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The English Reformation in Wittenberg: Luther and Melanchthon's engagement with religious change in England 1521–1560

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Abstract

Historians have long been puzzled by the character of the English Reformation, but how did contemporaries view it? This article explores the reception of the English Reformation in Wittenberg, focusing on the reactions of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon as revealed by their correspondence. Luther and Melanchthon's responses to events in England in this period show that they were generally well-informed. Although the Wittenberg Reformers cherished hopes of winning England for the Protestant cause, the theological ambiguity of the Henrician Reformation represented a real barrier to England's negotiations with the Schmalkaldic League. The executions of Thomas More, Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell caused the Wittenberg Reformers to regard Henry VIII with increasing suspicion. Developments during Edward's reign, however, made the English Reformation recognisable as part of the wider movement, and Melanchthon advised that English exiles in German territories should be treated as fellow believers.

Key words

Martin Luther – Philip Melanchthon – Henrician Reformation – English Reformation – Robert Barnes – Henry VIII – Alexander Alesius – Schmalkaldic League

The English Reformation in Wittenberg: Luther, Melanchthon and religious change in England*

Charlotte Methuen

Introduction

The historiography of the early English Reformation has long struggled to define what kind of phenomenon it was. While the Edwardian Reformation is generally recognised to have been unambiguously Protestant, Richard Rex has commented of the Henrician reform that it was ‘a folly to Catholics and a stumbling block to Protestants’.¹ As Diarmaid MacCulloch, remarks: ‘[Henry VIII’s] Church has often been called “Catholicism without the pope” [but] recent scholars have seen it more as “Lutheranism without justification by faith”, for the king never accepted this central doctrine of the Reformation.’² Historians continue to disagree about the extent to which Henry’s reforms of the church were influenced by reforms in Germany, and whether the changes to the church under his leadership can be considered a Reformation at all.³ This paper shifts the focus to ask how Henry’s contemporaries in the Holy Roman Empire viewed events in England. What did Martin Luther (1483–1546), Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and their reforming colleagues make of the Henrician reform, and, in Melanchthon’s case, subsequent developments in the English Reformation?

* The question underlying this article emerged from a commissioned contribution on Melanchthon and England; I am grateful to Günther Frank for his original invitation. The current article has benefitted immensely from the insights of Jonathan Birch, Ian Hazlett, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Andrew Spicer and two anonymous reviewers, and from feedback given by attendees at the 2017 conference of the Society for Reformation Studies, ‘Luther Received – Luther Abroad’, and at the 2017 Luther Congress. My research also profited from the access to two marvellous German libraries provided by an Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung Fellowship held at the University of Tübingen in autumn 2017, and a Senior Fellowship held at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel in spring 2018.

¹ Rex, “Crisis of Obedience,” 894.

² MacCulloch, “English Reformation,” 78, citing Marshall, mediated by Ryrie, “Strange Death,” 67. Compare also Marshall, *Reformation England*, 26–7.

³ For an insightful overview of recent English-language historiography of the English Reformation, see MacCulloch, “Changing Historical Perspectives.” Ian Hazlett (“Impact,” 86) observes that the German-language literature has tended to neglect the English Reformation: ‘Many German writers ... have never been convinced that the English Reformation was a real one.’ Hazlett offers a brief but useful survey of German approaches to the English Reformation: *Ibid.*, 86–8.

Remarkably, this is a question which has been largely neglected by previous scholarship, which has focused on the influence of Luther, and to some extent Melancthon, in England, and on the diplomatic relations between England and the Schmalkaldic League. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie's observation in 2002 that 'English Protestantism's international context is a subject which awaits its modern historian,'⁴ remains largely true. It is well known that Luther and Henry VIII (1491–1547, r. 1509) crossed swords in 1521 over the publication of Henry's *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, a response to Luther's *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520), which defended papal authority, and the seven sacraments. In recognition of his contribution to the refutation of the Lutheran heresy, Leo X (1475–1521, r. 1513) conferred on Henry the title *defensor fidei* [defender of the faith], which is still used by the British monarch. Nearly sixty years ago, the complex relationship between Henry VIII and Luther was discussed in Erwin Doernberg's study of Henry's *Assertio*, Luther's *Apology*, and the embassy and delegation on 1535/6 and 1539.⁵ More recently, Dorothea Wendebourg has considered "The German Reformers and England," but her focus too is primarily on Luther's relationship to Henry VIII, although she also highlights his important friendship with Robert Barnes (1495–1540). There is a general consensus amongst historians of the Henrician Reformation that, when Henry started to consider reforms of the church in the late 1520s, and to introduce changes in the 1530s, despite the mutual antagonism between him and Luther it was the Lutheran strain of the Reformation that initially proved most influential.⁶ As Alec Ryrie has observed, 'during Henry's reign the dominant strain of English evangelicalism was broadly Lutheran in its doctrine.'⁷ Moreover, even though, as MacCulloch has put it, the 'the thought of the English reformers repeatedly displayed certain key themes which clashed with Lutheran theology' (specifically its emphasis on moral law, its dislike of images and shrines, and its scepticism about Eucharistic real presence),⁸ it is clear that both before and after the break with the papacy in 1534, Luther's name was synonymous in England with reform, a term initially of opprobrium and later of at least moderate approval.

⁴ Marshall and Ryrie, "Introduction," 10.

⁵ Doernberg, *Henry VIII*.

⁶ See for instance, Hall, "Early Rise and Gradual Decline"; Hazlett, "Impact"; Ryrie, "Strange Death".

⁷ Ryrie, "Strange Death," 68.

⁸ MacCulloch, 'English Protestantism and the Continent', 4.

Less well appreciated has been the reception of Luther's Wittenberg colleague Philip Melanchthon in England.⁹ Melanchthon's name was early associated with Luther's by both detractors and supporters of reforming ideas.¹⁰ However, Melanchthon had not only theological interests but also humanist credentials which were of much broader interest. His *Loci communes*, the theological treatise he published in 1521, was often found in English libraries; his works of rhetoric and dialectics were even more popular.¹¹ His renown as a Humanist and his reputation as a mediator drew Henry VIII's attention, and the king issued several invitations to Melanchthon to come to England to advise on the reforms. As one of the most notable humanist scholars of his generation, Melanchthon received many such invitations (at one stage in the early 1530s he simultaneously held offers of posts from Henry VIII, King Francis I of France, with whom Henry VIII saw himself in competition, and Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, his home territory¹²), none of which he was accepted, whether from personal commitment to Wittenberg as the centre of the Reformation or because the Elector of Saxony would not allow him to accept. However, in 1535 he dedicated the second edition of the *Loci communes* to Henry VIII, and he was closely involved in the theological negotiations between an English delegation and the Schmalkaldic League in winter 1535/6. Henry was disappointed and angry that Melanchthon did not accept any of his invitations, particularly in 1538 and 1539, when the Schmalkaldic League's return embassy and delegation to England did not include Melanchthon.¹³

⁹ Melanchthon's relations to England and to Henry VIII are considered by Kohnle, "Bündnisverhandlungen"; Schofield, *Melanchthon*; Methuen, "England."

¹⁰ As observed by Kusakawa, "Reception," 234; Wischmeyer, "Übersetzung und Kontaktaufnahme," 304. It is apparent from the Privy Council papers that ownership of theological works by Melanchthon was taken to indicate evangelical sympathies. Initially, this was seen negatively, as a ground for prosecution. By 1535, as the religious mood of England changed, Melanchthon was being cited as an exemplar of evangelical doctrine. Later, possession of his works once more became a ground for suspicion. See Methuen, "England," 662, 676.

¹¹ Based on book lists dating to the period between 1535 and 1576, Kusakawa has found that, 'at Cambridge, after the Bible (which 88% of the library owners owned), the six most frequently found authors ... were Erasmus, Cicero, Aristotle and Melanchthon, closely followed by Virgil and Augustine.' In Oxford, in contrast, works by Melanchthon, Luther, Bucer and Calvin all occurred less frequently than those of Erasmus, Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, Terence, Augustine and Horace. Kusakawa, "Reception," 243-4; compare Wischmeyer, "Übersetzung und Kontaktaufnahme," 305.

¹² Methuen, "England," 665-666.

¹³ See McEntegart, *Henry VIII*; Methuen, "England"; Schofield, *Melanchthon*.

The embassy and the subsequent delegation have received some attention. Friedrich Prüser's study of *England und die Schmalkalder* concluded that Henry VIII's interest in the Schmalkaldic League was related to his relationship to the Emperor: at times when he had friendly relations to Charles V, Henry had little interest in the Schmalkaldic League; when he was at odds with the Habsburgs, he gravitated towards the League.¹⁴ More recently, Rory McEntegart has shown that five of the six theological points made in the Act of Six Articles – that is, all except the reiteration of transubstantiation – were precisely those over which the embassy and delegation had failed to agree.¹⁵ McEntegart's focus, however, is on the English perspective, and he shows little understanding of the importance of theological consensus in establishing the Schmalkaldic League.

This article examines the German Reformers' response to the diplomatic negotiations with England. These negotiations took place at key points in Henry's reign: the death of Katharine of Aragon (1485–1536) in January 1536, and the drafting and passing of the Act of Six Articles in June 1539. How were these received in Wittenberg, and what impression did they give of the English church? Between 1535 and at least 1540, there was regular contact between England and Wittenberg via these official embassies. In addition, Luther and Melanchthon corresponded with Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, and with Henry VIII himself. Perhaps more reliably, English and Scottish contacts passed on news of developments in England to Luther and Melanchthon and offered their interpretations of events. The most prolific correspondents were Robert Barnes (known in Wittenberg as Dr Antonius) and the Scot Alexander Alesius (1500–1565), both of whom corresponded with Melanchthon after they left Wittenberg for England, but Melanchthon also had occasional contact to Nicholas Heath (1501–1578), who had been a member of the English embassy. Moreover, Luther and Melanchthon passed on what they heard to other correspondents, often adding their own comments on English events. Focusing on the period from the mid-1530s, when the Act of Supremacy removed England from papal jurisdiction, to 1547, when Henry VIII died, with a coda exploring the period until Philip Melanchthon's death in 1560, this article draws primarily on this correspondence of Luther and Melanchthon – including letters newly edited (and in some cases newly discovered) in *Melanchthons Briefwechsel* – to show how the Henrician Reformation and subsequent developments in England were perceived by the Wittenberg Reformers.

¹⁴ Prüser, *England und die Schmalkaldener*, 290.

¹⁵ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 60–1, 159–62.

