

The Propaganda Campaign against the Holy See by the Henrician Bishops

by
Brother BONAVENTURE [MINER], F.S.C., M.A.

The sixth session of the English Reformation Parliament got under way on November 3, 1534. The Act of Supremacy was passed to give parliamentary authority to the title of “supreme head” by which Convocation had consented to recognize the King four years previously. This act vested all spiritual power and jurisdiction in the monarch and deprived the Church of its divinely constituted teaching authority. Following are the pertinent passages:

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 *Anglicana Ecclesia*; and... 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, reform, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts and enormities, whatsoever they be,
...¹

With the King acknowledged to be the Supreme Head by both Convocation and Parliament, it remained but to enforce the active recognition of this claim throughout the country. The co-operation extended by the English episcopate in this direction forms the subject of this paper. Attention will be drawn to the bishops’ activities up to, but not beyond, 1539, for by that year the royal “supremacy” had been generally established throughout the kingdom.

On April 19, 1534, Rowland Lee was consecrated bishop of Lichfield and Coventry by Archbishop Cranmer of Canterbury without any authorization from the Holy See. Within three years twelve more such bishops were elected to bishoprics by the authority of King Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the Church in England. Without a single exception, all of the appointees had openly favoured the King’s claims for an annulment of his marriage with Katherine, or had publicly acknowledged the right of the King to the title of *Supremum Caput* in spiritual as well as in temporal power and jurisdiction. Coming into their sees under such conditions, all these new bishops had little, if any, conception of the spiritual nature of episcopal office. It was expected that such prelates would prove themselves ardent promoters of everything that the King desired. In the main, this

¹ Henry Gee and W. H. Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London, 1896), LV, 243-244.

expectation was fulfilled.

Only twelve bishops who had undergone the stress and strain of the ordeals of the divorce crisis and the royal supremacy remained in the opening weeks of 1535. Before the year was out four were called to their last judgment without having witnessed the full flowering of the religious revolution which had been sown in their lifetime. Bishop John Fisher, recently created Cardinal of the Catholic Church, remained steadfast to the end in defence of the Church's liberties. Having persistently refused to take the Oath of Succession which involved repudiation of all Papal jurisdiction, Fisher was condemned to death on June 17, 1535, and despatched five days later.²

With regard to three of the bishops, there is no positive evidence of the extent to which they promulgated the doctrine of the King's supremacy through their dioceses. These are: Bishops Charles Booth of Hereford, Richard Nix of Norwich, and Henry Standish of St. Asaph. From what we know of them in other respects it is safe to assume that they gave as much support to the enforcement of the King's supremacy as they considered necessary to conform; there is little likelihood that they were enthusiastic in the active promoting of it. Between March 10 and June 1, 1535, all three of them formally renounced Papal jurisdiction and swore to recognize the supreme jurisdiction of the King. The oath taken by the bishops on this occasion was very likely in the form of that of Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester, the relevant parts of which are as follows:

I, Stephen, bishop of Winchester, do purely of my own voluntary accord, and absolutely, in the word of a bishop, profess and promise to your princely majesty, my singular and chief lord and patron, Henry the eighth, by the grace of God king of England and of France, defender of the Faith, lord of Ireland, and in earth of the church of England supreme head immediately under Christ; that from this day forward I shall swear, promise, give or cause to be given, to no foreign potentate, emperor, king, prince, or prelate, nor yet to the bishop of Rome, whom they call pope, any oath of fealty, directly or indirectly, either by word or writing, but at all times, and in every case and condition, I shall observe, hold, and maintaine to all effects and intents the quarrell and cause of your royall majesty, and your successors, ... I profess the papacy of Rome not to be ordained of God, by Holy Scripture, but constantly do affirm and openly declare it to be set up only by man, ...³

Bishop John Kite of Carlisle had championed Henry's cause in the divorce question. He signed the renunciation of the Pope's jurisdiction on February 13, 1535. In 1536 Kite ranged himself on the side of Archbishop Lee of York in his opposition to the advanced proposals of Cranmer and his party in Convocation, a programme of religious change decidedly Lutheran in content. There is little known of the bishop's activities in promoting the royal supremacy, but as he was

² T. E. Bridgett, *Life of Blessed John Fisher* (London, 1922), p. 390.

