Religious Settlement
Mary (1516 –1558)

What was Mary’s religious policy?

October 1553: Mary’s first Parliament abolished Edward’s religious laws. Church doctrine was restored to the form it had taken in the 1539 Six Articles, which (among other things) re-affirmed clerical celibacy. Married priests were deprived of their benefices. Another of one of Mary’s first actions as queen was to order the release of the Roman Catholic Duke of Norfolk and Stephen Gardiner from imprisonment in the Tower of London, as well as her kinsman Edward Courtenay.

Return to Catholicism: The Pope was only prepared to accept reunion when church property disputes had been settled—which, in practice, meant letting those who had bought former church property keep it. Cardinal Pole arrived in November 1554 to become Archbishop of Canterbury in Cranmer’s place immediately after Cranmer’s death in March 1556.

Persecution of Protestants: After 1555, the initial reconciling tone of the regime began to harden. The medieval heresy laws were restored. The Marian Persecutions of Protestants ensued and 283 Protestants were burnt at the stake for heresy.

Why was this Mary’s religious policy?

A great part of Mary’s early education came from her mother, Catherine of Aragon, who was a Catholic and she was thus brought up a Catholic. After seeing the treatment of her mother by Henry in the name of reformed religion, she could never be reconciled to it and remained committed to Catholicism by marrying a Catholic.

What impact did Mary’s religious policy have?

- Welcomed at first by traditionalists
- Increased over her reign
- Wiped out key Protestant threats

But...

- Dying childless and without a Catholic successor undid her restoration
- Resistance to removing Henry’s reforms
- Did not wipe out underground resistance
- Did not create renewed Catholic enthusiasm

What opposition was there to Mary’s religious policy?

Individuals: By the end of September leading Protestant churchmen—including John Bradford, John Rogers, John Hooper, Hugh Latimer, and Thomas Cranmer—were imprisoned. Cranmer was imprisoned and tried for heresy. Cranmer initially recanted but recantations but withdrew this at the last minute as he was to be burned at the stake, thus ruining her government’s propaganda victory.

Rebellion: in Kent led by Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Persecution: after the reinstatement of the Heresy Laws, the heroism of some of the 283 martyrs burnt at the stake was an example to those who witnessed them, so that in some places it was the burnings that set people against the regime and Catholicism. Around 800 rich Protestants, including John Foxe, chose exile and opposed Mary from afar.

Low level: Full restoration of the Roman Catholic faith in England to its pre-Reformation state would take time and enthusiasm that Mary lacked and so few monasteries, chantries, and gilds were reinstated. Protestants were secretly ministering to underground congregations, such as Thomas Bentham, were planning for a long haul, a ministry of survival.