RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

JOHN WYCLIF: THE PATH TO DISSENT

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IT is a paradox that England which was virtually free from heresy for most of the Middle Ages should have produced in John Wyclif the greatest heresiarch of the later Middle Ages. Not that Wyclif ever regarded himself as anything but a true believer; he was not condemned as a heretic in his own lifetime, nor was he ever the leader of an heretical group. In that sense he bears no comparison with Peter Valdès who founded a new sect. Yet the fact remains that Wyclif directly inspired the Lollards in England and powerfully influenced Hus and his confrères in Bohemia. Moreover, he did so through the power of his advocacy, not accidentally through the debasement or misinterpretation of his ideas as happened with the teachings of Joachim of Fiore, Peter John Olivi, and Meister Eckhart. Wyclif openly preached his challenge to the Church to be heard and acted upon; although, in being taken up, it lost many of its original nuances and refinements, he remains the author of the heresy to which it led even if he did not personally instigate it and would have recoiled—as he recoiled in the case of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381[1]—from its consequences. It is this that sets him apart from all other medieval thinkers implicated in heresy.

I

John Wyclif was born *c.* 1330 probably near Richmond in Yorkshire.[2] He spent the greater part of his career at Oxford.

[1] *De blasphemia* (Wyclif Society(W.S.), London, 1893), 189–99, 267–9.

[2] Among the growing number of books on Wyclif two stand out: H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1926); and K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1952). Workman's is the major study to date; it is comprehensive but unsystematic, especially over Wyclif's thought; it also suffers from a tendency to conjecture, which, in the case of Wyclif's Oxford and his so-called band of Poor Preachers, is groundless (an assertion repeated in E. Delaruelle, P. Ourliac, and E.-R. Labande, *L'Église au temps du Grand Schisme* (Paris, 1964), 966 ff.). McFarlane should be consulted whenever possible for an historical account as well as a

He was a Fellow of Merton in 1356, M.A. at Balliol in 1360 and D.D. in 1372. He was Warden of Canterbury College for two years before he had to resign in 1365, because its monastic constitutions made him ineligible for the office. He then lived in hired rooms in Queen's College until he finally left Oxford in 1381. During that time he held a succession of benefices as an absentee before being rewarded in 1374 with Lutterworth in Leicestershire for services to the crown. He had become connected with John of Gaunt in 1371. In July 1374 he went on a diplomatic mission to Bruges; and in 1376 he took a leading part in Gaunt's persecution of William of Wickham, by preaching against him in the pulpits of London. For these activities and his growing attack upon the Church hierachy he was summoned before William Courtenay, Bishop of London, in 1377. But he was preserved from any censure by Gaunt's presence. Wyclif had already begun to put forward his views on lordship and church possessions in his *De civili dominio*, published between 1376 and 1378; and in 1377 eighteen articles from the work were condemned by Pope Gregory XI to whom extracts had been sent.[1] Once again, however, Wyclif was saved by his protectors and later by the outbreak of the Great Schism in 1378. No attempt was made to arrest him as the Pope had decreed. By mutual agreement with the university he was merely confined to Black Hall at Oxford while his teachings were investigated. The verdict was that, although 'they sounded badly to the ear', they were true.[2] He was next called before the Archbishop of Canterbury; after at first refusing to go, when he did appear he was again virtually absolved, this time through the Queen Mother's presence.[3] After this Wyclif was left undisturbed until 1381.

The year 1378, however, marked the watershed in his career, as has long been recognized. It saw the completion of both his royal service and his *De civili dominio*, the first major work of his

corrective to Workman. It does not deal with Wyclif's thought. For this see J. A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* (Cambridge, 1961), down to the end of his metaphysical phase (together with the bibliography contained there). There is no satisfactory account of Wyclif's outlook as a whole. His own works (in Latin: those ascribed to him in English, where they are not translations, are doubtful) have been almost entirely edited by the Wyclif Society.

[1] Published in *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* (henceforward *F.Z.*), ed. W. W. Shirley (London, 1858), 242–4; D. Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii (London, 1737), 116–18; and T. Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley, i (London, 1869), 345–53.

[2] McFarlane, 81; Workman, i. 305–6.

[3] McFarlane, 81–82; Workman, i. 308–9.

new theological and ecclesiological phase. It was only the beginning. Over the next five years Wyclif reached an extreme anti-sacerdotalism which left most of what he had written in *De civili dominio* far behind. Nevertheless, as the result of Gregory XI's condemnation, the eighteen articles continued to be taken as the standard Wyclifite tenets, especially those concerning dominion and grace. This has had the effect of magnifying the latter's importance in Wyclif's outlook, whereas, as I hope to show, they were transitory, effectively superseded within a year or so by Wyclif's subsequent writings on the Church, Pope, and King. During this period, work followed work with a febrile intensity. They were increasingly dominated by his obsession with the Church's betrayal of Christ, and, from 1380, the problem of the Eucharist. Beginning in 1378 with *De veritate sacre scripture*, as yet comparatively moderate, Wyclif made a swift progression from unqualified fundamentalism to a full statement of his heretical view of the Church in *De ecclesia*,[1] already foreshadowed in *De civili dominio*. Shortly afterwards, in November of the same year, Wyclif wrote *De officio regis* asserting the king's supremacy over all his subjects, including the priesthood, and thereby nullified what he had said about civil lordship in *De civili dominio*. In 1379 his *De potestate pape* completed his disavowal of the hierarchy, above all the Pope and cardinals, begun in his previous book. His subsequent writings[2] and sermons added little or nothing to his doctrines of the Bible, Church, and lay power. The difference was one of tone, which was of sustained virulence. Much of it was due to the other element in Wyclif's mature doctrine—the Eucharist. It was formulated in 1379 in two works, *De apostasia* and *De eucharistia*. These acted as the catalyst to his break with the past. That his comparatively innocuous eucharistic propositions should have become the focal point of his heresy is the measure of how far he had already travelled from orthodoxy. The reaction to them was almost immediate. It lost him the support of the friars, many of whom had been his allies in attacking ecclesiastical abuses: they now became among the bitterest targets of his invective. His last plea to his erstwhile friends among the friars testifies to the breach the Eucharist had made.[3] The effect upon Wyclif's life at Oxford was equally far-reaching. In 1381 his doctrine was

[1] 1378.

[2] e.g. especially *Polemical Works*, *Opera minora*, *De blasphemia*, the *Opus evangelicum*, and *Sermons*.

[3] *De apostasia* (W.S., London, 1889), 44.

condemned by a commission of twelve appointed by the chancellor, William Barton, one of Wyclif's academic opponents, and its teaching proscribed on pain of excommunication.[1] Wyclif was taken by surprise. He vainly appealed to the king.[2] He then published his *Confession* in May 1381 defending his views.[3] By the end of the summer he left Oxford for ever.

While Wyclif retired to his rectory at Lutterworth, William Courtenay, now Archbishop of Canterbury, acted against his teachings and his followers at Oxford. In May 1382 he convened a synod at Blackfriars (the so-called Earthquake Council) where twenty-four propositions from Wyclif's works were condemned.[4] Courtenay then went on to enforce the ban at Oxford. Wyclif was not mentioned as the author of the twenty-four articles, and he remained unmolested at Lutterworth; but his name headed the list of those banned from preaching at Oxford and he may well have been made to submit.[5] He passed the last three years of his life at Lutterworth in a frenzy of writing.[6] Indeed the works of this last phase often lose any separate identity; the topics merge into a refrain repeated with variations; structure and relevance, the lack of which at the best of times makes reading Wyclif a trial, largely vanish.

It was not until 1407 that Arundel, then Archbishop of Canterbury, set up a committee to examine all Wyclif's works. This resulted in a comprehensive list of 267 articles censured as heretical or unsound.[7] They were sent to Rome. While they were never condemned in their entirety, some of his works were burned at Rome in 1413;[8] and the forty-five articles first banned at Prague in 1405[9] were again proscribed at the Council of Constance in 1415.[10] Thus Wyclif officially became a heretic twenty years after his death, but the other decree of the Council of Constance, that his body be exhumed, had to wait until 1428

[1] Text in *F.Z.*, 105–14. [2] Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii. 171.

[3] *F.Z.*, 116–31.

[4] Printed in Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii. 159–60; it is translated in Workman, ii, Appendix T, 416–17.

[5] McFarlane, 115–16.

[6] He seems to have suffered a stroke in these later years; his secretary, John Purvey, later a prominent Lollard, was his amanuensis. McFarlane, 119–20.

[7] *Snappe's Formulary*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford, 1924), 128–30.

[8] Mansi, *Concilia*, vol. 27, cols. 505 ff.

[9] F. Palacký, *Documenta Mag. Joannis Hus* (Prague, 1869), 327–30, 430.

[10] Mansi, *Concilia*, vol. 27, cols. 610, 630; not, as Workman (ii. 319) says, the whole 267.

to be carried out; his remains were then thrown into a stream at Lutterworth.[1] By then the ideas which Wyclif had propagated had been taken up by others and had produced their own martyrs.

II

As a thinker Wyclif was an extremist. In his earlier, metaphysical, phase he pressed his conclusions beyond the limits of reason; later, when he turned to theology and ecclesiology, he went beyond the bounds of faith. Yet, like most medieval dissidents, his premisses belonged to Christian tradition; and to Wyclif his outlook embodied it. To make the cause of his divergence exclusively intellectual would be as mistaken as to see it solely in terms of his personal fortunes. That Wyclif's progression to heresy was not simply an autonomous development of his ideas without reference to experience can be seen in his changed tone after 1378 and more especially in the conclusions he drew from the Eucharist—conclusions which had been open to him philosophically for fifteen or more years. Equally, it shows that his ideas were not independent of his experience in the world of affairs.[2] Indeed, more than with most scholastics, it would be artificial to separate in Wyclif the thinker from the man and to attribute his heresy to one rather than the other. At most, events accentuated a fundamentally constant orientation. This was largely determined by his metaphysics and temperament; they gave a unity to much of his theology and ecclesiology, which was both his strength and his weakness. It enabled him to set his protest against the Church within a comprehensive theoretical framework and to conduct it on a variety of fronts. He brought to it considerable dialectical skill and sometimes eloquence. This made him a formidable opponent even when, as so often, he was defending the indefensible. His conviction and undoubted sincerity gave him certainty at a time when the dominant intellectual climate was doubt. These attributes combined to establish his supremacy at Oxford: it took official action after his departure to destroy it. On the other hand, being wiser after

[1] On the Lollards see especially: McFarlane, op. cit., 100 ff.; M. E. Aston, 'Lollardy and Sedition', *Past and Present*, no. 17 (1960), 1–44; J. A. F. Thompson, *The Later Lollards 1414–1520* (Oxford, 1965).

