2022

RELIGION AND QUEEN KATHERINE PARR

Gregory Mersol

John Carroll University, gmersol23@jcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays/156

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Essays at Carroll Collected. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Essays by an authorized administrator of Carroll Collected. For more information, please contact mchercourt@jcu.edu.
**Introduction**

Katherine Parr (1512-1548) is best known as the sixth and last wife of King Henry VIII and perhaps second for her ironic and ultimately sad romantic life. Parr, however, was much more than that. In her short thirty-six years, she wrote four books on religious subjects, sponsored a major project to translate works by Erasmus into English, became the first woman in England to publish under her own name, served briefly as Queen Regent, successfully worked to restore future Queens Mary I and Elizabeth I to the line of Tudor succession, and suffered two near brushes with death on account of her and her husbands’ religious beliefs. It is virtually a cliché that Katherine Parr led a remarkable life.¹

This paper will review the religious aspect of that life, one about which historians differ profoundly. More specifically, it will first discuss how her own religious beliefs evolved and changed over time. Throughout this time, Katherine became an object of mixed religious and political conflicts between those with different views on how much the Church of England should follow Catholic teachings and whether, and to what extent, it should embrace growing continental Lutheran Protestant tenets and the use of English language texts.

Katherine was in all likelihood a practicing Catholic until Henry VIII’s break with Rome in the 1530s. Like many in England, she accepted or at least acquiesced in his separating the church from the pope and declaring himself the Supreme Head of the

---

church in England. Over time, as reflected in her work and writings, Katherine came to agree with Erasmus’s views that religious texts should be made available in the vernacular tongue and then went on to accept more Protestant ideas, such as the more Lutheran view that salvation could be gained solely based on faith rather than on both faith and acts.

The more difficult and hotly disputed issue is Katherine’s influence (or lack thereof) on the English Reformation over time. The disputes on this topic largely revolve around the quality of Katherine’s education, her scholarly interests, and the ability of any woman in her position to influence the Tudor court.

As discussed below, while Henry VIII had, in large part, started the English Reformation, he opposed further reform once he had achieved his goal of annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and seizing the church’s power and wealth. Despite the genuine risk of losing the king’s favor and drawing charges of treason, Katherine worked both openly and behind the scenes to effect more Protestant reforms. She both wrote and sponsored religious texts in English, influencing readers and gaining the support and confidence of those whose work she patronized. Katherine also gained the trust of Henry’s three legitimate children, affecting their religious outlook and development to differing degrees. Her likely most significant influence was on the future Queen Elizabeth, to whom she provided a mother role and whose own 44-year reign would end with England a predominantly Protestant nation.
I. **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

A. Parr’s Early Life

While this paper will focus primarily on Katherine and her religion after her marriage to Henry VIII in 1543, it is helpful first to review her life and religion leading up to that time. Katherine Parr was the daughter of Thomas Parr, an ambitious member of a family of rising influence, and Maude Greene, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Catherine of Aragon. It is a testament to the scantness of the historical record that even the year of her birth is unknown but is generally accepted to have been around 1512. Katherine Parr would have been baptized a Catholic, but we have no record of her baptism, a document that would also have shed light on her date of birth.

Some sources suggest that Catherine of Aragon was Katherine Parr’s godmother, but that appears to be little more than speculation based on Maude’s status as her lady-in-waiting and their sharing of the common name of Catherine/Katherine. Katherine Parr’s father Thomas died in 1517, when she was likely only five years old.

The sources are divided on the extent and quality of the education Katherine received afterward. This issue is important, however, because the nature of Katherine’s

---

2 Following the spelling conventions of most authors, this paper will refer to her as “Katherine Parr.” It will often use her full name to avoid confusion, such as distinguishing her from Catherine of Aragon or Catherine Howard. Where her identity is otherwise clear from the context, it may also refer to her as either “Katherine” or “Parr,” depending on the context. Similarly, this paper will use modern spellings for ease of reading, in most cases drawn from Janel Mueller’s *Katherine Parr, Complete Works & Correspondence* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011) ("Complete Works"). Katherine herself added “KP” after her signature, presumably to distinguish herself from the other two Catherines.


5 This is also, coincidentally, the year in which Martin Luther posted his 95 theses, an event viewed by many as sparking the reformation. James, *Katheryn Parr*, 189.

education bears heavily on questions during her queenship regarding her scholarship, understanding of Latin, and her influence on the religion of Henry VIII’s three children.

Due to the thin historical record on this point, scholars tend to rely on circumstantial proof and inferences drawn from it for the conclusions they reach.7 Maria Dowling argues that Katherine would have received an education that was “limited,” particularly as to Latin.8 She relies on the norms of the day relating to the education of girls and the provision of separate but unequal education for boys and girls at an early age. She also asserts that later writings during her queenship reflect a weak facility with Latin and a lack of interest in intellectual pursuits generally.9

Susan James and others, by contrast, assert that Maude Parr worked tirelessly to educate her offspring, including Katherine. James bases her arguments on the association of the Parr family with others who promoted scholarship and had provided educational opportunities for their daughters. Perhaps the strongest piece of evidence in favor of this conclusion is the later statement of Katherine’s younger sister Anne that they had both been educated under a model developed by Sir Thomas More for his own children, one that provided schooling for girls as well as boys.10

Anthony Martienssen similarly asserts that Katherine received an excellent education, but his work is conspicuously weak on sources. For example, he asserts that Maude was responsible for the royal nursery, and thus was “able to ensure that her

---

7 Anthony Martienssen, who only cites to his sources in a very general way, observes that due to the relative scarcity of documents about Parr, “modern biographers must . . . rely mostly on circumstantial evidence to piece together the details of her life.” Martienssen, Queen Katherine Parr, ix.
9 Dowling, “Gospel,” 59-71. These views are discussed further below.
10 James, 27; Porter, 32-33. Retha Warnicke observes that Henry VIII, likely influenced by humanists such as Thomas More, took an active role in ensuring a classical education for both of his daughters. Warnicke, Women, 31-40.
children would receive the same education and upbringing of the King’s own family,” but cites no evidence in support of that assertion.\textsuperscript{11} He further argues that Katherine had the same tutor as the young Princess Mary, but even James concedes that that is unlikely due to the lack of any supporting evidence.\textsuperscript{12} William Haugaard takes a middle ground, accepting her later sponsorship of religious and academic study, but suggesting that those interests were sparked later in her life by others.\textsuperscript{13}

While the complete answer most likely will never be known, the circumstantial case relied upon by James and those sharing her conclusions is strong. Even detractors would have to concede that she would have been schooled in the Bible and the religious teachings of authors such as St. Thomas Aquinas.\textsuperscript{14} She also was likely exposed to Latin in addition to other languages.\textsuperscript{15} Irrespective of the depth of her early education, most historians credit her throughout her life with sponsoring and promoting scholarship.

In 1526, Katherine was married to Edward, Lord Borough. Again, the quality of the sources here attests to the poor record-keeping as historians only recently concluded that this Lord Borough was not a 63-year-old man, but rather his much younger grandson who shared the same name.\textsuperscript{16} Following Lord Borough’s death in around 1533, having borne no children, Katherine was left only a small estate and had limited financial prospects.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine Parr}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{12} James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 28.
\textsuperscript{14} James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 23.
\textsuperscript{15} James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 35.
\textsuperscript{16} Compare Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine Parr}, 36-39 (the grandfather, noting the great age difference) with James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 61 (writing in 1999, noting the confusion, and recounting the difficulties arising from her marriage to the grandson and living with her “overbearing father-in-law”) and Norton, Elizabeth, \textit{Catherine Parr: Wife, Widow, Mother, Survivor, the Story of the Last Queen of Henry VIII}. (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2011), 24 (noting the confusion).
\textsuperscript{17} James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 64.
\end{flushleft}
Her economic fortunes improved in 1534, however, when she, now likely in her early 20’s, married John Neville, the third Lord Latimer. Latimer was relatively wealthy and influential in the north and had ties to King Henry’s court based on his past military service. Katherine was Latimer’s third wife and became stepmother to his teenage children. By this time, King Henry had broken from the church in Rome, had divorced Catherine of Aragon, and had married Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn, in turn, had given birth to Princess Elizabeth, the future Elizabeth I, in 1533. As Latimer’s wife, Katherine Parr would have been a known figure in court.18

