

Queen Katherine Parr's "Praier for men to saie enteryng into battayle"

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Introduction

In July 1544 Queen Katherine Parr's husband, King Henry VIII, sailed off to join his army, which was already in France. After a short military campaign he returned, victorious, the end of September. Queen Katherine, who was left to govern England as regent, sent her husband off with a remarkable prayer that she herself composed.

Here I present Queen Katherine Parr's "Prayer for men to say entering into battle" and offer a brief analysis and reflection. As the title indicates, it was intended for King Henry to say on the field of battle – and by extension, to be said by all his soldiers. Queen Katherine could also use it to remember her spouse in his absence. I believe that it still has much to say to us today.

In order to highlight the uniqueness and depth of Queen Katherine's prayer, I also present and analyze briefly several medieval and early Anglican prayers In Time of War and For Peace.

Sources

Queen Katherine's text became part of a body of five prayers that were printed at the end of her book, *Prayers or Medytacions* (1545). Early printings available in the ProQuest database Early English Books Online, are listed here in order of enumeration in the Short Title Catalogue, second edition.

4818 (1545); 4818.5 (1545); 4819 (1545); 4820 (1556); 4822 (1547); 4822.5 (1545);
4823 (1550); 4824 (1550); 4824a (1550); 4826 (1559).

This prayer is also available in a facsimile edition published recently.

Katherine Parr. Ed Janel Mueller. in *The Early Modern Englishwomen: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works. Part 1: Printed Writings, 1500-1640. Volume 3*. General Eds Betty S Travitsky and Patrick Cullen. Scholar Press and Ashgate 1997 (unpaginated).

The Prayer of Queen Katherine

The text of the prayer follows, with original spelling; line divisions are my own. Where thought useful, modern spellings are given along the right margin.

Praier for men to saie entering into battayle	[say [battle
O Almighty Kyng and lorde of hostes, which by thy angelles therunto apoynted doost mynister both warre and peace, and whiche diddest geue unto Dauid bothe courage and strength, beyng but a littell one, unarmed, and unexpert in feates of warre with his sling to sette upon and ouerthrowe the great huge Goliath: our cause now being iust, and beyng inforced to entre into warre and battaile, we most humbly beseech the [thee (O Lorde God of hostes) so to tourne the hertes of our enemies to the desyre of peace, that no christen blood be spilt, or else graunt (O Lorde) that with small effusion of blood,	[appointed [does, was [did give [being, little [feats, war [set [forced, war, battle [turn, hearts [desire [blood, Christian

and to the litle hurte and damage of innocentes,
we maie to thy glorie obtaine victorie:
and that the warres beyng sone ended,
we maie al with one hert and mynde,
knitte together in concord and unitie,
laude and praise the:
which lyuest and reignest,
worlde without ende.
Amen.

[little hurt
[obtain
[soon
[may, heart, mind, all
[unity
[thee

Literature

There is a small and interesting literature relating to this prayer of Queen Katherine. References are given in full below.

All would agree with Hoffman that “the composition can be dated to the summer of 1544 when Henry was in France leading the siege of Boulogne, leaving Catherine behind as queen regent” (p 354). It was first published in late 1545 as one of several “original prayers that Parr appended to close” her book, *Prayers or Meditations*” (Mueller 1996, p xi).

So far as authorship is concerned, Hoffman suggests that this and related prayers “are perhaps not original” (p 354). In contrast, Anthony Martiensen writes “there is little doubt that Katherine wrote it, though Cranmer’s guiding hand can be seen in the cadence and clarity of the style” (p 180).

With respect to the circumstances and motivation of its composition, Agnes Strickland writes, “In the true spirit of a Christian, queen Katherine entered upon her high office [of regent] by imploring the Divine protection for her royal husband and his realm in [this] prayer, which she composed for their use” (p 216). James Kelsey McConica sees these and related prayers in the context of Queen Katherine’s intellectual circle, which he characterizes as displaying “a non-dogmatic, humanist pietism” (p 228). Along these lines, Anthony Martiensen describes it as “a prayer in the pure spirit of Humanism” (p 180). Hoffman concludes that “the theology of these prayers is distinctively Catholic” (p. 354).

The fact that Queen Katherine’s prayer was written at the same time as Cranmer’s new litany and on the same occasion – the war in France – has led to some intriguing suggestions and conclusions. Thus Anthony Martiensen states that “Henry VIII’s directive to Cranmer to prepare the new litany and associated prayers (commonly called suffrages) in English... was taken by Cranmer as an invitation not only to translate the old Latin prayers, but also to add new simpler prayers which would be more in tune with the spirit of the times.” He continues, “his [Cranmer’s] work aroused Katherine’s interest, and one of the first new special prayers – to be said for the soldiers going to France – appears under her name” (pp 179-180).

