**How successful were Elizabeth I and her ministers in managing Parliament?**

During her reign, Elizabeth I and her ministers were required to deal with and manage Parliament at several points. In order to deal with the matters of religion, marriage and succession, the Queen had to negotiate with Parliament. These issues lead to the issue of Parliamentary Privilege being raised, and in the latter half of the Queen’s reign Parliament raised the issue of finances and monopolies. There are diverging points of view on whether the dominant theme of the relationship between Elizabeth I and her Parliaments was one of conflict or cooperation, and whether Elizabeth and her ministers were effective in the management of Parliament. The historian J.E Neale created the orthodox argument that the relationship was one of conflict. However, the revisionist G.R Elton argued that, although there were periods of conflict, the dominant theme of the relationship was cooperation between Crown and Parliament. There is perhaps more evidence to suggest that G.R Elton was correct in arguing that cooperation was the dominant theme.

The issue of religion is perhaps the underpinning reason behind the other issues raised in Parliament, with the exemption of finance and monopolies. Indeed, Elizabeth called her first Parliament to attempt to pass her 1559 Religious Settlement, drafted by both the Queen and Sir William Cecil. It cannot be argued that there was conflict between Parliament and the Queen over the matter of religion. Neale argued that the House of Commons was the main source of conflict between Crown and Parliament, with an extreme Protestant pressure group the ‘Puritan Choir’ forcing Elizabeth into a more extreme Protestant settlement than she wished for. In addition to this, Elizabeth was forced to crush Protestant bills in 1566, 1571, 1572, 1589 and 1593 in defence of her Royal Prerogative. In 1571, William Strickland proposed an altered Common Book of Prayer, and was excluded from the House by the Queen. The Queen was later forced to readmit him into the House. Royal Prerogative was clearly challenged by the House of Commons, with Anthony Cope and his Presbyterian cabal being sent to the Tower in 1587. However, Cope was not sent to the Tower by the Queen. Cope and his Presbyterian supporters were censured, excluded from the House and imprisoned in the Tower by Parliament. It would be nonsensical for a staunchly Protestant House of Commons to imprison one of their own in the Tower. Thus, doubts can be raised over the apparently conflict-filled relationships between Elizabeth and her Parliaments. Furthermore, the existence of the ‘Puritan Choir’ has been doubted. J.E Neale cited a document signed by 43 MPs as proof for the existence of a Puritan pressure group in Parliament. However, the document is now widely believed to be satire, with members of Elizabeth’s own Council signing it. It is also believed that Elizabeth’s authority was never seriously challenged on religion, with the majority of the House of Commons accepting the Act of Supremacy. The only objections that Elizabeth received from Parliament over religion and the Religious Settlement came from the Catholic Bishops in the House of Lords. Even with this resistance, Elizabeth was able to successfully pass her Settlement through Parliament. This indicates that Elizabeth and her ministers were effective in their management of Parliament concerning the issue of religion.