Latimer was a Catholic and unwillingly played a role in the 1536-37 “Pilgrimage of Grace” when the north of England rebelled against Thomas Cromwell’s policies and sought to return England in a direction back towards the Catholic faith. The rebels pressed Latimer into service to speak on their behalf. When they began to believe that Latimer was not acting in their interests, they stormed his home and took his children and Katherine hostage.19 Latimer, in turn, came under suspicion by the crown for his actions during the rebellion, and only narrowly escaped charges of treason and execution. His efforts, involuntary as they were, to mediate the dispute between the king and the rebels over matters of faith pleased no one, but also reflected the danger of involvement in religion and politics at the time.20

While there is evidence that Katherine took interest in religious education during her marriage to Latimer, none of her writings from this time have survived. Based on these events, however, she was very personally bound up in the disputes over the early

---

18 Porter, Katherine the Queen, 111-112.
19 James, Kateryn Parr, 77-79.
20 Porter, Katherine the Queen, 103, 106-09.
English Reformation with the lives of herself, Latimer, and her stepchildren all at risk. The fact that she and Latimer survived the aftermath of the rebellion suggests that, at least outwardly, she would have supported Henry XIII’s break with Rome and his initial reforms. We have no basis, however, to assess the impact of her and her stepchildren having been held captive by an angry Catholic mob during the uprising.\textsuperscript{21}

Latimer died early 1543, leaving Katherine again a widow of roughly 30 years of age, but with reasonably good financial means.\textsuperscript{22} She returned to the Court and became a close friend of Henry’s oldest daughter, Mary.\textsuperscript{23}

By this time, Henry was again unmarried following the execution of Anne Boleyn (1536), the death of Jane Seymour (1537), the annulment of his marriage to Anne of Cleves (1540), and the execution of Katherine Howard (1542). Jane Seymour had borne Henry his only legitimate son, Edward, in 1537. Henry now began to pursue the newly widowed Katherine Parr, who, unable as a practical matter to decline his proposal, married him on July 12, 1543.\textsuperscript{24} Their marriage would last three and a half years until Henry’s death in January 1547.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{B. The Status of Religion in England in 1543}

The history of the church in England was at least as tumultuous as that of Katherine Parr during the same period. Henry had originally been a staunch Roman Catholic, earning the title “Defender of the Faith” based on his work \textit{Assertio Septem Sacramentorum} (“\textit{Defense of the Seven Sacraments}”) in 1521. The \textit{Defense} was exactly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Susan James makes the common-sense observation that the negative experience at the hands of the conservative northern mobs likely buttressed any reform-minded ideas she may have been having. James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 81.
\item[22] Porter, \textit{Katherine the Queen}, 113-114.
\item[23] Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine Parr}, 148.
\item[24] Porter, \textit{Katherine the Queen}, 139, 143.
\item[25] Parr thus was Henry VIII’s queen longer than all but Catherine of Aragon.
\end{footnotes}
what the title proclaimed, a defense of the seven Catholic sacraments against the challenges made by Martin Luther, thus placing Henry squarely in opposition to many of the building blocks of Protestantism.

Henry’s break with Rome only a few years later began not as an act of religious protest, but rather as part of his quest for a male heir. By the mid 1520s, Henry convinced himself that the lack of a male heir was due to a defect in his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, now likely unable to bear children, and he sought to divorce her so that he could marry a younger queen who might bear him a son. Henry petitioned Rome for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1527. While the grounds for the request were dubious, at least at this juncture he was still following Church procedures, and ordinarily his request might have been granted. In this instance, however, due to continental politics the request was subjected to lengthy and convoluted proceedings designed to avoid ever reaching the issue.

After years of frustration with the slow pace of the drawn-out procedures, Henry, with the help of his advisors, divorced Catherine in 1533 to marry Anne Boleyn. In 1534, Parliament passed the first Act of Supremacy, declaring Henry to be the “Supreme Head” of the church of England, and formalizing the break from Rome. This act was not strictly a matter of religious dogma and did not address the theological differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Importantly, the Act did not adopt the views of Martin Luther and many Protestants on the continent on matters such as the

---

presence of Christ in the Eucharist, priestly celibacy, and salvation through faith or
works. Thus, while the break from the church was real, the new church of England
would otherwise adhere to Catholic tenets.

Within two years, Henry used his new powers to begin the dissolution of the
monasteries, disposing of hundreds of religious houses and appropriating their wealth
and property. While this act was justified on the grounds that the monasteries had failed
in their religious duties, and while it plainly was undertaken for the king’s own financial
gain, it was, again, not per se a change in theological ideology.30

By the time of Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine Parr, he had already attained
his goals for the Church. He, not the pope, was now the Supreme Head of the church, at
least in England. He had seized much of the church’s wealth and property for himself.
He had secured the annulment from Catherine of Aragon and subsequently one from
Anne of Cleves. While Protestants on the continent were calling for substantial changes
in Christian rites and theology, Henry seemed content with the church as he has remade
it, one that was Catholic in most respects except that he, not the pope, was its head.31

There is not much doubt about where Henry stood at the time on the primary
Christian theological issues of the day. Under the 1534 Act of Supremacy, Henry was, by
law, the Supreme Head of the Church of England. In June 1539, Parliament had passed,
at Henry’s insistence, what became known as the “Six Articles.”32 On theological

30 Richard Rex, Henry VIII and the English Reformation. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 2, 71
(describing it as “an act of state”).
31 George Bernard would refute this characterization as an oversimplification, but in the most important
elements, the presence of Christ in the host, salvation by faith and works, and a celibate clergy, Henry
continued to hew to Catholic dogma. Bernard, King’s Reformation, 597-98. Bernard’s objection is based
in part on Henry’s dissolution of the monasteries as fundamentally altering the church. Richard Rex, too,
chafes at the label due to his view that Henry was making the church distinctively English and subject to
the King of England’s views rather than “catholic” in the universal sense. Rex, Henry VIII, 171-175.
32 Dickens, English Reformation, 176-77.
matters, apart from his usurpation of the church in England, the articles tracked closely with Roman Catholic dogma, and rejected many important Lutheran ideas. Among other things, they reaffirmed that during the sacrament of communion, the bread and wine became the “natural body and blood of our Savior Jesu Christ,” required celibacy among the clergy, and reiterated the need for confession before a priest, in private.33

The penalties for refusing acceptance of these articles were Draconian, with burning at the stake for even a first violation of the first article (communion), and the same penalty for second violations of the remainder.34 One departure from the otherwise conservative Catholic cast to the articles was the lack of any reference to the use or translation of the Bible into native languages, such as English, but even that was qualified by limitations on who might have access to English translations.35

Thus, at this stage of the English Reformation, the different views and movements fell roughly into three camps. The first, referred at times as “Henrician” was Henry’s own view of the church, adhering to many Catholic tenets other than the question of the Church’s leadership. The second was a humanist reformation based on the works of Erasmus that promoted the search for human dignity and happiness that were consistent with making religious works like the Bible available in the common vernacular.36 The third was the Lutheran reformation, rejecting many of the trappings of the Catholic church and contrary to Henry’s Six Acts. Henry’s view was the law of the land; the Erasmian view, particularly as to English translation of religious work, was

33 Martienssen, Queen Katherine Parr, 112.
34 Dickens, English Reformation, 117.
35 Mueller, Complete Works, 99 n.95 (Henry directed the placement of an English language Bible in every church in 1541); Kujawa-Holbrook, Sheryl A., “Katherine Parr and Reformed Religion,” Anglican and Episcopal History, Vol. 72, No. 1 (March 2003), pp. 55-78, 56 (commoners were prohibited from reading the Bible).
36 Matzat, Katherine Parr, 147.
tolerated to a degree; the Lutheran view was prohibited to the extent that it conflicted with Henry’s own. As William Haugaard observes, an individual viewed as a “Protestant” in England would likely have different views from a Lutheran “Protestant” on the continent, particularly on matters such as communion and the Latin liturgy.37

