

Queen Katherine Parr and Early Anglican Bidding Prayers

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Introduction

Sunday worship in late medieval England included sets of vernacular intercessions generally referred to as bidding prayers. These were significantly altered in 1534 to reflect Henry VIII's claim to be supreme head of the church in England. The body of six such texts from the reign of Henry VIII and four from the reign of Edward VI are here collectively referred to as "early Anglican bidding prayers."

As a result of the changes decreed by Henry VIII, the king, queen and other members of the royal family became appreciably more prominent than previously had been the case. Here I note the place of Queen Katherine Parr in the early Anglican bidding prayers, and consider the influence -- direct or indirect -- that she had on the content of several of these texts.

Katherine (Catherine) Parr married Henry VIII on July 12, 1543; she was his sixth wife. They had no children together, but Katherine became stepmother to Princess Mary, Princess Elizabeth, and Prince Edward. Henry VIII died in January 1547 and she remarried later in the same year. Katherine died on September 5, 1548, shortly after giving birth to a daughter.

Previous studies on early Anglican bidding prayers and related topics include the following articles posted on this website, all dated 2003:

Sovereign and Pope in English Bidding Prayers before and after 1534
Queens, Nuns, Pregnant Women and Mothers: Consequences for Women of Henry VIII's
1534 Decree on Bidding Prayers
Clergy, Nobility, Commoners, the Dead and Henry VIII's Second Decree on Bidding
Prayers (1536)
Henry VIII's 1534 and 1536 Decrees on Bidding Prayers: Unintended Consequences
Queen Mary I and a Court Form of Bidding Prayer in Medieval England

Bidding Prayers that Name Katherine Parr

Katherine Parr is significant, in the first place, because she is named in more early Anglican bidding prayers than any other queen: in two prayers from the reign of Henry VIII and in four from the reign of Edward VI. The printed sources of these prayers are given here, followed by the relevant portions of the texts themselves. The prayers continue with intercessions for nobility, clergy and the dead.

H. O. Coxe, *Forms of Bidding Prayer*. Oxford: John Henry Parker 1840

F. E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, 2 vol. London: Rivingtons, 1921

Edgar Hoskins, *Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis or Sarum and York Primers with Kindred Books and Primers of the Reformed Roman Use*. London: Longmans Green 1901

1544, September 12 [Henry VIII]

Ye shall pray for the whole congregation of Christ's church
and specially for this church of England
wherein first I commend unto your devout prayers the King's most excellent majesty,
supreme head immediately under God
of the spirituality and temporality of the same church.
Also ye shall pray for Queen Katherine that now is,
and for our most noble Prince Edward.

Hoskins 156

1546 [Henry VIII]

You shall pray for the whole congregation of Christ's Church,
and specially for this Church of England and Ireland,
wherein first I commend to your devout prayers; the King's most excellent Majesty,
supreme head, immediately under God,
of the spirituality and temporality of the same Church,

and for Queen Katherine,
Prince Edward, and for the Lady Mary and the Lady Elizabeth
Coxe 71-72

1547 [Edward VI] [Introduction by Coxe]

This form of bidding the common prayers was inserted in the Injunctions of King Edward VI, published by his authority 1547, with the proper alterations and the additions of the Lord Protector's Grace,

The alterations stand thus:

You shall pray...

[Queen] Katherine Dowager,

and for my Lady Mary and my Lady Elizabeth, the King's Sisters.

Secondly, you shall pray for my lord Protectours Grace

with all the rest of the King's Majesty his Council

for all the Lords of this realm

Coxe 72-73

1547 [Edward VI]

Fyrst you shall pray for the whole congregatyon of the true Chrysten and Catholyke Church of Chryste; and specially for thys Church of Englande and Irelande; wheryn firste I commende to your devoute prayers our moste Soveraigne Lord the Kyng, supreme heade yn earth, ymmediately onder God

of the spiritualty and temporalty of the same Church of England and Ireland,

that God for his great mercy send hym grace so to governe and to rule this realm

that God be pleasyd and worshyppyd,

and to the propht and salvacyon of thys londe

and for Queen Katerine, dowagier,

and also for my Lady Mary and Lady Elizabeth the Kyng's Susters

Coxe 75-76

1547-1548 [Edward VI]

Fyrst yow shall pray for the whole congregatyon of the true Chrysten and catholyke church of Chryste,

And specyally for thys church of Englande and Irelande.

