KATHERINE PARR
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KATHERINE PARR

A Guided Tour of the Life and Thought of a Reformation Queen

BRANDON G. WITHROW
To my mother, who taught me that women are human, and to my wife, who continues the lesson
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So few people wish to see Queen Katherine Parr, sixth wife of King Henry VIII, in her true colors. While it is accurate to say that she was an advocate of the “New Learning,” which seems to cover Renaissance principles as much as Reformation principles, and while it is true that her end, dying in childbirth from her quite completely unreliable “true love” Thomas Seymour, could be interpreted as a triumph of the human love affair over the divine Spirit, this book confirms overwhelmingly that Katherine was to her core a woman of consuming religious ardor.

Such misconstruction has always sullied the landscape of English Reformation scholarship. Secular people do not wish to see in the Reformation the importance of the religious ideas that fueled it. Secular historians generally wish to paint it as a political revolution selecting religious ideas to cover over issues of Machtpolitik. Religious people have been more open to the voices of the participants themselves. This is to say, religious people recognize in characters such as Katherine Parr characters like themselves. For religious people, the theological issues of a thing always trump the sociological and political sides to it. For secular people, it is usually the other way around.

The histories of Katherine Parr have reflected the same duality. If a commentator is sympathetic to her authentic religious voice, that sympathy comes out in the treatment. If not, a text such as her Lamentation is regarded as formulaic
or as part of a genre or as simply repeating commonplaces. Yet a quick reading of Katherine’s text will dispel that notion absolutely. Her book, one of the few books written by women in the early modern period, defies any reduction to a type or category. *The Lamentation* is a distilled and almost overwhelming religious confession of a personal, if not classically evangelical, religious experience.

A few years ago, I tried to acquire a copy of this book. The only source where it appeared was a nineteenth-century edition of the British Reformers. So we had to send for it from far away. Brandon Withrow has now accomplished the inestimable service of making this important text available to us all again. The more texts of this kind that can be made accessible to the common reader, the more cost will be involved for those historians who aspire to de-theologize the English Reformation. Katherine’s short book gives the lie to any construction of key participants in those consequential events of the mid-sixteenth century that fails to do justice to their evangelical convictions.

In short, Mr. Withrow’s edition is much needed. It is needed not only for the scholarly community, and not only for the feminist community, for whom Katherine is a powerful if counterintuitive progenitor (which is to say, she used “feminine wiles” to influence King Henry). It is needed also for the common reader, and for the reader in search of religious role models who were also thoroughly human.

Read the book, say her prayers, discover Queen Katherine’s story—and I believe you will know a most important truth about the Reformation in England.

Paul F. M. Zahl
Bringing back into print a beloved but long-forgotten work such as Queen Parr’s is a tedious (though rewarding) task, and therefore the assistance of others cannot be overestimated and must not be left unacknowledged. Foremost, I say thank you to my dedicated and forgiving wife, Mindy, who while working hard to put me through my Ph.D. program did not flinch at the prospect of discussing and proofing yet another manuscript that was not my dissertation. She is a constant source of strength for me, and without her these pages would be blank. My gratitude also belongs to Emily Sirinides of the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary for her willingness to search far and wide for those hard-to-locate interlibrary loan sources. I have been edified by the forever gracious spirit of the Very Rev. Dr. Paul F. M. Zahl, former dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (Ambridge, Pennsylvania) and former dean of Cathedral Church of the Advent (Birmingham, Alabama), whose enthusiastic comments on the manuscript confirmed the value of its publication. Last, but far from least, I am grateful for the friendship of Dr. Stephen J. Nichols, who brought to life the Guided Tour series and became a favorite visitor of mine as I sat strapped to my study carrel in the Montgomery Library during the dissertation years. Like Parr’s, his writing continues to bless the church.
INTRODUCTION: WHY READ KATHERINE PARR?

The life of Katherine Parr could have been simply a footnote to the Tudor rule. She was the daughter of a respectable, though not the most prominent, family in England. Had she not been widowed twice before becoming queen, she would probably have led a life of relative obscurity. Being the wife of Henry VIII, however, does not lend itself to simple and quiet living. Katherine rose to the highest position of power that a woman could have in England, and she used that power to bring about lasting change. She was also one of only a dozen English women in a hundred-year period to publish not just one, but two books and several prayers.

