

Introduction: Elizabeth I has sparked the imagination and interest of modern culture for decades now. Numerous movies, books, TV series have been dedicated to depicting Henry VIII, his wives, and their offspring. Elizabeth I was an extraordinary historical figure, ruling for almost 45 years. This longevity offered England the political stability that allowed it to expand and set the stage for the vast empire it would become. In fact, the Commonwealth is of course named after her, as it was under her rule that the Charter for the Virginia Company was established. Her title “Virgin Queen” was given because she chose never to marry so as not to relinquish power. This would set an interesting precedent in England that would vary different from other kingdoms. But as we have seen in the past, England already had a history of strong female rulers.

As you read through the selection of speeches below consider how Elizabeth claims power and exerts authority over Parliament and her subjects. Also consider how she uses the newly established Church of England and Protestant faith to support her claims.

Queen Elizabeth I of England (b. 1533, r. 1558-1603), Selected Writing and Speeches

Introduction from site: *Behind these texts is the difficulty Elizabeth I had in ensuring stability in the present, and security for the future. The problem for the Tudor Dynasty, which had come to power through Henry VII's 1485 triumph in Wars of the Roses, was in ensuring the succession. The key to peace was to have an undisputed heir. Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had had three children survive him. Two, Mary and Elizabeth, were female, and so on his death, Henry VIII was succeeded by his ten-year old son, Edward VI in 1547.*

Edward died six years later, and even though they were women, England preferred to crown Mary as a legitimate heir rather than to search for a suitable male. Mary, though, not only revealed herself to be a Catholic who persecuted Protestants, but she married Philip II, King of Spain, one of the most aggressive and devout foes of Protestantism. Mary jailed her sister on suspicion of fomenting a revolt. Five years later, Mary died, and so in 1558, twenty-five year old Elizabeth became Queen of England.

Response to a Parliamentary Delegation on Her Marriage, 1559

Additional Introduction: *Elizabeth's response to a delegation from Parliament who petitioned her to marry soon, and not to marry a foreigner. The delegation wanted to be sure of the succession by her having a male child, and they wanted it to be English through and through, so that no foreigner would have a claim to the throne (she was under pressure to marry her sister's widower, Philip of Spain).*

Begin text:

As I have good cause, so do I give you all my hearty thanks for the good zeal and loving care you seem to have, as well towards me as to the whole state of your country. Your petition I perceive consisteth of three parts and my answer to the same shall depend of two.

And to the first part I may say unto you that from my years of understanding since I first had consideration of myself to be born a servitor of almighty God, I happily chose this kind of life in which I yet live, which I assure you for my own part hath hitherto best contented myself and I trust hath been most acceptable to God. From the which, if either ambition of high estate offered to me in marriage by the pleasure and appointment of my prince whereof I have some records in this presence (as you our

Lord Treasurer well know); or if the eschewing of the danger of my enemies or the avoiding of the peril of death, whose messenger or rather continual watchman, the prince's indignation, was not a little time daily before my eyes (by whose means although I know or justly may suspect, yet I will not now utter, or if the whole cause were in my sister herself, I will not now burden her therewith, because I will not charge the dead); if any of these, I say, could have drawn or dissuaded me from this kind of life, I had not now remained in this estate wherein you see me. But so constant have I always continued in this determination, although my youth and words may seem to some hardly to agree together, yet is it most true that at this day I stand free from any other meaning that either I have had in times past or have at this present; with which trade of life I am so thoroughly acquainted that I trust God, who hath hitherto therein preserved and led me by the hand, will not now of his goodness suffer me to go alone.

For the other part, the manner of your petition I do well like of and take in good part, because that it is simple and containeth no limitation of place or person. If it had been otherwise, I must needs have misliked it very much and thought it in you a very great presumption, being unfitting and altogether unmeet for you to require them that may command or those to appoint whose parts are to desire, or such to bind and limit whose duties are to obey, or to take upon you to draw my love to your likings or frame my will to your fantasies; for a guerdon constrained and a gift freely given can never agree together. Nevertheless if any of you be in suspect, that whensoever it may please God to incline my heart to another kind of life, you may well assure yourselves my meaning is not to do or determine anything wherewith the realm may or shall have just cause to be discontented. And therefore put that clean out of your heads. For I assure you--what credit my assurances may have with you I cannot tell, but what credit it shall deserve to have the sequel shall declare--I will never in that matter conclude anything that shall be prejudicial to the realm, for the weal, good and safety whereof I will never shun to spend my life. And whomsoever my chance shall be to light upon, I trust he shall be as careful for the realm and you--I will not say as myself, because I cannot so certainly determine of any other; but at the least ways, by my goodwill and desire he shall be such as shall be as careful for the preservation of the realm and you as myself. And albeit it might please almighty God to continue me still in this mind to live out of the state of marriage, yet it is not to be feared but He will so work in my heart and in your wisdom as good provision by his help may be made in convenient time, whereby the realm shall not remain destitute of an heir. That may be a fit governor, and peradventure more beneficial to the realm than such offspring as may come of me. For although I be never so careful of your well doings and mind ever so to be, yet may my issue grow out of kind and become perhaps ungracious. And in the end this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin.

