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THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES BY KING HENRY VIII AND
ITS EFFECT ON THE ECONMOY, POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, AND SOCIAL
INSTABILITY IN TUDOR ENGLAND THAT LED TO THE CREATION OF
THE POOR LAWS

by

Casey Jo Cooper

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science
in the College of Sciences
and in The Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Robert Bledsoe

ABSTRACT

Before the reformation and the schism of the Catholic Church, it had always been the duty of the Church and not of the state, to undertake the seven corporal works of mercy; feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the prisoner, and bury the dead.¹ By dissolving these institutions, Henry had unwittingly created what would become a social disaster of biblical proportions. In essence, this act was rendering thousands of the poor and elderly without a home or shelter, it denied the country of much of the medical aid that has been offered by the church, it denied future generations of thousands of volumes of books and scriptures from the monastic libraries, as well as denied many an education who would have otherwise never received one without the help of the Church.

The ultimate goal of my thesis is to prove my hypothesis that the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII was not merely a contributory factor in the need for the creation of poor laws, but the deciding factor (in a myriad of societal issues) for their creation.

¹ Matthew 25 vv. 32-46.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to those who have suffered religious persecution and for those who have given their lives in the service of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my father, Bruce G. Cooper, because of your guidance and upbringing, I have become the strong, resilient, and ambitious woman that I am. You've always taught me the value of standing by one's convictions regardless of the consequences. You let me know that it was ok to not choose the popular choice when it was diametrically opposed to the righteous one. You have taught me that the purpose of one's life is not to serve one's self but to serve others. It is to you I owe the belief in the importance of being an advocate for those that cannot advocate for themselves. There have been times in the last year that I could have given up, and it would have been so easy to do. However, I held it together when everyone else would have understood if I fell apart; that's true strength. I owe that to you. To my mother, Amy Cooper, you and father could not be more different, but it makes you both so perfect as companions and as parents. You are the tenderhearted nurturer that everyone needs in life. You are the unjudgemental and listening ear, and kind shoulder that I know I can come to at any time and that you'll drop anything to make your daughter smile. Your love is one that cannot be measured in words; it can only be felt in the heart. You have taught me the value of benevolence to others and the power of a kind smile and soft words; and the effect it leaves on others. I hope to one day be as loving as a mother and as beautiful of a wife as you. I hope that the path that I have chosen to take in my life is one that will make you both proud!

Also, thank you to my committee and to all of my professors that have challenged me throughout this year and my last 4 years at UCF. I have constantly been pushed out of my comfort zone and

into realms of the unfamiliar. Because of this I have been able to grow as an academic and a future professional. Furthermore, thank you Dr, Bledsoe, Dr.Larson, and Dr. Kiel for being understanding when I fell ill this semester.

An acknowledgement would not be complete without listing those who have been with up with me late into the night, and there for me day in and day out; my friends. Thank you Alejandro Caicedo for always being there whenever I was in a bind. Whether it was a blown tire or a sad heart, you have always been there whenever I needed help. Only God could have blessed me with a better little brother. Corey Hubbard, thank you for your constant positivity and bright outlook. You have the endearing and kind ability to lift up my heart whenever I've been found down. Sarah Cox, thank you for always making me smile; your kindness will never be forgotten. Nadia Emerson and Kristin Neilson, thank you for always being willing to pick up where I fell behind during my illness; your benevolence is immensely appreciated. Austin Miniard, thank you for being a constant listening ear and kind shoulder. Very rarely do I trust people enough to let them into my chaos. However, your sincerity and altruism has been a blessing. Never let that be lost, and never let the world jade you; you're genuine as is.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Sturdy Beggars:

Those classed in the English Poor Laws of 1531 as able-bodied persons who chose not to work.

This presumed, wrongly, that there was enough work for everyone who wanted it. Those who took to the roads, seeking jobs or charity, were severely punished. This was because Tudor governments regarded them as threats to public order, especially returned soldiers who organized themselves into bands and robbed travelers. By the end of the century new poor laws made parishes provide work for the genuinely unemployed, while “incorrigible rogues” were to be whipped, returned to the parishes whence they had come, or even banished overseas for persistent offences.²

Monasteries:

The “dissolution of the monasteries” includes more than just Catholic Churches. It also includes the monasteries, abbeys, nunneries and friaries that were home to over 10,000 monks, nuns, friars and canons.

The Church:

² "sturdy beggars." *A Dictionary of World History*. 2000. *Encyclopedia.com*. (November 28, 2010). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O48-sturdybeggars.html>

When referring to “The Church”, I am referencing the institution of The Roman Catholic Church.

Rome:

When referencing Rome I am referring specifically to the Vatican as well as the Pope.

Grammar and Olde English:

Throughout my thesis I will often be referencing first hand documents, speeches, and quotes from much and the clergy and nobility from this era. It is necessary to note that for accuracy's sake these will be direct quotations and not paraphrases. Hence, many things will be spelled in an almost foreign manor in comparison to modern day English language. For instance, “ of pylgremages, worshyping of seyntes, wurshyping off ymages, off purgatory, &c. yn the whyche he dyd vehemently perswade towarde the contrary, that the people ware nott a little offendyd”³ would read “ of pilgrimages, worshiping of images, of purgatory, and in the which he died vehemently to persuade toward the contrary, that the people were not a little offended.

³ John Hilsey to the chancellor of the diocese of Worcester, 2 May 1533, printed in Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, VII, Appendix (unpaginated).

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church has been in existence for over two-thousand years and is the world's oldest Christian tradition. It is also one of the most influential institutions in the world. Since its inception and rise of influence in the world, the Catholic Church has had its autonomy challenged. One of the most notable was during the English Reformation.

For centuries prior to the reformation, the Monarchy of England answered to a higher power than to its king; it answered to Rome. This practice remained virtually unchallenged in Medieval England. The health of Catholicism prior to England's break with Rome was strong and flourishing; although the Reformation did occur, we cannot necessarily assume the contrary. In fact, Tudor England was not heading towards a Reformation during the beginning of Henry VIII's reign; quite the contrary. In response to many of the writings and teachings of Martin Luther, Henry with the help of Sir Thomas More, wrote *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, which translated from Latin means, *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. Interestingly enough, this book defended the sacramental nature of marriage and adamantly defended the supremacy of the Pope. For this, Pope Leo X granted Henry the title of *Fidei Defensor*, which translates to *Defender of the Faith*. This also clearly displayed the English opposition to the Protestant Reformation occurring elsewhere in Europe. However, with time and the introduction of various political figures and consideration, Henry would be influenced to eventually break from Rome.

The dissolution of the monasteries was one of the defining features of King Henry VIII's reign. The strength and number of the monasteries was viewed as the cornerstone of papal authority in England. However, not only were these religious houses places of prayer and worship, but also places of sanctuary for the poor, widows, and orphans. Since the inception of the Catholic Church's presence in England, it was often the local church parish that tended to the individual needs of its people; not the monarchical authority. It was the monasteries that supplied free food and alms for the poor and destitute, and the removal of this charitable resource is one of the hypothesized reasons for the rise of social instability during this time.

In addition, the monasteries also undertook the responsibility of educating many of its younger parishioners; with the dissolution this resource was also lost from the community. Furthermore, one of the greatest cultural losses during this time was the destruction of the monastic libraries. Often, the books were either destroyed for their precious binding, or they were simply sold off; many of these books and manuscripts were irreplaceable and are now forever lost

The monasteries were truly the axiom of hospitality, learning, charity, and medical care in England. The dissolution of over eight hundred of these institutions left many gaps in the social fabric of society. The removal of these Catholic institutions posed a large question that was imperative to resolve to maintain stability; how does one fill this void?

