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## FACULTY NEWS Insert

## MARTIN LUTHER AND HIS INFLUENCE ON ENGLAND

#### **GORDON HUELIN**

The literature on Martin Luther, the 500th anniversary of whose birth we commemorated in November 1983, is immense. Yet, apart from the work of an American scholar, H. E. Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England*, which is now nearly a century old and extremely hard to come by, as well as being somewhat out of date, plus an unpublished thesis in the University Library, Cambridge, by Dr. Susan Brigden, entitled *The Early Reformation in London 1520-47: The Conflict in the Parishes*, comparatively little has been written on Luther's links with England and his influence on the religious thought of not a few of its inhabitants. This paper is therefore intended to fill something of a gap.

It was in the year 1520 that Luther published his three great Reformation treatises, the second of which, De Captivitatae Babylonica Ecclesiae (Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church) appeared in the month of October. Unlike the first and the third it was written in Latin, since it was a theological treatise intended primarily for the clergy. In it, Luther turned his attention to the sacraments, and particularly to that of the Lord's Supper. The first captivity as far as this was concerned lay, he said, in the withholding of the cup or chalice from the laity. The second captivity lay in the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation. And the third captivity, which Luther declared the most wicked abuse of all, since it brought in its train a host of other abuses, lay in the teaching that the Mass was a sacrifice.

Now it was this second of Luther's Reformation treatises which not only more than any other marked his breach with Rome, but which also roused the wrath of the English King Henry VIII. That is of considerable importance to us, since thereafter Henry became a determined enemy of Luther, with the result that Lutheranism never had the opportunity of making the impact on England which Calvinism made at a later date. We cannot be certain as to why Henry VIII felt moved to write a refutation of Luther's second Reformation treatise, although Erwin Doernberg, in his book Henry VIII and Luther: an Account of their Personal Relations, published in 1961, suggests three possibilities:

- i) Henry may have been genuinely disturbed by Luther's reformation activities – after all, he was deeply interested in theology;
- He may have seen that Luther was an embarrassment to the Pope and realized that here was the chance of obtaining a papal title from Leo X that he had long coveted;
- He may have had mixed motives partly arising out of a genuine concern for the threat to orthodoxy, partly from a consideration of the political effects if he were to rise to the Papacy's defence.

Whatever his reasons, Henry wrote the Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, a book of 78 quarto pages which appeared in 1521 and was dedicated to Pope Leo X. (Doernberg believes that the King did "a good deal of the writing himself" but that the "final version of the book was the work of a schooled cleric" (pp. 22, 23).) The Pope having received a beautifully produced copy from the English Ambassador in Rome, was so delighted that he granted an indulgence of 10 years to anyone who should read it, and promptly bestowed on Henry and his successors the title of "Defensor Fidei", i.e. "Defender of the Faith", a title still borne by our present Queen.

Not only did Henry rise to the defence of Catholocism and its sacramental teaching, but at the same time he let it be known in no uncertain language what he thought of Martin Luther, that "vile heretic whose false and frivolous teaching was the fruit of a mind utterly divorced from God". He would not, Henry declared, attempt to bring about a recantation from Luther by means of this book, since the case seemed hopeless. "Alas! The most greedy wolf of hell has surprised him, devoured and swallowed him down into the lowest part of his belly where he lies half alive and half in death." Incredible as it seems to us in the 1980s, a Roman Catholic priest issued a reprint of Henry VIII's book against Luther during the first decade of the present century, in the hope, he declared, that by means of it Anglican readers might be brought back to the true fold!

