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The Principal Place of the Divine Right Theory in Achieving Sustainable Public Accountability

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Abstract:

Several theoretical and legal attempts have been made to achieve public accountability. Despite these, the challenge with achieving public accountability persists. Legal frameworks appear not to have been sufficient in curtailing the penchant of public officials to privatize public resources. In the consideration of this paper, something beyond legal frameworks is needed to ensure proper public accountability. This paper considers the nature of allegiance in Divine Right Theory against the backdrop of theories of public accountability and the challenge to public accountability and concludes that the ultimate test in achieving public accountability is the conscience of the public actor. Accordingly, the paper considers that the Divine Right Theory is the ultimate restraint and moderator of the conscience of public actors and therefore, the ultimate guide to achieving credible public accountability. Consequently, the theory of the Divine Right is considered as the means by which public accountability can be secured. However, the public can only measure the degree of adherence of the public actor to divine restrictions by the record of their character. Against this backdrop, it is recommended that greater attention should be given to the profile of those who seek public office.

Keywords: Public accountability, Divine right Theory, Agency, Public character, Sustainable development

Introduction

The public sector has an enormous impact on the economy and the society at large. It is widely acknowledged that the public sector has the responsibility and potential to advance sustainable development given the dual role of the public sector (as both a public service provider and a regulator) and tackle environmental and social challenges (CIPFA, 2021). In performing these functions, there is need for sustainable public accountability. Sustainable public accountability is the practice of holding public officials and organisations accountable for their actions and decisions. Accountability in the public sector has attracted the attention of academics, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide in recognising the need for a theory of public accountability. It would appear that in spite of these and the legal frameworks put in place to ensure sustainable public accountability, there have continued to be leakages and ineffectiveness in the management of public resources. Against this backdrop, this paper reexamined the theory of the divine right of kings as a basis for achieving public accountability.

Initially the divine right theory was valuable for its defense of the rights of monarchy against the political claims of the papacy; later it was equally useful against the similar claims of Presbyterians. But perhaps, since Figgis's (1896) pioneering study of The Divine Right of Kings,

historians have found a variety of new perspectives from which to view the subject. It seems, however, that the best recent work has, in a number of respects, reinforced Figgis's own judgements. Figgis rejected the view that the divine right of kings was a collection of purely ridiculous propositions perversely preached by a servile church (Figgis, 1896). Instead, he perceived the deep medieval roots of the theory, and saw how it was developed to cope with real political problems posed in the aftermath of the reformation (Berkowitz, 1975).

The most significant of the interpretative claims made by Figgis was that the divine right of kings had an essential place in the development of Western political theory: it enabled the establishment of a proper theory of sovereignty. It was necessary as a transition stage between medieval and modern politics because it served as the popular form of expression for the theory of sovereignty. The divine right of kings made the theory of sovereignty concrete, thus facilitating its growth (Glenn, 1992). This paper attempts to explore other views on the theory of the Divine Rights of Kings and goes beyond the foregoing view to explore how the theory can bring about the desired public accountability required in not just government but in administration.

Attempt is made to establish a nexus between divine obedience as reflected in personal choices and the decision of the individual to be publicly accountable. That is not to discountenance legal frameworks. Indeed, legal frameworks best serve their purpose when persons with the right attitude manage those frameworks. Of course, the law will ultimately act to reward or punish those who uphold or disobey it but the attention to character and conscience emphasises the need to investigate and pay closer attention to the character and track record of the aspiring public official. The paper concludes with the central thesis of the principal place of the theory of divine right of kings in public accountability.

Allegiance in Divine Right Theory

The long-exploded doctrine of the divine right of kings was defended by St. Paul and the necessity of yielding them an absolute obedience. As he stated in his first two verses of the 13th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation”. (Dion cited in Wirenius, 2024, p. 108) tried to argue against this, but realised that if we look to the Old Testament, we shall find numberless instances of wicked kings, driven from their thrones, by the express command of God Almighty. Therefore, far from containing a defense of despotism or enjoining a tame submission to its tyrannic sway, we are tacitly, authorised to free ourselves from the oppressive burden of its galling yoke (The Belfast Monthly Magazine, 1813). This is because rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.

