

**THE STATE VERSUS THE CHURCH OR TEMPORAL, NATIONALISTIC, PROTESTANT POWER  
VERSUS SPIRITUAL, IMPERIALISTIC, PAPAL POWER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF T. S.  
ELIOT'S *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL* AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE FAMOUS  
HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF KING HENRY THE EIGHT***

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**ABSTRACT**

*A close reading of T.S. Eliot's seminal modernist "poetic drama" Murder in the Cathedral and William Shakespeare's monumental, pivotal "history play" Henry VIII reveal a serious and deadly conflict between the state and the church or the Crown and the Pope. This paper sets out to investigate the cause(s) of this conflict, the winner and loser, who is to blame and the possible ideal solution on the relationship between the church and the state. Using New Historicism this paper argues that Murder in the Cathedral and Henry VIII superficially or explicitly dramatize or present a conflict between the State/King/Crown and the Roman Catholic Church/Pope but implicitly these two plays are nationalistic plays whose aims are geared towards establishing an English protestant state free from papal domination and imperialism in its Roman Catholic disguise. This argument is buttressed by King Henry VIII during the trial of Queen Katharine:*

*Campeius: So please your highness,*

*The queen being absent, it's a needful fitness*

*That we adjourn this court till further day*

*Meanwhile must be an earnest motion*

*Made to the queen, to call back her appeal*

*She intends unto his holiness. [They rise to depart]*

*King Henry: [Aside] I may perceive*

*These cardinals trifle with me; I abhor*

*This dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome.*

*(Act II Lines 228-235)*

*Cardinal Campeius is sent by the Pope to represent him in the divorce trial case between King Henry and Queen Katharine. At the end of this study, it is realized that the conflict between the state and the church is always deadly to the church as seen in Becket and Cardinal Wolsey. In any union between church and state, the state will always want to lead the church. This is seen in Henry II and Henry VIII. Any religious authority who wants to combine temporary power and spiritual power will always lose spiritual power in favour of temporary power. This is seen in Cardinal Wolsey. Becket sees the trap and refuses to fall into it. Lastly the quest of the English monarchs to do away with the imperialistic papal power started by Henry II is completed or realized in Henry VIII with complete separation from Rome/Roman Catholic Church. The biblical statement let us give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's defines the ideal*

relationship between the state and the church and prevents any conflict between the two. Generally while the state deals with temporary affairs of governance, legal, social and economic issues, the church preoccupies itself with the moral or spiritual issues of its christians or citizens of the country.

**KEYWORDS:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pope, King/Crown, Beckett, Wolsey and Katherine

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the conflict between the state and the church in T. S. Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral* and William Shakespeare's play *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth*. T. S. Eliot is a twentieth century English poet, critic and playwright. William Shakespeare is the English Renaissance playwright as well as the most famous English playwright of all times with his 37 plays, 17 comedies, 10 history plays and 10 tragedies, 154 sonnets and two narrative poems. Critics have classified his plays into three categories which are comedies, tragedies and history or chronicle plays. Some critics have added tragicomedies and problem plays which defy classification. T. S. Eliot has written five plays which are: *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Confidential Clerk* (1955), *The Cocktail Party* (1959) and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

In his introduction to *Murder in The Cathedral* Nevill Coghill establishes the difference between William Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot. He writes: "for this is not a Shakespearean chronicle-play that tells an intricate, proliferating story full of incident, but a sparer drama, more in the manner of Aeschylus, about a great cause in which incident and idiosyncrasy lose their importance. Unlike Shakespeare's plays, all of which take and give delight in the excitements of narrative, Eliot's plays are about situations, not stories, like *Everyman* before them, and *waiting for Godot* after. *Murder in the Cathedral* is about a situation and a quality of life; the situation is perpetual and the quality is rare." (10)

In the same introduction when talking about the differences between Shakespeare, Tennyson and Eliot's plays he writes:

Because he was not writing a loose chronicle play in the pseudo-Shakespearean style of Tennyson's play about Becket, Eliot offers little about the Constitution of Clarendon or the disputed coronation ceremony which were the chief bones of contention between Becket, Henry and their continental supporters, the pope, the Emperor, and the King of France. He is writing about a conflict between the material and spiritual worlds and he rapidly tells us all we need to know of the historical situation in the exposition given by the three priests, and by the herald who announces the return of the Archbishop to the chorus, as the action opens. The chorus sense a doom in which they will find themselves involved and pray that Becket may return at once to France; they do not wish anything to happen, they would rather go on in the misery of their half lived lives (16-17).