More than just a writer, she was a religious and cultural reformer who pressed a king for change, and nearly lost her life in trying. With so many of Henry’s previous wives either discarded or executed, Katherine’s proddings for reform were serious risks. Nevertheless, she championed the language of the people, encouraged academia to put Christ before Plato, urged Henry to bring England closer to the Reformation, commissioned scholarly translations of Erasmus, and brought a royal English family together. In Katherine’s day, her books became examples of the bold Reformation spirit. Her brilliant mind captured the souls of her people and the respect of the Reformers themselves.
Despite her accomplishments and popularity in her day, this reformer continues to be passed over by modern readers. Until now, her published writings have been available to the modern audience only in the form of facsimile. For certain, the old English text, terribly long paragraphs, and archaic terminology do not always make for pleasure reading, but Katherine’s trust in grace, colorful meditations, and strong conviction are ripe for the modern audience. Her dedication to the cross of Christ is a theme that transcends a culture gap of nearly five centuries, and her fervent spirituality and passion demonstrate that the Reformation was not limited to the ivory tower, but played itself out in real and practical ways.

As a historical figure, Katherine offers us more than just a look into the trials and struggles of the Protestant Reformation; she also gives us a picture of what it was like to be a woman of influence and conviction in such a dangerous age. She had to overcome not only the restricted life of a closet reformer (difficult no matter who you are), but also the cultural restrictions placed on her because of her gender. If fighting for the Protestant faith was not complicated enough, she had to overcome a husband who was not only the king, but also the newly proclaimed “supreme head of the church” in England. He was also not too fond of a wife who, to his perception, thought herself to be a “doctor.”

Part One of this volume tells the Parr family’s story, including Katherine’s unexpected rise to power. It looks at her education and theological evolution, as well as at a plot hatched against her by enemies that nearly led to her death and to her placement in the annals of Henry’s failed marriages. Ending with her tragic death as a result of the traumatic birth of her daughter, these pages are a glimpse into the drama of one who dared to put her people on a brighter path.
Part Two presents selected writings of Katherine, each with a brief introduction. These writings include Katherine’s first book, Prayers or Meditations. With vibrant language, Katherine calls the reader to awaken, trust in Christ, forsake sin, and find forgiveness. A writer with mixed influences from Augustine to Erasmus to Luther, Katherine shows in this book that she is dedicated to an enduring and mystical relationship with Christ. Following this piece is Katherine’s openly Protestant call for reform in England in the form of a spiritual autobiography known as The Lamentation or Complaint of a Sinner. Here Katherine calls Christians to forsake the “bishop of Rome.” “For he is a persecutor of the gospel and grace,” she writes; “he deceiveth and robbeth under Christ’s mantle.” Katherine urges Christians to learn from her personal failures, which she laments, and to find solace in the mercy and grace of the cross. Finally, this section closes with select letters from and to Katherine. These writings reveal her as a leader, a lover, and a mother.

This biographical introduction and the selected writings portray Katherine Parr, the person. She is not merely a historical figure; she is a thoughtful Christian whose works, as they did then and should now, raise one’s senses to Christ and demand a response.
PART ONE

KATHERINE PARR’S LIFE
The young girl, sitting in her father’s study, with crossed legs and pen in hand, scribbling her name in the margins of his books, may not have caught the attention of most people. Noble girls were expected to learn the basics, but children were still children. It was said that as a girl Katherine had her palm read and was told that she would one day rise to great power. Whether or not the story is apocryphal no one knows for sure, but she certainly had hopes that one day she would be important. As she would write near the end of her life: “Christ came to serve his brethren, and I coveted to rule over them.” Despite her hopes, the death of her father put her family in serious financial hardship. Her dowry was not impressive, and she would not have been voted “most likely to be queen.”