Henry’s views did not moderate between 1539 and his marriage to Katherine. With substantial changes dictated by Henry, on April 30, 1543, a convocation of bishops approved *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man*.38 Known as “King’s Book,” it was important as Henry’s pronouncement regarding the basic tenets of the Church of England. In addition to its reiteration of the Six Articles on topics such as transubstantiation, priestly celibacy, and confession, it continued to promote Catholic-like church rituals and ceremonies. It specifically rejected the Lutheran doctrine, one pressed by Cranmer, that salvation could be achieved by faith alone, reiterating the Roman Catholic view that salvation required both faith and spiritual works.39

Henry punished both conservatives and reformists severely alike for departing from his taking of the church or the Six Articles. Most famously, Sir Thomas More was executed for refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn. Yet Henry also executed Protestants who violated the Six Articles equally severely.40 On July 16, 1546, four Protestants who denied transfiguration, including Anne Askew, a woman, were burned at the stake. 41 At the same time, demonstrating

37 Haugaard, *Religious Convictions*, 354. And, of course, there were other Protestant schools developing on the continent.
39 Matzat, *Katherine Parr*, 152; Dickens, *English Reformation*, 184. This was a significant setback for Cranmer, but despite this he remained a trusted and respected advisor. Haigh, *English Reformations*, 160-61.
more tolerant views toward the use of the vernacular, Henry permitted Cranmer to publish an English language service for use in certain ceremonies. Based on this robust record, we know as precisely as possible where Henry stood on these issues.

II. Katherine Parr’s Faith in 1543

Although we know less about the religious beliefs of Katherine Parr than of Henry VIII on her wedding day, her life and later writings provide many clues. Katherine was born and raised a Roman Catholic. Her first two husbands were Roman Catholic at the time of her marriages. Her second husband, John Neville, appears to have acquiesced when Henry declared himself the head of the church in 1533. As a figure in court, and one that drew Henry’s affections, it can safely be assumed she did the same. There is little to suggest in these events that Katherine was anything other than a religious moderate who accepted Henry as the head of the church of England.

Henry’s attitude towards Katherine seems to have been different from that towards her predecessors. With a male heir, Edward, Henry was probably less concerned with having a son with her and objectively she was an unlikely candidate in that regard given her age (approximately 31) and the fact that she had borne no children in either of her two prior marriages. After Catherine Howard’s youthful indiscretions

---

42 Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 590.
43 James, *Kateryn Parr*, 190.
and execution for them, Henry may have been looking for more of a stable influence and, if not an intellectual equal in his mind, at least a woman of intellect. As discussed further below, Henry would later trust Parr to act as regent during his absence in France, a level of trust he had given no queen other than Catherine of Aragon. That level of trust suggests that he respected her judgment in other areas, including the potential extent, if any, to which reformation might continue.

Katherine wasted no time in making her mark on the royal household. Along with gaining a third husband, she became stepmother to three royal children of different mothers, two of whom, Elizabeth (age 9) and Edward (age 6), likely having no memory of their birth mothers. Given the rapid succession and short marriages of Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Catherine Howard, these last two likely had had no stable mother figure in their lives. Following their mothers’ fates, Mary and Elizabeth had both been removed from the line of succession.

Most sources credit Katherine with reuniting the royal family.\(^45\) By 1544, Mary and Elizabeth were restored to the line of succession.\(^46\) Correspondence reflects that Katherine was close to all three children and that Edward and Elizabeth in particular admired and had strong personal feelings towards her.\(^47\) By reuniting the family and becoming a loving step-mother to all, Katherine was in a unique position to influence the beliefs of the next three rulers of England. Significantly, one of the bonds that united them was the study of religious works.

---


\(^46\) In hindsight we know that Katherine Parr and Henry would produce no offspring, but she would not have known that at the time. In one of the countless “what ifs” of Henry’s reign, had Parr produced a son, or if she gave birth to a daughter with Mary and Elizabeth out of the line of succession, her child would eventually have sat on England’s throne.

III. The Queenship and Writings of Katherine Parr

Katherine Parr was the author of four books, all focused on religion, as well as the patron of a fifth translating Erasmus’s *Paraphrases of the Gospels*. The topic is telling, not only because it reflects her own devotion to religion, but also because it was considered a relatively safe area for women to comment. The contents of these books provide valuable clues regarding her religious views and how they evolved over a relatively brief period of time. They are:

- *Psalms or Prayers*, published in 1544;
- *Prayers or Meditations* (1545);
- Patroness and likely manager of a major project to translate Erasmus’s *Paraphrases of the Gospels* (1545);
- *The Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547); and
- *Personal Prayerbook* (widely attributed to the years 1544-1548, but quite possibly assembled from other works prior to 1540).

As explained below, the five works are very different in kind, and each presents a distinct facet of Katherine Parr’s religious development and outlook. This paper will also address a much-cited letter she wrote in early 1546 to Cambridge University both because it is a central document in disputes over the extent of her scholarship and influence and because it reflects her Erasmian view that even scholarly religious works should be written in a way that laypersons could readily understand.

A. The Personal Prayerbook

The last of these, the *Personal Prayerbook* can be addressed first because it likely did little to influence history. Janel Mueller confidently states that little contained in the
book dates past 1540, even before Katherine’s marriage to Henry. The *Personal Prayerbook* was just that, Katherine’s personal prayerbook. It was not a work she created to influence others but, instead, was her own collection of prayers for personal meditation, not published until well after her death.

**B. Psalms or Prayers**

The first book of importance, *Psalms or Prayers*, was released anonymously in 1544 when Parr had been queen for but a year. The book is for the most part an English language translation of works by John Fisher, who in turn had been executed for failing to acknowledge the legitimacy of Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn. For obvious reasons, the work does not cite the source, but the identity of the original author is telling. Fisher was a conservative Catholic whose crime was only his refusal to accept Henry (and to reject the pope) as the head of the church of England. The work does not comment on the legitimacy of Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon or the question of his marriage to Anne Boleyn, but rather on matters of theology, for which Fisher was still respected. Apart from the question of who the head of the church should be, Katherine’s choice of this material reflects continued adherence to mostly Catholic views. Importantly, though, it also reflects her desire to make religious readings more accessible and available to the public in English in the humanist/Erasmian tradition.

---

48 Mueller, *Complete Works*, 492. This also raises the interesting point of how little her later more Lutheran outlook changed her day-to-day prayer.

49 Touchingly, it would be given to a young Lady Jane Grey at Katherine’s death in 1548 and she herself would take it with her to the scaffold in 1554. Had Lady Jane Grey assumed the throne on Edward’s death, this might have been a work of great importance, but as Princess Mary outmaneuvered her for the crown and Jane lost her life, it is little more than an interesting historical footnote.

50 While the book was published anonymously, there is a very strong circumstantial case that she was the author and there is virtually no debate over her authorship other than questions by historians such as Anne Dowling as to Katherine’s Latin ability. Numerous pieces of evidence also suggest that her role in writing the book was well known. See generally James, *Kateryn Parr*, 199-214.

51 Mueller, *Complete Works*, 197 n.2; McConica, *English Humanists*, 150.

C. The Regency of 1544

1544 was a significant year in another respect in that in the summer of that year Henry went to war in France and left Katherine as regent while he participated in the ultimately pointless siege of Boulogne. This appointment reflected Henry’s trust in his new wife and, presumably, that nothing she wrote in Psalms or Prayers offended him.

Of even greater importance to many historians, Henry also selected a regency council to assist her in governing in his absence, a council that included Thomas Cranmer, now Archbishop of Canterbury, who was widely credited for his role in creating and executing the plan through which Henry broke from Rome to obtain his annulment from Catherine of Aragon. While Cranmer was generally supported by Henry, he believed in, and had pushed for, further Lutheran-type church reform without success. Cranmer became Katherine’s personal confessor, and as the two worked together daily on affairs of state during this time, many commentators consider this to be the most likely candidate for the turning point in her religious development.