In that introduction Coghill presents the conflict when he writes:

He [Eliot] chose for his subject-matter the martyrdom of the most famous of all English saints, Thomas Becket, who was Archbishop of Canterbury between the years 1162 and 1170, when he was brutally murdered, on the twenty-ninth

of December, in his own Cathedral church. The assassins were four knights, Reginald Fitz Urse, William de Traci, Hugh de Morville and Richard Brito. When they had accomplished what they had come to do if Becket proved stubborn, they left the precincts shouting that they were the King's men; and indeed in fairness to their bloody-minded and reckless feudality it must be said they probably believed themselves to be acting in consonance with a half-expressed wish of his in the matter, in a long-drawn-out but not entirely straight fight between Crown and Church on certain constitutional issues. To them Becket appeared an arrogant and turbulent priest, a traitor whittling away the rightful and reasonable powers of their supreme overlord, Henry II and his successors, to Becket and his fellow monks it was a spiritual conflict, an incident in the eternal struggle of good and evil in which they happened to be all-importantly involved; to the monks and later to the Christian world, Becket was God's champion, *agonotheta Dei athleta Christi*; it had the air of a naked war between black and white, each side believing itself to be the latter.

This paper attempts a comparative study of two history plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Henry VIII* bringing out the similarities and differences between the two plays in their dramatization of the conflict between the state and the church. The two plays are also poetic, not only history plays.

This write-up intends to answer the following questions: Who represent(s) the state and the Church in the two plays? What is the cause of the conflict between the state and the church? Who is to blame in this conflict? Who is the winner and who is the loser in this conflict? What is the ideal relationship between the state and the church? Which one comes first, the state or the church? Can the two be combined? Can one live without the other? Is the biblical statement give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's the solution between the conflict between the state and the church?

Our argument in this paper is that overtly or explicitly *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Henry VIII* present the conflict between the state and the Church but covertly or implicitly the two plays show the struggle of the English nation to create a protestant state free from papal domination and control in the guise or name of the Roman Catholic Church.

This work is structured in two parts: we shall first present the cause of the conflict between the church and the state in the two plays and lastly we shall present the characters who represent the state and the church in the two plays and the similarities and differences between these characters.

### **Reason for Conflict between the State and the Church**

In *Henry VIII* the cause of the conflict between the state and church is the divorce between King Henry VIII and his wife Catherine of Aragon whom Shakespeare spells as Katharine. King Henry VIII had six official spouses but only the first two are presented in this play: Catherine of Aragon and Anne Bullen. The other four who do not appear in the play are Jane Seymour, Anne Clevis, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr. He divorced Catherine of Aragon because he wanted a male child to succeed him. This male child was gotten with the third wife Jane Seymour and the child became king Edward VI of English who ruled from 1547-1553. After him we had the child of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon Mary I who ruled from 1553-1558 and lastly from 1558-1603 we had the reign of Queen Elizabeth I child of King Henry VIII and Anne Bullen until James I succeeded her coming from Scotland already James VI there. The play *Henry VIII* ends with the baptism of Princess Elizabeth by Cranmer the Archbishop of Canterbury and her future greatness. One critic says all events in *Henry VIII* move towards the birth of Elizabeth and any character who stands on her way falls beginning with mighty Duke Buckingham, then Queen Katherine, Cardinal Wolsey and even Bishop Cranmer who is about to fall engineered by

Bishop Gardiner but who is helped by King Henry VIII. Elizabeth was the name of the mother of Henry VIII that he gave to his child with Queen Anne Bullen.

As said above the conflict between the state and the church in the play *Henry VIII* is the trial of the divorce case between King Henry VIII of England and his first wife Queen Katherine, the wife he inherited from his late brother who was groomed to become king: Prince Arthur. Henry VIII only became king because Prince Arthur died. Queen Katharine during her trial which takes place at the Black Friars the third theatre house of Shakespeare after The Theatre and The Globe brings out salient issues in this court case.

