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John Wycliffe's Challenge to the Late Medieval Understanding of the Eucharist:

Affirming the Reality of Christ's Presence in Eucharistic Worship

by

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Abstract:

John Wycliffe's understanding of the real presence ignited a debate of mammoth proportions when he challenged the late medieval understanding of the Eucharist. Despite the magnitude of this debate, many accounts have minimized the importance of this challenge. Although Wycliffe believed in the paramount importance of the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the life of the church, he challenged the late medieval understanding of the Eucharist because he felt that it caused the people to worship the visible sign rather than the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament. Most late medieval worshippers only knew one theological understanding of Christ's real presence, namely transubstantiation. Wycliffe contended that transubstantiation was a recent addition to canon law that was founded neither on Scripture nor traditional canon law. Traditionally the Church previously had allowed for a variety of views regarding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Wycliffe's figurative view of the real presence provided worshippers an alternative understanding which incorporated a dialectic of presence and absence. The significance of Wycliffe's polemic is seen in the many dialogues that were generated through this challenge. The vitality of this debate is evidenced by the rich variety of eucharistic understandings that were generated by this polemic. Wycliffe's challenge is important because it centers attention on the reality of Christ's presence in eucharistic worship.

Dedication:

For my Great-grandfather William Stanley Martin in gratitude for his inspiration. He was an English Church historian who with passion wrote extensively about Wycliffe and his followers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction. – Christ’s Eucharistic Presence: Growing Intolerance of an Imprecise Definition.

“Wycliffe was a man of ideas and ideas lose their force and go stale if they are not subjected to discussion: debate is their oxygen.”¹

Maurice Keen.

Many historical accounts have minimized the importance and impact of Wycliffe and his followers on late medieval piety.² It has become common to exclude Wycliffism from major medieval English church history texts.³ Among the most notable of these texts has been Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* which has greatly influenced the now dominant school of thought regarding the nature of pre-Reformation piety in England.⁴ Similarly, Richard Rex’s influential book *The Lollards* understands Wycliffism to be an insignificant movement that had little impact on either the late medieval society, Church or Reformation.⁵ After reading these assessments, I found myself puzzled and asking such questions as: if the impact of Wycliffe and his followers was as insignificant as these accounts suggest, then why were Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas so durable? Why did Wycliffe’s ideas keep coming back even after the English authorities made it illegal to communicate Wycliffe’s views and to possess Wycliffite books?⁶

¹ Maurice Keen, “The Influence of Wyclif,” in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 136.

² Robert Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006), 4.

³ Peter Marshall, “Lollards and Protestants Revisited,” in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 312.

⁴ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c 1400-c1580* (London: Yale, 1992), 2.

⁵ Richard Rex, *The Lollards: Social History in Perspective* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), xiv,xv.

⁶ This thesis will use the word Wycliffite or Lollard interchangeably. There has been much debate in recent years regarding which of these two names is the most appropriate. Many sources including trial records use both terms. When Wycliffe along with Jan Hus was formally declared a heretic at Constance in 1415, the term Wycliffism was used. Lollard was a common pejorative term applied to Wycliffe and his followers which was drawn from the New Testament parable of the wheat and the tares (*lolia*). For more details see J Patrick Hornbeck II, Stephen E. Lahey, and Fiona Somerset. *Wycliffite Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 1-2; J. Patrick. Hornbeck II, *A Companion to Lollardy* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 4, 15-23.

What was it about Wycliffe's eucharistic ideas that persisted for so long in an underground movement in England? What was it about these ideas that catalyzed Bohemians and the revolution that followed the burning of Jan Hus at Constance in 1415? If Wycliffe's ideas were so insignificant, why was the Church's reaction against him so drastic? Why did the Church go to the extreme of singling Wycliffe out and declaring him to be a great heretic at the Council of Constance? Why were many of Wycliffe's eucharistic ideas seemingly echoed by later Reformers including Martin Luther? What was it about Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge that produced so many recurring conversations and dialogues?

Duffy and Rex downplay the impact of Wycliffism by foregrounding their claim that there were a "small number of Lollards." They argue that because there are a relatively "small number of Lollards" known to history, we must conclude that Wycliffism had little influence on late medieval piety. These allegedly "small numbers" are asserted in the face of numerous known Lollard cases and many of these are known in detail. Furthermore, there is copious data to suggest that Wycliffites were adept in the art of concealment in the face of persecution.⁷ Notwithstanding plentiful evidence, it is unlikely that modern researchers are likely to determine Lollard numbers with any statistical accuracy.⁸ Accordingly, this thesis will not undertake the traditional approach of focusing on numerical evidence to argue whether or not Wycliffism exerted significant influence on pre-Reformation England. Rather, this thesis will assert that the significance of Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge is seen in the many conversations that were stimulated by the ensuing debate. Maurice Keen once said that debate is the oxygen of ideas and ideas lose their force and go stale if they are not subjected to discussion.⁹ The momentous debate

⁷ A.G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York: 1509-1158* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ Keen, "The Influence of Wyclif," 136.

that followed Wycliffe's challenge is evidence of his significant ideas. This thesis contends that the enormity and durability of the debate that was generated by Wycliffe's eucharistic controversy is a witness to the significance of his ideas.

Wycliffe's Eucharistic ideas of course did not occur in a vacuum. Helen Hudson writes that what makes the study of Wycliffe so exciting, is that the issues that were addressed by his ideas, "whether, philosophical, theological, political, or social, are those that lie at the heart of medieval thought."¹⁰ Above all the Eucharist lay at the heart of medieval thought. In today's secular age, people have difficulty understanding the importance of the Eucharist in the highly religious culture of late medieval society. A case in point is that people today identify the medieval cathedral with amazing architecture. However, people in medieval society identified the cathedral with the celebration of the Mass. The cathedral was a tabernacle for the presence of the host which stood at the center of Christian devotion in late Middle Age worship.¹¹ The host was the embodiment of the supreme holiness of God on earth and the Mass became the means of prayer par excellence. Whatever the spiritual or material benefit sought by the supplicant, there was no more powerful and accessible means of intercession with God than the Mass.¹²

Late medieval worshipers had a limited understanding of Christ's eucharistic presence because most worshipers knew only one theological understanding of Christ's presence, and accordingly Wycliffe's challenge was seen by many to be a defiance to the very presence of Christ Himself.¹³ However, in Wycliffe's day, this narrow understanding of the sacramental

¹⁰ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 517.

¹¹ Hermann Sasse, *This is my body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Augsburg: Fortress, 1959), 60.