For the Parr name to rise to the second-highest position in the land was no small accomplishment, even if Katherine could not have planned it. From their earliest years, the Parrs struggled to climb the ladder of power. The first Parr, Sir William (1350–1404), owned a meager portion of the villa of Parr. Having served as a knight for
Katherine Parr’s Life

Fig. 1.1 Katherine Parr and Her Times

1478  Thomas Parr born
1508  Thomas Parr marries Maude Greene
1509  Henry VIII becomes king
1509  Henry VIII marries Catherine of Aragon
ca. 1512  Katherine Parr born
1512  Michelangelo completes Sistine Chapel
1516  Birth of Princess Mary
1517  Thomas Parr dies
1517  Martin Luther posts “95 Theses” in Wittenberg
1521  Martin Luther excommunicated by Pope Leo X
ca. 1525  Birth of Katherine Howard
1526  Katherine Parr marries Lord Borough
1526  William Tyndale publishes English New Testament
1527  Henry VIII seeks annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon
1528  Lord Borough dies
1529  Maude (Greene) Parr dies
1533  Thomas Cranmer becomes Archbishop of Canterbury
1533  Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn
1533  Princess Elizabeth born
1534  Katherine Parr marries John Neville, the third Lord Latimer
1534  Church of England separates from Rome
1536  Anne Boleyn executed on the false charges of witchcraft, incest, and adultery on May 19; Henry marries Jane Seymour 11 days later.

John of Gaunt (the Duke of Lancaster and the famous protector of John Wyclif), William met Elizabeth de Roos (d. ca. 1392), a wealthy heir of her grandfather. It was a transaction that brought William a quarter of the barony of Kendal and its castle.

Keeping the land, however, would prove to be difficult for the Parrs. William’s son, John (1382–1408), inherited the land after his father’s death and married Agnes Crophill. Unfortu-
nately, upon his death, their son, Thomas (1407/8–61), was not yet a year old, and the family inheritance was given to Sir Thomas Tunstall of Thurland, Lancashire. By the time Thomas was of age, he had to reconstruct the Parr family influence all over again. Through cunning political maneuvering, Parr managed to gain two-thirds of the barony of Kendal (and make a significant amount of income from it), only to lose it again. But this hardly held him back—with perseverance and other
Katherine Parr’s Life

significant connections, Parr was still able to climb the power ladder again.

It was his sons, William (1434–83) and John Parr (d. 1475), who brought the family name lasting influence. Skilled with building alliances, William married Elizabeth Fitzhugh (1462–1505), whose powerful family owned a large amount of land, and he fostered a risky loyalty to Edward IV. It was a prodigious move, and when the Fitzhugh line ended, William’s son Sir Thomas (1478–1517) inherited half the barony of Kendal.

Thomas, through his cousin Cuthbert Tunstall, kept the Parr family in the inner circle of Henry VIII and eventually became a knight. His influence was greatest in northern England, where his acquisition of land continued. In 1508, Thomas married Maude, the youngest daughter of Sir Thomas Greene, and had three children, William (1513–71), Anne, and Katherine (1512/14–48). Katherine was no more than five years old when Thomas died in November 1517, leaving Maude to care for the children by herself.¹

The Life of Katherine

The Parrs were fortunate in that, even after Thomas’s death, they remained within the inner circle of Henry. That Katherine’s grandmother, Elizabeth, had strong connections to Henry’s grandmother, Margaret Beaufort, also helped. But despite the important family connections, the Parr money was not nearly strong enough to offer a substantial dowry.

Much is uncertain about the early years of Katherine’s life. In 1526 Maude successfully arranged a marriage between Katherine and Edward, Lord Borough. Borough’s wife had died when he was around sixty-three years old, leaving him with a family. He quickly sought to remarry, and Katherine, an attractive young woman, was his choice. “Like many girls in her position,” writes biographer Alison Weir, “Katherine found herself a stepmother to children older than herself.” In 1528 Lord Borough died, and Katherine became a teenaged widow. The following year, on May 20, 1529, Katherine buried her mother, Maude, in the church of the Blackfriars, London.2

Things began to look up again when, in 1534, Katherine married John Neville, the third Lord Latimer, a distant relative. Latimer had been married twice before, with the last Lady Latimer dying around 1526/27. He was of strong medieval ancestry and had already loyally served Henry, having been knighted at twenty years of age. In 1536–37, Latimer became an important figure in the Pilgrimage of Grace, considered one of the worst uprisings against Henry’s religious policy in the history of his reign. As supporters of the old faith, the rebels did not welcome concessions to the Reformers. Latimer, a Catholic, did not immediately side with the rebels, but they eventually pressured him to play a leading role in the rebellion. This move could have cost him his life when other rebel leaders were executed had he not been pardoned by Henry. Katherine’s position as Lady Latimer brought her into the adult life of court attendance, entertaining, and household management, and is one of the many direct connections she had to the king.

