

38 John Dastin and the Pope

John Dastin (or Dastyn or Dastain or Dausten) defended alchemy when it was attacked by Pope John XXII in the 1320's.

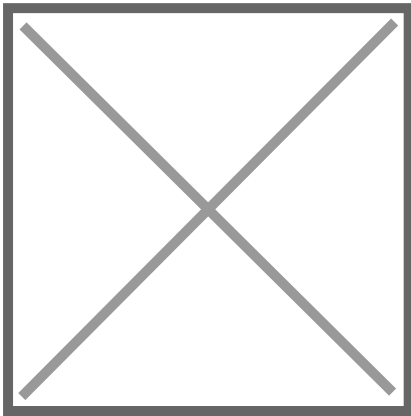
Here is the Pope's decretal:

“

Spondet quas non exhibent
"Guarantees they do not offer"

Poor themselves, the alchemists promise riches which are not forthcoming; wise also in their own conceit, they fall into the ditch which they themselves have dugged. For there is no doubt that the professors of this art of alchemy make fun of each other because, conscious of their own ignorance, they are surprised at those who say anything of this kind about themselves; when the truth sought does not come to them they fix on a day for their experiment and exhaust all their arts; then they dissimulate their failure so that finally, though there is no such thing in nature, they pretend to make genuine gold and silver by a sophistic transmutation; to such an extent does their damned and damnable temerity go that they stamp upon the base metal the characters of public money for believing eyes, and it is only in this way that they deceive the ignorant populace as to the alchemic fire of their furnace. Wishing to banish such practices for all time, we have determined by this formal edict that whoever shall make gold or silver of this kind or shall order it to be made, provided the attempt actually ensues, or whoever shall knowingly assist those actually engaged in such a process, or whoever shall knowingly make use of such gold or silver either by selling it or giving it in payment for debt, shall be compelled as a penalty to pay into the public treasury, to be used for the poor, as much by weight of genuine gold or silver as there may be of alchemical metal, provided it be proved lawfully that they have been guilty in any of the aforesaid ways; as for those who persist in making alchemical gold, or, as has been said, in using it knowingly, let them be branded with the mark of perpetual infamy. But if the means of the delinquents are insufficient for the payment of the amount stated then the good judgement of the justice may commute this penalty for some other (as for example imprisonment or another punishment, according to the nature of the case, the difference of individuals and other circumstances). Those, however, who in their regrettable folly go so far as not only to pass monies thus made but even despise the precepts of the natural law, overstep the limits of their art and violate the laws by deliberately coining or

casting or causing others to coin or cast counterfeit money from alchemical gold or silver, we proclaim as coming under this animadversion, and their goods shall be confiscate, and they shall be considered as criminals. And if the delinquents are clerics, besides the aforeside penalties they shall be deprived of any benefices they shall hold and shall be declared incapable of holding any further benefices.



This Pope was also against witchcraft and sorcery.

Dastin answers in a letter to the Pope, calling the philosopher's stone "the most noble matter, which, according to the tradition of all philosophers, transforms any metallic body into very pure gold and silver" which "makes an old man young and drives out all sickness of the body." Dastin implies that the "ferment" or "sulfur" of mercury is actually pure gold but before the action of the stone will work the mercury must be fixed or made non-volatile:

“ Gold is more valuable than all other metals, because it contains in itself the essence of any metal. It tinges them and vivifies them, because it is the ferment of the elixir, without which the philosophers’ medicine can by no means be perfected, like as dough cannot be fermented without a ferment. It is indeed as leaven to dough, as curd to milk for cheese, and as the musk in good perfumes.... For those two bodies duly prepared are mercury and very pure sulphur, because if mercury is properly coagulated it transmutes into genuine gold and silver. If the mercury has been pure, the force of white, non-burning sulphur will congeal it. And that sulphur is the best one that those who practise alchemy can find or receive so as to convert it into silver. If however the pure and very good sulphur be of a clear red colour, and if there be in that sulphur the force of a simple non-burning fieriness, it will be the best thing that alchemists can find so as to make gold. And again: The ferment of gold is gold, and the ferment of silver is silver, and there are no other [suitable] ferments on earth.