Q. Kath. Sir, I desire you do me right and justice;  
 And to bestow your pity on me; for  
 I am a most poor woman, and a stranger,  
 Born out of your dominions; having here  
 No judge indifferent, nor no more assurance  
 Of equal friendship and proceeding. Alas! Sir,  
 In what have I offended you? What cause  
 Hath my behavior given to your displeasure,  
 That thus you should proceed to put me off  
 And take your good grace from me? Heaven witness,  
 I have been to you a true and humble wife,  
 At all times to your will conformable;  
 Ever in fear to kindle your dislike,  
 Yea, subject to your countenance, glad or sorry.  
 As I saw it inclined. When was the hour  
 I ever contradicted your desire,  
 Or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends  
 Have I not strove to love, although I knew  
 He were mine enemy? What friend of mine  
 That had to him deriv'd your anger, did I  
 Continue in my liking? Nay, gave notice.  
 He was from thence discharged. Sir, call to mind  
 That I have been your wife, in this obedience  
 Upward of twenty years and have been blest

With many children by you: if, in the course  
And process of this time, you can report  
And prove it too, against mine honour aught,  
My bond to wedlock, or my love and duty,  
Against your sacred person, in God's name  
Turn me away; and let the foolish contempt  
Shut door upon me, and so give me up  
To the sharp'st kind of justice. Please you, sir,  
The King, your father, was reputed for  
A Prince most prudent of an excellent  
And unmatched wit and judgment: Ferdinand,  
My father, King of Spain was reckon'd one  
The wisest Prince that there had reign'd by man  
A year before: it is not to be question'd  
That they had gather's wise council to them  
Who deem'd our marriage lawful. Wherefore I humbly  
Beseech you, sir, to spare me till I may  
Be by my friends in Spain advis'd whose counsel  
I will implore: if not I' the name of God,  
Your pleasure by fulfill'd

(ACT III, Lines 11-55)

Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of the king of Spain Ferdinand I and Queen Isabella I of Castile. King Ferdinand and King Henry VII had a special relationship and organized an arranged marriage between Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon. When Prince Arthur died at 15, Catherine argued she never made love with him and that is why she was allowed to marry Prince Arthur's younger brother the future King Henry VIII. In this court case Henry says he wants to divorce her because all the male children she gives him die. The big question is that who has put in Henry's head that his marriage with Katharine is unlawful? All the characters in the play *Henry VIII* say it is Cardinal Wolsey and even Queen Catherine knows it is Cardinal Wolsey. When she says "or which of your friends/Have I not strove to love, although I know / He were mine enemy?" she is referring to Cardinal Wolsey. After first refusing to submit to her trial in the court, she moves to King Henry and makes the long speech quoted above and after she talks directly to Cardinal Wolsey telling him he can't be her judge as he is the one who has put in the King's conscience that his marriage with her is illegal. She walks out and says she will never appear in the English court. She intends to write to the Pope to try her himself. As a

foreigner she thinks she cannot have a fair trial in England. She attacks the English later on as she says “Would I had never trod this English earth/Or felt the flatteries that grow upon it!/Ye have angel faces, but heaven knows your hearts” (Act III, Scene I lines 143-145). This is when Cardinals Wolsey and Campeius come to her pleading she should leave her case to them and that King Henry VIII really loves her.

In Act Two Scene I we see two Gentlemen who represent the common man on the street talking about first the trial and execution of the good and innocent Duke of Buckingham who curses the people who have killed an innocent man like him and lastly about the misfortune of Queen Katharine. The Second Gentleman says “Either the Cardinal /Or some about him near, have, out of malice/To the good queen, possess’d him with a scruple/That will undo her.” (Act Two Scene I, Lines 155-159). The First Gentleman confirms that it is the cardinal who has done this as revenge on Emperor Charles V of Germany for not bestowing on Cardinal Wolsey at his asking the Archbishopric of Toledo. He says “this is purpos’d”. The Second Gentleman concludes and affirms that “I think you have hit the mark” but that this is very cruel to her. The Cardinal will have his will and she must fall and of course she falls.

In Act II Scene 1 Cardinal Wolsey visits the king with Cardinal Campeius and says he is happy that King Henry has freely committed his “scruple to the voice of Christendom. Who can be angry now?” He says “Rome, the nurse of judgement, invited by your noble self, hath sent one general tongue unto us, this good Cardinal Campeius, whom once more I present unto your highness”. Cardinal Campeius hands to King Henry a letter of “The Court of Rome” which appoints him to preside over the trial of Katharine and to work with the Cardinal of York, Wolsey. When Katharine walks out of the court, King Henry expects the trial to go on but Cardinal Campeius says the trial cannot continue in the absence of the queen. In an aside king Henry says:

I may perceive  
 These cardinals trifle with me: I abhor  
 This dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome  
 My learn’d and well – beloved servant Cranmer  
 Prith, return: with thy approach, I know,  
 My comfort come along. Break up the court.  
 I say, set on

(Act II Lines 233-337).