¹² Rex, *The Lollards*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid*, 42.

presence of Christ had been a recent development, as the Church previously had allowed for a variety of views.¹⁴

The two great fourth century patriarchs Ambrose and Augustine offered two different ways of looking at the reality of Christ's presence in Eucharistic worship. Ambrose supported the conversion of the elements and said that they "are transfigured by the mystery of holy prayer into the flesh and blood."¹⁵ Augustine spoke of the outward sign of grace and the consequent union of the faithful.¹⁶ Christians in the first millennium understood the Eucharist as the communal participation of the faithful in the body of Christ and saw no contradiction between Augustine and Ambrose.¹⁷

As the Church pressed into Northern Europe with its missional activities in the ninth century, emphasis began to shift from communal participation towards the action of the priest himself as celebrant. This increasing attention on the action of the priest led the clergy to clarify and systematize Church doctrine and law. As doctrine became canon law, there was less room for dissent from approved formulations.¹⁸ This shift can be seen by comparing ninth century eucharistic debates with those of the eleventh century. In the ninth century Paschasius Radbertus (785-865) and Ratramnus (d. circa 868) wrote two separate tracts on the eucharistic presence.¹⁹ Radbertus emphasized the teaching of Ambrose regarding conversion that the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist was the same body of Christ that was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified on the cross.²⁰ On the other hand, Ratramnus's teaching emphasized the teaching of

¹⁴ Levy, Ian Christopher. *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2015), 132, 288.

¹⁵ Bryan D. Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 86.

¹⁶ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 128.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 130.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 132.

²⁰ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 215.

Augustine regarding signs and he taught that by consecration the bread and wine become the sacrament of Christ's body and blood.²¹ A change takes place, not in a corporeal sense but in a spiritual (figurative) sense.²² In the ninth century these two monks were allowed to disagree on the meaning of the eucharistic presence.

However, the allowance for disagreement regarding the eucharistic presence in the ninth century was not seen in the eleventh century debates surrounding the teaching of Berenger of Tours (999-1088). These debates might be considered the first great "scholastic disputes over the Eucharist."²³ Berenger taught that the substance of the bread and wine remained after consecration.²⁴ He also taught that the sign must be distinct from the reality which it signifies (*res*).²⁵ This teaching was condemned in a council convened by Pope Nicholas II (d. 1061) in 1059. The statement of condemnation was drafted by Cardinal Humbert of Silva (d. 1061) and became incorporated into canon collections under its opening words *Ego Berengarius*.²⁶ Berenger's writings were burnt and Berenger signed the *Ego Berengarius* statement where he was forced to deny a) that after consecration the bread and wine are "only the sacrament and not the true body and blood of the Lord," and b) that it is impossible except in the sacrament alone for them to be handled or broken by priests' hands or crushed by the teeth of the faithful.²⁷ The wording of this *Ego Berengarius* formula was sufficiently ambiguous as to concede Berengar's essential point. Henry Chadwick writes that "he believed neither that after

²¹ Ibid, 217.

²² Ibid, 217.

²³ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 141.

²⁴ Ibid, 142.

²⁵ Ibid, 150-151.

²⁶ Henry Chadwick, "Ego Berengarius." *Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no.2 (1989): 415.

²⁷ Ibid, 423.

consecration there is only *sacramentum* without *res*, nor that there is *res* without *sacramentum*.²⁸

Another important development in the history of the Eucharist was Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Peter Lombard (circa 1100-1160) was bishop of Paris from 1159-1160.²⁹ His *Sentences* was the standard textbook for all theologians and apart from Scripture it was the late medieval work that was most frequently commented on by Christian theologians.³⁰ Lombard developed Augustine's principle of the signs in a way that drastically changed the conception of the Church's relationship to the Eucharist.³¹ In the patristic vision, the Church was the "true body," while the Eucharist was the "mystical body," but in the *Sentences* the emphasis had switched, and the Eucharist was the "real body" on the altar, present in the "mystical body" of the Church. Lombard's use of "mystical body" to mean the Church made the "real Church" to be reliant upon a "real Eucharist." The Church had now tied its very identity to the Sacrament of the Altar and thus there was need for precision in defining the presence of Christ in the sacrament.³²

This need for exactitude is seen in the 1215 Twelfth Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, Lateran IV, convened by Pope Innocent III (circa 1160-1216). The Council attempted to clarify the manner in which Christ is present in the sacrament by introducing the word transubstantiation. The Council stated that Christ's "body and blood are truly contained in the Sacrament of the Altar underneath the species of the bread and wine, the bread having been transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood."³³ We noted earlier that Ambrose had used the word transubstantiation in his writings, however this was the first time that this

²⁸ Ibid, 423.

²⁹ Philipp W. Rosemann, "Peter Lombard." in *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb, and David A. Johnson (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 59.

³⁰ Ibid, 64.

³¹ Stephen E. Lahey, *John Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127.

³² Ibid, 127.

³³ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 186-187.

word was introduced into canon law. Ian Christopher Levy notes that the word transubstantiation was simply introduced without providing a precise definition of the manner in which Christ is present in the Eucharist.³⁴

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) systematized the doctrine of transubstantiation. Aquinas took Augustine's concept of signs and Ambrose's concept of conversion and interpreted them using Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aquinas the Eucharist is "the end of all the sacraments"³⁵ that makes the faithful "perfect in union with Christ."³⁶ Aquinas follows Lombard when he says that there are three things that must be noted when considering the Eucharist as sacrament: "that which is sacrament only" (the bread and wine), that which is reality only (*res*) (the effect of the sacrament), and that which is both sacrament and reality (Christ's true body).³⁷ The whole substance of the bread is "converted" (transubstantiated) into the whole substance of Christ's body so that "the entire body of Christ is present," "that is, the bones, the nerves, and the like."³⁸ Although, the substance of Christ's body with all of its natural parts is really present, its quantity is present only "concomitantly."³⁹ The substance of the bread is not "annihilated" but rather the accident of quality (appearance) of the bread is sustained uniquely by the quantity of the bread.⁴⁰ Aquinas understood that for an accident to exist without its substance is an Aristotelian impossibility, however he believed that the quality of the bread is sustained miraculously. The substantial presence of Christ cannot be detected by the senses, or by understanding, but by faith

³⁴ Ibid, 187.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.), III q.73 a.3 resp.

³⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.73 a.3 ad 3.

³⁷ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 237.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.76 a.1 ad 2.

³⁹ Cross, "John Duns Scotus," 110.

⁴⁰ Stephen Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments." in *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 256.

alone.⁴¹ Aquinas's understanding of the real presence became the dominant understanding of Christ's eucharistic presence.

Some scholars did challenge Aquinas's interpretation. Duns Scotus (1265-1308) engaged Aquinas's thought and pointed out that according to Aristotle, being in a place is a relation. Aquinas had understood that there are only two ways in which a body can begin to be present at a place: (1) by local motion from place to place and (2) by transubstantiation. For Aquinas, local motion could not explain the presence of Christ in the sacrament since Christ's body in heaven does not travel to earth.⁴² Scotus suggested that local motion was not the only alternative to transubstantiation. Scotus uses Aristotelian arguments regarding the relationship between places to suggest that the bodily presence could be explained through consubstantiation, the doctrine that Christ's body comes to exist in the same place as the substance of the bread.⁴³ In fact, Scotus found consubstantiation intuitively more attractive than transubstantiation because consubstantiation relies on less philosophical assumptions and less miracles.⁴⁴ William of Ockham (1285-1347) came to a similar conclusion regarding consubstantiation, however both Scotus and Ockham accepted transubstantiation as a matter of faith based on the authority of the Church.⁴⁵

After transubstantiation became officially accepted, the debate regarding the real presence became more and more constricted so that in the fourteenth century the debate was systematized to a binary: Either Christ was present in his whole earthly body, or he could not be present. Nothing besides these alternatives was thinkable, or at least licitly thinkable.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.75 a.1 ad 1.

