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Religious Ministry in Bristol 1603-1689: Uniformity to Dissent

Jonathan Harlow, assisted by Jonathan Barry (Bristol Record Society, 2017) vol. 69.

Review for *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*

by Dr Rebecca Warren

This book seeks to illustrate, as the author notes, ‘something of the content of religious ministry of this century’, although it achieves only partial success. Its greatest strength lies in its second section, comprising a well-researched gazetteer of ministerial tenures in each city parish, in a period for which assembling comprehensive information on the clergy is very difficult. This is supplemented by a catalogue of Bristol’s lecturers and dissenting ministers and a useful appendix of individuals, although a discussion of the sources used (and not used) would have been advisable. Sections One and Three are more problematic. Section One aims to provide an historical context for the experiences of Bristol’s ministers but the tone is somewhat mannered, and it is marred by the omission of ministers’ first names, requiring constant recourse to the appendix. The structure is at times confused, burying some excellent detail within an over-generalised interpretation of wider events, and the author’s familiarity with his subject has led to inadequate explanations for the reader. The footnotes needed careful editing and are sometimes lacking. Section Three is, unfortunately, of debatable value; in cherry-picking extracts from publications by city ministers, little guidance has been given to the reader on how to understand the passages; whether they were typical or atypical, how such opinions evolved, and how they sat within the shifting nature of religious practice over the century and amongst the vast mass of other contemporary publications. Overall, a curate’s egg of a volume: good in parts.