Strategies of Rulers Throughout History: A Comparative Analysis of Constantine the Great and James VI

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Abstract. Throughout history, rulers have employed various strategies and methods to justify their authority, and ruling by divine right stands as one of the most fascinating strategies. This concept asserts that leaders derive their legitimacy and power from divine entities, often gods or supernatural beings. This essay discusses how rulers assert authority through ruling by divine right, examining two prominent case studies: Constantine the Great and James VI. It analyzes the extent to which the employment of ruling by divine right contributed to consolidating their control and the challenges they encountered. By exploring both case studies individually and comparing their outcomes, this paper gains insight into the complexities of using divine legitimacy as a basis for rule. As a result of this paper, ruling by divine right can most definitely be advantageous to rulers wanting to consolidate their rules, but only under the right circumstances, proper employment and ruler's social skills.

Keywords: Historical rulers; Strategies analysis; James VI.

1. Introduction

Ruling by divine right is a belief that rulers hold their authority as a result of being chosen by a higher power [1]. This connection to the divine bestow them with unquestionable legitimacy, making their control and rule beyond questioning. This strategy has been adopted by rulers across cultures and societies to legitimize their reigns. By positioning themselves as links between the divine and earthly realms, rulers project an absolute power and command over their citizens. Existing research has conducted extensive research on theocratic rule, such as Li Qin's in-depth analysis of the factors influencing Western democratic politics from the perspective of medieval Western European theocratic rule, and providing relevant suggestions [2]. Taking China as an example, Shao Hong focused on discussing the content of ancient Shu Shu activities and presented the paradox of divine monopoly [3]. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the two effects from two different rulers received from utilizing Ruling by divine right. Then compare and contrast the two rulers' employment and result of this method. A thorough examination of the influencing factors of different rulers' use of theocratic rule not only helps to better understand the evolution of policies related to theocratic rule, but also helps the author to further understand the great historical role of theocratic rule in advancing history. Two contrast case studies will be shown and discussed in this paper, Constantine the first and James VI. Along with a comparative analysis, then a conclusion to sum up this entire paper.

2. Case Description

2.1. Constantine the Great Consolidation and Complexities

Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire, is a great example of a ruler who employed the strategy of ruling by divine right to consolidate control. His conversion to Christianity not only aligned him with the growing Christian population but also positioned him as a chosen leader appointed by God. [10] The Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, where Constantine saw a divine sign and claimed victory, illustrated how he linked divine legitimacy with his reign. However, Constantine's adoption of ruling by divine right posed challenges [4]. The Roman Empire was religiously diverse, and although he aligned himself with Christianity, he mixed in religious things in traditional Roman religion.

Constantine's approach to religious diversity within his empire becomes evident in the Edict of Milan, issued in 313 AD [5]. This edict, co-authored by Constantine and Licinius, granted religious tolerance and legalized Christianity along with various other religions. The edict presented a significant shift in the Roman Empire's approach to religion, allowing freedom of worship for Christians. However, this pragmatic move, while reinforcing Constantine's commitment to Christianity, introduced a paradox. By legalizing other religions, the edict contradicted the Constantine's pure Christian rule, highlighting the complexities of governing a religiously diverse empire.The skepticism regarding the sincerity of his faith, despite using Christian symbols and titles, made his intention unclear between genuine devotion and political maneuver. The issuing of the Edict of Milan reflected Constantine's practical view of the empire's religious landscape [5]. Legalizing Christianity along with other religions showed the diverse belief systems within the empire and emphasized on the need for coexist. Constantine, while not perfectly aligning himself with the concept of ruling purely by christian divine rule, demonstrated his acknowledgment of the realistic challenges of governance in a diverse society.

Constantine figured out another way to solve the complexities of diverse religions, by calling the first Council of Nicaea [6]. The council was made of various Christian bishops in churches from around the globe, all of whom were invited by Constantine the first [7]. The creed was formulated to provide clarity on the basic fundamental Christian beliefs, especially served as a response to various theological disputes and heresies. Constantine played a crucial role in conveying the church leaders into resolving the controversy of Arianism, and that was the most prominent dispute the Nicene Creed resolved [8]. Arianism is a belief that God is a self-existence and a singular divine entity. However, the son Jesus, was created by God, therefore is not self-existence. The controversy centered on the true relationship between Jesus and God. Calling the first Council of Nicaea brought numerous advantages. Constantine's active participation in the council and his role in convening the council displayed his commitment to Christianity, as well as the emperor of the Roman Empire. His accomplishments in the council assisted him to consolidate his divine authority and his influence among the Christian community. Furthermore, the first Council of Nicaea contributed in reducing the challenge posed by complexities of religion diversity within the empire, at least ensuring the majority of Christian believers' beliefs are united.

2.2. James VI Double Trouble

James VI, also known as James I of England, provides another case study of ruling by divine right [9]. James VI was the king of England and Scotland from 1567 to 1625 [10]. His claim to rule England was grounded in the divine right of kings, a belief that reinforced monarchs were appointed to rule by God. While this approach aimed to solidify his authority, it encountered challenges [11]. The Belief faced resistance from those who believed in a more parliamentary approach to governance, leading to conflicts between the crown and Parliament. James VI's pursuit of ruling by divine right was complicated by religious tensions within the country as well [12]. The ongoing tensions between Catholics and Protestants in his rule influenced his ability to consolidate power. His efforts to maintain a centralized monarchy often clashed with the desires of his subjects and contributed to a tense relationship with Parliament. This displays how employing ruling by divine right may not always lead to the desired consolidation of control. Comparing the outcomes of these case studies underscores the multifaceted nature of ruling by divine right. While both Constantine and James VI aimed to use divine legitimacy to consolidate power, their approaches and results differed. Constantine's strategy aligned with a religious movement on the rise, aiding in his consolidation of authority. James VI, however, faced greater opposition due to existing power dynamics and religious divisions.