In March 1543, after leading thousands of men to battle against the Scots, Lord Latimer fell sick and died. By that time Henry had married Katherine Howard, had executed her for adultery, and had set his eyes on Katherine Parr. But before the king had formally expressed an interest in her, Sir Thomas Seymour, a handsome, wealthy, ambitious, and devious man, had already caught Katherine’s attention. The Seymour family was politically powerful and Thomas well

1.2 Queen Katherine Parr, engraving by J. Cochran after the painting by Holbein.
known as a self-serving charmer who preyed on the women of the court. He cast his spell on Katherine and won her engagement, but they were not to marry, since the king (her fourth cousin) had had his eyes on her first. Determined to have whatever and whomever he wanted, Henry interfered with the engagement by sending Thomas to Brussels as ambassador to the Netherlands. Thomas got the message, and though Katherine’s heart was his, no woman of this period who valued her position or life would resist the king, and she finally gave in. On July 12, 1543, Henry and Katherine married in a private ceremony.

With execution as an alternative to divorce, it was dangerous to be the wife of Henry. Katherine, however, had a few benefits that his other wives did not, the foremost being that his son Edward, by his third wife, Jane Seymour, had already been born. Once Henry had satisfied his lust for an heir, he was ready to turn his attention toward finding a mate. By the time of his marriage to Katherine, Henry had three children under his care: Mary, daughter of his first wife, Catherine of Aragon; Elizabeth, daughter of his second wife, Anne Boleyn; and Edward. Anne Boleyn had been executed in 1536 under the false charges of witchcraft, incest, and adultery. Jane Seymour had died after giving birth to Edward, and Henry’s fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves, whom he found unattractive, had been annulled without consummation. His fifth wife, Katherine Howard, had been executed for infidelity. But in Katherine Parr, Henry found a woman whom he could respect in his limited way. Even more, she won the trust of Henry’s children and became a mother to them.

The Education of a Queen

Early historians of Parr emphasized Katherine’s family connections with royalty, life as a young girl in the court,
and a high education in the “New Learning.” The New Learning first arrived in the English court around 1485 through Henry’s grandmother Margaret, who actively encouraged the education of women, especially those of noble heritage. A humanist education, promoted by intellectual giants such as Thomas More, Juan Luis Vives, and Erasmus, included a study of the classics in the original languages, requiring a good reading knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.

Anthony Martiennsen, a biographer of Katherine, describes Margaret Beaufort as “tolerant, shrewd,” and “immensely rich,” financing “a succession of thinkers and teachers,” endowing colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and bringing her “powerful influence to bear on the Court in the cause of reform.” Believing that women should hold prominent positions in public life, Beaufort, according to Martiennsen,

was a convinced believer in the duty of women to moderate the excesses and guide the destiny of the new bustling society which her son had begun to create. At that stage of history, women had begun to achieve a high degree of independence. They ran their own businesses, were accepted as members by many of the Craft Guilds, held property in their own right, and could follow almost any calling they chose. . . . True, they usually had to be wives or widows before they could enjoy their freedom, but they then tended to retain their maiden names as proof of their separate identity in business or public life.3

Because of this connection, biographers have traditionally argued that Katherine’s family was influenced by Beaufort’s promotion of the New Learning. When Henry VIII ascended

3. Martiennsen, Queen Katherine Parr, 3.
to his father’s throne, his grandmother’s duties passed on to Henry’s wife, Catherine of Aragon, and in charge of Catherine’s court school was Katherine’s mother, Maude.

What is known by some extant letters is that Maude had a strong reputation as an educator, a skill demonstrated by her negotiation for Katherine’s marriage to the son of Lord Scrope. Agreeing to speak on her behalf, a cousin of Thomas Parr (namely, Lord Dacre) wrote to Scrope. Maude offered an unimpressive dowry, to be repaid if the marriage was not carried out because of death, disagreement, or any other reason. Lord Dacre, realizing that Lord Scrope was not agreeable to these terms, placed other selling points on the table, suggesting that before the marriage, Scrope could recoup any financial loss by letting his son board with Maude, who would supply his food and drink as well as his education. “For I assure you,” wrote Dacre, that “he might learn with her as well as in any place—that I know, as well nurture, as French, and other languages, which me seems were a commodious thing for him.”