Janel Mueller (1990), has carried this idea further. She states, “Strype’s *Ecclesiastical*

Memorials records a report that Parr wrote ‘a prayer for the kyng’ and ‘A praier for men to saie entryng into battayle’ for inclusion in Cranmer’s issue of a vernacular Letanie with Suffrages to be Said or Song that duly saw two editions in 1544. Although both these editions and subsequent ones from Henry’s reign introduce bidding prayers for the king, Queen Katherine and Prince Edward, none in fact includes Parr’s prayers, which found their own way into print at the end of her *Prayers or Meditations...* dated 6 November 1545” (p 176). As a general conclusion she says; “[I]t seems Queen Katherine undertook to complement the vernacular service books for public church worship then being advocated to Henry VIII by archbishop Thomas Cranmer. She would assemble a vernacular manual for the private devotion of individuals in the new national Church of England” (p 174). See also McConica, pp 233-234.

C. Fenno Hoffman, Jr., “Catherine Parr as a Woman of Letters,” in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 23 (1959) 349-367

James Kelsey McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965. See chapter 7, “The Last Years of the Reign: The Role of Catherine Parr, pp 200-234

Anthony Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr*. New York et al., McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973

Janel Mueller, “Devotion as Difference: Intertextuality in Queen Katherine Parr’s *Prayers or Meditations* (1545)”, in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53 (1990) 171-197

Janel Mueller, ed., *Katherine Parr*. The Early Modern Englishwomen: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works. Part I: Printed Writings, 1500-1640. Scholar Press 1996. Introductory Note, pp ix-xii and *Prayers or Medytacions*. unpaginated.

Agnes Strickland, “Katherine Parr: Sixth Queen of Henry VIII,” in her *Lives of the Queens of England*, 8 vol. London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer 1875. Here vol 3, pp 174-300.

Analysis

Rather than comment on the text from top to bottom, I shall consider its several component elements. The order in which these are dealt with follows the internal logic of the prayer: title, petition, expansion of the petition, identification of the persons praying, the God addressed in the prayer.

Title

Though originally intended for King Henry, this prayer is worded in the plural throughout: men, we, our; it was thus intended for all the soldiers. In addition, however, the “we” of the prayer could be understood more broadly to include Queen Katherine herself, families of other soldiers, and the English “side” generally. To carry this line of thought further, the prayer could also be said by enemy soldiers – the “other side”.

Petition

The core of a prayer like this is the petition, which generally is positioned toward the middle of the text. In this prayer there are three petitions.

Petition 1 turn the hearts of our enemies to the desire of peace

Petition 2 grant that we may obtain victory

Petition 3 grant that we may laud and praise thee [God]

The long term goal, for soldiers entering into battle, is to give glory to God (petition 3); this of course is considered the purpose of human life in general. The immediate means by which that is to be attained in the context of war, is victory (petition 2). Both of these petitions are rather conventional.

The first petition is remarkable, however. God is asked to prevent the war, to make battle unnecessary. This will happen if the hearts of the enemy (who is indicated later to be the side that starts hostilities) are converted, that is if they now seek peace instead of war, that they withdraw from battle. Such a last minute decision to seek peace instead of war would also be a victory, though of an unexpected sort; this too would be a means of giving glory of God. Thus, with God’s help, war is not inevitable.

Expansion of the Petition

All three petitions are expanded upon, and the language used broadens, qualifies, interprets and particularizes the basic texts of the petition.

Petition 1 that no Christian blood be spilt

Petition 2 (a) with small effusion of blood

Petition 2 (b) and to the little hurt and damage of innocents

Petition 3 (a) that the war being soon ended

Petition 3 (b) we may all with one heart and mind,

knit together in concord and unity

Peace is to be sought rather than battle, so that soldiers may not have to spill the blood of soldiers on the other side – the enemy. In war, however, soldiers on both sides are wounded and killed, and combatants are here praying for their own survival and safety as well.

The use of the qualification, “Christian”, here is not, I believe, an attempt to distinguish Christian from Moslem or Jew, as if it would be permissible to spill their blood; not at all. Queen Katherine is addressing the immediate context of English and French soldiers in battle – all alike baptized and thereby brothers in Christian faith, all alike adopted brothers of Jesus Christ, adopted children of the one God. This bond makes war between English and French soldiers especially repugnant.

If war does occur, and men do enter into battle, then at least, one prays, may there be only “a small effusion of blood” – may casualties among combatants, be few; may only small numbers of soldiers be killed or injured. And here Queen Katherine’s prayer does not distinguish between “our side” and “their side”; many enemy casualties are as undesirable as our own.

