

## **To what extent was the outbreak of Civil War in England in 1642 caused by disputes over religion?**

In 1642, religion and politics were inextricably entwined. While the outbreak of Civil War was largely caused by disputes over religion, there were also constitutional crises and longer term financial issues that divided Charles I and Parliament that cannot be dismissed. Ultimately, even though it was religion to the greatest extent, it was a combination of all three that resulted in Civil War.

The medium term causes of the Civil War were dominated by the 1637 Prayer Book Rebellion in Scotland and subsequent National Covenant of February 1638, indicating that disputes over religion were the main cause of Civil War. When Charles I refused to yield to the Scottish Covenanters and demands of 'The Tables' who were rejecting the religious innovations of the Personal Rule, the First Bishops' War erupted. Under the inexperienced Earl of Arundel, England were defeated by Scotland. Comparatively, the Scottish retained their strong sense of unity thanks to their National Covenant and Presbyterian Kirk acting as wellsprings of national identity. That Charles I would attempt to impose the Anglican Prayer Book there demonstrates how ignorant the King was of Scotland; this incident serves as evidence of the King's arrogance that would later prevent him from negotiating with the Parliament and lead to the outbreak of Civil War. The deep opposition that emerged across Scotland, for example in the riot at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh, shows that religion was at the forefront of people's lives and loyalties at this period. Merely the King's attempt to impose episcopacy in Scotland was severe enough to result in the Bishops' Wars. Dissatisfied by the terms of the Pacification of Berwick and determined to fight again but short of money, Charles called the Short Parliament in April 1640. This drew to an end his period of Personal Rule and turned the direction of political developments away from absolutism, a prospect which many had feared due to the lack of Parliament and harsh enforcement of Laudianism. For example, though notably an extreme one, the case of Burton, Bastwick and Prynne in 1637. With Parliament in session, the resentment from the King's Personal Rule could be released. The severity of religious disputes outside of Parliament is evidenced by the 1640 Root and Branch Petition, which was signed by 15,000 Londoners. It is important that the English people's resentment was focused on financial and political concerns as well as religious ones. Although in 1625 the King had been permitted to collect tonnage and poundage for one year only, he had continued to solicit the tax; this ongoing grievance was exacerbated by the King's use of fiscal feudalism and fiscal antiquarianism, for example through introducing an annual Ship Money tax. The Short Parliament, who refused to provide funds without an addressance of their grievances, was quickly dissolved; this could suggest that finance was of greater portent to the King in the medium term than the religious disputes in Scotland. The Treaty of Ripon that concluded the Second Bishops' War required England to pay £850 a day to the Scottish, a mounting pressure further indicative that finance was the crucial medium term factor. That said, it

was the religious riots in Scotland that enabled Parliament to meet and resentment over the Personal Rule to be unleashed in England. The King's recognition of the divisive nature of religion was shown by his decision to make protesting against the Anglican Prayer Book treasonable. Therefore, in the medium term, divisions that arose over religion, particularly in Scotland, were of greater significance to the outbreak of Civil War than disputes over finance or politics.

On the other hand, it was political disputes in Westminster that had the greatest role in establishing the two sides to the Civil War in the short term. The Treaty of Ripon caused the Long Parliament to meet, which enabled Pym and his followers to galvanise their support. The Long Parliament served to dismantle the tools of the Personal Rule through a series of acts, such as the Triennial Act, Own Consent Act, and abolishment of the Courts of High Commission and Star Chamber. An unintended consequence of the abolishment of these religious courts was the removal of censorship, which they had controlled. Propaganda increased exponentially into the 'paper wars' and politicised the nation; this chain of events illustrates the entwined nature of politics and religion. While political concerns were at the forefront of disputes between the Long Parliament and King Charles I in the year following November 1640, the importance of religion should not be understated. Alongside Strafford and the Ship Money judges, Archbishop Laud was amongst the impeachments of the Long Parliament. Throughout the Personal Rule, Laud had introduced innovations to the Church and a draconian enforcement of these hated religious practices. The communion table was moved to the chancel and decorated with ornate cloth, altar rails, and crucifixes as befitting Laud's belief in the Beauty of Holiness. However, the fears of Catholicism and absolutism that these religious innovations substantiated were widespread and deeply felt, as demonstrated by the 1627 altar controversy and Laud's impeachment. Despite Laud's punishment, it was Strafford who faced the greatest retribution. With news of the Army Plot and use of the intimidating London Mob, Pym was able to persuade the Commons, Lords, and King to sign Strafford's execution warrant. The King would never forgive Parliament for Wentworth's execution, which arose from parliamentary political innovations. Strafford's Bill of Attainder was passed by 204-59 votes, whereas the Root and Branch Bill, a redraft of the earlier petition, was passed by a narrower margin of 139-108 in the Commons and rejected in the Lords; this demonstrates that resentment over the politics of the King's Personal Rule was greater than that over Laudian religious practices. By dismantling the financial architecture of the Personal Rule, for example through the Ship Money Act and Tonnage and Poundage Act, the Long Parliament was able to resolve the majority of financial grievances by 1642. Therefore, while it could be argued that either religion or politics was central to the shorter term disputes that escalated into Civil War, finance certainly was not.