The theory of the divine right of kings explains that powers are ordained by God, which means that a virtuous ruler is ordained by God, while a vicious ruler is a usurper, subject to divine and human wrath. An ordained ruler is a chosen minister of God, His representative on earth, clothed with the robe of righteousness, armed with the sword of justice (Drimbe, 2022). It was based on this that St, Paul commands us to obey the higher powers. However, he also argued that vicious leaders could also be divinely appointed to punish the people for their sins, just as war, famine and disease can be sent by God as punishment for the sins committed by man. The point

therefore, is that government and administration requires responsibilities from two sides; that of the leader and the people. The leader is expected to do as God has ordained, while the follower is to obey the leader as a representative of God. Ultimately, allegiance from both ends are located in divine instruction and therefore to God.

Flowing from the foregoing, secular laws and legal processes are human instruments that are expected to be divinely approved. This has been discovered and proven by the Anglo-Catholics who defended ceremonial and sacramental worship, turning to the law to clarify doctrinal disputes. A clear example of this was on November 20, 2012, the Church of England's General Synod rejected draft legislation to allow women to be consecrated as bishops; the legislation, which required a two-thirds majority in each of the three synodical houses to pass, achieved the requisite number of votes in the House of Bishops and the House of Clergy, falling just six votes short in the House of Laity (Davies, 2012). The reaction was sharp and critical. The very next day, the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, as one of the Church Estates Commissioners in the House of Commons, stated that the "Church needs to get on with it, as it were, and get with the program, but we must respect individual institutions and how they work" (Hansard, 2012, p. 579).

In this case, government pressure led to achieving a good result, the consecration of women as bishops within the Church of England – but did so by intimating that the church's hand might otherwise be forced. The unique constitutional and legal relationship between the Church and the State in England that gives the government power to compel the church to act or refrain from acting has been, since the Reformation Settlement, uneasily received by the church. The less tangible benefits of establishment have been summarised as "the presence of its Archbishops and senior diocesan bishops in the House of Lords, the exclusive rights to conduct the ceremonies of coronation, the legal right to the monarch's adhesion to its communicant membership, together with a certain official status and social prestige, the loss of which was so keenly felt by the by the author of the First Tract"" (Buckler, 1941, P. 299). More concrete benefits conferred upon the Church of England via establishment include "state funding for religious associations that provide non-religious public goods, such as schools, hospitals, adoption agencies, homeless shelters, drug treatment centers, etc., as well as tax advantages for religious organisations and taxes paid to the Church, although citizens are able to opt out of these payments" (Seglow, 2017, p. 190).

What distinguished the English idea of Divine Right from the Roman Catholic tradition was that in the latter, the monarch is always subject to divine testaments and authorities. In theory, divine law, natural law, and customary and constitutional law still held sway over the king. However, in the absence of a superior spiritual power, such concepts could not be enforced, since the king could not be tried by any of his own courts (Butler, 1999). In England for example, since there was no longer the counter-veiling power of the papacy and since the Church of England was a creature of the state and had become subservient to it, this meant that there was nothing to regulate the powers of the king, who had become an absolute power. The only power that could regulate the monarch was the divine or the supernatural power.

It therefore implies that the allegiance to the divine right of kings flows from the fact that the king was divinely chosen and is also divinely checked. The king can be able to rise above the

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laws but due to the fact that there is a supreme power that can curse or punish a tyrant, monarch or leaders who act against divine laws and humanity, the king (leaders) act in check. This is because there is either conscious or sub-conscious allegiance to divinity.

Theories of public accountability

The notion of accountability in public administration has indeed gone through major developments in theory and practice over the years. The debates on public accountability have brought about superior understanding of government and its relationship with the society it governs, as well as encouraging public policies to be more responsive to social needs and to institute managerial practices attuned to effectiveness, efficiency, and the deeper human requisites of the citizenry (Basu, 1994). However, the issue of public accountability still remains a major issue in the society. This has brought about several crisis. Most importantly is the crisis of an acceptable theory that will advocate the need and importance of public accountability to public office holders. This crisis is further exacerbated by the fact that different people seem to have different and often conflicting ideas as to what constitutes or satisfies a meaningful 'public' accountability. Some critical theories of transformation that have brought about growth in public accountability over the years are discussed in this section.

