



A-Level History

7042/2D Religious Conflict and the Church in England, c1529-70

Report on the examination

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Question 01

The sources related to Henry VIII's 'Great Matter', a topic which is possibly better known and understood than any other part of the specification. They were generally found to be accessible; as a result, they elicited thoughtful responses and a broad range of contextual knowledge.

Source A was from the famous speech, in 1528, in which Henry announced to his 'trusty and well-beloved subjects' his intention to pursue the annulment of his marriage to Queen Catherine. Most students recognised this source as valuable to historians studying the 'Great Matter' because it outlined some of the main reasons why Henry desired an annulment, including his concern for the succession and for the security of his realm, as well as his belief that he and Catherine 'live[d] together abominably and detestably in open adultery'. Students contextualised Henry's dynastic concerns by describing the Wars of the Roses, the Yorkist threat to Tudor rule and the disputed reign of Queen Matilda. Henry's belief that the Aragon marriage was invalid was explained by a pleasingly large number of students with reference to Leviticus 20:21. The Biblical prohibition on marrying one's brother's wife, which formed the basis of Henry's demand for an annulment, contrasted with the argument, based on Deuteronomy, employed by Catherine and her supporters. Reference to this debate was one way of analysing the limitations of the source, which only explained the 'Great Matter' from Henry's viewpoint. Some students thoughtfully commented on the fact that it was convenient for the King to make a high-minded political and religious case for the annulment, thus neglecting to mention his infatuation for Anne Boleyn. This point was linked to the source's provenance: it was a speech to members of the political nation, whom Henry would need on his side if (and when) he faced opposition to his cause, which explains why the King appealed to them in the way he did.

Source B offered a rather different perspective on the 'Great Matter' to that of Sources A and C. From a letter written by Cardinal Campeggio to Cardinal Sanga, secretary to Pope Clement VII, Source B viewed the 'Great Matter' from Rome, not England.

It was necessary to pay attention to the date of the letter. Campeggio's prescient warning that 'if this divorce is not granted, the authority of the Pope in [England] will be annihilated' was valuable in showing that the papacy was aware of the high stakes at play. However, since Campeggio warned of the prospect of an English break with Rome, some students leapt at the chance to demonstrate their knowledge of the Reformation statutes that formalised the break in the 1530s, instead of explaining how the 'Great Matter' ever got that far. These answers took at face value the claim in the source that 'the King will endure no delaying tactics'. In fact, Henry continued to accept Clement's delaying tactics – and his authority to decide on the annulment – until 1533. Better answers explained why the Pope was powerless to decide in Henry's favour, referring to the Sack of Rome by the army of Catherine's nephew, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, in 1527, and the Emperor's victory at Landriano, in 1529.

Another fruitful avenue of evaluation was the role played in the 'Great Matter' by Cardinal Wolsey. Wolsey was the source of Campeggio's information, and this gave students the

opportunity to explain how Wolsey attempted to secure the annulment for his royal master – and why he failed. As the source states, Wolsey was ‘desperate’ for a resolution that would maintain ‘the authority of the Pope’ while at the same pleasing Henry. Many students used the legatine court at Blackfriars as evidence of the failure of Wolsey’s strategy. Wolsey, one of the notable victims of the King’s ‘Great Matter’, fell from power shortly afterwards.

Source C was from the preamble to the Act of Restraint of Appeals 1533, which surely ranks as one of the most important Acts of Parliament in English history. Some students suggested that this Act did not establish royal supremacy over the Church, on the grounds that it predated the Act of Supremacy 1534. This surprisingly common mistake is presumably based on an overly literal reading of the Acts’ titles. As Source C made clear, the Act in Restraint of Appeals declared England to be an ‘Empire governed by one Supreme Head and King’. The Act ensured that Catherine could not appeal to Rome, thus paving the way for Cranmer’s annulment of the Aragon marriage and the settlement of the ‘Great Matter’. While Henry and Anne had already married in secret, they were now able to make it official, just in time (they hoped) for the birth of a male heir to the throne.

