

Elizabeth I's Act of Supremacy (1559) - original text¹

An acte restoring to the crown the ancient jurisdiction over the state ecclesiastical and spiritual and abolishing all foreign power repugnant to the same. Most humbly beseech your most excellent majesty your faithful and obedient subjects, the lords spiritual and temporal and the commons in this your present parliament assembled, that, where in time of the reign of your most dear father of worthy memory, King Henry VIII, divers good laws and statutes were made and established, as well for the utter extinguishment and putting away of all usurped and foreign powers and authorities out of this your realm and other your highness's dominions and countries, as also for the restoring and uniting to the imperial crown of this realm the ancient jurisdictions, authorities, superiorities, and pre-eminences to the same of right belonging and appertaining; by reason whereof we, your most humble and obedient subjects, from the five-and-twentieth year of the reign of your said dear father, were continually kept in good order, and were disburdened of divers great and intolerable charges and exactions before that time unlawfully taken and exacted by such foreign power and authority as before that was usurped, until such time as all the said good laws . . . in the first and second years of the reigns of the late King Philip and Queen Mary . . . were . . . repealed . . . ;' by reason of which act of repeal your said humble subjects were eftsoons brought under an usurped foreign power and authority, and yet do remain in that bondage, to the intolerable charges of your loving subjects, if some redress by the authority of this your high court of parliament with the assent of your highness be not had and provided: may it therefore please your highness, for the repressing of the said usurped foreign power and the restoring of the rights jurisdictions, and pre-eminences appertaining to the imperial crown of this your realm, that it may be enacted by the authority of this present parliament that the said act . . . and all and every branch, clauses, and articles therein contained, other than such branches, clauses, and sentences as hereafter shall be excepted, may from the last day of this session of parliament, by authority of this present parliament, be repealed, and shall from thenceforth be utterly void and of none effect . . .

And to the intent that all usurped and foreign power and authority, spiritual and temporal, may forever be clearly extinguished and never to be used nor obeyed within this realm or any other your majesty's countries, may it please your highness that it may be further enacted by the authority aforesaid that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state, or potentate, spiritual or temporal, shall at any time after the last day of this session of parliament use, enjoy, or exercise any manner of power, jurisdiction, superiority, authority, pre-eminence, or privilege, spiritual or ecclesiastical, within this realm or within any other your majesty's dominions or countries that now be or hereafter shall be, but from thenceforth the same shall be clearly abolished out of this realm and all other your highness's dominions forever, any statute, ordinance, custom, constitutions, or any other matter or cause whatsoever to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding . . . ; and that your highness, your heirs, and successors, kings or queens of this realm, shall have full power and authority . . . to exercise . . . all manner of jurisdictions, privileges, and preeminences in any wise touching or concerning any spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdiction within these your realms. . . .

And for the better observation and maintenance of this act, may it please your highness that it may be further enacted by the authority aforesaid that all and every archbishop, bishop, and all and every other ecclesiastical person and other ecclesiastical officer and minister, of what estate, dignity, pre-eminence, or degree soever he or they be or shall be, and all and every temporal

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judge, justicer, mayor, and other lay or temporal officer and minister, and every other person having your highness's fee or wages within this realm or any your highness's dominions shall make, take, and receive a corporal oath upon the Evangelist, before such person or persons as shall please your highness, your heirs or successors, under the great seal of England to assign and name to accept and take the same, according to the tenor and effect hereafter following, that is to say-

"I, A. B., do utterly testify and declare in my conscience that the queen's highness is the only supreme governor of this realm and of all other her highness's dominions and countries, as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes as temporal, and that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state, or potentate hath or ought to have any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence, or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual, within this realm; and therefore I do utterly renounce and forsake all foreign jurisdictions, powers, superiorities, and authorities, and do promise that from henceforth I shall bear faith and true allegiance to the queen's highness, her heirs, and lawful successors, and to my power shall assist and defend all jurisdictions, pre-eminences, privileges, and authorities granted or belonging to the queen's highness, her heirs, and successors, or united or annexed to the imperial crown of this realm: so help me God and by the contents of this Book." . . .

And for the more sure observation of this act and the utter extinguishment of all foreign and usurped power and authority, may it please your highness that it may be further enacted by the authority aforesaid that, if any person or persons dwelling or inhabiting within this your realm or in any other your highness's realms or dominions . . . , shall by writing, printing, teaching, preaching, express words, deeds, or act, advisedly, maliciously, and directly affirm, hold, stand with, set forth, maintain, or defend the authority, preeminence, power, or jurisdiction, spiritual or ecclesiastical, of any foreign prince, prelate, person, state, or potentate whatsoever, heretofore claimed, used, or usurped within this realm or any dominion or country being within or under the power, dominion, or obeisance of your highness, or shall advisedly, maliciously, or directly put in ure or execute anything for the extolling, advancement, setting forth, maintenance, or defence of any such pretended or usurped jurisdiction, power, pre-eminence, or authority, or any part thereof, that then every such person and persons so doing and offending, their abettors, aiders, procurers, and counsellors, being thereof lawfully convicted and attainted according to the due order and course of the common laws of this realm [shall suffer specified penalties, culminating in punishment for high treason on the third offence]

Provided always, and be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that such person or persons to whom your highness, your heirs, or successors, shall hereafter by letters patents under the great seal of England give authority to have or execute any jurisdiction, power, or authority spiritual, or to visit, reform, order, or correct any errors, heresies, schisms, abuses, or enormities by virtue of this act, shall not in any wise have authority or power to order, determine, or adjudge any matter or cause to be heresy but only such as heretofore have been determined, ordered, or adjudged to be heresy by the authority of the canonical Scriptures, or by the first four general councils or any of them, or any other general council wherein the same was declared heresy by the express and plain words of the said canonical Scriptures, or such as hereafter shall be ordered, judged, or determined to be heresy by the high court of parliament of this realm, with the assent of the clergy in their convocation - anything in this act contained to the contrary notwithstanding...