³ David Wilkins, *Concilia Magna Britanniae et Hiberniae a synodo Verulamensi A.D. 446 ad Londoniensem, A.D. 1717* (4 Vols., London, 1737), III, 780.

in his late seventies and quite sick it is likely that he gave directions to his clergy to preach the King's supremacy and let it go at that. At least Kite does not seem to have aroused suspicion for having done anything contrary to the injunctions set forth by Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's vicar-general.

Bishop Robert Sherborne of Chichester renounced Papal jurisdiction, on February 26, 1535. Writing to the King on June 6, the same year, Sherborne assured Henry of his desire to promote his cause: "I have received your letters and commandment, which I will put in execution to the best of my power, and besides declare myself for your other most dread commandments past heretofore, so that you shall be satisfied."⁴ These promises were carried out to the letter the following Sunday. Well over ninety years of age, Sherborne then asked to be relieved of any further duties in this connection, and resigned his see on August 21, 1536.

Bishop John Veysey of Exeter was quite explicit in his support of the King against Papal jurisdiction. Writing to Cromwell in the summer of 1536, he says: "Yet I am at your command. As to the setting forth of the abuses of the bishop of Rome, I suppose no one has preached more freely than I."⁵ When Bishop Veysey made his ordinary visitation of the diocese two years later, he marked the occasion with the following injunctions to his clergy:

...Also every curate, the Sunday after the publication of this, and thenceforward at least once a quarter shall, in his preaching, set forth the King's Supremacy, and utterly abolish the usurped power of the bishop of Rome.

The public prayers accompanying their sermons are to be observed in accordance with the regulations lately set forth by the King and his prelates; no curate is to permit any person, secular or regular, to preach unless he show the King's licence or the Bishop's; every one of the clergy is to procure a copy of the King's injunctions given to them during the late royal visitation.⁶

From the official abolishing of Papal jurisdiction in 1534 to Cromwell's downfall in 1540 there were four bishops who were often linked together in opposition to Cranmer and the more recently created members of the episcopal bench. Along with Bishops Edward Lee of York and John Longland of Lincoln they comprised a group of six who, outwardly at least, professed confidence in the King's sincerity to maintain Catholic doctrine though not in communion with the rest of Christendom. All of them had in varying degrees supported the royal divorce and the more recent assumption of ecclesiastical power by the Supreme Head.

Bishop John Clerk of Bath and Wells had supported the stand of Bishop Fisher quite consistently until he, too, subscribed to the required oath on February

⁴ Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of State Papers, Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-1547*, eds. J. S. Brewer and J. S. Gairdner (11 Vols., London, 1862-1910), IX, No. 835.

⁵ *Letters and Papers*, XI, No. 211.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, i, No. 1106.

10, 1535. He signed the judgment handed down by the English bishops and clergy in which they maintained the right of princes to convoke a general council over the head of the Pope.⁷ In the controversy over the sacraments in the spring of 1537 Clerk supported Bishop Stokesley of London in his defence of Catholic tradition and belief.⁸ In a letter to Cromwell the following autumn, in connection with the King's appointment of a cleric to a benefice, Clerk requested the royal secretary to assure Henry of his desire to accomplish his pleasure.⁹ Shortly afterwards, Clerk had the questionable distinction of admitting Cromwell himself to the deanship of Wells on the King's recommendation; but Clerk professed pleasure at the selection, thinking it would be profitable to the cathedral church of Wells "to have such a protector as Cromwell."¹⁰

In the absence of more direct evidence, it is once again safe to assume that Clerk's promotion of the King's cause satisfied both Henry and Cromwell; nowhere is there even a hint that the bishop was remiss in his duties in this regard. For the zeal of John Stokesley, Bishop of London, however, the evidence is much more striking.

In December of 1536 Stokesley, in collaboration with Cuthbert Tunstal, bishop of Durham, composed a reply to Reginald Pole's defence of Papal jurisdiction.¹¹ While the context makes it clear that both bishops are supporting Henry VIII to the limit, it is also apparent that neither sees anything unorthodox in relegating to himself the traditional role of the Catholic Church to interpret Scripture as the divinely-commissioned teacher:

For the good will we have borne unto you in times past, as long as ye continued the King's true subject we cannot but lament that you have declined from your duty to the King who brought you up, seduced by the fair words and vain promises of the bishop of Rome... If ye be moved by conscience to acknowledge the bishop of Rome as head of the Church by virtue of the text "Tu es Petrus," many of the best ancient expositors take that to refer to the Faith first confessed by Peter, upon which the Church is built.¹²

It would seem that Stokesley attempted to make a sharp logical distinction between schism and heresy. In July, 1536, he made the following suggestion in a letter to one of Cromwell's agents:

It is very important that you should suggest to his lordship with what zeal Roland Philips at this time last year laboured in our presence to bring the Carthusians

⁷ *Ibid.*, XI, No. 124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, i, No. 790.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XII, ii, No. 683.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 753.