England in the first years of Elizabeth’s reign was religiously divided between Protestants and Catholics. In order to prevent a Catholic monarch succeeding to the throne, the Protestants wished for the issue of marriage and succession to be addressed by Elizabeth and her ministers. Following Elizabeth’s near-fatal bout of smallpox in 1562, the issue of succession was raised by not just Parliament, but Elizabeth’s Privy Council as well. Had Elizabeth died in 1562, Mary, Queen of Scots would have succeeded to the throne. Mary was a Catholic with strong French sympathies (having been married to the Dauphin, and later King of France, Francis II). Because of this, the Protestants in Elizabeth’s government wished to see Elizabeth marry and produce an heir. Peter Wentworth, an MP, lead a campaign of pressure in Parliament in an attempt to see Elizabeth married to a Protestant of worthy stature. Neale believed that Parliament “employed such arts of opposition and displayed so resolute a spirit that no House of Commons before their time could furnish the like”. The Commons attempted to coerce Elizabeth into marriage by withholding supply until she made a public commitment to marriage. The Queen was forced to tell Parliament that she would “marry as soon as We can conveniently.” The Queen later privately stated that “it is a strange thing that the foot should direct the head in such a weighty matter.” However, Parliament was unsatisfied by Elizabeth’s ‘commitment’, and continued to demand that she committed to marriage properly. The Queen issued an express commandment to Parliament instructing it to cease discussing marriage, which was a matter of state. Following the delivery of the Queen’s commandment to Parliament, Peter Wentworth spoke in an attempt to defend Parliament’s right to freedom of speech, which resulted in the wroth Queen proroguing Parliament. Neale argued that once Elizabeth passed childbearing age, Parliament pressured the Queen into executing Mary, Queen of Scots. However, the Queen herself instructed Parliament to discuss the fate of Mary, Queen of Scots on two separate occasions. It must also remember that Parliament never made well on its threat to withhold funds if Elizabeth did not commit to marriage – Parliament never refused to grant the Queen supply, indicating cooperation and a sense of obedience. Furthermore, the desire for Elizabeth to marry was not confined to Parliament alone, it spread throughout the entire political nation. Indeed her own ministers used Parliament to pressure the Queen into marriage, with William Cecil himself coordinating the campaign to convince Elizabeth to marry. It must be said that on the issue of marriage and succession, Elizabeth and her ministers were not as effective in their management of Parliament as they were on the issue of religion, as Elizabeth’s ministers held the view that she should marry, while she did not.

Religion, marriage and the royal succession were all matters of state, and therefore outside of Parliament’s traditional purview. However, given the divided state of the realm upon Elizabeth’s succession, Parliament wished to have the right to discuss matters of state in order to address the problems of religion, marriage and succession. Peter Wentworth pushed for the defence of parliamentary privilege, wishing for Parliament to have the right to discuss matters of state. In his 1576 speech, Wentworth stated that “there is nothing so necessary for the preservation of the Prince and State as free speech and without, it is a scorn and mockery to call it a Parliament House, for in truth it is nought but a school of flattery and dissimulation.” Following this push for parliamentary privilege, Wentworth was imprisoned in the Tower. However, as previously mentioned, Wentworth was censured and imprisoned by his fellow MPs. Wentworth’s views were highly controversial and unpopular in the Elizabethan House of Commons. Indeed, historian A.G.R Smith states that Wentworth was a “maverick”, whose views of free speech were “well ahead of his time.” The fact that Wentworth was detained by his own colleagues creates a sense of loyalty and cooperation. In this regard, the Queen was effective in her management of Parliament, allowing the House of Commons to deal with dissent itself rather than intervene directly, which could have been interpreted as an abuse of royal power and therefore created conflict.

In 1601, Elizabeth’s ministers lost control of Parliament in the Monopolies Crisis. In 1601, a list of all monopolies created by the Crown since 1597 was read out in Parliament. What followed was an uproar, with one MP, William Hakewill interrupting “Is not bread there? If order not be taken for these, then bread will be there before the next Parliament.” Elizabeth’s chief minister Robert Cecil lost control of Parliament, declaring the behaviour to be “more fit for a grammar school than a Parliament House.” As a result of her ministers collective failure to control Parliament, Elizabeth was forced to address Parliament in person, delivering her Golden Speech. Elizabeth immediately cancelled twelve monopolies and halted all others being processed. For the first time, the Queen, the Head of State, had been forced to back down on a matter of state. However, following the Golden Speech and Elizabeth’s resolving of the monopolies, Parliament granted Elizabeth a subsidy four times larger than what she had initially asked. Elizabeth had effectively gained more money that she would have had she maintained the monopolies. Despite the conflict between the Crown and Parliament over monopolies, Elizabeth managed Parliament in this issue with great effect, mitigating the effects of her ministers’ complete failure in the management of Parliament in regards to the monopolies crisis.

Overall, Elizabeth and her ministers managed Parliament effectively throughout her reign, with the dominant theme of the Crown’s relationship with Parliament being cooperation. However, it could be argued that Elizabeth was more effective in her management of Parliament when considering the issue of monopolies and finance. Despite the failure of her ministers to control Parliament, Elizabeth was able to compromise and charm Parliament, resulting in the giving of an unprecedented quadruple subsidy. Clearly, Elizabeth was effective in her management of Parliament.