The traditional school of thoughts views public accountability as a responsibility, an obligation, a commodity in an exchange relationship, and a set of procedures leading to better performance. Koontz and O'Donnell (1972) explained that accountability obliges the subordinate to do all assigned and implied duties. They equate accountability with responsibility arising from the superior-subordinate relationship. From a psychological viewpoint, a number of characteristics of the accountability relationship are indicated. There is the notion of accountability as social control in addition to economic control of the individual. In other words, you feel accountable because of interpersonal influences as well as because you desire the rewards implied in the accountability agreement. In addition, participation in goal setting, commitment to these goals, and performance monitoring are also important (Knouse, 1979).

Another model of public accountability focuses more on the individual within society (Knouse, 1977). According to this model, the basis for establishing accountable performance lies in psychological role theory. Katz and Kahn (1966) define role as a set of expected behaviors which constitute a position within an organisation. Roles are defined by the role-sending process, which is simply the group telling the individual what is expected; him or her then exhibits appropriate behaviors, and receives feedback on how well performance met expectations. For this model, the criteria for measuring accountability are the role expectations you receive from your constituency (superiors and peers in the work group). The measure of accountability is then how well your behavior meets these expectations. The assessor who determines how well expectations are met constitutes the individual's constituency.

These views explain traditional terms and in more recent terms of organisational control and role theory. The traditional approach has focused upon accountability as the state of being held liable for one's performance. It is proposed that the concept of accountability be expanded to include processes of social control as well as the rewards and punishments meted out in the traditional accountability setting. If accountability is redefined according to the performance expectations in the work environment, social influence processes leading to compliance, identification, and

internalisation of role expectations should then strengthen one's motivation to be accountable (Knouse, 1979).

Political accountability is more people-focused unlike the traditional model where accountability is through hierarchical leadership with hardly any direct links with the people, either through consultation or through interest groups. Thus, it aims at greater responsiveness to meeting citizen needs and active participation. Its performance measure is linked to the value of responsiveness to the constituents, the various stakeholders, where public employees are urged to vigorously support their political leaders' agenda as part of their career objectives in serving the public interest. Public accountability tends to be affected by neo-patrimonial acquaintances, nepotism and seclusion, which undermine the principle of responsiveness to the public. For example, while the history of appointing permanent secretaries by political executives as opposed to hiring them through the professional public service is intended to ensure responsiveness to elected officials (Romzek, 2000), it has been patronised to serve the whims of dictatorial regimes, rather than the larger public. This quagmire is more exacerbated in the developing countries, where the constituencies of public agencies tend to be political, and where value systems are crowded by the patron-client orientations that serve to foster the interests of dictatorial regimes, rather than the public interest (Kakumba & Kuye, 2006).

The New Public Management (NPM) emerged to replace the traditional school of thoughts on accountability in public administration. The NPM protagonists have stressed the study and processes of public organisations to move towards what is called public sector management, so as to focus on results, personal responsibility and accountability, as well as efficiency (Mahboubeh & Mohammad, 2012). Similarly, the neo-liberal reforms challenged the state and welfare approach to the management of economies and societies, and instead suggested a reorganisation of the public sector in terms of objectives, structure and methods of work. These, together with its prescriptions of liberalisation, privatisation and decentralisation have significantly affected the nature and scope of public sector accountability (Adamu, 2023).

In opposition to the above, many in the Anglo-American world perceive a growing crisis in public accountability. They fear that privatisation and globalisation are breaking down the traditional accountability arrangements that give us confidence in our government—for example, by devolving important political authority and power to private actors who are able to operate outside the public accountability mechanisms designed for civil servants, or by shifting governmental powers and responsibilities on to transnational actors, both public and private, who operate outside the jurisdictional reach of domestically formulated accountability systems. All these lead to suspicion about whether the political forces affecting our lives are really acting in the interest of the public (Dowdle, 2017).

Historically, the major sources of accountability theories have been identified with civic virtues, regime values, community norms, democratic ethos, constitutional requirements, religious beliefs, and professional standards (Jun, 1999). However, accountability goes beyond fear of control and material incentives; it refers to the sense of individual responsibility, and concern for the public interest. Both of these concepts go beyond the core external control and economic incentives advocated in other theories. This explains the bias of this paper towards the theory of

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the divine right of kings as an avenue to achieve sustainable public accountability amongst public office holders.