As for Luther, he penned a reply in which he expressed in plain terms his opinion of the King of England, calling Henry "a pig, an ass, a dunghill, spawn of an adder, a basilisk, a lying buffoon dressed in King's robes, a mad fool with a frothy mouth and whorish face". Erwin Doernberg points out in the volume already mentioned that "whatever can and must be said about the unnecessarily objectionable language in which Luther addressed Henry VIII, this must be judged in the proper perspective, for there has hardly ever been a time in which slogans and abusive verbosity, often childishly primitive, was so widespread and in such common use as in the 16th century". No doubt devout Protestant ladies in 19th century Victorian England, who were shocked at such outbursts on dear Dr. Luther's part, might have been comforted to learn from Johann Mathesius that Luther never indulged in indecent conversation. But in fact, as Heinrich Boehmer said in his book Luther and the Reformation in the Light of Modern Research, it is Mathesius' statement which is surprising, for if we go back to Luther's day we soon realise that the tone prevailing at his table and in his writings was not in the least contrary to the tone of good society in Germany, nor yet in France or England. Bochmer writes: "The familiar phrase, 'What is natural is nothing to be ashamed of has hardly ever been followed so literally, even by the highest persons, as in those outspoken times. Things which everybody knew of, it was held, could be discussed out loud with anyone, even in the presence of modest womanhood. For the modest womanhood of that time possessed the delicacy of feeling of a (more) modern Hamburg fish-wife . . . The pious and delicately sensitive Queen Margaret of Navarre wrote tales which today no decent woman can read without blushing; while Elizabeth of England, the Virgin Queen, would sit through such a coarse comedy as 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' with hearty enjoyment; indeed she expressed no disapproval when her suitors greeted her with the appelation, not perhaps entirely false, but certainly impolite: 'Good morning, old whore!'." The point to bear in mind, emphasizes Boehmer, is that it was "from this coarse and primitively gross generation that Martin Luther sprang, to this coarse generation he spoke, and with this coarse generation he had to measure himself in his struggles".

At the same time as the King of England was pouring forth his invective against Luther and gaining papal approval for so doing, some of Henry's subjects were studying Luther's writings and were making them more widely known – until the year 1521 there was no reason for their not doing this, for only then were they hindered by the authorities. The circulation of Luther's works in England can be traced to various sources:

- 1) First, there were the Universities with Cambridge well to the fore. The reasons for Cambridge's addiction to Luther were its proximity to the East Anglian ports through which the Reformers' writings infiltrated; the fact that many of the Cambridge students were drawn from East Anglia and were ready to absorb the new teaching; and finally, the existence within the University of that group of gifted young scholars already mentioned which included men such as Cranmer, Latimer and Coverdale. These were accustomed to meet at the "White Horse" Inn which stood on a site between the buildings of King's College and St. Catherine's but has long since disappeared, and which, because of the nature of the discussions that took place there, became known to contemporaries as "Little Germany". Yet, if the University of Cambridge was in the lead, that of Oxford also had its supporters of Luther: e.g. the bookseller John Dorne sold a dozen or more copies of his books in 1520, and in the following year Cardinal Wolsey received the news from Oxford that banned books were circulating there; indeed, it was said that the "University was infected with Lutheranism".
- Secondly, there was a rather mysterious group known as 2) the "Society of Christian Brethren" which organized secret meetings to study and spread Luther's teaching -Gordon Rupp calls it a kind of "Forbidden Book of the Month Club". London seems to have been its main centre. We hear of secret meetings, particularly in the neighbourhood around Cheapside: there was a "night school" in Friday Street; there was a meeting in a warehouse in Bow Lane; and there were those who gathered together in the Rectory of the pre-Fire church of All Hallows Honey Lane, of which, during the late 1530s, Thomas Garrett, who was martyred at Smithfield in July 1540, had charge. One would like to know much more about that Rectory, but at any rate it seems clear that in the late 1520s it was dangerous for anyone to be seen approaching it, since by this time the living of All Hallows was held by Dr. Robert Forman (incidentally Thomas Garrett was his curate), and in 1528 Forman was examined and in due course suspended by Tunstall the Bishop of London for having copies of Luther's books in his possession. The "Society of Christian Brethren" was supported by City merchants, men such as Humphrey Monmouth, a wealthy cloth merchant of the parish of All Hallows Barking, who after hearing William Tyndale preach at St. Dunstan-in-the-West became his patron and benefactor. Other supporters of the "Christian brethren" were members of City livery companies: and from evidence given by Thomas Keyle, a mercer of London, it seems that there existed wellorganized funds to which the "Christian Brethren" could have recourse when they needed money to distribute the proscribed literature.
- 3) Thirdly, there were those who had daily contact with the Continent by reason of their trade, and who managed to import Lutheran ideas and books. One thinks of the East Anglian ports to which I have already