Despite Maude’s respectable reputation as an educator, Lord Scrope drove too hard a bargain, and the deal fell through.

During her youth, according to Martiessen, Katherine (along with Princess Mary) was educated by Juan Luis Vives, the New Learning extraordinaire who caught the attention of Catherine of Aragon. His book, On the Education of Christian Women, was dedicated to the queen, and she believed that he was just the person to tutor the girls at court. No historical evidence, however, has been found to back up this claim, and Parr’s relationship to Vives and the New Learning is a sticking point among modern historians, who argue that such a background is the concoction of biased scholarship.

5. Martiessen, Queen Katherine Parr, 21.
As biographer Susan E. James points out, “besides the fact that there is no evidence that Vives actually taught the princess personally—or ever left Spain for that matter—Kateryn was four years older than Mary and in 1523, when Catherine of Aragon was hiring tutors for her daughter, Kateryn, at 11, was already well into her education.”

Modern biographers have attempted to clean up perceived misconceptions produced by the idealistic portrait of the young queen. Over forty years ago, historian C. Fenno Hoffman Jr. challenged the traditional view of Katherine’s classical education. Two decades later, Retha M. Warnicke also disputed certain received opinions on Katherine in her book *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, arguing that “sympathetic biographers have exaggerated” her educational background.

Hoffman agrees that Katherine had the benefit of an education but finds no evidence that she was classically trained with all the pomp of nobility, as is usually claimed. To prove this point, Hoffman points to a letter from Prince Edward to Katherine in June 1546, in which he compliments her on her progress in Latin. This is an indication, according to Hoffman, that Katherine probably did not know Latin well (knowledge of which is a hallmark of a classical education). But as Hoffman notes, Katherine did have knowledge of French and Italian, two other important languages of the New Learning.

Another face could be put on this evidence, however, one that is more in keeping with Katherine’s family heri-
tage and later zeal for education. Hoffman assumes too much by concluding that Edward’s comment on Katherine’s progress in Latin testifies to her level of training. As James points out, “the queen’s progress in Latin and in belles-lettres commended by Edward in the same letter may, in fact, refer not to lessons such as the young prince delighted in but to the translation project from Latin into English which the queen had at that moment in hand.”

The work that Edward would be referring to was the translation of Erasmus’s *Paraphrase of the Gospels* into English, a work that Katherine commissioned.

Another potential nail in the coffin of the traditional view is Katherine’s letter to Cambridge in 1545, in which Katherine seems to acknowledge both her poor Latin and her disapproval of classical texts. Previously, Cambridge had requested—by a letter written in Latin—the queen’s intervention before the king. Katherine’s response, according to Warnicke, speaks to her understanding of Latin and her view of the classics:

Your letters I have received, presented on all your behalves by Mr Doctor Smith, your discreet and learned advocate. And as they be Latinly written, which is so signified unto me by those that be learned in the Latin tongue, so (I know) you could have uttered your desires and opinions familiarly in your vulgar tongue, aptest for my intelligence: albeit you seem to have conceived rather partially than truly a favourable estimation both of my going forward and dedication to learning.

... And for as much (as I do hear) all kind of learning doth flourish amongst you in this age, as it did amongst the Greeks at Athens long ago, I desire you all not so to hunger for the exquisite knowledge of profane learning, that it may be thought the Greeks’ University was but transposed, or

now in England again revived, forgetting our Christianity, since their excellency only did attain to moral and natural things. But rather I gently exhort you to study and apply those doctrines as means and apt degrees to the attaining and setting forth the better Christ’s reverent and most sacred doctrine: that it may not be laid against you in evidence, at the tribunal of God, how you were ashamed of Christ’s doctrine: for this Latin lesson I am taught to say of Saint Paul, *non me pudet evangelii*.10

Warnicke argues from this that Katherine “deplored the study of pagan literature,” which, if true, strongly suggests that she had not been trained under the New Learning.11

Despite Katherine’s strong rebuke in this letter, there is another possible interpretation. She could be understood as not rejecting the natural and moral philosophy of Plato as much as encouraging Cambridge professors to give Scripture its top priority—a trademark of Reformation thought. Because this letter is written during a time in which Katherine is slowly coming to accept Protestant theology, the emphasis on Scripture would make sense. It does not appear that the mere study of pagan literature bothered her; rather, it was its position over divinity, the queen of sciences. If Cambridge was to be known for anything, in her estimation, it should primarily be seen as a school of divinity.