Several theories on divine right of kings have been put forward with the aim of expressing how it brings leaders to public accountability. Figgis's theory of divine right of kings identified the divine right of kings with the theory of sovereignty, where he argued in favour of royal absolutism. According to Figgis (1922, p. 256), the doctrine is "that there must be in [the state] some ultimate authority, which because it can make laws is above law". When that ultimate authority is placed in the monarchy, then it must follow that the monarch will be an absolute sovereign. However, not all historians have accepted this argument. For some there has been a need to qualify Figgis and to step back from the starkness of his interpretation. Oakley (1968) for example, has stressed the ambivalence of the theory. It was not solely absolutist, but could also imply some sort of limitation on royal authority.

Daly (1992) has argued that the world view underlying divine-right theories far from making kings absolute was actually hostile to the idea that kings had any substantial latitude for the discretionary exercise of sovereign will. It embedded them in a divinely created hierarchy, and this position required them to obey the norms and serve the purposes that God had laid down. Daly (1992) laid so much stress on the belief that the concept of 'cosmic harmony' was inherently inimical to absolutist thinking, but his general perception that Loyalist thinking in the early seventeenth century was in some ways as constitutionalist as it was absolutist remains valuable. That is to say those leaders are divinely ordained but must also be loyal to laws. It is compatible, too, with the verdict reached in the neglected few pages that Allen (1938) wrote on the political thinking of the early Stuart divines. He was of the opinion that only ignorance and misapprehension were responsible for the belief that the Jacobean and Caroline divines were absolutists. On the contrary, belief in the King's divine right implied no particular belief as to the extent of a King's rights in England or elsewhere (Glenn, 1992). The crucial difference between Figgis and Allen is that the latter did not see divine-right theory as a phase in the history of the concept of sovereignty; rather it was a theory of obligation, concerned primarily with the need to demonstrate to both rulers and subjects their duties before God.

There has been a powerful reassertion of perspectives on the divine right of kings that are basically Figgisian (i.e. they see it as a theory of absolute royal sovereignty). Sommerville (1986, p. 38) believes that the force behind the development of such a theory was a polemical one: "Absolutists magnified royal power". They did this to protect the state against anarchy and to refute the ideas of resistance theorists. But did they? Russell (1990) argues instead that divine-right theory - even the view that kings derived their authority directly from God was perfectly compatible with the view that kings were also limited by the law. This is because it was not the case that kings could make, or ignore, laws at their pleasure. These arguments make the subject of the divine right of kings worthy of further interrogation.

Divine right theorists such as Sommerville (1986) and Glenn (1992), believed that the kings of England were answerable only to God. However, they also believed that the kings of England were not absolute, but were kept within legal bounds by the nature of the English constitution. More so, the dominant Elizabethan position seems to have combined the view that monarchical authority in both Church and State was by divine right with the view that authority should be

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exercised through legal (and above all parliamentary) channels (Elton, 1992). The English constitution ensured that its monarchs ruled well. Furthermore, stress on the English constitution permitted the argument that in other, less fortunate polities, where tyranny was a real possibility, resistance might be legitimate. Thus, the ideological character of 'mainstream' Elizabethan political thought was dependent upon the simultaneous acceptance of the divine right of kings and avoidance of royal absolutism (Russell, 1990). But it needs to be pointed out that, even while eliminating all earthly rivals to the king, divine-right theorists were very careful to indicate that they did not intend this to free the king from the need to govern lawfully.

Unlike the theorist of absolutism, the divine-right theorists could thus believe the king to be bound to exercise his authority through defined constitutional channels. Such a requirement went beyond that expected of the absolute monarch, who was to rule well if he were to avoid the charge of tyranny. In some cases, divine-right theory could even come close to serving as an avenue for the criticism of monarchy. Rawlinson (1614, p. 24), for example, declared that "a king in his absolute and unlimited power is able to do more than a good King will do", and advised the King that he would do well "to impose upon yourself a necessity of keeping the laws". It was the tyrant, not the king, who refused to obey law (an argument which could have come close to collapsing the distinction between an absolute sovereign and a tyrant). Certainly, Rawlinson (1614, p. 24) ruled out tyrannicide, or resistance; but he warned, forcefully enough, that the fate of Saul was "a fair example and warning-piece for Princes, to teach over themselves, lest God suffer them".