Both Queen Katherine and the soldiers to whom she offers this prayer are also aware of the possibility – even likelihood – that soldiers are not the only ones whose lives are at risk. God is asked that innocent persons also suffer little hurt or damage. In the language of our own day, that collateral damage be small. This surely is also an admonition to the men who enter into battle to be careful not to injure civilians.

God is also asked that any war be of short duration; that it conclude quickly.

The prayer then looks ahead to the time when the war will be over. Soldiers -- on both sides -- who have been fighting each other now pray that “all [have] one heart and mind [and be] knit together in concord and unity.” I understand “all” here to include our side and their side together, both the English and the French – not simply our side. This is a remarkable expectation:

that there be no rancor, hard feelings or bitterness between the sides and among the soldiers on both sides. Rather, they are envisioned as achieving an inner unity – even though one side wins and the other loses on the battlefield.

Identification of the Person Praying

The petitions are preceded by a three-fold identification of the persons praying; these go deeper than thinking just of king, soldier, spouse, country.

Statement 1 which did give unto David both courage and strength,
being but a little one, unarmed, and inexpert in feats of war,
with his sling to set upon and overthrow the great huge Goliath

Statement 2 our cause being just

Statement 3 being forced to enter into war and battle

The part of the prayer devoted to David has several functions and meanings. First, it is a biblical story that provides a precedent for God's action in the present day. It also connects Henry VIII with this prayer, as both he and David are kings; it gives Henry a personal biblical model.

In addition, the allusion to David being "a little one, unarmed and inexpert" is an example of the self deprecation typical of much language of its day (by men as well as women). It is also a way of claiming that England is the underdog in this conflict. Despite this, victory can be theirs as a result of God's action on England's behalf. However, any victory attained is purely the result of God's action, not that of humans.

The statement that "our cause [is] just" is noteworthy on several grounds. For Queen Katherine, it is important that soldiers be able to affirm that "our cause [is] just." This should not be just a hasty and casual boast, but rather the result of serious reflection in light of the principles and criteria having to do with just warfare. Soldiers – both kings and privates – as well as the folks at home, are expected to know the difference between just and unjust war and will want to be sure that any war they are involved in, is indeed just.

Finally, soldiers using this prayer state that they are being forced to enter into battle. They really do not want to go to war, they would rather avoid war, they are not acting first; they go to war reluctantly.

The God Addressed in Prayer

Finally, the prayer names and identifies the God to whom the prayer is addressed, and whose honor and praise are among the results sought.

Statement 1 O Almighty King and Lord of hosts,

Statement 2 by the angels you have appointed for this purpose
you administer both war and peace

That God is imaged as king affirms that earthly kings – both Henry and the French king – are subordinate to One who has far more power than they do and to whom they must give their allegiance. Kings have limited rule, power and authority. This point is reinforced by the image of God as leader and chief of angelic armies (hosts).

God's role in war is often a difficulty for the people involved. Sometimes it is thought

that war is divine punishment for the sins of “our side” and that it is a kind of purification and cleansing. Sometimes, God is thought to be only on “our side”, and absent from the other. Without explanation, Queen Katherine’s prayer simply states that God is involved in both war and peace. By implication, I think, it also says that God is present on “their side” as well as “our side.”

Prayers In Time of War and For Peace

For the sake of contrast, context and comparison, I print five prayers that were roughly contemporary with that of Queen Katherine Parr. They were in official liturgical books of the time, either the Catholic Sarum Missal or the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Full references are given below.

For brevity, these prayers are identified by bold face letters **A** through **E**. Prayers **A**, **C** and **E** are for use In Time of War, while prayers **B** and **D** are For Peace. Further analysis and commentary follow the texts.

Continued on next page...

A O God, the ruler of all kingdoms and kings,
who both by smiting healest us,
and by forgiving preservest us;

extend unto us thy mercy,
that we may use for our remedy and
correction
the peace and quietness established by thy

power.

Mass in Time of War
The Sarum Missal in English, vol 2,
p 119

B O God, from whom all holy desires,
all good counsels, and all just works do
proceed,
give unto thy servants that peace which the
world cannot give;
that both our hearts may be set to obey thy
commandments,
and also that by thee we being defended
from the fear of our enemies
may pass our time in rest and quietness.

Mass for Peace
The Sarum Missal in English, vol 2,
p 99

C O God, who bringest wars to nought,
and shieldest by Thy power all who hope in
Thee,
overthrowing those that assail them;
help Thy servants who implore Thy mercy;
so that the fierce might of their enemies
shall be brought low
and we may never cease to praise and thank
Thee.