⁴² Cross, "John Duns Scotus," 107.

⁴³ Ibid, 108.

⁴⁴ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 258.

⁴⁵ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 239.

⁴⁶ David Ares, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 54.

Despite the tight parameters of this debate, Wycliffe argued against this particular official doctrine of the Church. Wycliffe was the first medieval scholar who formally challenged transubstantiation to the point that he was willing to stand against the recent decretals regarding the real presence without recanting. Wycliffe fully believed in the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar; however, he believed that the elements of bread and wine were materially unchanged by the consecration and that the substance of the bread remained. Wycliffe held that the body of Christ was really present as a sacrament. This sacrament is a sign from God that it signifies the body of Christ.⁴⁷ To the physical substance of the bread was added the spiritual reality of Christ.⁴⁸ Bread and wine are *habitually* or *figuratively* the body and blood of Christ.⁴⁹ Wycliffe's understanding of Christ's real presence can be understood as a dialectic of presence and absence.⁵⁰ In this way he differed from both Berenger and Aquinas. Aquinas saw no separation between the sign and the reality of the signified sign (*res*). The body of Christ on the altar was identical to Christ's Galilean body. On the other hand, Wycliffe did not affirm that the real presence was identical to Christ's Galilean body. In this way Wycliffe affirmed a separation or an absence. Berengar saw an absolute separation between the sign and the reality which it signified (*res*).⁵¹ On the other hand, Wycliffe did not affirm this absolute distinction between sign and *res* but understood Christ to be present as when Christ said, "I am with you always."⁵²

⁴⁷ John Wycliffe, *Triologus*, trans. Stephen E. Lahey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), IV.1.

⁴⁸ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 282.

⁴⁹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.8. Augusta Cook and W. Stanley Martin. *The Story of The Light That Never Went Out: A History of English Protestantism for Young Readers* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1903), 107.

⁵⁰ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 59.

⁵¹ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 150-151.

⁵² Maurice Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 14.

This thesis will consist of five chapters: 1) The introduction explains why I chose to investigate the impact of Wycliffe's polemic by focusing on the dialogues that were precipitated by Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge, rather than the traditional approach of focusing on the number of Lollards that may have existed in late medieval England. We observed that in the first millennium there was tolerance of disagreement regarding a specific definition of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the Church accepted multiple definitions. However, in the second millennium there was demand for a more exact definition of the real presence which led to the Lateran IV council's introduction of the word transubstantiation. In subsequent years transubstantiation became tightly defined with no allowance for disagreement. Wycliffe was the first theologian to openly challenge transubstantiation without recanting his views. Wycliffe's view of real presence as a dialectic of presence and absence offered an alternative understanding to the mainstream understanding. 2) The second chapter suggests that Scripture was the starting point for Wycliffe's theological understanding of the Eucharist, however it also emphasizes that metaphysics was also integral to his beliefs. We will see that Wycliffe effectively dialogued with Ockham and Aquinas. Both Ockham and Aquinas sought to add precision to the Church's definition of the real presence. Ockham's view involved the annihilation of the bread and Aquinas developed the doctrine of transubstantiation. Wycliffe's dialectic of presence and absence offered an arguably less precise definition of the real presence in an era that was demanding an exact definition. Wycliffe was especially concerned by the influence that contemporary understandings might have on the laity because he believed that transubstantiation caused them to worship the sign rather than the reality of Christ in the Sacrament. 3) The third chapter will investigate Wycliffe's polemics through the eyes of his opponents who declared him a heretic by comparing their arguments in three time periods: the later period of Wycliffe's

lifetime (1370-1384), during the administration of Thomas Arundel (1399-1414), and during the time of Thomas Netter (1414-1430). Although Wycliffe himself was formally declared a heretic in the later period at Constance, his ideas were declared heretical in a much earlier time period. We will see that the significance of Wycliffe's eucharistic debate is evidenced by Wycliffe's opponents' profoundly strong reactions to Wycliffite ideas. A major reason why the authorities declared Wycliffe to be a heretic was because they desired to protect the laity from ambiguous doctrine. One of the common allegations against Wycliffe's polemic was "scandalous ambiguity." Despite these allegations Wycliff did not provide his Christian culture the precise definition of Christ's eucharistic presence that it demanded because Wycliffe's figurative explanation of the real presence is arguably "ambiguous." Despite the fact that Wycliffe did not give the exacting definition that his culture demanded, his polemic generated an enormous debate which was especially popular among the laity. One of the singular achievements of Wycliffe and his followers was that in the course of a generation they were able to equip laypeople with the vernacular theological vocabulary necessary to effectively discuss eucharistic theology. 4) The fourth chapter will affirm that the positive impact of Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge can be seen in the many dialogues that were spawned by this challenge in different medieval communities. These communities include different Lollard communities as well as the greater medieval community. The prevalence of Wycliffite dialogue in the greater medieval community can be observed in the dialogues of the *Upland Series*, *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer's Lollard jokes. In the Lollard communities we will see a variety of eucharistic dialogues in different Lollard writings. Although most studies dismissive of Wycliffism have pointed to variety as evidence of its decay, this thesis will argue that Wycliffite diversity is a sign of vitality and development. There has been a common tendency in Wycliffite studies to see any

variation in Lollard viewpoint as evidence of incoherence and doctrinal inconsistency. However, this variation is not an indication of weakness but is rather a sign of strength and openness to fresh doctrinal ideas. While there were divergences of eucharistic views within the Wycliffite communities, the differences in practices of worship between Lollard and mainline communities were more similar than we once thought. This rich variation in eucharistic worship persisted among the laity into the English Reformation.

Chapter 2: John Wycliffe's Theological Understanding of the Eucharist.

Christ's presence was sacramental and spiritual; non the less real, but real in the same sense as when he said, "I am with you always," Not in the sense as when He hung on the Cross bodily.⁵³

Maurice Keen

This chapter will propose that Scripture was the starting point for John Wycliffe's theological understanding of the Eucharist and then examine the enormous contribution that metaphysics also made towards this understanding. We will then look at Wycliffe in dialogue with William of Ockham and Thomas Aquinas. Wycliffe was an able scholar who was steeped in contemporary issues and lucidly interacted with the greatest theological minds of his era. At the same time, he was far more than an armchair scholar because he addressed the practical consequences of how these ideas impacted the lives of laypeople in his culture. Wycliffe was concerned that the contemporary Church's understanding of transubstantiation caused the laity to worship the sign rather than the figurative reality of Christ that is present in the sign.

2.1 Scripture as Wycliffe's Starting Point.

Scholars are divided as to whether Scripture or metaphysics formed the starting point for Wycliffe's theological understanding of the Eucharist.⁵⁴ Many post-Reformation writers have tended to emphasize the scriptural basis of Wycliffe's writing to such a point as to downplay the significance of Wycliffe's metaphysics in his eucharistic theology. Gordon Leff suggests that Wycliffe's latter position on the Eucharist did not primary develop, "as used to be believed, through the upholding of the doctrine of *scripture sola*," but rather grew directly out of his

⁵³ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 14.

