

# Some Documents on the Divine Right of Kings

THE DIVINE RIGHT AND IRRESISTIBILITY OF KINGS AND SUPREME MAGISTRATES CLEARLY EVIDENCED ... (1645)

## *Judging*

We must not judge of the king, his government, or counsellors; yea, it is a perilous thing to commit unto subjects the judgment, which prince is wise and godly, and his government good, and which is otherwise; as though the foot must judge of the head; an enterprize very heinous, and must needs breed rebellion, 2.279.23.

## *Murmuring*

We may not murmur against the king, or speak evil of him, 1.299. 12.31. 34. 300.3.

## *Resisting*

We may not in any case resist or stand against the superior powers, though they be wicked, because they have their power from God, 1.72. 12.29. 30. 2.280. 5.33. 285. 6.28.

## *Rebellion*

The sink of all sins, both of the first and second table, 2.292. 7.

Lucifer, the first author of rebellion, 2.276.7.

The two principal causes of rebellion are,

1. Ambition, and restless desire in some men to be of higher estate than God hath given them.

2. Ignorance in the people, and lack of knowledge of God's blessed will, declared in his holy word, concerning their obedience, 2.307. 16.28. 313.14.

Rebels no true Christians, 2.289. 45.

Rebels a wicked example against all Christendom, and whole mankind, &c., 2.282. 24.

Rebels pretences vain, viz. redress of the common-wealth, and reformation of religion, 2.301. 19. 302. 2. 22. 25. 29.

Rebellion no good means of reformation, 2. 279. 34.

Miseries following rebellion, viz. pestilence, famine, the calamities of war extraordinary, 2.294. 29.

God's judgment on rebels, 2. 300. 9.

Rebels never prospered long, 2. 300. 45.

Hell the place of rebels, 2. 296. 45.

*(A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on the Most Entertaining Subjects: Reign of King Charles I. Vol. 5. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sir Walter Scott, 1811. pg. 156ff.)*

## ***WILLIAM PRYNNE, A BRIEF MEMENTO TO THE PRESENT UNPARLIAMENTARY JUNTO ... (1648)***

6thly, Consider, that though many of the kings of Judah and Israel were extraordinary sinfull and idolatrous, bloody and tyrannical, great oppressors of their people, yea, shedders of priests, of prophets, and other good men's innocent blood, not only in the wars, but in peace; yet there is not one president in the Old Testament of any one king ever judicially impeached, arraigned, deposed, or put to death by the congregation, sanhedrim, or parliaments of Judah and Israel: that those who slew any of them, in a tumultuous or treacherous manner, were, for the most part, slaine themselves, either in a tumult, or else put to death by their children, who succeeded to the crowne, or people of the land; and that the Israelites, after the revolt from Rehoboam, had never any one good king, or good day almost amongst them, but were overrun with idolatry, prophanenesse, tyranny, invaded by enemies, involved in perpetuall warre, civill or forraigne, and at last all destroyed and carried away captives into Babilon, as the books of Kings and Chronicles will informe you: that the rule in the Old Testament is, not to take any wicked kings from their thrones, and behead them, but<sup>6</sup> "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousnesse;" and the rule in the New Testament,<sup>7</sup> "To be subject to kings and the higher powers, and to submit unto them, even for conscience and the Lord's sake; and to make prayers, supplications, and intercessions for them, that under them we may lead a peaceable and quiet life, in all godlinesse and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; not to depose or shed their blood, for which there is no precept. And is not this plaine way of God safest for you and the army to follow, yea, the only short cut to peace and settlement? Ruminat upon it, and then be wise, both for your soules good and the kindomes too."

*(A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on the Most Entertaining Subjects: Reign of King Charles I. Vol. 5. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sir Walter Scott, 1811. pg. 180.)*

**A SPEECH TO THE LORDS AND COMMONS OF THE PARLIAMENT AT WHITE-HALL,  
ON WEDNESDAY THE XXI. OF MARCH. ANNO 1609 [1610 new style]. KING JAMES I**

... THE State of Monarchie is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only Gods Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon Gods throne, but even by God himselfe they are called Gods. There be three principall similitudes that illustrate the state of Monarchie: one taken out of the word of God; and the two other out of the grounds of Policie and Philosophie. In the Scriptures Kings are called gods; and so their power after a certaine relation compared to the Divine power. Kings are also compared to Fathers of families: for a King is trewly *Parens patriae*, the politique father of his people. And lastly, Kings are compared to the head of this Microcosme of the body of man.