An initial review of the literature and first hand documents in my area of study has revealed a lack of synthesis of different ideas and viewpoints. For instance, there is literature written in the view point of the laymen as well as literature written from the view of a third party

looking on. However, little has been written that has really investigated into the consequences of the dissolution. For the most part, facts are stated, and ideas are presented. In addition, there is a vast amount of correspondence about the dissolution and the break from Rome in the *State Papers* between approximately 1530 to 1540. Many of the papers include correspondence between King Henry and the Pope himself.

It is most prudent to examine the beginnings of a phenomenon before coming to any brash conclusions. To parallel this event to the modern day and the affect that it has had on our culture today, we must look at the state England was in and the relationship of the church with the kingdom before the dissolution of the monasteries and the English Reformation took hold. We must address questions that answer what the political, societal, cultural, and religious landscape looked like before and after these events.

In addition, can it be claimed that the Poor Laws were truly the first form of social welfare that existed in the civilized world? Was it the challenge and breakdown of such a powerful private institution whose benevolence fed, clothed, and educated the masses the force that created a void that could only be filled by another governing body? Was this the first step in a sequence of events that led to welfare states of today? Since there are no exacts in political history, these ideas can only be postulated and examined. Many of these questions will not be able to be completely answered. However, they are well-backed ideas that I desiderate to provoke, inspire, and enliven debate within this controversy.

BACKGROUND

The landscape of 16th century Europe was changing dramatically from the landscape that had existed for centuries before; religiously, politically, socially, and economically. Institutions were being challenged, the status quo was changing, and the feudal system was evolving into something anew. The changes that would occur in this era paved the way for the creation of many new ideas; i.e. capitalism and individualism.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

For centuries in medieval England, there was a tradition of open “common land” being available to the masses and peasants for mowing meadows for hay, allowing livestock to graze, et cetera. The use of this land had never been restricted to a particular owner. However, this ceased during the Tudor era and became known as the enclosure movement.

Although some enclosure legislation had been created in prior years, it drastically increased during the Tudor era. Land that had once been open to the community was now being shut off from common use and converted into “severalty”, whereas one owner had sole control over the use of the property; often a Noble. These enclosures were often accompanied by a loss of common rights and could result in the destruction of whole villages.⁴

The motives for this change are not completely clear. However, a very popular view is that open field rents were generally below the marginal productivity of the land and that

⁴ Beresford, Maurice, *The Lost Villages of England*, Sutton Publishing, 1998, p. 28

enclosure offered the means by which extra income could be diverted to the landlord.⁵ Although this increased profit for wealthy landowning individuals, it created a new problem; unemployment, displacement of poor rural labourers, and increase in crime.

In Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, he discusses this issue and suggests that enclosure is responsible for some of the societal problems (such as theft) affecting England.

'But yet this is not only the necessary cause of stealing. There is another, which, as I suppose, is proper and peculiar to you Englishmen alone'. 'What is what?' quoth the Cardinal. 'Forsooth my lord,' quoth I, 'your sheep, that were wont to be so meek and tame and so small eaters, now, as I hear say, be become so great devourers and so wild that they eat up and swallow the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses, and cities. For look, in what parts of the realm doth grow the finest and therefore dearest wool, there noblemen and gentlemen, yea, and certain abbots, holy men no doubt, not contenting themselves with the yearly revenues and profits that were wont to grow to their forefathers and predecessors of their lands, nor being content that they live in rest and pleasure, nothing profiting, yea much annoying the weal public, leave no ground for tillage. They enclose all into pasture; they throw down houses; they pluck down towns, and leave nothing standing but only the church to be made a shee-house. And as though you lost no small quantity of ground by

⁵ J.A. Yelling, *Common Field and Enclosure in England 1450-1850*, London: Macmillan, 1977, pp. 209-13.

forests, chases, lands, and parks, and parks, those good holy men turn all dwelling places and glebe land into desolation and wilderness.’⁶

The enclosures in a majority resulted in a conversion of the land use from arable to pasture; predominantly sheep farming because of its profitability.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND CATHOLOICISM IN ENGLAND

The dissolution of the monasteries was not an event held in political isolation from the rest of Europe. The seed of this movement had been planted elsewhere. The most notable of the reformers included Martin Luther with the publishment of *The Ninety-Five Theses*, William Tyndale, and John Calvin. Nevertheless, the religious reformations by King Henry VIII are in a sense, diametrically different in the underlying principles, purpose, implementation, and doctrine of those that took place in Germany, France, Bohemia, and the rest of Europe.

Much of the fuel for the fire that inspired the anger, unrest, and beginning of a reformation movement came from the sell of indulgences by the church as well as corruption and scandal within the Clergy and the Church.

In 1476, Pope Sixtus IV took the sell of indulges a further step. As defined by the *Code of Canon Law* (can. 992) and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1471):

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the

⁶ Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*. New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2005, p. 29.

Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints⁷

In essence, full or partial remission of punishment for sins, could be obtained by offering an amount of money as alms to the church.⁸ This was one step further than what had been allowed by the Church previously, by decreeing that any person still living could obtain an indulgence on behalf of someone in purgatory.

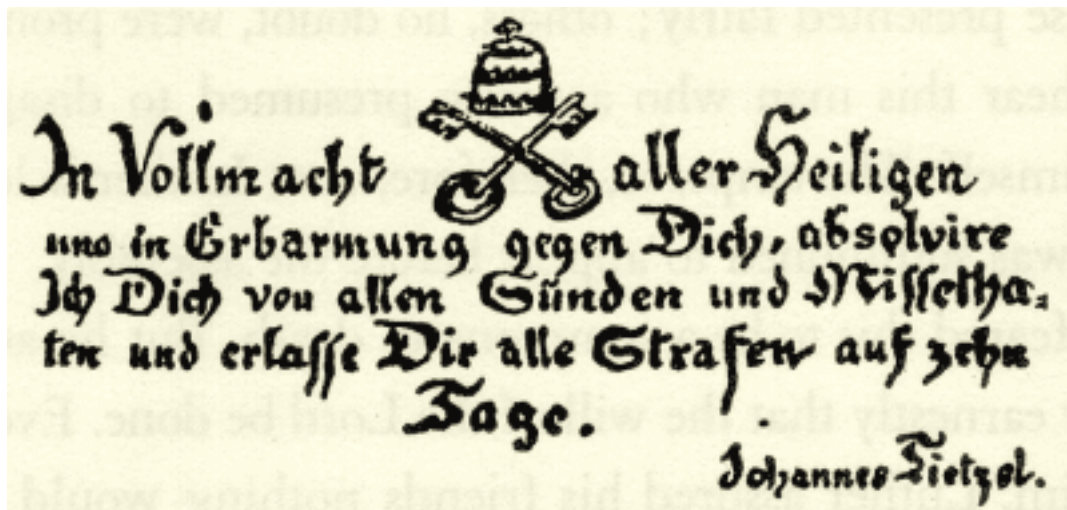


Figure 1: Example of Indulgence. This indulgence was sold by authority of Pope Leo X by Johann Tetzel in 1517. It reads “By the authority of all the saints, and in the mercy towards you, I absolve you from all sins and misdeeds and remit all punishments for ten days”

In 1517, another act regarding the sell of indulgences sparked even more controversy within religious circles and the clergy; this act, was by the archbishop of Mainz, Albert of Brandenburg. The archbishop sponsored the sale of indulgences to pay the Construction of Saint

⁷ IV Canon 992

⁸ “The Gift of The Indulgence.” *Vatican.: The Holy See.* Cardinal William Wakefield Baum, 29 Jan. 2000. Web. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/dosuments/rc_trib_appen_pro_20000129_indulgence_en.html.

Peter's Basilica in Rome. One of the most powerful responses to this came from within the confines of the Church itself.