In letters to Cardinal Orsini, who probably informed the Pope on alchemy, he says, according to Holmyard:

“ Dastin indicates that the red sulphur he postulates in gold is sufficient to convert suitably prepared mercury into the Red Elixir. In this operation, the product is first white, and then, after further heating, it assumes a clear red colour. "The process," Dastin assures us, "is quite simple, and may be carried out over a gentle fire in a hermetically sealed glass vessel, through the wall of which the changes of colour may be watched. The fire should be so regulated that the vapours continually ascend and do not solidify at the top of the vessel. The whole operation takes about 100 days."

The power of elixirs is that

“ one part converts a million parts of any body you may choose into the most genuine gold and silver, according to which of the two elixirs was prepared. The red elixir has effective virtue over all other medicines of the philosophers to cure all infirmity, because, if it were an illness of one month, it cures it within one day; if it were an illness of a year, it cures it in twelve days. But if it were an inveterate illness, it cures it in a month. And therefore this medicine ought to be sought for by all, and before all other medicines of this world. This magistry is for kings and the great of this world, because he who possesses it has a never-failing treasure.

Was Dastin successful? The Pope never changed his mind on alchemy, but he died leaving an enormous fortune said to be of alchemical origin. quite an accomplishment for a man who earlier in his life accepted the vows of poverty. This is the Pope in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, wherein the Franciscan friar William of Baskerville travels to a Benedictine abbey used as neutral ground in a dispute between Pope John XXII and the Franciscans accused of heresy.

John Dastin's poetry on alchemy appears in [Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum](#) by Elias Ashmole starting page 257 as "Dastin's Dreame."

“ The Work of John Dastin

Not yet full sleping, nor yet full waking,
But betweene twayne lying in a traunce;

Halfe closed mine Eyne in my slumbering,
Like a Man rapt of all cheer & countenance;
By a manner of weninge & Rememberance
Towards Aurora, ere Phoebus uprose,
I dreamed one came to me to doe me pleasaunce
That brought me a Boke with seven seals close.

2. Following upon I had a wonerfull dreame,
As semed unto my inward thought,
The face of him shone as the Sun-beame:
Which unto me thys heavenly Boke brought,
Of so greate Riches that yt may not be bought,
In order set by Dame Philosophie,
The Capitall and the flowrishing wrought
By a wife prince called Theologie.

3. Thys Boke was written with letters [aureat],
Perpetually to be put in memory,
And to Apollo the Chapters consecrate,
And to rge seven Gods in the heavenly Consistory:
And in Mercuries litle Oratory,
Groweth all the fruite in breese of thys Science,
Who can expresse hem and have of hem Victory,
May clayme the tryumph of his Minerall prudence.

4. Of this matter above betweene Starrs seaven,
By Gods and Godessess all of one assent,
Was Sent Caducifer to Erth downe from Heaven:
Saturnus as Bedell by great advisment;
For to summon a general Parliament,
By concord of all both old and young of age,
To say in Breife their Councell most prudent:
For Common proffit to knit up a Marriage.

5. Betweene twaine Borne of the Imperiall blood,
And descended from Jupiters line,
Of their Natures most pure and most good;
Wythowte infeccion their seede is most divine;
That noe Eclips may let them for to shine,
So that Mercury doth stint all debate,
And restraîne their Courage by meaknes them incline;
That of frowardnes they be not indurate.

6. For the Sunne that sitteth so heigh a loft,

His gloden dew-droppes shall cleerly raigne downe,
By the meane of Mercury that moven first made soft:
Then there schalbe a glad Coniunccion,
Whan there is made a Seperacion:
And their two Spermes by Marriage are made one;
And the said Mercury by devision,
Hath taken his flight and from both is gone.

7. These be the two Mercuries cheife of Philosophers,
Revived againe with the Spirit of lyfe,
Richer then Rubies or Pearles shut in Cofeurs;
Washed and Baptized in waters vegetative,
The body dissevered with heate nutritive:
By moderate moysture of Putrefaccion;
So that there is no excesse nor no strife
Of the foure Elements in their Coniunccion.