referred, and there were others like Bristol and Hull. Nor must we forget the German merchants of the Hanseatic League who had their headquarters at the Steelyard in the City of London. As has been said, "Not only were these merchants interested in the Lutheran movement, but they knew more about it than English students and bishops, and desired a similar Reformation in England". It was towards the end of the 13th century that some German merchants mainly from Cologne (though they were soon joined by others known collectively as the "Hansa" or "Hanseatic League") were granted a plot of land on the band of the River Thames as their headquarters, close to where today stands Cannon Street Station. It was known as the "Stahlhof", or in English as the "Steelyard", a word derived from "stahl", meaning simply a place where goods are offered for sale. The Steelyard was square in shape and was surrounded by a wall. Apparently it did not have its own place of worship and the merchants used the nearby church of All Hallows-the-Great. When, in 1526, the Hanseatic merchants were suspected of Lutheranism it was Cardinal Wolsey, who as papal legate had jurisdiction over them, who began proceedings against them. So Hans Ellendorp said that he had found a treatise of Luther in the room of someone who had died, and had read scarcely a page of it. He excused himself for not having immediately burnt it on the grounds that it was not his own. Another merchant, Herbert Bellendorp, said that about a year before, he had had some Lutheran books in German, including the Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of which he had read a few pages and then burnt it. Returning from Germany at Whitsuntide, he had brought with him some more of Luther's works, but had not realized that those possessing them were automatically excommunicated. He was, he said, "willing to be reformed". Yet another, Hans Reussel, had some of Luther's books in translation, not realizing that a translation of Luther's books was prohibited. Henry Pryknes said that around the previous Michaelmas the purser of a ship left in his room a little book in German which he recognized as Luther's, in which he read a treatise on the Lord's Prayer. He submitted himself to correction. It certainly does not seem that the merchants of the Steelyard had any intention of becoming martyrs for Luther's sake!

However, the motives of some of the merchants and tradesmen were not entirely disinterested – there was certainly money to be made out of smuggling Luther's works into this country, and its seems to have been worth the risk involved. Clearly, we should not minimize the importance of this agency for the transmission of Lutheran material. As Professor Carl Meyer has said in an article entitled "Henry VIII burns Luther's books, 12 May 1521", which appeared in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1958): "Peddlers gossip and merchants swap yarns as well as goods".

4) Fourthly, there were those who were called the "Known men", the survivors of the earlier Lollard movement, who had in the previous century been forced underground but now threw in their lot with the Reformation, and took on a fresh lease of life. We should not forget that it was their founder, John Wycliffe, whose name is associated with an English translation of the Scriptures, and the new interest shown in the Bible by Lutherans would specially appeal to them. Dr. J. E. Oxley in a study on *The Reformation in Essex* shows how Essex and Suffolk had been Lollard strongholds, and hence would be very receptive to the teaching of Luther. The real difficulty facing anyone doing serious research into the religious history of the 1520s and '30s is that it is by no means always easy to distinguish between Lollards and Lutherans.

5) Fifthly, we must not overlook the English religious houses - the monasteries and friaries. Martin Luther himself was a monk. The news of his revolt would therefore be of special interest to members of the religious orders, for many of whom by the 1520s the life of the cloister had ceased to have any meaning or appeal. Luther belonged to an order which followed the Rule of St. Augustine, and it was to the order of the Austin friars in Cambridge that Robert Barnes, who became the most devoted of all Luther's champions in England, belonged. Another friar of the same order attracted to Lutheranism was Miles Coverdale, subsequently responsible for an English translation of the Bible. Another Cambridge friar, though of a different order, the Carmelites, was a Suffolk man, John Bale. All three of them used to attend the meetings at the White Horse Inn. We know that the monks of Bury St. Edmunds helped to circulate the proscribed Lutheran books. Yet another follower of Luther's opinions was William Roy, who was for a while a member of the Franciscan Order at Greenwich. Roy left for Germany, where he assisted William Tyndale in translating the New Testament, though apparently not with great success; for Tyndale later wrote concerning Roy, "I bade him farewell for our two lives and (as men say) a day longer".

So we can say that during the 1520s and 1530s Luther's teachings and writings were spread around in England by various agents, despite the prohibition laid down by the authorities.

