What Parliament Decreed Concerning the Clergy, and the Judgment Cranmer Gave in the King’s Favor

The king was advised that for Cranmer to give sentence in his favor, it would be best for the parliament of the realm, then in session, to command all churchmen to take an oath of obedience to the king, such as they had formerly sworn to the pope, and that to put this forward with authority, he should choose the bishop of Rochester, esteemed throughout the kingdom. If the bishop agreed, it would be accomplished; if not, it would reveal the vicious spirit he harbored against the king. Anne hoped for the latter, for she had wished to see Rochester dead ever since he had defended the cause of the queen with such valor. Out of this hatred, she had previously tried to murder him, bribing one of the bishop’s cooks, called Richard Roose, who poured some poison into the pot from which Rochester and his servants usually ate all together, but it was God’s will that the bishop did not eat at table that day as was his custom. Almost all the servants who did eat died, and the cook was publicly punished; in consequence, Anne’s hatred and fury toward the bishop only grew stronger. The king sent Rochester a writ concerning the oath, to the distress and agony of the saintly bishop. For, on the one hand, he saw that what the king

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1 Sander, De origine ac progressu, 104–09.
2 The preface to the 1531 “Acte for Poysoning” recounted how Richard Roose (d.1531), otherwise called Richard Coke, which of his most wikked and dampnable disposicon did cast a c[er]teyn venyme or poyson into a vessell replenysshed w[i]th yist or barrne stondyng in the kechyn of the rev[er]end ffather in god John Bisshop of Rouchest[er] at his place in Lamebythe mersshe w[i]th which yist or barme and other thynges convenyent porrage or gruell was forthw[i]th made for his fiamlyye there beyng whereby not onely the number of xvii parsones of his sed famylye which did eate of the seid porrage were mortally infected and one of them therof is decessed but also c[er]teyn poor people which resorted to the seid bishops place for almes and were there charitably fed w[i]th the remaynes of the seid porrage and other vytailles were in likewise infected and one pore woman of them is also therof nowe deceased. [...] And because that detestable offence nowe newly comytted requyreth condigne punysshment for the same it is ordeyned and enacted that the seid Richard Roose shalbe therfore boyled to deathe.” K.J. Kesselring, “A Draft of the 1531 ‘Acte for Poysoning’,” EHR 116, no. 468 (September 2001): 894–99, here 898–99.

Contemporary rumor speculated that Anne or Henry had been behind the attempt, but Roose only admitted that he had added purgatives to the dish “as a jest.” Ibid., 894, 896.
commanded was contrary to God, and, on the other, that the king would not allow delay or excuse of any kind: embattled with conflicting thoughts like contrary winds,\(^3\) in the end he allowed himself to be conquered. He saw that a frightful, cataclysmic storm threatened him and all clergymen if he did not obey; to allay the scruples of his conscience, the king said that he would add to the oath that they swore to the extent licit and permitted by divine law.\(^4\) Fisher also hoped that in time the king would be restored and return to his senses and, tired of his affection for Anne, take better counsel and understand that what he demanded and commanded was neither lawful nor possible. And so, befuddled by fear, vain hopes, and passable arguments, Rochester allowed himself to be borne along, and persuaded other churchmen (hitherto firm and unyielding) to obey the king and swear the oath he demanded, with the condition of its being licit and in accordance with the law of God. Later, Rochester was so distraught and pained at this deceit that he felt he could not expunge the guilt save by his own blood, and he publicly accused and berated himself, saying, “As a bishop, my duty is not to proceed in so grave a matter with double-dealings and dubious reservations, but to instruct others clearly and openly in the truth, the commands and prohibitions of God’s sacred law, and to draw the deceived out of their errors.”\(^5\)

When the churchmen submitted to the oath, the king’s plan had succeeded, and he commanded Cranmer, being now, by the authority of parliament and the ecclesiastical arm, free of the oath of obedience made to the pope, to pronounce the sentence of divorce, which he did in this way. Bringing with him all the bishops, jurists, lawyers, and notaries that seemed suitable, he went to a small town near the queen’s residence. Over the course of fifteen days, he had her repeatedly summoned, but she never answered.\(^6\) Then Cranmer warned

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\(^3\) Isa. 57:20.


\(^5\) Pollen suggests that this description of Fisher’s remorse may originate with a now-lost life of the bishop available to Sander. The possibility that the scene may be Sander’s invention either did not occur to Pollen, or he elected not to voice it. Pollen, “Nicholas Sander,” 44–45.

\(^6\) On May 10, 1533, Thomas Cranmer opened yet another inquiry into Catherine's marriage(s). These proceedings took place at Dunstable Priory in Bedfordshire, ten miles from Ampthill,