¹¹ Pole's book, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, was addressed to Henry himself, May, 1536.

¹² *Letters and Papers*, XI, No. 1354.

into obedience to the King as head of this Church.¹³

By contrast, in Convocation the following spring Stokesley took issue with Cromwell when he reverted to traditional Catholic belief and practice in his contention that the origins of the sacraments were not necessarily to be found in Scripture but in the tradition of the Fathers and the teaching of the Church, both of these being of equal authority within the deposit of faith.¹⁴

Within the space of another twelve months Stokesley's actions were variously interpreted. At the end of May, 1538, the attorney general brought forward a bill on the King's part accusing the bishop of violating the well-known statutes of 16 Richard II and 28 Henry VIII by attributing authority to the see of Rome. The occasion was the bishop's admitting of some Augustinian nuns and Bridgettine brothers to final vows, a ceremony held suspect since the rules of both orders had obtained their original approval from the Holy See.¹⁵ Bishop Stokesley was quick to crave pardon with a humble letter to Cromwell, the vicar-general:

I have this day recognized the bill and submitted myself to the King's mercy. You know what pains I took to persuade them of Sion to renounce the bishop of Rome, and at every profession since the late statutes I have caused them to take the oath according thereto, with certain words of exception of the King's prerogative, and the laws and customs of the realm. Notwithstanding I have yielded myself to the extreme danger that I may not be seen to contend with my Sovereign. I beg your intercession for me, in accordance with your promise on Passion Sunday last.¹⁶

A few months later the bishop of London was apparently once more in good standing with the government. He was named to a commission signed by Cromwell to examine into the beliefs and practices of alleged Anabaptists, "that detestable sect."¹⁷ When a William Colyns, accused of slighting the royal supremacy, protested his innocence of the charge, he volunteered as proof of his sincerity a list of bishops in any one of whose houses he was willing to remain half a year that his loyalty to the King might be vouched for by one who could distinguish in such matters between loyalty and treason. Stokesley's name is one of a list of six.¹⁸ Evidently it was common knowledge that the bishop of London was a royal apologist.

John Longland, bishop of Lincoln, subscribed to the oath of supremacy on February 13, 1535. A supporter of Henry's matrimonial cause throughout the proceedings, Longland was prompt in setting forth his support of the King's

¹³ *Ibid.*, No. 186.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, i, No. 790.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, i, No. 1096.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, ii, No. 498.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV, i, No. 647.

supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. Writing to the King from Woburn in September, 1535, he acknowledged receipt of the royal letters for the institution of a Master Rokes to the benefice of Shirington with the following comment:

There are few men so learned in divinity, Latin and Greek, or so meet to serve your Highness as touching good letters. He lately preached a sermon against the usurped power of the bishop of Rome, such as few in the realm have done.¹⁹

Before another year was out, Longland's enthusiasm for the schism was interpreted in some quarters as an endorsement of the doctrinal and liturgical changes championed by Cromwell, Cranmer, and their party. When the commons rose in Lincolnshire in the early autumn of 1536 they informed Audeley, the Lord Chancellor, that they would continue in rebellion until certain reforms were effected, one of which was to have the heretical bishops delivered up to them or banished from the realm. Bishop Longland is included in this list of undesirable prelates.²⁰ Later that October Longland was again singled out when the rebels, addressing their King, accused his recently appointed bishops of having subverted the faith of Christ, concluding their complaint with the statement, "...the beginning of all the trouble was the bishop of Lincoln."²¹ Describing the risings in the north, a nephew of Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador to London, informed the Queen of Hungary by letter that some of the peasants "went to the bishop of Lincoln's lodging where, failing to find him, they put to death his chancellor out of spite to his master, who is regarded by the people as one of the principal councillors who raised scruples in the King to repudiate your said aunt."²² The following January, in the examinations of alleged leaders of the rebellion, the bishop of Lincoln's name was among those accused by the rebels of being "devisers of taking church goods and pulling down churches."²³

Although Longland supported Stokesley in the defence of the Catholic tradition of the seven sacraments, it is doubtful if he would have done so if Henry VIII had not favoured such a stand at that time. Longland seemed to be completely at the King's bidding. In the early part of 1538 he issued a mandate to all the beneficed clergy of his diocese to preach in person or by sufficient deputies at least

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, IX, No. 453.