Henry later on in the play uses Cranmer the Archbishop of Canterbury to divorce Katherine and marry Anne Bullen. Henry trusts Cranmer why? This is explained historically: initially Henry bypassed Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and used his secretary William Knight and wrote to the Pope, this time Pope Clement VII asking for the annulment of his marriage to Catherine and taking another woman. Henry argued that the Book of Leviticus 20:21 in the Old Testament forbid marrying the wife of your brother and also that his sickly Prince Arthur has made love with Catherine of Aragon. Pope Clement VII was at this time the prisoner of Catherine’s nephew Emperor Charles V of Germany who did not accept his aunt’s divorce. William Knight got acceptance for a new marriage but no annulment. The king had to turn to Cardinal Wolsey who did a lot for him and organized an Ecclesiastical Council to meet in English not in Rome to decide the matter. The Pope had never had any intention to empower his legate. Emperor Charles V resisted also. Henry saw there could be

no divorce and he and Anne blamed Wolsey for being treacherous especially when it was said the matter could not be decided in England but in Rome. Through Anne's influence Wolsey was dismissed from office. He begged her to reinstate him and she refused. Wolsey now decided to write to the Pope and Catherine and was caught by the king. Luckily he died of an illness, if not the king would have killed him for high treason. Cardinal Wolsey was now replaced by Sir Thomas More who initially cooperated with the king's new policy and he and the Oxford and Cambridge scholars said the marriage of Catherine to Henry VIII was unlawful but when Thomas More discovered that Henry began to deny the authority of the Pope, More's qualms grew. A year later, Anne entered the palace as Catherine was chased away. Anne was a woman of unusual intellectual and educated level and was influenced by protestant Reformers. When the Archbishop of Canterbury William Warham died, she used her political influence and power to appoint the Boleyn family chaplain Thomas Cranmer as the new Archbishop.

On 23 May 1533, Cranmer sitting in Judgement at a Special Court convened at Dunstable Priory to rule on the validity of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, declared the marriage of Henry to Catherine null and void. Five days later, on 28 May, Cranmer declared the marriage of Henry and Anne to be valid. Catherine was formally stripped of her title of queen and Anne was crowned Queen Consort on 1 June 1533. The queen gave birth to a daughter slightly prematurely on 7 September 1533. The child was christened Elizabeth, in honour of Henry's mother, Elizabeth of York. Rejecting the decisions of the pope, parliament validated the marriage of Henry and Anne with the First Succession Act (Act of Succession 1533). Catherine's daughter, Mary, was declared illegitimate and Anne's issue were declared next in the line of succession. Most notable in this declaration was a clause repudiating "any foreign authority, prince or potentate." All adults in the kingdom were required to acknowledge the Act's provisions by oath; those who refused were subject to imprisonment for life. Any publisher or printer of any literature alleging that the marriage was invalid was automatically guilty of high treason and could be punished by death. While Pope Clement VII refused to annul the marriage between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, Pope Paul III excommunicated Henry from the Roman Catholic Church. Earlier Pope Leo X had conferred on him the title "Defendant of the Faith" when he wrote his book titled *Defence of the Seven Sacraments* which set out to say that what Martin Luther wrote against the Catholic Church was false.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* the reason for the conflict between the state is the Archbishop of Canterbury's decision not to combine the posts of Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury to bring church and state together as his boss King Henry II has wished and appointed him to do just that. When Becket is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, he resigns from the post of Lord Chancellor who was the first citizen of the kingdom. The reason why Becket is killed is explained by the Second Knight (who is introduced by the First Knight Reginald Fitz Urse, their MC as Hugh de Morville, who has made a special study of statecraft and constitutional law:

During the reign of the late Queen Matilda and the irruption of the unhappy usurper Stephen, the Kingdom was very much divided. Our king saw the one thing needful was to restore order: to curb the excessive powers of local government which were usually exercised for selfish and often for seditious ends and to reform the legal system. He therefore intended that Becket who had proved himself an extremely able administrator – no one denies that – should unite the offices of Chancellor and Archbishop. He Becket concurred with the king's wishes, we should have had an almost ideal state: a union of spiritual and temporal administration, under the central government. I knew Becket well, in various official relations; and I may say that I have never known a man so well qualified for the highest rank of the Civil Service. And what happened? The moment that Becket, at the king's instance, had been made Archbishop, he resigned the office of Chancellor, he became more priestly than the priests? He ostentatiously and offensively adopted an ascetic manner of life,

he affirmed immediately that there was a higher order than that which our king, and he as the King's servant, had for so many years striven to establish; and that – God knows why – the two order were incompatible.

You will agree with me that such interference by an Archbishop offends the instincts of a people like ours. So far, I know that I have your approval: I read it in your faces. It is only with the measures we have had to adopt in order to set matters to rights that you take issue. No one regrets the necessity for violence is the only way in which social justice can be secured. At another time, you would condemn an Archbishop by vote of parliament and execute him formally as a traitor, and no one would have to bear the burden of being called murderer. And at a later time still, even such temperate measures as these would become unnecessary. But, if you have now arrived at a just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the state, remember that it is we who took the first step. We have been instrumental in bringing about the state of affairs that you approve. We have served your interests; we merit your applause; and if there is any guilt whatever in the matter you must share it with us. (Part II Lines 492-534).

When Becket resigns from the Lord Chancellor and assumes the post of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he soon runs into conflict with his mentor King Henry II. This is captured in the dialogue between Becket and the Four knights:

#### **FIRST KNIGHT**

Of your earlier misdeeds I shall make no mention.  
 They are too well known. But after dissension,  
 Had ended, in France, and you were endued  
 With your former privilege, how did you show your gratitude  
 You had fled from England, not exiled  
 Or threatened, mind you; but in the long  
 Of stirring up trouble in the French dominions.  
 You sowed strife abroad you reviled  
 The King to the king of France to the Pope,  
 Raising up against him false opinion.

#### **SECOND KNIGHT**

Yet the king, out of his charity  
 And urged by your friends, offered clemency  
 Made a pact of peace and all dispute ended  
 Sent you back to your see as you demanded.

**THIRD KNIGHT**

And burying the memory of your transgressions  
Restored your honours and your possessions.  
All was granted for which you sued:  
Yet how, I repeat did you show your gratitude?

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Suspending those who had crowned the young prince  
Denying the legality of his coronation

**SECOND KNIGHT**

Binging with the chains of anathema

**THIRD KNIGHT**

Using every means in you power to evince  
The king's faithful servants every one who transacts  
His business in his absence, the business of the nation.

**FRIST KNIGHT**

These are the facts.

Say therefore if you will be content  
To answer in the king's presence. Therefore were we sent.

**THOMAS**

Never was it my wish  
To uncrown the king's son, or to diminish  
His honour and power. Why should he wish  
To deprive my people of me and keep me from my own  
And bid me sit in Canterbury, alone  
I would wish him three crowns rather than one,  
And as for the bishops it is not my yoke  
That is laid upon them, or mine to revoke.  
Let them go to the Pope. It was he who condemned them.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Through you they were suspended

**SECOND KNIGHT**

By you be this amended

**THIRD KNIGHT**

Absolve them

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Absolve them

**THOMAS**

I do not deny

That this was done through me. But it is not I

Who can loose whom the Pope has bound.

Let them go to him, upon whom redounds

Their contempt towards me, their contempt towards the church shown.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Be that as it may, here is the king's command:

That you and your servants depart from this land.

**THOMAS**

If that is the Kings command, I will be bold

To say: seven years were my people without

My presence; seven years of misery and pain.

Seven years a mendicant on foreign charity

I lingered abroad: seven years is no brevity.

I shall not get those seven years back again

Never again, you must make no doubt

Shall the sea run between the shepherd and his fold.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

The King's justice, the King's majesty,

You insult with gross indignity;

Insolent madmam, whom nothing deters.

From attaining his servants and ministers

**THOMAS**

It is not I who insult the King,

And there is higher than I or the King.

It is not I, Becket of Cheapside,

It is not against me, Becket, that you strive.