⁵⁴ Levy, *John Wycliffe's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 47.

metaphysics.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Jeremy Catto astutely questions whether conclusions primarily based on “metaphysical ideas should have precipitated so unprecedentedly violent a debate.”⁵⁶

Leff’s argument that metaphysics was the starting point for Wycliffe’s eucharistic views draws from evidence that Wycliffe had expressed doubt about transubstantiation up to fifteen years prior to publishing his views. Wycliffe debated with the Oxford Carmelite John Kynnyngham between 1372-1374 on matters unrelated to the Eucharist. During the course of this debate Kynnyngham expressed concern that Wycliffe did not believe that in the words of institution, *hoc est corpus meum*, Christ said the bread is His body. Furthermore, the Franciscan William Woodford wrote in 1381 that, “when the said Master John was first lecturing on the *Sentences* (circa 1371-1372) he asserted that though the sacramental accidents had a subject, yet the bread ceased to exist at consecration. And being much pressed as to what the subject of the accident was ... he answered that he did not know what the subject of the accident was, yet he asserted clearly that they had a subject. Now he lays down expressly that the bread remains after consecration and is the subject of the accidents.”⁵⁷ Leff suggests that academic speculation “ineluctably” led Wycliffe to final eucharist views that could have been reached at any time in the fifteen years prior to his publications of these views.⁵⁸ Maurice Keen astutely observes that the time gap is uncomfortably long to produce Leff’s “ineluctable” conclusion.⁵⁹ During this period Wycliffe had not only been involved in metaphysical debate but also in the study and translation of the Scriptures. Keen suggests that Wycliffe had long been concerned with

⁵⁵ Gordon Leff, “Wycliffe and Hus: A Doctrinal Comparison,” in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 110.

⁵⁶ J.I. Catto, “John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist.” *SCH Subsidia* 4 (1985): 269.

⁵⁷ Keen, “Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation,” 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

contemporary teaching on the Eucharist, but that what finally convinced him that he was wrong were his 1372-1379 studies in Scripture.⁶⁰

Wycliffe argued with Kynyngham and Woodford in 1377 and 1378 regarding the authority of Scripture. These opponents both took issue with Wycliffe's view of scriptural authority, namely that truth is ultimately found in Scripture.⁶¹ Scripture was foundational for Wycliffe, however much metaphysics played a key role in his theology. What could not find foundation in Holy Scriptures ultimately had no real foundation in Wycliffe's thought.⁶²

It is artificial to dissect Wycliffe's metaphysics from his scriptural interpretation because he was a product of a medieval tradition which drew from Augustine's understanding of Scripture as a source of logic.⁶³ Wycliffe, like most medieval theologians, held to the modus operandi of "faith seeking understanding."⁶⁴ Wycliffe understood the logic of Scripture to be the "logic of Christ." Throughout his writings Wycliffe insisted that "the logic of Christ" is the proper instrument with which to read Scripture and to understand any theological position. Stephen E. Lahey says that in the case of the Eucharist, he understood that Scripture asserted that Christ's being was present in the elements of the sacrament. It is because of the Eternal Word's presence that there is no room for an "either/or" relation between theology and philosophy.⁶⁵ Lahey further suggests that to describe a theology of Scripture without reference to other elements of a thinker's philosophical theology is "short sighted."⁶⁶ Wycliffe's philosophical

⁶⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁶¹ Rex, *The Lollards*, 35; Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.8; Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 67.

⁶² Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 4.

⁶³ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 93.

⁶⁴ Stephen E. Lahey, *Introduction: Triologus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 31.

⁶⁵ Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 134.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 136.

theology is primarily a matter of biblical exegesis. Metaphysics was simply a means to illuminate sacred grammar.⁶⁷

The real language of Scripture for Wycliffe went far deeper than the scriptural text itself. Language for Wycliffe was an ordered collection of signs, each referring to one of the constitutive elements of universal reality.⁶⁸ Wycliffe wrote that “First, Holy Scripture signifies Jesus Christ the book of life, in which every truth has been inscribed.”⁶⁹ The logic of Scripture is the embodiment of Christ’s logic. The ultimate significance and origin of all true language was Christ Himself.⁷⁰ Christ Himself as the mind of Truth that Scripture signifies is the commencement point for Wycliffe’s understanding of the Eucharist. In the *Triologus* Wycliffe begins his discussion of the Eucharist with these words, “It appears first, that a sign and the signified are convertible with being. For every creature is a sign of the Creator, just as smoke naturally signifies fire.”⁷¹ Stephen Penn writes that signs in nature are signs of their Creator, since each creature has intelligible, universal being in the mind of God.⁷² Of all the signs in nature the Sacrament of the Eucharist holds “greater honor” because it is signified specially by the words of Christ in Scripture.⁷³ Wycliffe understood that Christ’s presence is guaranteed by the Scriptural words, “*Hoc est corpus meum*.”⁷⁴ These words derive their signifying power directly from Christ whom Wycliffe asserts cannot lie.⁷⁵ Wycliffe held that while the elements of

⁶⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 15.

⁶⁸ Alessandro D Conti, “Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham: A Case of Realist Reaction to Ockham’s Approach to Logic, Metaphysics, and Theology.” in *A Companion to the Responses to Ockham*, vol. 65, *Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition*, ed. Christian Rode (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 139.

⁶⁹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, III.31.

⁷⁰ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 27.

⁷¹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.1.

⁷² Penn, “Wyclif and the Sacraments,” 247.

⁷³ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.1; IV.2.

⁷⁴ Jennifer Illig, “Preparing for Easter: Sermons on the Eucharist in English Wycliffite Sermons,” in *Europe After Wyclif*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael Van Dussen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 250; Mark 14:22.

⁷⁵ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 99.

bread and wine were materially unchanged by the consecration, and when the words of institution were spoken the spiritual being of Christ was added to their physical reality.⁷⁶

The contemporary understanding of the words of institution was that the transformative power is in the divine blessing conferred through the priest's pronouncement of the words.⁷⁷ In contemporary understanding of the words of institution, the demonstrative pronoun "hoc" (this) was a word that was understood to demonstrate the body of Christ. This understanding came from Lothario of Segni (circa 1160-1216), who became Pope Innocent III in 1198 and who convened Lateran IV in 1215. Lothario had addressed the question, to what does the demonstrative pronoun "hoc" refer? Lothario's answer was that Christ consecrated the host when He blessed it. Although Christ accomplished this by His own divine power through the blessing, He then expressed the form under which later priests could bless the host. The priests simply recite the words which confer the power of Christ's blessing. This explanation would gain popularity and become dominant in subsequent years.⁷⁸

Wycliffe felt that such an interpretation deprived Christ's words of any signifying power since the whole prayer must be taken materially as though recited by Christ. Wycliffe thought that Lothario's view was an instance of material supposition whereby the words simply stand in for words and not actual things.⁷⁹ Such an interpretation means that Christ is only stating the fact

⁷⁶ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 282.