This same year an Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther posted his *95 Theses* on the door of the Castel Chapel in Wittenburg, Germany. Henceforth, inviting and sparking true debate over the legitimacy of the church doctrine of the sale of indulges; and later much more.

In Thesis 82, Luther questioned the sale of indulgences,

“Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial.”⁹

In Thesis 28, Luther stated that indulgences led to nothing more than profit and greed; nothing that substantiated to true pardon with God,

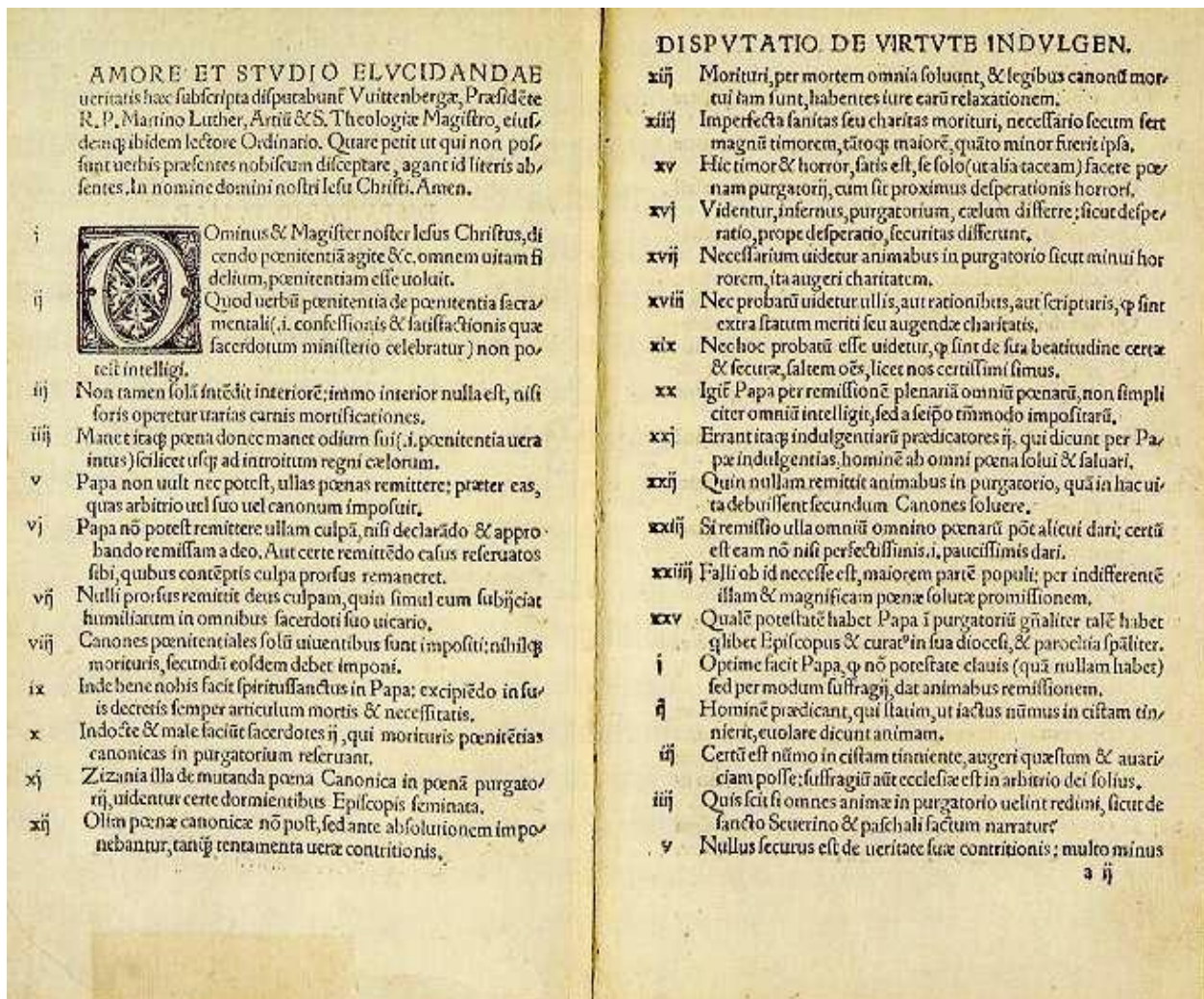
It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.¹⁰

In Thesis 21 and 22, Luther describes the error that priests are in, whom say that purchasing indulgences absolves the purchaser of their sins,

⁹ *Scilicet. Cur Papa non evacuat purgatorium propter sanctissimam charitatem et summam animarum necessitatem ut sausem omnium iustissimam, Si infinitas animas redimit propter pecuniam funestissimam ad structuram Basilice ut causam levissimam.* Translated from Latin (Theses 82)

¹⁰ *Certum est, nummo in cistam tinniente augeri questum et avariciam posse: suffragium autem ecclesie est in arbitrio dei solius.* Translated from Latin (Theses 28)

Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved; Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.¹¹



¹¹ Errant itaque indulgentiarum predicatores ij, qui dicunt per pape indulgentias hominem ab omni pena solui et saluari. Quin nullam remittit animabus in purgatorio, quam in hac uita debuissent secundum Canones soluere. Translated from latin (Theses 21 and 22).

Figure 2: 95 Theses nailed to the door of Castel Chapel in Wittenburg, Germany by Martin Luther.

Communal Verses Internal Piety and Reform versus Reformation

It is important to note that there is a distinct difference between reform and complete reformation. Many devout Catholics such as More and Henry were humanists. Meaning, they saw a necessity for certain reforms and changes within the Catholic Church. However, the avenue by which it would be taken was diametrically different that the one Luther had taken and the one that Henry would subsequently take in later years. Also, in many countries where the Church had a very strong presence (i.e. Spain, Italy, and France) there were many reformist sympathizers. And they existed not only within academia, but also within the clergy.

Furthermore, other than his rejection of many catholic practices and dogma, much of Luther's emphasis was placed on internal piety as opposed to communal, and to faith over works (justification over sanctification).

The emphasis on justification is an idea that was not rejected by the church, however the Church places a strong degree of one's grace upon sanctification. Justification is a righteousness that is not earned by an effort of the person, but upon the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; received by faith alone. This is an instantaneous occurrence resulting in eternal life. Whereas sanctification involves the good works of the person. Sanctification is not mutually exclusive of justification. However, grace is not instantaneous. The justified person (their works are God working in the person to produce a more godly character by one who has accepted the faith) is in a lifelong journey of submitting to God's will, seeking holiness, rejecting and resisting sin, and

working to be more “Christ like” and godly. And due to this, there is an emphasis placed upon the Seven Sacraments of the church; baptism, eucharist, reconciliation, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, and anointing of the sick.

CHAPTER 1: POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND RELIGION BEFORE 1530

POLITICS AND PARLIAMENT

Leading up to the 1530's, the Church had remained relatively unchallenged in England. However, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York, and Lord Chancellor for King Henry VIII during his reign in office had established many changes to the ability of common lawyers in regards to their ability to wield power over things that had traditionally been only ecclesiastical jurisdiction. A Writ of *Praemunire facias*, could be asserted over clergy within the English Kingdom which prohibited the assertion of papal jurisdiction over the supremacy of the King. Ironically, the most infamous praemunire indictment resulted in Wolsey's fall from grace, seems as if it unexpectedly resulted in the events that would allow for the fall of the Pope's authority in England.

Wolsey was not only one of Henry's closest advisors, but also one of his closest friends and confidants. With Henry's trust and his power (from both his church office and his office of Lord Chancellor), Wolsey amassed a great wealth. This gained him many enemies, and deeply damaged not only his reputation, but the reputation of the church as well. Being that he was unpopular with parliament and that he could not wield influence or power over it, it was imperative for him to maintain the King's favor. One of his most ostentatious displays of this

were his constant attempts at dissolving Henry's marriage with Katherine of Aragon; via a decretal commission from Pope Clement VII annulling the marriage. However, this was not an easy feat seeing as how Katherine's nephew played puppeteer to the Pope; he had him as his prisoner.