[2] He was passed over for a prebend at Lincoln in 1373. McFarlane, 27, thinks 'that a plum or two even as late as the early 1370's . . . might have shut his mouth for ever', and that his 'frenzied attacks' upon institutions and doctrines were partly the result of 'the flattering attentions of the great' and possibly of physical causes (ibid. 85). See also 30, 67–68, 84.

the event, we can perhaps more easily recognize Wyclif's flaws: he was unsubtle and repetitive; the system, for all its elaboration in work after work, turns out on closer inspection to be little more than a few guiding threads cocooned in endless words; the arguments, rigorous in themselves, lack structure; the exposition consists in reiteration rather than development; the dialectical agility hides mental rigidity; the certainty was more often an inflexible resolve to force square pegs into round holes. But if these are shortcomings in a thinker, they can be a source of strength in an advocate. In the latter role Wyclif was supreme. He left an imprint upon history which cannot be effaced. For this reason, however much we may dismiss his ideas on a purely intellectual plane, we cannot ignore them.

III

Philosophically Wyclif is classed as an extreme realist. He believed in the self-subsistence of all universal concepts, such as goodness, man, animal, and so on; and only stopped short of the Platonists, who made them autonomous, by locating them eternally in God. The majority of medieval thinkers, with the exception of the Ockhamists, or terminists, of Wyclif's own epoch, subscribed to realism to the degree of positing an essence or nature in every recognizable being which made it what it was —the humanity in a man, the equinity in a horse, and so on. The differences arose over the status of this common nature: did humanity or equinity exist in its own right, independently of and prior to individuals? or through their medium? Those who asserted their independence were extreme realists. Wyclif was of their number, which had never been great and was virtually extinct by his day. But Wyclif did more than revive a position which had been effectively destroyed by Abelard 250 years before. He characteristically extended the notion of self-subsistent being to all God's archetypes of creatures. They were all what he called intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*). This constituted the idea which God had of every creature and which inhered eternally in him. As such it was inseparable from God's own essence. This was traditional enough, going back to St. Augustine. But where Wyclif passed beyond tradition was in defining these archetypes as both idea and being, in virtue of their participating in God's being. In consequence each creature had his source in an archetype which was also being in God. God in knowing and willing each creature's being was thereby endowing his image of it with his own being. The effect was to

make being and intelligibility identical both in God and among his creatures.[1] Not that they had the same being.[2] Wyclif was never remotely in danger of pantheism because, like every good Christian, he made creation the result of an act of God's will by which he conferred being upon what had previously been nothing. But, like Bradwardine, though by a distinctive metaphysics, Wyclif bound the whole of creation so closely to God's will that he thereby excluded contingency and freedom from the universe. As conceived by Wyclif every creature possessed a threefold order of being: his intelligible being as an archetype which resided eternally in God; potential being among secondary causes, namely the possibility that parents will have a child or an acorn give rise to an oak tree; and actual being when this results in the generation of a specific individual child or tree.[3] Of these only the first was eternal; the other two occurred in time and place. Hence, an individual's being was part of creation and not God.[4] Nevertheless what Wyclif had done was to treat individual existence in place and time as merely accidental to its eternal being in God. The effect was momentous. By making the individual's archetype share God's being Wyclif conferred upon it the same attributes of eternity, necessity, and indestructibility as God enjoyed.[5] Since, moreover, all created being was in turn dependent upon that of the *esse intelligibile* in God, these same attributes were transmitted to the order of creation. For, if a creature's being was merely the temporal realization of its eternal archetype, it was itself antecedently eternal and necessary; it could not be destroyed without the destruction of the archetype through whose being its own was made possible.[6] Everything was tied to everything else by an

[1] *Miscellanea philosophica*, 2 vols. (W.S., 1901–2), i. 231. Ideo satis est pro sensu philosophorum quod esse generatione productum sive effectum habet suum esse intelligibile pro mensura eternitatis ... cum sit veritas absolute necessaria, idem essentialiter cum deo. [2] e.g. *De dominio divino* (W.S., 1890), 179.

[3] cum omni creature simul insunt (illa tria) secundum quemdam ordinem: ut esse intelligibile creature est eius esse supremum; quod esse est eternum in hoc quod deus eternaliter existere tempore suo; et post illud esse sequitur esse possibile creature in causis secundis ordinatis a deo ad producendum creaturam in tempore suo et illud est temporale medians inter esse intelligibile et esse existere; 3° vero sequitur esse existere vel esse accidentale creature in suo genere (*De ente* (W.S., 1909), 101–2).

[4] Moreover, they were formally distinct from God's being. *De dominio divino*, 195.

[5] *Miscellanea philosophica*, ii. 170–4; *De ente*, 43, 62–63, 287–308; *De ente predicamentali* (W.S., 1891), 1–2.

[6] e.g. Impossibile est ens aut veritatem esse nisi vel deum vel causatum

eternal chain of being which God was as powerless as his creatures to dissolve.[1] It is characteristic of Wyclif that he fully accepted these implications. He seems to imply that he may once have been a terminist, accepting only the reality of individuals and regarding all general categories as merely mental descriptions.[2] Later he came to find the truth in the reality and pre-eminence of universal being.[3] The firmness with which Wyclif adhered to his discovery and the active part which it played in formulating his subsequent notions suggest that he regarded it as something of a revelation. Certainly his faith in his own brand of realism remained unimpaired to the end, and, as we shall see, bore directly upon his eucharistic teaching. He had also to defend it early on from criticism in the Oxford schools before it carried any such doctrinal overtones. His most notable dispute was with the East Anglian Carmelite, John Kenningham. It took place probably between 1372 and 1374 when Wyclif was incepting in the theological faculty.[4] It illustrates clearly how early Wyclif was diverging from orthodoxy. Kenningham argued that Wyclif's notion of the *esse intelligibile*, by endowing all that God knew with being, entailed that the future must already be. God's eternal knowledge of Antichrist, for example, meant, on Wyclif's assumption, that Antichrist already existed—even though its coming was for the end of the world.[5] Wyclif's mistake, said Kenningham, was to separate a creature's being in God from its actual existence in time.[6] It led also to the absurdity of Wyclif's claim that every word in the Bible was strictly true for all time: a position which, as we shall later mention, Wyclif had to modify. But on the main issue of the *esse intelligibile* he was immovable. It would, he replied to Kenningham, be a contradiction for God to know what was not; therefore all that God knew must be.[7]

a deo mediate vel immediate; sed annihilatio nec potest esse deus nec causata a deo; igitur non potest esse (*De ente*, 288. See also *Summa de ente*, ed. H. S. Thomson (Oxford, 1930), 2 and 20).

[1] This was to be emphasized later in Wyclif's eucharistic teaching where he said that God was bound to sustain an accident in its subject. *De apostasia*, *De eucharistia*, *Trialogus*, *passim*; and pp. 177–8 below.

[2] Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*, 145. [3] Ibid.

[4] Robson dates them *c.* 1372–4 (ibid. 163). [5] *F.Z.*, 33–35. [6] Ibid. 10.

[7] sed contradictionem claudit deum quicquam cognoscere nisi proportionaliter habeat esse.... Et sic concesserunt (sancti doctores) quod omne quod potest esse, est; et quod deus solum possibilia potest cognoscere (ibid. 463–4). It will be observed that Wyclif invokes the support of the 'holy doctors'—in this context St. Thomas Aquinas.

He went on to draw the corollaries that such being, as part of God, was eternal, necessary, and indestructible.[1]

Here, then, was a God who, despite Wyclif's protestations, was bound by his own knowledge; he was also made to share his attributes with the product of his knowledge—the *esse intelligibile*. In consequence, contingency was effectively denied. It could only apply to the transition between Wyclif's second and third categories of being: to the phase before possible being became actual existence in time. As soon as this occurred the individual became necessary in that it could no longer not be: as Wyclif said, what previously need not have been now had to be.[2] It was conditionally necessary (*ex suppositione*), being freely willed by God, unlike the archetype which was absolutely necessary, as inseparable from his knowledge.[3] By this distinction Wyclif, like Bradwardine, sought to preserve a creature's freedom. God's will had to be done when once he had willed, but he willed it freely. It was therefore the source of both contingency and necessity.[4] In fact, however, this was to reduce creation to the working of God's will in time; time thus became the medium for its realization.[5] As such time marked the point at which contingency was transposed into necessity. In its duration, said Wyclif, lay the difference between the possible and the necessary.[6] Once realized in time a being's progression was always to necessity and away from contingency; the contingent could become necessary but the necessary never contingent.[7] The reason was that, for Wyclif, being, however it originated, was necessary because from God.[8] Wyclif was so concerned

[1] *De ente*, 62, 63, 111, 116, 305; *Misc. Philosophica*, 75, 77, 229; *F.Z.*, 475, 476.

[2] dicitur quod ex contingenti fit necessarium, non quidem ut ex nocte fit dies, sed idem quod iam est contingens erit alias necessarium . . . per hoc quod oportet ipsum esse postquam fuit possibile ipsum non esse (*Misc. philosophica*, i. 75).

[3] Ibid. 66–67, 74, 229; and *F.Z.*, 465. [4] *Misc. philosophica*, i. 78.

[5] Ymmo ens communicatur omni existenti in aliquo tempore preterito vel futuro, et hoc absolute necessario, quamvis contingenter secundum esse existere (*De ente*, 63).

[6] Non igitur videtur mihi quod inter proprietatem contingentis ad utrumlibet et proprietatem necessarii sit talis magna distantia nisi quoad ad durationem temporis (*Misc. philosophica*, i. 77).

[7] Nam contingens potest mutari in necessarium, sed non est possibile e contra, quia semper proficit et non desinit quantum ad perpetua (*Misc. philosophica*, i. 75).

[8] e.g. Omne quod est deo presens est; omne quod fuit vel erit est deo presens; igitur omne quod fuit vel erit, est (*F.Z.*, 475).

to vindicate God's decrees at a time when theological possibilities of evading them were widespread that he ended, like Bradwardine, by constricting him. The God who must transmit his necessity to all that he sees or moves is more limited than one who can retain his own attributes while preserving the freedom of his creatures. How God was able to reconcile these different modes was one of the accepted Christian mysteries. Wyclif in attempting to strip away the veil only managed to reduce God and his creatures to the single dimension of necessity. If it destroyed the contingency of creation it also impaired God's freedom. Wyclif never dwelt at length on the powers of free will, probably because even he would have had little positive to say within the context of his metaphysics.

Far more significant were the necessity, eternity, and indestructibility of all being, which approximated more to a Plotinian conception, of being as an eternal procession, from archetype to individual and back again, than to the Christian notion of all creation as temporal and contingent.[1] Necessity, eternity, and indestructibility were the media through which Wyclif conceived all existence. He subsequently extended them to his treatment of theological and ecclesiological questions. They formed, as it were, the poles around which his thinking revolved and to which it always returned. Whether deliberately employed, or merely a frame of mind, their influence was profound as we shall now see.

IV

The centre of Wyclif's outlook—and heresy—has usually been seen in his exalting of the Bible at the expense of the Church, or at least its traditions. It has seemed that, if he did not actually preach a doctrine of *scriptura sola*, he came very near to it and to the Reformers of the sixteenth century. Schoolman all have recognized him to be; but also innovator. Recently this assessment has been questioned.[2] A comparison with earlier medieval thinkers shows that there was an unbroken tradition of treating the Bible as the basis of belief and the criterion of all doctrine. Wyclif's veneration of the Bible, it is held, was nothing new apart from the fervour with which he

[1] See B. Smalley, 'The Bible and Eternity: John Wyclif's dilemma', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964), 73–89, who likens his notion of time to that of Plotinus rather than St. Augustine.