It is not Becket who pronounces doom,

But the law of Christ's Church, the judgment of Rome.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Priest, you have spoken in peril of your life

**SECOND KNIGHT**

Priest, you have spoken in danger of the knife

**THIRD KNIGHT**

Priest, you have spoken treachery and treason.

**THE THREE KNIGHTS**

Priest! Traitor, confirmed in malfeasance.

**THOMAS**

I submit my cause to the judgement of Rome,

But if you kill me, I shall rise from my tomb

To submit my cause before God's throne.

**FOURTH KNIGHT**

Priest! Monk! and servant! take, hold, detain

Restraint this man, in the king's name.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Or answer with your bodies

**SECOND KNIGHT**

Enough of words

**THE FOUR KNIGHTS**

We come for the King's justice, we come with swords

[Exeunt] [Part II Lines 132-205]

**KNIGHTS**

Where is Becket, the traitor to the King?

Where is Becket, the meddling priest?

Come down Daniel to the Lions' den

Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Are you marked with the mark of the beast?

Come down Daniel to the Lions' den

Come down Daniel and join in the feast.

Where is Becket the Cheapside brat?

Where is Becket the faithless priest?

Come down Daniel to the Lions' den,

Come down Daniel and join in the feast

**THOMAS**

It is the just man who

Like a bold lion, should be without fear.

I am here.

No traitor to the King. I am a priest

A Christain, saved by the boold of Chirst,

Ready to suffer with my blood.

This is the sign of the church always,

The sign of blood: Blood for blood.

His blood given to buy my life

My blood given to pay for his death

My death for his death.

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Absolve all those you have excommunicated

**SECOND KNIGHT**

Resign the powers you have arrogated

**THIRED KNIGHT**

Restore to the king the money you appropriated

**FIRST KNIGHT**

Renew the obedience you have violated

**THOMAS**

or my Lord I am now ready to die.

That his Church may have peace and liberty.

Do with me as you will, to your hurt and shame

But none of my people, in God's name,

Whether layman or clerk, shall you touch. This is forbid.

**KNIGHTS**

Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!

**THOMAS**

You, Reginald, three times traitor you:

Traitor to me as my temporal vassal.

Traitor to me as you spiritual lord,

Traitor to God in desecrating His Church .

**FIRST KNIGHT**

No faith do I owe to a renegade

And what I owe shall now be paid.

**THOMAS**

Now to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin

To the blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles Peter and

Paul, to the blessed Martyr Denys, and to all the Saints

Commend my cause and of the Church. [While the knights kill him, we hear the..... [Part II lines 353-396]

When the knights ask Becket to absolve or forgive his fellow English bishops and he refuses, we need to go back to history to understand what took place in England. Before King Henry II his predecessor King Stephen had brought anarchy in England allowing three courts to exist: court, church and customary. When Henry came up, he wanted a uniform legal system for the whole country. Becket opposed criminal priests to be tried in criminal courts. King Henry drew up 16 points in what was called the Clarendon Constitution which was to define the relationship between the church and the state. "The Bishops demaured; Becket opposed" (142). Later he was persuaded to sign his consent. He signed but

never sealed. After he regretted by fasting and abstaining from serving at the altar. Henry decided to counter – attack him by indicting him for secular offences claiming he did not present to him accounts as a Lord Chancellor and was to pay 30.000 pounds. The king decided to imprison him but at night Becket fled to France. The king demanded his extradition but King Louis of France said Becket fled England not as a criminal but because he was afraid of violence. Becket stayed in France for seven good years. When he was in France, Henry decided to crown his eldest son Prince Henry as king while still alive. He called on the bishop of York assisted by those of London and Salisbury to assist him. In England crowning the king and queen had always been the right of the Bishop of Canterbury. Becket saw them as traitors and they were excommunicated by the Pope (Pope Alexander). The knights accuse him of excommunicating these bishops and refusing the coronation of the king's son and he categorically refuses as seen in the long abstracts quoted above in the conversation between Becket and the four knights who in the first part of the play came to tempt him as the four tempters. In "Brief Synopsis of the Historical Situation" what some writers call the "Relationship between Becket and Henry II" Nevill Coghill talking about Henry II writes: "He was determined to restore the "ancient customs" of the kingdom in this respect, and to exert control over clerics, especially in this matter, and in the matter of appeals and visits to Rome in search of papal backing in church affairs. He wanted no interference in his system of government" (142).