Students should be reminded to ensure that their evaluation is clearly linked to the particular purpose given in the question. This is true of every source, but it was a particular issue this year vis-à-vis Source C. Rather too many students explained how the source was valuable in relation to the break with Rome – which it is, but this was not the question. A more relevant approach to the source was to explain how and why the Act was used to solve the ‘Great Matter’. Students who maintained this explicit focus on the question were able to emphasise the important part played by parliament and, in particular, the source’s presumed author: Thomas Cromwell.

Question 02

Of the essay questions in 2025, the most popular was the question on the extent to which the beliefs and practices of the Church of England changed in the years 1536 to 1547. This was an era of religious experimentation, as the King, newly recognised as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, embarked on a stop-start programme of reform and reaction. Major changes included the dissolution of the monasteries, the introduction of the first legal Bible in English, doctrinal change (as set out in the Ten Articles, the Bishops’ Book, the Act of Six Articles and the King’s Book) and changes to religious practice, such as the discouragement of pilgrimages, the destruction of shrines and the partial dissolution of chantries. As a result, students were spoilt for choice as to what to include in their essays. Nevertheless, it is worth reminding centres that their students must address the question precisely. Some answers included lengthy descriptions of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, including detailed analysis of its impact on society and the economy. Unless the changes had an impact on ‘beliefs and practices’, as specified by the question, they were unlikely to gain credit from examiners.

Another way in which good answers can be differentiated from those that are not so good is by their attention to detail. For example, many students referred to the Ten Articles as ‘the Act of Ten Articles’, perhaps confusing it with the later Act of Six Articles. While this might seem like a pedantic point, the difference between these doctrinal statements is important. The Ten Articles were a compromise between reformers and conservatives in Convocation; its

statements on the eucharist and justification were confusing and, crucially, short-lived as official policy. In contrast, the Six Articles had statutory authority, having been introduced into parliament by the Duke of Norfolk (acting on behalf of the King himself), and it lasted until the end of Henry's reign. Students should be encouraged not simply to describe the changes made by such statements of faith but also to evaluate their significance in the development of Henrician religious policy.

The highest-scoring answers to this question were those that made a consistent and coherent argument. Some students argued that the period 1536-47 should be seen in terms of two phases: 1536-8, when Cromwell utilised his position as Vice-Gerent in Spirituals to promote evangelical reform; and, in the years that followed, the conservative reaction. Others stressed the leading role played by Henry, who was always willing to make changes to the beliefs and practices of the English Church, unless those changes threatened his authority as Supreme Head or the doctrine of the real presence in the eucharist.

Question 03

Question 03 required students to assess the validity of the view that the strength of Protestantism was the main reason why Mary I failed fully to re-establish Catholicism by the time of her death. This question elicited wide-ranging analysis of the strength of Protestantism in the 1550s, which included such evidence as the willingness of c.285 English Protestants to die as martyrs, the propaganda campaign conducted by the Marian exiles and, rather less convincingly, the abortive rebellion led by Thomas Wyatt the Younger in 1554.

The question was answered unsuccessfully some students, who analysed (or simply described) the opposition to the Marian regime instead of addressing the question that was asked. These responses tended to use Wyatt's Rebellion as evidence of 'the strength of Protestantism', ignoring the fact that Wyatt and the other leaders were forced to disguise their religious agenda. Only by appealing to anti-Spanish xenophobia did they win any support for their rebellion – and, even then, not enough people rallied to their cause. Even more common was the view that the burning of Protestants in the years 1555-58 provoked opposition because of people's outrage at the regime's cruelty. This analysis is superficially attractive but was seldom supported by relevant evidence. In numerous cases, the testimony of John Foxe was uncritically employed as evidence of popular hostility towards Mary and her religion. Yet the 'Book of Martyrs' was propaganda, which was compiled by a radical Protestant and not published until 1563; for all that it helped to mould the view of posterity, it did not represent public opinion in the 1550s.