Luther, Henry VIII and the sacraments

Luther's initial encounter with Henry VIII was in the context of their disagreement over the sacraments. Luther published *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae* in 1520, in which he argued that there were only two dominical sacraments. He was quickly made aware of Henry VIII's *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, to which he offered a robust response in 1522;¹⁶ he was also annoyed by the conferring of the title 'Defender of the Faith' (*defensor fidei*) by Pope Leo X on Henry in October 1521. In January 1524, Luther wrote acerbically to Georg Spalatin, or Burkhardt (1484–1545), secretary to the Saxon Elector Friedrich III (1463–1525, r. 1486), associating Henry VIII with Johannes Eck (1486–1543), with whom he had disputed at Leipzig in 1519:

Eck is not worth answering; this is not only my opinion but that of everyone else as well. ... The King of England, the 'Defender of the Church', is worthy of such a defender; and [Hieronymus] Emser in turn is the right defender for Eck. Let them therefore protect each other.¹⁷

However, in 1525, King Christian II of Denmark (1481–1559, r. 1520–21), who was living in exile in Wittenberg, with what Gordon Rupp described as his 'customary and well-intentioned tactlessness', told Elector Friedrich that Henry was 'growing more inclined to the Gospel.'¹⁸ This prompted Spalatin to encourage Luther to write to Henry VIII.¹⁹ Luther's letter was not well received by Henry, not least because Luther had mistakenly understood the king to be at odds with Cardinal Wolsey (1473–1530), whom he described as 'that monster, publicly hated

¹⁶ The *Contra Henricum regem Angliae* was translated into German and published in 1522 in three Latin and five German editions: see WA 10/2, 175–222 (Latin); 223–62 (German).

¹⁷ Luther to Georg Spalatin, 14 January 1524: LW 49, 71; WABr 3, 234 (no. 705). For a list of Eck's writings against Luther, see Bagchi, *Luther's earliest opponents*, 273–4. Hieronymus Emser was another opponent of Luther, who published a revised German translation of the New Testament, which sought to correct what he saw as Luther's errors; see Methuen, 'Language and Theology,' 155–6.

¹⁸ Rupp, *English Protestant Tradition*, 91.

¹⁹ Luther to Henry VIII, 1 September 1525: WABr 3, 562–5 (no. 914), and see also Luther, *Antwort*. Luther's letter was translated into English and published together with Henry's reply and a treatise claiming that he had retracted his theological teachings, as *Answer unto a certaine letter of Martyn L[u]ther*; this particularly annoyed Luther: Rupp, *English Protestant Tradition*, 91. For the context of Luther's *Antwort*, see Wendebourg, "Die Deutschen Reformatoren," 56–63 [ET: 98–104].

by God and man ... that pestilence of your realm.²⁰ Henry's reply in autumn 1526 in turn displeased Luther,²¹ as he complained to Wenceslaus Link (1483–1547) in January 1527:

Persuaded by the King of Denmark, I wrote a suppliant and humble letter to the King of England; I certainly had high hope and [wrote] with a guileless and candid heart. He has answered me with such hostility that he sounds just like Duke George, and as if he rejoiced in the opportunity to have his revenge. These tyrants have such weak, unmanly, and totally sordid characters that they are worthy of serving the rabble. But thanks be to Christ, I am sufficiently avenged, for I disdain them and their god, who is Satan, and this is my joy.²²

During the 1520s, then, Luther found no reason to be sympathetic to Henry VIII. Rather, as a Catholic king, opposed to Luther's evangelical theology, he could be condemned outright.

Perceptions of England and the break from Rome

Nonetheless, by February 1530 it was apparent to observers in Wittenberg that church policies were changing in England. Luther heard of the fall of Wolsey in autumn 1529: Wolsey was indicted for praemunire on 9 October, surrendered his seal of office to the King on 18 October and ceded his property soon afterwards.²³ Writing to Nicholas Hausmann (1478/9–1538), Luther passed on the rumour that Wolsey was under arrest:

Everywhere the ungodly papists are caught in troubles; still they do not repent. England is admitting the gospel while the King looks the other way. The Cardinal, that demigod of England, even of Europe, has been sentenced to life imprisonment. In France and Spain the Word is also beginning to spring forth.²⁴

Luther's perception that the gospel was succeeding in England despite Henry, rather than because of him, would characterise his attitude to subsequent events in England. He never entirely trusted Henry VIII's commitment to reform.

²⁰ Luther to Henry VIII, 1 September 1525: WABr 3, 563; cf. Henry VIII, *Answers*, Ax^r [unnumbered page].

²¹ Henry VIII to Luther Sept/Oct 1526: WABr 4, 125–6 (no. 1046).

²² Luther to Wenceslaus Link, 1 January 1527: LW 49, 71; WABr 4.147–8 (no. 1065). Duke George of Saxony (1471–1539, r. 1500) resisted Luther's teachings and in 1523 had Luther's German translation of the New Testament and other writings confiscated and burned.

²³ For the complexities of Wolsey's fall from grace, see Ives, "Fall of Wolsey."

²⁴ Luther to Nicholas Hausmann, February 1530: LW 49, 264; WABr 5.237 (no. 1527).

In 1530, however, at the suggestion of Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556; Archbishop of Canterbury 1533–1555), the Wittenberg theologians were drawn into the consultation on King’s Great Matter: his proposed divorce from Katharine of Aragon and his marriage to Anne Boleyn (1501/07–1536). Robert Barnes, who was already in Wittenberg having fled England under suspicion of heresy, was nevertheless directed to seek Luther’s opinion.²⁵ Luther was not minded to approve, as he wrote to Barnes in September 1531:

[T]he King, if he has sinned by marrying his deceased brother’s wife, has sinned against a man-made law, or a law of the state. If he would divorce the Queen, however, he would indeed sin against the divine law.²⁶

Even if the original marriage had been a sin, it would, Luther thought, ‘be a heavier and more dreadful sin [for the King] to divorce the woman he had married’ and to condemn her and her daughter to the charge of incest.²⁷ Henry’s attempts to secure a divorce did not incline Luther to view the king as an ally for the evangelical cause.

By spring 1534, however, news was reaching Wittenberg of a change in English attitudes. In March, Melanchthon wrote to his friend Friedrich Myconius (1490–1546), pastor and Reformer in Gotha, reporting that ‘the king of England has published articles against the Pope denying his authority, and summoning him to a Council (*synodum*).’²⁸ On 3 November 1534, the Act of Supremacy was passed by the English Parliament: ‘An Act concerning the King’s Highness to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, and to have Authority to reform and redress all Errors, Heresies and Abuses in the same’ (26 Hen. VIII c. 1).²⁹ It is not clear when Luther and Melanchthon learned of this development, but in March 1535 Melanchthon commented to his friend Joachim Camerarius (1500–1574), that Henry, having married Anne Boleyn, ‘cares nothing about Church matters,’ although ‘no cruelty is exercised

²⁵ Chapman, “Martin Luther,” 9 [pdf download], citing Doernberg, *Henry VIII*, 84–93; Beiergröblein, *Robert Barnes*, 46–59.

²⁶ Luther to Robert Barnes, 3 September 1531: LW 50, 27–41, quotation at 35; WABr 6, 178–2 (no. 1861a), quotation at 179.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: LW 50, 33; WABr 6, 178.

²⁸ Melanchthon to Friedrich Myconius, 12 March 1534: and compare also Melanchthon to Camerarius, 17 March 1534: MBW R2, 128, 129–30; T6, 63, 69–70 (nos 1419, 1421); cf. CR 2, col. 708–9 (nos 1173, 1174); LP 7, 136, 137 (nos 318, 321). It is unclear to what ‘articles’ Melanchthon is here referring.

²⁹ Bray, *Documents*, 113–14.

against those who are zealous for better doctrine.’³⁰ Two days later, Melanchthon wrote directly to Henry, praising the situation of ‘letters’ – the liberal arts – in England, affirming that England had ‘never before produced so many men of genius’, expressing his hope that the king would ‘use his influence for good, as certain abuses have crept into the Church’, and stressing the need for ‘a simple and certain form of doctrine’, supported by the monarch.³¹ The tone of this letter was reflected in his dedicatory epistle in the 1535 edition of the *Loci communes*, also written at about this time, which praised Henry’s knowledge of scripture, his love of philosophy, his just rule, his care for peace, his piety and his study of the Christian religion.³² In Henry’s kingdom, affirmed Melanchthon, ‘there is no cruelty exercised against good men who are zealous for purer doctrine.’ He suggested that Henry could serve as a model for ‘all those wise and good princes ... who seek to leave the Church settled and tranquil for their descendants.’³³ Melanchthon’s hope was probably to persuade the king of ‘the importance of the purity of doctrine’ as Kusukawa suggests,³⁴ but he was also anxious to achieve a peaceful religious settlement across Europe. He sent copies of the revised *Loci communes* for the king and Cranmer to England with the Scot Alexander Alesius, who, sensing a change in religious attitudes was moving there from Wittenberg, and whom Melanchthon warmly recommended to Cranmer.³⁵ In October, in a response over which, Melanchthon wrote, ‘many have rejoiced,’³⁶ Henry greeted Melanchthon as ‘*sacrae theologiae professori eximio amicoque nostro plurimum dilecto*’ [professor of sacred

³⁰ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 11 March 1535: MBW R2, 178; T6, 322 (no. 1551); cf. CR 2, col. 860–1 (no. 1263); LP 8, 150 (no. 375). For the date of Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn in November 1532 and/or January 1533, see MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 637–8.

³¹ Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 13 March 1535: MBW R2, 178; T6, 323–8 (no. 1552); cf. CR 2, col. 861–4 (no. 1264); LP 8, 152 (no. 384).

³² CR 2, col. 927–8; CR 21, col. 339; cf. LP 9, 74 (no. 223), but see also the very brief summary in LP 9, 368 (no. 1068). The editors of LP do not appear to have realized that these relate to the same text.

³³ CR 2, col. 928, 923; CR 21, col. 339–40, 335; cf. LP 9, 74 (no. 223). See also Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 61–3.

³⁴ Kusukawa, “Reception,” 236.

³⁵ Melanchthon to Henry VIII and Melanchthon to Cranmer, August 1535, MBW R2, 198; T6, 420–4 (nos 1606, 1607); cf. CR 2, col. 919–20 (no. 1310) and LP 9, 930–1 (no. 1312); cf. LP 9, 74 (nos 224, 225). Very few letters between Cranmer and either Luther or Melanchthon survive.

