

The Lollard movement

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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The Lollard Movement

After the Black Death, many priests were accused of deserting their flocks and fleeing from the plague – somewhat unfairly, for half the clergy had died. People felt the Church had let them down; it was said that priests were only interested in the wealthier parishes and higher wages.

John Wyclif, a teacher at Oxford University in England, claimed that the priests had become too wealthy and that people should stop paying tithes (taxes) to the Church. He argued that priests were not necessary for salvation, and denied transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine change into the actual body and blood of Christ during the Mass). He had the Bible translated from Latin into English, so that ordinary people could understand it.

Wyclif's supporters, called Lollards, came from all levels of society. His influence spread across Europe, particularly to Bohemia. His followers, dressed in rough, homespun coats, went into the countryside, preaching their new ideas to the people and reading them the Bible in their own language. Many were even more extreme than Wyclif. Sybil Godsell said that women ought to be allowed to become priests. Another woman, Hawise Moone, wanted to give the wealth of the Church to the poor. Some Lollards claimed that Christ had taught that war was evil, so they refused to fight in the army.

The Lollards were accused of being heretics. A number of Wyclif's supporters, including John Huss in Bohemia and Jerome of Prague, were burned at the stake. The Lollards continued to meet in secret; a century later many people in northern Europe accepted their ideas in the period of religious changes called the Reformation.

This Lollard refuses to accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. He will be burned to death.