"...as the last letter of declaracon in Englishe whiche your Mastershippe sent unto me laste, must goo in to soo many severall places within my Dioces, that all the clerks I have ar not hable to wrythe them in long processe of tyme, I have caused twoo thousand of the same to be putt in prynte for the spedy and good setting forward therof, and have sent unto you a Paper of the same...." John, Bishop of Lincoln, to Cromwell Sir Henry Ellis, *Original Letters* (3 Vols., 3rd series, London, 1846), No. 336, II.

²⁰ *Letters and Papers*, XI, No. 585.

²¹ *Ibid.*, No. 705.

²² *Ibid.*, No. 714.

²³ *Ibid.*, XII, i, No. 70.

four times a year either in Latin or in the vulgar tongue, provided they did not touch on doubtful matters, but truly declared “the articles lately sanctioned by the King and the whole clergy of England in Convocation.”²⁴ On Good Friday, the same year, Longland preached before the King at Greenwich, proclaiming against “papal supremacy as a usurpation of the office of Christ.”²⁵ In the autumn of 1539 the bishop petitioned Cromwell “to take some good order with those scholars and townsmen who did eat flesh in Lent, contrary to the King’s proclamation, which commands all honest ceremonies to be observed.”²⁶ From this last it is seen that Longland would have traditional Catholic discipline observed, not because of Church law, but “the King’s proclamation.”

When we come to an examination of the part played by Archbishop Edward Lee of York in the promotion of the royal supremacy, we have an interesting example of one who seems to have assessed the ecclesiastical changes in their more profound implications. Although the latest episcopal creation among the Catholic bishops, Lee was evidently not in accord with those appointed shortly after him. He had already been noted as the one who saw Lutheran tendencies in much of Erasmus’s work, and this and Lutheran background was to remain with him.

The attitude Lee adopted once the royal supremacy was to be preached up and down the countryside is evident from his profession of surrender which he forwarded to Cromwell on February 27, 1535. On this occasion the archbishop expressed his willingness to do whatever was required, but as “his conscience and learning will suffer.” He was prepared to follow the King’s commands and fulfil his pleasure “Our Lord be not offended, and the unity of the Faith and the Catholic Church saved.” Lee feels certain, however, that the salvation of the Church is assured by the “King’s Christian and Catholic mind”; this he saw from the wording of the statute of 25 Henry VIII. He “will not knowingly offend the King, God not offended.”²⁷

The whole tone of this letter is one of caution. But the significant feature of it is Lee’s concern for the Church’s welfare. Lee is the only bishop during these years, as far as our evidence shows, who expresses anxiety for the unity of the Faith. Nowhere else do we find any reference by the bishops to the implications of being cut off from the rest of Christendom. Concern is felt for the pernicious effects of Lutheranism, for the rights and privileges of the episcopacy, for the retention of the sacraments, but the actual schism is regarded as *a fait accompli*, even the prelude to a purified Catholic faith.²⁸

In the first month of 1536 Lee expressed his willingness to conform to instructions in connection with the uprooting of allegiance to the Papacy. He is to avoid “contrariety in preaching” against the new novelties; this he will observe by

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XIII, i, No. .278.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 804.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, XIV, ii, No. 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, No. 277.

²⁸ “Lee is the only bishop during these years...” – Fisher, of course, excepted.

checking the qualifications of the preachers. He is to repress “the temerity of adherents of the bishop of Rome.” This, too, he promises to look into, although he is personally unaware of such people.²⁹ In 1538 the archbishop was again under suspicion for ignoring the royal injunctions, Cromwell having forwarded to Lee a complaint against one of his chaplains for having preached against the said injunctions at Beverley. Once more Lee affirmed that he had heard of no such preacher, that he certainly had no chaplain answering to the description, but that he would inquire, and send commissions to the archdeacons to prevent any preaching of such a nature.³⁰

Between these two incidents there is some evidence that Edward Lee endeavoured to acquiesce in the state of things quite as much as his fellow bishops. Writing to a student friend of his at Louvain, Reginald Pole exclaimed: “What health is to be expected there (England) where Lee and Tunstal, otherwise most grave and learned men, take the lead in vomiting lies from the pulpit and impugn the decrees of the holiest father.”³¹ How well informed Pole was on these proceedings is open to question, but his opinion of Lee is significant. Shortly after this, the archbishop wrote a letter of thanks to Cromwell, expressing his gratitude for the vicar-general’s good counsel and good report to the King of his sermons, by which he hoped his Highness’s displeasure was somewhat assuaged.³²