Wheryn, fyrste, I commende to your devoute prayers

owr moste sourerangne lorde the kyng,

supreme heade yn earthe, ymmedyatly under God,

for the spiritualtie and temporalty of the same church of England and Ireland,

that God for hys greate mercy, send hym grace so to gouerne and to rule thys realme,

that God be pleasyd, worshyppyd, and to the profytt and saluacyon of thys londe.

And for quene Katerine dowagier,

And also for my lady Mary, and my Lady Elizabeth the kynges susters.

Brightman 2, 1050

1550 [Edward VI]

In which prayer I commend unto Almighty God your most excellent Majesty our
Sovereign Lord, King of England, France, and Ireland
and of the Church of England and Ireland
next and immediately under God on earth supreme head,
Queen Katharine Dowager,
my Lady Maries Grace, and my Lady Elizabeths grace,
your Majesty's most dear sisters
Coxe 83

Other Queens in Bidding Prayers

Other bidding prayers from the reign of Henry VIII name previous wives of Henry VIII as follows:

1534 for the most gracious Lady Queen Anne his wife
[Anne Boleyn, m 1533, d 1536, mother of Elizabeth]

1536 and the most noble and virtuous Lady Queen Jane, his most lawful wife
[Jane Seymour, m 1536, d 1537, mother of Edward]

1539 and Queen Anne his wife
[Anne of Cleves, m 1540]

1541 [no queen named]

Of course, Edward VI never married.

Katherine as Royal Wife

Based on the earlier prayers for Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves, just considered, it is worthy of note that Katherine Parr is never described as royal "wife." It may be that this is simply an accident of composition. Alternatively, it may be that her role as wife was played down for some particular purpose. The declining state of Henry's health and the fact that Katherine had not had children in her two earlier marriages, for example, may have tempered expectations that this queen would bear a child with him.

Katherine as Queen Regent

The text of the first bidding prayer that names Katherine Parr as queen (dated quite precisely to September 12, 1544) is distinctive in that it adds the words “that now is” following the queen’s name; this phrase is found in no other English bidding prayer.

One interpretation is that this is an attempt to distinguish Katherine Parr from her most recent predecessor, Catherine Howard. However, Catherine Howard was beheaded in February 1542, more than a year before Katherine Parr and Henry were married, and two and a half years before the date of this prayer. It would seem unlikely that anyone would confuse the two queens after such an interval.

Another view is that the phrase “that now is” reflects Katherine Parr’s strong sense of self-identity. Thus she always added her personal initials, “KP”, at the end of each signature, whether this was Queen, Queen Regent or Queen Dowager. In every case, she was still Katherine Parr.

The most likely interpretation, I think, is that “that now is” refers to the fact that on the date of this prayer; Katherine was Queen Regent. Henry had left England to join his army in France in July 1544, and did not return until late September. In his absence, Queen Katherine had full authority in the realm – though of course with many advisors. In these circumstances, “that now is” could refer to her not simply as queen consort but as queen regent – *the* queen with the authority of the sovereign.

Katherine as Stepmother

When Katherine Parr married Henry VIII in July 1543, she became stepmother to Henry’s three children by previous marriages: Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, born 18 February 1516; Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, born 7 September 1533; and Edward, son of Jane Seymour, born 12 October 1537. Edward, as only son, was heir to the throne and Henry’s favorite.

The bidding prayers from Henry VIII’s reign, taken as a whole, show the special place of Edward among the royal children; he is named in three or the seven prayers. He is first named in a prayer from Queen Anne of Cleves’ era, “and for the prosperite of the noble Prynce Edworde his sonne” (1539). Next, he is included in a prayer from 1541 that names no queen (though Catherine Howard was queen at the time): “for the prosperity of the noble Prince Edward his son”. Finally, he is named in the first prayer from Katherine Parr’s time: “and for our most noble Prince Edward” (1544) It is of interest that a prayer that names Queen Jane Seymour (1536) does not name Edward; presumably it preceded his birth in 1537 – and her death in childbirth.

