

contaminate breasts sacred to Christ with impious heresies, for if one sews these he has no charity, swells with vain glory, loses his reason and burns with envy. Finally with what feelings they would stand together against the Turks, against the Saracens, against anything infidel anywhere, with the same feelings they should stand together against this one little monk weak in strength, but in temper more harmful than all Turks, all Saracens, all infidels everywhere” (p. 462).

Luther’s Response to Henry VIII

“In the Fall of 1525 Martin Luther wrote a letter to King Henry VIII. They had exchanged writings before and it had not been pleasant. Luther’s response to Henry’s response was so full of abusive words and foul language that it has never been translated.

“So it could not have been easy for Luther to write four years later a fawning letter to Henry whom he addressed as “most serene and illustrious King.” King Christian II of Denmark—a frequent visitor to Wittenberg—had told Luther that Henry had now changed his mind and was ready to allow the gospel and embrace the Reformation. So Luther obtained the permission of his own prince, John of Saxony, to write to the English monarch, and for the possibility of a change of heart forced himself to say words that were almost impossible for the proud reformer to say to anyone:

I cast myself with the utmost possible humility at your Majesty’s feet, and pray and beseech you, by the love and cross and glory of Christ, to deign to leave off your anger and forgive me for what I have done to injure your Majesty, as

Christ commands us in His Prayer to forgive one another.

“Ten years later the letter might have been welcomed in the English court, for by that time King Henry was seeking friendship and alliance with the German Lutherans. But in 1525 Luther was misinformed about the King’s intentions. Instead of achieving reconciliation, Luther earned ridicule as his letter was reprinted all over Europe as a sign of how two-faced he was—a toady of the princes. Henry also wrote directly to Luther blaming him for the peasants’ war, the decline of morality, and attacking him savagely for having gotten married earlier that year despite being a monk. The disastrous consequences of this letter was part of what led old man Luther to be so rejecting of both compromise and alliance of any sort” (*A Sermon for the Lutheran - Episcopal Celebration Of Achieving Full Communion*, 14 November 2000 Augustana Lutheran Church, Denver, CO). <http://www.plts.edu/articles/lull/missedopportunities.html>

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Pamphlet 154

Henry VIII’s Defense of the seven sacraments

Part three



King Henry VIII
1491-1547

Continued from part two, pamphlet 153.

In 1521, just four years after supposedly posting his famous "Ninety-five theses" on a church door in Wittenberg, and the same month he was excommunicated, Martin Luther published a controversial work called *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. This book denounced the seven sacraments as corruptions and papist inventions. When Luther’s book reached England, Thomas More, in refutation of Luther’s work, composed a high quality theological treatise called *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum contra Martinum Lutherum* ("In Defense of the Seven Sacraments Against Martin Luther"). King Henry claimed authorship of the book and was given the title Defender of the Faith by the Pope. In gratitude, King Henry raised More to a Peer of the Realm and he became Sir Thomas More.

The treatise challenged the Martin Luther’s heretical opinions on the seven sacraments and was presented to Pope Clement VII in October 1521. Henry was subsequently named *Defensor fidei* ("Defender of the Faith") by the Roman

pontiff—a title still claimed by English monarchs to this day.

Luther responded with the German *Response to the Book of King Henry*, which was filled with vulgar, personal attacks on the king. The King didn't want to dignify the German Response with a direct reply. Therefore, Sir Thomas More, who was then Henry's Lord Chancellor and one of the leaders of the Catholic humanist party in England, was chosen to refute Luther's arguments and defend the King's honor. In 1523, More produced his first major work of apologetics, *Response to Luther*, under the pen name "William Ross."

Henry called Luther a prevaricator, a corrupter of the Testament, a labyrinth of stupidity, a destroyer of both soul and body, a little know-it-all, and a pest to be avoided.

In the "*Defense...*", Henry (More) defended with heart and soul the independence of the Holy See until the Pope forbid him to divorce his lawful wife. Queen Catherine, in order to marry Anne Boleyn. Goaded on by his unbridled sensuality and encouraged by his many servile, self-seeking flatterers Henry tore away from the Church and became its bloodthirsty persecutor.

In spite of his later crimes, he did not alter his *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. We still possess it as it was sent to the Holy Father. Since it was written in Luther's time it undoubtedly furnishes some valuable and interesting information. For this reason a few extracts are given here from *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum; or Defense of the Seven Sacraments*, by Henry VIII, King of England, Edited by Louis O'Donovan, Benziger Brothers, Inc. New York, 1908.

"In this Sacrament of Extreme Unction: that Luther might be twice divided himself, he twice scoffs the Church: first, because Divines, (says he) do call this Unction a Sacrament; (as if those

he calls Divines, were the only men who call it a Sacrament). Again, because they call it Extreme; to which as to the second, he himself objects, after a joking manner, what he can never answer in earnest: For it might be rightly called Extreme as being the last of four. Afterwards, to shew that it is no Sacrament, himself first objects, what he foresees everybody will object against him, viz., the words of St. James the Apostle, 'If any be sick amongst you, let him send for the Priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of our Lord: and the prayer of the faithful will save the sick, and our Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.' These words, (Which, according to his own definition, most apparently testify Extreme Unction to be a Sacrament, as wanting neither a visible sign, nor promise of grace) he immediately begins, with most imprudent confidence, to divide; as if they were of no manner of force. 'For my part, (he says) I say, that if ever there was a folly acted, it is especially in this place.' And I, again on the contrary do affirm, that if ever Luther was mad at any time, (as indeed his madness appears almost in every place), he is certainly distracted here, in the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, to an extreme height of madness" (pp 430, 432).

"But though, as I said, I admire why Luther should be so much displeased at St. James's Epistle; yet, having read it more attentively, I wonder not at all: for, by the Apostle's writings, I find that he so narrowly touches Luther everywhere, as if, by his prophetic spirit, he had plainly foreseen him. For, when Luther under the pretext of faith, despises good works; St. James on the other side, disputes, by reason, Scripture, and example, 'that faith without works is dead.' Nor is it in one place alone, that by bitter words, he resists that prattling petulance of Luther: 'If any one (says he) esteem himself religious, not bridling his tongue, but seducing his own heart,

his religion is vain." Besides Luther frets at this, which he sees very fitly may be applied to his own tongue. The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Finally he perceives that what the Apostle has writ against contentious person is truly spoken against his own opinions. 'For (says the Apostle) who is wise and well disciplined among you? Let him shew forth his works by a good conversation, in the meekness of wisdom descending from above, from the Father of Lights, but an earthly beastly, and diabolical wisdom: for where zeal is joined with contentions, there also is inconstancy, and every naughty work. But the wisdom, which is from above, is first of all shamefaced, then peaceable, modest, compliable, agreeing with good things, full of mercy and good works, judging without dissimulation. And the fruit of justice is sown in peace to workers of peace.' These, gentle reader, are words which move Luther to wrath against the Apostle: these, I say, are the words whereby the Apostle as openly touches Luther's petulance, railings, wicked and contentious objections; even as if he had seen him, and read his words. I question not but this Epistle, though never so much despised by Luther, will sufficiently prove to all Christians the Sacrament of Extreme Unction" (pp 446, 448, 450). King Henry VIII, concludes his *Defense of the Seven Sacraments* with these memorable words: "But I beseech and entreat all other Christians, and through the bowls of Christ, (whose faith we profess), to turn away their ears from the impious words and not to foster schisms and discords, especially at this time when most particularly it behooves Christians to be concordant against the enemies of Christ. Do not listen to the insults and detractions against the Vicar of Christ which the fury of the little monk spews up against the Pope; nor