The event that tested Archbishop Lee’s allegiance to the King as Supreme Head was the rising in Yorkshire in the last three months of 1536, commonly called the Pilgrimage of Grace and an insurrection of formidable proportions. Under the leadership of Robert Aske, the Pilgrims had drawn up an oath couched in the following terms:

Ye shall not enter to this our pilgrimage of Grace for the common wealth, but only for the maintenance of God’s faith and Church militant, preservation of the King’s person and issue, and purifying the nobility of all villains’ blood and evil counsellors; to the restitution of Christ’s Church and suppression of heretics’ opinions, by the holy contents of this book.³³

In taking this oath, Lee became a virtual prisoner of the insurgents. Shut up in Pontefract Castle, the archbishop wrote to the King of his plight and the danger he was in from “the malice of the rebels of this country,” evidently seeking to convince the King of his disapproval of the whole movement.³⁴ Yet he was at the same time giving out to the Pilgrims that he was one of themselves. Robert Aske, mindful of Lee’s known opposition to the Lutheran heresies, was confident that

²⁹ *Letters and Papers*, X, No. 172.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII, i, No. 1247.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XII, ii, No. 310.

³² *Ibid.*, No. 331.

³³ *Ibid.*, XI, No. 705.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 689.

the archbishop was Catholic at heart despite his support of the royal supremacy.³⁵

So certain, in fact, were the Pilgrims that their archbishop approved of their course of action that when their representatives met in council on November 21 at York it was decided to ask Archbishop Lee to help in drafting their statement of grievances. Only two days before this all the bishops had received instructions from the Supreme Head to preach the doctrine that subjects had no right to resist the King's ordinances even though they were unjust. Lee would eventually be forced to give an answer, written or oral, to the question that now confronted every Pilgrim, whether it could ever be lawful for subjects to take up arms against their King. That very Sunday the archbishop was invited by Lord Latimer, in the Pilgrims' name, to explain in his sermon at the parish church the moral issues involved in their taking of the oath and resisting the King as Supreme Head. Edward Lee's answer revealed the mentality of the court servant: "No man may draw the sword but by the prince's order."³⁶

Archbishop Lee's answer filled the Pilgrims with resentment, and his stand was regarded as all the more despicable when set beside the religious demands that were formulated by a small council of ecclesiastics the day following Lee's sermon. These included the following:

We think that try the laws of the Church, General Councils, interpretations of approved doctors and (the) consent of Christian people, the Pope of Rome hath been taken for the head of the Church and Vicar of Christ and so ought to be taken.³⁷

On hearing that his position had been misrepresented to Lord Darcy, leader of the Lincolnshire rebellion, Archbishop Lee wrote to Darcy the following letter of explanation:

...When I came into the pulpit I came into it indifferent to live or die; and thought I could not spend my life in a better cause than to save so many lives, both bodily and ghostly, and that after this rate I came. I can bring forth some sufficient tokens. If I had not done so, if anything had happened of you, I had been afore God guilty of the death both of bodies and souls; wherefore I have no cause to repent that I have said, although the death should follow it. Our Lord make me worthy to die in so good a cause.³⁸

The letter is self-explanatory. Edward Lee was resolved at all costs to obey the King's commands. He had rationalised himself into the position that the Pilgrims were unlawfully resisting royal authority and were unnecessarily endangering their lives; as their shepherd, it was incumbent upon him to prevent their committing a serious crime.

³⁵ Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England* (2 Vols., London, 1950-), I, 313.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 314.

³⁸ *Letters and Papers*, XI, No. 1300.