³⁶ Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 1 December 1535, MBW R2, 221–2; T6, 514–56 (no. 1668); cf. CR 2, col. 995–7 (no. 1368); LP 9, 311 (no. 918).

theology, esteemed friend and dearly beloved], acknowledged his letters, thanked him for the dedication of the revised *Loci communes*, and expressed the hope that Melanchthon could be persuaded to come to England to advise on church matters.³⁷

However, both Luther and Melanchthon were well aware of the tragic consequences that could befall those who opposed Henry. On 6 July 1535, Thomas More had been executed. By the end of August, Melanchthon had heard the news. He wrote to Camerarius: ‘This year is fatal to men of our stamp. I hear that More has been put to death, and others. I too am in great danger. The hatred partly showed itself in the French business.’³⁸ Although More had not been a Reformer, he was a notable Humanist, and his primary crime had been to protest against the king’s divorce, a position with which both Luther and Melanchthon were in agreement.³⁹ Months later Melanchthon remained, as he confessed to Camerarius, ‘affected by More’s fate.’⁴⁰ What were he and Luther to make of this king who rejected papal authority and yet had one of England’s leading Humanists executed?

English Theology and the Schmalkaldic League

Peter Marshall has suggested that in the Act of Supremacy ‘many saw a merely jurisdictional change, which would not affect the firm Catholic faith of the King and the great mass of his subjects’ while ‘others, probably a minority, held that to repudiate the Holy Father was itself a heretical act.’⁴¹ For the observers in Wittenberg, however, repudiation of papal authority was

³⁷ Henry VIII to Melanchthon, 1 October 1535: MBW R2, 209; T6, 465–6 (no. 1637); cf. CR 2, col. 947–8 (no. 1335); LP 9, 166 (no. 508).

³⁸ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 31 August 1535: MBW R2, 202; T6, 440 (no. 1616); cf. CR 2, col. 918 (no. 1309); LP 9, 74 (no. 222). The ‘French business’ is presumably a reference to the *Affaire des Placards* and the executions that had followed it in late 1534.

³⁹ Similarly, in April 1537, Melanchthon sought help for an Englishman exiled on account of his protest against Henry VIII’s divorce, commenting ‘His exile is long, his misfortune long, and he seems a modest man.’ Melanchthon to Veit Dietrich (Vitus Theodorus), 6 April 1537: MBW R2, 309; T7, 413 (no. 1881); cf. CR 3, col. 335 (no. 1553); LP 12/1, 374 (no. 845). However, by the time Melanchthon came to write his *Oratio de Erasmi Roterdamo* in 1557 (CR 12, cols 265–71) he seems no longer to have viewed More as one of the “men of our stamp” (*homines aulicis*): although Melanchthon offers an account of Erasmus’s time in England (CR 12 col. 267), he does not mention More by name. I am grateful to Dr Asaph Ben-Tov for this point.

⁴⁰ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 22 December 1535, MBW R2, 226–7; T6, 546 (no. 1678); cf. CR 2, col. 1027–8 (no. 1381); LP 9, 344 (no. 1013).

⁴¹ Marshall, *Reformation England*, 35–6.

not a heretical act, but one that signalled an affinity with the evangelical theology. They assumed – despite Henry’s initial theological antagonism to Luther’s theology of the sacraments – that an introduction of an evangelical-style Reformation would follow this step. This expectation was strengthened when Henry VIII began to petition to be admitted to the League of Schmalkald, at which point even Luther conceded that he might be carrying forward God’s work. In September 1535 he wrote as much to Elector Friedrich’s chancellor, Gregor Brück (1483–1557):

Since the King now also offers to accept the gospel, join the federation of our sovereigns, and permit our *Apologia* to circulate in his kingdom, it seems to me that, if His Royal Majesty would be honorably received into the federation, it would confound the papists with regard to both the council and all [their other] plans. For since all of this is taking place by itself in this way without our seeking it, God may, indeed, intend something which is bigger and better than we are capable of understanding. If God intends graciously to meet us in this way, it is up to us not to let him pass by in ingratitude.⁴²

There can be no doubt that the addition of Henry VIII and England to the ranks of the Schmalkaldic League in the mid-1530s would have been a significant boost to the Reformation cause. The Protestation at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 had been signed by fourteen imperial cities of eighty-six listed in the 1521 *Reichsmatrikel* and by five of the thirty-five secular *Fürstentümer* and *Kurfürstentümer*; the empire also included six (or seven) archbishoprics and forty-five (or forty-seven) bishoprics, each with its own *Hochstift* or territorial lands.⁴³ Although it is not easy to define confessional allegiance in this period,⁴⁴ the period to 1535 had seen evangelical gains, mostly in Northern German cities and territories, including Bremen, Hamburg, Göttingen, Lübeck, and Magdeburg, and the Duchy of Pomerania, but also the Imperial City of Augsburg and the Duchy of Württemberg,⁴⁵ in

⁴² Luther to Gregor Brück, 12/15 September 1535: LW 50, 104; WA 7, 268 (Nr 2241).

⁴³ The cities were Nuremberg, Strasbourg, Ulm, Constance, Rentlingen, Windsheim, Lindau, Kempten, Memmingen, Nordlingen, Heilbronn, Isny, St Gall, and Weissenburg (Frankfurt and Cologne initially joined the Protest but withdrew before it was published); the territories were Electoral Saxony, Hesse, Brandenburg, Lüneburg and Anhalt. For the 1521 *Reichsmatrikel*, see Köbler, *Historisches Lexikon*, xviii.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of these complexities, see Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 112–3.

⁴⁵ Brady, *German histories*, 221. This does not include those cities which followed Zwingli: moreover, although they had signed the Protest, the cities which in 1530 had aligned themselves with

Sweden under Gustav Vasa, and in Denmark under Christian III, who as Duke Christian of Schleswig and Holstein had become an adherent of the Reformation. The political situation of the adherents to the Reformation was still precarious, and the passing of England's Act of Supremacy in 1534 potentially brought a further national ruler into the Reformation camp.

However, the agreement which bound together the members of Schmalkaldic League also represented a loose theological agreement, expressed primarily through assent to the *Confessio Augustana* of 1530. Haug-Moritz has shown the fragility of this theological agreement,⁴⁶ which was exacerbated by the fact that it was due to expire in 1537. In August 1535, Elector Johann Friedrich of Saxony (1503–1554; r. 1532–1547 [as Elector], 1547–1554 [as Duke]) agreed that representatives of the League should meet to negotiate its extension; his condition was that new members of the League should be required to assent to its confessional basis, a proposal to which Landgrave Philipp of Hesse (1504–1567; r. 1514–1567) objected.⁴⁷ Strasbourg's city council and Reformers, in contrast, entered into negotiation and signed the Wittenberg Concord on 28 May 1536.⁴⁸ In December 1536, Luther drafted what came to be known as the Schmalkald articles, intended to form a theological basis for the League, however, they proved unacceptable to Philipp of Hesse, who did not want Saxony's theologians to have the defining theological voice. On 24 February 1537, they were nonetheless signed by the theologians present in Schmalkald for the negotiations of the extended treaty.⁴⁹ In 1535, when Henry VIII began to seek a closer relationship to the League, these intense negotiations as to the confessional basis of the League were at an early stage. Moreover, although Henry VIII had disassociated England from the authority of Rome, the doctrinal situation in the English church was far from clear. Melanchthon affirmed to Martin Bucer in December 1535, 'there is hope of pure doctrine being received and propagated in England,'⁵⁰ but he thought that this hope was not – or not yet – being fulfilled. However, the arrival of Henry VIII's embassy in Wittenberg that winter encouraged both Luther and Melanchthon to believe that the English might 'receive a purer sort of doctrine by

the *Confessio Tetrapolitana* (Constance, Lindau, Memmingen and Strasbourg) were regarded by some members of the Schmalkaldic League as 'Zwinglian'. Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 98–9.

⁴⁶ Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 98–111.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105–6.

⁴⁹ Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 108–11; Führer, *Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel*, 1–17.

⁵⁰ Melanchthon to Bucer, 11 December 1535: MBW R2, 224–5; T6, 531 (no. 1675); cf. CR 10, col. 150 (no. 7129); LP 9, 320 (no. 953).

our example',⁵¹ so that it was important to take Henry's overtures seriously. Moreover, the visit of the papal legate, Paolo Vergerio, to Wittenberg in November 1535 had shown Luther that Rome considered Henry VIII a murderer of the true church, as he wrote to Melanchthon:

It is quite easy for someone who knows what kind of traitors, thieves, robbers, and even devils the most reverend lord cardinals, popes, and their ambassadors are, to have second thoughts. I wish there would be more kings of England who would slay them. For with these words the legate, Paolo Vergerio, answered me here: 'Yea! (I know) the King of England kills cardinals and bishops. But,' etc. Then, gesturing with his hand and gnashing his teeth, he threatened that King with sufferings greater than the emperors ever had experienced before.⁵²

It remained to be seen however, whether an enemy of the papacy was necessarily a friend of the Wittenberg cause. Luther had already discovered the intransigence of theological difference in his conflicts with Erasmus and Zwingli. Henry's embassy to the Schmalkaldic League would be received by the Saxon diplomats and Wittenberg theologians, but it would be received with caution.

The embassy was assembled by Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell in September 1535. Its leader was Edward Foxe, since 1528 Provost of King's College Cambridge, since 1531 Archdeacon of Leicester and since 1533 concurrently Archdeacon of Dorset, who that same month was made Bishop of Hereford.⁵³ Foxe's deputy was Nicholas Heath, the Archdeacon of Stafford. They were directed to meet the embassy's remaining two members in Germany: the German-English diplomat Christopher Mont (1496/7–1572), and Robert Barnes.⁵⁴ The embassy's primary aim was to seek recognition of Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn.⁵⁵ Foxe was also charged to negotiate with Melanchthon and to deliver to him a gift of '300 cr. or £70' from the king.⁵⁶ The embassy arrived in Saxony in early December,

⁵¹ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 22 December 1535: MBW R2, 226–7; T6, 546 (no. 1678); cf. CR 2, col. 1027–8 (no. 1381); LP 9, 344 (no. 1013).

⁵² Luther to Melanchthon, December 1535: LW 50, 115; WA 7, 330–1 (no. 2276). For Vergerio's visit to Wittenberg, see Reinhardt, *Luther der Ketzer*, 282–90 (from Vergerio's perspective); 290–4 (from Luther's).

⁵³ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 31–2.

⁵⁴ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 32–3.