[2] P. de Vooght, *Les sources de la doctrine chrétienne* (Louvain, 1954), especially 168 ff.

expressed it. This has not gone unchallenged;[1] and we now have chapter and verse to establish Wyclif's continuity with the past and his break from it. Where does the truth lie? With neither, I suggest, as it stands. Formally each can be accepted: Wyclif was treating the Bible much as his predecessors had done; he was also investing it with a different significance from theirs. But this lay not within the Bible itself but in his attitude to the Church, which he regarded in an entirely new light. To revere the Bible as the inviolable word of God is the right of any believer; it only becomes dangerous and subversive if it is contraposed to the Church; and this only arises when the Church is no longer accepted as conforming to God's word. It is, therefore, the attitude to the Church which determines the significance attached to the Bible, rather than vice versa. Wyclif was no exception. Indeed, far from being the first to turn the Bible against the Church hierarchy of his day, he was the culmination of a line which went back to at least the twelfth century among the Waldensians and other apostolic groups. During the fourteenth century, under the impetus particularly of the Franciscan disputes on poverty, there had been an increasing tendency to attack the present Church for betraying the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. Dante, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, and Dietrich of Niem, each in different ways invoked the primitive Church against the Roman hierarchy and demanded a return to the apostolic past. Marsilius and Dietrich said most of what Wyclif said against the primacy of Rome, while the Franciscan publicists among whom Ockham was prominent had preached the abandonment of possessions and jurisdiction for those true to Christ. Nor can Wyclif be validly held to have pioneered a new form of biblical literalism. Literal interpretation of scripture was an indispensable element in all biblical exegesis; indeed it had a golden era among the school of St. Victor in the twelfth century.[2] Wyclif, like any exegete, was more than a literalist. It has been rightly pointed out that he adhered to the formal methods of scriptural interpretation, and opposed individual attempts at elucidation.[3] Far more disruptive was his use of the Bible historically, as a document for past

[1] M. Hurley, '"Scriptura sola": Wyclif and his critics', *Traditio*, 16 (1960), 275–352. De Vooght replied to Hurley in 'Wyclif et la "Scriptura sola" ', *Ephemerides Theologicas Lovanienses*, 39 (1963), 50–86.

[2] B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), 120 ff., especially Andrew of St. Victor.

[3] De Vooght, ibid. 71.

events. It was here that his fundamentalism entered. But again we must remember that this had also been done, albeit on a different basis, by John of Paris, Marsilius of Padua, and Ockham as well as countless Franciscan Spirituals, Joachists, and Waldensians. For all of them the Bible was historical evidence for the discrepancy between Christian precept and ecclesiastical practice. Neither for his attacks upon the Church nor for his weapons was Wyclif an innovator. His solutions were not strikingly different from those of Marsilius of Padua or Dietrich of Niem. Ultimately as a critic of the Church Wyclif was one more moralist appealing to Christ's example. As such he was of a large company extending over centuries. His uniqueness lies not in being an advocate of reform but in the outlook which inspired his advocacy.

It was founded upon the metaphysical presuppositions to which we have already alluded, namely, the conviction that everything was in essence timeless and changeless and independent of the vagaries of the created world. This applied equally to the Bible and the Church. But while it led him to fundamentalism over the Bible, it caused him to reject the existing form of the Church for its archetypal reality. The paradox that such opposing conclusions were reached from the same premiss is more apparent than real. The Bible as God's word was true in itself; it therefore literally sufficed. To seek the Church in its corresponding essentiality, however, meant going beyond its temporal existence to its true nature as conceived in God. It was not a matter of making scripture more important than the Church but of each being independent of time and place. They were coeternal in truth. Far from the Bible displacing the Church it was invoked in its defence; for, as God's word, it was the criterion of truth and falsity.

Wyclif's doctrine of the Bible is, as with much of his thought, far from consistent. He was a writer of moods, with sudden and often self-contradictory shifts of position, as there will be occasion to observe. His reverence for the Bible's truth was absolute. He wanted to believe that every word in it was literally true and eternally unchanging, as for a time he maintained against Kenningham.[1] But it was an untenable position. To say, as Kenningham insisted, that each word was in itself true (*vi vocis*) led to absurdities in standing contradictory statements together. Wyclif then modified his position to mean the strict sense of the words (*de virtute sermonis*).[2] Even so, the

[1] *F.Z.*, 14. [2] Ibid. 20.

difficulty remained of making a statement hold forever. When, for example, Amos said: 'I am not a prophet', this would deny that he could ever be a prophet—a statement palpably at variance with other passages in the Bible.[1] Wyclif was compelled to change his ground from eternity to metaphor, nor did he ever attempt to regain it: prophecy here, he said, meant the gift of prophecy at a particular time.[2] Henceforth Wyclif accepted a fundamentally traditional interpretation of the Bible with a fundamentalist attitude to its truth. On the one hand, it was God's word ever-present in its eternal truth; every part of it had to be taken absolutely and without qualification.[3] As truth it contained all that could be known: nothing could be added to it or subtracted from it.[4] As the mirror of God it was also the mirror of conduct, the norm to which all men must conform.[5] Yet on the other hand it was not enough just to read it in order to know what these truths were. For all the Bible's self-sufficiency and infallibility, Wyclif no longer treated it as simply an open book. Like every other medieval thinker he accepted that not all of it was equally accessible. With St. Augustine he distinguished between its explicit and implicit meaning.[6] The latter was not immediately apparent and had to be deduced by reason, as it conformed to the truths of metaphysics,[7] and the testimony of the saints and other trusted authorities who upheld the apostolic tradition. Together these constituted the *sensus catholicus*. Although the metaphysics were Wyclif's, and his choice of authorities his own, their invocation is important on two counts. In the first place, Wyclif remained a fundamentalist, in believing that everything in the Bible was eternally true, without attempting to make his interpretation of the truth exclusively literal. Rather he sought to give it a metaphysical connotation by translating the meaning of the words into reality,[8] as opposed to the terminists whom he accused of trying to exploit its verbal

[1] Ibid. 20–22. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. 474; also *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 1–2 and *passim*, ii. 99; *De officio regis*, 221, *Sermons*, iv. 140.

[4] e.g. *De civili dominio*, i. 118–24, 391, 427; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 395, 399, 402 and *passim*, ii. 181–4; *Sermons*, i. 83, iii. 283; *Pol. Works*, i. 257; *De blasphemia*, 44–51.

[5] *De civili dominio*, i. 120–1, 377–9; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 20, 80; *De eucharistia*, 41; *Sermons*, iii. 389, iv. 79; *Pol. Works*, i. 14; *De officio regis*, 10, 111; *De potestate pape*, 34.

[6] *Trialogus* (Oxford, 1869), 240. Ch. 31 of Bk. III provides a résumé of Wyclif's scriptural doctrine.

[7] Ibid. 241–3. [8] Ibid. 242–3.

inconsistencies.[1] The difference that it made was less in Wyclif's interpretation of scriptural texts, where like most men he found the meaning that he sought, than in his attitude to the Bible. It was for him a metaphysical entity, eternally in being with every word, however understood, denoting an ever-present truth. It led him to embrace it with a fervour which was nearer to fanaticism and which really distinguishes his approach to the Bible. In the second place, his reliance upon the saints and those true to Catholic tradition has nothing to do with a doctrine of *scriptura sola*. Wyclif believed no less than others in a *sensus catholicus*, which was based upon the Bible.[2] It was the purely human laws of the recent Church which he opposed. This again took him away from a simple individual and literal approach. Those who were to be treated as authorities, among whom St. Augustine was pre-eminent, were those who had proved themselves by their faith in the Bible and the sanctity of their own lives.[3] Reason could be an instrument of understanding only for those enjoying such a moral state.[4] When thus properly applied, true belief resulted. It was confirmed and strengthened by the testimony of the Fathers and others, who, besides St. Augustine, included Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, and Grosseteste.[5] It was *fides quaerens intellectum* over again, but this time with the Bible as the object of faith and the individual believer buttressed by the full weight of apostolic authority and a proper understanding of metaphysics.[6] Wyclif stressed each person's responsibility to know the Bible and defend it.[7] While he should be prepared to do so against any wrong interpretation—even among the Fathers discrepancies called for individual judgement[8]—the main adversary in view was the present hierarchy of the Church. It was this which made Wyclif's insistence upon a believer's adhesion to the Bible, even to the point of accepting what he

[1] *Trialogus*, 241.

[2] patet quod necesse est stare concorditer expositioni sensuum quos sancti doctores concorditer elicuerant. Aliter enim liceret extorquere sensum scripture ad votum peccantis, quod hodie incipit in multis (*De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 386).

[3] Debemus ergo acceptare testimonium Augustini specialiter propter tria. Primo propter testimonium scripture. Secundo propter fortitudinem rationis, que consonat dictis suis; et tertio topice propter famam sanctitatis sue ab ecclesia approbate (*De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 36).

[4] Ibid. 60, 249. [5] Ibid. 37 ff. [6] Ibid. 201, 249.

[7] Ibid. 136; *Dialogus*, 93.

[8] Ibid. iii. 284–5; *De eucharistia*, 277.

could not understand, no matter how unlikely,[1] so crucial to his outlook. It meant the exclusion of the Church in its existing state from the dialogue between the individual and tradition; in place of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Wyclif put God's word fittingly interpreted. The latter became the mediator between God and the faithful. It, not the Church, was the arbiter of truth.

This, I suggest, was Wyclif's real break with the past. He appealed over the heads of pope and prelates direct to scripture and the apostolic tradition; in turning to them he was disavowing the Church as it stood. The grounds for his doing so were more than a sense of betrayal, although, in practice, this formed the heart of his attack upon the Church. They lay in his conception of the Church which, like that of the Bible, had a metaphysical basis. Whether or not his metaphysics set him upon the path to dissent, they unquestionably helped to lead him along it. They provided him with the means for disavowing the present visible Church in the name of its true archetypal reality which existed independently and eternally. Moreover, he was able to do so by turning to the Bible for infallible evidence of its true apostolic state. His doctrine of the Bible was thus inseparable from his notion of the Church. It was at this point that his teachings became explosive. Fundamentalism alone could deny the false claims of the hierarchy; it could hardly deny that the Church was the Church. But fundamentalism harnessed to a doctrine which denied that the visible Church was necessarily the real Church left no other criterion for authority than the Bible: hence its importance in Wyclif's treatment of the Church. Here, as elsewhere, he owed much of his initial impulse to the influence of St. Augustine even if their final conclusions bore no recognizable affinity. St. Augustine in his *De civitate dei* had distinguished between the two cities, the heavenly and the earthly. The members of the heavenly city were the saved who would enjoy everlasting life; those of the earthly city were the damned. All believers, however, reprobate as well as elect, belonged to the Church on earth while in this world; only when they departed it were they separated. Augustine saw all human history as the movement of mankind to its final destiny under the saving will of God. But what for St. Augustine had been an

[1] Ecce, regula huius sancti est ut honoremus scripturam sacram, credentes quod, quandoque falsa de illa concipimus, est ex nostra ignorantia, ipsa manente undique summe auctoritatis incorrigibiliter ordinata (*De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 61).

eschatological division, Wyclif, in keeping with his conception of time, made ever-present. He foreshortened the entire process by keeping the two cities apart from the outset. Since only the saved were destined for the heavenly city, they alone were of the Church; the damned, called by Wyclif the foreknown (the *presciti*), were eternally excluded. The status of each remained what it was eternally. Nowhere is the character of Wyclif's thinking more clearly exposed than here. His desire to reduce everything to its archetypal reality led him to the complete separation of the saved and the damned. Eternally distinct conceptually, they must remain so existentially. Each represented a different mode of being; hence they could not merge. The effects were far-reaching.