Nevertheless, despite Lee's attitude towards the Pilgrimage of Grace, the King and his vicar-general had cause to doubt the sincerity of the archbishop's professed conformity to the royal supremacy. Christopher Aske, on being examined in connection with the disturbances in the north country, declared that Archbishop Lee, in reply to a question put to him, stated that the supreme headship touching the cure of souls "did not belong to the King as King, but punishment of offences, of sin and such other, as the head of his people, that therein he was supreme head." This was the first time, commented Aske, that he had ever heard "that division touching the supremacy."³⁹ One week later, John Dakyn, rector of Kirkby Ravensworth, made the following observation: "I have heard the bishop preach five or six times in his chapter house at York, but not more than twice heard him declare the King's superiority."⁴⁰

From all this one point is clear. Edward Lee was in agreement with the demands of the Yorkshire insurgents inasmuch as they protested against the heretical doctrines and Lutheran practices of the new school of bishops. But in the conviction that outward conformity, at least, to the King's wishes was the bishops' sole hope of retaining Henry's confidence and thus preserving the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine and practice, Lee disapproved of the violent methods of the insurgents which would place him and other bishops in an embarrassing position with the King. Such a procedure, in his view, would jeopardize the chances of the Catholic Church in England to ride out the storm. He would continue to conform to the commands of the Supreme Head, however reluctantly.

That Lee did not abandon the Catholic cause is evident from the manner in which he continued to assert the rights and privileges of the clerical order when it was attacked or ignored. His letter of protest to Cromwell in the late autumn of 1537 is one indication of this:

At Whitsuntide twelvemonth you gave me as ample commission for my jurisdiction as ever I had. Lately I wrote for your pleasure concerning two monasteries of nuns, being void, as they stood in danger of the Act of Suppression and had no confirmation of the King. I now understand that two commissions be come down for election in the said monasteries and confirmation of the same. I beg you to consider that I have cure of the said houses and must answer to Our Lord for them, and therefore should have some say in the election of their governors. Confirmation is an act of commission of cure of souls, which cure should be committed by me that have cure of their souls.⁴¹

Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, signed the articles of the royal supremacy on February 10, 1535. There is no doubt at all of Gardiner's attitude towards the assumption of Papal jurisdiction by the King. He gave full approval to the schism. Writing to Cromwell on June 10, 1535, Gardiner explains that he has informed himself of Stokesley's proceedings in the matter of the King's

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XII, i, Norfolk to Cromwell, No. 698.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 786.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XII, ii, No. 1093.

supremacy, and fearing that specific instructions for his diocese of Winchester might be delayed owing to Cromwell's many and onerous duties, he has gone right ahead in the enforcement of the royal commands throughout the whole diocese as he thought they should be carried out!⁴² In September the bishop sent his answer to the Papal brief that had denounced Henry for the execution of Bishop Fisher. He mentioned further that he had completed his apology of the royal supremacy, called *De Vera Obedientia Oratio*.⁴³ In December, 1535, therefore, Cromwell could write to the bishop that Henry was so highly pleased with his services "that ye shall assuredly, what end soever your business there shall take, return to his Highness as heartily welcome and in as great reputation as you could yourself desire."⁴⁴

Gardiner's continued public support of the enlarged jurisdiction of the Supreme Head encouraged Cromwell, in the early autumn of 1537, to recommend to Drs. Wilson and Heath that they include the bishop's work, *De Vera Obedientia*, among the books whereby they hoped to win over Edmund Pole.⁴⁵ However, from 1537 to the decree of the Six Articles in 1539 Gardiner found himself more and more in opposition to the advanced reforms advocated by Cranmer, Latimer, and most of the new bishops. In this position Gardiner gradually assumed leadership of the conservative or moderate party which included Tunstal, Lee, Stokesley and Clerk. Writing to Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, Martin Bucer refers to this situation:

...The crafty bishop of Winchester bears rule, who has warned the King that if he proceed with the Reformation it will lead to commotion and the principal lords of England will be against him. Henry yields to his suggestions the more readily because the Bishop, who has been sometime his ambassador in France, holds out to him a hope that Francis will also depose the Pope and ally himself with him on the understanding that the Reformation go no further... Winchester and other bishops have devised this means to maintain themselves in their pomp, and to put themselves and their King in the Pope's place...⁴⁶

These observations of Bucer go far to clarify Gardiner's position. The bishop is entirely in favour of the schism and would even welcome further estrangement from the Holy See. But once this schism is completed, it is the duty of the King to see to it that the deposit of Catholic faith is preserved intact. Unlike Lee, Gardiner evidently sees no danger to the faith within the framework of a separate, national Church; the King could maintain the continuity of Catholic doctrine and practice as well as could the Pope.

⁴² James A. Muller, *Letters of Stephen Gardiner* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 66, No. 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 67, No. 51.

⁴⁴ *Letters and Papers*, IX, No. 1039.

⁴⁵ R. B. Merriman, *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (2 Vols., Oxford, 1902), II, 85.

⁴⁶ *Letters and Papers*, XIV, ii, No. 186.