Mass in Time of War
Missale Romanum 1570 / Saint
Andrew Daily Missal, p [149]

D O God, which art author of peace,
and king of concorde,
in knowledge of whome standeth oure
eternall life,
whose service is perfect fredome;
defende us, thy humble seruantes,
in al assaultes of our enemies,
that wee surely trustyng in thy defence,
maye not feare the power of any

aduersaries...

Second Collect for Matins
Book of Common Prayer 1549, p 26,
355

E O Almighty God, kyng of al kinges, and
gouvernour of all thyngs,
whose power no creature is able to resiste,
to whom it belongeth justly to punishe
sinners,
and to be merciful to them that truly repent:
saue and deliuer us (we humbly beseche
thee)
from the handes of our enemies:
abate their pride, assuage their malice,
and confound their deuises,
that we beeing armed with thy defence,
may be preserued euermore from al periles
to glorifie thee,
whiche art the onely geuer of all victory...

In the tyme of Warre,
Book of Common Prayer 1552, p
366

The Sarum Missal in English. Translated by
Frederick E. Warren. Alcuin Club
Collections XI. London: Mowbray 1913

Book of Common Prayer, 1549.

There are many printed editions. Here I am
using *The First and Second Prayer Book of
Edward VI.* Introduction by Douglas
Harrison. London: Dent / Everyman's
Library, 1968.

Analysis

Again, these prayers are analyzed according to their component elements, beginning with the petition.

Petition

- A extend to us your mercy
- B give to your servants that peace which the world cannot give
- C help your servants who implore your mercy
- D defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies
- E - save and deliver us (we humbly beseech you) from the hands of our enemies
- abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices

Result

- A that we may use for our remedy and correction
the peace and quietness established by your power
- B - that both our hearts may be set to obey your commandments,
- and also that by you we being defended from the fear of our enemies
may pass our time in rest and quietness
- C - and we may never cease to praise and thank you
- so that the full might of their enemies shall be brought low
- D that we surely trusting in your defense,
may not fear the power of any adversaries
- E that we being armed with thy defense
may be preserved evermore from all perils to glorify you,
who are the only giver of all victory

Basis – what justifies our prayer

- A who both by smiting heal us, and by forgiving preserve us
- B from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed
- C who... shields by your power all who hope in thee,
overthrowing those that assail them
- D in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life,
whose service is perfect freedom
- E whose power no creature is able to resist,
to whom it belongs justly to punish sinners,
and to be merciful to them that truly repent

Address - images of God

- A O God, the ruler of all kingdoms and kings
- B O God
- C O God
- D O God, who are author of peace and king of concord
- E O Almighty God, king of all kings and governor of all things

In general these prayers are more general and more abstract than that of Queen Katherine; there is less passion. This, however, is understandable in prayers for use on many different occasions.

Prayers **A** and **E** imply that war is punishment for our sins.

Petition

In texts **A** through **D** the perspective is only that of the one praying – “us” or “our side” in any conflict. In text **E**, however, the second petition speaks directly of the enemy. For the most part the content is conventional: extend mercy, give peace, help, defend, save and deliver.

Only the second petition in prayer **E** is exceptional: “abate their pride, assuage their malice, confound their devises.”

Result

Texts **A** and **B** are interesting in that they speak of what we will do in the peace that follows war, namely “our remedy and correction” and “obey your commandments”. Texts **B** and **D** also speak of being preserved from fear of the enemy and of trusting in God’s protection, and (**E**), being preserved from all perils. Defeat of the enemy is named in texts **C** and **E**. Victory will enable “us” to praise and thank the God who brought this about: **C, E**.

Basis

God’s mercy and forgiveness of sinners is named in texts **A** and **E**. God’s power

in war is named in texts **B** and **C** God is described as the source of holy desires, good counsel, just works, eternal life and perfect freedom in texts **B** and **D**.

Address

As in Queen Katherine's prayer, God is imaged as ruler and king of all earthly kings, but also author of peace and concord.

Conclusions

Queen Katherine Parr's "Prayer for men to say entering into battle" was remarkable in its own day, being quite unlike the usual prayers used either For Peace or In Time of War. Where did her thoughts come from? How and why did it take the shape – conceptual and literary – that it did? These questions need further study.

It is also thought provoking for us today. It is realistic in naming the fact that blood is spilled and innocents are hurt. It is idealistic in envisioning the conversion of the hearts of the enemies and in thinking that deep unity can follow war. It is challenging in speaking of a just war, based not on simplistic jingoism but on serious analysis. It is refreshing in not demonizing the "other side" and in reaching out to them. I invite readers to ponder ways in which Queen Katherine's prayer may speak to our own day – and ways in which it does not; after all, times are very different today, as are the means of warfare.