To begin with, the Church became defined as the community of the elect (*congregatio predestinatorum*).[1] If it remained the expression of God's saving will, both its composition and efficacy were confined to those eternally saved. Wyclif here opened up a chasm between himself and tradition that was unbridgeable. More than any other tenet it made him heretical, as it was to make Hus who followed him in it. Moreover, it was at the opposite extreme from even Marsilius of Padua, who largely derived his destructive effects from emphasizing the accepted definition of the Church, as the community of all believers, to the point where it should have no separate corporate existence. Wyclif seems first to have put forward his conception in *De civili dominio*;[2] it was elaborated more fully in his treatise on the Church, *De ecclesia*. But, like all Wyclif's leading ideas, once formulated, it recurred in work after work regardless of the ostensible theme: it formed the main armoury in his general attack upon the existing ecclesiastical order.[3] Those who were truly of the Church, he said, were bound together eternally by the grace of predestination; it enabled them to remain in a state of election until the end.[4] This was an essentially Augustinian

[1] e.g. Quamvis autem ecclesia dicitur multipliciter in scriptura, suppono quod sumatur ad propositionem pro famosiori, scilicet congregatione omnium predestinatorum (*De ecclesia*, 2). Also ibid. 7, and *Supplementum trialogi*, 415.

[2] *De civili dominio*, i. 288: Tertio vero accipitur ecclesia pro universitate sanctorum. In *De dominio divino*, 235, he still adhered to Uthred of Boldon's final option (Hurley, 'Scriptura sola', 284). Workman (ii. 9) was wrong in saying that he inherited his doctrine from Bradwardine.

[3] e.g. *De potestate pape*, 25; *De eucharistia*, 98–99; *Supplementum trialogi*, 415; *Opus evangelicum*, 119–20; *Sermons*, iv. 42–45, 148; *Opera minora*, 100, 118–19, 176.

[4] *De ecclesia*, 107, 111.

concept which Wyclif again took to extremes in granting the elect immunity from the consequences of mortal sin; their grace of predestination remained unimpaired by it.[1] Once more the truths of eternity triumphed over the vagaries of time.

Secondly, the Church was not only timeless but also outside space: it was not a physical entity, or as he put it a spatial and temporal continuum, but in being wherever the elect were.[2] It was in three parts corresponding to their disposition—the triumphant Church in heaven, the sleeping Church in purgatory, and the militant Church on earth.[3] It therefore had existed before the Incarnation; as with any being, its true nature or *esse intelligibile* was for all time, in its species, principles, individuals, and causes.[4]

Thirdly, the unity of the damned was no less absolute. Just as the saved were eternally joined to one another by the grace of predestination, with Christ at their head, so the foreknown shared eternal exclusion from God's company, under Antichrist.[5] They therefore constituted a parallel congregation, made up of the three classes of infidels, heretics, and those not chosen.[6] Furthermore, in lacking the grace of final perseverance, their grace in this world, however great, did not suffice for salvation. Hence, in contradistinction to the saved, those who were unsaved remained in mortal sin, even though temporally in grace.[7] Each body was eternally constituted, and the destiny of every member irrevocable.

Fourthly, these divisions meant that in practice the Church as a visible body lost any identity. Here, in striking contrast to his insistence upon the sovereignty of every word in scripture, Wyclif never ceased to stress that in this world neither the damned nor the saved could be known. These were, he said, three mysteries hidden from all men: whether they were predestined to glory or reprobation; when they would die; and the

[1] Quo ad secundum dicitur cum nemo dubitat quin multi predestinati peccarunt mortaliter . . . manifestum est quod gratia predestinationis stat cum peccato mortali (ibid. 139). See also *Trialogus*, 149–50.

[2] *De ecclesia*, 99.

[3] Ibid. 8.

[4] Ibid. 106.

[5] manifestum est quod est unum corpus diaboli, sicut est unum corpus Christi. . . . Forma autem extrinseca est prescientia dei eterna qua scit et ordinat omnes tales constringi ad penam perpetuam; deformitas autem intrinseca est finalis inobedentia vel superbia (ibid. 102–3).

[6] Ibid. 63.

[7] . . . gratia presciti secundum presentem iustitiam repugnat dampnationi, licit aggregata ex illa gratia et prescientia inferat necessario dampnationem (ibid. 139).

day of judgement.[1] Now it was the emphasis upon our ignorance which, perhaps more than anything else, made Wyclif's ecclesiology so disruptive, for it undermined the certainty of the existing order. If only those chosen by God belonged to the Church, and they could not be known, there was no reason for accepting any visible priestly authority or for recognizing the powers of those who exercised it. More: there was no reason for such authority at all; if those elected remained of the elect regardless of temporal vicissitudes, nothing could further or detract from their final glory. Likewise for the damned in their damnation. The Church in its traditional form therefore lost its *raison d'être*.

Wyclif fully accepted these implications. They led him to discount the visible Church for the true Church outside space and time. As the body of Christ its members owed allegiance only to Christ.[2] He was, to use a favourite phrase, its chief abbot;[3] faith in the authority of any local church was due only in so far as it emanated from Christ.[4] The test therefore became conformity to Christ's word and example as found in the Bible. Its invocation completed a pincer movement, as it were, from which the visible Church had no chance of survival as an entity in its own right, at least in its present form. Anyone could, and many did, point to discrepancies between the Bible and current church practice without denying the Church's reason to exist. The challenge was not then to the Church as a body, even if, as with Marsilius of Padua and many Joachists, it would have entailed a thoroughgoing reformation. The aim was rather to revivify the existing Church as the only true congregation of believers. The same cannot be said of Wyclif: for him the true Church bore no direct or discernible relation to the present one. Like so many later medievals he was obsessed by the presence of Antichrist; and, under the stress of time, gradually came to identify the endowed Church with Antichrist and see it as the Church of the reprobate. In later works like *De blasphemia*, the *Opus evangelicum*, and in many sermons, the presence of Antichrist becomes all-pervasive, to be found in the abuses which infect the Church and the religious orders.

From the outset, Wyclif's metaphysical conception of the two bodies of Christ and Antichrist engendered an ambivalence to the Church which ultimately became irreconcilable. On the one hand, since the Church was constituted from an elect, who

[1] e.g. *De civili dominio*, i. 25; *De ecclesia*, 251; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 216.
[2] *De ecclesia*, 7, 94, 99.
[3] e.g. *De civili dominio*, ii. 166, iii. 5.
[4] *De civili dominio*, i. 375.

were unknown, there could be no guarantee of the authority of any pope, prelate, or priest: they might all be of the *presciti*; and, if they were, they should not be obeyed.[1] At the same time, every member of the elect, as alone of the true Church, could be ordained of God just as any layman could receive from him sacerdotal powers.[2] This was tantamount to the denial of the priesthood as an order. As such it must be accounted the single most destructive and heretical feature in Wyclif's teaching. As he himself expressed it, there was no need to be a cleric in orders to be a priest;[3] conversely to be ordained a priest offered no certainty of God's approval or authority.[4] This inevitably opened the way to taking God's law into one's own hands; or, more precisely, for making his word in scripture the sole criterion of truth in conformity with the *sensus catholicus*. On the other hand, Wyclif, for all his willingness to discount the hierarchy as metaphysically unverifiable, could not resist the very application of the *sensus catholicus* to judge it. According to whether a priest or pope conformed to Christ's teaching and example, he was, as we have mentioned, to be accepted or rejected. Fundamentalism was made to serve pragmatism as well as metaphysics. The Bible was the bridge between them—the visible expression of eternity, as time was of necessity. Nor did Wyclif regard their coalescence as a contradiction any more than he did the necessity and contingency of the same action in God's will. Logically it flawed his system; psychologically it gave him the best of two worlds and he indulged each to the full. He at once denied that any pope or priest could claim to exercise the authority of his office without a special revelation—a test too impalpable to be of any effect, even if any should have had the temerity to make it;[5] and he employed the Bible as evidence to discount most of the offices and paraphernalia of the existing Church and to damn those for exercising them as betrayers of

[1] e.g. *De ecclesia*, 28, 29, 31, 32.

[2] Nullus, inquam, fidelis dubitat quin deus posset dare layco potentiam conficiendi.... Ymmo videtur iuxta testimonium Augustini, Chrisostomi et aliorum sanctorum quod omnis predestinatus laicus est sacerdos, et multo magis devotus laycus conficiens, cum daret ecclesie sacrum ministerium, haberet rationem sacerdotis (*De eucharistia*, 98–99). Also *De veritate sacre scripture*, ii. 148; *De ecclesia*, 577.

[3] *De officio regis*, 149. [4] Ibid. 134, and *De ecclesia*, 28, 29, 31, 32.

[5] videtur quod solus deus eligit hominem in papam vel summum pontificem (*De potestate pape*, 176). . . . And: sed nemo cui non fit specialis revelatio potest presumere se esse sic electum (*De civili dominio*, i. 381). Also, ibid. 374; *De ecclesia*, 31; *De blasphemia*, 42.

Christ and members of Antichrist.[1] In this context little that Wyclif said was of much novelty. Marsilius of Padua, the Franciscan Spirituals, and the Michaelists,[2] to say nothing of the Waldensians, had said most of it before; but with Wyclif it carried the undertones of an indictment of the visible Church as a whole. As such it was more far-reaching.

In his treatment of the contemporary Church Wyclif followed this by now common practice of making the Church stand condemned by its departure from apostolic tradition. As we have suggested earlier it was one of the most disruptive elements in later medieval ecclesiology. He contrasted the evangelical virtues of poverty, humility, charity, and equality, to the present abuses of wealth and worldliness, to the growth of what he termed a 'Caesarian' hierarchy, and to civil involvement.[3] He saw the source of these evils in the abandonment of poverty which had led to the desire for goods, which in turn was the occasion of sin.[4] It had engendered priestly avarice, the most dire of all heresies:[5] Wyclif attributed the great break with the apostolic past to the Donation of Constantine by which the Church under Pope Sylvester had accepted endowments. Wyclif again was not the first to have done so: it had a comparable role in the Waldensians' historicism, although there is no evidence that Wyclif took it from them. For him it constituted the crime of secularization.[6] Occasionally, it is true, Wyclif allowed that the desire to endow could be praiseworthy; but as time went on attachment to possessions, by religious, became increasingly the mark of Antichrist.[7] Conversely, in terms reminiscent of St. Francis and his

[1] e.g. *Sermons*, ii. 58, iii. 78, 426–9; *Opera minora*, 255; *De blasphemia*, *De simonia*, *Opus evangelicum*, *passim*. The occasions are too numerous to bear listing here.