E. Paraphrases of Erasmus

Around this same time, Katherine sponsored Nicholas Udall, one-time Eton headmaster and an open supporter of Luther’s ideas, to prepare an English-language translation of Erasmus’s Paraphrases of the Gospels, a rewriting of the gospels in Latin. John McConica describes this as her “great project,” and one that was particularly important as it complemented Henry’s own pronouncements and achieved

---

53 Porter, Katherine the Queen, 209-220.
54 E.g., Bernard, King’s Reformation, 67; Matzat, Katherine Parr, 39.
55 E.g., Porter, Katherine the Queen, 203-204; Matzat, Katherine Parr, 38-39.
a kind of harmony among the various religious views.\textsuperscript{57} According to Patricia Pender, Katherine was not only the patron of the project, generally referred to as “\textit{Paraphrases of Erasmus},” but managed it as well, a conclusion that can easily be drawn from Udall’s lengthy and glowing dedication.\textsuperscript{58}

The creation of such a large work required the collaboration of talented translators, editors, and printers, thus extending her influence to those actually working on religious writings.\textsuperscript{59} She even briefly persuaded Princess Mary, a steadfast Catholic, to work on the project for a time.\textsuperscript{60} The work later became especially important as Edward would direct its use in the first year of his reign, Mary would ban it, and Elizabeth would require that a copy be placed as required reading for clergy in every church.\textsuperscript{61} As with \textit{Psalms or Prayers}, this project reflects her support of Erasmian ideals and the making of religious texts available in English, the common tongue.

\textbf{E. Prayers or Meditations}

Katherine’s second book, \textit{Prayers or Meditations}, was published in 1545 and is famously the first book published by a woman in England under her own name. It was also extremely popular.\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Prayers or Meditations} was a Christian work, and is largely in the form of an extended prayer to God, but nothing in it distinguishes it as being either

---

\textsuperscript{57} McConica, \textit{English Humanists}, 231.
\textsuperscript{59} James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 3
\textsuperscript{60} Pender, \textit{Dispensing Quails}, 40.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, 42
\textsuperscript{62} Haugaard, \textit{Religious Convictions}, 354.
Protestant or Catholic. William Haugaard describes much of the prose as “unexceptional,” and notes that the work was “so free of references to any contemporary doctrinal dispute that Christians of almost any variety might find its prayers appropriate for their own use.” Indeed, it was so neutral that it continued to be published during both the reign of the Protestant Edward and Mary’s Catholic efforts to reverse the reformation. As with Katherine’s other works, this one was also in English.

Prayers or Meditations does not touch upon topics that divided Protestants and Catholics, but rather on Christian humility towards God. It is replete with lines such as:

\[ O \text{ Lord, grant me that I may wholly resign myself to Thee: and in all things to forsake myself, and patiently to bear my cross, and to follow Thee.}\]

As a work of the queen and without controversial content, any English Christian could pray from it without concerns about committing heresy. Indirectly, the work also would have established Katherine as having devotional views that were both respected and admired. This credibility might very well have given greater weight to her next work, published after the end of Henry’s reign, with far more controversial material.

D. The Cambridge Letter

The Chantries Act of 1545 permitted Henry, as he had with the monasteries, to seize the property of English universities and colleges. Shortly afterward, representatives of Cambridge University wrote to Katherine to ask that she intercede with the king not to have its property seized. While the original letter or letters have been lost to history, there is little question that they were written in Latin and, based on

---

63 Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook notes the absence of references to saints or prayers for the dead, but otherwise finds it “non-controversial.” Kujawa-Holbrook, “Reformed Religion,” 58.
64 Haugaard, Religious Convictions, 355.
65 Ibid.
66 Prayers or Meditations, Mueller, Complete Works, 408.
the tone of Katherine’s response, likely employed a patronizing tone. In many respects, this relatively short letter, dated February 26, 1546, provides more insights into her thinking than Katherine’s first two books.

Her letter begins with a tart rebuke for the university’s use of Latin in its letters “as they [the requests by the school] be latinly written, which is so signified unto me by those that be learned in the Latin tongue, so I know you could have uttered your desires and opinions familiarly in our vulgar tongue [English], aptly for my intelligence . . . .”67 This one sentence chides the authors for their use of Latin in England, an English speaking country, as condescending to the English people and to her. Such a rebuke by extension echoed Katherine’s own Erasmian belief that the Bible should be available in the common tongue. Irrespective of the quality of her own facility with Latin, Katherine’s simultaneous involvement with the Erasmus translation project leaves little doubt that she had at least a working knowledge of Latin and was criticizing its use, not genuinely proclaiming ignorance of it.

This letter also provides a clue regarding when she wrote *Lamentation*. Her criticism of the university’s use of Latin and complex language was that it separated their scholarship from the English public. She expresses nearly the same sentiment in *Lamentation*, not attacking scholarship per se, but questioning instances in which the meaning of scripture is lost in scholarly analysis.68

Katherine makes a religious point by noting that scholars focused on classical learning from Greek (*i.e.* pagan) times at the risk of “forgetting our Christianity” and urges them to continue to study the gospel. Finally, Katherine reassures the university

68 Ibid.
that she has spoken with King Henry and that he had no intention of “confounding” the school through taking the property that was now his by Act of Parliament.\textsuperscript{69} Any doubt that Katherine’s self-deprecation was intended as ironic is dispelled in her signature line: “Scribbled with the hand of her that prayeth to the Lord and immortal God . . . .”\textsuperscript{70}

Katherine’s letter thus reflects both her growing confidence in the role of queen and in asserting Erasmian religious ideas that included the use of English for religious works.\textsuperscript{71}

E. John Foxe’s Account of Near Arrest

Perhaps the most famous event of Katherine’s queenship occurred in the late spring or early summer of 1546. Believing that they had obtained the upper hand in ongoing disputes over further church reforms with the more Lutheran-leaning court members, a group of conservatives began to build a case for heresy against her. Virtually every source on the subject cites the account given by John Foxe in \textit{Acts and Monuments}, but with varying degrees of skepticism.\textsuperscript{72}

According to Foxe’s account, Henry became irritated with Katherine’s frequent debates over religious matters with him. The conservatives, led by Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor Wriothesley, smelling weakness, worked to develop a case against Katherine by, among other things, searching for heretical books among the members of her court and interrogating and even torturing those associated with her

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} David Starkey posits that the tone of Katherine’s letter to Cambridge University may have been reflected in other communications, triggering concern on Henry’s part and at least indirectly precipitating this event. Starkey, \textit{Six Wives}, 759. Martienssen identifies Gardiner as the Chancellor of the University, which would make the connection even clearer as this would have been a direct attack against him. Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine Parr}, 207.

known to hold Protestant views.\textsuperscript{73} With the evidence they gained, they persuaded Henry to sign bills of articles against Katherine. Before she could be arrested, however, Henry revealed them to one of his physicians who in turn managed to alert her by dropping them where they would be brought to her. After her initial shock, Katherine recovered and, when she met with Henry shortly afterward, refused his invitation to debate religion but, according to Foxe, said:

\begin{quote}
Since therefore, God has appointed such a natural difference between man and woman, and your majesty being so excellent in gifts and ornaments of wisdom, and I a silly poor woman, so much inferior in all respects of nature to you, how then comes it now to pass that your majesty, in such causes of religion, will seem to require my judgement? Which when I have uttered and said what I can, yet must I, and will I, refer to my judgement in this, and in all other cases, to your majesty’s wisdom, as my only anchor, supreme head and governor here in earth, next under God, to lean to.”\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Katherine, Foxe’s account continues, further won over the king by attributing their past debates to her desire to ease his physical pains by distraction and her hope that upon “hearing your majesty’s learned discourse might receive to myself some profit.”\textsuperscript{75} The king’s heart was turned, Foxe relates, and when the guards arrived shortly afterward to arrest Katherine he drove them off with insults of “knave, arrant knave,” “beast and fool.”\textsuperscript{76}

