

Volume 21, Number 2, November 2018

## Revision

# The Thirty Years' War

*Nicholas Fellows*

Consider the following question on the topic of the Thirty Years' War, then take a look at the sample student response and examiner's commentary (in red).

## Question

'The Thirty Years' War caused the most serious foreign policy dispute between James I and his parliaments.' How far do you agree?

### Student answer with commentary

The outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618 and the subsequent consequences would have a dramatic impact on James' relationship with his parliaments. The war brought together a number of elements that had already strained relations between the two, most notably religion and finance. England's role within the war would cause disagreements which would dominate the remainder of James' reign and bring to the fore the influence of both his son, Charles I, and his favourite, the Duke of Buckingham. However, foreign policy was an area of contention throughout James' reign. His desire to be seen as a 'peacemaker' and maintain a balance between Catholics and Protestants caused tensions with Parliament as did the king's belief that foreign policy was part of the royal prerogative. These issues would resurface with the Thirty Years' War and therefore given the number of different elements of conflict with Parliament that the war brought about it is clear that it did cause more disputes with than other foreign policy issues.

The nature of the question encourages a chronological approach, weighing up various foreign policy 'events' and the extent of the dispute they caused with Parliament. The introduction sets out clearly why the outbreak of war in 1618 was so important in impacting relations, but these are balanced against other issues. It also makes clear that it was not simply the war that caused disputes, but the other issues that it raised, such as religion and finance. It is a clear and well-focused start.

Although the war with Spain had already lasted some 15 years when James ascended the throne in 1603, his decision to bring about peace caused dismay with some in Parliament. Despite the fact that the peace of 1604, with the Treaty of London, allowed English merchants the right to trade in Spain and the Spanish Netherlands without fear of their religion, there were some in Parliament who opposed it. They argued that England should be taking up the leadership of the Protestant cause and were angry when James was willing to pursue only a limited involvement in the United Province's struggle against Spain, rather than being the peacemaker. However, opposition to James' policy was limited to those who had a deep-seated hatred of the Spanish or had been making profits from piracy.

There is some discussion as to the depth of disquiet about the peace made with Spain in 1604. The response explains why there was disquiet and there is some analysis as to its limited nature, although this would benefit from greater development in order to assist in addressing whether it was the most serious dispute.

James' desire to be seen as a peacemaker, '*rex pacificus*', brought him into further conflict with his parliaments. Although they were content with his decision to marry his daughter Elizabeth to Frederick the Elector Palatine, whose family were closely linked to many leading Protestant figures, they were less happy when, to balance this, he sought a Catholic marriage for his son, Charles. The chief problem with this policy was that Parliament, and many of his subjects, were convinced that Spain and Roman Catholicism continued to remain a serious threat. Most MPs failed to recognise that Spain was in decline after its bankruptcy in 1598 and the death of Philip II. Further anger was created as foreign policy was traditionally part of the royal prerogative and therefore James did not always explain his policy, which was often misunderstood. The situation was not helped by the arrival of the new Spanish ambassador, Gondomar, with whom James struck up a close friendship. The situation was made worse as the Howard family, who held most major offices in England, were pro-Spanish and many were Catholic or only nominally Protestant, encouraged the marriage. This led to a clash with the Protestant faction under Southampton and matters were made worse by the failure of the Addled Parliament of 1614 to grant James financial help, which made the marriage and the prospect of the dowry more attractive.

The issue of a possible Spanish marriage and the opposition it created is addressed and again the response explains why it caused a dispute with Parliament. However, as with the previous paragraph the response would benefit from a stronger focus on the 'most serious dispute' which is only hinted at when the response discusses the financial problems it created for James.

Despite these differences, it was the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War that caused the greatest disagreement. Against James' advice, Frederick had accepted the throne of Bavaria. His subsequent defeat and removal from there and the occupation of the Palatinate by imperial troops led to outrage amongst many Protestants, including the English Parliament. Parliament expected James to take action on behalf of both his son-in-law and the Protestant cause. Disagreements soon followed as James attempted to pursue a peaceful policy of negotiation and persuasion with Spain to restore Frederick, while Parliament wanted action. The failure of negotiation led to further conflict over the strategy to be pursued. While James had been willing to involve Parliament in discussions about strategy, even though it was outside their jurisdiction, they attempted to direct the policy that should be followed. They wanted an alliance with the Dutch and a naval war, while James was willing to mount an expedition in alliance with the Dutch and German princes to win back the Palatinate. James further angered Parliament by not informing them of his intentions. He wanted an anti-Habsburg war, involving France, whereas Parliament wanted a policy driven by religion as they made clear in a petition and also demanded that James ended negotiations with Spain. Instead, by dissolving Parliament, James drove Parliament into active dislike of his foreign policy and created a situation that would only get worse, something that had not happened with previous policy. They simply could not understand why he wanted his son to marry a Catholic when Catholics were already fighting against his son-in-law and would lead to further conflict on how to resolve it.

