Luther's position on the divorce of course offended Henry and at the same time endangered Anne Boleyn, the most powerful protector of the Lutherans in England. Not even for the great prize of winning England would Luther wound his conscience. When knighthood was in flower!

Barnes left Wittenberg before April 10 and in May asked Cromwell for the Mastership of the House of Our Lady of Bethlehem, now Bedlam, held till now by Queen Anne's brother George.

Barnes used the stay at Wittenberg to print his *Lives of the Popes*, dedicated to King Henry. The material was taken from Platina and other papal historians. In the introduction Luther writes: "In the beginning, not being much versed in history, I attacked the Pope *a priori*, *i. e.*, from the Holy Scriptures. Now I am wonderfully delighted that others are doing the same *a posteriori*, *i. e.*, from history. And I think I am triumphing, since, as the light appears, I understand that the histories agree with the Scriptures. For what I have learned from St. Paul and Daniel as teachers, that

the Pope is the adversary of God and of all, this history indicates with its very finger, pointing out not merely genus and species, but the very individual."

Fueter says: "Protestant historiography has received its program from the hand of Luther himself. Its first work appeared under the eyes of the Reformer at Wittenberg and with a preface by him."

In 1545 Luther wrote an introduction to *Papal Fidelity of Hadrian IV and Alexander III shown to Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossa*. This booklet is a literal translation of part of Barnes's *Lives*, the translation and notes likely by Luther himself.

In May, 1536, Henry beheaded George Boleyn for incest with Anne, a few months before the birth of Elizabeth! With his dying breath he declared his innocence. A convinced Lutheran, he said to the people, "I desire you to help to the setting forth of the true Word of God." On May 19, 1536, Henry beheaded his Queen Anne, to the end declaring her innocence.

Melanchthon wrote, "More accused than convicted of adultery." Cardinal Campegi also testified to her innocence. Queen Mary of Hungary, now regent of the Netherlands, wrote her brother Ferdinand of Austria, "People say Henry trumped up the charge to get rid of her." At her death Anne called herself a Lutheran. Froude says, "She had been conspicuously Lutheran; her family and her party were Lutheran." Bishop Aylmer asks: "Was not Quene Anne . . . the chief, first, and only cause of banyshing the beast of Rome with all his beggarly baggage? Was there ever in England a greater feate wrought by any man then this was by a woman? . . . Wherefore though many deserved mucche praise for the helping forward of it, yet the croppe and roote was the Quene, whiche God hath endewed with wisdom that she coulede, and gyven hir the minde that she would do it."

In June Barnes warned Melanchthon not to come to England in spite of Henry's earnest and repeated invitations.

Coverdale's translation of the Bible of course did not please all, and hot debates were held in the convocation begun June 9, 1536, at St. Paul's with Hugh Latimer's stinging sermon on "The Unjust Steward." Alesius gives a vivid account of one of the sessions.

"At the King's pleasure all the learned men, but especially the bishops, assembled, to whom this matter seemed chiefly to belong. . . . The bishops and prelates attending upon the coming of Cromwell, as he was come in, rose up and did obeisance unto him as their vicar-general, and he again saluted every one in their degree and sat down in the highest place at the table, according to his degree and office. . . . Thereupon Cromwell opened the discussion by sketching in a short speech the King's purpose and commands. He will not, he said,

'admit any articles or doctrine not contained in the Scripture, but approved only by continuance of time and old custom and by unwritten verities, as ye were wont to do. . . . His Majesty will give you high thanks if ye will set and conclude a godly and a perfect unity, whereunto this is the only way and mean, if ye will determine all things by the Scripture, as God commandeth you in Deuteronomy; which things His majesty exhorted and desireth you to do.'

"The bishops rose up altogether, giving thanks unto the King's Majesty . . . for his mostly godly exhortation."

Alesius, at the invitation of Cromwell, explained the meaning of the word "sacrament." Stokesley, Bishop of London, interrupted him as he was looking up the Fathers and was in turn checked by Edward Fox, Bishop of Hereford, who had on July 4 returned from his conference with Luther at Wittenberg. He reminded both that they were commanded by the King that these controversies should be determined by the rule and judgment of the Scriptures.

He said to Alesius: "Brother Alexander, contend not so much about the mind and sayings of the doctors and school-writers, for ye know that they in many places do differ among themselves and that they are contrary to themselves in almost every article. And there is no hope of any concord if we must lean to their judgment in matters of controversy." Then, specially addressing the bishops: "Think not that we can by any sophistical subtleties steal out of the world against the light which every one doth see. Christ hath so lightened the world at this time that the light of the Gospel hath put to flight all misty darkness, and it will shortly have the higher hand of all clouds, though we resist in vain ever so much.