8. The graine of Wheate which on the ground doth fall,
But it be dead it may not fructifie,
If it be hole the vertue doth appayle;
And in no wise it may not Multiplie,
The increase doth begin whan it doth Putrefie;
Of good Grafts commeth Fruites of good lastage;
Of Crabs Verjuyce, of ash is made Lye,
Of good Grapes followeth a good Vintage.

9. Who soweth good Seede repeth good againe,
Of Cockles sowne there can grow no good Wheate,
For as such a Ploughman traveleth in vain,
To fruitfull Land Cockle is not meete;
Gall is ever bitter, Honey is ever sweete,
Of all things contrary is fals Conneccions,
Let Male and Female together ever meete;
But both be clensed of their Complexions.

10. A Man of Nature ingendereth but a Man,
And every Beast ingendereth his semblable;
And as Philosophers rehearse well can,
Diana and Venus in marriage be notable,
A Horse with a Swine joyneth not in a stable,
For where is made unkindly geniture,
What followeth but things abominable:
Which is to say Monstrum in Nature.

11. All this I finde in the said Boke,
Brought to me when I lay a sleepe;
And of one thing good heede I toke;
The Wolf in kind is Enemy to the Sheepe.
The Rose full divers to the wild Neepe:
For things joyned that be contrary;
Dame Nature complayning doth sit and weepe:
For falce receipts found in her Library.

12. And there it was to be pitiously complained,
That men to err by false Opinions
That be so farr from truth away restrained,
Like as they had lost wholly their Reasons,
Not considering in their discretions;
What mischeife followeth as is oft seene,
By these false froward Conneccions:
As doth leapers with folkes that byne cleane.

13. Notwithstanding he that is fate so high in heaven,
Crown'd with a Crowne of bright stones cleere,
Borne there to raine as ceife chosen of seaven:
Equal with Phoebus shone in the same sphere;
Without difference as Clerkes to us leare,
Sate there most royallin his diadem:
Very Celestiall and Angelike of cheare;
And in all vertue like as he did seeme.

14. And in that Boke I found well by writing,
Like as the processe made mention:
How that there was once a mighty rich King,
Cleane of nature and of Complexion:
Voyde of deformity from head soe forthe downe,
Which for his beauty as it is specified,
And for his cleanes most soverayne of renowe:
Was among Planets in heaven stelled.

15. Certaine Brethren I found he had in Number,
and of one Mother they were borne every each one:
But a Sicknes did them fore cumber,
That none was whole on his feete to gone,
Hoarse of language, cleere voice hed they none:
For with a scabb that was contagious,
They were infected, hole was their none;
For ever exiled because they were Leaprous.

16. The said King rose up in his Royall fee,
Seeing this mischeife cast his Eye downe,
And of his mercy, and fraternall pittye,
Surprized in heart, full of Compassion:
And began to complaine of their Infeccion,
Alas quoth he how came this adventure,
Under what froward or false Constelacion;
Or in what howre had yee your ingendure.

17. But sithence this mischeife is to you befall,
There is nothing which were more expedient,
Then to chuse one out amongst us all,
Without spott all cleere of his intent,
For you to dye by his owne assent,
To save the people from their Damnation:
And with his blood ere you be fully shent,
To make of his mercy your remission.

18. The which Liquor most wholesome is and good,
Against leprous humors and false infeccions,
When from a veyne taken is the blood;
Cleansing each part from all corrupcions,
The Originall taken from generacions:
Which is descended downe from stock ryall,
Nourished with Milke of Pure complexion;
With menstrous which are not superficiall.

19. But when the Brethren of this worthy King
Heard the Language, they fell in full great dread,
Full sore [fore] weeping and said in Complayning
That none of them was able to bleede,
Because their blood was infeccious indeede,
And corrupt blood made is now Sacrifice,
Wherefore alas there is noe way to speede,
That we can finde, to help us in any wise.

20. Of our Birth and of our Originall,
Cleerely and truly to make mencion;
Excuse is there none in parte nor in all;
In sin was our first conception:
Our bringing forth and generation,
Fulfilled was in sorrowe and wickednesse,
And our Mother in a short conclusion
With Corrupt milke us fostred in distresse.