Nevertheless, the bishop of Winchester was to perceive that much effort would be required to preserve this faith even after the Six Articles of 1539 had given the Catholic episcopal party some cause for relief, if not for complete satisfaction. In the early spring of 1540 Montmorency, formerly ambassador to England, was informed that a private matter which might assume proportions had occurred in the shape of a serious contention between the bishop of Winchester and Dr. Barnes, the principal preacher of the new doctrines. It was further reported that the bishop, on a Lenten Sunday, had done “marvels of preaching” in St. Paul’s Cathedral against the said new doctrines, “confirming wisely the old and sharply refuting the new.”⁴⁷ Giving evidence before the vicar-general that summer, in reply to accusations levelled at him because of indifference to the royal ecclesiastical jurisdiction, Richard Sampson, bishop of Chichester, affirmed that both Tunstal and Gardiner had encouraged him to retain traditional Catholic practices. “Both he (Tunstal) and the present bishop of Rochester (Nicholas Heath),” continued Sampson, “showed me it was one of the matters wherein they stayed, and my lord of Winchester said they were all in one opinion, very few except, that many old traditions as praying for souls, baptising of infants, and the like, must be kept.”⁴⁸

Cuthbert Tunstal, bishop of Durham, acknowledged the royal ecclesiastical jurisdiction on March 2, 1535. For some ten months past the bishop had thrown in his lot with the King. It is certain that no bishop promoted the royal cause with more devotedness than did Tunstal. In the prelate who had at one time leagued himself with Fisher to resist Henry VIII’s invasion of episcopal jurisdiction the transformation was indeed remarkable. In the first month of 1536, the royal commissioners for the suppression of the monasteries, Thomas Legh and Richard Layton, reported to Cromwell their first-hand impressions of the observance of the King’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the diocese of Durham. Legh reports that Tunstal has set it forth by preaching in various parts of his diocese, “to the utter abolishment of the bishop of Rome,” so that “no part of the realm is in better order in that respect all through his handling.” Furthermore, the commissioner suggests that it would be worth while for either the King or Cromwell to have Tunstal write a book on the matter, for he would make an excellent job of it, and “many learned men hang much upon his judgment.”⁴⁹ Layton affirms that the country about Durham is “substantially established in the abolition of the bishop of Rome and his usurped power.” He, too, would welcome a book from Bishop Tunstal on this subject, for, as he goes on to say, “I thought myself to have known a great deal and all that could be said in the matter: but when I heard his learning, and how deeply he had searched into this usurped power, I thought myself the veriest fool in England.”⁵⁰

Six months later Tunstal undertook to reprove Reginald Pole for addressing

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, No. 306.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 758.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, X, No. 182.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 183.

such a book to the King as the *De Unitate Ecclesiae*. Pole had tried to explain the consequences of the schism upon the unity of the faith, really the whole point in the entire programme of ecclesiastical change, and Tunstal's efforts to explain this away are revealing:

But to show you how the whole is wide of the truth, you presuppose that the King has severed from the unity of Christ's Church, and that by taking the title of Supreme Head, he separates his Church of England from the whole of Christendom, that he usurps an office belonging to spiritual men, and does not know the duty of a Christian king. No prince in Christendom knows that duty better. For his purpose is to see God's laws purely preached and Christ's faith kept; not to separate himself from the Catholic Church, but to reduce his Church of England out of all captivity to foreign powers, and abolish the usurpation of the bishops of Rome.⁵¹

Tunstal's correspondence with Pole did not end here. A few weeks later the bishop of Durham affixed his signature to two judgments relating to general councils, one denying the Pope to be above such a council, the other justifying princes in summoning such councils on their own authority. Tunstal then wrote to Pole, warning him against obeying the Pope's summons to attend the congregation in preparation for the Council then pending. The Pope, Tunstal asserted, only wished to make a tool of him, and if Pole insisted on accepting the invitation, he would grievously offend the King.⁵² It was at the end of this year that Tunstal and Stokesley wrote the joint letter referred to above in which they lament Pole's support of the bishop of Rome.