[2] Discussed in my forthcoming *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1966) i, pt. 1.

[3] . . . cum ipse (Christus) sit summus pontifex manens hic cum sua ecclesia usque ad in finem seculi, nec in Petro nec in alio talem dignitatem approbans, sed voluit Petrum, Paulum et ceteros apostolos esse socios, ut patet Gal II, in paupertate, humilitate et caritate, ad patiendum usque ad mortem pro Christi nomine si oporteat, et ad hoc ordinavit apostolis multos fideles vicarios ipsos in ista virtute triplici imitantes (*Opera minora*, 204). Also *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 70.

[4] Postquam autem dotata est dotatione sapiente seculum, decrevit continue tam virtute quam quantitate, cuius causa indubie est declinatio ad carnem et seculum (*De civili dominio*, iii. 217).

[5] Ibid. 59. [6] *Opera minora*, 226; *De blasphemia*, 61.

[7] *De potestate pape*, 161–2; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 71; *De blasphemia*, 54–55; *Trialogus*, 333; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 126.

followers, he extolled Christ's poverty as the supreme virtue and the summit of simplicity and purity;[1] it was the most perfect of all states, indeed—theologically surprising—the foundation of perfect charity.[2] As inseparable from Christ's privileges it could never be renounced.[3] Rather it was property which must be forsworn for ever. To do so was the way back to Christ.[4] This was Wyclif's message; it became a call to disendowment, made with growing stridency, as the solution for the Church's ills. Wyclif never elaborated his belief in poverty into a precise doctrine, such as that of the Franciscans; but he stressed that the Church and religious should be without ownership in common or private of the goods they used, and that these should be strictly limited to needs, after Christ's example.[5] He should also be followed in the renunciation of all dominion and civil rule—another of Wyclif 's ceaseless themes—so that the Church should have jurisdiction over nothing and no one.[6] True dominion was from Christ, whereas civil dominion derogated from grace,[7] and, as practised by the Church in its dispossession of the poor, was actively sinful.[8] This insistence upon material penury went together with one equally strong upon humility, or spiritual poverty, which Wyclif was at times inclined to rate even more highly.[9] If pride and avarice were the marks of Antichrist, humility and poverty were of the kingdom of heaven. The growth of ecclesiastical pomp, wealth, civil dominion, and the taking of the law into its own hands, were all characteristic of a Caesarian priesthood which had irrevocably departed from Christ and the Apostles.[10] The primitive Church in its simplicity

[1] *De civili dominio*, iii. 60; also *Trialogus*, 302.

[2] Et inde est ad perfectionem caritatis acquirendam primum fundamentum est voluntaria paupertas, ut aliquis absque proprio vivat (*De civili dominio*, iv. 444).

[3] Ex istis videtur quod omnes pure clerici debent esse pauperes evangelii in specie altissime paupertatis, quia debent renuntiare omni proprietati pro suo perpetuo (*De civili dominio*, iii. 242). Also *De apostasia*, 88, 90–91, and *Trialogus*, 378–83.

[4] *De ecclesia*, 371–2.

[5] *De civili dominio*, i. 219–20, 241, 311–16, 377 ff.; *Trialogus*, 292, 305; *Opera minora*, 298–9; *De potestate pape*, 89; *Dialogus*, 70.

[6] *De potestate pape*, 83, 200–1, 485. Also *De civili dominio*, ii. 145 ff., iii. 60 ff., 445 ff.; *De ecclesia*, 184–7, 365; *Opera minora*, 19–71, 159, 166–9, 188–9.

[7] Servet itaque clericus illam paupertatem altissimam et non est compossibile civile dominium sibi pro tunc in gratia coequari (*De civili dominio*, iii, 201).

[8] Ibid. 412.

[9] *De civili dominio*, i. 120, iv. 492–3. Also *Opera minora*, 443; *Opus evangelicum*, i. 15, 17.

[10] e.g. *Sermons*, ii. 58, iii. 78, 426–9; *Opera minora*, 255.

had known only a single order of priests and deacons. They had been the only ones instituted by Christ, and they alone enjoyed divine authority.[1] Appointment to their office had been direct from God or by popular election.[2] There had been no patronage and no popes, bishops, cardinals, or curia to exercise it; they were all unscriptural in both their offices and their abuse of them.

We come here to Wyclif's single most revolutionary step in his rejection of an ecclesiastical hierarchy.[3] It was made as we have said on two—self-contradictory—grounds, both sanctified in the Bible. The first was the ecclesiological one founded upon Wyclif's denial to any pope, priest, or prelate of an inherent claim to office or membership of the Church. Nothing less, we have seen, than a direct revelation sufficed to establish it. God alone could create a pope;[4] and no man could assert primacy over others.[5] Already in *De civili dominio*, before he had become irrevocably opposed to the papacy, Wyclif had divested the Pope of any innate right to rule, in virtue of his human fallibility and lack of scriptural support. Christ, as the son of God, was, as we have seen, the true head of the Church;[6] he alone was necessary for its governance, where popes and cardinals could be dispensed with by God, or, if in mortal sin, were already excluded from the church.[7] At the human level, a pope, like any priest, was to be obeyed only if he observed God's law.[8] After his condemnation by Gregory XI in 1377, Wyclif's

[1] . . . sed nullus sinon ille quem Christus instituit. . . . Tunc autem non ordinavit nisi diacones et presbyteros (*De blasphemia*, 66). Also ibid. 65; *Opera minora*, 142, 143, 305; *De civili dominio*, i. 380; *Trialogus*, 296.

[2] *De simonia*, 43.

[3] Wyclif more than once asserted that the humblest priest was the Pope's equal, e.g. *De potestate pape*, 35, 272.

[4] *De potestate pape*, 175.

[5] *De civili dominio*, i. 374, 381; *De ecclesia*, 31; *De blasphemia*, 42.

[6] e.g. *De civili dominio*, ii. 166; *De ecclesia*, 31; *Trialogus*, 263; *Sermons*, iii. 422, iv. 59.

[7] Ex istis colligi potest quod nullum papam cum cetu cardinalium citra Christum sit absolute necessarium capitaliter regere ecclesiam sanctam dei. Primo patet ex hoc quod omnem talem personam sit possibile peccare mortaliter et dampnari, ex proximis dictis, sed tunc non est pars ecclesie, ergo conclusio. Item deus libere contradictorie dat sua carismata cuilibet Christiano constituens cum eo tamquam membro suo unum corpus mysticum; ad nullam talem influentiam requiritur persona hominis disparata; ergo nulla persona Romane ecclesie requiritur, tamquam mediamen absolute necessarium ad regulandum ecclesiam. Item caput Christi cum sua lege est per se sufficiens ad regulam sponse sue, ergo nullus alius homo requiritur tamquam sponsus (*De civili dominio*, i. 380).

[8] Ibid. 283–5.

attitude to the papal curia became outspokenly hostile, losing the earlier qualifications in its favour. The opening of the Great Schism in 1378, with two popes each denouncing the other, served to confirm him in his opposition; his initial partisanship for Urban VI—'our Urban'[1]—gradually gave way to condemnation of both popes as Antichrists who were fulfilling Christ's prophecy.[2] The seal was set on his disavowal in *De potestate pape* written in 1379 after he had already formulated his doctrine of the Church in *De ecclesia*. While reaffirming his earlier theoretical grounds against a pope's power, he now turned to the same scriptural arguments which Marsilius of Padua had used to such devastating effect against papal primacy. Did Wyclif take these from Marsilius? There are no references to Marsilius in *De potestate pape* or any other works; but then, for all his intemperance, Wyclif was prudent—as well as lucky—enough to have remained free to die of a stroke, instead of, like Hus, at the stake. Marsilius had been condemned as a heretic; that had not debarred Dietrich of Niem from quoting him by name,[3] but then Dietrich was not on Wyclif's vulnerable ground. Wyclif knew Ockham's work and he had clearly been, as we saw, influenced by Franciscan doctrine, much of which had been largely formulated in direct opposition to Pope John XXII. Ockham and other leading Franciscans were, together with Marsilius and John of Jandun, protégés of the Emperor Louis of Bavaria for the best part of two decades. Their anti-papal polemics formed one of the major doctrinal episodes of the fourteenth century, only a generation removed from Wyclif. It would be hard to see how Wyclif could have missed their products, even had he tried. In fact, there is no less reason why Wyclif should have known of Marsilius's anti-papal writings than of Ockham's much more moderate ones; and from the similarity of his arguments every reason to think that he did. Like Marsilius he directed his attack along two main lines. The first was the nature of spiritual power, which was entirely independent of human agency. Hence, no man could exercise it or bestow it on others.[4] Only God could bind and loose;[5] he

[1] *De ecclesia*, 37–38, 352, 358.

[2] *De potestate pape*, 185 (note in the same work Wyclif's ambivalent attitude); *De blasphemia*, 42; *Dialogus*, 424–5; *Sermons*, iii. 275–6, iv. 137, 156, 173, 184–5; *Opera minora*, 204, 252, 267–72; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 169.

[3] *De modis uniendi et reformandi ecclesiam*, ed. H. Heimpel (Leipzig, 1933), 61.

[4] Ibid. 14–15.

[5] e.g. *De ecclesia*, 353; *Opera minora*, 264; *Sermons*, ii. 433, 434, iv. 175, 177; *Trialogus*, 329.

alone made a sinner contrite.[1] The Pope could only act for God in promulgating what God had ordained.[2] Consequently papal absolution or sentences of excommunication were of themselves worthless unless from God.[3] To this widespread emphasis on God's direct power, Wyclif added his own. Since God gave his power without visible sign, just as Christ had ordained his priests without outward sacrament, there were no means of assessing a priest's powers. This was a blow struck at the entire sacramental life of the Church; although Wyclif conceded that priestly mediation was necessary as the result of the fall,[4] and never openly disavowed the sacraments, the whole tendency of his thought was to depreciate them. With God the direct source of all spiritual power,[5] nothing remained to intermediaries, even prayer.[6] No true member of the Church could ever be severed from it, whatever the temporal bans imposed upon him.[7] More actively Wyclif was concerned to reduce priestly pretensions by minimizing their role in the sacraments. He decried repeatedly Innocent III's laws requiring annual communion and auracular confession—both to be important Lollard tenets—as arbitrary human enactments.[8] Not only was contrition independent of priestly absolution, but the very words, 'I absolve thee', were not to be found in the Bible.[9] Nevertheless, Wyclif never went to the point of openly counselling refusal of the sacraments, even if he was inclined to equivocate over accepting them from priests known to be of bad character[10]—another sign of his prudence in the last resort. At the same time all that he said diminished the priesthood's standing and exalted that of the layman. On the one hand ordination could only take place if it led to the conferring of the Holy Spirit[11]—an entirely unverifiable requirement, which could only make for uncertainty over

[1] *De potestate pape*, 26–28. [2] Ibid. 16.

[3] Ibid.; see also n. 1 above. [4] Ibid.

