

Bishop's Note: Article 37—Of the Civil Magistrates

Today, we continue our examination the 39 Articles, shifting our attention from Church matters only, to the relationship of both individuals and the Church to the State. I found this article difficult to read in the Original Kings English, therefore I have used the more modern English translation below. This article concerns four different aspects of Civil Authority, and I'm going to break it up a bit in order to explain each part:

Article 37 - Of the Civil Magistrates

The King's Majesty has the chief power in this Realm of England and his other dominions. The chief government of all aspects of this realm, including both ecclesiastical and civil, belongs to him. The government is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign jurisdiction.

In 1553, King Henry VIII established the Act of Royal Supremacy, which made official what was already in practice—the King served as the Head of the Church, as well as the Head of State. Queen Elizabeth I changed the wording, in 1563, to state that Christ was the Head of the Church. The English monarch continues to be the head of the Church of England, but shares responsibility with Parliament for many actions—primarily the confirmation of all Bishops and Archbishops in the Church of England.

Some slanderous people are offended when we attribute to the King's Majesty the highest government. But we do not give to our Princes the ministering either of God's Word, or of the Sacraments. The Injunctions recently set forth by Elizabeth our Queen plainly testify to this. We only give that right, which we see in the Holy Scriptures was always given to godly Princes by God himself. That is, that they should rule all positions and classes committed to their charge by God, whether they are ecclesiastical or civil. And that they should restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evildoers.

Prior to the Act of Royal Supremacy, people could appeal to the Pope for relief in both civil and religious matters. This article only recognizes the monarch as having authority in those areas. However, it also limits that authority to the boundaries laid out in scripture for rulers. Therefore, the monarchs do not have authority to officially preach the Word of God or administer the Sacraments.

The Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this Realm of England.

This statement is quite clear, and was incredibly bold for the sixteenth century.

The Laws of the Realm may punish Christians with death, for terrible and serious offenses. It is lawful for Christians, at the commandment of the Ruler to carry weapons and serve in the wars.

This paragraph permits the practice of capital punishment by the State, and authorizes military service by members of the Church of England, which set the Church

of England apart from the Anabaptists (now known as Amish & Mennonite), who argued for pacifism.

As the Church of England spread throughout the world, so spread the biblical understanding that we are to recognize and respect those in authority over us. St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome: ***“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”*** (Romans 13:1 ESV)

However, this does not mean that we cannot question authority when the state acts in a manor opposed to scripture. Because of the authority of scripture, when that happens, we are to uphold scripture while still respecting authority.

For us in the Diocese of San Joaquin, we are living this out by submitting ourselves to the authority of the civil courts. While we disagreed with the decision of the judge in Kern County, we respected his authority and submitted to his decision. We pray that the other judges will make godly decisions, but ultimately we trust in the great Judge, Jesus Christ!

May the Lord bless your week ahead and your worship on the Lord’s Day!

Bishop Menees