"The lay people do now know the Holy Scriptures better than many of us, and the Germans have made the text of the Bible so plain and easy by the Hebrew and Greek tongues that now many things may be better understood without any glosses at all than by all the commentaries of the doctors. And, moreover, they have so opened these controversies by their writings that women and children may wonder at the blindness and falsehood that have been hitherto. [This in reply to Bishop Stokesley's sneer at the Word of God, which every cobbler was now reading in his mother tongue.] Truth is the daughter of time, and time is the mother of truth; and whatsoever is besieged of truth cannot long continue; and upon whose side truth doth stand, that ought not to be thought transitory or that it will ever fall."

Hard pressed in the argument, Stokesley replied to Alesius with great heat: "Ye are far deceived if ye think that there is none other Word of God than which every souter and cobbler doth read in their mother tongue. And if ye think that nothing pertaineth unto the Christian faith but that only that is written in the Bible, then err ye plainly with the Lutherans."

"Now, when the right noble Lord Cromwell, the archbishop, with the other bishops who did defend the pure doctrine of the Gospel, heard this, they smiled a little one upon another, forasmuch as they saw him flee even in the very beginning of the disputation unto his old rusty sophistry and unwritten verities.

"Thus through the industry of Cromwell the colloquies were brought to this end, that, albeit religion could not wholly be reformed, yet at that time there was some reformation had throughout all England."

The Wittenberg Articles, of 1536, called by Seckendorf a "repetition and explanation of the *Augsburg Confession*," were not adopted; Gardiner supplied the political reasons against them. But for these political reasons England would likely have become Lutheran in 1536.

Even as it was, they had considerable influence on the *Book of X Articles of Faith and Ceremonies* presented by Bishop Fox to Convocation on July 11. On the 31st Alesius through Aepinus sent a translation to Germany. "A most confused composition," commented Melancthon.

It was said in convocation there were sixty-seven Lutheran errors current in England. Fuller calls them "the Protestant religion *in ore*." We have read it had even been proposed in Parliament to adopt the *Augsburg Confession*.

The Wittenberg Articles, of 1536, had also an influence on *The Institution of a Christian Man*, of 1537, the Bishops' Book, with a preface by Bishop Fox of Hereford. Froude calls this book "in point of language beyond all question the most beautiful composition that had yet appeared in the English language."

In May, 1543, Henry revised the Bishops' Book and called it *A Necessary Doctrine of Erudition for Any Christian Man, the King's Book*. Of it Gardiner wrote, "The king's majesty hath, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, composed all matters of religion."

Richard Taverner, one of the "Lutheran" students at Wolsey's Cardinal College at Oxford, who suffered persecution for his faith, was a layman and a lawyer and good in Greek, even went "to quote the law in Greek." Cromwell got Henry to give him a clerkship. In 1536 appeared *The Confession of the Fayth of the Germanes, exhibited to the Most Victorious Emperour Charles the V., at Augusta, the yere of our Lord, 1530. To which is added the Apologie of Melancthon, who defendeth with Reasons invincible the aforesayd Confession, translated by Richard Taverner, at the commandment of his Master, the ryght honourable Master Thomas Cromwell, chefe secretare to the Kynges Graces*. London, Robert Redman.

At the same time came out *A compendious letter which John Pomerane—curate of the congregacion of Wittenberge sent to the*

faithfull christen congregacion in England. London, Richard Charlton.

The King's own printer published Tyndale's "Luther's New Testament in English."

Lucy told Cromwell a priest declared, "Ember days were named after one Luther, a paramour of a certain bishop of Rome."

When Jacob Schenk and Philip Moth were made Licentiates of Theology, on October 10, 1536, Luther presided at the disputation "On the Power of the Council," which Paul III on June 4 had called to Mantua for May 23, 1537. Dr. Barnes took part in the debate. Perhaps it was for the "honorable guests" that the city council sent eight cans of Rhine wine for the banquet at the Black Cloister, Luther's house.

Stephen Gardiner sent Henry Phillips and Gabriel Donne to arrest William Tyndale, the translator of the New Testament. In May, 1535, they had him in the great state prison of Vilvorde, near Brussels. With the King's consent Cromwell wrote Archbishop Carondelet and the marquis of Bergen. Thomas Poynts of the "English House" at Antwerp delivered the letters. Stephen Vaughan also made strenuous efforts to save the reformer. In vain. On October 6, 1536, he was strangled and burned — which he had long looked for. His last word was, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!"

WM. DALLMANN.

The Greatness of Luther's Commentary on Galatians.

If some theologians and historians declare to have been disappointed with Luther's Galatians, it is because they looked for a commentary more learned and critical than popular.*) It was not intended to be a critical study in the present philological sense of the term. Nor does the work hold out the slightest shred of comfort to the Modernist. During the stormy years that gave birth to this commentary Luther had too much practical work of prior importance on his hands to find leisure for comparative and critical exegesis.

It still remains a marvel how he could pen a commentary so diffuse and yet so simple. Its thought- and sermon-stimulating properties are immense. It is not so much a commentary which deals with every iota of the original — although sincere exposition is by no means neglected — as a course of lectures on the chief Christian doctrine, justification by faith, and as set forth in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. There lies the reason why the commentary

*) Cp., e. g., Fife, *Young Luther*, pp. 214 ff.