While there was a distinct political strand to the Irish Rebellion of October 1641, the roots of the revolt lay in religion which supports the notion that religion was at the core of events

that would lead to Civil War. Plantations, such as that in Ulster, had been settled by Protestant English and Presbyterian Scottish on confiscated Catholic land. So, the two sides of the conflict in Ireland were determined by religion. For many, the King's aloof response combined with Phelim O'Neill's claim that Charles had ordered the massacres proved that the King had effectuated the massacres. Atrocities such as the House at Shewic and the Bridge of Portadown Massacre spread into England through wood carvings and newsheets, further exacerbating this climate of mistrust and unravelling the consensus that had emerged over the previous year. The Irish Rebellion was so significant because it created a crunch point over royal prerogative: Parliament was unwilling to allow the King control of an army to crush the rebellion. Parliament's radical Militia Bill was highly contentious, persuading MPs such as Sir Ralph Hopton and Sir Arthur Capel to become Royalists. The initial compromise proffered, the Additional Instruction, escalated into the Grand Remonstrance, 206 articles on constitutional and religious reform which had to be accepted or rejected in their entirety. The Grand Remonstrance was passed in the Commons by a narrow 159-148 votes, but it was shelved before reaching the Lords. While the intensely divisive Grand Remonstrance served to change both religion and politics, other acts of Parliament passed during this period that concern religion suggest it was religious disputes that were central to debates of the time. For example, the Bishops' Exclusion Bill which received an extraordinary 30,000 signatures. The Irish Rebellion acted as a spark, triggering fears in England, legislation and divisions in Parliament, and questions over the King's royal prerogative to command the army. The religious conflict at the heart of the Irish Rebellion had far reaching consequences indicating that, in 1641, religion was the central factor to the outbreak of Civil War.

However, in the immediate short term of 1642, political disputes in Westminster were arguably more significant to the outbreak of Civil War later that year. Following the Grand Remonstrance, Charles had been in a stalemate with Parliament. Until, in January 1642, the King marched with 500 soldiers to the House of Commons and broke parliamentary privilege by entering the chamber. The Failed Arrest of the Five MPs was greatly important to the outbreak of Civil War because, in the aftermath, the King was forced to flee London for Hampton Court Palace. As many of his loyal supporters followed Charles out of the capital, the active politicians and influential people remaining in the city were, for the most part, radical and Parliamentarian. When the King's return was erroneously rumoured, citizens from London became willing to fight against him. The Buckinghamshire Uprising, in support of the Londoners, illustrates that sentiments against the King were felt strongly outside of the capital. Although the King was widely mistrusted, acts of parliamentary absolutism, such as the Militia Ordinance and Act of £400,000, particularly when combined with the anti-enclosure riots that erupted nationwide, caused such fear of disruption of the social order that many moderates pledged their commitment to the Royalist side. After the radical Nineteen Propositions and King's Answer, any chance of negotiation between the two sides had dissolved. Across England, people were polarised as both sides armed and recruited. It

was the political turmoil of 1642, catalysed by the Failed Arrest of the Five MPs, that led immediately to the outbreak of Civil War; however, religion acted as an underlying driving force for both sides. Arguably the most important role religion played in the outbreak of Civil War, King Charles I's obdurate faith in Divine Right of Kings prevented him from negotiating with Parliament and making concessions. Parliament, with their Nineteen Propositions and removal of Catholics from the House of Lords, were motivated by Puritan zeal. Similarly, the London Mob were radicalised by feelings of religious righteousness that escalated alongside the political extremity. In Ireland, the ongoing massacres, with their religious roots, provided a high-tension backdrop for events in England. Not as severe but nevertheless significant, Scottish commissioners who had travelled to London continued to advocate Presbyterianism and contributed to rising pressures. So, while it initially appears that political and constitutional disputes were the main factor contributing to the outbreak of Civil War within this second set of trigger events, religion was actually at the core of the Parliamentary and Royalist division in 1642.

Overall, while disputes over religion were not the sole cause of the outbreak of Civil War, they were undoubtedly the most important factor. The divisive nature of religious policies and practices in England, Scotland, and Ireland can be traced back through Charles I's Personal Rule. Comparatively, explicit and widespread political disputes did not arise until November 1640, when the Long Parliament was called into session. Although 1642 was dominated by events triggered by and creating disputes over politics, royal prerogative, and parliamentary privilege, religion was the underlying factor that influenced these attitudes and actions. Whereas religion and politics were so closely entangled in the 17th century that they were difficult to separate, finance can be considered as a more isolated, and altogether less significant, factor. That no financial issues were raised by the Nineteen Propositions demonstrates that the resentment caused by the King's financial policies during the Personal Rule had largely dissipated by 1642. On the other hand, religious and political debates were rife up to and throughout the Civil War. Ultimately, the outbreak of Civil War was a result of religious disputes to a greater extent than political disputes because the political disputes that arose were only escalations of long-standing, underlying religious differences.