As Wolsey's attempts continually came back unsuccessful, the patience of Henry waned and the annoyance of Anne became greater. English commissioners warned Clement that Wolsey's position in England depended on the grant of a commission, and hinted that Henry's loyalty to Rome was being jeopardized.¹² In October of 1528, Cardinal Campeggio met with Wolsey on behalf of the Pope to discuss the matter further. Upon arriving in London, Campeggio did deliver a commission from the pope. Although the pope did make some concessions, he would grant Henry neither the guarantee of a new marriage, nor the public acceptance of any heir resulting thereof. Wolsey soon recognized that it was the best that could be had from a pope very much more afraid of Charles V than of Henry VIII.¹³ Wolsey warned Campeggio that if Henry was not granted his divorce quickly, that his life was gravely at risk. And when he also warned Campeggio that papal authority in England was at risk too, he was not exaggerating.¹⁴ That same year Katherine was sent away from Court, essentially being replaced by Anne Boleyn; Anne and Henry did not share a bedroom, however their suites were adjoined.

Anne's frustration with Wolsey weakened his influence with the King, thus making him more vulnerable to the will of parliament. In early 1529, Anne was plotting with her father

¹² *LP* iv(2). 3913, 131-2.

¹³ Haigh, Christopher, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 92-3.

¹⁴ Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 282-3, 286.

(Norfolk, Duke of Suffolk) on ways to achieve their agenda; achieving annulment via ignoring Rome. To further her agenda, Anne showed Henry a copy of Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, which advocated that princes were not subject to a papacy, but to God Alone.¹⁵

That summer, the legatine court was opened to hear the case of Henry's divorce. Only days after the proceedings had begun, Charles V's army routed the French army at Landriano, and removed any possibility that French military pressure might free the pope from imperial coercion.¹⁶ On 16 July Clement VII formally revoked Henry's suit to Rome.¹⁷

Wolsey's enemies within the Privy Council and parliament saw this as their opportunity to rid themselves of him. Lord Darcy would be the one to collect the evidence against Wolsey to indict him. The indictment alleged that Wolsey had exercised papal authority contrary to the royal prerogative, overridden the jurisdiction and rights of other churchmen, and misused Church revenues and properties.¹⁸ However, Darcy was not only pushing for the dismissing of Wolsey. His programme he was giving to parliament would exclude cardinals and legates from England, would reduce the fees charged by the clergy, and confiscate ecclesiastical property. Henry did not accept all tenants of the Darcy programme, however he did agree to dismiss Wolsey.

Wolsey was indicted in King's bench for praemunire, having infringed jurisdictions in England by exercise of his legatine authority; he was ordered to surrender his seal.¹⁹ With Parliament set to convene within a matter of days, Wolsey formally accepted his guilt and threw

¹⁵ E.W. Ives, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford, 1986) 102, 106-9.

¹⁶ Haigh, Christopher, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, at 93.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, at 94.

himself at the mercy of the King, knowing that the King would be much less wrathful than the House of Lords and Commons.²⁰ Wolsey was not imprisoned, but had almost a complete majority of his lands and goods forfeited to the crown. He was permitted to retire at his home in Esher.

In the summer of 1530, the attorney-general filed 14 praemunire indictments to the King's bench against ecclesiastical officials (eight of which were bishops) alleging that by entering into agreements with Cardinal Wolsey for the exercise of their jurisdiction, they had involved themselves in the illegal assertion of Wolsey's legatine powers. By September, it was rumored that another 200 clergy would be indicted, and by 21 October Henry VIII had agreed that the whole clergy of England should be charged.²¹

HUMANISM OR THE “KINGS GREAT MATTER”

One of the great matters of debate revolves around the true underlying cause of the reformation in England. Some scholars postulate that the root causes stem from Henry's underlying humanist ideals. Whereas others, place it almost solely on his desire for divorce from Catherine of Aragon; his first wife and mother of his daughter Mary. However, it is not unwise to see the split as coming from a variety, or combination of avenues. Can one not have a multitude of reasons for a decision, or be predisposed to certain ideas or actions because of their underlying principles along with carnal desires?

Throughout Western Europe and throughout the clergy of Rome, Henry was regarded as a devout Catholic. Much of this appeal came from his writings (with the help of Sir Thomas More) in response to “heretics”.

²⁰ *Ibid*, at 95.

²¹ J.A. Guy, *The Political Career of Sir Thomas More* (Brighton, 1980), p. 136-8.

Three years after he nailed his Ninety- Five Theses to the door of the Castel Chapel in Wittenburg, Germany, Martin Luther published three works in quick succession: *An Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*; *Concerning the Babylonish Captivity of the Church*; and *On the Liberty of a Christian Man*.²² The idea or philosophy so have it of “salvation through faith alone” (and dismissing much of the widely taught and accepted philosophy of the importance of works to salvation) and an outright rejection of certain Catholic practices, abuses, and excesses of the Catholic Church and its clergy came out of these writings by Luther.²³ In 1521, Henry VIII responded to Luther’s works by writing, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, which translated from Latin means, *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. Interestingly enough, this book defended the sacramental nature of marriage and adamantly defended the supremacy of the Pope. For this, the Pope, Leo X granted Henry the title of *Fidei Defensor* which translates to *Defender of the Faith*.²⁴

²² Ackroyd, Peter. *The Life of Thomas More*. New York: Anchor Books. 1999, pg 225

²³ *Ibid*, 225-226

²⁴ *Ibid*, 226-227



Figure 3: An excerpt from *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*. A dedication copy given to Leo X.¹

Martin Luther then attacked Henry VIII in print, calling him a “pig, dolt, and liar”.²⁵ At the request of Henry VIII, More set about composing a rebuttal: the resulting *Responsio ad Lutherum* was published at the end of 1523. In the *Responsio*, More defended the supremacy of the papacy, the sacraments, and other church traditions. More’s language, like Luther’s, was malevolent, and he branded Luther an “ape”, a “drunkard”, and a “lousy little friar” amongst other vindictive insults.²⁶

From this, one can conclude that Henry was already a proxy-theologian and devout Catholic from the religious works he published in response to Luther. At heart however, Henry truly was a humanist reformer. Long before the dissolution, Henry had made several attempts along with the help of Cardinal Wolsey to reform and “make right” many of the mistakes that had been committed by the clergy. A reoccurring theme of his humanist ideals revolved around the return to scripture. More than anything perhaps, humanism relied on the rediscovery of the Bible. This constant elucidation on *Verbum Dei* (translated from Latin, Word of God) by humanists was a direct reflection of the current enthusiasm of many popular humanists.²⁷ One such humanist was Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus was Catholic priest, theologian, and scholar who raised many questions that became quite influential during the reformation; he has been called “the crowning glory of Christian humanists”.²⁸ Erasmus explained what was occurring (the debate) in his *Enchiridion*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 227

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 230

²⁷ Wooding. *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England*, 2000, p. 21.

²⁸ Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953, p. 661.

*I dyd se the comen people of christendome / not onely in effecte / but also in opinions to be corrupted. I considered. The moste parte of those whiche professe the selues to be pastours and doctours, to abuse the tytles of Christ to their propre aduantage... And in suche great derkenesse, in suche great troublous rufflynge of the worlde, in so great dyuesyte of mens opynions / whyther shulde we rather flye for socur than to the very great and sure anker of Christes doctryne / whiche is the gossell?*²⁹

Verbum Dei was coveted as one of the greatest undertakings of leading humanist scholars; such as Erasmus.