There is some attempt to explain why the Thirty Years' War did create the most serious disagreement. The explanation as to why there was a division in aims and strategy between Crown and Parliament is explained and the last part of the paragraph does begin to make an evaluative comment as to why it was serious

These divisions were only made worse by the decision to allow Charles and Buckingham to travel to Madrid to pursue the marriage negotiations. The failure of the trip and the virtual holding of Charles as a prisoner while Spain pushed for a favourable marriage agreement did result in improved relations between Crown and Parliament, but that was only short-lived. Calls for revenge against Spain led to

Parliament devoting £300,000 to war, but in the euphoria of Charles' return little thought was given to how the war would be fought. Once again divisions between Crown and Parliament were soon evident with Parliament wanting a self-funding naval war rather than a continental conflict and granted the money on those conditions. On the other hand, Buckingham and the Crown wanted an anti-Habsburg alliance which once again led to concerns in Parliament about James' commitment to the Protestant cause, particularly as there were now attempts to secure a French marriage. The terms of the marriage agreement angered Parliament even more as Henrietta Maria was to be allowed to worship as a Catholic and Catholics would be granted toleration, something which went beyond anything ever offered to Spain.

The paragraph links back to the previous one and builds on the argument. It explains how and why relations with Parliament deteriorated. It does suggest that there was a short-term improvement in relations, but explains why this did not last and how issues of religion and finance only added to the dispute.

The conduct of the subsequent conflict soon became a cause of dispute between Crown and Parliament. Mansfeld's disastrous expedition, which achieved nothing and wasted £60,000 of the Commons subsidy, sparked anger as it went against their wishes for a naval war. This was followed by Buckingham provoking anger from the Commons by agreeing to finance English troops to fight in the Netherlands and partly funding Danish troops to fight in Germany. Both of these undertakings were unpopular with Parliament as they would be expected to fund them, and Parliament had already made it clear that it did not want to subsidise allies or fight a land war. Therefore, by the time James died in 1625 the conduct of a war that Parliament had wanted since 1618 in support of co-religionists had become very controversial.

Once again the paragraph links events back to the outbreak of war in 1618 to argue that it was the most serious conflict and explains why there were disagreements. It builds on the arguments made about strategy and the cost showing how tensions were escalating as these issues continued.

Parliament's most serious condemnation of foreign policy was in the latter part of James' reign. The Crown had failed to keep to its intention of a sea war and had launched a continental expedition. It had also promised Parliament that there would be no religious concessions when negotiations began with France, but this was also broken. However, although these issues were the greatest cause of disputes, the situation would not have arisen but for the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War and Parliament's insistence on support for Frederick. James had always been reluctant to get involved as he saw himself as a peacemaker and attempted other ways to restore his son-in-law and when they failed the land campaigns driven by Charles' increasing influence served only to worsen relations that had already deteriorated. Unlike other disputes over foreign policy the question of England's response to the Thirty Years' War dragged on for the rest of the reign and would continue under Charles, causing even greater concerns about his sincerity and therefore making it the most significant cause of conflict between Crown and Parliament.

The conclusion is strong and helps take the response towards the higher end of the mark range as there is some attempt to weigh up the importance of issues. There is a well-developed and supported judgement as to why the Thirty Years' War was the most serious foreign policy dispute and this builds on the balanced discussion of other events that is present throughout the response. The answer would not reach the very top as it would benefit from greater focus on 'most serious foreign policy dispute', particularly in the early part of the answer, but there is still sufficient evaluation of issues for it to score highly.

This resource is part of MODERN HISTORY REVIEW, a magazine written for A-level students by subject experts. To subscribe to the full magazine go to: <http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/historyreview>