This is indeed a great story, one reminiscent of the tale of Scheherazade or, perhaps, a different Katherine (Katherina/Kate) in Shakespeare’s \textit{Taming of the Shrew}. But it has the feel of being too good to be true. Linda Porter describes it as “paint[ing]\textsuperscript{73} It is difficult to dismiss some personal feelings in the disputes. Gardiner had been the one to marry Henry and Katherine. Katherine had written what appears to be a somewhat heartless letter to Wriothesly’s wife after the loss of a child, urging her not to mourn as the death was God’s will. Mueller, \textit{Complete Works}, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{74} Porter, \textit{Katherine the Queen}, 258.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}, 259.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}.\textsuperscript{75} The king’s heart was turned, Foxe relates, and when the guards arrived shortly afterward to arrest Katherine he drove them off with insults of “knave, arrant knave,” “beast and fool.”\textsuperscript{76}
too simple a picture. The story appears among a set of dramatic accounts of the lives of Christian martyrs with a strong Protestant bias. Foxe wrote the account in 1562, over fifteen years later, based on an unnamed source who allegedly had heard it from Thomas Cranmer (who had died in 1556), but there are no corroborating witnesses. As discussed below, it also fails to account for how Katherine’s Lutheran-inspired Lamentations of a Sinner might have been concealed from her enemies.

Theories abound as to what actually might have happened. Some, like Rosemary O’Day, argue that, while likely embellished, the account is essentially correct. Linda Porter asserts that an aging Henry was bored after three years of marriage and growing to resent her outspokenness and failure to produce a child. He approved the bill of articles but realized that many of Katherine’s ladies-in-waiting were the wives of the members of his own privy council and, not wanting to disturb the balance between conservatives and evangelicals, simply changed his mind. Others posit that the entire affair was an example of Henry’s trademark way of scaring those who he did not want to confront directly into hewing to his will, such as he had done previously with those seeking to remove Thomas Cranmer.

---

77 Ibid., 255.
78 It is also contrary to another Foxe account, which he also attributed to Cranmer, in which Henry suggested to the French ambassador in August 1546 that France and England both change the Mass to a different kind of service. Dickens, English Reformation, 195; Lacey Baldwin-Smith, Henry VIII, 1251. This event is discussed further below.
79 Bainton, Women, 164-65 (“The question probably admits of no answer.”).
81 Bainton, Women, 164-65. Bainton cites Lacey Baldwin Smith for this point, but Smith focused more on the composition of Edward’s regency council in terms of whether they were in his favor than to its members’ wives’ role as Katherine’s ladies-in-waiting. Lacey Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1237-1264.
82 E.g., Bernard, King’s Reformation, 592.
For the purposes of this paper, the questions about Foxe’s account are unfortunate. At the one extreme, Foxe’s version of the story would, in addition to making her a clever hero, place Katherine’s religious views at the forefront. Porter’s view at the other extreme would render them less relevant.

The outcome of these events is also in dispute. Some suggest that Henry and Katherine reconciled, in one case so far that Henry even began to be converted by Katherine’s views. Others conclude that a kind of breach occurred. Whatever outcome there may have been lasted only briefly as Henry died roughly half a year later and Katherine never saw him during the last month or more of his life. During that time, surrounded by his advisors, he wrote his last will in which she was designated dowager queen, not regent to Edward. Whatever Henry’s view toward Katherine may have been, it did not include giving her the power of a regent.

**F. Lamentation of a Sinner**

Katherine’s last book, *Lamentation of a Sinner*, appeared after Henry’s death in 1547, at which time she was dowager queen and the nine-year-old Edward had become King Edward VI. *Lamentation* is different in kind from Katherine’s other books. It is not a translation of other works, but rather recounts her conversion to a more Lutheran form of Protestantism. What is also striking about the book is its humility, with a Tudor

---

83 *E.g.*, Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr*, 195-196.  
84 *E.g.*, Porter, *Kateryn the Queen*, 268 (“the queen’s position had been weakened by the efforts to bring her down and she was unable to recover it fully”).  
85 Porter, *Kateryn the Queen*, 271.  
86 David Loades goes as far as to suggest that a will may have been drafted by Protestant supporters in Henry’s waning days, who then affixed his seal on it whether he was conscious or not. David Loades, *The Tudor Court*. (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 156-57.  
87 Although she did become regent to Elizabeth, whose reign would prove longer and more influential.
queen of England repeatedly referring to herself in the basest possible terms, such as a “heathen” or “a dunghill of wickedness.”

The work describes aspects of Katherine’s conversion experience but, somewhat frustratingly for the historian, she does so in terms of her thoughts and feelings but reveals no hard factual detail such as the dates of her conversion, the sources that prompted the conversion, or the external events that may have affected her. As Maria Dowling comments, “there is no way of knowing when it was composed.” Many believe that Katherine wrote the work while Henry was king, which is consistent with references to him in the present tense, but that raises other questions. If, as suggested by the Foxe account, Katherine’s enemies were searching for books to prove her a heretic, *Lamentation* would alone have supplied the necessary proof, making it a dangerous work to own let alone having written.

*Lamentation* is written in three parts and, unlike *Prayers and Meditations*, reads more like a confession to the reader than an extended prayer to God. In the first part, Katherine relates her conversion experience. Shortly into this part, Katherine expresses contempt for the pope and, at least some aspects of Roman Catholicism:

> But I sought for such riffraff as the Bishop of Rome hath planted in his tyranny and kingdom, trusting with great confidence, by the virtue and holiness of them, to receive full remission of my sins. And so I did as much as was in me to obfuscate and darken the

---

88 Mueller, *Complete Works*, 452, 454
91 There is also no mention of it or how it might have been hidden in John Foxe’s account, a notable omission given the high level of detail his story otherwise contains.
great benefit of Christ’s passion: than the which no thought can conceive of any more value.\textsuperscript{92}

This quote was largely in line with Henry’s own outlook but for the subtle suggestion that Catholic ritual might “obfuscate . . . the great benefit of Christ’s passion.” But the discussion quickly moves to express a far more Lutheran outlook:

Saint Paul saith we be justified by the faith in Christ, and not by the deed of the law.\textsuperscript{93}

Quoting Paul (even if accurately) to assert that salvation can be achieved through faith alone would have been contrary to Henry’s beliefs and the King’s Book. Katherine tempers this assertion by saying that good works spring from faith:

This dignity of faith is no derogation to good works, for out of this faith springeth all good works.\textsuperscript{94}

But this was likely a common argument and one that would likely have done little to avoid a charge of heresy in Henry’s day. By making this assertion, Katherine expressed a Lutheran outlook.

In the second part, Parr refers to the “Book of the Crucifix,” deliberately appropriating the term “Crucifix” to describe her internal struggle. In this part, echoing at least in part her comments to Cambridge University in early 1546, she calls out those who preach doctrines beyond those described in scripture, a criticism of many Christian and especially Catholic scholars.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92} Mueller, \textit{Complete Works}, 450, 468 (describing Henry as Moses and the pope as the Pharoah). Note that the last sentence of the quote is almost a paraphrasing of the attempt by St. Anselm (former Bishop of Canterbury) to prove the existence of God without reference to scripture. St. Anselm of Canterbury, \textit{Proslogion}, translated by Matthew D. Walz. (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press 2013), 23 (God is “that than which a greater is not able to be thought”).

\textsuperscript{93} Mueller, \textit{Complete Works}, 456.

