Gold brought was, by nature, ephemeral, and there is little evidence that Wolsey had much concern for, or even understanding of, the country's long-term strategic or economic interests. Although he had a phenomenal capacity for work, Wolsey attempted so much that little was systematically pursued, save perhaps in the law. It was been suggested that he showed Henry the potential for controlling the English Church. That may be doubted. Wolsey's unique position postponed the policy of a breach with Rome that was ultimately adopted, since it seemed simpler to exploit his influence with the papacy. But his arrogance, ostentation, and pluralism helped to discredit the Church at a time when it needed all the friends it could get.

Wolsey's eventual successor as minister, Thomas Cromwell, is sometimes contrasted with the Cardinal, but the differences can be pressed too far. Cromwell was a Wolsey man and came to prominence under his patronage. It is true that Wolsey showed little faith in Parliament, while Cromwell made vigorous use of it. This is partly a matter of circumstances. As a Cardinal of the Church, Wolsey found the anti-clerical attitude of the Commons awkward, while Cromwell could make use of it as a weapon against the papacy. At an earlier stage in his career, however, Cromwell had referred to the Commons disparagingly as a talking-shop.

The 1530s saw so many reforms that the effect has been claimed as a revolution in government. That is perhaps excessive. Yet there is no doubt that Cromwell's attack upon problems was far more systematic than Wolsey's had been. Though the driving force behind Cromwell's innovations was undoubtedly the divorce, his reorganization extended much further—into the incorporation of Wales described earlier and the attempt to delineate a clearer policy towards Ireland.

Cromwell was not firmly established in power until after More's resignation in May 1532. His successor as Lord Keeper was Thomas Audley, a close colleague of Cromwell's. Cromwell succeeded not only to Wolsey's position but also to his problems. The attempt to obtain the divorce through pressure on the papacy had stalled: the military successes of Charles V meant that Catherine's nephew had the Pope *en prise*. Much of 1530 had been devoted to a fruitless attempt to obtain opinions from the universities of Europe. Even had they been unanimous which, predictably, they were not, it is far from clear how their views could have unlocked the door. Cromwell's key was a bold change of policy, using the power of Parliament to decide the issue.

The first step in the evolving strategy was an attempt to soften up the clergy by indicting fifteen of them, including eight bishops, on a charge of praemunire. Though it was not followed up with much vigour, a request to Convocation in January 1531 for a subsidy hinted that all the clergy might have been guilty of praemunire. In exchange for recognition of his position as Supreme Head of the Church of England, Henry offered a pardon. The clergy managed to salvage some dignity by submitting 'so far as the law of Christ allows'.