

ACT OF SUPREMACY

Henry VIII (1491–1547), King of England (1509–1547)

While Henry VIII's desire to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was the proximate cause for a rupture with Rome, long-term political and religious issues also affected the English body politic. With the kingdom having recently emerged from civil war and facing the future with only a daughter as heir, Henry had concerns for the political stability of his realm. Moreover, there were equally long-standing concerns about the autonomy of the English Church as well as the lifestyles of its members.

England's political and religious tensions would become invariably linked to the monarch's marital problems beginning in 1526, when the King met Anne Boleyn. After many years of negotiating, an English court headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, finally annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine in 1533. Pope Clement VII subsequently excommunicated Henry, who, in turn, responded in 1534 with this Act of Parliament, which stated Henry's authority over the English Church, claiming a power similar to that exercised by contemporary kings of France and Castile. Leaders of the Church and Parliament were ordered to give their consent to this document; Sir Thomas More's refusal led to his death.

3 November 1534

Albeit the King's Majesty justly and rightfully is and owes to be the supreme head of the Church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their convocations, yet nevertheless for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and for increase of virtue in Christ's religion within this realm of England, and to repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses heretofore used in the same;

Be it enacted by authority of this present Parliament that the King, our sovereign lord, his heirs, and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*, and shall have and enjoy, annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm, as well the style and title thereof, as all honors, dignities, pre-eminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities, to the said dignity of supreme head of the same Church belonging and appertaining; and that our said sovereign lord, his heirs, and successors, kings of this realm, shall have full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offenses, contempts, and enormities, whatsoever they be, which by any manner spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, corrected, restrained, or amended, most to the pleasure of almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of the peace, unity and tranquility of this realm; any usage, custom, foreign laws, foreign authority, prescription, or any other thing or things to the contrary hereof notwithstanding.

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