And what of those authorities? They certainly did not turn a blind eye to what was happening; on the contrary, they did their best to stop it. C. H. Cooper in his Annals of Cambridge claims that Luther's books were burned there as early as 1520 (though perhaps it should be 1521), and as proof he cites the following extract from the proctor's accounts of that year: "To Dr. Nychols, deputy Vice-Chancellor, for drink and other expenses about the burning of the books of Martin Luther 2/-". In London the great holocaust took place on 12th May, 1521 at Paul's Cross in the presence of Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the other bishops, as well as a vast crowd of allegedly 30,000 Londoners who had turned up for what the Venetian ambassador called "Luther's festival". Bishop John Fisher of Rochester preached a sermon lasting two hours, and as he did so, a large number of Luther's books were burned in the churchyard. This was followed by a speech from Wolsey excommunicating and cursing Luther, after which he gave the crowd his blessing!

Furthermore, the authorities made great efforts to catch the culprits. John Longland, who became Bishop of Lincoln in 1521, was violently anti-Lutheran and hurled abuse across the North Sea at the German Reformer – a manuscript in the Bodleian Library gives us a sample: "You, Luther, already turn everything upside down and confound tverything, preaching (as you do) neglect of everything in place of charity, for cleanliness filth, for celibacy and

chastity the company of women, for obedience contempt and sedition, for a Christian life the lax and uncontrolled life of the sons of Belial. Thus you despise the Church, you despise its authority, the honour of the Eucharist, all sacrifice, the priesthood, vows, religion, virginity and chastity." But Bishop Longland, whose diocese included Oxford and the University, also kept the authorities there on their toes, so that they were ready when the curate of Dr. Forman in London, Thomas Garrett, paid a visit to the city in 1528 in order to distribute Lutheran books, which according to Bishop Longland he had obtained from a bookseller in Fleet Street named John Gough. Longland informed Wolsey of this, and Wolsey in turn ordered Bishop Tunstal of London to examine Gough. Tunstal reported to Wolsey in 1528 that he had done so, but that Gough when examined said he did not know Garrett, that he had never dealt in forbidden books, and that he thought he had been mistaken for another man. Nevertheless, Tunstal had committed Gough to the Fleet prison as "all my other prisons are full of persons from the farthest parts of the diocese". One wonders how many of these were there on charges of Lutheranism. Meanwhile in Oxford the proctors seized Garrett and handed him over to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Cottisford, who was Rector of Lincoln College, for safe-keeping. Dr. Cottisford placed Garrett in custody in his room and then went off to chapel for evensong. One can imagine his consternation when he returned to find that the bird had flown. Garrett was presently found perched at Bristol. Along with others, he was subsequently released on Wolsey's orders. However, this leniency proved to be no deterrent, and the authorities then resorted to the extreme penalty. Garrett, who by this time had become Rector of All Hallows Honey Lane - and Luther's debt to him as a propagandist on his behalf was probably immense – went, as we have seen, in July 1540 to the stake in Smithfield; and of the two others who perished with him one was Robert Barnes, sometime member of the Austin Friars in Cambridge, in whose honour Luther himself penned a fulsome obituary notice entitled "Saint Robert".

Despite all such efforts, the influence of Luther on English life and thought was too strong to be suppressed. We may consider it particularly in the matter of worship where it can be said to have been threefold:

First, as regards the translation of the Bible. Hitherto in public worship, the readings from holy Scripture had been in a language unintelligible to the ordinary layman. One may imagine then the thrill when for the first time people in Germany were able to hear the gospel in Luther's German New Testament, which was published in 1522: a folio volume with numerous initial-letter woodcuts from the workshop of the painter-cum-publisher Lukas Cranach, plus 21 full pages to accompany the last book of the New Testament, Revelation. Some of the woodcuts illustrating Revelation left no doubt as to how Luther applied its vivid imagery to contemporary Rome - the Great Dragon of Rev. 12-13 being shown as wearing the papal tiara. This was too much for the moderate Reformer and protector of Luther, Frederick the Wise, and in the next edition of the German New Testament the dragon appeared minus the top two sections of the tiara, so that it looked like any ordinary crown. In England too, the ordinary people were to hear the Bible in the vernacular through the translation made by their fellow-countryman William Tyndale – though Tyndale