And here I end, and take your coming unto me in good part, and give unto you all eftsoons my hearty thanks, more yet for your zeal and good meaning than for your petition.

On Religion, 1559, Introduction from site: *The next document, also from 1559, is a reply to some English Bishops who wanted to continue Mary's pro-Catholic policies. They maintained that her father, Henry VIII had been influenced by heretics to quarrel with the Pope.*

Sirs,

As to your entreaty for us to listen to you we waive it; yet do return you this our answer. Our realm and subjects have been long wanderers, walking astray, whilst they were under the tuition of Romish pastors, who advised them to own a wolf for their head (in lieu of a careful shepherd) whose inventions,

heresies and schisms be so numerous, that the flock of Christ have fed on poisonous shrubs for want of wholesome pastures. And whereas you hit us and our subjects in the teeth that the Romish Church first planted the Catholic within our realm, the records and chronicles of our realm testify the contrary; and your own Romish idolatry maketh you liars; witness the ancient monument of Gildas unto which both foreign and domestic have gone in pilgrimage there to offer. This author testifieth Joseph of Arimathea to be the first preacher of the word of God within our realms. Long after that, when Austin came from Rome, this our realm had bishops and priests therein, as is well known to the learned of our realm by woeful experience, how your church entered therein by blood; they being martyrs for Christ and put to death because they denied Rome's usurped authority.

As for our father being withdrawn from the supremacy of Rome by schismatical and heretical counsels and advisers; who we pray advised him more or flattered him than you good Mr Heath, when you were Bishop of Rochester? And than you Mr Bonner when you were archdeacon? And you Mr Turberville? Nay further, who was more an adviser of our father than your great Stephen Gardiner, when he lived? Are ye not then those schismatics and heretics? If so, suspend your evil censures. Recollect, was it our sister's conscience made her so averse to our father and brother's actions as to undo what they had perfected? Or was it not you, or such like advisers that dissuaded her and stirred her up against us and other of the subjects?

Response to Parliamentary Delegation on Her Marriage, 1566 *In 1566, Parliament was still nagging Elizabeth to marry. A delegation from both houses came to petition her. Here is part of the angry dressing-down she gave them:*

'Was I not born in the realm? Were my parents born in any foreign country? Is not my kingdom here? Whom have I oppressed? Whom have I enriched to other's harm? What turmoil have I made in this commonwealth that I should be suspected to have no regard to the same? How have I governed since my reign? I will be tried by envy itself. I need not to use many words, for my deeds do try me.

'Well, the matter whereof they would have made their petition (as I am informed) consisteth in two points: in my marriage, and in the limitations of the succession of the crown, wherein my marriage was first placed, as for manners' sake. I did send them answer by my council, I would marry (although of mine own disposition I was not inclined thereunto) but that was not accepted nor credited, although spoken by their Prince.

'I will never break the word of a prince spoken in a public place, for my honour's sake. And therefore I say again, I will marry as soon as I can conveniently, if God take not him away with whom I mind to marry, or myself, or else some other great let happen. I can say no more except the party were present. And I hope to have children, otherwise I would never marry. A strange order of petitioners that will make a request and cannot be otherwise assured but by the prince's word, and yet will not believe it when it is spoken.

'The second point was for the limitation of the succession of the crown, wherein was nothing said for my safety, but only for themselves. A strange thing that the foot should direct the head in so weighty a cause', a cause, she pointed out, to which she had give careful consideration since it concerned her more nearly than it concerned them.

'I am sure there was not one of them that ever was a second person, as I have been and have tasted of the practices against my sister, who I would to God were alive again. I had great occasion to hearken to their motions for whom some of them are of the common house.'

She forbore to name those who had plotted against the Crown in Mary's reign, contenting herself with:

'And were it not for my honour, their knavery should be known. There were occasions in me at that time, I stood in danger of my life, my sister was so incensed against me. I did differ from her in religion and I was sought for divers ways. And so shall never be my successor. I have conferred with those that are well learned, and have asked their opinions touching the limitation of succession.'

The lawyers, she said, had been silent; they understood the legal complications but 'they could not tell what to say considering the great peril to the realm.'