[5] et per consequens preter potestatem quam deus creat in anima non est dare aliam datam ab homine (*De potestate pape*, 14); Workman, ii. 13, rightly I think, says that Wyclif never properly grappled with the question of the sacraments.

[6] Wyclif several times stressed that prayer was efficacious only for the elect. *De civili dominio*, iv. 465–6, where he concluded that the prayers of a sinner were harmful; *De ecclesia*, 517–20; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 222.

[7] *De civili dominio*, i. 265–6, 276, 277, 278–80; *De veritate sacre scripture*, iii. 39–40; *De potestate pape*, 353; *De officio regis*, 36, 167–76, 231–7; *De blasphemia*, 70; *Sermons*, ii. 312, iii. 147, 152, 158.

[8] *De ecclesia*, 111; *De officio regis*, 166. [9] *De blasphemia*, 134.

[10] Ibid. 140.

[11] *Dialogus*, 50; *De simonia*, 36; *Opera minora*, 286.

any priest's true standing. On the other hand, the saved layman —an equally unreal category—could hear confession[1] and give pardons, as well as be pope.[2] Inevitably, in the absence of any other signs, scripture became the only guide to what should be done and who should be rejected. It made preaching God's word and living according to it the indispensable conditions of a true priesthood. Preaching became the first duty of a priest as Christ's disciple;[3] it was his justification and the test of his authenticity,[4] more important than the Lord's Prayer or the sacraments.[5] Any priest who failed to preach failed as a priest. The fact that so many did fail provided Wyclif with one of his chief weapons against the priesthood;[6] taken together with its crimes of simony, blasphemy, and apostasy it branded them as usurpers and traitors to Christ.[7]

The necessity of preaching thus merged with Wyclif 's general attack upon the hierarchy. But he also sought to condemn it by directly appealing to the word of the Bible. This took two—theoretically inconsistent—forms. The first was to point to the absence from scripture of any mention of pope, cardinals, and bishops; the second to the discrepancy between the mode of their lives and that of Christ's and the Apostles'. The first concerned the generally accepted Petrine basis of papal power. Here, too, Marsilius had preceded Wyclif.[8] Both of them rejected the claim, that the Pope had succeeded Peter as head of the Church, as invalid exegetically and historically. It rested upon Christ's commission to Peter in Matthew xvi. 18 and 19, 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church. . . .' Traditionally Peter had been identified with the rock of the Church and so taken to be its head, although St. Augustine had acknowledged that it could mean Christ.[9] It was in this second sense that Marsilius and later Wyclif understood the words. Christ,

[1] *De potestate pape*, 266; *De blasphemia*, 140.

[2] *De potestate pape*, 272.

[3] *De veritate sacre scripture*, ii. 137: Sexto sequitur quod omnes Christiani et precipue sacerdotes atque episcopi tenentur cognoscere primo omnem legem scripture. Also ibid. 138.

[4] Ibid. 173.

[5] Ibid. 156. Also ibid. 179 and *Pol. Works*, i (W.S., 1883), 261.

[6] e.g. *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 348, ii. 138–9, 141–4, 147, 150, 166, 170–9, 187–94, 207; *Sermons*, i. 100, iii. 73–75, 266; iv. 115; *Opera minora*, 76, 305, 313; *Pol. Works*, i. 261.

[7] e.g. Ex quo videtur quod maior pars et specialiter superiorum ecclesia sit heretica (*De simonia*, 4).

[8] *Defensor pacis dictio*, ii, Chs. 15, 16, 19, 20, 28 and *passim*.

[9] *Retractationes*, i. 21, 1. Discussed by P. de Vooght, *Hussiana* (Louvain, 1960), 93 ff.

they held, not Peter, was the sole head of the Church. Peter's primacy referred simply to his own spiritual qualities which had made him pre-eminent among the other Apostles; as such it was purely personal to him and could not be transmitted to his successors as Bishops of Rome.[1] But even in that capacity Peter had not been supreme; Paul had more right to the title of bishop while Rome at least shared her position with Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem[2]—a now common argument in fourteenth-century ecclesiology.[3] Each of these had merely represented a local church; none had had a jurisdiction which extended to the Church as a whole.[4] How, then, had the Pope's primacy arisen? From usurpation, Wyclif replied. The Emperor Constantine had taken the law into his own hands and elevated his bishop into the head of the Church. It was inadmissible both as a deed and in having presumed to create a new article of faith—that of obedience to the Pope.[5] Like Marsilius, Wyclif also enlisted the accounts of the chronicles to support what the Bible revealed. If Marsilius had preceded him in the use of both, Wyclif once again went beyond Marsilius's more empirical approach by denying that anything not mentioned in the scripture could be true—in contrast to Marsilius, who was principally concerned with false and unhistorical interpretations of the Bible. He thus attacked the very existence of pope and cardinals for having no scriptural foundation[6] as well as for betraying Christ.[7] Like bishops, they had not been part of the primitive Church.[8] He contrasted the Pope as a fallible man with Christ who was man and God: the Pope could not return from the dead and redeem mankind;[9] he could not work miracles;[10] he could not write canonical books.[11] The reason was that he was of human contrivance.[12] For this Wyclif turned on

[1] *De potestate pape*, 97, 135. [2] Ibid. 76, 173, 178, 218–19, 232.

[3] e.g. *Defensor pacis*, ii, Ch. 16; Ockham, *Octo questiones* (*Opera politica*, i (Manchester, 1940), 82–83); Pierre d'Ailly in Gerson, *Opera omnia* (Antwerp, 1706), ii. 128.

[4] *De potestate pape*, 97, 111, 140–1, 150, 165–79. Also *Trialogus*, 330; *Opus evangelicum*, i. 40, iii. 109, 188; *Pol. Works*, i. 1, 35, 101, 256–7, 259, 260, 349, 350, ii. 678, 685, as well as *Opera minora*, *De blasphemia*, *Dialogus*, *De apostasia*.

[5] *De potestate pape*, 215, 246, 259.

[6] *De potestate pape*, 165. Also *Opus evangelicum*, i. 55, ii. 187; *Opera minora*, 101; *Sermons*, iii. 509.

[7] See n. 4 above. [8] Ibid. [9] *De potestate pape*, 102–4.

[10] *De potestate pape*, 106–7. [11] Ibid. 108–9.

[12] . . . imperator Constantinus circa annum domini trecentesimum primum hoc censuit et precipit quod suus episcopus ab omnibus papa vocaretur (ibid. 215). Also ibid. 319; *De officio regis*, 18–19.

the cardinals who were responsible for the pretence that they could create a Pope by human election. Only God could do this, he added somewhat contradictorily, and then they were but his agents. As it was they were monsters who had usurped the place of the Apostles; their electoral practices were a scandal; they amassed and devoured the benefices of the church and robbed the poor. They existed only to serve Antichrist.[1]

Yet Wyclif was also a pragmatist as much as he was a theorist; he never pressed his notions to the point of no return, where he denied that there was any priesthood at all—though he came near to doing so towards the end. But this was for the very reason that he was judging them by their practice, in failing to live and preach like Christ and the Apostles. It was for these derelictions—or, as he regarded them, crimes—that in his eyes they effectively stood condemned; and it was upon these that he dwelt in work after work. In doing so he was, of course, being inconsistent to his basic tenet that no one's destiny could be known in advance—saved or damned; it may have been this which caused him to draw back from the brink in never openly disavowing priestly ministrations. If in the case of the Pope and cardinals he was able to go the whole way because they were unscriptural, as he ultimately did, he could still not resist also branding them as Antichrist for asserting their authority. It is hardly surprising. Wyclif's theory was unworkable; to make his belief in an apostolic tradition meaningful, he had to set his basic tenets aside. He thus came to concentrate more and more upon what he regarded as the *visible* betrayal of Christ, according to his definition of Christ's evangelical life and teaching. By this, the Pope and the hierarchy became Antichrist, that is of the body of the damned, for their manifold abuses of Christ's law.[2] These were summed up in his ten signs of Antichrist: they included seduction from Christ's teachings; the making of laws not in scripture; worldliness; failure to preach; the assertion of civil jurisdiction; the use of force and the existence of foes; arrogance and lack of humility.[3] Thus his attacks were centred upon the evils associated with endowment and the possession of dominion. They formed the source of his repeated catalogues of clerical crimes: the taking of first fruits, which was simony; excommunication for non-payment of tithes; litigation; patronage;

[1] *De potestate pape*, 195–7. Also *Opera minora*, 118, 142, 196, 203, iv. 193, 284–6; *Supplementum trialogi*, 450–2.

[2] *Opera minora*, 118, 119, 207, 217, 349, 678.

[3] Ibid. 120–4.

the desire for honours; robbing the poor; the false granting of indulgences. They were like a chorus in a Greek tragedy. Nor was Wyclif its only member. Indeed what is ultimately so noteworthy about these complaints is their universality. That does not necessarily make them more valid; but it does mean that we should recall that, for all his distinctiveness of outlook, Wyclif also shared the preoccupations of the time.

What made them more than the laments of a moralist is that Wyclif sought to dissolve the Church as an independent corporation. Here the force of his theoretical preconceptions had their effect. He was sufficiently convinced in the independent existence of the true Church not to shrink from dismembering its visible counterfeit. Moreover, this was not a vague call to insurrection or spiritual renewal. Wyclif was neither a social revolutionary nor a visionary. But he was a patriot. As in his last six years he came more and more to regard the Church as the visible expression of Antichrist, so he looked increasingly to the King of England—and sometimes lay lords—to bring its corporate existence to an end. He saw the struggle between Christ and Antichrist as principally one between the truth of the Bible and the pretensions of the modern hierarchy.[1] It dominated his later writings: the last two books of his unfinished *Opus evangelicum* were called *De antichristo*. By then the progression from denying the Pope's sanctity to identifying him with Antichrist was complete. It was no longer a question of not believing in him but of removing him—an act which could scarcely concern the King of England. The sequence, if not inevitable, was predictable. Although it was not, as we have seen, followed consistently, it sprang from the initial antinomy between Wyclif's attitude to the Church and to the Bible. It became open conflict through Wyclif's deliberate exclusion of the Church from any say in interpreting the Bible. The Church could only conform to the *sensus catholicus* which lay with apostolic tradition and reason based on metaphysical truths.[2] Nothing remained to its own dictates; its laws, decretals, and bulls, taken in themselves, were

[1] e.g. Quod quicumque est Christo vel legi sue contrarius dicitur Antichristus (*De potestate pape*, 118).

