**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

# Anne Boleyn - Religious Reformer?

<http://spartacus-educational.com/ExTEU18.htm>

[Anne Boleyn](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDboleyn.htm) had strong opinions about religion. It has been suggested that her religious views were formed by her early years in France. It is believed that Boleyn had read [A Supplication for the Beggars](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32464/32464-h/32464-h.htm) by [Simon Fish](http://spartacus-educational.com/Simon_Fish.htm). He argued that the clergy should spend their money in the relief of the poor and not amass it for monks to pray for souls. Fish claimed that monks were "ravenous wolves" who had "debauched 100,000 women". He added that the monks were "the great scab" that would not allow the Bible to be published in "your mother tongue". Boleyn is said to have urged Henry to reform the clergy by act of Parliament. It is claimed by her biographer, [Eric William Ives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Ives), she helped the careers of reformers such as [Thomas Cranmer](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDcranmer.htm), [Hugh Latimer](http://spartacus-educational.com/Hugh_Latimer.htm), [Nicholas Shaxton](http://spartacus-educational.com/Nicholas_Shaxton.htm) and [Matthew Parker](http://spartacus-educational.com/Matthew_Parker.htm).

Anne's brother, [George Boleyn](http://spartacus-educational.com/George_Boleyn.htm), was often sent on diplomatic missions. He used his diplomatic bag to smuggle religious books that were banned in France as well as England. Anne Boleyn's chaplain, [William Latymer](http://spartacus-educational.com/William_Latymer.htm), also collected religious books for her from Europe.

Anne Boleyn was a supporter of [William Tyndale](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDtyndale.htm) and attempted to protect those involved in the distribution of his English translation of the [Bible](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDtyndaleB.htm). She knew several people involved in this including Thomas Garret and Thomas Forman. Garret was the curate and Forman the rector of [All Hallows Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Hallows_Honey_Lane), [Honey Lane](https://baldwinhamey.wordpress.com/2014/09/29/honey-lane/), [London](http://spartacus-educational.com/ITlondon.htm). When they were arrested Anne wrote to Cardinal [Thomas Wolsey](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDwolseyT.htm) asking for them to be released.

In 1528 [Anne Boleyn](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDboleyn.htm) read [Obedience of a Christian Man](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Obedience-Christian-Man-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140434771/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1419878697&sr=1-1&keywords=Obedience+of+a+Christian+Man). In the book he had argued that kings had authority over the church. It was taken away by Richard Sampson, the Dean of the Chapel Royal, as it was a banned book. Boleyn claimed it was "the dearest book that ever dean or cardinal took away" and she eventually got it back. She now passed the book to [Henry VIII](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDhenry8.htm) with "certain passages marked by her fingernail for his attention". Henry was impressed and commented that "by the help of the virtuous lady... his eyes were opened the see the truth" and pronounced it a book "for me and all kings to read".

##### Primary Sources

**(Source 1)** The death of [William Tyndale](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDtyndale.htm) (1563)



#### (Source 2) [William Latymer](http://spartacus-educational.com/William_Latymer.htm), [Chronicle of Anne Boleyn](http://www.amazon.co.uk/William-Latymers-Chronickille-Anne-Bulleyne/dp/B00QNMX0TC/ref%3Dsr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1431412367&sr=1-3&keywords=William+Latymer) (c. 1560)

Anne Boleyn... was very expert in the French tongue, exercising herself continually in the reading of the French Bible and other French books of like effect and conceived great pleasure in the same... she charged her chaplains to be furnished with all kinds of French books that reverently treated of the whole Scriptures.

#### (Source 3) [Eric William Ives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Ives), [*Anne Boleyn : Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/557?docPos=1) (2004-2014)

Anne's influence was especially evident in religion. While abroad she had encountered early evangelical reform at the French royal court... Anne embraced this reformist spirit for herself, possibly even experiencing some kind of spiritual crisis.... The Bible text Anne used was a French translation by Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples. She sent out collectors to bring back French evangelical texts for her, a number of which survive in the royal library.

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#### (Source 4) [Retha M. Warnicke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retha_Warnicke%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rise-Fall-Anne-Boleyn-Politics/dp/0521406773/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1419791405&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Rise+and+Fall+of+Anne+Boleyn) (1989)

An intelligent, quick-witted lady who was already interested in religious topics, she would have made every effort to become knowledgeable about new books and religious commentaries in order to discuss them with the king. After all, she had fallen in love with a man who believed himself to be and who was reputed to be a theological expert...

Although the king was willing to explore the possibility of translating the scriptures into English, he was reluctant to permit his subjects, even university scholars, to read heretical books...