⁵⁵ The instructions issued to Foxe and the other members of the embassy can be found at LP 9, 69–71 (no. 213).

⁵⁶ LP 9, 72–3 (nos 217, 219).

although it was not until mid-January that Melanchthon was finally deputed to engage in theological disputation with its members.⁵⁷ Luther expected the discussions to take three days; they lasted nearly three months. Before they began, Luther wrote to Elector Johann Friedrich confirming his position on the divorce:

Your Electoral Grace will certainly find out that I shall not let myself be talked into publicly condemning the Queen and the young Queen, together with the whole kingdom, as being incestuous, as they brag that the Pope and eleven universities have already done. I will not get mixed up with their incest business.⁵⁸

He remained uncertain as to the real intentions of the embassy, promising Johann Friedrich: 'I will not discuss my opinions casually, just as the English, too, are not committing themselves.'⁵⁹

The embassy's primary aim of achieving a settlement over the divorce came into sharp focus with the death of Katharine of Aragon on 7 January 1536. By 19 January, the news had reached Wittenberg; Luther conveyed it to Caspar Müller:

For the Queen is dead; it is also said that the child, her daughter is deathly ill. In the eyes of the whole world she has lost her case; we poor beggars, the theologians at Wittenberg, are the only exceptions who would like to maintain her in royal honor, where she should have stayed.⁶⁰

However, he remained uncertain about both the implications of the events in England and Henry VIII's position:

In this case the Pope has acted like a real pope, and has issued contradictory bulls. He has played such a game that it served him right to be ousted from England – and not even for the sake of the gospel. He has played his game well against the King, so that I am forced to stand up for the King, and yet I am unable to approve of the matter.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Luther advised Elector Johann Friedrich, who would rather have refused the application, that Melanchthon should be allowed to take part. See Elector Johann Friedrich to Luther, 9 January 1536: WABr 7, 340–1 (no. 2282); CR 3, col. 10–1 (no. 1387); LP 10, 23 (no. 63). Luther to Johann Friedrich, 11 January 1536: WABr 7, 341–3 (no. 2283); LP 10, 29 (no. 81).

⁵⁸ Luther to Elector Johann Friedrich, 11 January 1536: LW 50, 117–22, quotation at 121; WA 7, 342–3 (no. 2283), quotation at 342.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: LW 50, 121; WA 7, 342–3.

⁶⁰ Luther to Caspar Müller, 19 January 1536: LW 50, 124–30, quotation at 127; WA 7, 348–50 (no. 2287), quotation at 349.

⁶¹ Ibid.: LW 50, 127; WA 7, 349.

In these changed circumstances, discussions of the divorce continued, for the legitimacy of the young princess Elizabeth depended on her parents' marriage being recognised.⁶²

McEntegart has detailed the difficulties encountered by the theological discussions.⁶³ Melancthon was at times not unhopeful of the outcome: although he found that 'the English bishop does not seem to like the German philosophy,'⁶⁴ he also affirmed that the embassy's members 'do not seem averse to a study of purer doctrine,'⁶⁵ and felt that progress had been made. However, by the end of March discussions had stalled. 'Everybody thinks the English ambassadors are stopping here too long,' he wrote to Camerarius. Moreover, the outcome was not conclusive, and 'no slight differences' remained.⁶⁶ The negotiations resulted in the so-called 'Wittenberg Articles', seventeen articles which drew heavily and explicitly on the *Confessio Augustana*, commenting on all but five of its twenty-eight articles.⁶⁷ They show, as Mentz observes, the extent of the concessions that the Wittenbergers would have been prepared to make to achieve a treaty with England.⁶⁸ They included articles dealing with private masses, clerical marriage, monastic vows, and the reception of communion in both kinds, although all involved were aware that agreement had not been reached in these areas.⁶⁹

This awareness reflected the restrictions placed on the English ambassadors. While they emphasised Henry's wish to support 'a right reformation of the Church' (*iusta ecclesiae reformatio*) and affirmed 'the honour conferred [by the League] upon him above all other princes by calling him to be the protector of their religion,' they were anxious not to go

⁶² McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 38–44.

⁶³ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 45–61, especially 55–8.

⁶⁴ Melancthon to Veit Dietrich, 9 March 1536: MBW R2, 240; T7, 70 (no. 1707); cf. CR 3, col. 44–5 (no. 1405); LP 10, 180 (no. 447).

⁶⁵ Melancthon to George of Anhalt, 10 March 1536: MBW R2, 240–1; T7, 71 (no. 1708); CR 3, col. 45 (no. 1406); LP 10, 181 (no. 448).

⁶⁶ Melancthon to Camerarius, 29 March 1536: MBW R2, 242–3; T7, 79 (no. 1714); cf. CR 3, col. 52–3 (no. 1409); LP 10, 230 (no. 584).

⁶⁷ The Wittenberg Articles drew heavily on the *Confessio Augustana*. The only extant copy was discovered in Wittenberg in 1904 and was published by Georg Mentz in 1905: *Die Wittenberger Artikel von 1536*. The Latin text with English translation can be found in Bray (ed.), *Documents*, 118–61.

⁶⁸ Mentz, *Wittenberger Artikel*, 11.

⁶⁹ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 55–8, 60.

beyond what Henry was known to approve.⁷⁰ Henry insisted that any agreement should forbid either party to agree to a Council without the consent of the other; he also sought to limit the military support to be offered to allies.⁷¹ But for the Reformers, these were not the main points at issue.

At the end of March 1536, Luther wrote to Elector Johann Friedrich to inform him that his vice-Chancellor, Francis Burchardt, was bringing him the draft articles, which, he said, [show] how far we have progressed with the English by this time. Since they do not know, however, how their Lord King will react to these articles, especially to the last four, they have taken a recess in order to inform His Royal Majesty accordingly. If His Royal Majesty should accept these articles, then one may proceed to form the alliance. For these articles are certainly in agreement with our teaching. ... If His Royal Majesty should not accept these articles, however, or if he searches in them for much to be discussed or changed, then, indeed we are not in a position again to confuse or upset our congregations – which have hardly been brought to peace and quiet – just because of the English.⁷²

Both the English members of the embassy and Luther thus believed that the ultimate decision lay with the King. Nonetheless – or perhaps for this reason – Luther initiated a correspondence with Thomas Cromwell, encouraging him in his endeavours for the Reformation in England:

Doctor Barnes has ... made me extraordinarily happy in telling me of Your Lordship's earnest and determined will regarding the cause of Christ, especially since because of your prestige, by which you are capable of accomplishing very many things throughout the whole kingdom and with the Most Serene Lord King, you can do much good. I do pray and I shall pray to the Lord to strengthen abundantly his work, begun in Your Lordship, to his glory and the salvation of many. Amen.⁷³

To Francis Burchardt, however, he emphasised the need for theological consensus and the limits of the concessions that could be made:

in this matter we are unable to concede anything beyond what has been already conceded. ... it is impossible that the articles and the central points be believed or

⁷⁰ For the response of the English legate, see CR 3, col. 45–50 (no. 1407), quotations at 46, 48; LP 10, 183–4 (no. 457).

⁷¹ Ibid.: CR 3, col. 46; LP 10, 183.

⁷² Luther to Elector Johann Friedrich, 28 March 1536: LW 50, 133; WA 7, 382 (no. 3003).

⁷³ Luther to Thomas Cromwell, 9 April 1536: LW 50, 138; WA 7, 396 (no. 3013).

taught differently. Were it otherwise, it certainly would have been easier for us at Augsburg – and might still be today – to become one with the pope and with the Emperor; further, it would be a disgrace for us not to be willing to concede to the Emperor and to the pope what we would now concede to the King.⁷⁴

Whilst Luther recognised that ‘in England not everything can be abruptly put into practice according to the teaching (just as among us it also did not go swiftly),’ he maintained that ‘the central points must not be changed or abandoned.’⁷⁵ Theological consensus was the foundation of the Schmalkaldic League, he concluded, and ‘it seems to me to be dangerous externally to make an alliance if the hearts are not united.’⁷⁶ This position was reiterated by the Elector, who warned that any political alliance could be built only on the basis of theological consensus. Via the English ambassadors, he responded firmly to Henry:

if the King objects to admit the Gospel according to the Confession of the confederates, which the ambassadors discussed with Luther and Melanchthon, or persists in the answer lately made to the Elector at Wittenberg concerning the articles of Smalcald, he does not see what use it will be to make a treaty or send ambassadors.⁷⁷

Henry seems to have underestimated the significance of the theological agreement which underpinned the Schmalkaldic League and its resistance to the Catholic princes, a new articulation of which was also of concern to Luther during 1536. Although, as Gury Schneider-Ludorff has shown, theological differences did exist between its leading figures, notably between Philip of Hesse and Johann Friedrich, Philip of Hesse’s concern was that the Schmalkaldic articles did not take the Reformation far enough, and not that they had gone too

⁷⁴ Luther to Francis Burchardt, 20 April 1536: LW 50, 140–1; WABr 7, 403–4 (no. 3016). Luther enclosed correspondence between Elector Johann Friedrich and Edward Foxe which showed that the Elector had broken off the negotiations: WABr 7, 401–3.

⁷⁵ Luther to Francis Burchardt, 20 April 1536: LW 50, 141; WABr 7, 404 (no. 3016).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Elector Johann Friedrich to Henry VIII’s embassy, spring 1536: CR 3, col. 60–3 (no. 1415); LP 10, 323–4 (no. 771). For the Elector’s original petition to Henry, see LP 9, 345–6 (no. 1016), parts of which are in CR 2, col. 1018–22 (no. 1379). See also the introduction to no. 3016, WABr 7, 400–2.

far.⁷⁸ Henry's lack of commitment to fundamental theological tenets of the Reformation was and remained politically problematic to the League's leaders.⁷⁹

The Fall of Anne Boleyn

The embassy left Wittenberg on 10 April to attend the Diet of the Schmalkaldic League in Frankfurt am Main, finally arriving back in England on 4 July 1536.⁸⁰ In the meantime, events in England had developed fast. Around the time of Katharine of Aragon's death in January 1536, Anne Boleyn had miscarried a baby. Henry, devastated at the loss of a possible son, was heard to say that he had been persuaded to marry her by witchcraft. He turned – or was persuaded to turn – against her.⁸¹ Anne was arrested on 2 May, tried, and executed on 19 May. Melanchthon was horrified, writing to Justus Jonas on 29 May: 'The reports from England are more than tragic. The Queen is thrown into prison, with her father, brother, two bishops, and others, for adultery.'⁸² Less than two weeks later, on 9 or 10 June, he wrote to Jonas again, passing on the news of Anne's execution – 'more accused than convicted of adultery' – and Robert Barnes' warning that he should on no account travel to England.⁸³ Luther too was shocked by the news, writing to Georg Spalatin of 'that absolutely monstrous tragedy in England.'⁸⁴

That these events might endanger the supporters of reform in England was clear to both Luther and Melanchthon. The Convocation of Canterbury was required to annul Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn on 21 June 1536.⁸⁵ On 11 July, just a week after he had returned

⁷⁸ See Schneider-Ludorff, *Der fürstliche Reformator*; and for a useful summary of her argument in English, eadem, "Philipp of Hesse." Compare also Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 98–105.