Kings are justly called gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth: For if you wil consider the Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King. God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all, and to bee judged nor accomptable to none; to raise low things, and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soule and body due. And the like power have Kings: they make and unmake their subjects: they have power of raising, and casting down: of life, and of death: judges over all their subjects, and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God onely. They have power to exalt low things, and abase high things, and make of their subjects like men at the chesse; A pawne to take a Bishop or a Knight, and to cry up, or down any of their subjects, as they do their money. And to the king is due both the affection of the soule, and the service of the body of his subjects: And therefore that reverend Bishop here amongst you, though I heare that by divers he was mistaken or not wel understood, yet did he preach both learnedly and trewly anent this point concerning the power of a King: for what he spake of a Kings power in *Abstracto*, is most trew in Divinitie: for to Emperors, or Kings that are Monarches, their Subjects bodies & goods are due for their defence and maintenance. But if I had bene in his place, I would only have added two words, which would have cleared all: For after I had told as a Divine, what was due by the Subjects to their Kings in general, I would then have concluded as an Englishman, shewing this people, that, as in generall all Subjects were bound to relieve their King; So to exhort them, that as wee lived in a settled state of a Kingdome which was governed by his owne fundamentall Lawes and Orders, that according thereunto, they were now (being assembled for this purpose in Parliament) to consider how to help such a King as now they had; And that according to the ancient forme, and order established in this Kingdome: putting so, a difference between the generall power of a King in Divinity and the settled and established State of this Crown, and Kingdome. And I am sure that the Bishop meant to have done the same, if he had not been straited by time, which in respect of the greatnesse of the presence preaching before me, and such an Auditory, he durst not presume upon.

As for the Father of a familie, they had of old under the Law of Nature *Patriam potestatem*, which was *Potestatem vitae et necis*, over their children or familie, (I mean such Fathers of families as were the lineall heires of those families whereof Kings did originally come:) For Kings had their first originall from them, who planted and spread themselves in *Colonies* through the world. Now a Father may dispose of his Inheritance to his children, at his pleasure: yea, even disinherit the eldest upon just occasions, and preferre the youngest, according to his liking; make them beggars, or rich at his pleasure; restraine, or banish out of his presence, as hee finds them give cause of offence, or restore them in favour againe with the penitent sinner: So may the King deale with his Subjects.

And lastly, as for the head of the naturall body, the head hath the power of directing all the members of the body to that use which the judgement in the head thinkes most convenient. It may apply sharpe cures, or cut off corrupt members, let blood in what proportion it thinkes fit, and as the body may spare, but yet is all this power ordeined by God *Ad aedificationem, non ad destructionem*. For although God have power as well of destruction, as of creation or maintenance, yet will it not agree with the wisdome of God, to exercise his power in the destruction of nature, and overturning the whole frame of things, since his creatures were made, that his glory might thereby be the better expressed: So were he a foolish father that would disinherit or destroy his children without a cause, or leave off the carefull education of them; And it were an idle head that would in place of phisicke so poyson or phlebotomize the body as might breede a dangerous distemper or destruction thereof....

(from *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, James by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c.* Published by James, Bishop of Winton, and Dean of his Majesties Chappel Royall. London: Printed by Robert Barker and John Bill, Printers to the Kings most Excellent Majestie. Anno 1616, pages 529-30.)

**THOMAS HOBBS, *LEVIATHAN* (1651)**

\*Note: Hobbes' notions about sovereignty don't derive from the concept of divine right, but *Leviathan* favors royal absolutism: nothing is worse than the state of nature before monarchy, and once the latter is established, the people have no right to change their form of government:

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (Part 1, Ch. XIII. Of the Naturall Condition of Mankind ...)

Soveraigne Power Cannot Be Forfeited.... Because the Right of bearing the Person of them all, is given to him they make Soveraigne, by Covenant onely of one to another, and not of him to any of them; there can happen no breach of Covenant on the part of the Soveraigne; and consequently none of his Subjects, by any pretence of forfeiture, can be freed from his Subjection. (Part 2: Of Commonwealth. Ch 18, Of the Rights of Soveraignes by Institution)