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, \textit{Works}, 457.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.}, 470.
In the last part, Katherine calls for readers of various stations to repent and change their lives. She divides individuals into multiple groups and suggests actions for them based on their stations in life. She describes as “weaklings” or “carnal gospellers” those who oppose Protestant ideals. She contrasts children, servants, husbands, and wives, who carry out the duties of their roles in society and thus receive God’s grace.\(^96\) The book ends with a call for all Christians to confess their faults and repent.\(^97\)

Scholars debate whether *Lamentation* was an Erasmian or Lutheran work. Linda Porter generally has little use for the work, finding it to be “neither great literature nor compelling religious writing.”\(^98\) James McConica describes it as “a classic production of Erasmian piety” and asserts that it has “no allusions to . . . any peculiar Protestant tenets,”\(^99\) a claim that is difficult to sustain given the Lutheran-inspired passages quoted above. By contrast, most others commenting on the issue describe the work as depicting a conversion from Erasmian views to those of Lutheran.\(^100\) Two editions were published during Edward's reign and a third during that of Elizabeth.\(^101\)

G. The Death of Henry VIII and Afterward

Henry died in January 1547. All too hastily, Katherine quietly married a former suitor, Thomas Seymour (uncle to now King Edward VI), that spring. Both the speed and secrecy of this fourth marriage alienated many. It came as an unwelcome surprise to Edward in particular, and others, further diminishing her role in court.\(^102\)


\(^{97}\) Mueller, *Complete Works*, 483-84.

\(^{98}\) Porter, *Katherine the Queen*, 241.


\(^{101}\) Haugaard, *Katherine Parr*, 356.

\(^{102}\) James, *Kateryn Parr*, 303.
Katherine, however, continued to act as stepmother to Elizabeth, extending her influence over her. Rumors eventually swirled over possible sexual misconduct between Seymour and 15-year-old Elizabeth, resulting in Elizabeth being sent to live with a different family. Katherine, died of post-partum medical complications on September 5, 1548, less than two years after Henry’s death, and became first English queen to receive a Protestant funeral.

IV. Influence of Katherine Parr

It can be and has been argued that Parr’s had only minimal influence over the English Reformation. From an objective standpoint, there are numerous facts that would serve to limit what power she might have asserted. Katherine was queen for only three and a half years, a relatively short period of time. Upon Henry’s death, she became queen dowager rather than a more powerful position as regent to the child King Edward. She lived fewer than two years after that, and her marriage to Thomas Seymour only a few months after Henry’s created a cloud afterward. Thus, she was in a position where she might effect change only for a short period, and just after Henry had reiterated his conservative views of Christianity.

There is little consensus, in fact, on the extent to which Katherine’s religion and theology might have influenced history. O’Day’s extensive 1986 historiography of the English Reformation does not even mention Katherine by name. Janel Mueller, who

---

103 James, Kateryn Parr, 316-323.
104 James, Kateryn Parr, 333.
105 Katherine was kept from Henry during the last several weeks of his life. Porter, Katherine the Queen, 271. It may have been that those surrounding Henry, after seeing her competently run the country as regent in 1544, wanted to avoid the chance that she would be named regent over Edward as well and exert her own influence.
106 James, Kateryn Parr, 3. Perhaps too strongly James comments ironically that “[a]ll the influence she had worked so hard to attain during her four years of union to Henry VIII, Kateryn had sacrificed on the altar of her fourth marriage.” Ibid., 312-313.
praises Parr’s *Lamentation* as a writing “without parallel” concedes that it is an “all-but-forgotten work.”[^107] Maria Dowling asserts not only that Katherine Parr’s influence was limited, but that given her position it was unlikely that she could not have wielded much influence in this arena, a view accepted uncritically by Christopher Haigh in 1993[^108]. David Loades similarly followed the view of Maria Dowling in 1987, further asserting that Katherine could not have done anything in the realm of religion without Henry’s “active connivance” due to the dangerous religious/political environment[^109].

At the other extreme, Patricia Pender asserts that “Katherine Parr exerted a significant influence on the English Reformation.”[^110] Linda James recounts Katherine’s unique position to influence Henry VIII, but also the loss of that influence almost immediately after his death after her precipitous marriage to Thomas Seymour. James McConica describes her efforts as “a momentous influence on both court and letters.”[^111]

### A. The Case Against Parr Having Had Significant Influence

Maria Dowling is the leading scholar asserting that Katherine’s influence was limited, and her arguments deserve further examination. Dowling first focuses on the education of the king’s children, in part because that education reflected Henry’s preferences. She takes issue with the quality of Katherine’s education, reading into correspondence from Prince Edward in 1546 that she had only recently received Latin schooling. Relying on excerpts from Katherine’s own writings, she states that Katherine

---

[^109]: Loades, *Tudor Court*, 121.
[^110]: Pender, *Dispensing Quails*, 36.
had “a certain anti-intellectual tendency.” Dowling concludes that “Katherine Parr was not fitted intellectually to supervise the studies of the royal children . . . .”

Dowling further argues that Mary was too old to be a student during Parr’s queenship and had already been well educated by her mother, Catherine of Aragon. Dowling further argues that Mary was too old to be a student during Parr’s queenship and had already been well educated by her mother, Catherine of Aragon. Edward, she asserts, would have been educated by a man to avoid the perceived risk of “wantonness, effeminacy and frivolity” had he been schooled by a woman Edward’s own writings reflect that at age six (1544), he began to be educated by two male Cambridge scholars, which also would have been consistent with the patronage of the day. Elizabeth would not have been taught alongside Edward, Dowling continues, because equality of education between boys and girls was the exception, not the rule.

Dowling argues that Katherine was but one of many Protestant-leaning individuals at court who were the targets of plotting by conservatives. In Katherine’s case, according to Dowling, she was targeted not because she was a reform leader, but rather because many of the women around her were the wives of the more Protestant-leaning figures in Henry’s council. The power of council members with Protestant sympathies would be greatly diminished if she were removed.

While Dowling’s argument is well-constructed, it suffers from numerous weaknesses. The first among those weaknesses are the words of Edward and Elizabeth themselves. In a series of affectionate letters in 1546, the young Edward, writing in

113 Ibid.
114 Kujawa-Holbrook, while sympathetic to Parr, also concludes that she “did not really contribute to [Mary’s] religious upbringing.” Kujawa-Holbrook, *Reformed Religion*, 70.
116 William Haugaard reached an entirely different conclusion, stating firmly that “Elizabeth shared some of Edward’s tutors whom Katherine had been instrumental in selecting.” Haugaard, *Religious Convictions*, 348.
117 Ibid. 70.
Latin, shared his love of scholarship with Katherine using phrases such as “now I write this letter to you, that it may be a testimony of love to you and of my study.”

In a letter dated December 31, 1544, Elizabeth sent Katherine her own English translation of Marguerite of Navarre’s *Miroir de l’ame Pecheresse* ("Mirror of a Sinful Soul"), noting that “the wit of a man or woman [shall] wax dull and unapt to do or understand any thing perfectly unless it be always occupied upon some manner of study.” The letter reveals many things, not the least of which is Elizabeth’s taking on the English translation of a religious work written by another queen. The letter reflects a shared passion for learning and a view that “study” was not only a proper but desirable undertaking for a woman. The following year, Elizabeth gave Katherine the gift of an embroidered manuscript containing her own translation into several languages of English prayers Katherine had selected. These exchanges show not only that Katherine was engaged in the education of her youngest two stepchildren, but that they responded enthusiastically towards her in that regard.

Similarly, while Dowling relies upon the *formal* schooling arrangements that would likely have been made for Edward and Elizabeth, it does not consider her influence in their outlook as a loving, and loved, stepmother. As the above letters reflect, the two children looked up to Katherine and sought to please her. Elizabeth’s December 31, 1544 letter even contains a passage that suggests the Lutheran Protestant belief that

---

118 Mueller, *Complete Works* 121.
120 Haugaard, *Religious Convictions*, 347; Kujawa-Holbrook, *Reformed Religion*, 72. Notably, these are the only religious works attributed to Elizabeth, suggesting that religion was a personal bond between her and Katherine. Some sources describe the work as the translation of Katherine’s *Prayers or Meditations*. E.g., Starkey, *Six Wives*, 757
121 While Mary, a staunch Catholic, would never follow Parr’s Protestant path, she, too, was moved to collaborate with her on religious works, in her case at least starting the translation of the gospel of John in *Paraphrases of Erasmus*. E.g., Haugaard, *Religious Convictions*, 349.
salvation could be attained through faith alone.\textsuperscript{122} Katherine’s own education, inspired by Thomas More’s view of equality of education for both sexes, also creates the possibility that she applied the same concept to her two youngest stepchildren, undercutting Dowling’s diminishment of her role.

