**To what extent was the English Church in 1553 different from what it had been in 1532? (25 marks)**

Certainly to many contemporaries the changes made in the English Church in the period 1532 to 1553 must have seemed vast, with the imposition of the new framework of Protestantism made immediate by the introduction of the Prayer Book and the rampant iconoclasm under Edward VI. However the changes made by this ‘new Josiah’, although clearly of great import, were by no means as fundamental as has been asserted. The new religion had barely ensconced itself before Mary returned Catholicism to centre stage, and the quick readeption of the key conceits of the faith; to wit the observant of sacraments and saints, clearly shows that for the mass of the population, the old, popular, Catholic services and structures remained highly relevant, and also, popular.

Perhaps part of the reason for the failure of Protestantism to really fire the popular imagination arises from the actions of Henry VIII. Certainly the degree of support for the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 would seem to imply that the least popular measures of the new Protestantism were certainly resented. 72,000 deaths were a sacrifice Henry found to be necessary for his love and his heir, but this Protestant Reformation was a far cry from the system attempted under Edward VI in 1553.

Henry clearly demonstrated his willingness to return to the conservative Catholicism of his youth with the Six Articles (known as the Whip with Six Strings) and then the King’s Book. In many ways he was endeavouring to return to the institutional Catholicism and practices he had never really deserted. However, the degree of his support for Protestant reformers is confusing, as he allowed his son Edward to be brought up in the pervasive climate of radical Protestant reform. Henry VIII had been a friend to Erasmus, whilst Edward was brought by Sir John Cheke, a noted humanist.

Edward VI was very clearly bent on a radical Protestant church when he came to the throne. Although in many ways the early regime bears the imprimatur of the Protector, Somerset, with the moderate 1549 Prayer Book, which allowed Catholics to maintain the fiction of transubstantiation in the Sacrament, provided clear direction as to his intentions, the clearer analysis of Edward’s own motivations and wishes really only emerges in the radical 1553 Prayer Book which probably is a closer depiction of Edward’s own views.

Certainly there are some points of continuity between the two reigns. Whilst both are imperfect, the obvious connotations of Cromwell’s policy vis-à-vis the monasteries can clearly be seen in the successor regime, with the now established policy of raiding the church utilised once again with the dissolution of the chantries. The fact that this was now considered a likely event can be supported by the evidence collected by John Guy, who has assessed that wills begin to trail off in this period as bequests to the churches were unlikely to be honoured. However, whilst some points of continuity do exist between the two reigns, this is limited, and indeed, the very lack of an able figure like Thomas Cromwell really precluded the reign of Edward from matching the depth and drive of Protestant reform despite the pressure from Edward himself.

However by 1553 and the death of Edward the English Church, whilst superficially a Protestant entity, was still very much a product of the European Catholicism it was rooted in. Whilst Edward had attempted to sweep away the ‘stains of Popery’, he had as much success in removing the deep rooted, almost superstitious beliefs of the majority as he had in penning his ‘Devise for the Succession’. In many ways, Edward’s English Church was swept away not by Mary but by the lingering affection for Catholicism that was bound to remain latent in the light of such a circumscribed rule. If time was the great healer, the wounds caused by the bifurcation of the Protestant faith were still too recent in 1553, and the bandages of the Marian regime would prove effective. By 1533, whilst much of the character of the English church was formed, particularly in regard to land and, compassed through statute law, the royal supremacy, the complaisance of both clergy and laity in easily returning to the strictures of Catholicism under Mary underscores the relative weakness of the new changes. For many, Catholicism remained the only true religion, and Henry VIII’s limited catholic regime was, to all intents and purposes, the system that Mary I was able to return to in short order in 1553.