21. For who may make that seede to be cleane,
That first was conceived in uncleanes,
For cancred rust may naver I meane,
By noe crafte shew forth parfect brightness:
Now let us all at once our Course addres;
And goe unto our Mother to ask by and by,
The finall cause of our Corrupt sickness;
That she declare unto us the Cause and why.

22. The said Children uprose in a fury
Of wofull rage, and went by one assent
Unto their Mother that called was Mercury:
Requiring her by greate advisement,
Before her Godesses being everyone present.
To tell them truly and in noe parte to faine,
Why their nature was corrupt and shent [fhent];
That caused them evermore to weepe and complaine.

23. To whom the Mother full bright of face and hew,
Gave this answer remembered in Scripture,
First when I was wedded a new,
I conceived by prosses of true Nature:
A Child of Seede that was most cleane and pure,
Undeified, most orient, faire and bright,
Of all the P L A N E T S cheife of ingendure:
Which now in Heaven giveth so cleere a light.

24. Whose Complexion is most temperate,
In heate and cold and in humidity,
In Erth also that there is noe debate,
Nor noe repugnaunce by noe quallity:
Nor none occasion of none infirmity,
That among them there may be none discord,
So well proportioned every-each in his degree,
Each however and space they be of so tru accord.

25. Whose Nature is so imperiall,
That fire so burning doth him no distresse:
His royall kinde id so celestiall,
Of Corruption he taketh no sickness;
Fire, Water, Air, nor Erth with his drines,
Neither of them may alter his Complexion,
He fixeth Spirits through his high noblenes;
Saveth infected bodyes from their Corrupcion.

26. His Heavenly helth death may not assayle,
He dreadeth noe venome, nor needeth no treacle,
Winde Tempest ne Wether against him may prevaile,
Soe high in Heaven is his Tabernacle,
In Erth he worked many a miracle:
He cureth Lepers and fetcheth home Fugitive,
And to gouty Eyne giveth a cleere Spectacle:
Them to goe that lame were all their lief.

27. He is my Son and I his Mother deare,
By me conceived truly in Marriage;
As touching your Birth the sickness doth appeare,
Of Menstruous blood brought forth in tender age,
Your Leprie is shewed in Body and in Visage,
To make your hole Medicine is no other
Drinke, nor potion to your advantage,
But the pure blood of him that is your deare Brother.

28. A good Shepard must dye for his Sheepe,
Without grudging to speak his words plaine,
And semblable take hereof good keepe,
Your Brother must dye and newe be borne againe,
Though he be old, of hereof well certaine;
To youth againe he must be renewd,
And suffer passion or else all were vaine,
Then rising againe right fresh and well hewd.

29. Old Aeson was made young by Medea,
With her drinks and her potions,
Soe must your Brother of pure Volunta
Dye and be young through his operation,
And that through subtile natures Confections,
By whose death plainely to expresse;
Yee shalbe purged from all infeccions:
And your foule leaprie changed to cleanes.

30. With the said words the King began to abrayd
The tale adverting that she had tould,
How might a Man by nature thus he said
Be borne againe, namely when he is old;
Then said his Mother by reason manifold:
But if the Gospell thus doth meane,
In Water and Spirit be renovate hott and cold,
That he shall never plainely come into Heaven.

31. The King was trifty and heavy of cheere,
Upon his Knees meekly kneeled downe,
Prayed his Father in full low manner,
To translate the Challice of his passion,
But for he thought the redempcion
Of his brethren, might not be fulfilled,
Without his death nor their Salvation;
For them to suffer he was right willed.

32. And for to accomplish his purpose in sentence,
By cleere example of who so looketh right,
Heavy things from their Circumferance,
Must up assend and after be made light,
And things light ready to the flight
Must descend to the Center downe,
By interchaunging of natures might,
As they be moved by meane of Revolution.

33. So as Jupiter in a Cloud of Gold,
Chaunged himselfe by transformacion,
And descended from his hevenly hold
Like a Golden dewe unto Danae downe,
And she conceived as made is mencion,
By influence of his power divine;
Right so shall Phoebus right soveraigne of renowne
To be conceived of his Golden raine decline.

