The *Divine Right of Kings* assumed a new importance during the reign of Henry VIII. The theory was particularly relevant whilst Henry VIII was wrangling with the Pope and separating the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church. Henry VIII used the *Divine Right of Kings* to claim a new position as head of the Church of England. The fact that his power was said to have been bestowed by God (as the pope claimed as well) made him a natural alternative source of authority and governance. from governance by the Pope in Rome.

Even Elizabeth I benefitted from the security offered by the *Divine Right of Kings* and used the fact that God had ordained her rule to strengthen her reign during a period full of threats, notably from Mary Queen of Scots.

Early-modern monarchy relied upon the legitimacy provided by a *Divine Right* to rule. Recent scholarship has seen the early Stuart reliance on *Divine Right* as a reaction to the politico-religious violence of the late reformation and events on the continent, such as the French Wars of Religion. *Divine Right* claimed that monarchs were chosen by God, and their subjects had no role in either choosing or resisting a king. Through proclaiming their *Divine Right* to rule, monarchical government was legitimised and allegiance was sworn to the King in the name of God.

The *Divine Right of Kings* was a crucial basis for stable government throughout the Early Modern era. Since kings were chosen by God, *Divine Right* theory claimed, subjects could not resist even a bad king; if a monarch acted tyrannically against their subjects, the proper response was prayer and patience. Publicly, the rights of the monarch were reinforced, sometimes through dramatic public executions of those who challenged the monarch’s right to rule.

Monarchs not only reinforced their god given right to rule through public execution, but also through propaganda. The most influential early modern example of a monarch themselves claiming *Divine Right* came from James VI of Scotland. James’s treatise *Basilikon Doron* (1599) (the title means ‘*The King’s Gift*’) was written before James VI succeeded to the English throne (from which point he assumed the English crown as James I).

James VI intended his treatise to be advice to his eldest son Henry, for his future reign as King. Intriguingly, whilst commenting upon the obligations of subjects living under a divinely-appointed monarch, James VI also proffered advice on the obligations of a *Divine Right* monarch answerable to God. It was ultimately the role of the King to protect the godly and ‘plague the profane’ but to always respect and obey God’s laws.

From left to right: **Henry VIII** who relied upon the theory of Divine Right to legitimise his Church in the reformation, **Henry Frederick** the first born son of **James VI** who was the subject of *Basilikon Doron.* James VI gave sensible advice on the limits of monarchical power that were not heeded by his son **Charles I** (1625-1649).



**The importance of the Divine Right of Kings to Medieval and Early Modern monarchs**