3. Comparative analysis

Constantine's conversion to Christianity allowed him to gain support from the God's followers and positioned himself as the leader chosen by God. The battle of Milvian Bridge exemplified his connection to Christ and to divine legitimacy to rule. However, his coexistence of Christianity and Roman religion raised complexities in the religiously diverse empire. James VI on the other hand took the similar approach, claiming that the monarchs were appointed by the divine to rule. James the sixth attempted to consolidate from this, however, encountered resistance due to conflicts with parliamentary governance supporters. Moreover, tensions between Catholics and Protestants further strained his efforts. As a result, a tense relationship with the parliament and his consolidation of rule was challenged. A crucial comparison point arises in the way these two rulers handled religious diversity within their empires. Constantine recognized the need for religions to coexist in a diverse society in order to thrive peacefully. As a result, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, which legalized Christianity alongside other religions. This practical approach aimed to accommodate the diverse religions within the empire. In addition, Constantine called the first Council of Nicaea and was actively involved to better resolve the challenge he faced and further consolidate his divine rule. On the contrary, James VI encountered internal religious tensions in his empire that strained his pursuit of ruling by divine right. Additionally, faced conflicts with the parliamentary governance while attempting to deploy this strategy. This shows the limitations of employing ruling by divine right in a society with religious tensions and conflicts between different governance.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, ruling by divine right has been a crucial tool for rulers aiming to consolidate their power. By presenting themselves as ones chosen or appointed by the divine, these leaders form a connection between the celestial and earthly realms, projecting absolute authority. However, the two case studies, Constantine the Great and James VI show that while ruling by divine right can strengthen authority, it also introduces challenges rooted in complex religious and political contexts. Constantine the Great's use of ruling by divine right illustrates how aligning with a religious movement supports authority. Embracing Christianity solidified his bond with the growing Christian community and make him as divinely appointed. However, the religious diverse Roman Empire may have presented challenges for Constantine's divine rule. The Edict of Milan, embracing religious tolerance and legitimizing Christianity and many other religions, highlighted the pragmatic challenge of governing a diverse populace, revealing the need for modifications to diverse religious sentiments. Constantine responded to those challenges with the formulation of the first Council of Nicaea and his pivotal role in the council. James VI's case displays that employing ruling by divine right can bring formidable obstacles, both political and religious. James' claim to the English throne grounded in the divine right of kings conflicted with people who supported governance by parliament. Additionally, religious tensions within the country—Catholics versus Protestants—added complexity, underscoring how religious divisions could disrupt authority consolidation. This case demonstrated that the strategy of ruling by divine right does not always lead to success, sometimes even failure. Comparing these two case studies reveals divergent outcomes reflecting unique circumstances. Constantine's alignment with a religious surge and management of religious diversity enforced the consolidation of authority. In the contrary, James VI's struggle with established power structures and religious conflicts posed difficult obstacles to his pursuit of divine legitimacy. These instances emphasize that Ruler needs to be skilled at navigating through the current circumstances, establishing necessary organizations, and to employ this strategy. In a broader context, the power of ruling by divine right is vulnerable to proper governance. Religious diversity, political dynamics, and societal shifts collectively shape triumphs or failures for rulers using this approach. The lessons from Constantine and James VI stress adaptability and awareness in employing ruling by divine right. Rulers must balance projecting celestial endorsement with grappling the intricate realities of society. The research process for this essay has been comprehensive, involving extensive historical inquiry, online research, and a

meticulous examination of valuable sources. This investigation also encompassed the analysis of historical documents to glean insights from primary sources.

Through this essay, the author aim to offer a valuable perspective on the efficacy of the ruling by divine right approach employed by historical rulers to solidify their power. It is worth mentioning when examining the first case study Constantine the first, questions were raised regarding his true intention and his sincerity of conversion to Christianity. Constantine serves as just one example; throughout history, numerous rulers and politicians have utilized similar strategies to attain political influence, which may not always are related with religious affairs. Nonetheless, this essay includes areas for potential improvement. One crucial aspect is the lack of other scholars' view and thoughts on this specific topic. Despite exhaustive internet research, essays and scholars' work that were publicly available were scarce. To further enhance this essay, analyzing other scholars work would definitely help to make this essay better-rounded. For this essay, the author has conducted various historical research, surfed the internet for any relating content then meticulously search for any information that is valuable. This essay provides a valuable insight on the effectiveness of the method ruling by divine right adopted by rulers to consolidate their control. Some doubts were raised, in the first case, Constantine, on his true intention of his conversion to Christianity. Constantine was just an example, there were and are still many rulers, politician out there using this kind of strategy to get political influence, it may not be religion related. There are most definitely room for improvements in this essay, such as a lack of other credible scholars view on this topic. When the author was researching on the internet, the author was unable to discover any essays about this topic that were available to public. The essay would be more completed when others' view is discussed, analyzed and compared.

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