[2] e.g. *De civili dominio*, i. 377–80, 399, 409–10; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 192, 348, 402–4; *De potestate pape*, 248, 346; *De officio regis*, 191, 222, 223, 224; *De eucharistia*, 173, 243, 282, 283, 289, 291; *De apostasia*, 244–6; *Dialogus*, 77, 78, 94; *Pol. Works*, ii. 713–14; *Opera minora*, 75, 87, 137, 138, 227, 240, 243, 289; *Sermons*, iii. 263, 264, 445, 509, iv. 46; *Trialogus*, 262; *Opus evangelicum*, i. 12, 100.

of purely human invention devoid of divine sanction;[1] to claim otherwise was blasphemy.[2]

Always sensitive to the perils of confusing human traditions with divine laws,[3] Wyclif arrived at the open rejection of the Church's authority in his later works. He expressed his attitude in *De eucharistia* when he said that not even a thousand times a thousand bishops should be believed before St. Augustine, because of the sanctity of his life compared with the simony, apostasy, and blasphemy of the hierarchy.[4] The one sprang from fidelity to the Bible; the others from exalting the Pope as head of the Church. By then he had extended the body of Antichrist to include the four orders of friars, or sects as he called them, as well as the Caesarian priesthood. Opposed to them were those true to the Bible and apostolic tradition. To restore it demanded the disendowment of the Church, which, once more freed from possession and lordship, and the avarice and worldliness they engendered, could return to its original simplicity. Thus returned to Christ, the priesthood would again follow his example of spiritual ministrations and above all preaching, which he saw as its main and highest function.[5] Disendowment accordingly became Wyclif's panacea urged without remission from *De civili dominio* until his death. In the context of the time it constituted a frontal attack upon the very existence of the Church; it became his most explosive legacy.

To achieve it the king and the lay lords were to expropriate the Church and withdraw its civil rights.[6] Instead of living on

[1] e.g. *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 395: Quarta conclusio . . . quelibet pars scripture sacre est infinitum maioris auctoritatis quam aliqua epistola decretalis, patet sic: quelibet epistola decretalis est condita per aliquem papam; quelibet pars sacre scripture immediate et proxime autorizatur per deum, igitur conclusio.

[2] Ibid. 408.

[3] e.g. *De eucharistia*, 286–91; *De simonia*, 25, 64–65; *De blasphemia*, 128, 159–61; *De officio regis*, 125; *Sermons*, i. 302, 370, ii. 66, 283, 323–5, 388–9, 434–5, iii. 58, 81, 158, 245, 262, 392, 447, 505, 509, iv. 63, 66, 79, 80, 96; *Dialogus*, 21, 25, 27, 49, 77, 94; *Opera minora*, 75, 87, 138, 240; *Pol. Works*, i. 349–50, 713–14; *Opus evangelicum*, i. 12, 29, 91–92, 100, ii. 38, iii. 189.

[4] *De eucharistia*, 41, 281, 328; *De blasphemia*, 19.

[5] e.g. *De potestate pape*, 89, 101–2, 198, 341; *De civili dominio*, i. 330–1, 450, 469, 470–8, ii. 14, 18, 22, 23, 24, 32, 115, iii. 25; *De ecclesia*, 190–2, 292, 294, 337–45, 372; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 62, 65, 81, iii. 16, 21; *De officio regis*, 60, 61, 64, 89, 97, 203, 210–13, 224; *De simonia*, 67, 93–98; *De blasphemia*, 32–36, 56, 70, 81, 264, 270–1; *De eucharistia*, 311, 322; *Sermons*, i. 132, 376, 435, ii. 367, iii. 20, iv. 3, 55, 246, 292, 414; *Trialogus*, 376–88; *Supplementum trialogi*, 412–22.

[6] *De officio regis*, 210, 211–13; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 28, 93; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 8; *Opera minora*, 189, 207.

endowments, those of its priests who were worthy were to be supported by voluntary offerings and tithes; the remainder were to be dispossessed.[1] By making the Church's spiritual regeneration depend upon the lay power Wyclif turned an indefinite aspiration into an immediate programme; in place of the prophetic expectations of the Franciscan Spirituals and other Joachists, which he expressly disavowed,[2] he put political action. It was this which made him an heresiarch where they remained essentially heterodox. Unlike them, his conception of Antichrist, as a palpable presence at work within the Church, called forth palpable measures for its destruction; where they looked to a new spiritual order and the end of the present age, Wyclif looked to the secular arm and the consummation of the existing state.

Not surprisingly, then, Wyclif was the champion of royal authority. His treatise *De officio regis* was devoted to establishing the king's authority over all mankind, including the priests and religious. Whereas, he declared, the king's power was made in the image of Christ's divinity, that of the priest was to be compared with Christ's humanity.[3] The king was God's vicar; he stood apart from the rest of men who were his servants.[4] To resist him was to sin.[5] Even tyrants were ordained of God and had to be suffered, provided that the evil done was to men and not to God.[6] As Christ had himself enjoined, all men were to obey the king[7]—a sentiment reinforced in an English Lollard sermon pointing to his birth within the domains of the Roman emperor.[8] For Wyclif, as for so many orthodox medievals, the principle of kingship was inherent in all human association; it applied to the Church before the fall and endowment, when it had been subject to the king with a minimum of civil law.[9] Since the Church's secularization it had been dependent upon the king for its temporalities, as indeed in all other respects[10]—a purely Marsilian sentiment. The king, while obliged to act in conformity with God's laws, which was his justification,[11] had thus virtually limitless powers of sovereignty over his own kingdom.[12]

[1] *De officio regis*, 59; *De civili dominio*, i. 56, 311–12; *Opera minora*, 23, 171, 244, 302; *Dialogus*, 76, 79–80.

[2] *Opera minora*, 375; also ibid. 165–6; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 102.

[3] *De officio regis*, 13; also ibid. 16, 137, 143, 144; *Dialogus*, 73.

[4] *De officio regis*, 5; *Sermons*, iii. 210–11, 217.

[5] *De officio regis*, 4, 5, 346; also *Opera minora*, 165–6, 375; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 102.

[6] *De officio regis*, 8.

[7] Ibid. 14.

[8] Workman, ii. 20.

[9] *De officio regis*, 19.

[10] Ibid. 36–37, 139.

[11] Ibid. 55, 57, 78–79, 82, 96, 110, 234–5.

[12] Ibid. 66, 118–20.

Unlike the priesthood, moreover, he was of this world;[1] its right ordering fell to him even if it should entail sanctions against the Church. As in Marsilius's system, the king, for Wyclif, was the spiritual overseer of the Church.[2] He could correct and ban evil priests; withdraw alms; sequestrate church property; demolish churches in emergencies and convert them into towers for the defence of his realm.[3] The contrast between royal and sacerdotal power was as complete in practice as Wyclif conceived it in theory. Not only was the entire Church subject to the king, including the Pope where he was concerned in such matters as patronage;[4] so were the predestined during their time in this world.[5] Where a pope could be deposed, disobeyed, and corrected, and *ipso facto* denied, to the king and lay lords there must be universal submission.

Once again pragmatism—or, if it is not a contradiction in terms, pragmatic theory—had triumphed over metaphysics. Strictly speaking there were no more means of knowing whether a king or lay lord was damned or saved than a pope or priest. Practically, however, property and power were the yardstick: for the Church, their possession was sin; for the king, his badge of office.[6] The Church, in enjoying them, betrayed Christ;[7] the king was merely being true to his nature as king: the more he excelled others in them the truer he was.

V

There remain to be considered Wyclif's two doctrines of dominion and grace and the Eucharist. While they bore no direct relation to one another, and were again in themselves too academic to be of any practical consequence, they each marked a decisive moment in Wyclif's progress towards dissent. The theory of dominion and grace as Wyclif stated it in *De civili dominio* provided, as we have earlier said, the majority of the articles for his first condemnation in 1377. It thereby precipitated Wyclif's breach with the papacy and his growing antagonism towards the Church hierarchy. His eucharistic teaching completed it, and extended it to the friars, who from formerly having been

[1] Ibid. 96–97. [2] Ibid. 68–70.

[3] Ibid. 61, 64, 71, 84, 97, 188, 207; also *De ecclesia*, 337–45; *De veritate sacre scripture*, ii. 21, 28, iii. 86, 93; *De simonia*, 44; *Sermons*, iii. 210–11.

[4] *De officio regis*, 192. [5] Ibid. 133.

[6] e.g. *De civili dominio*, i. 188–9, ii. 148; *De officio regis*, 60.

[7] e.g. *Dialogus*, where he said that the pope's temporal possessions made him a heretic.

allies became, from about 1380, his most bitter enemies. Under the taunt of CAIM (compounded of the initials of the four religious orders) he poured a ceaseless stream of abuse upon what he called the 'sects'; they were of the devil, locusts who devoured the country's wealth; their existence was illicit and unauthorized in scripture, and their founders, St. Benedict as well as St. Dominic and St. Francis, were guilty of disregarding it.[1] The orders' supreme crimes came to be mendicancy and their support for the established doctrine of the Eucharist.[2] Thus any of Wyclif's earlier affinities to the Franciscan ideal were obliterated by his hatred for its adherents. In having denied the true nature of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, they were all members of Antichrist.[3]

As mentioned earlier Wyclif's doctrine of dominion and grace, apart from its intrinsic inapplicability, was effectively nullified by his teaching on kingship and lay power. He owed it primarily to Richard FitzRalph's *De pauperie salvatoris*, the germ of which in turn went back to Giles of Rome's *De potestate ecclesiastica*. In view of what has been said it is hard not to feel that its importance has been much exaggerated.[4] Its highly subversive potential was realized neither by Wyclif nor by his predecessors; the last thing they envisaged was the weakening of authority; they were rather concerned to strengthen some authority at the expense of other authority: for Giles that of the Church against lay rulers; for FitzRalph the seculars against the friars; for Wyclif the State against the Church. Moreover, in Wyclif's case, once he had expounded it in the first book of *De civili dominio*, it had virtually no part in his subsequent development. The Church was excluded from civil and spiritual jurisdiction on independent metaphysical and biblical grounds;

[1] *Pol. Works*, i. 24; also ibid. 14, 28 ff., 56, 59, 89, 101, 175, 180, 181, 368–9; *Trialogus*, 345 ff., 361–85; *Opera minora*, 305, 442.

[2] e.g. *Trialogus*, 338–41, 341–9, 349–56; *Pol. Works*, i. 453–4; *Opera minora*, i. 223; *Sermons*, i. 226, iii. 107, 108, 110–14, iv. 13.

[3] Ibid. and *Sermons*, i. 227, ii. 435 ff., iii. 38–39, 126–32, 152, 163–5, 219–24, 233–9, 272–3, 416–20, 496–501, iv. 10, 39–41, 50–52, 59, 61–62, 64–65, 109–112, 118–21, 122–3, 184–5; *Pol. Works*, i. 252, 340; *De blasphemia*, 201–72; *De apostasia*, 1–46, 60–61, 148–9; *Opus evangelicum*, iii. 63.

