

HENRY VIII The Break with Rome - The Divorce Question

What Were the Causes of the Break?

Henry strongly disapproved of the Protestants and had no wish to damage the Catholic faith. He had defended the Catholic faith against Martin Luther and Pope Leo had given him the title "Defender of the Faith." His quarrel with the Pope was purely personal and political not religious. Henry VIII often kept his "cards close to his chest". He nearly always had ulterior motives to those he admitted to.

The Background

- The **Papacy** was already **unpopular in England** owing to the many abuses of power that the Church openly practised, i.e. pluralism where a bishop held more than one office, absenteeism, and the sale of Indulgencies.
- Some **Popes** had abused their position of authority by becoming involved in **political** activities rather than religious. This has resulted in a loss of respect for the Papacy.
- The ever-increasing **wealth of the Church** and in particular certain clergymen was a cause for concern. Henry was short of cash!
- Large sums of money had to be paid to the Pope. (Peter's Purse) Henry could make better use of it!
- Henry and Thomas Wolsey wanted to make England a '**Sovereign nation state**' with no allegiance to any foreign authority.



Immediate Cause - The Divorce Question.

- By 1527 Henry and Catherine of Aragon had been **married for 18 yrs.** That marriage had only produced one surviving child, a **daughter - Mary.** (5 children had died)
- **Male pride** and a fear of a return to the **anarchy of the Wars of the Roses** made Henry desperate for a son. A daughter would not do, as there had been no Queens allowed up to this point in history. (Remember Matilda had never been crowned). Sadly, **Catherine** at forty was now **passed child-bearing age.** Henry himself was now 34.
- Henry had a **riding accident** in which he nearly drowned. This made him even keener to have a son to take over if necessary.
- Henry began to believe that his **sonless marriage** was a **punishment from God** for marrying his dead brother's wife (Arthur and Catherine). The Book of **Leviticus** says "**If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing; they shall be childless.**"
- Henry was having an **affair with Anne Boleyn** and wanted to marry her.



- In 1527, Henry sent **Thomas Wolsey** to see the **Pope (Clement VII)** to **seek permission** for an **annulment** of his marriage to Catherine on the grounds that
 - a) the **marriage was not legal.** i.e. it was incestuous
 - b) Pope Leo should not have issued a dispensation to Henry VII, allowing the marriage between Henry and Catherine
- **Divorce was virtually unheard** of and only offered to kings as a **favour**, so an annulment was the only answer. (often where marriage had not been consummated)
- **Clement VII** (pope) was a **prisoner of Charles V**, nephew of Catherine of Aragon. The Pope was in a **no win situation** (catch 22 or stuck between a rock and a hard place!) as he did not wish to offend either monarch. He also couldn't go against an act of a previous Pope.

- **Wolsey also didn't want to upset the Pope** as he still had ambition to be the Pope one day!
- In 1528, Clement tried to delay the matter by sending **Cardinal Campeggio** back to England with Wolsey to look at a possible solution. (lasted two years) '**The Legatine Trial**' as it was called was held at Blackfriars in London. Catherine called before 'The Legatine Trial'. Questioned as to whether she has consummated her marriage with Arthur. She denied that she had had sex with Arthur. Therefore this reduced the grounds for an annulment. Bad news for Henry!
- Pope hoped that during the delay, the situation might change. Henry might change his mind, Catherine might become pregnant or even die. **Henry was furious at the delay** and Wolsey's failure to get the result he wanted. **Wolsey was sacked** as Lord Chancellor and fell from power.
- **Wolsey summoned to London** to answer charges of treason but died on route. **Thomas Cromwell** was waiting in the wings to take over from Wolsey.



