

The reign of Edward VI saw great religious upheaval from a Protestant religion that was Catholic in nature to a more clearly defined and radical quasi-Calvinism. In that sense religious policy hardened. But the policies and ideal never became deeply entrenched and accepted throughout the country and often only existed to serve the interests of those who enacted them, and not the future stance of the church. Under Somerset the changes involved merely creating a Protestant facelift, and only under Northumberland did sweeping radical changes emerge. However, policy never hardened enough, or became accepted enough, to prevent it being disintegrated when Mary came to power in 1553.

The religious situation was highly unstable at the time of Edward's ascendance. Although Henry had allowed Protestant leaning clerics to predominate in the later year of his reign, most religious statutes remained orthodox, and conservative. But under Somerset Protestants who had previously fled to Europe after the six articles, such as Hooper, Becon, and Turner, all returned. Many were writers banned under Henry VIII, along with Luther and other European Protestants. Guy points out that 159 out of 394 new books printed during the Protectorate were written by Protestant reformers.

Reformers predominated the Privy council under Somerset, and reform was popular amongst the gentry of the time. But outside London and East Anglia Protestantism was not a major force. In terms of religious hardening, it is unlikely that the surge of Protestantism had any particular long term impact outside these areas. It was only in these areas that violent iconoclasm took place. Elsewhere far more moderate reforms such as vernacular Bibles and services were introduced.

The legislation of the Somerset era also did little to aid a definite hardening of religious policy. The Privy council remained reluctant to make any radical moves. The Council, parliament, and the convocation all wanted reform, but not of the type that would firmly thrust the country into radical Protestantism. Moderate leanings were all that was desired, and this was reflected in the two major pieces of legislation, the Chantries Act and the Treason Act, which both did little to resolve doctrinal uncertainties. The new book of common prayer also trod a careful path between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Jordan states that "These years ... were characterised by patience with the bishops, almost half of whom were conservative in their views and Catholic in their doctrinal sympathies, though all, trained as they were in the reign of Henry VIII, lent complete support to the Act Supremacy in all its constitutional and political implications ... the lesser clergy and the laity were with few exceptions under no considerable pressure to conform, even after the passage of the Act establishing the first Book of Common Prayer."

Guy suggests that the Protestant stance was only ever introduced by Somerset to promote his own interests. "Although accurate figures are lacking, roughly one fifth of Londoners were Protestant by 1547 ... but elsewhere Protestantism had barely progressed. Yet London activists had a disproportionate influence on official policy ... secret cells of 'Christian brethren' existed to spread the word; links were forged with Lollard congregations, the Protestant book trade established ... Since so many of Somerset's supporters were radical, he had an incentive to assimilate the supremacy to their interests. The danger was that religious opinion would polarise and lead to civil discord; uniformity was the linchpin of order."

Bush argues that due to the political motivation behind reform, real religious zeal was not apparent, the apparent hardening Protestantism only a token gesture. "The outstanding characteristic of the settlement was its moderate enforcement. Victims were relatively few, martyrs at the stake were non-existent, and the conservative bishops tumbled from office in any number only after Somerset's fall ... the regime certainly showed a noticeable leniency in the persecution of religious dissent within the context of the age."

Northumberland presided over moves to a far more radical religion. Ridley was

appointed Bishop of London and Hooper Bishop of Gloucester. Protestantism had already been hardened through doctrine and procedural changes. By Northumberland's fall, communion tables had been moved into the centre of the church, and second new prayer book was issued in 1552. Communion no longer resembled mass. Only plain surpluses were allowed, and the 1553 42 articles produced far more Protestant doctrinal changes than had been seen before. The new vernacular bible was reinforced by the new style of service. Also, the number of priests marrying under the new Protestant rule created a vested interest within the church for the prolongment of Protestantism. In the long term, this undoubtedly helped harden Protestant values at the grass roots level within the church.

Such changes enacted a hardening of Protestantism in statute only. Throughout the country many middle class and gentry resented the stricter brand of Protestantism, and the erosion of Catholicism.

The balance of the Privy council swung far more heavily to radical reformers under Northumberland, and this is probably reflected in the hardening of religious policy seen. Conservatives were quickly driven from office. Gairdiner was imprisoned in the Tower of London, Bishop Bonner of London was retired and deprived of his diocese, to be replaced by reformer Ridley. Reformers were subsequently installed into the bishoprics of Rochester, Chichester, Norwich, Exeter and Durham.

Parliament was recalled in January 1552 and presented with a substantial program of religious reform. The new Treason Act, the Act of Uniformity, the limiting of Holy days to 25, the new and almost Calvinist Book of Common Prayer, the redefining of the Eucharist and a vestments ban were all introduced.