As for those who thought they knew better:

'They would have twelve or fourteen limited in succession and the more the better. And those shall be of such uprightness and so divine, as in them shall be divinity itself. Kings were wont to honour philosophers, but if I had such I would honour them as angels that should have such piety in them that they would not seek where they are the second to be the first, and where the third to be the second and so forth. It is said I am no divine. Indeed I studied nothing else but divinity till I came to the crown; and then I gave myself to the study of that which was meet for government, and am not ignorant of stories wherein appeareth what hath fallen out for ambition of kingdoms--as in Spain, Naples, Portugal and at home; and what cocking hath been between the father and the son for the same. You would have a limitation of succession. Truly if reason did not subdue will in me, I would cause you to deal in it, so pleasant a thing it should be unto me. But I stay it for your benefit. For if you should have liberty to treat of it, there be so many competitors--some kinsfolk, some servants, and some tenants; some would speak for their master, and some for their mistress, and every man for his friend--that it would be an occasion of a greater charge than a subsidy. And if my will did not yield to reason, it should be that thing I would gladliest desire to see you deal in it.'

And still she had not finished. She accused them of errors; she accused them of 'lack of good foresight'; and then she turned on the bishops with withering scorn:

'I do not marvel, though Domini Doctores, with you my Lords, did so use themselves therein, since after my brother's death they openly preached and set forth that my sister and I were bastards. Well, I wish not the death of any man, but only this I desire, that they which have been the practisers herein may before their deaths repent the same, and show some open confession of their fault, whereby the scabbed sheep may be known from the whole. As for my own part I care not for death, for all men are mortal; and though I be a woman yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had. I am your anointed Queen. I will never be by violence constrained to do anything. I thank God I am indeed endowed with such qualities that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat I were able to live in any place in Christendom.

'Your petition is to deal in the limitation of the succession. At this present it is not convenient, nor never shall be without some peril unto you, and certain danger unto me. But as soon as there may be a convenient time and that it may be done with least peril unto you, although never without great danger

unto me, I will deal therein for your safety and offer it unto you as your prince and head without requests. For it is monstrous that the feet should direct the head.'

She told the Lord Chief justice to deliver this message to the House of Lords, and Cecil to inform the Commons. It took Cecil three drafts to word the matter diplomatically enough for it to bear repeating.

On Religion, 1583: *In 1583, Elizabeth addressed Parliament and took time to discuss religion. There were still "Romish" factions, but also many upstart Protestant sects, like Puritans, Baptists etc. (In here, as in many of her statements, she uses the words "Prince", "King", and "Queen" interchangeably).*

One matter touches me so near as I may not overskip [she told them]; religion is the ground on which all other matters ought to take root, and being corrupted may mar all the tree; and that there be some fault finders with the order of the clergy, which so may make a slander to myself and the Church whose overruler God hath made me, whose negligence cannot be excused if any schisms or errors heretical were suffered.

Thus much I must say that some faults and negligence may grow and be, as in all other great charges it happeneth; and what vocation without? All which if you, my Lords of the clergy, do not amend, I mean to depose you. Look ye therefore well to your charges.

I am supposed to have many studies [she reminded them] but most philosophical. I must yield this to be true, that I suppose few that be no professors have read more. And I need not tell you that I am so simple that I understand not, nor so forgetful that I remember not. And yet amidst so many volumes I hope God's book hath not been my seldomest lectures; in which we find that which by reason, for my part, we ought to believe--that seeing so great wickedness and griefs in the world in which we live but as wayfaring pilgrims, we must suppose that God would never have made us but for a better place and of more comfort than we find here. I know no creature that breatheth whose life standeth hourly in more peril for it than mine own; who entered not into my state without sight of manifold dangers of life and crown, as one that had the mightiest and the greatest to wrestle with. Then it followeth that I regarded it so much as I left myself behind my care. And so you see that you wrong me too much if any such there be as doubt my coldness in that behalf. For if I were not persuaded that mine were the true way of God's will, God forbid I should live to prescribe it to you. Take you heed lest Ecclesiastes say not too true; they that fear the hoary frost the snow shall fall upon them.

I see many overbold with God Almighty making too many subtle scannings of His blessed will, as lawyers do with human testaments. The presumption is so great, as I may not suffer it. Yet mind I not hereby to animate Romanists (which what adversaries they be to mine estate is sufficiently well known) nor tolerate newfangledness. I mean to guide them both by God's holy true rule. In both parts be perils. And of the latter I must pronounce them dangerous to a kingly rule: to have every man according to his own censure, to make a doom of a validity and privity of his Prince's government with a common veil and cover of God's word, whose followers must not be judged, but by private men's exposition. God defend you from such a ruler that so evil will guide you. Now I conclude that your love and care neither is nor shall be bestowed upon a careless Prince, but such as for your good will passeth as little for this world as who careth least. With thanks for your free subsidy, a manifest show of the abundance of your good wills, the which I assure you, but to be employed to your weal, I could be better pleased to return than receive.

