
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE MONARCHY

Elizabeth I, queen of England from 1558 to 1603, was a shrewd leader who respected the power of Parliament and skillfully avoided any confrontations during her reign. Her successor, James I, however, believed in the divine right of kings and clashed repeatedly with Parliament. The following selections reflect the contrasting views of Elizabeth I and James I. As you read, think about how their views probably influenced their relationship with Parliament.

SPEECH OF ELIZABETH I TO PARLIAMENT, 1601

To be a king and wear a crown is a thing more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasing to them that bear it: for myself, I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king, or royal authority of a queen, as delighted that God had made me his instrument to maintain his truth and glory and to defend this kingdom . . . from peril, dishonor, tyranny, and oppression.

There will never a queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care for my subjects, and that sooner with willingness will venture her life for your good and safety, than myself. For it is not my desire to live nor reign longer than my life and reign shall be for your good. And though you have had, and may have many princes, more mighty and wise, sitting in this state; yet you never had, or shall have any that will be more careful and loving.

From Elizabeth I, "Golden Speech" to Parliament, 1601.

SPEECH OF JAMES I TO PARLIAMENT, 1610

The state of Monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods. . . . In the Scriptures kings are called gods, and so their power after a certain relation compared to the Divine power. Kings are also compared to the fathers of families, for a king is truly *parens patriae* [father of his country]. . . .

Now a father may dispose of his inheritance to his children at his pleasure, yea, even disinherit the eldest upon just occasions and prefer the youngest, according to his liking; make them beggars or rich at his pleasure; restrain or banish out of his presence, as he finds them give cause of offense, or restore them in favor again. . . . So may the King deal with his subjects. . . .

. . . It is sedition [rebellion] in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power; but just kings will ever be willing to declare what they will do, if they will not incur the curse of God. I will not be content that my power be disputed upon, but I shall ever be willing to make the reason appear of all my doings, and rule my actions according to my laws.

From King James I, *Works* (1616).

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Cite evidence that indicates Elizabeth felt humble in her role as queen.
2. Cite evidence that indicates James I's view of the monarchy sharply differed from Elizabeth's view.
3. Which ruler do you think was more effective? Explain.