**Divine Right of Kings: Theory & Definition**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Define “divine right” in your own words here:

Where did divine rights originate from?

What does the bible say will happen to people “who resist the authorities God has appointed?”

How is a king/citizens following divine right like a babysitter/kids?

**Definition of Divine Right**

'Divine right of kings' was a way of justifying monarchies, particularly in Europe during the 16th to the 18th centuries. The idea is that the king is given his authority directly by God. Because of this, he had the 'right' to rule completely and totally, with no need for approval from the people or any representative body such as a parliament.

**Origin of Divine Right**

It is fairly clear that the theory of the divine right of kings in Europe must be traced back to the Bible. Romans, chapter 13 begins in this way:

*“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. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, only to bad conduct.”  (Bible, Revised Standard Version)*

So what the Apostle Paul is saying in the letter to the Romans is that there are two types of authority for human beings. On the one hand, human beings are to be subject to God. On the other hand, they are also bound to obey kings and rulers, because these are seen as being set in place by God.

To put it more simply, think of this example: imagine a parent who has a commitment, so they have to hire a babysitter to watch over their child. The parent gives the babysitter instructions and then turns care of their child over to the babysitter. On the way out the door, the parent says to his eight-year-old, who sometimes tends to push the limits: 'Listen to your babysitter, or there will be consequences tomorrow!' Once the parent leaves, authority for the child is turned over to the babysitter.

Despite some of the points of legal dispute about responsibility for the child by the babysitter, this is still a good way to understand how Europeans came to view kings during the early modern period in Europe. Three things can be seen about divine right in this illustration:

1. The king is appointed at the discretion of God, just as the babysitter is hired using the best judgment of the parent. Furthermore, it may be that it is a really busy night for babysitters, and so babysitters may be in short supply. So the babysitter may not be the best one possible, just as the king may not be the ideal king, but still is appointed and given authority by God.
2. The babysitter acts on behalf of the parent while the parent is away. In the same way, the king is considered God's regent on earth, and his decisions are not subject to disapproval from the people (or in the case of the babysitter, the child).
3. The babysitter is ultimately responsible to the parent. Likewise, divine right theory still insisted that a king is responsible to follow the ways of God in his actions and his carrying out of justice. In the end, when it comes time to pay the babysitter (or to schedule another job), the parent has the final say.

**History of Divine Right**

Who was “god on earth” in the 16th and 17th centuries?

What do you think “absolute obedience” means?

According to JBB, what are rulers supposed to do if someone in the kingdom “does evil”?

Who does he say the throne actually belongs to?

During the 16th and 17th centuries, European rulers consolidated power in a number of ways, ending in some places with the establishment of a type of rule now often called absolutism. In this type of rule, the king or queen was seen as the sole source of unquestioned power in the state. Ultimately, the justification for this kind of rule came down to the notion of divine right. The king or queen could rule absolutely because they were essentially 'god on earth.' While they were subject to God's divine judgment, they were not subject to the people in any way, for that would undermine the normal order of things.

**Key Writers of Divine Right**

Two of the most important individuals to consider this connection between God and the king were King James VI of Scotland and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, the court preacher of Louis XIV. Both of these individuals emphasized the similarity between kings and God, using metaphors that highlighted the parallels. Because of this, they both also stressed absolute obedience by subjects.

**JACQUES BENIGNE BOSSUET (1627-1704) *Priest and preacher Jacques Benigne Bossuet was a tutor and advisor to the Prince of France from 1670 to 1681, before becoming court preacher to Louis XIV. This excerpt from his writings express his ideas of the “divine right of kings”.***

We have already seen that all power is of God. The ruler "is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth [bears] not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Rulers then act as the ministers of God and as his lieutenants on earth. It is through them that God exercises his empire. Consequently… the royal throne is not the throne of a man, but the throne of God himself.

**Illustrate the “divine right of kings” in a humorous way below:**