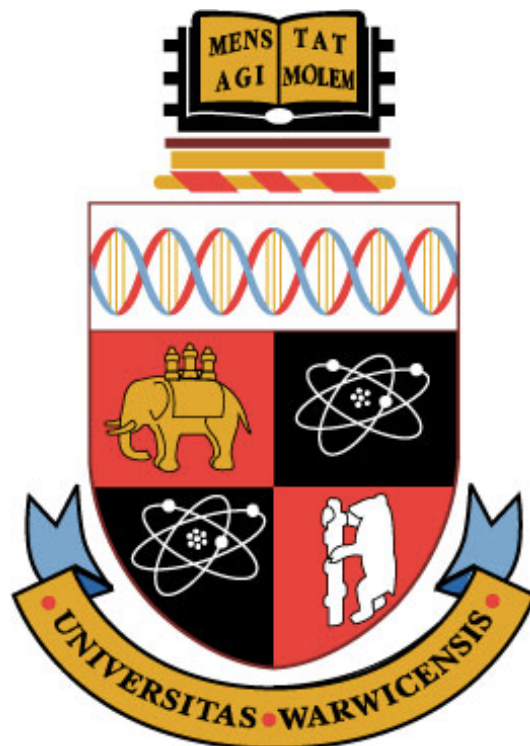


Agents of “Cultural Exchange” between the German and
English Reformations
Project Report

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This project focuses on Cultural Exchange in the integration of the English Reformation, examining the view of Rory McEntegart and Alec Ryrie, assessing each with the intention to redirect focus from the whims and demands of royalty and politics to the role of reformers, especially the previously underestimated Phillip Melanchthon. Philip Melanchthon is outstanding in this episode, as his mastery and manipulation of Lutheran theology provided the real background to the English Reformation, and despite his choice not to visit England his presence was surely felt and resounds to this day. Thomas Cranmer was an essential figure in not only embracing reformed ideology in England but also its dissemination with the aid of fellow domestic and international theologians such as Martin Bucer. Using materials from the German Historical Institute London, this project argues that the English Reformation was certainly a negotiated process, emphasising not Henry VIII's demand for reform as supreme but instead the efforts of continental reformers. Though Henry's permission was essential, continental reformers, with renewed focus on Philip Melanchthon, did not attempt to transfer the Reformation out of fear of confrontation. Instead, these attempts were based on a genuine attempt to adjust and mould the reformed message to English conditions, facilitated through Henry's initial welcome. The role of Philip Melanchthon as a widely renown reformer and his theology endeared the entire movement to Henry, and the loss of Henry's respect later did not result in the destruction of his messages.^{1 2}

Study at the German Historical Institute in London, made possible through funding awarded by the IATL, allowed access to under utilised and specialist materials necessary for the project. Resources available suggest that attention has been misdirected, focusing on the individual role of Henry VIII and Martin Luther, seen to be the logical protagonists of this exchange. Instead, increased emphasis must be placed on the importance of negotiation, with emphasis placed instead on the Lutheran reformer Philip Melanchthon, due to his virtually universal appeal and respect and thus his pivotal role in the transmission of Reformed theology.

Opposing the widely held view that Henry VIII initiated the English Reformation purely for selfish concerns, namely to obtain a divorce and thus a legitimate heir, Rory McEntegart argues that Henry VIII was 'genuinely interested in close religious and political' relations with reformers.³ McEntegart suggests that genuine interest and common concern led to a negotiated Reformation in England, with welcome input from continental reformers. Alec Ryrie offers an alternative narrative. Ryrie contends that Henry VIII was largely uninterested in the theological implications of reform, and was more interested in the practical workings on the



¹ Ryrie, 'Strange Death', p.67.

² Ryrie, 'Strange Death', p.78.

³ Rory McEntegart, *Henry VIII, The League of Schmalkalden and the English Reformation* (Woodbridge, 2002), p.6.

movement. In addition, continental reformers were uneasy collaborators in moulding the English Reformation, electing to help more from an unwillingness 'to force a confrontation with the king'. These Lutheran evangelicals were aiming to reform the 'imperfect Church from within' rather than 'condemn' it.⁴

The fact that religious discussion was neither dictated nor entirely rejected by the King supposed to have forced the Reformation on England is thus challenged, making space for the investigation of Cultural Exchange to explore the true nature of the English Reformation. Henry's whims did play significantly into the implementation of the Reformed theology in England, however attention should be redirected to the process of moulding continental ideas into the English context. This can be seen in obvious ways, such as the visitation of European reformers to England under the gracious hospitality of Thomas Cranmer, but this is too direct. A great level of negotiation in fact occurred beyond this, with the reformer Phillip Melancthon rather than the more predictable Martin Bucer. Despite Melancthon declining repeated invitations to England, including esteemed professorships, he was still supremely influential in England. Ultimately his willingness to allow flexibility in the reformed message initiated by Luther proved more influential in the English environment. This is due to his theory of essential and non-essential components of Lutheran theology laid out in his *Loci Communes*, which permitted a more fluid and less obstructive transfer of the general Lutheran message. This allowed its dissemination in the English environment, permeating through society with less violence and outright resistance that the message met in Europe.⁵