However, it is unclear as to whether the intention was to secure a hardening of Protestantism. If it was, it didn't succeed. At the fall of Northumberland Protestantism was accepted but not widely supported. In the country Catholicism was still somewhat endearing. Certainly, there was little evidence that Protestantism was increasing in popularity in the country, or any evidence of a long term appeal. Jordan states that: "the thrust of Northumberland's policy had been in the direction of an evangelical Protestant party ... whose theological preferences were Zwinglian or Calvinistic, whose view of faith and worship displayed no nostalgia whatever for the ancient church, and whose principle interest it was that all remaining Roman survivals be swept away and that a pure, an undefiled, Protestantism be vigorously preached and enforced throughout the realm." That is what Northumberland preached, but it also poses significant doctrinal problems. Calvinism and Zwinglism were intrinsically different and could not be merged into some Protestant cocktail, yet Northumberland allowed both views to predominate. And more alarmingly, as Jordan reveals, "Northumberland died in 1553 a professed and a communicating Roman Catholic, making the staggering statement that his sympathies had been secretly Catholic during the whole of the Edwardian era."

The government's subsequent pillaging of church wealth therefore presents a more likely incentive for religious zeal. In 1552 an exhaustive survey of church wealth was conducted, estimating a total value of over £1m. Northumberland then attacked the church to gain control of as much of this wealth as possible. For example the Bishopric of Durham was halved, inventories of gold and silver plate were conducted and removed.

There is however, much evidence that Protestant religious policy was hardened during Edward's reign. In 1547 Somerset succeeded in making Parliament permit communion of both kinds, and to repeal the heresy laws, including the Act of Six Articles. The new Injunctions also strengthened the Protestant stance of the church. In 1549 the new Protestant prayer book merged traditional catholic ideal with more radical Lutheran notions, and by the time of the prayer book of 1552 Protestantism was even more evident. Priests were subsequently allowed to marry. The new prayer book was declared a monopoly, all previous editions were ordered to be destroyed. A new ordination rite was created that denied the full priesthood to ministers. Mass was reduced to little more than a token procedure and church monasteries and chapels were all dissolved during Edward's reign. The prayer book of 1552 was enforced by a new Act of Uniformity and the Forty Two Articles of 1553. At this stage religious policy had been hardened in that there was a distinct

policy - the country was officially Protestant, in doctrine and in law. Previously there had been no such clear policy and the country as a whole had not known definitively where it stood.

Only the appearances were beginning to change considerably. Catholic religious groups, chantries, educational establishments such as chantry schools seemed to remain untouched, except for their now increasing Protestant teaching.

Such was the hardening of Protestantism in England, moderate Lutheran influences had given way to the more radical church-state ideals of Calvin and Zwingli by the end of the reign, ideals that would never have been tolerated under Henry VIII.

Dickens suggests this led to the "reorientation from the Saxon to the Swiss emphasis becoming decisive." He continues, claiming, "when Cranmer sought to call a conference to unite European Protestants he was rebuffed by the unimaginative Lutherans. On the other hand, thousands of religious refugees, the great majority of them owing no direct allegiance to Luther's Wittenburg, came to settle in England. Martin Bucer and several other eminent foreign theologians occupied key posts in the universities, while the great company of foreigners in London were given the Austin Friars and there allowed by Cranmer to organise their congregations along Swiss lines."

One way in which religious policy was arguably hardened was the way in which personal supremacy was undermined. Elton claims that "in the first place, the Edwardian Acts of Uniformity went a long way towards resting the liturgy and ceremonial of the church on the authority of Parliament; the second act could speak of the first Prayer Book as a 'very godly order set forth by authority of Parliament' and the second as annexed to the act. Instead of merely enforcing, by penalties, personal decree of the supreme head, Parliament thus fully participated in the ultimate exercise of his power, the definition of true faith.

It could be argued that the hardened religious position was not a result of Protestantism but simply to strengthen the power of factions at court. Loades suggest: "the Edwardian church was every bit as much an instrument of government propaganda as that of Henry had been. Sermons, homilies and exhortation of every kind urged the sacred duty of obedience to the Prince, terming rebellion '...the puddle and sink of all sins against God and man.' So obvious was the alliance of convenience between the Protestant divines and the secular politicians that the conservative regarded the reservations of the former with pardonable suspicion ... the sincerity and religious conviction which actually inspired them became evident only when political power had been stripped away."

In conclusion, the reign of Edward VI did see a hardening of religious policy in that such policy was clearly defined. Protestant ideals and ideas were strengthened, but not necessarily for devotional or theological motives. The key protagonist of radical change, Northumberland, still proclaimed his Catholicism on his death-bed. Also, the country as a whole did not view Protestantism as a great religious advancement, and only in London and East Anglia can local level religious policy be said to have hardened. Another factor is that none of the religious policy became steadfast or hardened to the extent that it could not be swept away even more quickly than it had been enacted.

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"The reign of Edward VI saw a definite hardening of religious policy." Do you agree?