had to flee to Germany in order to carry out the task, and it ultimately cost him his life. Tyndale, who seems to have become acquainted with Luther's works in 1522, felt the call to do for Englishmen what Luther had done for Germans: as he wrote to a "learned man" in Gloucestershire: "Ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost". It may be that Tyndale managed to secure a copy of Luther's recently-published German translation through the merchants of the Steelyard in London - we do not know. What we do know is that Tyndale depended very considerably on Luther's work. It was only towards the end of the last century that the full extent of his debt to the German Reformer was realized, when Bishop Westcott in his General View of the History of the English Bible drew attention to the fact that much of Tyndale's work consisted of either direct translations or else paraphrases of Luther. Thus, Tyndale's "Prologue" to his quarto Testament includes a large section from Luther's Preface to the German New Testament, while his Prologue to Romans, published in 1529, was largely a translation of Luther's Preface to that Epistle. Moreover, Tyndale kept Luther's order of the books of the New Testament, with Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation at the end. At the same time a more recent "Reappraisal of William Tyndale's Debt to Martin Luther" (L. J. Trintereed, in Church History, Vol. 31, 1962) has shown that while Tyndale followed Luther closely in the matter of Biblical translation, he was not of the same mind when it came to theology, and tended to look more towards Erasmus and to the Reformers in Basle and Zurich.

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2) Secondly, we note the Lutheran influences as regards the first English Prayer Book, which came into use in June 1549. In compiling this book, Thomas Cranmer drew from various sources old and new; and for the new material, he leaned to some extent on Luther and Luther's followers. One should not forget that in 1532. shortly before his appointment to the Primacy, Cranmer served as Henry VIII's ambassador abroad and his journeys took him to Nuremburg. There, for the first time, he made the acquaintance of some of the Lutheran divines, including Andreas Osiander, who was pastor of the church of St. Laurence. Furthermore. Cranmer fell in love with Margaret Osiander, the pastor's niece, and married her, and her influence as much as that of her Lutheran uncle no doubt showed itself in her husband's liturgical projects. Certainly, Cranmer's desire, first to have the service in English, the language of the people, rather than in Latin, and secondly to ensure that at the Eucharist all the people should communicate, and in both kinds - two desires which he was unable to achieve as long as Henry VIII lived - may have been nurtured by what he saw in the churches of Germany. It was in 1526 that Luther produced his Deutsche Messe, or German Mass, which was a communion service from which all reference to sacrifice had been carefully removed. At the same time, Luther did not display the iconoclasm which was to be seen in the efforts of other 16th century Reformers such as Zwingli in Zurich and Calvin in Geneva. The wearing of the old Eucharistic vestments was left optional, candles and altars were still allowed, and, as someone has rather nicely put it, "Neither the heads of

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the images nor of their venerators were broken". In these and other respects the 1549 English Prayer Book was much closer to Lutheranism both in its content and in its teaching than its successor, the Second Prayer Book of 1552. As in the case of the Lutheran liturgies, all the services, Mattins and Evensong, Holy Communion and the rest, were in the vernacular tongue. During the 1540s, Archbishop Hermann of Cologne, who had become a disciple of Luther, drew up A Simple and Religious Consultation – for which he was deposed by the Pope – a book whose influence is clearly visible in the First Prayer Book. For example, the Comfortable Words in the service of Holy Communion were drawn from Hermann, while the title, "The Supper of the Lord", one of those found in the 1549 book, was Hermann's name for the service, and paragraphs and phrases in the services of Baptism and Confirmation clearly reflect Lutheran influences.

3) Thirdly, we cannot overlook Luther's contribution with regard to hymns. Suffice it to say that visiting a German Lutheran church in London a couple of years ago, my wife and I were invited after the service to join the small congregation for tea, and as we sat round the table and tea was ended, there came the inevitable singing of German hymns. I asked if we might have, "Ein' feste Burg", generally known to us as "A safe stronghold". I shall never forget the enthusiasm with which that group of people joined in the German words, or how their faces lit up. It was still the confessional hymn of the Reformation and the challenge of their own countryman as he faced and resisted the opposing forces.

It breathes too the spirit of that Londoner of the year 1527, John Parkyns, who, having heard read in his own tongue the Gospel, longed to possess a copy for himself, and firmly resolved that should he be fortunate enough to do so, neither the threats of the authorities nor the dire penalties which he faced if he was caught, would make him give it up. According to a manuscript preserved in the Greater London Record Office, John Parkyns remarked "If I have 20 books of the true holy scripture translated into English, I would bring none of them in for my Lord of London, curse he or bless he; for he doth it because *we* should have no knowledge, but keeps it all secret to himself".

Whether he realized it or not, Parkyns was echoing the very sentiments of one whose influence in England was more considerable than he, or possibly we ourselves, may have appreciated.