⁷⁹ McEntegart's otherwise excellent study also fails to take this into account. See Methuen, "England," 660–1.

⁸⁰ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 68, 73.

⁸¹ There is considerable historiographical controversy over events surrounding the fall and execution of Anne Boleyn, summarized in Gunn, "Review of Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions."

⁸² Melanchthon to Justus Jonas, 29 May 1536: MBW R2, 255; T7, 148 (no. 1745); CR 3, col. 81–82 (no. 1430); LP 10, 411 (no. 990). Compare also Melanchthon to Johannes Agricola, 7 June 1536: MBW R2, 257; T7, 162 (no. 1751); cf. CR 3, col. 90 (no. 1438); LP 10, 428 (no. 1033).

⁸³ Melanchthon to Justus Jonas, 9/10 June 1536: MBW R2, 258; T7 165–6 (no. 1753); cf. CR 3, col. 90–1 (no. 1439); LP 10, 428 (no. 1034); Melanchthon to Camerarius, 9 June 1536: MBW R2, 258; T7, 163 (no. 1752); cf. CR 3, col. 89–90 (no. 1437); LP 10, 466 (no. 1106).

⁸⁴ Luther to Georg Spalatin, 10 June 1536: LW 50, 151; WABr 7, 546–7 (no. 3082).

⁸⁵ LP 11, 52 (no. 123).

from his embassy to the Schmalkaldic League, Foxe presented ‘a book of articles of faith and ceremonies’ to Convocation, which endorsed them.⁸⁶ On 20 July, in response to Paul III’s bull of 2 June 1536, which had called a general council to convene in Mantua on 23 May 1537, Convocation denied the pope’s authority to call a general council.⁸⁷ Alesius reported these developments to Melanchthon via Johannes Aepinus, sending him a text which was presumably a copy of the Ten Articles.⁸⁸ To Melanchthon’s dismay, however, except in their formulation on the Lord’s Supper, these diverged significantly from the articles agreed in Wittenberg, presenting justification to be by ‘contrition and faith joined with charity’, affirming auricular confession and remaining ominously silent on the key issues of communion in both kinds, clerical marriage, private masses, and monastic vows.⁸⁹ They were, he judged, *confusissime compositi* [a very confused piece of work].⁹⁰ In August, the Royal Injunctions were issued, which were intended to ensure that the Ten Articles were put into practice.⁹¹ It is, however, unclear whether these were sent to Wittenberg and if so how they were received. In September, Luther reported to Nicolaus Hausmann:

Our Alesius writes to us from England that the new Queen Joanna, an enemy of the gospel (as he says), is to be crowned on [St.] Michael’s Day; the conditions in the kingdom are now so different that Antony [i.e. Barnes] has to go into hiding and be silent, and is not without danger.⁹²

Yet, in the same letter, Luther could still affirm that ‘the King persists in rejecting the pope’ and that he had received assurances that the English would not take part in any General

⁸⁶ LP 11, 52 (no. 123). This ‘book’ was the Ten Articles, printed in Bray (ed.), *Documents*, 162–74.

⁸⁷ LP 11, 53 (no. 124). Iserloh, Glazik and Jedin, *Reformation and counter Reformation*, 463.

⁸⁸ Alesius to Aepinus, 31 July 1536: CR 3, 104 (no. 1450). Mentz is of the opinion that the text which accompanied Alesius’s letter was of a copy of the Ten Articles: *Wittenberger Artikel*, 12 n.2.

⁸⁹ See art. 4, ‘The Sacrament of the Altar’, 169–70; art. 5, ‘Justification’, 170–1; art. 3, ‘The sacrament of penance’, 166–9. Mentz (*Wittenberger Artikel*, 12) sees in the Wittenberg Articles the basis for the Ten Articles, but he seems to ignore the significant omissions and changes of emphasis. McEntegart (*Henry VIII*, 58–60) offers a more cautious assessment of the influence of the Wittenberg Articles in England.

⁹⁰ Melanchthon to Veit Dietrich, 28 November 1536: MBW R2, 281; T7, 282 (no. 1813); CR 3, 193 (no. 1490).

⁹¹ Bray (ed.), *Documents*, 175–8. For the date see Frere and Kennedy (eds), *Articles and Injunctions*, 2: 1.

⁹² Luther to Nicolaus Hausmann, 20 September 1536: LW 50, 147–51, quotation at 150–1; WABr 7, 546–7 (no. 3082), quotation at 546.

Council.⁹³ Similarly, Melanchthon had heard by January 1537 of Robert Barnes's arrest the previous November 'by the king's order'.⁹⁴ Soon afterwards, however, Henry's refusal to have any part in a council called by the pope also raised his hopes that Henry might yet be won as an ally. Elector Johann Friedrich, surely having first consulted Luther and Melanchthon, wrote in November 1537 to Henry 'rejoicing that Your Majesty's opinion is so congruent with our own' on the question of the council.⁹⁵ This letter accompanied a joint message from Johann Friedrich and Philip of Hesse, which not only approved Henry's stance on the council but affirmed that his 'piety and zeal are applauded throughout Germany by all students of sincere religion.'⁹⁶ Henry, however, wanted not plaudits, but a return embassy, including Melanchthon. This he was not to have. Instead, in May 1538 Melanchthon commended to him the ambassadors appointed by the Schmalkaldic League, particularly Francis Burchardt and Friedrich Myconius (who had been involved in the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, helped to negotiate the Wittenberg Concord in 1536 and been present in Schmalkald in 1537), hoping that under Henry's direction the embassy would yield 'a firm and durable agreement'.⁹⁷ The same day, Luther wrote to Edward Foxe attempting to ascertain the English situation:

We speak of you people often and at great length, especially since, in view of the changing conditions in your kingdom, either you are unable to write letters to us with which we might satisfy our wish [for news concerning you], or those letters which you did dispatch have perhaps been intercepted. So we are hanging in the air, and indeed are afraid that this persistent silence might perhaps be a sign of some harsh blow struck against the progress of the gospel. In addition there are some who think that

⁹³ Ibid.: LW 50, 151; WABr 7, 546.

⁹⁴ Melanchthon to Veit Dietrich, 20 January 1537: MBW R2, 292; T8, 329 (no. 1839); cf. CR 3, col. 238–9 (no. 1518); LP 12/1, 78 (no. 181).

⁹⁵ Elector Johann Friedrich to Henry VIII, 14 November 1537: CR 3, col. 448–51 (no. 1626), quotation at 449; LP 12/2, 382 (no. 1088).

⁹⁶ Elector Johann Friedrich and Landgrave Philip of Hesse to Henry VIII, 14 November 1537: CR 3, col. 448–50 (footnote to no 1629); LP 12/2, 382 (no. 1089).

⁹⁷ Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 12 May 1538: MBW R2, 368; T8, 114–5 (no. 2030); cf. LP 13/1, 364 (no. 985). The other members of the embassy were the Hessian diplomat Georg von Boineburg and Georg Bernhard von Mila; Mila, however, returned to England after only three weeks: McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 94–5.

your King, finally ensnared by the Roman intrigues, would like to get back into the pope's good grace.⁹⁸

Luther and Melanchthon were at this point evidently far from certain about what was happening in England.

The Act of Six Articles and the execution of Cromwell and Barnes

The Schmalkaldic ambassadors travelled to England in June 1538 and remained until October, engaging in theological debate with an English team which consisted of Cranmer and Barnes, but also the more conservative bishops of London, John Stokesley, and Chichester, Richard Sampson.⁹⁹ Some indication of the content of these discussions is given by the Thirteen Articles, which, as Mentz and Bray have observed, drew on the Wittenberg articles.¹⁰⁰

Melanchthon was kept informed, in July writing hopefully to Veit Dietrich of 'the many learned men in England who desire to propagate the doctrine of the Gospel and who aid our men in this congress.'¹⁰¹ In September he reported to Brenz: 'There is hope that the English Church may be amended and pious doctrine and rites restored.'¹⁰² By November he had heard that 'superstitious pilgrimages' had been abolished, and the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury and the Marian shrine at Walsingham destroyed.¹⁰³

Henry, however, was deeply unhappy that Melanchthon had not accompanied the other ambassadors. He conceded to Elector Johann Friedrich that those sent had 'given evidence of such sound erudition and Christian piety that we feel assured hope of good results.'¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, an agreement had not been reached, and the king emphasised that mature

⁹⁸ Luther to Edward Foxe, 12 May 1538: LW 50, 180; WABr 8, 219–20 (no. 3228). This letter included further information regarding the situation in England. Nicholas Heyt to Melanchthon 27 August 1536: WABr 8, 220–3 (no. 3228, enclosure).

⁹⁹ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 103–4.

¹⁰⁰ The editions of the Wittenberg articles prepared by both Bray and Mentz show that considerable portions of its text were used in the Thirteen Articles. However, these articles never had any official status. For an English translation see Bray (ed.), *Documents*, 184–221.

¹⁰¹ Melanchthon to Veit Dietrich, 22 July 1538: MBW R2, 383; T8, 173 (no. 2067); cf. CR 3, col. 557–9 (no. 1700); LP 13/1, 531 (no. 1438).

¹⁰² Melanchthon to Johannes Brenz, September 1538: MBW R2, 392; T8, 218 (no. 2092); cf. CR 3, col. 585–7 (no. 1723); LP 13/2, 141 (no. 357).

¹⁰³ Melanchthon to Veit Dietrich, 1 November 1538: MBW R2, 398; T8, 244 (no. 2111); cf. CR 3, col. 601–2 (no. 1745); LP 13/2, 287 (no. 741).