### **Characters who Represent the State and the Church**

In *Murder in the Cathedral* the state is represented by King Henry II who is at the background and the four knights who carry out Henry's commands. This is seen in the following excerpt:

*[Enter the Four knights. The banners disappear]*

#### **FIRST KNIGHT**

Servants of the king

#### **FIRST PRIEST**

And known to us.

You are welcome. Have you ridden far?

#### **FIRST KNIGHT**

Not far to day, but matters urgent

Have brought us from France. We rode hard.

Took ship yesterday, landed last night

Having business with the Archbishop

#### **SECOND KNIGHT**

Urgent business

#### **THIRD KNIGHT**

From the king

## **SECOND KNIGHT**

From the king

## **SECOND KNIGHT**

By the king's order

## **FIRST KNIGHT**

Our men are outside [*Part II Lines 63-73*]

The church in *Murder in the Cathedral* is represented by Archbishop Thomas Becket and his new master the Pope and also the three priests. The Pope like King Henry is at the background. We see the clash on the stage between supporters of these omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent powers of the King and the Pope. In *Henry VIII* the state is represented by King Henry VIII himself the protagonist of the play, his Dukes, Earl, Lord Chancellor and Lord Chamberlain, Lords and Sirs. The church is seen in the Pope, Cardinal Wolsey, Cardinal Campeius, the Bishops of Winchester, Lincoln and London (and even Queen Catherine).

### **Archbishop Thomas Becket and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey**

Archbishop Thomas Becket and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey share many similarities and differences. They are similar in that they both share the name of Thomas (in the bible and also a saint). Secondly they both occupied the post of Lord Chancellor in their lives in England. Thirdly the two had links with the French kingdom. Fourthly the two are pillars of the Catholic Church in England recognizing the Pope as their leader and lastly the two are proud men.

The play *Murder in the Cathedral* begins when Thomas Becket comes back from France after seven years of exile people asked whether he had reconciled with the king and people say there cannot be reconciliation between two proud men like Thomas Becket and King Henry II. When the Pope pressurized Henry II and they met in Freteval on July 22, 1170, Henry never kissed Thomas Becket, meaning they were still not reconciled. Thomas coming back knows he will be killed. He is even advised not to come back but he refuses. When the Fourth Tempter comes and urges him to die for pride as a martyr, he refuses to do the right thing for the wrong reason. At the end of Part I he has done away with his pride and is ready to die now as a martyr and doing the right thing for the right reason. Cardinal Wolsey in Act 1 Scene 1 which acts as exposition is described as a very proud man and he falls with his pride and ambition. We see him telling his servant who has been promoted by the king, Thomas Cromwell to shun pride, ambition and corruption which brought him down. In this Act 1, Scene 1, Wolsey is presented as ambitious, proud, cunning, "Count-cardinal" "worthy Wolsey" which is ironical, corrupt, treasonous, a rock which is also ironical, ravenous, venomous, "high hatred", a "butcher's dog", potent, malicious, revengeful and a "holy fox or wolf or both". Even Wolsey himself accepts his ambition and pride "My high-blown pride/At length broke under me, and now has left me"

Thomas Becket studied ecclesiastical law as a student in France. When he has conflict with Henry II he runs to France and is protected by the French King Louis. Cardinal Wolsey organized the meeting between the English and the French Kings/suns, we see at the beginning of the play *Henry the Eight* which is very costly and does not last. All English citizens are taxed 1/6 of their property by Wolsey which the king does not know. Only Queen Katharine knows this. Wolsey also wants King Henry VIII to marry but the Duchess of Alencon in France, the daughter of the French King for

his personal benefit. When he engineers the fall of Queen Catherine, that is the woman he wants the king to marry but the king surprises him by marrying the former lady in waiting of Katharine, Anne Bullen still from France.

As Lord Chancellor Thomas Becket was impeccable, flawless and not corrupt. He was straightforward and that is why when the Archbishop of Canterbury died, Henry proposed him as the new archbishop to combine the two posts. Beckett hesitated and Henry II still appointed him. Seeing that he would have two masters – the King and the Pope. Cardinal Wolsey was very corrupt and selfish as Lord Chancellor. He falls from power because his secret letter to the Pope against the king miscarries and also the king sees an inventory of land he has seized from fallen lords and put under his name, planning to use the money to become Pope and bribe men of God in Rome. In spite of this difference between the two, the two are similar in that King Henry II and King Henry VIII all trust the two religious men as Lord Chancellors.