1.3 The Hierarchy of the Sciences as conceived by medieval thought, from the Berri Bible. From the bottom left, second row up, Avicenna, Socrates, and Plato. At the top of the hierarchy are God the Father and the crucified Christ.
As to her Latin, Katherine’s inclusion of Paul’s words in Latin (“I am not ashamed of the gospel”) at the end of the letter is but a small sampling of her many references and translations of the Latin biblical text into English in her book *The Lamentation or Complaint of a Sinner* (1547/48). It is more likely that she was feigning humility, especially given the reputation of the scholars of Cambridge and their honoring her with a letter in Latin to begin with. It appears that they had no reason to believe her incapable of reading it.

Her education in Latin was strong enough that in 1544, when Henry campaigned in France, he turned regency over to her. Only one other wife of Henry had this privilege: the promoter of New Learning, Catherine of Aragon. To effectively carry out her role as regent and handle the country’s business, Katherine would have to be capable of reading many languages. Henry could hardly have turned the empire over to a woman who could not read basic correspondence in Latin, a favorable form of letter writing in that day. She would have been at the mercy of the integrity of those around her to translate and respond in kind, not only accurately, but also without any agenda set against the king in his absence.

Even more to the point, the Parr family maintained many intellectual connections. For example, Thomas Parr was friends with Roger Ascham and Thomas More (an in-law to the Parr family and friend of Erasmus). With Cuthbert Tunstall as one of the greater influences over the widowed Maude Parr, and “given the scholarly proclivities of those who had the organization of the Parr children’s education,” argues James, “the standard adhered to would seem to have been high.” In their schoolroom at home, when Katherine was a child, she and her siblings read their father’s copy of *Horae ad Usum*
Sarum. A dedication to her uncle William appears in the volume in Katherine’s childish handwriting, next to a woodcutting of her patron saint. Latin seems to have been a part of their curriculum. A revised picture of her education may not necessarily include her education in the prestigious court itself (based on the evidence), but it does appear that the New Learning model found its way into Katherine’s home.

A Reformer of Culture and Religion

The queen also took a keen interest in bringing the language of Christianity into the common tongue. While there appears to be evidence that Katherine used and encouraged the use of Latin, it seems that she preferred English, especially as a pedagogical tool. From early on, Katherine took an interest in the writings of Erasmus. She found them to be important enough that she received permission to procure a translation team with the sole purpose of translating Erasmus’s *Paraphrase* into English for her people. She was also the patron of other translation projects, notably a treatise written by Margaret of Navarre.

That she wanted to communicate with the layperson and believed in providing for the laity’s religious education in the people’s tongue is even clearer by her own writings. The majority of her letters are in English. Besides one poem in French, her two published works, popularly known as *Prayers or Meditations* and *The Lamentation or Complaint of a Sinner*, are both in English. Moreover, when Henry waged war in France, he directed Thomas Cranmer to “revive the Catholic custom of holding processions through villages and towns to pray for ‘the miserable state of Christendom,’” but allowed Cranmer to conduct these prayers in English. The idea of

prayers in English excited the queen so much that she contributed a prayer on behalf of the soldiers in France:

Our cause being now just, and being enforced to enter into war and battle, we most humbly beseech Thee, O Lord God of Hosts, so to turn the hearts of our enemies to the desire of peace, that no Christian blood be spilt; or else grant, O Lord, that with small effusion of blood and to the little hurt

1.4 Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), Archbishop of Canterbury, engraving by W. Holl after the painting by “Gerbicus Flicciis,” or Gerlach Flicke (ca. 1545).
and damage of innocents, we may to Thy glory obtain victory. And that the wars being soon ended, we may all with one heart and mind, knit together in concord and unity, laud and praise Thee.\(^\text{13}\)

She was, in this way, a cultural reformer, accomplishing what many such as William Tyndale had only dreamed.