Besides reading the scriptures in French and attempting to aid individuals who were arrested for owning heretical works. Anne may have had in her possession books by Simon Fish and William Tyndale.

#### (Source 5) [Jasper Ridley](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1466429/Jasper-Ridley.html), [*Henry VIII*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Jasper%20Ridley%2C%20Henry%20VIII) (1984)

If the common people could understand the Bible and read it for themselves, or have it read aloud to them by those of their friends who could read, they would interpret the Bible for themselves, and appeal to the Word of God, as they interpreted it, against the orders of the Pope and the King.

#### (Source 6) [Alison Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Weir), [The Six Wives of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Six-Wives-Henry-VIII/dp/0099523620/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1420991252&sr=1-1&keywords=Alison+Weir,+The+Six+Wives+of+Henry+VIII) (2007)

Anne Boleyn attracted the enmity of Catholics because she openly espoused the cause of church reform, and was widely, but erroneously, reputed to be a Lutheran. She was also indiscreet, arrogant, vindictive in her treatment of her enemies, and given to abrupt mood swings...

We have the saintly queen of the Protestant writers, who did so much to further true religion in England, gave her protection to the followers of Luther, and produced the great Queen Elizabeth. These writers saw Anne as a veritable saint...

These conflicting portraits of Anne Boleyn have in them some degree of truth; and both are partially inaccurate. Anne was no saint, but neither was she an adulteress nor guilty of incest. She was however, ruthless and insensitive, and if she was not as black as the Catholics tried to paint her, it is likely they were nearer the truth. Nevertheless, she was a remarkable woman of considerable courage and audacity, who knew exactly what she wanted, and made sure she got it.

#### (Source 7) [Eric William Ives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Ives), [*Anne Boleyn : Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/557?docPos=1) (2004-2014)

Anne was not backward in promoting the vernacular English Bible. A lectern Bible was available for her household to use, and she herself owned a specially illuminated copy of Tyndale's illegal translation of the New Testament. Both before and after becoming queen, Anne protected the importers of illegal English scriptures, and George Joye knew enough of this to send her a sample sheet of the book of Genesis translated into English.

Anne used her position to advance evangelically minded clergy within the church. Not only was this so where she had the presentation - for example, she secured the rich London living of St Mary Aldermary for Edward Crome - but she was also influential in helping to place reformers in the episcopal hierarchy. As well as Cranmer, Anne patronized Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Shaxton, Edward Fox, Thomas Goodrich, and William Barlow.

#### (Source 8) [Antonia Fraser](http://www.antoniafraser.com/antonia_fraser.aspx), [The Six Wives of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=Antonia+Fraser,+The+Six+Wives+of+Henry+VIII&rh=n%3A266239,k%3AAntonia+Fraser%5Cc+The+Six+Wives+of+Henry+VIII) (1992)

Anne Boleyn had unexpected depths and strengths, unexpected at least to the male-dominated world in which she lived. For one thing, she had a genuine interest in religion, the kind of reforming religion rapidly becoming fashionable on the continent following Luther as a reaction to the obvious failures and corruptions of the clergy. It was not a taste she shared with King Henry, the ten years's gap in their ages was, in terms of religion, a difference of generation... He was a natural "Catholic" as it might now be termed, and remained so, religiously speaking, for the rest of his life, compared to Anne who might similarly be described as naturally "Protestant".

#### (Source 9) [David Loades](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Loades), [*The Six Wives of Henry VIII*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=David+Loades%2C+The+Six+Wives+of+Henry+VIII&rh=n%3A266239%2Ck%3ADavid+Loades%5Cc+The+Six+Wives+of+Henry+VIII) (2007)

With the benefit of hindsight, later Protestant chroniclers of these events represented Anne as a champion of the reformation... Her patronage of reforming preachers and writers can easily be substantiated, but whether this resulted from conviction or from the logic of her situation is less clear... In 1530 she had every incentive to outflank Catherine of Aragon.

##### Questions for Students

Question 1: Read the introduction and study source 1. Explain why [Henry VIII](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDhenry8.htm) liked William Tyndale's [Obedience of a Christian Man](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Obedience-Christian-Man-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140434771/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1419878697&sr=1-1&keywords=Obedience+of+a+Christian+Man) but was totally opposed to his English translation of the Bible. It will help you to read source 5.

Question 2: What evidence is there that Anne Boleyn developed an interest in religious reform while in the French royal court?

Question 3: Why did devout Catholics dislike Anne Boleyn?

Question 4: Give as many reasons as you can why Anne Boleyn gave her support to religious reformers.