In the late summer of 1537 Tunstal begged to be relieved of his duties as president of the Council of the North. He gave as his reasons that he was "in hate with the people of the north," whatever justice he enforced would be attributed to his revenge, and a grudge would thereby be created against the King. He was old, and would be better occupied preaching and teaching in his diocese.⁵³ Tunstal was only sixty-three years old at the time, and although he also alleged a lack of money to keep up estate befitting one presiding over suitors, he probably had other reasons for making this request. The bishop not only disliked handing over people for execution, as had already been done, but he was no doubt anxious to direct personally the continued enforcement of the royal jurisdiction in religious matters without permitting the inroads of Lutheran practices and beliefs. Indeed, it would seem that Bishop Tunstal had rationalised himself into this position: by maintaining the King in orthodox Catholic principles, the English Church would benefit from its separation from Papal jurisdiction. It was therefore up to Tunstal to see to it that Henry did not encourage the increasingly radical proposals of Cromwell, Cranmer, and Latimer. It is not without significance that it was Tunstal's friend among the new bishops, Richard Sampson of Chichester, who

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XI, No. 72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, No. 401.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XII, ii, No. 651.

was sent to the tower in 1540 for being too Catholic.⁵⁴

That the bishop of Durham was making headway with the King is apparent from a series of events in the last two years of Cromwell's rule. On Palm Sunday, 1539, the year of the official reaction favouring things Catholic, Tunstal preached before the King. Choosing a passage from the second chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians as his theme, the bishop considered the humility of Christ and, by contrast, reflected on the worldliness and ambition of the Papacy. He denounced the conduct of the bishop of Rome in promoting war against England, because he could no longer "use his usurped power."⁵⁵ One month after Bishop Gardiner of Winchester had publicly preached against Friar Barnes, Montmorency in France was informed that a great change was to come over England very shortly. The King was busy recalling ministers he had rejected and degrading those he had raised. Cromwell was tottering, and it was said on good authority that Cuthbert Tunstal, bishop of Durham, "a person in great esteem with the learned, shall be vicar-general of the spirituality... In any case, the name of vicar-general will not remain to him (Cromwell) as even his own people assert."⁵⁶

The deposition of Bishop Sampson of Chichester expresses clearly enough Tunstal's policy. Refuting statements to the contrary, Sampson insisted in the presence of the royal examiners that the bishop of Durham had advised him about reforming his diocese. "Lately he comforted me not to fear to help things forward," continued the bishop of Chichester, "but to leave ceremonies to the King's ordering, and not break them without great cause."⁵⁷

In December of 1538, Henry VIII, in a circular to the justices of the peace, commended those who had co-operated in having his supremacy set forth, and had handed over to punishment "maintainers of the bishop of Rome's usurped authority." But more still had to be done, and the justices were to seek out those "cankered parsons, vicars, and curates, who do not substantially declare our injunctions, but mumble them confusely, saying that they be compelled to read them, and bid their parishens nevertheless to do as they did in times past."⁵⁸

The King's concern is significant. It was one thing to preach the royal supremacy; it was quite another to encourage the abolition of Catholic ceremonies. Cranmer and his Lutheran-minded bishops were not content with a schism; they wanted the English Church "purified" of the entire sacramental system. They not only advocated the abolition of chantries and of the whole monastic system, but repudiated the very notion of grace. Carried to their logical conclusion, these ideals of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King's vicar-general would eliminate the Catholic priesthood and – what is surely a commentary on the confused state of things – the episcopacy itself, the fullness of the priesthood. The "moderate" bishops, such as Gardiner, Lee, Tunstal and their allies, had to

⁵⁴ Charles Sturge, *Cuthbert Tunstal* (London, 1938), p. 212.

⁵⁵ *Letters and Papers*, XIV, i, No. 628.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, Marillac to Montmorency, No. 486

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 758.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, ii, No. 1171.

contend against this ever more popular movement. They, therefore, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, promoted the King's cause at all costs, trying to maintain the King as anti-Lutheran as he once professed himself to be. It is easy to understand that some injunctions their clergy "would mumble confusedly."

Despite their efforts, the bishops were soon disillusioned. The schism not only failed to retain Catholic belief and practice within the framework of a national church, but its future course was at the mercy of a King who had unmistakably repudiated not only the primacy of the Holy See, but the divinely constituted teaching authority of the Catholic Church. In the King's injunctions of 1538 concerning the reading of Scripture, for instance, there is not even a hint that Christ's Church is the divinely appointed interpreter of the Word of God. Like examples could be cited to show that the King and all those who supported his schism had committed themselves to jeopardizing the prime essential of the Catholic Faith – freedom from error.

Under the absolute authority of an heretical prince and an unprincipled lay vicar-general, the bishops had all but ceased to exist as a clerical body, much less as a hierarchy.

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