¹⁰⁴ Henry VIII to Elector Johann Friedrich, 1 October 1538: LP 13/2, 194 (no. 497).

deliberation was necessary: ‘we hope you will send us Philip Melanchthon and other learned men to conclude the matter.’¹⁰⁵ In spring 1539 Christopher Mont (1496/7–1572) was despatched to Germany in an attempt to persuade the Schmalkaldic League to send a more substantial embassy, including Melanchthon.¹⁰⁶ In response, a delegation was dispatched to England in April 1539; however not only did it not include Melanchthon, but it was led by two laymen: Francis Burchardt and the Hessian diplomat Ludwig von Baumbach who had been instructed not to engage in theological negotiation.¹⁰⁷ In preparation, Melanchthon wrote to Henry towards the end of March, praising his ‘zeal in religion’ and encouraging him, having ‘begun to purge some superstitions’ to take action to ‘correct the remaining abuses.’¹⁰⁸ In the same letter, Melanchthon articulated his own desire for ‘a general consent in doctrine among those churches which disown the tyranny of Rome.’¹⁰⁹ However, just days later, he was writing again, protesting that Henry had required the observance ‘of accustomed rites’ (such as fasting and ‘creeping to the cross’), celibacy and religious vows.¹¹⁰

Melanchthon’s letter was responding to an edict on ‘Heretical Books, Church Ceremonies etc.’ issued by Henry on 16 November 1538, which controlled the sale of books; forbade the printing of Bibles except under the supervision of the king, one of his council or a bishop; restricted participation in debates about the Eucharist to those who had studied divinity; instructed that ‘Holy bread, holy water, kneeling and creeping to the Cross on Good Friday and Easter day, setting up of lights before Corpus Christi, bearing of candles on Candlemas day, purification of women, offering of chrisms, &c, must be observed till the King please to change them’; and banned clerical marriage.¹¹¹ This had been sent by Francis Burkhard to Elector Johann Friedrich, who in turn sent it to Melanchthon, asking that the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance, Melanchthon to Justus Jonas, 5 April 1539: MBW R2, 430; T8, 409 (no. 2185); cf. CR 3, col. 688; LP 14/1, 348 (no. 704). See also McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 142–9.

¹⁰⁷ McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 26 March 1539: MBW R2, 422; T8, 367 (no. 2167); cf. CR 3, col. 671–2 (no. 1788); LP 14/1, 240 (no. 613).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 1 April 1539: MBW R2, 425–6; T8, 384–9 (no. 2175); cf. CR 3, col. 681–5 (no. 1792); LP 14/1, 333 (no. 666).

¹¹¹ LP 13/2, 353–4 (no. 848).

English text be translated into Latin and German, a task which Melanchthon had completed by February.¹¹² In a frank letter to Cranmer, he expressed his wish that

Britain (sic!), having stamped out the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome, would cast out the abuses which from Rome have flowed into the churches: For how do these things accord; do you retain the impious laws of Rome after having removed their author? Why not get rid of the poison with the author?¹¹³

He warned Cranmer that the Archbishop of Cologne's attempts at reform, which had been well-received in England, retained 'pagan practices' and expressed his concern that English divines were still drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius or William Durand's *Rationale divinarum officiorum*, and were misusing the writings of the Reformers. Remembering that even Augustine had criticised superstitious practices, the English church should return to the simplicity of Scripture.¹¹⁴ To Cromwell, Melanchthon protested that the king's edict not only promoted false teachings, but also rejected true teachings on monastic vows and clerical marriage.¹¹⁵ He hoped that the expressed intention to rectify false practice might nonetheless show some genuine intention to reform the English church.¹¹⁶ For the Wittenberg Reformers, the reform in England appeared to be rejecting some of the Wittenberg Reformers' most fundamental criticisms of traditional church and practice. Moreover, the English bishops seemed dangerously attracted to what Melanchthon had come to see as the problematic developments in Cologne.¹¹⁷

It is apparent that Melanchthon had recognised the theological direction being taken by Henry's 1538 Edict, which in Summer 1539 would be confirmed in the Act of Six Articles. This Act reasserted a traditional position on transubstantiation (explicitly stating the doctrine, albeit without mentioning the term), reaffirmed the necessity of clerical celibacy, declared religious vows to be binding even on those religious whose monastic houses had been

¹¹² Johann Friedrich to Melanchthon, 31 January 1539: MBW R2, 412; T8, 306–7 (no. 2144); CR3 634–5 (no. 1771); and Melanchthon to Johann Friedrich, February 1539: MBW R2, 415; T8, 318–24 (no. 2151).

¹¹³ Melanchthon to Cranmer, 30 March 1539: MBW R2, 423; T8, 373 (no. 2170); CR 3, col. 676–9 (no. 1790); LP 14/1, 245–6 (no. 631).

¹¹⁴ Melanchthon to Cranmer, 30 March 1539: MBW R2, 423; T8, 374 (no. 2170); CR 3, col. 676–9 (no. 1790); LP 14/1, 245–6 (no. 631).

¹¹⁵ Summarised in Cromwell to Henry VIII, 24 April 1539: MBW R2, 426; T8, 390 (no. 2176).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

dissolved, denied the necessity of receiving communion in both kinds, emphasised the desirability of auricular confession, and asserted that justification came about through a combination of faith and works.¹¹⁸ The Act was approved by Parliament in June 1539. By July the news had reached the German Reformers. Melanchthon feared that this – as he viewed it – retrograde step was an indication Henry was about to enter a marriage alliance with the Habsburgs: ‘In England the pious doctrine is again oppressed and our adversaries triumph. Some suspect this is because of the deliberations for the marriage of the Emperor Charles with the king of England’s daughter. I hear that many are put in great danger, whom may God preserve!’¹¹⁹ Caspar Cruciger (1504–1548) reported that Barnes was in Hamburg ‘and dare not return to the realm, although he is the King’s ambassador. Many good men are in danger.’¹²⁰ In October Luther shared his concerns about the situation in England with Martin Bucer in Strasbourg, who was still hopeful that England might be gained as an ally:

I am afraid that your hopes regarding the King of England are empty. We heard the English themselves, while they were here, complaining about their King and admiring our freedom. Now the King has an envoy at our Sovereign’s court; but that envoy neither brought nor reported anything that could give any hope. May the Lord direct the King’s heart, together with all the other kings, to his glory.¹²¹

Together, Luther, Melanchthon, Justus Jonas, and Johannes Bugenhagen drafted a long report on the situation in England for Elector Johann Friedrich, condemning Henry for acting ‘against his conscience ... [for] he knows that our teaching is not contrary to God’s Word’.¹²² In the light of all that had transpired, they wrote, ‘we have little hope that he will commit and submit himself wholeheartedly to the Word of God.’¹²³ The king’s advisors were inconsistent, particularly ‘the man from Winchester’ (that is, Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester) who was now condemning the doctrine of justification by faith, where before he had ‘pushed for

¹¹⁸ For the final version of the Act, see Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation*, 222–32.

¹¹⁹ Melanchthon to Wenceslaus Link, 6 July 1539: MBW R2, 452; T8, 490 (no. 2242); cf. CR 3, col. 742 (no. 1828); LP 14/1, 547 (no. 1224).

¹²⁰ Casper Cruciger to Myconius, 7 July 1539: CR 3, col. 743–5 (no. 1830); LP 14/1, 562–3 (no. 1278).

¹²¹ Luther to Martin Bucer, 14 October 1539: LW 50, 190; WABr 8, 568–9 (no. 3394).

¹²² Luther *et al.* to Elector Johann Friedrich, 23 October 1539: LW 50, 191–204, quotation at 198; WABr 8, 572–5 (no. 3396), quotation at 573.

¹²³ *Ibid.*: LW 50, 202; WABr 8, 574.

the burning of two people solely on the ground of transubstantiation.’¹²⁴ The Wittenberg Reformers no longer believed that it was possible to negotiate with Henry:

From all this we conclude that thus far we have done everything possible. We know that we did everything with the best Christian intention, and maintain that we are not obligated to try further to deal with the King; there is little hope for such an undertaking. Perhaps God does not wish his gospel to be touted by this King who has such a bad reputation.¹²⁵

Luther put his views even more strongly in his accompanying private letter to the Elector:

The King is a dilettante and has no serious intentions. ... The English themselves said: ‘Our King vacillates.’ And Doctor Antony said several times: ‘Our King in no way respects religion and the gospel.’ Since that time I have come to be glad that the King has shown by public action that he has fallen from the gospel and, even more, that he has revealed his hypocritical pretence. ... Gold and money make him so cocky as to think that he should be worshipped, and that God could not get along without him. ... We have more than enough evidence [of his hypocrisy]: he [betrayed] Emperor Maximilian and soon thereafter King Louis of France as well. He should be pope, as in fact he is in England.¹²⁶

Henry had, in Luther’s view, taken all the worst aspects of the papacy and abrogated them to himself.

However, the situation in England continued to be unstable and unpredictable. In late October, Francis Burchardt reported to Melanchthon:

The impious statute of Parliament which you saw, has indeed been enacted, at the instance especially of the bishops of London and Winchester, of whom one is dead and the other excluded from Court and public business. Latimer and the Bishop of Salisbury refused to sign, and resigned their bishoprics to the King, but beyond this nothing is done as yet. Now all action is suspended, and the King seems already displeased at the promulgation of the decree, and little favourable to those who have so astutely done this.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: LW 50, 203; WABr 8, 574.

¹²⁶ Luther to Elector Johann Friedrich, 23 October 1539 (private letter): LW 50; WABr 8, 577–8 (no. 3397).