⁷⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 267.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 174.

⁷⁹ Supposition theory was designed to explain the different role that words (or phrases) can have in relation to language and the extra-mental world when they appear as extremes (that is subject or predicate) in propositions. Wycliffe divides supposition into improper and proper. Improper supposition means a term stands for something different from its primary signification, and proper supposition means that a term stands for something by the virtue of the expression itself. Wycliffe further divides proper supposition into material and formal supposition. Material supposition means that a term stands for itself or its sound and formal where the term stands for what it properly signifies. Alessandro D. Conti, "Semantic and Ontological Aspects of Wyclif's Theory of Supposition," in *Medieval Supposition Theory Revisited*, ed. Egbert P. Bos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 305-306.

that His body is His body.⁸⁰ Wycliffe appealed to Jerome “that saint who was better acquainted with the sense of Scripture than all these deceitful postulators since the time of Innocent III.” The bread that Christ gave to His disciples is His body, meaning that the pronoun “hoc” demonstrated the substance of the bread which He had just previously taken in His hands.⁸¹ Wycliffe says that Jerome could not have been clearer. The bread taken in the hands of the priest is the Lord’s body, for Christ, “who cannot lie,” was clearly demonstrating the bread when He said, “*Hoc est corpus meum*.”⁸² Wycliffe’s absolute confidence in the signifying power of the words of institution came from the fact that they were grounded in the words of Scripture, the starting point of his theology.

2.2 *The Contribution of Metaphysics.*

Having outlined that the starting point for Wycliffe’s eucharistic theology was Scripture and given that metaphysics was an important instrument for his interpretation of Scripture, it is crucial to discuss Wycliffe’s metaphysics in further detail. As a realist Wycliffe believed that all things that exist derive their being from “universals” which in turn ultimately have their origin in the mind of God.⁸³ Wycliffe’s theory of universals is outlined in his *Tractus de Universalibus* (1374).⁸⁴ Although Wycliffe’s *de Universalibus* does not deal with the Eucharist directly, many concepts in the *Tractus* provide much of the metaphysical structure behind Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas. Two concepts in the *Tractus* that help us to understand Wycliffe’s eucharistic theology are Wycliffe’s theory of identity and distinction, and his concept of habitual predication.

⁸⁰ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 267.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 267.

⁸² *Ibid*, 267-268.

⁸³ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 31.

⁸⁴ J.I. Catto, “Wycliff and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356-1430,” in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2, ed. J.I. Catto and Ralph Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 190.

Anthony Kenny writes that in order to understand Wycliffe's view of universals one has to grasp his theory of predication.⁸⁵ Predication, for Wycliffe, involved an understanding of identity and distinction.⁸⁶ Kenny also says that "Wycliffe's theory of predication is initially perhaps the most difficult and obscure part of his doctrine in *de Universalibus*."⁸⁷ Predication, for Wycliffe, was not just the relationship between parts of language structure, but also was the relationship between things in the world to which linguistic terms correspond.⁸⁸

Wycliffe's theories of predication modified Aristotelian metaphysics.⁸⁹ Through these modifications Wycliffe's theories maintained a close isomorphism between the extramental world and the sensible world itself.⁹⁰ These modifications can be seen when Wycliffe draws from Robert Grosseteste to explain that there are five types of universals.⁹¹ Grosseteste (circa 1168-1253) was a former bishop of Lincoln whose ontological ideas were highly esteemed by Wycliffe.⁹² The first kind of universal are the divine ideas referred to above and the second are the common created notion in the superior causes of interest in the context of medieval Aristotelian cosmology. The third kind is the common form rooted in its individuals which Wycliffe believes is what Aristotle meant by genera and species. The fourth kind which is the

⁸⁵ Anthony Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 17.

⁸⁶ Conti, "Semantic and Ontological Aspects of Wyclif's Theory of Supposition," 318.

⁸⁷ Anthony Kenny, *Introduction: On Universals (Tractus de Universalibus)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), xx.

⁸⁸ Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 18.

⁸⁹ This understanding of Wycliffe as a qualified Aristotelian is contrary to the common portrayal of Wycliffe as a Platonist. (See for example: Rex, *The Lollards*, 33.) While Wycliffe followed Augustine in his belief in universals, Wycliffe's understanding of universals was not Platonism because he does not accept that there are universals outside of the divine mind which are independent both of the existence of the individuals and of the existence of created minds. Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 24.

⁹⁰ Conti, "Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham," 110.

⁹¹ Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 23.

⁹² Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 66.

common form in its accidents, apprehended by the lowest form of intellect.⁹³ The fifth type of universal are signs and mental acts - which Grosseteste sets aside as irrelevant to his concerns.⁹⁴

Wycliffe's answer to the third type of universal demonstrates Wycliffe's theory of identity and distinction. Aristotle taught that an individual or a singular is that which is not apt to be predicated of many whereas a universal is that which is apt to be predicated of many.⁹⁵ Boethius' neoplatonic understanding of universals had long been widely accepted.⁹⁶ Boethius held that a universal is something that is common to many.⁹⁷ The problem of the relationship between common natures and singular items had always been the most difficult issue for medieval realists.⁹⁸ Wycliffe sought to overcome the problem of universals through modifying Aristotelian notions with those of Boethius. Wycliffe maintains a Boethian approach when he refers to the "common form" and at the same time supports the Aristotelian notion of predication in terms of the "individuals."⁹⁹ For Wycliffe individuals and universals are not two metaphysically different kinds of things and in fact universals are numerically the same as the individuals.¹⁰⁰ Paul Vincent Spade says that "everything in reality is singular. Nevertheless, those same singular real things can be apprehended by a mind in a universal way."¹⁰¹ In drawing from both Boethius and Aristotle, Wycliffe's metaphysics maintained a dialectic of identity and distinction.

⁹³ Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 24.

⁹⁴ Paul Vincent Spade, "The Problem of Universals and Wyclif's Alleged "Ultrarealism." *Vivarium*, 43 (2005): 119; Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 24.

⁹⁵ Spade, "The Problem of Universals and Wyclif's Alleged "Ultrarealism," 114.

⁹⁶ Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 66.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 94.

⁹⁸ Conti, "Semantic and Ontological Aspects of Wyclif's Theory of Supposition," 321.

⁹⁹ Spade, "The Problem of Universals and Wyclif's Alleged "Ultrarealism," 119.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 121.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 120.

Wycliffe's understanding a dialectic of identity and distinction can be seen in his understanding of the sacramental sign.¹⁰² This dialectic of identity and distinction speaks to the presence and absence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. David Aers writes that, affirmations of the sacramental efficacy and Christ's real presence "do not invite us to dissolve the dynamics of the sign; we are not to identify the bread with Christ's body."¹⁰³ While describing Christ's institution of the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Wycliffe notes that Paul quotes Christ's words, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."¹⁰⁴ He then comments that the wine figured forth the new covenant as the calf's blood had been the sign of the Old Testament covenant.¹⁰⁵ In his *De Eucharistia*, Wycliffe observes in verses thirty-six and thirty-seven that these Christians each brought their own bread and wine, one getting drunk and another going hungry. There can be no doubt that in Paul's narrative the apostle is talking about material bread and wine, both in its abuse and its proper sacramental use.¹⁰⁶ At the same time the apostle is clear that the cup is truly the new covenant in Christ's blood and the bread is really Christ's body.