The other royal children receive less attention in the bidding prayers. Princess Mary is included in no surviving prayer prior to Katherine Parr’s period. One text from 1534 prays “for the most gracious Lady Queen Anne [Boleyn] his wife, and for the the Lady Elizabeth, daughter and heir to them both”. Thus the text of 1546 is noteworthy in praying “for Queen Katherine,

Prince Edward, and for the Lady Mary and the Lady Elizabeth.”

Historians have noted the good relations that Katherine Parr had with all three royal children. She also helped to heal rifts between Henry and his two daughters. Finally, she helped make it possible for all three children to live at court. Two treatments of Katherine Parr’s role as royal stepmother are given in *Appendix I*.

Katherine as Queen Dowager

Four bidding prayers from the early years of Edward VI’s reign name Katherine Parr as Queen Dowager. She was not referred to as Queen Mother, as she was not the biological mother of either Edward VI or of his royal sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. Nevertheless she was the widow of the king and had been called queen during his life: she was dowager.

In the history of English bidding prayers since the 10-12th centuries, this was first time the title Queen Dowager had been used (at least in surviving texts). A text from 1483 does refer to “the Ladye the Kinges Mother”, however. In the subsequent history of Anglican bidding prayers, one text from the reign of Charles II names “our gracious Lady Mary the Queen Mother” and one from the reign of Queen Victoria names “Adelaide the Queen Dowager.”

Katherine’s use of the title Queen Dowager was challenged, however. Two treatments of this matter are given in *Appendix II*.

Discussion

The “early Anglican” bidding prayers of Henry VIII and Edward VI’s reigns shifted the focus of attention away from church and society and toward the sovereign and royal family. Thus in contrast to previous practice, in which queens and royal offspring were mentioned in general terms but not named, personal names are now given. The several bidding prayers from this period give a partial picture of Henry VIII’s several marriages and of the birth of his several surviving children.

The six bidding prayers considered here, in particular, provide a kind of mirror of Queen Katherine Parr’s career as queen. They show her not only as queen consort but also queen regent, royal stepmother, and dowager queen -- but not as wife. Henry’s esteem and trust were shown when he named her regent during the time when he left England to join his army. He also established her as “first lady” following his death. Her influence on Henry in his relationship with Mary and Elizabeth is also evident in these prayers.

Appendix I: Stepmother

Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 8 vol, second edition. London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer 1875. Here, volume 3.

Katherine Parr had now for the third time undertaken the office of a step-mother, – an office at all times of much difficulty and responsibility, but peculiarly so with regard to the children of Henry VIII, who were the offspring of queens so fatally opposed as Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Jane Seymour had successively been. How well the sound sense and endearing manners of Katherine Parr fitted her to reconcile the rival interests, and to render herself a bond of union between the disjointed links of the royal family, is proved by the affection and respect of her step-children, and also by their letters after King Henry's death. (p 203)

One of the first fruits of Queen Katherine's virtuous influence over the mind of the king was, the restoration of his daughters, the persecuted Mary and the young neglected Elisabeth, to their proper rank in the court, and recognition in the order of succession to the crown. The privy-purse expenses of the princess Mary bear evidence of many little traits of kindness and friendly attentions which she, from time to time, received from her amiable step-mother. [examples] ... (p 207)

Notwithstanding the great difference in their religious tenets, a firm friendship ever subsisted between Katharine Parr and Mary. They were near enough in age to have been sisters, they excelled in the same accomplishments, and the great learning and studious pursuits of these royal ladies rendered them suitable companions for each other. The more brilliant talents of the young Elizabeth were drawn forth and fostered under the auspices of her highly gifted step-mother. Katharine Parr took also an active part in directing the studies of the heir of England, and her approbation appears to have been the greatest encouragement the prince could receive. ... (p 208)

Anthony Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1973.

The main key to Katherine's success, however, was her treatment of the King's children. Vives had taught her as a child, and she had proved his teaching by experience, that a man valued few things more in a second, or subsequent, wife than affection and care for his children by his former wife or wives.....

With Princess Mary there were no difficulties. She and Katherine were almost contemporaries: they had shared the same tutors and had been brought up as children together, and down the years Mary had come to respect Katherine's superior intelligence and her integrity. She remembered her own mother's friendship for Katherine's mother and, although nothing was ever to obliterate the bitterness left by Henry's treatment of Catherine of Aragon, she associated Katherine Parr with those who sympathised with her. Moreover, ever since the days of Jane Seymour, Mary had been welcome at Court, and all that Katherine had to do with to make sure that that welcome would be even warmer than it had been.