In Act II Scene II, King Henry says of Wolsey “who’s there? My good Lord Cardinal? O! My Wolsey, The quiet of my wounded conscience; thou art a cure fit for a King?”

Both Thomas Becket and Thomas Wolsey are pillars of the Roman Catholic Church in England. They are called the Princes of the Roman Catholic Church. An archbishop has bishops under him who are in the various dioceses. After the archdiocese the next seat of power is in Rome. A cardinal can also be at the head of an archdiocese and is a promotion from an archbishop. An archbishop is called His Grace and a cardinal is addressed as his Eminence.

Both Wolsey and Becket fall at the end of the two plays but for two different reasons. Becket’s fall is salutary because he falls like a martyr and is even proclaimed a saint. He becomes immortal beside God in Heaven and many people come to his shrine for pilgrimage and those who killed him have been condemned in history. Wolsey dies an ignominious death and nobody will remember and even if they do, it is for a bad reputation like pride and unbridled ambition and corruption .

### **King Henry II and King Henry VIII**

These two kings are similar in that they bear the same name Henry, trusted their Lord Chancellors very well and hated the Papal domination and control of English church. As a young man Becket studied in England and France where he studied ecclesiastical law and served as a close confidante of Archbishop Theobald of Cantebury; Canterbury being the most important English “See” or seat of Church authority. Theobald ordained Thomas a deacon and appointed him Arch-deacon of Canterbury in 1154, a post in which Thomas oversaw the See’s temporary affairs. Thomas was 10 years older than King Henry II. In Canterbury Thomas met important politicians of the kingdom. King Henry saw him hence and he became his friend. In 1161 when Archbishop Theobald died, Henry elevated a reluctant Thomas to the post and conflict started between the two former friends. King Henry appointed Cardinal Wolsey because his father loved Wolsey “My father lov’d you”. Both Henry II and Henry VIII hate Italian Popes whom they consider as politicians who intrude in English affairs. While King Henry II went about it cautiously being afraid of excommunication, Henry VIII went about it bluntly and was excommunicated. When Henry VIII was excommunicated, he created the Anglican Church and put himself at the head replacing the Pope as the “Supreme Head in Earth”. He seized Roman Catholic property and in 1540 destroyed the monasteries and even destroyed shrines. He got much money and used it to build coastal fortresses because he was afraid that Roman Catholic countries like Spain and France would attack his protestant Anglican Church country. Henry VIII wronged Spain by disgracing their daughter Catherine of Aragon. When Henry died and was succeeded by his son Richard VI, who ruled only for a few years. When he died the throne came to Mary I, the daughter of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. She proceeded to undo everything her father did and brought England to Roman Catholicism again.

Unfortunately she only ruled for five years and was succeeded by Elizabeth I whose mother was what Wolsey calls Lutheran who brought England back to Anglicanism and with her long reign she was able to consolidate this Anglicanism. Catherine refuses to be tried in this English church maybe because she fears this protestant bias. She insists to be tried by the Pope himself. At the end of the play *Henry VIII* we see Bishop Gardiner engineer the fall of the Archbishop of Canterbury Cranmer who is accused of heresies he is spreading in the kingdom. This hatred for Cranmer may have been transferred from his master the late Cardinal Wolsey. Heresy is a Roman Catholic word which punishes somebody who holds belief contrary to what the church teaches a heretic.

## CONCLUSIONS

*Murder in the Cathedral* and *Henry VIII* are two English plays which present the relationship between English Kings, their Lord Chancellors and their Bishops of Canterbury, as well as the Pope. These plays present the conflict between spiritual power and temporary or earthly power. In *Murder in the Cathedral* King Henry II wants Archbishop Thomas Becket to combine this spiritual power and earthly power in the posts of Lord Chancellor which is the first citizen in the kingdom and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the "Pope" of the English Church. Becket finds out the two cannot go together and quickly makes his choice for spiritual power. Those who attempt to combine spiritual power and temporary power end up seeing that they lose their spiritual power if they combine the two as seen in Cardinal Wolsey who is Lord Chancellor and the Bishop of York not the spiritual leader of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The control of the church by the state which Henry II started is achieved by Henry VIII who successfully created the church of England and replaced the post of Pope by himself at the head of the Anglican Church, assisted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. At long last papal domination and control of the English church came to an end.

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