The Reformation Parliament

- **Thomas Cromwell** was the mastermind behind getting Henry a divorce.
- **Thomas Cranmer** advised Henry to seek **advice from the Universities of Europe**. These universities had Protestant sympathies. Their advice was that Henry could if he wanted, circumvent the Pope and **take matters into his own hands**.
- Having failed with his attempts with Wolsey, Henry decided to exert more pressure on the Pope.
- Cranmer visited the Pope to try again to get an annulment/divorce. He failed.
- Henry decided to hit the Papacy by attacking its 'pocket'. In 1532, The **Payment of Annates** was forbidden. This was a tax paid by newly elected Bishops to the Pope. Henry pocketed the money himself.
- On **25th January 1533**, Henry **secretly married Anne Boleyn**. (Anne pregnant)
- In **March 1533**, Parliament passed the **Act of Appeals** that brought the Church Courts under the control of Henry. The Act made it illegal for anyone to appeal to the Pope.
- On **May 23rd 1533**, Thomas **Cranmer**, the newly created Archbishop of Canterbury, **granted the divorce**.
- In **September 1533**, Elizabeth was born.
- In **1534**, Parliament passed the **Act of Succession**, which declared Henry's and Catherine's marriage illegal and supporting Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn. The Act also restricted succession to the children of this marriage. Mary Tudor was no longer heir to the throne. It also made it a treasonable offence to oppose or criticise the marriage.
- A **Treason Act** followed this, which said that anyone writing or saying that Henry was a heretic, tyrant, schismatic or usurper was guilty of treason. Henry and Cromwell now had the ultimate weapon at their disposal.
- In 1535, Parliament passed the **Act of Supremacy** which declared Henry the '**Supreme Head of the English Church**'.
- **Papal authority was overthrown** and the **break with Rome** completed.
- Charles V was occupied elsewhere with his own trouble and was unable to intervene.

Ordinary people were horrified at the idea of the divorce. There was a feeling of sadness for Catherine of Aragon and Mary and the way that they had been treated. However, this had to be balanced against people's feelings towards the Church. The Church was not popular, it had become rich and greedy and the Pope was seen increasingly as a foreigner who was only interested in raising taxes. In the end, the majority sided with Henry. After all, the church services remained unaffected.

Countdown to Divorce

1. Wolsey to Rome - 1527
2. Legatine Trial 1528-1530
3. Advice from universities
4. Secret marriage - 1533
5. Act of Appeals - 1533
6. Divorce granted - 1533
7. Act of Succession - 1534
8. Treason Act - 1534
9. Act of Supremacy-1535.

It is important to remember that although the Church of England had broken away from Rome and that Henry VIII not the Pope was now head of the Church of England, there was no change of religion.

- Henry remained a **devout Roman Catholic** and was not influenced by Protestant doctrines.
- In his eagerness to obtain a divorce, he created a situation that was to send some of his best friends to the block. Among them were **Thomas More and Cardinal Fisher** who refused to accept the Act of Supremacy.
- In 1535, many Carthusian monks were arrested and then publicly hanged, drawn and quartered for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy.
- In 1539, he reaffirmed his Catholic beliefs by issuing the '**Statute of the Six Articles**' which was a list of what Catholics were expected to believe. This in fact led to the persecution of a number of Protestants.
- In his eagerness for a divorce, Henry unwittingly set the seeds for the Reformation in England.

Source A Seeking permission to divorce

If the Pope is unwilling, we are left to find a remedy elsewhere. Some remedies are extreme, but a sick man seeks relief in any way he can find.

Letter written by bishops and lords, sent to Pope at Henry's request, 1530.

Extract B Trial of Sir Thomas More

Sir Richard Rich : Master More, you are learned in the law. Pretend that an Act of Parliament said that I was King. Would you accept me as King?

Sir Thomas More : Yes.

Rich : Suppose an Act of Parliament said that I was Pope. Would you accept that?

More : Master Rich, Parliament may well meddle with the state of princes and make you King. As to your second question: suppose Parliament made a law that God was not God. Would you accept that?

Rich : No Parliament can make any such law.

More : No more that Parliament can make the King Supreme Head of the Church.

Interview during Thomas More's trial, 1535.