Sharing these similar views with Erasmus, it is no surprise that Henry could be viewed as at least some kind of protestant. His vehement ardor for reform within the church in England makes it hard to claim that Henry was ever entirely consistent in his Catholic religion. Nonetheless, he had passionate regard for the doctrines of salvation and the sanctity and importance of the Eucharist. Hence, it is clear that he was at least once, at home with his Catholic faith and was clearly an ardent evangelical.³⁰ However, it would soon be clear that Henry was easily influence by those closest to him.

In the late 1520's, it became clear that Henry had become enamored by a women other than his wife; that woman was Anne Boleyn. Henry was first bewitched by Anne Boleyne in

²⁹ Erasmus, Desiderius, *Enchiridion militis christiana*, English translation (1533), ed. A. M. O'Donnell, EETS 282 (Oxford, 1981), 11. Erasmus had originally contributed this explanation in the preface of 1518.

³⁰ Wooding. *Rethinking Cathlocism in Reformation England*, 2000, p. 10.

1926, when he was already vulnerable.³¹ Henry had begun having mistresses far before this. (including Anne's sister, Mary Carey). And not only was he sexually disenchanted with Katherine, he was also greatly concerned for the succession of the crown. Katherine had only bore him one child, Mary, and had had one miscarriage and one stillbirth. Henry longed for a strong male heir to abdicate the throne to. Anne's refusal to be a mere mistress created a passionate courtship and devotion from Henry. Due to these variables, both before and after Anne's arrival, it is unclear whether Henry desired to divorce Katherine due to his new found love in Anne, or if it just a mere afterthought because of his already clear disappointment in his wife; Anne being just a mere catalyst to his decision.

With a marriage to Anne, Henry could have both a marriage of love and one that fulfilled his regal duty; he had to first rid himself of his wife by annulment. Henry, being the well-educated and ambitious king he was, was ready with argument in hand, attacking the actual validity of his marriage to Katherine. Two biblical texts from Leviticus were said to forbid a man's marriage to his brother's widow; Henry had married the wife of his dead brother Arthur.³² During the next several years Henry would make several attempts to be granted an annulment from Rome. However, due to the influence of Katherine, the power of Charles V, and a multitude of others hindrances, Henry's attempts came up unsuccessful.

³¹ Woods, *English Reformations*. 89.

³² J.J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, (1971 edn.), 202-7.

CHAPTER 2: AN INSTITUTION CHALLENGED

POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND RELIGION 1530-1553

By 1530, Henry had become immeasurably impatient and had become frustrated with his inability to marry Anne. He had been seeking this divorce for almost 4 years and was at his wits end. It was apparent that the Pope would never grant Henry the annulment he so sought. He had however, found solace in *Collectanea satis copiosa*. *Collectanea*, was a collection of historical documents and manuscripts compiled by both religious scholars and royal agents of the king. Its purpose was to provide enough evidence to justify Henry's desire for an annulment from his marriage, and that this case ought to be adjudicated in England; not in Rome. Nevertheless, this new found hope was challenged when the October meeting of clergy and lawyers advised that parliament could not empower an archbishop to act against the pope's decision.³³ Henry had never truly embarked on a Reformation; nonetheless, it appeared as if there was no other available avenue to achieve his desires. From hereon out, he would begin a campaign of intimidation to alter the minds of his opponents; the pockets, privilege, and power of the clergy was not free from this.

³³ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 105.



Figure 4: A picture of Collectanea satis copiosa

In 1533, the Parliament of England passed the First Succession Act. This declared that any child bore from Anne was to be legitimate and that Princess Mary (Henry's daughter from Katherine) was in essence a bastard. Furthermore, it required all subjects to swear an oath recognizing this act as well as Henry's supremacy. Any person to refuse to swear this oath was to be found guilty of treason.

And be it further enacted by authority aforesaid that ... proclamations shall be made in all shires within this realm of the tenor and contents of this act. And if any person or persons ... , subject or resident within this realm, or elsewhere within any the king's dominions ... , by writing or imprinting or by any exterior act or deed maliciously procure or do, or cause to be procured or done, any thing or things to the peril of your most royal person, or maliciously give occasion by writing, print, deed, or act whereby your highness might be disturbed or

interrupted of the crown of this realm, or by writing, print, deed, or act procure or do, or cause to be procured or done, any thing or things to the prejudice, slander, disturbance, or derogation of the said lawful matrimony solemnized between your majesty and the said Queen Anne, or to the peril, slander, or disherison of any the issues and heirs of your highness being limited by this act to inherit and to be inheritable to the crown of this realm in such form as is aforesaid — whereby any such issues or heirs of your highness might be destroyed, disturbed, or interrupted in body or title of inheritance to the crown of this realm as to them is limited in this act in form above rehearsed — that then every such person and persons, of what estate, degree, or condition they be of, subject or resident within this realm, and their aiders, counsellors, maintainers, and abettors, and every of them, for every such offence shall be adjudged high traitors, and every offence shall be adjudged high treason, and the offender and their aiders etc.] ... , being lawfully convict of such offence by presentment, verdict, confession, or process according to the laws and customs of this realm, shall suffer pains of death as in cases of high treason....³⁴

In November of 1534, the Parliament of England under King Henry VIII passed the Act of Supremacy. This act was the official break from Rome and declared that the only head of the Church of England was the king, and that he would enjoy all the honours, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities thereof.

³⁴ 25 Henry VIII. c. 21

Albeit the king's Majesty justly and rightfully is and ought to be the supreme head of the Church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their convocations, yet nevertheless, for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and for increase of virtue in Christ's religion within this realm of England, and to repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses heretofore used in the same, be it enacted, by authority of this present Parliament, that the king, our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called Anglicans Ecclesia; and shall have and enjoy, annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm, as well the title and style thereof, as all honors, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities to the said dignity of the supreme head of the same Church belonging and appertaining; and that our said sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall have full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, record, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offenses, contempts and enormities, whatsoever they be, which by any manner of spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, corrected, restrained, or amended, most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of the peace, unity, and tranquility of this realm; any usage, foreign land, foreign authority, prescription, or any other thing or things to

the contrary hereof notwithstanding.³⁵

³⁵ 26 Hen. 8, c. 1



Figure 5: King Henry and Anne Boleyn Deer Shooting in Windsor Forest. ⁱⁱ

CHAPTER 3: SOCIETY AND ITS CHALLENGES POST DISSOLUTION

The clergy, monks, nuns, and the establishment that had once fed, clothed, and housed the impoverished of the kingdom now found themselves in that same sad state. What was to become of them? Who was to fill the void that now existed because of the withdrawal of the Church's benevolence and goodwill? For the first time we were now placing this duty of care of the poor and the downtrodden onto the state; a pattern that would be relinquished to all nations hereon after.

THE COURT OF AUGMENTATION, THE VALOR ECCLESIASTICUS, AND PENSION

Being that Henry's kingdom was in a poor economic state, dissolving the wealth of the monasteries couldn't be anymore opportune; confiscating ecclesiastical property to finance defense. In the parliamentary session of 1534, several pieces of legislation were introduced that were conditional acts. One such proposal would divert all payments from the realm to the pope into the king's coffers if the pope was to excommunicate the king or he was interdicted.

[6] Item, an act that if any bishop, dean, abbot, abbess or any other head or ruler of any body politic within this realm or within the king's dominions comit or do any high treason and be there of convict, that then they shall forfeit all the lands and tenements temporal to the king's highness which they had in the right of their churches, dignities or houses. And the king's highness to have those to dispose of for the defence of the realm.