As it was explained in the previous section, these theories pointed out to the fact that leaders are ordained by God, however, they are bound to act within the confines of the legal constitutions. They are expected to be accountable to the law and the people, who in turn are expected to obey the leaders because they were sent by God. Failure to do so can incur wrath from God, who can also send vicious leaders to the people as their plague or punishment. The laws and constitutions are like a guide on how to deal with their subjects in order not to become tyrants. However, the leaders who are divinely chosen, must be answerable to the one who chose them (God), else they also incur damnation on themselves.

The challenge of public accountability

Despite the desire and attention given to the need for public accountability, both by scholars and practitioners alike, there have continued to be cases and incidences of public officers not meeting the required standards of public accountability. The major challenge of public accountability over the world is corruption. Corruption is not a new phenomenon; however, the degree of attention currently paid to corruption is unprecedented and nothing short of extraordinary. Despite the evolution and adoption of new frameworks to ensure accountability in public administration, the issues of corruption have been on the increase over the years. The NPM which advocates for the adoption of the strategies of the private sector in the public sector, or for the public and private sectors to work side by side happens to have been the framework widely adopted in the public administration across the world.

However, there are evidences that show that the NPM has done more harm than good in encouraging corruption. Despite the adoption of the NPM model, public accountability has not really improved. This was clearly the case in Italy, before tangentopoli and in many Latin

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American countries (Nordio, 1997). The point has been made that the privitisation of non-natural monopolies is a necessary step to reduce corruption and ensure public accountability (African Studies Association, 2025). Unfortunately, the process of privatising public or state enterprises has itself created situations whereby some individuals (ministers, high political officials) have the discretion to make the basic decisions, while others (managers and other insiders) have information not available to outsiders so that they can use the process to benefit themselves (see and consider Okhonmina, 2003). These problems have been observed and reported in all regions of the world, but the abuses appear to have been particularly significant in the transition economies (Morris & Blake, 1997).

Cases of corruption and poor public accountability exist all over the world. The case of South Korea's former President Moon Jae-in is one of them. He was indicted on bribery charges. It was alleged that Moon appointed Lee Sang-jik to lead the SMEs and Startups Agency in return for his ex-son-in-law, surnamed Seo, being appointed executive director at Thai Eastar Jet, which was controlled by Lee at the time. It was recorded that some 223 million won ($151,959) in salary and other benefits provided to Seo constituted a bribe to Moon (Aljazeera, 2025a). Another case of corruption is the one that was recorded in Peru, where a court in Peru sentenced former President Ollanta Humala and his wife, Nadine Heredia, to 15 years in prison for laundering $3m received from Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht and $200,000 from the government of then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (Aljazeera, 2025b).

Another scenario of corruption was in 2015, where many of FIFA's (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) top executives were arrested, facing charges of bribery, fraud, and money laundering. Despite the governing body of FIFA which consists of three branches: the FIFA congress; the Executive Committee; and the General Secretariat. It is alleged that these executives engaged in corrupt activities as a means to help secure media, marketing rights, and locations in the World Cup bidding process (Boudreaux et al. 2016). Ades and Di Tella (1999) argued that FIFA's corruption emanates more from a lack of punishment and the incentives for member countries to engage in rent-seeking behavior. This implies that it is the conscience of the individual that ultimately limits the quest or desire to act against public accountability. As it was argued earlier that, the laws can hardly be enforced on leaders if there are no supernatural controls or restrictions, hence, the conscience of the leader is what can make him refrain from corruption, knowing that there will always be divine repercussion for his decisions.

It should be noted that it has been on record that the biggest corruption scandals over the years that inspired widespread public condemnation, toppled governments and sent people to prison, involved politicians across political parties and from the highest reaches of government, and staggering amounts of bribes and money laundering of epic proportions (see TBS Desk, 2019). In the wake of many of these scandals, many governments and international bodies committed to or implemented anti-corruption reforms, counted and, in some cases, recovered losses. While much progress has been made to improve public accountability, the issues of poor public accountability as a result of corruption still persist. Cases of corruption and poor public accountability have also been recorded amongst African countries.