34. And to comfort his Brethren that were full dull,
The Sun hath chosen without warr or strife,
The bright Moone when she was at the full,
To be his mother first, and after his wedded wife;
In tyme of Ver the season vegetative,
In Aries when Titan doth appeare,
Inspired by grace with the Spirit of lyfe,
This marriage hallowed at mdday Spheare.

35. And at this feast were the Godes all,
Saturne from blackness was turned to white;
And Jupiter let his mantle fall,
Full pale and meager of great delight,
Clothed in Lylies that in every manner wight,
Of Heaven and Erth, and Gods of the Sea,
Rejoyced in Heart, and were full glad and light,
To be present at this great Solemnity.

36. Mars forgot there his sturdy black hardines,
Cast off his Habergeon fret with old rust;
Venus foresooke her minerall redness,
Took Gold for green and she again also for lust,
Because she had in Phoebus such a trust,
That he should this feast hold of most noblenes:
Of brotherly pittie needs as he must,
Give her a mantle of Orientall brightness.

37. After this Wedding here afore devised,
Of faire Phoebus and freth Lucine;
Philosophers have prudently practised,
A Closset round by their wife Doctrine,,
Cleere as Christall of Glasse a litle shrine;
With heavenly deawe stuffed that dungeon,
Kept night and day with glorious maidens nyne;
To keep the Queene in her Concepcion.

38. Religiously they kept their Sylenee,
Till that from heaven their royall light,
And there with all in open audience;
Was heard a voice almost at mid night,
Among the Virgins most amiable of sight,
That said unto them, to save that was forlorne;
I must againe through my imperiall myght,
Be of my Mother new conceived and borne.

39. I must passe by water and by Fire,
The burnt abide and there from not decline,
To save my brethren I have so greate desire,
With new light their darkness to yllumine,
But fore I dread that venomous Serpentine,
Which ever advanceth with his violence,
My tender youth to hurt and to invenome,
But in your keeping doe you your diligence.

40. The King thus entred in his bed royall,
The Queene conceived under a Sun bright;
Under her feete a mount like Christall,
Which hed devoured her husband anon right,
Dead of defire and in the Maidens fight;
Lost all the Collour of his fresh face,
Thus was he dead, the Maidens feeble of mighr
Dispaired, slept in the same place.

41. The Serpent bold shed out of his poyson,
The Queene and Maidens for feare tooke them to flight,
Seven tymes assending up and downe
With in a vault, now darke, now cleere of light,
Their generation was so strong of might,
After death now passeth Purgatory;
Ao Resurreccion as any Sun bright,
Things that were lost to bring to his glory.

42. The Queene tooke her possession,
The Soule reviving of the dead King;
But of old hatred the toxicate poyson,
Was by the Serpent cast in to their hindring;
The Prince was buried, but of his rising,
The Brethren were glad the truth was seene,
When they were washed by his naturall clensing;
And their old Leprie by Miracle was made cleane.

43. The full Moone halfe shaddowed the Sun,
To putt away the burning of his light;
Black shaddowed first the skyes were to dunn,
The Ravens bill began who looketh right,
Blacker than Jett or Bugle to fight;
But little and little by ordinary apparance,
The temperate fire with his cherishing might
Turned all to white, but with noe violence.

44. Tyme to the Queene approched of Childing,
The Child of Nature was ready to fly,
Passage was there to his out going:
He spread his wings and found no liberty;
Of nyne Virgins he devoured three,
The other six most excellent and faire,
Fearfull for dread in their greatest beauty,
Spread their feathers and flew forth in the Aire.

45. The Child coloured first Black, and after White,
Having noe heate in very existence,
But by cherishing of the Sun bright,
Of forraine fire there was no violence:
Save that men say which have experience,
He drank such plenty of the Water of the well,
That his six sisters made noe resistance;
But would have devowred; Dasten can you tell.

46. Sometyms black, sometyms was he redd,
Now like ashes, now Citrine of Colour:
Now of Safforne hew, now Sanguine was his head,
Now white as a lylie he shewed him in his bower,
The Moone gave nourishment to him in his labour;
And with all their dorce did their buisnes,
To cloath him fresher then any flowre,
With a mantle of everlasting whitnes.

Revision #2

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