¹²⁷ Francis Burchardt to Melanchthon, late October 1539: MBW R2, 471; T8, 575 (no. 2295); cf. CR 3, col. 600 (no. 1744); LP 14/2, 149 (no. 423). The Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, had been

Burkhardt viewed the Act of Six Articles as the product of an attempt to bring down Cromwell and Cranmer, but one which Henry was already beginning to resist: ‘nor do I doubt but that (as all good men, and especially those in authority, affirm) the statute will shortly be abolished.’¹²⁸ Moreover, negotiations were taking place to arrange a marriage between Henry and Anne of Cleves, the younger sister of Elector Johann Friedrich’s wife Sibylle. A moderate Reformation was being introduced into the Duchy of Jülich-Berg-Cleves-Mark, as Melanchthon had reported to Elector Johann Friedrich in spring 1539;¹²⁹ Burkhardt therefore had good grounds for his conclusion that if the planned marriage went ahead, ‘not only will that statute [i.e. the Six Articles] be abrogated, but the true doctrine of religion received.’¹³⁰

Redworth sees the 1539 correspondence between Melanchthon and Burchardt as ‘the first manifestation of a concerted effort to blacken Winchester’s name in order to preserve the reformist credentials of the prince.’¹³¹ However, by this stage neither Luther nor Melanchthon regarded Henry VIII’s as having many ‘reformist credentials’, although they were not averse to trying again to persuade him to take up the cause. Melanchthon protested to Henry against the Six Articles and subsequent events. He had heard, he wrote, that Latimer and other men ‘of excellent learning and piety’ had been arrested; he wished them strength, and ‘would not have the King stain himself with the blood of such men, the lights of his Church, to the triumph of the Roman Antichrist.’ He also pointed out that Henry’s actions were having a detrimental effect on his reputation amongst the Reformers: ‘Many good men in Germany hoped that Henry’s authority would have induced other kings to lay aside their unworthy cruelty, and correct abuses; but that hope has now received a severe blow, the rage

dismissed from the Council in August 1539; the Bishop of London, John Stokesley, had died on 8 September 1539. For Stephen Gardiner’s complex relationship with Henry VIII at this period, see Redworth, *In Defence of the Church Catholic*, 84–102.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: MBW R2, 471; T8, 575 (no. 2295); cf. CR 3, col. 601 (no. 1744); LP 14/2, 149.

¹²⁹ Melanchthon to Johann Friedrich, March 1539: MBW R2, 424; T8, 278–81 (no. 2172). For the Reformation in Jülich-Berg-Cleves-Mark, see Helbich, “Kirchenpolitik Jülich-Kleve-Bergs,” and compare Freitag, *Reformation in Westfalen*, 193–227 (for the mid-1530s especially 193–6).

¹³⁰ Francis Burchardt to Melanchthon, late October 1539: MBW R2, 471; T8, 575 (no. 2295); cf. CR 3, col. 601 (no. 1744); LP 14/2, 149.

¹³¹ Redworth, *In Defence of the Church Catholic*, 89.

of the other kings is confirmed, the boldness of the impious increases, and the old errors are established.’¹³²

Whether Henry had actually been wavering or not, the events of the spring of 1540, and his unhappiness at the marriage arranged with Anne of Cleves, turned him against the Reforming party in England, and against Thomas Cromwell in particular. By mid-August, Melanchthon had heard the news of Cromwell’s trial and execution and was aghast. ‘In England, Cromwell, who had the highest influence with the King, has been hanged, quartered, and burnt. The English tyrant is contemplating other outrages, of which you will hear shortly,’¹³³ he wrote to Johannes Weinlaub; these ‘outrages’ included the divorce from Anne of Cleves. Melanchthon now regretted having dedicated the *Loci communes* to Henry:

Let us cease to sing the praises of the English Nero. I know not whether you have heard of his cruelty to the Queen. If you know anything about that business you can judge with what mind our people will read these panegyrics. I shall alter the preface in the *Commonplaces* and add a recantation of the praises, although they are not very extravagant. Cromwell has been hanged, quartered, and burnt.¹³⁴

Soon afterwards came the news of Robert Barnes’ execution on 30 July 1540. Luther wrote an appreciation of his friend, ‘this humble man who did not want to be called Doctor’ who had now been ‘called by God to become a holy martyr.’¹³⁵ Melanchthon expressed his revulsion to Myconius: ‘Must write nothing about the English Nero. May God destroy this monster!’¹³⁶ And to Camerarius: ‘Atrocious crimes are reported from England. The divorce with the lady

¹³² Melanchthon to Henry VIII, 1 November 1539: MBW R2, 472; T8, 578–91 (no. 2298); cf. CR 3, col. 804–19 (no. 1868) LP 14/2, 163 (no. 444).

¹³³ Melanchthon to Johannes Weinlaub, 16 August 1540: MBW R3, 74–5; T9, 331 (no. 2473); cf. CR 3, col. 1070–1 (no. 1989); LP 15, 492 (no. 982).

¹³⁴ Melanchthon to Johannes Stigel, 17 August 1540: MBW R3, 75; T9, 332 (no. 2474); CR 3, col. 1071 (no. 1990); LP 15, 493 (no. 985). Cromwell had in fact been beheaded.

¹³⁵ Luther’s accolade to Barnes formed the preface to the German translation of Barnes’s ‘Protestation at the Stake’ which was printed in Wittenberg in 1540: see Tjernagel, “Robert Barnes,” 651. An English translation of Luther’s preface can be found in Doernberg, *Henry VIII*, 124–6.

¹³⁶ Melanchthon to Myconius, 28 August 1540: MBW R3, 79; T9, 342–3 (no. 2483); CR 3, col. 1076–7 (no. 1996); LP 15, 501 (no. 1015).

of Juliers [Jülich = Cleves] is already made and another married. Good men of our opinion in religion are murdered.’¹³⁷

Epilogue: Melancthon and the English Reformation after the deaths of Luther and Henry VIII

Luther died on 18 February 1546; no further letters relating to England are extant in his correspondence. Henry VIII died on 28 January 1547. Henry’s theological policies during the last five years of his life had not been such as to give much hope to the Reformers, although his sixth wife, Catharine Parr, was known to be an evangelical sympathiser, and Henry’s son and heir, Edward, was educated by predominantly Protestant tutors. Melancthon was informed of his accession at the latest by March 1547, when Johannes Aepinus wrote to him that Henry had left the nine-year-old king Edward to the care of ‘seventeen evangelical guardians,’ including Thomas Cranmer.¹³⁸ Aepinus also reported that Henry ‘had died in the true faith’.¹³⁹ However, passing on this news to Alesius, who was in Bremen, Melancthon commented only that Henry had ordered that reformation theology ‘not be hindered’.¹⁴⁰ A month later, Melancthon confirmed to Alesius, now in Rochlitz, that the news of Henry VIII’s death was ‘now certain’.¹⁴¹ In September 1547 he commented to Georg Fabricius and Alesius (now in Leipzig) that Reginald Pole had aspirations to power in England, but gave no details.¹⁴² By December he had received the news that ‘the gospel was now being preached’ in England and that discussion about reforming the church were in train.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Melancthon to Camerarius, 1 September 1540: MBW R3, 79–80; T9, 343–5 (no. 2484); CR 3, col. 1077–8 (no. 1997); LP 16, 2 (no. 5).

¹³⁸ Johannes Aepinus to Melancthon, 12 March 1547: MBW R5, 70; T16, 189–90 (no. 4647). Compare also Schofield, *Philip Melancthon*, 153.

¹³⁹ Johannes Aepinus to Melancthon, 12 March 1547: MBW R5, 70; T16, 189–90 (no. 4647).

¹⁴⁰ Melancthon probably to Alexander Alesius, 25 March 1547: MBW R5, 76; T16, 208–9 (no. 4659); cf. CR 6, col. 450–1 (no. 3797).

¹⁴¹ Melancthon to Alexander Alesius, 23 April 1547: MBW R5, 102; T16, 296–7 (no. 4721); cf. CR 6, col. 508–9 (no. 3852).

¹⁴² Melancthon to Georg Fabricius, 4 September 1547: MBW R5, 174–5; T17, 163 (no. 4881); cf. CR 6, col. 670–1 (no. 4006); Melancthon to Alexander Alesius, 5 September 1547: MBW R5, 175; T17, 161 (no. 4881); cf. CR 6, col. 673 (no. 4009).

¹⁴³ Melancthon to Matthias Collinus, 5 December 1547: MBW R5, 215; T17, 299–300 (no. 4980); cf. CR 6, col. 741 (no. 4084).

Melanchthon's continuing interest in events in England was in keeping with his significance as a key German Reformation leader after Luther's death. He was in contact with other leading northern German Reformers, including Johannes Bugenhagen and Martin Bucer, and with rulers, including not only Elector Johann Friedrich, but also Elector Joachim II of Brandenburg, Duke Albrecht of Prussia, Landgraf Philipp of Hesse, Duke Ulrich of Württemberg (who, not for the first time, had offered Melanchthon a post at the University of Tübingen), and King Christian III of Denmark (who offered him a post at the University of Copenhagen). In October 1547, he was once again invited to travel to England, this time by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who urged him to lend his support to a Protestant Council.¹⁴⁴ Under the Regency of Edward's uncle, Edward Seymour, England was positioning itself as unambiguously evangelical. However, it was not yet clear what version of evangelical theology was to be espoused. The following January Melanchthon wrote to Edward VI, wishing him God's blessing and hoping that God might 'rule the young king's mind, that God's glory may be magnified and souls converted to him.'¹⁴⁵ He sent his letter by the Spaniard Francis Dryander (1518–1552), a longstanding friend whom he recommended to Cranmer for a university post.¹⁴⁶ He also encouraged Cranmer to develop a clear theological line for England, without 'ambiguous formulations' such as 'those of the Council of Trent.'¹⁴⁷ Later that spring, Melanchthon commented to Camerarius that 'difficult negotiations' over doctrine were taking place in England.¹⁴⁸ However, by May, Melanchthon himself was involved in sensitive negotiations about the Augsburg Interim taking place in Saxony. Whilst Melanchthon was assuring Cranmer of his 'collegial involvement,'¹⁴⁹ his response to the

¹⁴⁴ Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 154.

¹⁴⁵ Melanchthon to Edward VI, 13 January 1548: MBW R5, 235 (no. 5027); CR 6, col. 781–2 (no. 4124); Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 156.

¹⁴⁶ Melanchthon to Cranmer, 13 January 1548: MBW R5, 234 (no. 5026); CR 6, col. 780–1 (no. 4123).

¹⁴⁷ Melanchthon to Cranmer, January 1548: MBW R5, 262–3 (no. 5103); CR 6, col. 801–2 (no. 4142).

¹⁴⁸ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 10 March 1548: MBW R5, 253 (no. 5078); CR 6, col. 823–4 (no. 4168).

¹⁴⁹ Melanchthon to Cranmer, 1 May 1548: MBW R5, 283–4 (no. 5144); CR 6, col. 894–5 (no. 4225).