Major corruption cases came to light in 2024 in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, highlighting how even in the continent's more robust democracies, top public officials continue to engage in

large-scale corrupt acts (African Studies Association, 2025). At the same time, to address corruption risks and pursue accountability for corrupt actions, a number of different types of domestic and international anti-corruption measures and institutions such as anti-corruption agencies, financial institutions and public procurement reforms are being established and implemented on the continent. International cooperation has produced positive results for several African states, including a decision by the United States government to return billions of dollars in stolen assets to the Government of Nigeria. Post-conflict economic crimes courts are being created to pursue justice against corruption during periods of armed conflict (such as in Liberia), and new technological applications are being developed and implemented to stop corruption such as artificial intelligence (AI), and digital public services. However, despite these efforts, corruption seems to be on the rise especially by public office holders. To address these issues, there is the need to go beyond the traditional methods to tackle the issues of poor public accountability namely the imposition and or evolution of legal frameworks and law enforcement institutions and processes. The conviction is that such theoretical frameworks like the divine right theory need to be reexamined in order to proffer solutions to the challenge of poor accountability in administration.

A close examination of most of the statements of the divine right of kings shows that they were in fact statements of a general duty to obey, or to render duty willingly, and avoided specific indication of what that might entail. There is also argument, as we have seen, that advocacy of the divine right of kings did not preclude belief in the view that kings should rule through the common law. In the early modern period, the main contention which divine-right theory served to underpin was that the authority of kings was derived from God directly, and hence was not derived from their people. This did not, even for some of the arch exponents of the idea, rule out the possibility that kings might be elected or chosen by their people (Sanderson, 1989). It did, however, rule out the possibility that the people could resist or actively disobey their kings, whether they had elected them or not.

The language of divine right was not inherently 'opposed' to the language of common law or the language of consent, because each had its own sphere within which it could be used uncontroversial. The theory of the divine right of kings was a consensual position and was uncontroversial; it provided a number of conditions that must be met. One of these was crucial: the theory could not be used to justify specific royal powers in civil matters. The language of divine right had two perfectly legitimate uses. It could be used to justify the duty of obedience, and more specifically to condemn resistance theory. The theory of divine right of kings therefore advocates for rulers to act within the laws as laws are part of divine ordinances, to be accountable and the subjects to be submissive. But the problem with this theory when it comes to public accountability is that it does not encourage the public to question the actions of the ruler. However, the ruler is expected to act according to law, but is not expected to be punished by the law or be under it. Royal powers in civil matters were therefore unjustifiable and this questions the authenticity of the divine right of kings in public accountability.

However, in the main, the theory involves a supposition that the ruler or shall we say in the specific circumstances of public accountability, the public officer, is expected to act in accordance with the divine requirement of fairness, equity, and sincerity. That being the case, the restraint towards public accountability that the theory of divine rights provides, is to be found in

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the conscience of the individual and measurable by the record of service or public action and choices of the individual. This in essence means that beyond the reach of the law, it is the conscience of the individual that ultimately limits the quest or desire to act against public accountability.

The theory of the divine right of kings was further explained and backed up by the divine right of providence. It was a means of continuing in a modified form the more personal divine right of kings. These ideologies were meant to command public allegiance and accountability by linking government to the divine will. It is not only a theory of history; it was equally a law of direct physical causation. On occasion, divinely influenced, it was but logic to assume that during great events God could force nature out of her normal channel to accomplish His purposes (Burnet in Straka, 1962, p. 642)

Because of his pride, man frequently sought to defy the divine sovereignty and alter the divine purpose; therefore, it was God's necessity to establish a superintending providence which could overrule the councils and powers of men to bring about the divine will, by occasionally changing the course of nature to determine the issues of war or peace (Niebuhr in Straka, 1962, p. 652). God hath been pleased to give extraordinary indications of His power and providence, such Signs of the times, such wonders of government as the age's great political upheavals. Such great changes were God's way of achieving 'Political Justice' (Atterbury, 1723). Of course, there was ample biblical justification for these views since Jehovah's direct intervention in the governments of Saul, David, and Solomon provided the church with its fundamental justification for providential political theory

The churchmen of the Revolution, then, considered providence as a hierarchy of divine causes: on the lowest plane it ruled nature and the universe; it considered man and his general history; finally, christianity, protestantism, and the church of England. Since the Church was under the temporal guidance of the state, then providence's ultimate concern was believed to be tied to affairs of government: 'If God demonstrate his providence in anything here in this World, he exercises it in the governing, defending, and protecting of public persons and societies (Simon, 1696, p. 27).