[7] An act that if any war be attempted by the pope's occasion against the king or this realm, that then immediately after the war intimate[d], the king's highness to

levy and have for his defense and the realm the moiety of all the temporal lands in the church so long as the war shall stand and endure.³⁶

One of the acts following the 1534 Act of Supremacy that was passed regarding survey and valuation of the monastic property was in 1534, the Act of First Fruits and Tenths. This transferred annates (taxes) and tenths, which had been paid to the Pope by new incumbents of benefices to the Crown.³⁷ These benefices that commissioners were to survey and value included all religious houses and Oxford and Cambridge colleges. These efforts are known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. (Iain for church valuation).

After the Dissolution had taken place, there was a need for an institution to be set up that would manage the monastic estates that had been acquired by the crown. The Court of Augmentations was set up by Parliament in 1536 to deal with this issue. This court had its own lawyers, treasurer, chancellor, and auditors. The Court adjudicated disputes over former monastic lands and the property therein, and also administered over them. The Court of Augmentations followed the same procedure as a court of equity. One of the first priorities of the court was to compile inventories of movable goods, jewels, plate, farm stock, and even the lead on each roof for immediate sale and auction. However, some monastic estates were leased out to their prior religious tenants. This same trend continued after Henry. Immediately after his death, a statute was passed that declared that all the lands and revenues that had been “endowed to

³⁶ British Library, L Cotton MS Titus B I, fo. i6ir, printed in abstract, LP VI, no. 1381 (3).

³⁷ 26 Hen. VIII, c 3.

benefit the souls of their founders” (this included chantries, hospitals, fraternities, guilds, and colleges) were to be appropriated to the Crown.³⁸

Also, former monk, nuns, and priests were able to petition the Court for warrants and grants of pensions. Below is an illustration of a Grant of pensions:

Christabel Cowper, prioress of Marrick, receives a pension of 100 shillings a year – accounts of the Receiver for Richmondshire last record a payment of this in 1562 (LR 6/116/9 m.7), the year when she presumably died. Margory Conyers drew a pension of 66s 8d and described herself as “gentlewoman” in her will of 1547. As for the others, Joanna Norris was awarded 53s 4d; Margaret Lovechild, Elizabeth Dalton, Eleanor Maxwell and Joanna Barmingham, 40s; Grace Rutherford, Elizabeth Robinson and Anne Ledeman, 26s 8d and Elizabeth Singleton and Joanna Marton just 20s each.³⁹

Most of these ex-religious lived below the poverty line and at least 10% received no pension at all.

³⁸ 1 Edw. VI, c 14.

³⁹ 1539 Grant of pensions to the nuns of Marrick, E 315/245 p. 195.



Figure 6: Decree of Court of Augmentations, Henry VIII, 1539

RELIGIOUS HOSPITALS

A large majority of the hospitals existing in medieval England were monastic institutions; a part of the church. During this time almost exclusively, the lazar houses (leper), almshouses, and hospitals were funded, founded, under the supervisions of, and staffed by Saints (clergy or religious figures that have been beautified by decree of the Pope) in Abbots. Primarily monks and nuns administered the management of these institutions.

As previously established, it had always been the duty of the church and not of the state, to undertake the seven corporal works of mercy; feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the prisoner, and bury the dead.⁴⁰ Furthermore, pioussness meant that it was the clear duty of all Christians, as a clearly sacred and

⁴⁰ Matthew 25 vv. 32-46.

moral duty to help their impecunious Christian brethren. In the eyes of the people of the parishes, the royalty, and the clergy, Christ loved not only the righteous, but also the leper, the pilgrim, the poor, the mentally ill, et cetera.⁴¹ Hence, these people should be beloved and cared for by all Christians and this duty was clearly taken on by the Church on behalf of the people. The monastic brethren along with the help of the parish clergy would administer mass to the people in the hospital in addition to giving comfort and care.

One important thing to understand is that unlike the hospitals of today, not all hospitals employed or had physicians and doctors on staff.⁴² The goals of treatment of the ill person was healing, which more often than not was attributed to divine intervention as opposed to “skilled” medical treatment. However true this may be, many nuns and monks were still skilled in the medicine of the period. On top of prayer, care often centered around keeping the person well rested and comforted; often put on bed rest. And when the person could not be healed, concentration was based on preparing the soul for ascension into heaven and giving one their final rights.

As with all businesses (which you could consider a hospital to be) there are expenses and expenditures that must be met. The church often depended initially on the benevolence from lay gentry, knights, and royalty to start up. However, afterwards funding for the hospitals came almost primarily from alms raised by the community, parish, and church congregation. It was a religious duty to tithe and give alms to the church.

⁴¹ Mark 1 v. 41.

⁴² Amundsen, Darrel W. *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, 1996.

And all the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD.⁴³

Most of the smaller monasteries and religious houses were dissolved by parliament in 1536; houses worth less than £200 pa.⁴⁴ Not long after, many of the larger monastic houses were dissolved as well and surrendered to the crown. The deeds to these religious houses were surrendered in the Court of Augmentation as well.

An act for dissolution of abbeyes. Where divers and sundry abbots, priors, abbesses, prioresses, and other ecclesiastical governors and governesses of divers monasteries, abbacies, priories, nunneries, colleges, hospitals, houses of friars, and other religious and ecclesiastical houses and places within this our sovereign lord the king's realm of England and Wales, of their own free and voluntary minds, good wills, and assents, without constraint, coercion, or compulsion of any manner of person or persons, since the fourth day of February, the twenty-seventh year of the reign of our now most dread sovereign lord, by the due order and course of the common laws of this his realm of England, and by their sufficient writings of record under their convent and common seals, have severally given,

⁴³ Leviticus 27 vv. 30-32.

⁴⁴ 27 Hen. VIII, c 27-28.

granted, and by the same their writings severally confirmed all their said monasteries [etc.] ... , and all their sites, circuits, and precincts of the same, and all and singular their manors, lordships, granges, meses, lands, tenements, meadows, pastures, rents, reversions, services, woods, tithes, pensions, portions, churches, chapels, advowsons, patronage, annuities, rights, entries, conditions, commons, leets, courts, liberties, privileges, and franchises, appertaining or in any wise belonging to any such monastery [etc.] ... , to have and to hold all the said monasteries [etc.] ... , and all other the premises, to our said sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, forever; and the same their said monasteries [etc.] ... , and other the premises, voluntarily, as is aforesaid, have renounced, left, and forsaken ...: be it therefore enacted ... that the king, our sovereign lord, shall have, hold, possess, and enjoy to him, his heirs, and successors, forever all and singular such late monasteries [etc.] ... , which since the said fourth day of February ... have been dissolved ... , or by any other mean come to his highness; and by the same authority and in like manner shall have, hold, possess, and enjoy all the ... hereditaments which appertained or belonged to the said late monasteries [etc.] ... in as large and ample manner and form as the late abbots, priors, abbesses, prioresses, and other ecclesiastical governors and governesses of such late monasteries [etc.] ... had, held, or occupied ... their said late monasteries [etc.] ... at the time of the said dissolution ... , or by any other manner of mean coming of the same to the king's highness since the fourth day of February above specified.

And it is further enacted by the authority abovesaid that, not only all the said late

monasteries [etc.] ... , but also all other monasteries [etc.] ... which hereafter shall happen to be dissolved ... , and also all the ... hereditaments, whatsoever they be, belonging or appertaining to the same or any of them, whensoever and as soon as they shall be dissolved ... , shall be vested, deemed, and adjudged by authority of this present parliament in the very actual and real seisin and possession of the king our sovereign lord, his heirs, and successors, forever....

And be it also enacted by authority aforesaid that all the said late monasteries [etc.] ... which be dissolved ... , except such thereof as be come to the king's hands by attainder or attainders of treason, and all the said monasteries [etc.] ... which hereafter shall happen to be dissolved ... , and all ... hereditaments, whatsoever they be, belonging to the same or to any of them, except such thereof which shall happen to come to the king's highness by attainder or attainders of treason, shall be in the order, survey, and governance of our said sovereign lord the king's court of augmentations of the revenues of his crown....⁴⁵

⁴⁵ 31 Henry VIII, c. 13.