Wycliffe expresses similar concerns that the contemporary Church has collapsed the dialectic of presence and absence in its understanding of the sacramental sign. He draws from Augustine to support this concern. In his homily on John 6 Augustine writes that Jesus said, He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him.¹⁰⁷ Wycliffe again looks to Augustine to support this understanding, when the great Father says that to eat of the sacrament

¹⁰² Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 58.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:25.

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 24:5-8.

¹⁰⁶ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine of Hippo, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John," in *St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, vol. 7, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 173.

is to abide in Christ.¹⁰⁸ Christ is not present in the sacrament in his Galilean body, but he is salvifically and really present.¹⁰⁹ Christ's presence is just as real as when Christ said, "I am with you always."¹¹⁰ Wycliffe argues that contemporary theologians have collapsed the dialectic of absence and presence intrinsic to the sacramental sign, and as a result sacrament and *res* are made to be identical.¹¹¹

Wycliffe further develops his theory of real predication when he distinguishes between three categories of predication: formal, essential, and habitual predication. Formal predication refers to the form inhering in the subject: animality is the form by which every animal is an animal. Essential predication means that the same essence is in the subject and the predicate, although the notion of the predicate differs from the notion of the subject.¹¹² Habitual predication is relational "where a relationship of a kind attaches to a subject without making it as such strictly changeable."¹¹³ The subject does not change as when a thing is known or loved.¹¹⁴

Wycliffe's understanding of real predication relates to his understanding Christ's sacramental or figurative presence in the Eucharist. Wycliffe writes:

It is certain from faith that this writing "this is my body," just as with other like it should be taken according to habitual predication. Thus, we should know the difference between predication according to identity and predication according to habitude. For when two natures are identical within the same person, as happens in the incarnation, then both of these are naturally the same supposition. But this is otherwise regarding the Sacrament of the Altar, because although the bread may be broken into three or more pieces, each of them is not really, but habitually the same body.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 56; Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.7.

¹⁰⁹ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 56.

¹¹⁰ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 14.

¹¹¹ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 56.

¹¹² Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 20.

¹¹³ John Wycliffe, *On Universals (Tractus de Universalibus)*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), I.235-237.

¹¹⁴ Kenny, "The Realism of the De Universalibus," 20.

¹¹⁵ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.9.

Here Wycliffe expresses Christ's sacramental presence in terms of figurative speech. He suggests that the predication of the words of institution are an example of habitual rather than identical predication. Wycliffe traces the notion of identification back to Peter Lombard.¹¹⁶ Wycliffe believed when the host is consecrated, the host is not changed essentially, but rather relationally. For Wycliffe this conversion is a genuinely transformative relation that gives the bread a whole new reality. The all determining factor of this new reality is the all-determinative Word of Christ.¹¹⁷ The transformative power of Christ's words effect the Sacrament of the Altar as opposed to the dimensional presence of his body within the outwards signs.¹¹⁸ Christ is both the efficacious signifier of the sacramental change and the focus of sacramental worship.

Wycliffe believes that Scripture provides examples where "to be" can mean "to figure." "Christ suggests that the Baptist is Elijah and that the Baptist in a similar sense asserts himself not to be Elijah."¹¹⁹ Wycliffe suggests that these are examples of habitual predication. "As a consequence habitual predication ought not be considered to express identity, since Christ understood the Baptist to be figuratively Elijah, and the Baptist understood that he was not personally Elijah."¹²⁰ Wycliff reflects that when Christ said *hoc est corpus meum* (This is my body), He did not mean *hoc corpus est corpus meum* (This body is my body) – an absurd tautology – but *hoc panis est corpus meum* (This bread is my body). As He stood bodily before His disciples, He could only be speaking "in a figure" just as He was when He said, "upon this rock will I build my Church."¹²¹ The mode of speaking that Wycliffe calls figurative has a power lacking in simple allegorical discourses. Wycliffe writes, "the divine gift of the sacramental sign

¹¹⁶ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 268.

¹¹⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 309; Ian Christopher Levy, "Was John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist Donatistic?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53 (May 2000): 145.

¹¹⁸ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 291.

¹¹⁹ Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, IV.9; John 1:21; Matthew 11:14.

¹²⁰ Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, IV.4; IV.9.

¹²¹ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 12.

includes the unique power of making present the body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine.”¹²²

One common criticism of Wycliffe is that he does not detail a precise definition of how Christ is present in the Eucharist.¹²³ This lack of an exacting definition can be seen when Wycliffe states that the bread and wine are habitually or figuratively the body and blood of Christ. Wycliffe’s lack of exactitude is a source of frustration for many who desire great precision with regards to the mechanism whereby Christ enacts His real presence in the sacrament. Anne Hudson writes that the important matter in the Eucharist, by Wycliffe’s thinking was not any explanation of the change but the meaning. In an analogy found in the vernacular text which Hudson says has the strongest claim to be regarded as Wycliffe’s own, “just as a man looking at the statue does not consider first whether the statue is formed of ash or oak wood, but contemplates whom the statue represents, so men contemplating the Eucharist should be concerned with Christ and not the bread and wine.”¹²⁴ Wycliffe lived in an era which demanded an exacting definition of its eucharistic theology. Many, including Aquinas, felt that Aristotelianism could meet this need for precision in a way that traditional Platonic categories could not provide.¹²⁵ Others, such as Ockham, failed to find the precise details that they wanted in Aristotle and accordingly dispensed with many Aristotelian categories.

We will now investigate how Wycliffe’s metaphysics brought him into dialogue with Ockham. The significance of this dialogue is highlighted by Alessandro Conti’s claim that

¹²² Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 58.

¹²³ Spade, “The Problem of Universals and Wyclif’s Alleged “Ultrarealism,” 121.

¹²⁴ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 282.

¹²⁵ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 155.

Wycliffe's dialogue with Ockham was a major contributor of the late medieval dissolution of Aristotelian metaphysics.¹²⁶

2.3 *In Dialogue with Ockham.*

William of Ockham is well known for his nominalist views. These nominalist views brought him in sharp debate with Wycliffe's realist opinions. Nominalist views were dominant in Wycliffe's days in fourteenth century Oxford.¹²⁷ Ockham and Wycliffe are often portrayed as bitter opponents, however despite differing viewpoints, the two men had much in common. They were the two most outstanding anti-papal English writers of the fourteenth century.¹²⁸ They shared a common fate as refugees from the same university, and they shared the experience of writing against the Avignon papacy on behalf of the English monarchy. They both wrote for the same king, Edward III, one at the beginning and the other at the end of his long reign.¹²⁹ Gordon Leff rightly said that Wycliffe's "arguments are rigorous and reasoned and produced by careful definition and counter argument characteristic of scholarship discussion; there were no *betes noires* among his opponents, the nominalists, who suffer no worse a sobriquet than that of the "doctors of signs"; and he draws on most of the recognized authorities, theological and historical, rather than his own select list of great tradition."¹³⁰

Ockham's nominalism sees a sharp distinction between the extramental world and the various forms by which we think and talk about them.¹³¹ Nominalists denied the reality of

¹²⁶ Conti, "Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham," 137.

