Diversity & Dissension

Introduction

England had its own indigenous form of heresy from the late fourteenth century among the followers of John Wyclif, generally known as Lollards, and was therefore used to the presence of heterodox opinions among the population, the religious changes of the Reformation, the evangelical movements of the earlier sixteenth century, followed by the theological changes of Edward VI’s reign, and the restoration of Catholicism under Mary, had left large numbers of people, clergy as well as laity, confused about the place of religion in the new polity, and about the ultimate destination of the changes which they had lived through (see Context; Daily Life and Worship).

The Elizabethan Settlement, when it emerged through the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity and the Thirty Nine Articles, combined a broadly conservative Episcopal ecclesiology and mode of worship with a more radical Calvinist theology. This formulation disappointed many traditionalists who were unhappy with the dismantling of a liturgical cycle of which they had grown fond through the familiarity of practice, (see Liturgy) but it also proved troubling to many of those who supported reform, who viewed the mix of conservative ecclesiology and radical theology with discomfort if not with suspicion. As a result there were large numbers among the political and intellectual elites who were lukewarm about the settlement in its early years.

Professor W.J. Sheils
University of York

Key:
Interactive glossary terms
Links to other pages on the DVD-ROM