LIST OF ENGLISH RELIGIOUS HOUSES

An asterisk (*) prefixed to a religious house signifies that there are considerable remains extant.

A dagger (†) prefixed signifies that there are sufficient remains to interest an archaeologist.

No attention is paid to mere mounds or grass-covered heaps.

For these marks as to remains the author is not responsible. They have kindly been contributed by Rev. Dr. Cox and Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, who desire it to be known that they do not in any way consider these marks exhaustive; they merely represent those remains with which one or other, or both, are personally acquainted.

The following abbreviations for the names of the religious Orders, etc., have been used in the list:—

<p>A. = Austin Canons. A. (fs.) = Austin Friars, or Hermits. A. (n.) = Austin nuns. A. P. = Alien priories. A. (sep.) = Austin Canons of the Holy Sepulchre. A. H. = Alien Hospitals. B. = Benedictines, or Black monks. B. (fs.) = Bethlehemite Friars. B. (n.) = Benedictine nuns. Bridg. = Bridgettines. C. = Cistercian monks. C. (n.) = Cistercian nuns. Carm. = Carmelite, or White Friars. Carth. = Carthusians. Cl. = Cluniac monks. Cl. (n.) = Cluniac nuns. Cru. = Crutched, or Crossed Friars. Dom. = Dominican, or Black Friars. Dom. (n.) = Dominican nuns. F. A. = Friars de Areno. F. D. = Friars de Domina, or of Our Lady.</p>	<p>Franc. = Franciscan, or Grey Friars. Franc. (n.) = Franciscan nuns. G. = Gilbertines (canons following the rule of St. Austin, and nuns that of St. Benedict). H. = Hospitals. H. (lep.) = Leper Hospitals. H.-A. (fs.) = Hospitals served by Austin Friars. H.-B. (fs.) = Hospitals served by Bethlehemite Friars. H. G. = Hospitals served by Gilbertines. Hosp. = Knights Hospitallers. M. = Maturins, or Friars of the Holy Trinity. P. = Premonstratensian Canons. P. (n.) = Premonstratensian nuns. P. F. = Pied Friars. S. = Friars of the Sack, or De Penitencia. Temp. = Knights Templars. A plus (+) = Ancient religious houses. + (n.) = Ancient religious house of women.</p>
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ORDER.	HOUSE.	COUNTY.
	Abberbury (<i>see</i> Alberbury). Abberforth, Tadcaster (<i>see</i> Calcaria).	
B.	† Abbotsbury, abb.	Dorset.
C.	* Aberconway, abb.	Denbigh.
B.	* Abergavenny, pr.	Monmouth

Figure 7 List of English Religious Houses

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ORDER.	HOUSE.	COUNTY.
B.	† Abingdon, abb.	Berks.
	cells :—† Earls Colne	Essex.
	Edwardston	Suffolk.
H.	Abingdon, St. Helen	Berks.
H.	St. John.	
A.P.	Acley, or Lyre Ocle (cell to Lyre [B.], Norm.)	Hereford.
A. (n.)	Aconbury	Hereford.
P.	* Agatha, St., abb.	Yorks.
A.	Ailesham, or Ellesham, pr. Albalanda (<i>see</i> Whiteland).	Lincoln.
A.	† Alborn (united to Woodbridge, 1466)	Suffolk.
B.	* Alban's, St., abb.	Herts.
	cells :—Beaulieu-Moddry, or Millbrooke.	
	Belvoir	Lincoln.
	* Binham (afterwards abbey)	Norfolk.
	† Hatfield Peverel	Essex.
	Hertford	Herts.
	Pembroke	Pembroke.
	Redburn.	Herts.
	* Tynemouth	Northumberland.
	Wallingford	Berks.
	Cocket Island (cell to Tynemouth)	Northumberland.
H. (lep.)	Alban's, St., St. Julian's	Herts.
H. (lep. women)	St. Mary de Pratis	Herts.
A.P.	Alberbury, or Abberbury (cell to Grandmont in Limousin)	Salop.
	† Alcester (first abbey, then cell; <i>see</i> Evesham).	
A.	† Aldbury, pr.	Surrey.
	Aldeby (<i>see</i> Norwich).	

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Figure 8 List of English Religious Houses continued

THE POOR LAWS

The Poor Law of 1536 was truly the beginning of a new legislative era in the civilized world. The impact that that this legislation had on the English economic and social history is monumental; and the precedent that it would set forth from hereon after. Often, historians begin their discussion on the English's relief of the poor by addressing the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. And when the law is mentioned, it is done in great disfavor.

The social legislation of Henry's Parliaments was not only scant but brutal and demoralizing in that it reflected a puritanical callousness in assessing poverty as the just desert of sloth and evil-doing ...Thus Elizabeth inherited the problem of widespread poverty with her crown: and her legislative program was immediate, massive, and positive.⁴⁶

Leading up to 1536, Henry's kingdom was experiencing tremendous inflation along with problems of vagrancy and poverty. The Church had been the cornerstone of benevolence towards the poor bestowing its good will and help indiscriminately; whereas, the British government treated these problems in a repressive manner. This is illustrated in early statutes that dealt with the problems of laborers; employment, poverty, and vagabondage. After the Black Death of 1348-49, laborers refused to work at their previous wage rates. By denying alms to the sturdy beggars, the statutes of laborers attempted to force able-bodied poor to work at wages which

⁴⁶ Paul L. Hughes and Robert F. Fries, *Crown and Parliament in Tudor- Stuart England*(New York,19059), 100.

were fixed by law.⁴⁷ It appeared as if vagrancy, begging, migration, labor shortage, and problems of the like had become an encompassing issue. An issue that parliament believed could be solved by an avenue of establishing a maximum wage, forbidding travel, and stopping alms. The Statute of Laborers of 1388, created 40 years later, allowed for begging by the impotent poor; recognizing the distress of those truly unemployable.⁴⁸

For nearly 100 years, no new legislation regarding the poor was implemented. The only legislation enacted was by Henry the VII (The statutes of 1495 and 1504), which declared that vagabonds and idle persons were to be set in stocks and fed bread and water. However, no definition of vagabondage that would allow support for the impotent poor appeared.⁴⁹

During the middle of Henry VIII's reign (which was also during the height of the dissolution and suppression of the monasteries), he was facing an influx in the number of idle persons. This was due in large part to poor harvests, trade depression, and social dislocation (dislocation arising largely from the stripping of the Churches benevolence); a serious threat to the civility of the kingdom.⁵⁰ In an effort to create a more humane and positive relief of the poor than had previously existed, the Poor Laws of 1536 were enacted.

The 1536 "Reformation Parliament", through the enactment of this law established the parish as the local unit of government for poor law administration; in addition to ending indiscriminate charity.

⁴⁷ Edward III, the Statute of Laborers. 1349. If the workers refused to accept the wages they were set into the gaol. This statute is generally regarded as having instigated the first step towards the national control of poor relief. See Karl de Schweinitz, *England's Road to Social Security* (New York, 1961).

⁴⁸ Richard II c. 3, 4, and 7. This statute further restricted the movement of beggars and laborers to their place of residence.

⁴⁹ Henry VII c. 2 and 19 Henry VII c. 12. The acts did make special provisions for pregnant women and persons over sixty years of age.

⁵⁰ Kunze, Neil L. 1971. "The Origins of Modern Social Legislation: The Henrician Poor Law of 1536". *Albion*. 3 (1): 9-20, 10.