But was Katherine a reformer of religion as well when she became queen? Early biographers and admirers often portray Katherine as an unabashedly Reformed queen when she entered the throne in 1543. This portrayal is largely derived from the high praise Katherine receives from John Foxe in his popular *Acts and Monuments*. It is true that Katherine left the throne as a Protestant calling for reformation, but initially she was, to be precise, more a follower of Erasmus.

Her life, before her marriage to Henry, does not leave much room for Reformation influence. She was very young during her short-lived marriage to Lord Borough, who, it seems, had some Reformation connections, but exactly how Reform-minded he was is uncertain.\(^\text{14}\) While it is possible that during her time as a Latimer Katherine encountered Reformed ideas, there is no proof. It is usually argued that when Latimer moved to London, she was exposed to the Reformation, entertaining the likes of Miles Coverdale, Hugh Latimer, and John Parkhurst. There is no evidence that she had strong connections to these men at this time, either. There is also no reason to think that she changed her opinions about religion during her engagement to Thomas Seymour. He was not a religious person

\(^{13}\) Quoted in Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr*, 179–80.

\(^{14}\) Historians disagree about which Edward, Lord Borough, Katherine married. Some have thought it was the grandfather Borough, while others have believed it was the younger, grandson Edward. For more information, see James, *Kateryn Parr*, 60–62.
in any real sense of the word, and he honored only two sacraments: power and money.

Significant changes in Katherine’s religious life began after she married Henry. At that time she came into contact with John Parkhurst, who had written Latin verses in honor of Katherine and Henry’s visit to Oxford. He also came highly recommended from Katherine, the Duchess of Suffolk, who had hired Parkhurst as her chaplain some time before.  

Queen Katherine took Parkhurst on as her chaplain, in which position he remained for the rest of her life. Parkhurst’s sympathies with Reformed nonconformists probably helped serve as flint for her conversion to Protestantism.

Greater theological evolution occurred only a year later when Henry left Katherine as regent. As Diarmaid MacCulloch points out, while “the precise timing of her change of views is not clear,” it is interesting that in 1544, while Henry was away, she may have been “in daily contact with Cranmer as she fulfilled her duties as Regent.” This suggestion is not without merit. When Henry commissioned the queen with regency, he ordered Cranmer to serve as one of her advisers. Cranmer’s inclusion in this list implies that there would be plenty of need for her to consult his opinions. It is probably here that she fostered a relationship with him, eventually leading to her intentional pressuring of Henry for greater reforms in the following year.

Around this time, Katherine drafted and published her *Prayers or Meditations*, a devotional work with influences

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ranging from Thomas à Kempis to Augustine to Erasmus. There is nothing specifically Protestant about this work, and in large part, it is Katherine’s personalization of Thomas à Kempis, in that she, like many other writers in her day, borrows much of his language. (For more on Parr’s use of Thomas’s *The Imitation of Christ*, see the introduction to chapter 2 below.) In this work, Katherine’s serious religious life was beginning to show through:

Most benign Lord Jesus, grant me thy grace, that it may always work in me, and perseverance with me unto the end.

Grant me, that I may ever desire and will that which is most pleasant and most acceptable to thee.

Thy will be my will, and my will be to follow always thy will.

Let there be always in me one will and one desire with thee; and that I have no desire to will or not to will, but as thou wilt.

Lord, thou knowest what thing is most profitable and most expedient for me.

Give, therefore, what thou wilt, as much as thou wilt, and when thou wilt.18

Katherine was among only a handful of English women who had published anything within a century’s time. “The Queen’s book,” writes Weir, “represented a real breakthrough in an age when only the most privileged women were fortunate enough to receive an education.”19

This devotional work represents serious introspection. Her prayer “for my heart may not rest nor fully be pacified but only in thee” recalls Augustine’s statement “our heart is

unquiet until it rests in you.” A large percentage of these prayers emphasize her need for grace: “O Lord Jesus, make that possible by grace, which is impossible to me, by nature.”