[4] M. Wilks, 'Predestination, Property and Power: Wyclif's Theory of Dominion and Grace', *Studies in Church History*, ii (1965), 220–36, rightly sees Wyclif's theory of dominion and grace as 'the reverse of revolutionary'. But to treat it instead as a 'smokescreen' which enabled him to reconstruct the old lay ideal of a 'theocratic monarchy and a proprietary church' (ibid. 235) seems misconceived.

while kings and secular lords to whom it could have applied with most force were explicitly endowed by Wyclif with scripturally sanctioned power, which included controlling the Church. In either case the notions of dominion and grace were effectively superseded. It is best regarded as a transitory stage in the evolution of Wyclif's outlook. Briefly, Giles of Rome had sought to establish the ecclesiastical basis of all religious authority by making the Church alone the medium of justice. Only those who belonged to it could enjoy any jurisdiction over goods or other men; it lay with the Church to decide who was fitted to do so.[1] FitzRalph took up where Giles left off. Where Giles had stressed the dependence of all laymen—kings included—upon the Church, FitzRalph made justice synonymous with authority and exclusively from God. It was a gift which itself presupposed the gift of grace. Only he who had it could rule on God's behalf.[2] Where, then, there was no dominion there was no grace as its formal cause.[3]

These propositions said all that Wyclif was to say, and said it more cogently. The central issue for FitzRalph was the independence of original lordship from natural and civil circumstances. He had been concerned principally with the issues raised in the debate over Franciscan poverty. Wyclif, however, in adopting FitzRalph's doctrine, largely changed its import. While also touching on questions of use and possession, he treated the whole question as a moral issue. His aim, he said at the opening of the work, was to demonstrate two truths: one, that no person in mortal sin had justice as a gift from God; and two, he who was in God's final grace enjoyed all God's goods.[4] He shifted the stress away from lordship to justice; lack of justice meant not merely lack of lordship, but a state of mortal sin.[5] It seems that this particular tenet was superseded in Wyclif's later doctrine of the Church, where temporal grace could go with final reprobation and temporal sin with final election. At this stage, however, only grace could confer the right to civil dominion.[6] Even so he was prepared to allow that God could permit tyrants to rule, and try the just, as well as make all civil dominion independent.[7] Normally, however, rule must be based upon the gospel;[8] it could not be achieved by conquest or the use of force.[9]

[1] *De potestate ecclesiastica*, ed. R. Scholz (Weimar, 1929), Bk. II. 70 ff.
[2] *De pauperie salvatoris*, Bks. I–IV (ed. R. L. Poole), together with *De dominio divino* (W.S., London, 1890), 344 ff.
[3] Ibid. 355.
[4] *De civili dominio*, i. 1.
[5] Ibid. 12, 13, 136.
[6] Ibid. 15.
[7] Ibid. 24, 43–44.
[8] Ibid. 139.
[9] Ibid. 150.

Even without his subsequent repudiations, dominion and grace constituted a doctrine singularly devoid of immediacy. It remained a non-starter.

The Eucharist, on the other hand, marked the culmination of Wyclif's later thought and life. As we saw, his withdrawal from Oxford in 1381 was its direct consequence. The issue became almost compulsive for him in his last three or four years: in addition to forming the subject of two complete books—*De eucharistia* and *De apostasia*—it recurred in all his later writings, particularly *De blasphemia* and the *Trialogus*, as the supreme test of orthodoxy. Again, unlike the doctrine of dominion and grace, that of the Eucharist grew directly out of his metaphysics; that he did not bring it to its final form for at least fifteen years is a sign of his reluctance to pass beyond the accepted framework. Thus, according to Woodford, he had originally defined the substance of the Eucharist as a mathematical body; and when this proved unsatisfactory he was prepared to leave it unexplained beyond affirming that it had a substance.[1] Wyclif described in *De eucharistia* how he had been at the utmost pains to understand transubstantiation 'in agreement with the sense of the early Church' until he saw that it was being contradicted by the modern Church.[1] He had thus been prepared to subordinate his own doubts to dogma until he no longer accepted the Church's authority. His change of view was an ecclesiological and a theological one; but it carried with it the impetus of twenty years' delayed metaphysics which dominate the final argument.

Wyclif's violence in putting it forward, particularly in *De blasphemia* and the *Sermons* has tended to obscure the fact, rightly emphasized by Workman,[2] that his was but one more contribution to a debate in which all the participants were of the same fundamental belief: namely in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. Christ's real presence was as axiomatic to Wyclif as to his predecessors and opponents. On that point he was never heretical; his challenge was not to the truth of transubstantiation, but over how it occurred. This concerned the changed status of the bread and wine after they had become Christ's body and blood. On the one hand, they were now of a different nature; on the other, they still retained the outward appearances of their previous nature. In scholastic terminology, the substance had changed

[1] *F.Z.*, xv; translated by Workman, ii. 35.
[2] Workman, loc. cit.

into Christ's body, but the accidents remained those of bread and wine. The problem was how to reconcile their apparent continuation with the disappearance of their underlying reality.

Each of the two main explanations—one, that these outward manifestations represented mere quantity, and the other, that the accidents remained through divine omnipotence—accepted the common assumption abhorrent to Wyclif: namely, that there could be accidents without a substance. They both denied the very thing that Wyclif felt bound to accept—the continued existence of the bread and wine after consecration. For Wyclif they remained both as substances and as accidents. This was the only course which accorded with his metaphysical preconceptions. The doctrine of the *esse intelligibile* meant that there could be no being without essence which as such was indestructible. Hence, once in being, bread could not be annihilated, as both the prevailing solutions held; even when transubstantiated, its own essence must continue to coexist with the new substance which had been engendered. As defined by Wyclif in his later works[1] the Eucharist was 'the body of Christ in the form of bread and wine'.[2] In asserting the independent existence of the material elements he set himself to combat what he called the two heresies of received opinion.[3] An accident, he said, belonged by definition to its subject; far from his being able to give it independence, God was bound to sustain its subject, since he could not permit contradiction.[4] As white signified the essence of whiteness, so the appearance of the bread and wine denoted real bread and wine.[5] The existence of metaphysical truth was at stake. To permit knowledge to stop at accidents would put men at the mercy of their sense-impressions with no means of attaining to the reality beyond them.[6] Morally it would be the basest idolatry, for men would then be worshipping accidents[7] —an argument which could be used against Wyclif, since they

[1] Notably *De eucharistia*, *De blasphemia*, and the *Trialogus*.

[2] Et primo quod hoc sacramentum sit corpus Christi in forma panis (*Trialogus*, 249). See also *De eucharistia*, 29, 199, and *De apostasia*, 210.

[3] *Trialogus*, 249.

[4] *De apostasia*, 48, 49–50, 55–60, 79–80, 84, 85–87, 89–90, 96, iii. 117, 120, 121, 129, 132–48, 151–5, 156–9, 160–3, 163–4, 165–8, 204; *De eucharistia*, 51, 52, 57, 64, 67, 71, 78, 100, 128, 132, 134, 199, 202, 213, 220–1, 280, 284; *Trialogus*, 254, 259, 261, 263, 265, 268, 269.

[5] *De apostasia*, 119–20.

[6] Ibid. 120; *De eucharistia*, 78–80.

[7] *Trialogus*, 268, and 261, 263, 269. See also *De apostasia*, 129; *De eucharistia*, 14, 63, 284.

would only be worshipping real bread and wine in their place. Identifying the bread and wine with Christ's body and blood was no better, as this would commit the blasphemy of associating him with what was material and corruptible. Not only would a priest then be breaking Christ when he broke the bread, but should an animal eat the host it would be eating Christ.[1] Above all, Wyclif was not prepared to concede to the priest the power of making Christ's body when he celebrated mass. For these reasons it was untenable to treat the elements as Christ, rather than as a sign for him.[2]

To support them he turned once again to the *sensus catholicus* of apostolic tradition and the doctrines of the early church. The latter now extended into the eleventh century to the papal decree *Ego Berengarius* of 1059. There Berengarius in abjuring his errors on the Eucharist had stated: 'I believe that the bread and the wine placed on the altar after consecration are not only a sacrament but also the true body and blood of our lord, Jesus Christ.' Wyclif took this to mean that the bread and the wine placed on the altar before consecration remained after it, so that it was then both a sacrament and the body of Christ.[3] To Wyclif the modern Church had turned its back upon the truth of Berengarius's confession and so fallen into error.[4] He particularly criticized Innocent III, although in other matters he was often favourable to him.[5] In this, as in everything else upon which he had an opinion, Wyclif firmly believed that it was he who was on the side of tradition and the present church which had lapsed from it. How, he asked, could the last 100 years be compared to the 1,000 years which had preceded them?[6]

Wyclif's final solution was a much more precise one than he is often credited with. Accepting the independent existence of the bread and wine—as opposed to their being mere accidents or solely Christ's body—their transubstantiation was both natural and supernatural. The bread and wine remained bread and wine; but to them the body of Christ was now added. The change came not with the destruction of the bread and wine but in their coexistence with Christ.[7] The Eucharist, like Christ, had a dual nature. In its earthly aspect it was bread and wine; in its

[1] *De eucharistia*, 11–13; *Trialogus*, 272.
[2] *De eucharistia*, 16.
[3] *De apostasia*, 185–6.
[4] *De eucharistia*, 34.
[5] *De apostasia*, 65, 134, 135, 172, 200, 234; *De eucharistia*, 272–6.
[6] *De apostasia*, 174.
[7] Ibid. 210.

divine aspect Christ's body.[1] Accordingly they could not be identified with one another as substances or essences; rather Christ was present in the host spiritually, or, as Wyclif expressed it in the *Trialogus*, as a quality (*habitudinaliter*)[2] or influence. He was not to be seen there as a figure, but spiritually as through a glass darkly,[3] just as his body was to be taken and eaten in a spiritual sense.[4] His presence, which was universally in every host, therefore entailed no physical movement on his part.[5] One host was distinguished from others as individuals of the same species.[6] Transubstantiation, then, for Wyclif was a sacramental conversion, in which the bread and wine at once remained naturally the same and became something new. It was an essentially spiritual transformation which Wyclif did not attempt to explain naturally. It took place through a miracle.[7] As such, the role of the priest was correspondingly diminished.[8] Though Wyclif denied that it derogated from priestly power,[9] its total effect was as a further attack upon the Church. It also, paradoxically, became the hall-mark of his heresy, although it was less so by far than his doctrine of the Church.

VI

Wyclif had begun by investing God's knowledge with being; the created world was the transitory manifestation of the eternal archetypes in him. The individual's attributes of time, space, extension, and so on, were the accidents which accompanied it until it returned to its true archetype in God. The process only escaped being cyclical through the action of God's will. Nevertheless, for Wyclif, the idea, or *esse intelligibile*, became the reality and the actual world a fleeting arena. When applied to the Church it transferred its true body to the elect eternally chosen by God, and left no means by which they could be recognized on earth. The passage from heterodoxy to dissent

[1] Supponitur igitur... quod sicut Christus est due substantie, scilicet terrena et divina, sic hoc sacramentum est modo suo equivoco corpus panis sensibilis, qui de terra crevit, et corpus Christi quod verbum in Maria suscepit (ibid. 106).

[2] *Trialogus*, 276; also ibid. 270–2, 276, 278–9, 280; *De apostasia*, 103, 110, 213; *De eucharistia*, 19, 51–52, 230.

[3] *Trialogus*, 276.

[4] *De eucharistia*, 13.

[5] *Trialogus*, 267, 272; *De eucharistia*, 271.

[6] *Trialogus*, 273.

[7] *De apostasia*, 224.

[8] *De eucharistia*, 15–16, 123, 143–4.

[9] Ibid. 15.

became complete when the visible Church was denuded of authority for failing to conform to the one palpable criterion of God's word in the Bible. Scriptural truth and the apostolic tradition which embodied it supplanted the visible Church. They could only be renewed by the Church's forcible return to Christ. The path to dissent was complete, even if it had not been an exclusively intellectual one.