The act provided that all officers and ministers of every Citie Shire Townes and Parishes of this Realm . . . fynde and kepe all and every of the same poore people by way of voluntarie and charitable almes . . . to be socoured relieved and holpen with such and convenient and necessarie almes as shalbe thotoughtmeete by their discrecions. in suche wviseas none of them of verie necessitie shalbe compelled to wander idelly and go openly in begging to aske almes in any of the same Cities Shires Townes and Parishes; but also to cause and to compell all and every the said sturdie vacabunds and valeant bezgers to be sett and kepte to continuall labour, in sLichewise as by their seid labours they and every of them may gette their owne livings with the contyniuall labour of their owne handes.⁵¹

In essence, this statute placed duty upon the public officers of the parish to maintain and provide work for the poor. The government had now taken on the duty and responsibility of administering and securing the poor relief contributions. This act also ordered the local officials to obtain the necessary finances by;

gathering and procuring of suche charitable and voluntarie almes of the good christen people within the same with boxes every sonday holy dav and other festivall day or otherwise amonge them selffes . . . upon peyne that all and evenr the Maiers GovernoursAldermen hede officers and others the Kinaes officers and Ministersof every of the said Cities Borow!hes Towvnescorp- orate Hundredes Parishesand Hamlettes shall lesse and forfait for every moneth that yt is omitted

⁵¹ 27 Henry VIII c. 25., section I.

and undon, the somme of twentie shillings.⁵²

In addition, it prohibited the dispersement of open and common doles.

...no person or persones shall make or cause to be niade any suche common or open doole, or shall gyve any redye monev in almes, otherwise than to the common boxes and common gatheringes . . .upon peyne to lesse and forfaitte tenne tymes the value of all such redie money as shalbe gyven in almes contrv to the tenour and purporte of the same...⁵³

And although at this point the break from Rome had already taken place and the “Act of Supremacy” had been enacted two years prior, Henry’s orthodox views peak through by the emphasis of the Church Government on social and economic reforms. This is very clear by the selection of the church parish as the entity of poor relief; a continuation of a close relationship between charity and religion. Interestingly, the statute required that the church official during sermons, confessions, last wills, et cetera;

shall exhorte move stirre and provoke people to be liberall & boutefully to extende their good and charitable almes and contri- bucions frome tyme to tyme for and toward the comfote & reliefe of the said pore ixnpotent decrepitate indigent and nedie people, as for the setting and keeping to continuall worke and labour of the foresaid ruffelers sturdie vacabundes and valiaunt beggers...⁵⁴

The government was turning in large part to the ecclesiastical community in administering relief. Also, this statute set in place procedures for the accurate recording

⁵² 27 Henry VIII c. 25., section IV.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, section XIII.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, section IX.

and accounting of the procured relief funds. The parish priests were instructed to keep a book of;

rekennyng "in which they shall entre writte and make mencion from tyrne to tyrne in one place or part of the boke as well of all and every suche sommes of Money as shalbe gathered by the charitable ahnes of the in- habitautes of every of the same parisshe, as to make mencion in one other place of the same boke howe upon whome and in what wise any parte of the same mone) shalbe spent.⁵⁵

One of the most transformative ideas that arose from these Poor Laws was not the mere providing of accurate recording of relief funds or defining of the poor, but the fact that this statute was anticipatory of the future development of paid public welfare workers.

These collectors shall have and take for his and their so doying suche competente wages of the money of the said common colleccions as by the discrecions of the Maier Aldermen Governor Bailiffe or Justices of peace and others of the parisshe shalbe thought good and reason- able.⁵⁶

Another revolutionary principle developed from these poor laws was the recognition of economical inequalities. This act provided for the transfer of the “overplus” (higher revenue procured from more wealthy parishes) from wealthy parishes for the maintenance of the poor.⁵⁷ This was a progressive idea that can be reflected in the global economic systems of many western nations today; beginning of a Keynesian model

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, section XV.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, section XVII.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, section XXIII.

of economics? In addition to this, the statute had a provision for vagrant children. It ordered the justices of the peace to;

find children under the age of xiiij yeres and above the age of fv-e veres in begging or idelnes, and to appoynte them to maisters of Hus- bondrie or other craftes or labours to be taughte, by the whiche they may gette their livinges whan they shall come to age...⁵⁸

ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE LAW

There is no contention that there was a significant increase in the amount of poor and sturdy beggars in England during and post dissolution. This acknowledgement alone can further one in the opinion that A led to B (dissolution led to need for welfare “esk” legislation). However, one of the strongest pieces of evidence to further this idea is done via a comparative analysis of similar problems in Western Europe; showing causation instead of correlation.

England was neither alone nor isolated in this issue. Throughout Western Europe there was a noticeable problem arising in the social fabric of the European realm. In particular there was a substantial “poor problem” in Germany; where the protestant reformation started. Martin Luther in his discourse about the Church and other societal problems, often discussed the issue of beggars and vagabonds. In 1528, Luther wrote a preface to the book *Liber Vagatorum* on this very topic.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, section VI.

⁵⁹ Leonard, E.M., *History of English Poor Relief*, Cambridge, University Press, 1900, p. 13.

There had been secular attempts in many countries at relieving the poor, however they often were unsuccessful due to lack of organization.⁶⁰ This was not a problem for the powerful Catholic institution; hence the monasteries employed the methods of distributing charity more efficiently. Services rendered by the monks and nuns to education, the elderly, and children were maintained in the religious houses. Also, lodging was given to wayfarers, and thus a very useful function was fulfilled in countries where there were few inns and no casual wards.⁶¹ Indubitably, if one were to relinquish these services a void would be created.

What do both of these occurrences have in common? Both problems arise during the time that the traditional form of charitable giving is being challenged; the Church. Therefore, the increase in beggars, vagabonds, and vagrants can be attributed to the societal changes of the time.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, at 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, at 18.

CHAPTER 4: FINAL ANALYSIS

All actions have their own set of consequences; some good, some bad. It is uncertain what Henry's absolute reason was for dissolving the monasteries and breaking from Rome. However, it is not imprudent to surmise that the deepest-rooted reason was his desire for a divorce from Katherine. Had the religious and social climate not been what it had, he may or may not have had the audacity to separate himself from the most established institution that the world had known up until that point.

Very rarely do people consider the ramifications of their decisions, and a king is no exception. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with the doctrine of the Catholic Church, the omnipotence of the papacy, the reformation, or the establishment of a monarch as supreme head of the church (now the Anglican Church), one cannot argue that there were no negative consequences resulting from the dissolution.

The most obvious of consequences was the loss of a strong tradition of Catholicism in England. The people of the realm had for centuries been devoted Catholics. The parish church was the epicenter of the community and giver of benevolence. Since the time of the dissolution however, that strong sense of faith has never fully returned. Even today that religious tradition has largely been left out of the social fabric of British society.

In addition to the aforementioned loss, a societal and historical loss of culture was had. Many of those beautiful abbeys, churches, and monasteries are now in ruins. This resulted in a large part from the removal of lead from the roofs of these houses that were sold off to bring profit to the crown. Also, many of the monastic libraries that held invaluable scrolls, relics,

books (many of which there was only one or two transcribed copies of) were broken apart and sold off to the highest bidder. Many of these books were also destroyed so that their valuable bindings could be sold. This denied future generations of thousands of volumes of books and scriptures. Rampant also during this era was iconoclasm; destruction of religious icons, relics, statues, et cetera.

Furthermore, a majority of all benevolence given during this era was given by the Church, or from wealthy nobles to the church to dispose of to the needy; including collegiate churches and universities, which were a center for the arts and learning. By dissolving hundreds of these institutions a huge void had been placed in the fabric of society.

From an assessment of the historical information and a thorough examination of the evidence and a review of the myriad of societal issues, I am not timid in standing behind my hypothesis that the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII was not an insignificant factor for the need for the creation of poor laws, but the ultimate deciding factor.

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