Dowling’s criticism of Katherine’s intellect, or desire to pursue matters of intellect, seems misplaced. Katherine was, of course, the author of four books, and the first woman published in England under her own name. Her support of Udall and the massive project to translate Erasmus’s work provide further tangible support for her commitment to scholarship and ideas. All of the sources praise her support of intellectual matters and study.

Dowling’s argument for an anti-intellectual streak is based on the letter Katherine wrote to Cambridge University on February 26, 1546. As explained above, however, the letter not only refutes Dowling’s conclusion but also demonstrates Katherine’s likely conversion to at least some Protestant ideals and her growing confidence in her own position. Katherine’s letter reflects a lively intelligence, not an inability to exercise it.

Finally, while Dowling attributes the plot related by Foxe to a larger scheme to discredit the husbands of Katherine’s ladies-in-waiting, that is somewhat of a stretch. If Foxe’s account has any truth to it, if anything it demonstrates that Katherine, due to her ideas and influence, posed a threat to their own interests. Their actions even under her theory reflect that they perceived Katherine as a person of influence. Thus, Dowling’s arguments, despite their initial appeal, fall short of definitive analysis.

\textsuperscript{122} This portion of the letter reads “Trusting also that through His incomprehensible love, grace, and mercy she [Marguerite of Navarre], being called from sin to repentance, doth faithfully hope to be saved.” Mueller, \textit{Complete Works}, 85.
Criticism of Dowling’s conclusion aside, the true picture of Katherine’s influence is decidedly mixed, much of it driven by an admiration for her many positive traits. \(^{123}\) The remainder of this paper will review the various ways in which Katherine might have played a role in the English Reformation and the extent to which she actually did so.

**B. Influence on King Henry**

Any review of Katherine’s impact or influence must start with how she affected or changed Henry’s outlook. *Cuius regio eius religio.* \(^{124}\) At the time of their marriage, Henry had long since separated from Rome and had Parliament declare him the head of the Church in England. Katherine, then married to John Neville/Lord Latimer during these events, played no role in those decisions, and nothing in her writings suggests that she disagreed with them. Henry was the most important individual in the English Reformation during his lifetime. His desire to marry Anne Boleyn had sparked the English Reformation and he continued to exert his views toward the extent of reform through acts of Parliament, the punishment of those who deviated from them, and the publication of the *King’s Book.*

On the question of further reform on issues such as the presence of Christ in the Eucharist or salvation by faith or acts, it is difficult to argue that Katherine caused Henry to depart from his conservative, more Catholic views. From the *King’s Book,* issued only weeks before their marriage, and the prior Six Acts, it can be stated with certainty that Henry held those conservative views from the very beginning of her queenship. By contrast, we have almost nothing in the form of Henry’s words, acts of

---

\(^{123}\) While not stating this explicitly, Starkey cautions that “we must not sentimentalise too much, or exaggerate [K]atherine’s own role.” Starkey, *Six Wives*, 719.

\(^{124}\) Roughly, “the religion of the state is dictated by the ruler of the state.” This reference was provided by Macon Boczek, Ph.D., a retired adjunct professor of religion at Kent State University.
Parliament, or writings, suggesting that his views on any of these issues had changed by the time of his death in 1547. Even the terms of his will were consistent with the views expressed in the King’s Book.\(^\text{125}\)

A.G. Dickens suggested in 1964 that two sets of facts demonstrate that Henry was seriously contemplating a more Lutheran form of Protestantism in the last months of his life.\(^\text{126}\) The first is a report by John Foxe attributed, like the account of Katherine’s arrest, to Thomas Cranmer.\(^\text{127}\) In this report, Henry is said to have proposed to the French Ambassador in late August of 1546 that England and France replace the Mass with a communion ceremony and form a pact with the Holy Roman Empire to remove the pope. The report is subject to some question given the pro-Protestant sources, but it appears possible and even likely that the words were said.\(^\text{128}\) As Lacey Baldwin Smith ably argues, however, his doing so “had little to do with the cure of souls or the state of Henry’s conscience, and much to do with the diplomatic and military welfare of the realm.”\(^\text{129}\) Henry was engaged in the seemingly never-ending negotiations to form power alliances either with or against France or the Holy Roman Empire. Whatever his motives at the time, however, he took no steps to change the Mass in England even though it was fully in his power to do so and, as far as is known, continued to partake in the Mass for the remainder of his life.

The second matter relates to the choices for the regency council for Edward, created in the last weeks of Henry’s life, ones that favored the more Lutheran-leaning Protestants. There is no evidence that Katherine took any part in the selection of the

\(^{125}\) Bernard, The King’s Reformation, 593.

\(^{126}\) Dickens, English Reformation, 195 (as part of the chapter entitled “Signs of Change”).

\(^{127}\) Ibid., 195; Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1251.

\(^{128}\) Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1251.

\(^{129}\) Ibid.
regency council members and she was unable to see Henry in his final weeks. She was clearly bypassed in the decision not to make her queen regent. Lacey Baldwin Smith argues this was not a covert attempt to surround Edward with Protestants but, rather, one of timing. When Henry died, the more liberal advisors were more in his favor and the council might have looked very different if Henry had died a year earlier or a year later depending on who he preferred at the time. During these same last weeks, Henry continued to press the same policies toward religion as he had before.

George Bernard concludes in his account that Henry pursued his own unique view of Christianity largely to the exclusion of others through the end of his life. If the account of John Foxe is believed, Katherine nearly lost her life in the summer of 1546 because of the Protestant views she had pressed on Henry. The continued persecution of more liberal Protestants towards the end of Henry's reign and life further reflects that Katherine had little to no influence on his religious outlook.

C. Influence on Henry’s Children

Beyond Henry himself, however, there are many areas in which Katherine actually or potentially wielded influence. The first of these, and that most often discussed, is that of her relationship with and role in the education and religious development of Henry’s three children. Katherine enjoyed close relationships with Henry’s legitimate offspring and, as noted above, at a minimum traded correspondence with Edward and Elizabeth on matters of scholarship and religion. Advocating for her

\[\text{130 Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1252-1253; see also, Haugh, English Reformations, 166 (arguing the same).}\]

\[\text{131 Bernard, The King’s Reformation, ix, 595, 599-606. This work only mentions Katherine in passing, attributing the events described by John Foxe as further proof of Henry’s determination to follow his own path. Ibid., 592.}\]
influence, James McConica notes that she used “learned pietism” to unite the royal children early in her reign.\footnote{McConica, \textit{English Humanists}, 215.}

1. Influence on Mary

As in the case of Henry, however, Katherine did little to affect Mary’s views. Mary was in her mid-20s by the time of her marriage to Henry, and the two are repeatedly said to have a friendly relationship, but that friendship did not come to mean influence over religious ideas.\footnote{\textit{E.g.}, James, \textit{Kateryn Parr}, 133-34; Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine}, 148.} Mary, not surprising given her mother and family history, held strong Catholic views she would later try to reimpose on the country during her short five-year queenship after Edward’s death (1553-1558). Although Katherine arguably persuaded her to assist in the translation of Erasmus’s \textit{Paraphrases}, a work by a humanist Catholic, this is little basis to argue that Katherine changed many or even any of Mary’s views on religion. Both \textit{Paraphrases of Erasmus} and \textit{Lamentation}, in fact, would be banned under Mary’s rule.\footnote{Pender, \textit{Dispensing Quails}, 42.} The case for influence on Henry’s children must rest on his two Protestant offspring, Edward and Elizabeth.

2. Influence on Edward

Edward is the most difficult of the three to assess. He was but nine when he became king, died when he was only fifteen, and ruled entirely under a regency dominated by Protestants that included his Protestant maternal uncle. Thomas Cranmer was his godfather.\footnote{McConica, \textit{English Humanists}, 213.} Thus, Edward’s immediate circle included strong Protestant influences, making it all but impossible to parse out Katherine’s role. His existing correspondence with Katherine reflects his great affection for her and a shared interest...
in learning, particularly Latin, but contains little material reflecting a preference for either Protestant or Catholic views.