¹²⁷ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 272; Rex, *The Lollards*, 33.

¹²⁸ Michael Wilks, "Royal Patronage and Anti-Papalism from Ockham to Wycliff," in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 135.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

¹³⁰ Gordon Leff, "The Place of Metaphysics in Wycliffe's Theology," in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 219-220.

¹³¹ Conti, "Semantic and Ontological Aspects of Wyclif's Theory of Supposition," 318.

universals, and maintained instead that there were only things, which were known to the human intellect by a process of “abstraction” from sensory data.¹³² The central thesis of Ockham is that divine ideas are the creatures themselves qua known by God as pure possibilities.¹³³

Consequently, the term “idea” becomes relative and therefore becomes an uncertainty. Ockham, along with many other schoolmen of his era were questioning if theology, the “queen of the sciences” should qualify as a genuine science.¹³⁴ Up until the early fourteenth century possibilities were treated as having a foundation in God. Ockham inverted the patristic and early medieval primacy of real actuality over modal possibility.¹³⁵ On the other hand, Wycliffe’s basic thesis that the divine ideas centered on God who by nature was “Truth” was an absolute certainty.¹³⁶ Wycliffe was deeply concerned that this certainty was becoming eroded by the philosophical skepticism of Ockham nominalism. Ockham centered the divine ideas in the creatures themselves.¹³⁷ Wycliffe complained that “to be” is extended from everything existing to “everything possibly existing.”¹³⁸ The divine ideas are no longer absolute but have become relative.¹³⁹ The relationship between sacramental sign and the certain reality of the signified sign was replaced by an uncertainty. The apparent incongruencies that Wycliffe accepted when he considered the relationship between signs and things were now replaced by uncertainties.

Ockham’s approach to Aristotle was very different than that of Wycliffe. While Wycliffe upheld Aristotelian categories, Ockham attempted to rid Aristotelian reasoning of extra-philosophical influences.¹⁴⁰ Ockham simplified Aristotelian categories according to his principle

¹³² Rex, *The Lollards*, 33.

¹³³ Conti, “Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham,” 111-112.

¹³⁴ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 21-23.

¹³⁵ Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 195.

¹³⁶ Penn, “Wyclif and the Sacraments,” 247.

¹³⁷ Conti, “Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham,” 132.

¹³⁸ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, I.3.

¹³⁹ Conti, “Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham,” 132.

¹⁴⁰ Lahey, Introduction: *Triologus*, 4.

of ontological parsimony.¹⁴¹ Ockham accorded real status only to substance and quality and rejected most Aristotelian categories including quantity.¹⁴²

This rejection of the accident of quantity forms much of the impetus behind Ockham's eucharistic theology.¹⁴³ Ockham's rejection of quantity as a real substance meant that Christ's body does not need to possess dimensive quantity to exist under the species of the bread.¹⁴⁴ Unlike Aquinas, Ockham did not need to posit the qualities of the host existing in the quantity of the bread. The qualities of the bread exist in the converted, and definitively present body of Christ. The substance of the bread has been annihilated.¹⁴⁵

Annihilation of the bread for Wycliffe was an unconditional impossibility. Wycliffe maintained that an accident could not exist without a subject. Annihilation of a substance on an existential level necessitated annihilation at the highest level of universals which gave rise to those substances.¹⁴⁶ This notion was inconsistent with Wycliffe's belief that the natural order of things and the supernatural entity behind the natural order of things must cohere. The Eucharist was not a supernatural order of things beyond the natural order but must conform to the laws of being.¹⁴⁷

Wycliffe understood the laws of being to say that God could not go against His just nature.¹⁴⁸ If God could annihilate His subjects, then He could punish them out of any proportion

¹⁴¹ Conti, "Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham," 113.

¹⁴² William J Courtenay, "The Reception of Ockham's Thought in Fourteenth-Century England," in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 93.

¹⁴³ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 216.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁴⁵ Ockham distinguished between two types of annihilation. In one, the substance is absolutely destroyed so that nothing remains to be converted into something else. In the other, the substance is reduced to nothing, but not absolute nothingness. Instead, the annihilated substance reverts to the being that it had as a potential substance in God's mind before creation. This second "weaker" species of annihilation, Ockham asserted, is what occurs in the substance of the bread. Ockham reckoned this compatible with transubstantiation. Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 109; Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 228.

¹⁴⁶ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 253.

¹⁴⁷ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 271.

¹⁴⁸ Conti, "Wyclif as an Opponent of Ockham," 139.

to their deserts. If God could annihilate, He would cease to be just.¹⁴⁹ The first principle of God's nature is that God possesses the highest degree of goodness, perfection and power which can exist without formal contradiction.¹⁵⁰ This first principle holds "that God is good and perfect." God cannot lie, fail, or do something poorly.¹⁵¹ For Wycliffe there is no aspect of creation which is not valuable and thus inherently worthy of preservation. God's own goodness will not allow Him to inflict punishment, nor permit damnation, except on the occasion of guilt. Every individual creature is essential to the order of the universe.¹⁵² Accidental truth could no more exist apart from substance than a creature could exist apart from God's preserving power.¹⁵³

Ockham, on the other hand, was not committed to the view that God cannot deceive us.¹⁵⁴ For Ockham, quantity is no longer a real substance so therefore Christ's body does not need to possess it to exist under the species of the bread.¹⁵⁵ Ockham followed Scotus in saying that an accident without subject was a logical impossibility. However, by virtue of God's *potentia absoluta*, the case of the Eucharist was different.¹⁵⁶ God can annihilate and uphold accidents at His will, because He can do anything.¹⁵⁷ Wycliffe believed that such notions were incongruent with the dignity of the Eucharist. Wycliffe wrote in his *De Eucharistia*, "Annihilation seems a harmful transaction since the substance of bread and wine would profit the world more than this obscene transubstantiation of it; God would have profited His Church thus ineptly and ineffectively."¹⁵⁸ To profit the Church ineptly and ineffectively would run contrary to the just

¹⁴⁹ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 253.

¹⁵⁰ Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, I.1.

¹⁵¹ Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, I.4.

¹⁵² Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 61.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁵⁴ Rega Wood, "Intuitive Cognition and Divine Omnipotence: Ockham in Fourteenth-Century Perspective," in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 55.

¹⁵⁵ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 220.

¹⁵⁶ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 272.

¹⁵⁷ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 8.

¹⁵⁸ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 274.

nature of God. Such notions essentially turned God into a deceiver, which was an absolute impossibility for Wycliffe.

