

## Henry VIII – from *Moving Ideas* by F. Salerno

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He became king of England when he was 18. He was a scholar, a poet, a musician and a sportsman and his court was revitalized by his strong temper. He married six times and had problems with the Roman Church since his first marriage. In fact he had to obtain a special dispensation from the Pope to marry his brother's widow Catherine of Aragon. But she gave him only a daughter and he wanted a male heir, too. Besides, he had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn, a lady-in-waiting of the Queen. He wanted to take advantage of the fact that his marriage was illegal according to the Canon Law: he needed a special dispensation from the Pope to marry Catherine, so he asked the Pope to declare it void. Pope Clement VII couldn't say "Yes": he was allied with Charles V of Spain, Catherine's nephew and the real master of the Europe of the time, so he refused categorically. Henry VIII didn't accept the Pope's authority and decided to solve the question using the English Parliament and Clergy: they declared the king "Only Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England" with the 1534 Act of Supremacy.

England had already lived an anticlerical atmosphere since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with the contrast between Henry II and Thomas Becket, going on with Wycliffe and the Lollards, arriving at Martin Luther's doctrines, the monk who was leading the Protestant Reformation in Germany, and the French theologian John Calvin. It was a time when Henry VIII defended the Pope against Luther and was honoured with the title *Defensor Fidei*, but later his personal problems became preminent. Catholic monasteries and lands were confiscated and a new translation of the Bible was authorized: Henry VIII's new Anglican Church was independent but it remained faithful to Roman Catholic dogma.

Henry VIII ordered Anne Boleyn's execution and married Jane Seymour who gave him the so desired male heir, Edward, but she, unfortunately, died at childbirth. Henry VIII had other three wives: he divorced from Anne de Cleves because she was ugly, Catherine Howard was executed because of a love affair, and Catherine Parr took care of him until his death.