Given the absence of any direct evidence, much of the focus in this arena is on Edward’s education. James McConica describes Katherine as the “creative force” behind the schooling of Edward and for other noble children, a claim that is the frequent target of criticism. As noted above, Dowling disputes that Katherine had either the power or the aptitude to educate Edward or to choose his tutors, even though in hindsight they both turned out to be vocal Protestants. Lacey Baldwin Smith makes the cynical but quite possibly correct observation that given the attention Henry paid to Edward’s upbringing, neither Edward’s tutors nor Katherine would have dared to teach him Protestant tenets for fear of losing their lives.

Still, Katherine would have been the only mother Edward would remember and the two indisputably shared academic interests. Katherine could and likely did lay the foundation for later Protestant ideals and upon Henry’s death she could openly support those ideas to the new young king. Her Protestant views may have made him more receptive to the openly Protestant attitude of the majority of the regency council members. The conclusion is that the pieces were there for Katherine to have influenced Edward’s outlook, and thus the country’s greater shift to Protestantism during his reign, but the picture will never be clear.

---

136 Ibid., 215-218, see also, Kujawa-Holbrook, “Reformed Religion,” 74 (concluding that while Henry had the final say in Edward’s education, she still played a key role).
137 Dowling, The Gospel, 61; Lacey Baldwin Smith also expresses doubt that they would have dared express Protestant views to the young prince for fear of their lives. Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1243-1248.
138 Baldwin Smith, “Protestant Triumph,” 1246-1250. While William Haugaard credits Katherine with choosing Edward’s tutors, he also notes that they were likely influencing her as well. Haugaard, Religious Convictions, 351.
3. Influence on Elizabeth

The case for influence on the far longer serving Elizabeth is much easier. David Starkey observes that “if [K]atherine had a legacy, it was Elizabeth herself.” Like Edward, Katherine would be the only mother Elizabeth would have remembered. William Haugaard notes that Katherine acted as Elizabeth’s stepmother for her early teen years, from ages ten to fifteen, and would have been her role model on a host of matters at an important time in her formation. These would have included religious matters, as shown by Elizabeth’s translations of religious works, as well as how to behave as queen. Notably, Elizabeth’s only two known written religious works were both undertaken for Katherine.

Katherine had also played a critical role in persuading Henry to restore Elizabeth to the line of succession, a particularly important one as at Edward’s death Henry’s views on succession (Mary and Elizabeth) would triumph over Edward’s deathbed preference for Lady Jane Grey. Katherine would have been in a special place of influence for she acted as Elizabeth’s stepmother for another year after Henry’s death. Even when Elizabeth was sent away from Katherine’s home due to rumored sexual misconduct between her and Thomas Seymour, Elizabeth’s correspondence reflects a continued strong relationship and Katherine arranged for her to be taught by Protestant tutors.

---

141 Susan James explicitly makes this point that Elizabeth employed the strategies used by Parr in her own queenship. James, *Kateryn Parr*, 2. None of the sources used for this paper appear to suggest any other woman who would have served as Elizabeth’s role model as queen.
142 Mueller, *Complete Works*, 171-172; Haugaard, *Religious Convictions*, 347, 348. Haugaard contents that these were drawn from the same circle as those Katherine selected for Edward, but as noted above, that matter is hotly contested by other scholars.
Katherine similarly influenced Elizabeth’s future advisors. William Cecil, First Baron Burghley, wrote a laudatory “prefatory letter” used as a preface to *Lamentation.* Queen Elizabeth showed her strong support of Protestantism by appointing him to her council shortly after her accession, and he would remain her chief advisor for most of her reign. Cecil’s extended comments about *Lamentation* and Elizabeth’s placing him in such a prominent role both suggest that his admiration for Katherine’s work could have made its way into formal policy and that Elizabeth shared many of the same views. Thus, Katherine influenced Elizabeth’s religious outlook both directly and indirectly.

**D. Influence on Others**

Katherine’s potential influence was not limited to members of the royal family. Don Matzat points out that her support of Cranmer likely emboldened him after Henry’s death to push for more Lutheran views with Edward. This may be true, but there is little in Cranmer’s writings to buttress that claim, nor would that be expected given that he was a male archbishop, and she was a woman and not a cleric at all.

Katherine, of course, published multiple works in English that not only drew a large lay readership but in and of themselves would have increased interest in religious scholarship among those who did not read or speak Latin. Katherine’s work helped to create a body of English-language religious material to be used and studied by others. In that regard, while theologically neutral, *Prayers or Meditations* may have had the widest influence of her own four books based on its popularity and use of English.

---

143 Mueller, *Complete Works,* 443-446.
145 Matzat, *Katherine Parr,* 152.
While the level of her participation in the translation of *Paraphrases of Erasmus* can be disputed, there is no question that she was its enthusiastic patron. Nicholas Udall in his dedication took pains to praise every aspect of her involvement,\(^{146}\) and at least some historians credit her with being actively involved in the translation of text. As noted above, this was an extensive work requiring the recruitment and management of translators, editors, and printers, all of whom would have been aware of her role, in contact with her, and beholden to her.\(^{147}\) Coupled with *Prayers or Meditations* and *Lamentation*, the work would have increased Katherine’s reputation as a scholar and writer. As Pender points out, by sponsoring the project, Katherine wielded considerable influence over other religious writers.\(^{148}\)

That influence may have extended to music, as well as to those who heard it. It was recently discovered that portions of Katherine’s Psalms or Prayers was set to music by court composer Thomas Tallis. David Skinner raises the intriguing possibility that Tallis did so with Henry’s blessing as part of an English-language religious proceeding designed to drum up public support for his impending French invasion.\(^{149}\) If so, Katherine’s words would have come to countless English citizens in the form of song.

The Erasmus translation work itself was influential as Edward and Elizabeth both had copies placed in all churches in England.\(^{150}\) This not only made the work read (or required reading) for a large portion of the clergy but doing so reflected Edward and

---

\(^{146}\) Mueller, *Complete Works*, 151-156.

\(^{147}\) James, *Kateryn Parr*, 3, 227-229.

\(^{148}\) Pender, *Dispensing Quails*, 42.

\(^{149}\) Skinner, “‘Deliuer Me from My Deceytfull Ennemies’: a Tallis Contrafactum in Time of War,” *Early Music*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 2016), pp. 233-250. The music was intended for a religious service written by Cranmer supporting the war and its inclusion was no doubt helped by the line that became the title. *Ibid.*, 244.

\(^{150}\) Pender, *Dispensing Quails*, 42.
Elizabeth’s confidence in the work done by their stepmother. Given the lesser role of *Lamentation*, it also suggests that the influence of her writings on the Erasmian goal of making English language texts more available likely surpassed that of promoting Lutheran tenets.

Lastly, Katherine’s influence can be inferred from the actions of her enemies, as told, likely with embellishment, by John Foxe. To the extent his account may be believed, the conservative factions in court viewed her as a genuine threat to their interests. They conspired against her precisely because they recognized her as a person of influence and wanted that influence to stop.

**Conclusion**

In many respects, Katherine Parr’s experience paralleled that of many others during the early stages of the English Reformation, beginning life as a Roman Catholic, accepting Henry VIII’s declaring himself Supreme Head of the Church in England, adopting Erasmian ideals, and then developing more Lutheran views of Christianity.

But Katherine was not simply one of many English subjects affected by changes in religious views; she became a catalyst herself for change. She altered the course of English history by persuading Henry VIII to restore Mary and Elizabeth to the succession. Through her patronage of others, and in particular Nicholas Udall’s Erasmus’s translation project, she became a strong force in favor of making religious works available in a language those other than scholars could understand. In her role as stepmother, she may have been a Protestant influence on Edward and certainly was one on Elizabeth. Katherine’s influence can be seen from the number of prominent English Reformation characters whose lives she touched and from the policies Elizabeth initiated from the very beginning of her reign.
Bibliography

Key sources are noted with an asterisk (*).

Books


Periodicals


Music