The Farewell Speech, 1601 *The "farewell" Golden Speech to parliament. It is worth comparing her views with those of Machiavelli.*

On the afternoon of 30 November, 140 Members of the Commons, 141 with the Speaker, crowded into the Presence Chamber and fell on their knees as their sovereign entered the room. She was sixty-eight and in excellent health, but perhaps some guessed that this would be her last Parliament. She had come to deliver what should have been a rasping harangue on finance, but she turned it into 'golden words', which were to be reprinted time and time again up to the eighteenth century, whenever England was in danger, as the Golden Speech of Queen Elizabeth.

Several versions survive, including a printed pamphlet which it is thought Elizabeth may have checked and corrected, but its text is inferior to the moving account by the diarist, Hayward Townshend, who was among those kneeling before her that November afternoon in the Presence Chamber.

Mr Speaker,

We have heard your declaration and perceive your care of our estate. I do assure you there is no prince that loves his subjects better, or whose love can countervail our love. There is no jewel, be it of never so rich a price, which I set before this jewel: I mean your love. For I do esteem it more than any treasure or riches; for that we know how to prize, but love and thanks I count invaluable. And, though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my Crown, that I have reigned with your loves. This makes me that I do not so much rejoice that God hath made me to be a Queen, as to be a Queen over so thankful a people. Therefore I have cause to wish nothing more than to content the subject and that is a duty which I owe. Neither do I desire to live longer days than I may see your prosperity and that is my only desire. And as I am that person still yet, under God, hath delivered you and so I trust by the almighty power of God that I shall be his instrument to preserve you from every peril, dishonour, shame, tyranny and oppression, partly by means of your intended helps which we take very acceptably because it manifesteth the largeness of your good loves and loyalties unto your sovereign.

Of myself I must say this: I never was any greedy, scraping grasper, nor a strait fast-holding Prince, nor yet a waster. My heart was never set on any worldly goods. What you bestow on me, I will not hoard it up, but receive it to bestow on you again. Therefore render unto them I beseech you Mr Speaker, such thanks as you imagine my heart yieldeth, but my tongue cannot express. Mr Speaker, I would wish you and the rest to stand up for I shall yet trouble you with longer speech. Mr Speaker, you give me thanks but I doubt me I have greater cause to give you thanks, than you me, and I charge you to thank them of the Lower House from me. For had I not received a knowledge from you, I might have fallen into the lapse of an error, only for lack of true information.

Since I was Queen, yet did I never put my pen to any grant, but that upon pretext and semblance made unto me, it was both good and beneficial to the subject in general though a private profit to some of my ancient servants, who had deserved well at my hands. But the contrary being found by experience, I am exceedingly beholden to such subjects as would move the same at first. And I am not so simple to suppose but that there be some of the Lower House whom these grievances never touched. I think they spake out of zeal to their countries and not out of spleen or malevolent affection as being parties grieved. That my grants should be grievous to my people and oppressions to be privileged under colour of our patents, our kingly dignity shall not suffer it. Yea, when I heard it, I could give no rest unto my thoughts until I had reformed it. Shall they, think you, escape unpunished that have oppressed you, and

have been disrespectful of their duty and regardless our honour? No, I assure you, Mr Speaker, were it not more for conscience' sake than for any glory or increase of love that I desire, these errors, troubles, vexations and oppressions done by these varlets and lewd persons not worthy of the name of subjects should not escape without condign punishment. But I perceive they dealt with me like physicians who, ministering a drug, make it more acceptable by giving it a good aromatical savour, or when they give pills do gild them all over.

I have ever used to set the Last Judgement Day before mine eyes and so to rule as I shall be judged to answer before a higher judge, and now if my kingly bounties have been abused and my grants turned to the hurt of my people contrary to my will and meaning, and if any in authority under me have neglected or perverted what I have committed to them, I hope God will not lay their culps and offenses in my charge. I know the title of a King is a glorious title, but assure yourself that the shining glory of princely authority hath not so dazzled the eyes of our understanding, but that we well know and remember that we also are to yield an account of our actions before the great judge. To be a king and wear a crown is a thing more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasant to them that bear it. For myself I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a King or royal authority of a Queen as delighted that God hath made me his instrument to maintain his truth and glory and to defend his kingdom as I said from peril, dishonour, tyranny and oppression. There will never Queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care to my subjects and that will sooner with willingness venture her life for your good and safety than myself. For it is my desire to live nor reign no longer than my life and reign shall be for your good. And though you have had, and may have, many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had nor shall have, any that will be more careful and loving.

'For I, oh Lord, what am I, whom practices and perils past should not fear? Or what can I do? That I should speak for any glory, God forbid.' And turning to the Speaker and her councilors she said, 'And I pray to you Mr Comptroller, Mr Secretary and you of my Council, that before these gentlemen go into their countries, you bring them all to kiss my hand.'

Accessed 15 April 2021. Adapted from: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/elizabeth1.asp>