Such statements led Protestants after her to see

this as a Protestant devotional, but as William P. Haugaard observes, “The contents of the book could not offend [the] Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist. The prayers are not related to any liturgical observances but comprise a collection of purely private devotions.”

Though this small Christian work is well worth reading for both Protestants and Catholics, it is neither explicitly Protestant nor Catholic. It does seem to appear at a time when Katherine was considering the former and moving away from the latter. After all, having published this in 1545, Katherine found herself distinctly tied to the Reformers a year later when Anne Askew was put on the rack.

Our primary record for this dramatic event is John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments. While Foxe’s records are far from “good history,” and while Katherine does come across as a Queen Esther-like personality, there is a high probability that this record, in its general form, is closer to fact than some of his other historical accounts. Foxe, according to Haugaard, probably received the details of the incident from Parkhurst, a close friend.

Anne Askew, a determined and outspoken Protestant, was charged with heresy by Bishop Stephen Gardiner and Lord Chancellor Thomas Wriothesley. The first time, she was arrested and released, but the second time she was not so fortunate. Gardiner, Wriothesley, and others engaged in a less-than-ethical search to squelch the Protestant advancement. Gardiner believed that Anne, one of many targets, had connections to important persons in the court. According to Anne’s nephew, she was arrested when a letter she tried to send was intercepted. The letter implicated Katherine Parr as one whom she believed would be sympathetic to her cause. To add to the problem, while in prison, Anne

22. Ibid., 352.
received money from members of the “queen’s inner circle, as well as visits from the queen’s own cousin, Nicholas Throckmorton.”

These connections brought Katherine under suspicion by Gardiner and Wriothesley, who sought to implicate the queen in the conspiracy. In 1546 the queen and the king had such a close relationship that they discussed religion daily. From Foxe’s record it appears that Katherine had strongly encouraged Henry to press for more of Cranmer’s reforms and to end the “superstitions” of Rome. In her own way, Katherine was seeking to aid in the reformation of the church and was apparently successful at times. The king’s openess to what Katherine had to say encouraged her to be bolder with each discussion. As Foxe recounts, she was

oftentimes wishing, exhorting, and persuading the king, that as he had, to the glory of God, and his eternal fame, begun a good and a godly work in banishing that monstrous idol of Rome, so he would thoroughly perfect and finish the same, cleansing and purging his church of England clean from the dregs thereof, wherein as yet remained great superstition.

But while the king enjoyed a good debate, his temper grew hotter as Katherine’s discussions grew bolder and his counterpoints grew weaker. The king was adamant that a woman would not be his teacher. Gardiner and Wriothesley, keeping a close eye on Katherine because of her connections to Anne Askew, did not agree with the queen’s encouragement

23. See James, Kateryn Parr, 269–74.
of the king’s reforms and looked hard for a way to keep her from bringing him closer to the Reformation. During this time the king suffered from an illness that affected his leg and his temperament, leaving him less than patient with Katherine’s passionate discussions, and apparently open to suggestions.

One afternoon, the king’s irritation outweighed his tolerance, and he broke off a serious conversation with Katherine on the Reformation. His anger with the queen took her and Gardiner by surprise. Gardiner, Foxe concludes, “thought, that if the iron were beaten whilst it was hot,” he might be able to convince the king that the queen was a danger to his rule and should be removed from her position. Gardiner had hoped to remove her from influence indefinitely. Whispering in the king’s ear, he told Henry that Katherine thought she was wiser than he, that she sought to exalt herself to a doctor of theology, and that this had serious political, nearly treasonous ramifications, warranting death. Henry fumed with anger, and Gardiner, with Henry’s permission, called for an investigation, sought to find banned books in the queen’s library, and questioned the queen’s ladies. The investigation began quietly, leaving Katherine completely in the dark. Eventually the king signed a bill of articles against the queen, and Gardiner set his plan into action.

Master Thomas Wendy, one of the queen’s medical doctors, chose to disobey an order not to tell the queen. Foxe seems to imply that Henry told Wendy with the hopes that he would disobey orders and inform Katherine. Added to this, one of Henry’s men dropped a crumpled copy of the articles against Katherine conveniently near her ladies-in-waiting. The implication was that Henry, in giving these orders against Katherine, was actually testing her

26. Ibid., 555.