Research has focused on the role of Henry VIII in negotiating the English Reformation, seen in documents such as his *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, but this conceals the intricacies of a true negotiation. MacCulloch challenges his active involvement in producing theological writings, suggesting he contributed less to the *Assertio* than is accepted. Furthermore, it is clarified that Henry acted more as a critic or editor of the theology of others, which perhaps shows a more delicate process of negotiation in itself.⁶ Henry VIII's *Assertio* was a 'wholly negative' rejection of Luther, in theory rejecting the Reformation message from England.⁷ This shift in the King's interest would have taken the Reformation in England in a different direction, perhaps entirely away from relations with the Schmalkaldic League and Lutheran princes without the key moderating figure of Melancthon and his adaptation of Lutheran theology. Research has given attention to the input of German reformers and theology, but has neglected the role of accommodation on the part of German theologians to adapt to English needs and conditions. It has focused on the personality of Henry VIII and relations with the Lutheran Schmalkaldic League, but not the process of adapting theology to the English case, or Melancthon's key role in his willingness to accommodate in response to the English requests whilst retaining its essential message. This facilitated genuine Cultural Exchange, with both sides taking part in the transfer without one dominating. The seminal importance of Philip

⁴ Alec Ryrie, 'The Strange Death of Lutheran England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), p.84.

⁵ Peter Marshall, *Reformation England, 1480-1642* (London, 2012), p.38.

⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Henry VIII and the Reform of the Church', in Diarmaid MacCulloch (eds), *The Reign of Henry VIII, Politics, Policy and Piety* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp.162-163).

⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (London, 2003), p.198.

Melanchthon shows the importance of negotiation and communication during the period of the Reformation, as well as the need to rehabilitate Melanchthon as an important player in the English Reformation. This importance was clear in all elements of his persona, gaining him respect not only amongst diligent reformists such as Thomas Cranmer as well as other continental reformers but King Henry VIII, being the only reformer he regarded as worth considering.⁸ Though this respect was later lost, the initial interest from all sections of reformers Melanchthon gathered cemented his importance in the transference of the Reformation.

This project finds that, in accordance to Ryrie, Henry VIII showed little interest in the theological implications of the Reformation, but disagrees with his proposal that continental reformers aided the movement out of fear of confrontation. The reformers in fact engaged in a practise of genuine Cultural Exchange, mainly through the figure of Philip Melanchthon. A key mediator in the movement, Melanchthon was actively involved in the adaptation of Lutheran theology, moulding and accommodating it to the English case. These adaptations were certainly not



forced upon England. Henry VIII facilitated these exchanges, including sending envoys to the Schmalkaldic League as well permitting Thomas Cranmer to host innumerable continental reformers in his country. Initial relations with the Schmalkaldic League then also has genuine religious as well as political benefits Henry VIII sought, and aims for an alliance based on these factors, not purely for power, as argued by McEntegart. Overall, this project finds McEntegart's idea of genuine attempts to gain a true alliance more convincing, but offers the concept of Cultural Exchange as a more effective framework to view the process of the negotiated Reformation, giving due attention to the role of cooperation and mutual exchange without implying a dictation.

My experience at the German Historical Institute in London was essential to this project, and has certainly confirmed my intentions to pursue further study at this university, in the form of an MA in Religious, Social, and Cultural History.

The facilities at the German Historical Institute were instrumental in the success of this project. The staffs were more than welcoming, and were quick to offer advice the workings of the Institute as well as the mechanics of collecting resources.

Unfortunately, some materials that would have proved fruitful for the project were reserved or in use by other researchers. This has, however, not proved detrimental to the overall project. In fact, this drawback has in fact benefitted me as researcher, as this has prepared me for doctoral projects and research by illustrating potential issues,

⁸ Ryrie, 'Strange Death', p.67.

as well as the ability to work past them by using alternative materials. Additional materials will be sought to help expand this project, for publication in a *Reinvention* article.

The opportunity to use the facilities of the German Historical Institute in London afforded me by the funding from IATL immensely benefitted my research experience. The ability to work in specialist facilities with remarkable resources has not only allowed me to expand my knowledge in terms of breadth and depth but also enhanced my skills of research and decryption. Though my project focused on the age of the Reformation the skills I have learnt, such as the ability to work with professionals, librarians, and archivists, have equipped me to tackle my dissertation with enthusiasm and confidence I would not have without having undertaken this project. Spending an extended period working researching in specialist facilities, away from University or home, has taught me essential time management skills and independent studying skills. Pursuing this project in early modern cultural history, with focus on the Reformation, has more than confirmed my intention to undertake the MA in Religious, Social and Cultural History at the University of Warwick. Researching Cultural Exchange in depth has deepened my interest in the early modern period, particularly in the intricacies of the cultural and social processes within cultural accommodation and adoption. My MA dissertation will build from this project, focusing on the process of cultural accommodation and adaptation in early modern Europe.

I would like to thank IATL at the University of Warwick for the funding without which this project would not be possible, and Professor Beat Kūmin for his supervision. A full article based on this project will be submitted to the *Reinvention* journal for publication.



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