A more persuasive take on Mary's policies is that they were effective in weakening Protestantism in England. Although it was possible to argue that the enduring strength of English Protestantism was the main cause of Mary's failure fully to re-establish Catholicism, most of the strongest answers emphasised other explanations. The destruction of monasteries, chantries, shrines and church decoration in the years preceding Mary's accession to the throne made her task difficult. The House of Lords opposed the restoration of monastic land, forcing Mary to compromise before parliament would pass the Second Statute of Repeal. Pope Paul IV, an irascible Neapolitan with an undisguised animus towards Cardinal Pole and King Philip, refused to invest new bishops, and thus deprived the regime of leadership in seven dioceses by 1558. Ultimately, though, it was the brevity of Mary's reign

that conspired against her. The Queen died during the pandemic of 1557-8 at the age of 43. She had had two 'phantom pregnancies', which had not produced a child; her heir was her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth. Five years was not long enough for Mary to undo the changes made by her father and brother.

Question 04

The final essay question asked students how secure the Elizabethan Church was by c.1570. There have been several questions over the years about the threats posed to Elizabeth's reconstituted Church of England. Centres have clearly prepared their students well for this type of essay, as shown by the range of information provided on how Catholic and Puritan opponents of the Elizabethan Church threatened its security. To achieve a high mark, however, it was necessary to go beyond merely setting out the challenges to the Church; good answers assessed the security of the Elizabethan Settlement by evaluating the extent to which Elizabeth successfully dealt with these challenges.

A common error was the portrayal of the Elizabethan Church as 'partially' or 'mainly' Protestant. As was made clear in 2024's Report on the Examination, this is a misunderstanding. The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity abolished papal supremacy and the Mass; the unquestionably Protestant theology of the Elizabethan Church was (and is) made clear in the 39 Articles. While it makes sense to view Elizabeth's Settlement as a 'middle way', it charted a 'middle way' between Lutheranism and Reformed Protestantism, not between Protestantism and Catholicism. This distinction is relevant to the question. Those who misunderstood the nature of the Elizabethan Church were too willing to consider the Acts of 1559, which only just made it onto the statute book, as establishing a Church that was essentially secure and was only challenged by extremists. In fact, many English people did not accept the Elizabethan Church in the years to c.1570.

Elizabeth was capable of flexibility, as she showed in her compromises over the display of crucifixes, clerical marriage and the vexed issue of clerical vestments. She was able to maintain the support of all but the most radical of her Protestant subjects. Most answers included the Vestiarian Controversy, but students rightly viewed Puritan objections to vestments as not threatening the essential security of the Church. Catholics were a different matter. Good answers to this question evidenced Catholic opposition to the Elizabethan Church with reference to 'Church papism' and recusancy in the 1560s. Simmering discontent with the Religious Settlement boiled over when Mary, Queen of Scots, arrived in England in 1568; this led to the Rising of the Northern Earls. Some students minimised the importance of religion to the rebels, emphasising instead the Earls' political motivations. Not only did such analysis indicate a lack of sharp focus on the question, but it is also unconvincing. In Peter Marshall's words, the Rising was 'an attempt at regime change motivated by religion'. The rebels burned English Bibles and Prayer Books, erected altars and celebrated Mass in dozens of churches – most famously in Durham Cathedral. Some students concluded that, if such challenges could arise by c.1570, the Elizabethan Church was clearly insecure. Others recognised the threat that the Rising briefly posed to the Elizabethan Church (and state) but concluded that, ultimately, the Church was secure. No support arrived from the Catholic strongholds of Lancashire and Cheshire; Pius V's excommunication of Elizabeth, which may have encouraged more English Catholics to rise (as indeed it did in the 1570s and 1580s), arrived too late; the hoped-for Spanish troops never arrived at all. The Rising's weaknesses,

and the speed with which Elizabeth's government responded to the crisis, meant that the Elizabethan Church survived the most serious domestic threat to its security that it ever faced.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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