Biblical history, combined with a scholarly knowledge of the providential history of European courts, led churchmen to the conclusion that since the actions of governments affected the well-being of all souls, God's primary point of concentration was on politics, where the battle of good and evil assumed epic proportions. In great public transactions, God has reserved to himself a transcendent right (as it were a Court of Equity) to mitigate that rigorous procedure, and redress those un-equal Judgments (of human politics), which might otherwise reflect upon His Wisdom or His Justice' (Straka, 1962, p. 647). God's governance of the world was thus taken in its most literal sense, and the theoretical foundation was laid. An example is the assumption that William III had as much divinity in his kingship as did man.

Thus, a new dimension was added to the divine right theory by maintaining that there was no theological conflict between a legal entail derived by hereditary right and possession derived by conquest. It is all Providence still, the question is, why the Providence of an Entail is more Sacred and Obligatory than any other Act of Providence, which gives a settled possession of the throne? (Straka, 1962, p. 647) central idea kept in mind was that all power is from God and, if

this divine pronouncement which had been the basis of divine right of kings were true in the case of one sovereign, it was true in others.

There were many ways by which a dynasty could be established: by hereditary claim, by election of a people, and by conquest, which Sherlock thought was the most common form of establishment. In matters of succession there were two main categories: 'Divine Entail' as in the biblical sense of a direct grant from God, and 'Human Entail' made under constitutional procedure; (Straka, 1962). But Burnet (in Straka, 1962, p. 650) expressed the view that "all these ways, or any other, that can be thought of, are governed and determined by the Divine Providence, and the Prince thus advanced is truly placed in the Throne by God". The distinction between kings de jure and de facto related only to the laws of the land, but in the light of providence all kings had God's authority. If their reigns were sanctioned by God, regardless of the human legal right of one king over another, the great court of heaven had over- ruling jurisdiction in its providential acts against which man was powerless. God's primal concern with government for the sake of human society meant that His judgment could not err, neither could it be resisted (Lloyd, 1689).

Bohun (1853) believed that ' We are safe ', he affirmed, 'if we do our duty, and submit to and pray for those powers that we find set over us, by men as the instruments, by God as the great disposer of crowns. And this was by far the most popular expression of the divine right of providence appealing to the people's desire to lead quiet, safe lives in timeless resignation to the ways of kings and courts. The right and wrong of an issue mattered little compared to its reality; 'sometimes (God) builds us up, and sometimes He pulls us down; but whatever is the success, God is the Author, and Kings are but the Instruments of the Revolution: Which as it is too mysterious for us to understand, so 'tis too sacred for us to oppose' (Hickman, 1690).

Lloyd (1689, p. 5) also linked providence more closely with the responsibility to the end that "though no Christian ought to allow any rebellion of people against their prince, yet doth God never leave kings unpunished when they transgress these limits, just as the temporal power of the sword to enforce justice cannot be denied, so of God, that when he puts down one, and sets up another, he doth it as a judge, even as a judge among Gods". While Bohun (1853) on the other hand, believed, quite simply that the providence of God watched over pious princes to preserve them from violence, while those who degraded their office by becoming tyrants were not allowed to end their day in peace.

A good explanation of the foregoing arguments in support of the allegiance of the divine rights ideology as buttressed by the providential theory was evident in the framing of the Bill of Rights. The Lords and Commons were not insensible to the value of providential theory, either as divine truth or as propaganda. Upon the framing of the Bill of Rights, a clause was inserted which met with no opposition: "the said lords spiritual and temporal and commons, seriously consider how it hath pleased Almighty God, in His marvelous providence and merciful goodness to this nation, to provide and preserve their said majesties' royal persons most happily to reign over us upon the throne of their ancestor". When the proclamation was read, it was affirmed (Stephenson & Mercham, 1937, p. 573).