In the case of Prince Edward, Katherine's task was again comparatively easy. Motherless from birth, the six-year-old boy had known only the care of nurses and governesses who, however fond of him they might have been, were bound by her position to treat him with a deference which precluded a normal show of affection. As Queen, Katherine's relationship with the boy was the other way round, it was he who had to defer to her, and he quickly found in her a person he could love and honour as much as, or, because of the pent-up emotions of his infancy, perhaps even more than he would have loved his natural mother. Within a very short time after their first meeting, he indeed took to calling Katherine 'Mother', and for the rest of Katherine's life he always used this title for her, and in the most affectionate terms.

Princess Elizabeth, however, was a very different matter. Unusually precocious, even for a Tudor child, she was now in her tenth year and keenly aware that, in the eyes of the Court, she was little more than a poor relation. For most of her life, Henry had ignored her, except as a pawn in the diplomatic game. ... She was, therefore, highly suspicious of any overtures made to her. Added to this was the fact that Henry was also suspicious of anyone who singled her out for special attention. . . .

In spite of the suspicions of both father and daughter, Katherine Parr was not deterred. There was no longer any valid reason why Elizabeth should be ostracised and, knowing Henry's emotional nature, Katherine was certain that once he could be persuaded to accept Elizabeth as a full member of the family, he would delight in the opportunity to play the part of a doting father. (pp 161-162)

Father and daughter were both won over some time before Katherine's marriage to the King, for Elizabeth was already installed at Court in June and took second place to Princess Mary among the ladies at the wedding. ...

As well as their individual affection, Katherine also sought the collective support of Henry's children. She wanted all of them together in the Royal Household, for only then could she create the impression of a close-knit family circle... (p 163)

The most significant grant which the King made at this time [January 1544], however, and for which Katherine Parr must take the credit as being the direct result of her work in uniting Henry with his family, was the restoring of Princess Mary and Princess Elizabeth to the right of succession to the Crown. (P 165)

Appendix II: Dowager

Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 8 vol, second edition. London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1875. Here, volume 3.

After the death of the king, she received all the honours due to his acknowledged widow – he left two, be it remembered [the other being Anne of Cleves]; but SHE was prayed for as

queen-dowager in the presence of the young king, by her old enemy Gardiner, in the following prayer for the royal family: "I commend to God queen Katherine, dowager, my lady Mary's grace, and my lady Elizabeth's grace, your majesty's dear sisters." On February 7, 1547, Edward VI wrote a Latin letter of condolence to his widowed step-mother, superscribed "Reginae Katharinae," calling her his dear mother, and concluding, "Farewell, venerated queen." (p 254)

... Somerset is supposed to have been excited to injurious treatment of the widow of his royal master and benefactor, Henry VIII, by the malice of his duchess, who had always borne envious ill-will against Katharine Parr. ... Open hostility between them broke out after the marriage of Katharine with the admiral, in consequence of the duchess of Somerset refusing any longer to fulfill her office of bearing up the train of the queen-dowager, alleging, "that it was unsuitable for her to submit to perform that service for the wife of her husband's younger brother," ... (p 267)

The pretense on which the duchess of Somerset founded her presumptuous dispute for precedence with the queen-dowager in the court of Edward VII, was, that as the wife of the protector and guardian of the realm, she had a right to take place of every lady in England. It is possible that, with the exception of the ladies of the royal family, she might; but the act of Henry VIII, whereby it was provided that Anne of Cleves should take precedence after his queen, and the princesses his daughters of every other lady in the realm, settled the matter for Katherine Parr's precedence beyond contravention; and the arrogant duchess was compelled to yield, but never forgave the mortification. ... (p 268)

Anthony Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1973

The Protector's wife, the Duchess of Somerset, however claiming that Katherine had forfeited her rights as Queen Dowager by a marriage so far beneath her station, she demanded that she should now have precedence over Katherine. ... The Duchess refused to bear Katherine's train at Court, and even tried to push her, physically, out of her place at the head of their entrances and exits at Court. ...

Katherine won the battle by invoking the Act of Succession which clearly stated that she had precedence over all ladies in the realm, that after her came the Princess Mary and Elizabeth, after them, Anne of Cleves, and only then came the Duchess of Somerset.... (p 231)