Interim was being translated into English and read in England. In consequence, rumours began to circulate there that Melanchthon had retracted his evangelical theology.¹⁵⁰

Over the next three years, an English prayer book was introduced into the English Church, with the first edition appearing in 1549, and the second, heavily revised in 1552. In 1550, churches were instructed to be whitewashed, stone altars removed, and traditional practices such as blessing candles at Candlemas, the use of ash on Ash Wednesday, and ‘creeping to the cross’ on Good Friday banned. During this period, Melanchthon and Cranmer continued to engage in sporadic correspondence (not all of which seems to be extant), and Cranmer issued invitations to Melanchthon and others to come to England, to take up a post, or to take part in a Protestant Church Council.¹⁵¹ As Reformers known personally to Melanchthon, including Martin Bucer, Johannes a Lasco, and Peter Martyr Vermigli, took refuge from the Interim in England, Melanchthon used Cranmer as a conduit, sending greetings, news, and texts (such as part of his *Enarratio Symboli Niceni*) for their comments.¹⁵² He continued to seek to influence doctrinal developments in England, addressing at least two dedicatory epistles to Cranmer.¹⁵³ In June 1553, he received yet another invitation from Cranmer, this time offering him the Regius Professorship in Cambridge, recently vacated by the death of Martin Bucer, with £100 for his travel expenses.¹⁵⁴ Melanchthon’s refusal, sent on 4 July, was accompanied by ‘two mathematical books’ for Edward, now aged 15.¹⁵⁵ However, by the time Melanchthon’s letter reached Cranmer, the young king was dead, and after a nine-day interlude under the rule of Lady Jane Grey, Edward’s Catholic half-sister Mary ascended to the throne on 15 July. Melanchthon

¹⁵⁰ See Schneider, “Gutachten” (including an edition of the English translation made by John Rogers).

¹⁵¹ Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 162–4, 170–2. MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 394–5, 501–2, 518.

¹⁵² See, for instance, Melanchthon to Cranmer, 28 May 1550: MBW 6, 56–7 (no. 5810); CR 7, 605 (no. 4731).

¹⁵³ In March 1549, Melanchthon wrote his preface to Matthias Flacius Illyricus’s *De vocabulo fidei* in the form of a letter to Cranmer, emphasising the clarity of Scripture and the need to define correct doctrinal teaching: MBW R5, 437–8 (no. 5466); CR 7, col. 345–9 (no. 4500). Similarly in January 1553, his preface to Alesius’s *Omnes disputationes de tota epistola ad Romanos* was dedicated to Cranmer: MBW R7, 18–9 (no. 6696); CR 8, 8–11 (no. 5305).

¹⁵⁴ Cranmer to Melanchthon, 7 June 1553: MBW R7, 77 (no. 6852). For this episode, see MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 538–9; Beer, “Cambridge Professorship,” 185; Alsop, “Philip Melanchthon and England in 1553,” 164–5.

¹⁵⁵ Melanchthon to Cranmer, 4 July 1553: MBW 7, 89–90 (no. 6884); CR 8, 119–20 (no. 5426).

had heard (erroneously) that Edward had been murdered, and was concerned for Cranmer and a Lasco.¹⁵⁶ He feared that England ‘would fall to the Emperor’ and that Charles V intended to marry Mary.¹⁵⁷ In spring 1554, he wrote to Peter Martyr Vermigli in Strasbourg, relieved to hear of his escape,¹⁵⁸ but he was distressed as news of the arrests and executions of Latimer and Ridley, Hooper and Cranmer reached him.¹⁵⁹ The fate of the English Reformation and its followers also exercised him: when he heard that the English (and indeed French) exiles who had arrived in Frankfurt and Wesel were not being made welcome because they were not Lutherans, he intervened, emphasising that they were neither anabaptists nor followers of Servetus, and calling on the Wesel town council to allow the exiles to hold services in their languages, and on the divisive question of the Lord’s Supper, to teach and reason with them, rather than expelling them.¹⁶⁰ He was here seeking to stem a trend which Euan Cameron sees as leading ‘Lutheran hardliners’ to feel that they were ‘the only true heirs of the Reformation, while the rest were “heretics”, “fanatics”, or “sacramentaries”; Calvinists in contrast ‘pressed Lutherans to recognise themselves as sharers in a common enterprise with the Reformed.’¹⁶¹ That his efforts were unsuccessful increased his own sense of isolation and persecution by the *Flacianer*.¹⁶²

The 1550s were a difficult period for Melanchthon: he found himself embroiled in conflicts over adiaphora, justification, the place of good works, the use of the Law, and the

¹⁵⁶ Melanchthon to Albert Hardenberg, 31 October 1553: MBW R7, 133 (no. 7013); CR 8, col. 167–8 (no. 5491).

¹⁵⁷ Melanchthon to George of Anhalt, 28 July 1553: MBW R7, 100 (no. 6916); cf. Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 172–3.

¹⁵⁸ Melanchthon to Vermigli, 29 May 1554: MBW R7, 201 (no. 7199).

¹⁵⁹ Melanchthon to Camerarius, 7 July 1554: MBW R7, 212 (no. 7230); CR 8, col. 314–5 (no. 5635); Melanchthon to Paul Eber, 19 September 1554: MBW R7, 232 (no. 7286); CR 8, col. 349 (no. 5668); Melanchthon to Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin, 8 May 1556: MBW R7, 428 (no. 7814); letter of recommendation for Simon Haliaeus, 13 May 1556: MBW R7, 430 (no. 7819); CR 8, col. 753–4 (no. 5985).

¹⁶⁰ Melanchthon to the Wesel town council, 13 November 1556: MBW R8, 510 (no. 8023); CR 8, cols 908–10 (no. 6121). Compare also Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, 181–4.

¹⁶¹ Euan Cameron, ‘One Reformation or many? Protestant identities in the later Reformation in Germany’, in Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), 108–127, at 126.

¹⁶² Melanchthon to Hubert Languet, 28 March 1557: MBW R8, 52 (no. 8169); CR 9, col. 121–2 (no. 6215).

Eucharist; he was accused of crypto-Calvinism and threatened with exile.¹⁶³ He did not have much time or energy to concern himself with events in England or elsewhere. Nonetheless, learning of Mary's death in November 1558, and of Elizabeth's succession to the English throne, he had hopes that this would bring the country a new lease of Protestant life.¹⁶⁴ In March 1559, he wrote to Elizabeth of his hopes for a peaceful settlement and urged her to 'help the sick church', particularly by calling a synod to order doctrine and ceremonies.¹⁶⁵ News followed that Elizabeth had declared her support for the *Confessio Augustana*, and in October Elector Augustus of Saxony wrote to Elizabeth, in words probably drafted by Melanchthon, rejoicing at her approval and encouraging her to consider convening an international theological conference.¹⁶⁶ However, nothing was to come of this contact: soon afterwards, Melanchthon was taken ill, and less than six months later, on 19 April 1560, he died.

Conclusion

It is clear from Luther and Melanchthon's correspondence that they took a keen interest in the English Reformation, and that they were first frustrated and then alarmed about the lack of progress under Henry VIII. The Wittenberg Reformers knew that Henry VIII had, like them, rejected papal authority and been condemned by Rome, and they saw his potential as a key ruler amongst the small but growing band of evangelical territories and as an ally in the Schmalkaldic League. Despite the antagonism between Henry VIII and Luther, both Luther and Melanchthon were open to a rapprochement with England, on the condition that a theological agreement could be reached. This, however was not forthcoming. Although Henry VIII's respect for Melanchthon's humanist credentials, and his judgment of Melanchthon as presenting a more acceptable, quasi-Erasman, face of Wittenberg theology made this aim seem for a period attainable, Henry's lack of commitment to Wittenberg's theological guiding principles made him an unreliable, and ultimately an impossible, partner for an alliance. Moreover, as a period when Melanchthon and Luther, together with Elector Johann Friedrich of Saxony, were seeking a theological agreement amongst the existing

¹⁶³ Heinrich Bullinger to Melanchthon, 1 November 1556: MBW R7, 506 (no. 8013).

¹⁶⁴ Melanchthon to Johannes Stigel, 13 May 1557: MBW R8, 71 (no. 8821); CR 9, col. 154–5 (6248) and compare Melanchthon to Albert Hardenberg, 26 January 1559: MBW R8, 308 (no. 8842); CR 9, col. 733–4 (6689). See Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon*, p. 188.

¹⁶⁵ Melanchthon to Elizabeth I, 1 March 1559: MBW R8, 321 (no. 8880).

¹⁶⁶ Elector August of Saxony to Elizabeth I, 1 October 1559: MBW R8, 395 (no. 9082).

partners in the Schmalkaldic League, they could not – even had they wished to – offer Henry VIII and England membership on different terms.

Their correspondence shows that the Reformers in Wittenberg knew a considerable amount about what was going on in England. They received copies of texts such as the Ten Articles, Henry's 1538 edict, and the Act of Six Articles, although they seem not to have seen – or at least did not comment on – the Injunctions, the Bishops' Book or the King's Book. The role of Henry VIII himself emerges strongly in this correspondence: his ambassadors were convinced – and they also convinced the Wittenberg theologians – that it was the king who would ultimately determine the outcome of the theological negotiations. This is consistent with the correspondence between Luther and Melanchthon and the rulers of other territories who were exploring the possibility of reform. The principle of *cuius regio eius religio*, although it would not be codified until the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, nonetheless directed the priorities of both Luther and Melanchthon. Their own prince, Elector Johann Friedrich was himself well-informed about the negotiations, and information flowed through him, as well as through fellow Reformers.

The theological negotiations within the Schmalkaldic League coincided with the first English embassy and helped to define the theological boundaries – in both doctrine and practice – of the emerging confessional groups. The correspondence also reveals Luther and Melanchthon's conviction that the Reformation was an international phenomenon, as well as their attempts to unify it. From Wittenberg it was apparent that the English Reformation was caught up in the wider evangelical movement; the question was whether God was using Henry to spread the evangelical gospel. In the end, they became convinced that he was not. Nonetheless, the discussion of the Wittenberg reception of the Henrician Reformation has shown that the difficulty of categorising the Henrician Reformation began at the time: it is not merely a historiographical construct. Melanchthon's later response to the Edwardian reforms indicates that he affirmed it as unambiguously evangelical, even if he regretted the theological direction the English were taking. The attempts to achieve confessional clarity in the Schmalkaldic League did not override the sense that the English evangelicals 'belonged' to the wider movement, which emerges as a clear theme, even in Melanchthon's later correspondence. The Reformers who were executed in England were to Luther and Melanchthon 'our people'. At the same time, Melanchthon's deep affinity with the Humanist Thomas More, who was decidedly disenchanted with evangelical theology, whom

Melanchthon mourned on his execution as one of 'our order', and his efforts on behalf of the English exiles reveal the scope of this sense of belonging. Luther and Melanchthon, and Melanchthon after Luther's death, understood the Reformation movement to be interterritorial and international, creating networks of people across Western Europe, who cared about each other, and watched anxiously when things seemed to be going wrong.

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