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The ultimate test in public accountability

Hart (1997) narrated a story of how an undocumented immigrant woman in Los Angeles refused to get false documents to deceive the immigrant officers (la migra). Her reason was that: “if she can deceive the government, she cannot deceive herself and that her conscience tells her not to, it’s better to stay quietly undocumented, quietly looking for work, and not doing things we shouldn't" (Hart, 1997, p. 95). This story is both common and uncommon. It is about the structural constraints in both sending and receiving societies that shape the lives of immigrants. But it is equally about the agency of an individual who makes decisions in the face of these constraints and often circumvents them.

The story above is clear demonstrations that corruption is bound to continue even though structures are put in place to put it on check. However, it is the conscience of an individual that can make him/her refrain from corrupt practices. This conscience emanates from the fact that there is a supreme being that sees what the law might not see and can also punish individual wrong doings. In the United States (U.S) for example, there are a host of federal, state and local statutes targeting bribery of government officials and commercial bribery. For example, 18 U.S.C. § 201, which is part of a chapter addressing bribery, graft and conflicts of interest, prohibits federal public corruption domestically by criminalizing the payment, offer and receipt of bribes and illegal gratuities (Beguiristian & Madrid, 2024). Domestic commercial bribery also may be prosecuted under the Travel Act, mail- and wire-fraud statutes and various state statutes.

Despite these legal frameworks, Corruption cases continue to make headlines in the United States. For example, a former U.S. Senator Robert Menendez together with his wife were tried and convicted of federal bribery and other charges in the year 2024 (Criminal Division of the U.S. Dep’t of Just, 2024a). Furthermore, a former mayor who received USD $13,000 from a trucking company that had been awarded government contracts was convicted, still in the year, 2024. However, the court reversed the conviction on the ground that the governing federal statute does not apply to things of value given after an official act but with no prior agreement.

In the convicted mayor’s case, he solicited the payment three weeks after the official act – that is, the purchase of trucks (Criminal Division of the U.S. Dep’t of Just, 2024b). This raised a lot of comments from commentators that a majority of the Courts may narrow the anti-corruption laws of the United States, if given the opportunity for review in order to favour a party. The recent decisions may have raised those alarms. This further explains how leaders can be above the law or the ineffectiveness of the law to make leaders accountable. It takes a divine intervention, which speaks to the conscience of the administrators to make them accountable. The character or personalities of those who take up public offices are therefore key to ensuring public accountability. This is because; it takes a good person to have a conscience.

Conclusion

To conclude this discussion, it is necessary to attempt to specify something of the rules governing the uncontroversial use of the theory of the divine right of kings in early Stuart England, and its relations with other forms of political discourse found in the period. The divine right of kings was an uncontroversial theory, and was not seen as threatening to customary constitutional practice, provided that it was used within certain tacitly recognised boundaries and

restricted to a place on the edge of civil politics. The theory of divine right had a range of accepted uses. It was to demonstrate, as a conclusion of divinity, the duty that subjects had to obey their rulers because they were divinely ordained. The leaders on the other hand must be accountable to the public; else they would attract damnation from God.

Sustainable public accountability is the will of God which is expected from all leaders as a natural cause. Failure to do so can attract punishment from God. Just as the divine ordination calls for public accountability, it also appeals to the subjects to obey and support their leaders. In summary, those seeking public offices should acknowledge the fact that getting the position is a divine ordination that calls for public accountability. It is not just the legally right thing to do but also divinely approve. The fear of the divine consequences of going contrary to the law should therefore be the guide of not just those who seek public offices but also to those who vote them into power.

In terms of measurability and practicability of the stated propositions, the identifiable record of activities of public actors constitutes the summation of the preferences of their conscience. Consequently, the best way to measure the extent to which the serving or intending public officer would be publicly accountable is to examine his public record to see if these records suggest so. Political systems that continuously appoint or elect questionable characters to public office cannot but blame themselves for the low level of public accountability that they record. So that beyond rhetoric, the character preferences of an individual is the most significant indicator of whether or not a public officer would be accountable.

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