

11.3 The Act of Supremacy: The Church of England

Thwarted by the pope's reluctance from getting an annulment of his marriage, Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) invoked the principle "the king in Parliament can do anything" to validate by legislation his new position as head of the Church of England. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, granted the king his annulment and Henry married Anne Boleyn.

Source: *Select Documents of English Constitutional History*, ed. George B. Adams and H. Morse Stephens, (New York: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 239–40, reprinted from *Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810–28) III, 436–39.

ALBEIT the king's majesty justly and rightfully is and ought 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 extirp 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 in 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 title and style thereof, as all honours, dignities, preeminences, 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, offences, 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 tranquillity of this realm; any usage, custom, foreign law, foreign authority, prescription, or any other thing or things to the contrary hereof notwithstanding.

Questions:

1. On what grounds did Henry claim the right to exercise authority as "Supreme Head of the Church of England?"
2. How does this law change the relationship between church and state government? between England and other European states?