2.4 *In Dialogue with Aquinas.*

In contrast to Ockham, Thomas Aquinas had been careful to emphasize that transubstantiation as defined by the bread's conversion into the physical body does not entail annihilation. In his *Summa theologiae* Aquinas argues that "The substance of the bread or wine, after the consecration, remains neither under the sacramental species, nor elsewhere; yet it does not follow that it is annihilated; for it is changed into the body of Christ; just as if the air, from which fire is generated, be not there or elsewhere, it does not follow that it is annihilated."¹⁵⁹ Having argued that the substance of the bread and wine no longer remained, Aquinas was left with the problem of explaining how its accidental properties still remained. As we saw in the last chapter, Aquinas held that the quality (appearance) of the bread was sustained uniquely by the quantity of the bread.¹⁶⁰ In this way Aquinas maintained that the sacramental accidents had subject.¹⁶¹

Aquinas's claim that the accidents of the bread had subject has led Jeremy Catto to comment that Wycliffe seems to combine Ockhamist philosophy with Thomist theology. Wycliffe's belief that the substance of the bread remained after the consecration words entailed the understanding that the quality must be identical with a material substance – as Ockham asserted, in contradistinction to Aristotle and Aquinas. At the same time Wycliffe's belief that

¹⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.75 a.3 ad 1.

¹⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.77 a.2.

¹⁶¹ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 256.

the accident must have a subject (quantity) was a view which was rejected by Scotus and Ockham but maintained by Aquinas.¹⁶²

Catto's comment helpfully highlights common ground between Aquinas and Wycliffe for both affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament and both denied that the substance of the bread was annihilated. Wycliffe had tremendous respect for Aquinas and repeatedly referred to him with great esteem as the "Angelic Doctor."¹⁶³ Although, Wycliffe affixed Ockham and the Nominalists with the label "doctors of signs," he attached no such label to Aquinas. Despite his great respect for Aquinas, Wycliffe believed that transubstantiation was impossible because it allowed for an accident without a subject.¹⁶⁴ Wycliffe did not ascribe to Aquinas's understanding of substantial conversion, but rather believed that Christ's body is multiplied sacramentally to all places where the consecrated hosts were present.¹⁶⁵

Wycliffe commonly offered optical analogies to support this point.¹⁶⁶ In order to explain how Christ is present in the sacrament sacramentally but not dimensionally, Wycliffe argued that a mirror's reflection of the full image of the face is present at every point of the mirror, although two people see it from different places and different angles. Just as an image is multiplied at every point according to intentional being, so the body of Christ is sacramentally whole at every point of the sacrament.¹⁶⁷ One of the initial arguments in Wycliffe's *De Eucarista* is that "Christ is sacramentally, spiritually, or virtually whole at every point of the consecrated host as the soul is in the body... just as an image is whole at every point of the mirror so that it can be seen both

¹⁶² Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 272.

¹⁶³ Rex, *The Lollards*, 43.

¹⁶⁴ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 250; Fiona Somerset, "Here, There, and Everywhere? Wycliffite Conceptions of the Eucharist and Chaucer's "Other" Lollard Joke," in *Lollards and their Influence*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 131.

¹⁶⁵ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 315-316.

¹⁶⁶ Heather Phillips, "John Wycliffe and the Optics of the Eucharist," in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 245-258.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 251

in part or whole from any position, so the body of Christ is in the consecrated host as in a mirror.”¹⁶⁸ He further argues “that Christ can be perceived by all five senses in the consecrated host: by sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. *Moderniores doctores* deny that this is true for sight.”¹⁶⁹ Wycliffe did not develop these optical ideas in isolation. Mirror analogies were not uncommon with Augustine.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, optical concepts were topics of interest in the academic environment of Wycliffe’s day and his visual allusions presuppose the existence of a receptive audience.¹⁷¹

Aquinas also used optical analogies.¹⁷² Although Wycliffe and Aquinas both shared mirror analogies their interpretation of these analogies was different. Aquinas’s interpretation understood the analogy to support the whole physical bodily presence of Christ, whereas Wycliffe’s interpretation understood a figurative sacramental presence. Aquinas’s interpretation assumed an identity between sacramental sign and *res* because he believed that the substance of the bread is entirely converted into the body of Christ.¹⁷³ Wycliffe on the other hand maintained a dialectic of both identity and distinction between sacrament and *res*.

Wycliffe’s insistence on both identity and distinction in the sacramental sign can be seen in his reluctance to adopt an incarnational model to support his eucharistic doctrine. It has been suggested that the incarnation provides Wycliffe with a good model to support his understanding of the real presence.¹⁷⁴ For Wycliffe such a model would embrace the identity but deny the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 252.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 253.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 249.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 258.

¹⁷² When arguing that the body of Christ remains whole even when the host is broken, Aquinas notes that when the mirror is broken the whole image remains intact. He goes on to comment that the analogy is not perfect because different pieces of the mirror can give different reflections whereas there is only one consecration. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.76 a.3 resp.

¹⁷³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.75 a.3 resp.

¹⁷⁴ Levy, *John Wycliffe’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 326.

distinction between sacrament and *res*. Wycliffe writes that in the incarnation “two natures are made identical in the same person” of Christ.¹⁷⁵ To adopt such a model would be to say that the sacrament is really God. Rather, Wycliffe upholds a figurative model.

Aquinas, on the other hand, held that Christ is corporally present, but cannot be seen by any bodily eye as it exists in the consecrated host. The physical body that was born of the virgin Mary and that died on the cross is wholly and substantially present, but invisible to human senses.¹⁷⁶ Wycliffe was concerned that such an understanding of the host was a deception of the senses. Deception of the senses for Wycliffe was to cast Christ as a deceiver and to reduce the Eucharist to a deception.¹⁷⁷ Wycliffe writes,

We truly believe that not simply Christ, but that of God was crucified, dead and buried, just as He had been generated and made from woman beforehand. Likewise, if this bread is made identical with the body of Christ and his body really is the same Christ, then this bread is really God. But what kind of idolatry would be more hateful than this? Thus, anyone in the church could have his God, who would bear the above - mentioned abominable things, making God the most disgusting thing in the world.¹⁷⁸

The strong words in this passage demonstrate the passion Wycliffe had towards the sacrament. The notion of making the sign identical with God was one that brought out the strongest emotion in Wycliffe. For Wycliffe, the idea of making a sign an object of worship was tantamount to idolatry. Wycliffe was roused to strong emotion by the way that the doctrine of transubstantiation was being used in popular culture. Wycliffe was horrified by the misguided worship of the host that he witnessed all around him. In popular culture the practice of the Mass was commonly sensationalized and laced with sacerdotal magic.¹⁷⁹ “Fruits of the Mass” could be

¹⁷⁵ Wycliffe, *Dialogus*, IV.8.

¹⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.76.

¹⁷⁷ Catto, “John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist,” 274; Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 344.

¹⁷⁸ Wycliffe, *Dialogus*, IV.8.

¹⁷⁹ Keen, “Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation,” 14.

obtained by those present or by those who had paid a stipend to the ordained celebrant. These “fruits” include such ideas as after Mass one’s food tasted better, one would not die a sudden death during attendance at Mass, one does not get older while at Mass.¹⁸⁰ Popular practice involved the elevation of the host so that all could see Jesus their Lord in the form of bread.¹⁸¹ The host was commonly elevated as it was paraded in the popular feast of Corpus Christi,¹⁸² and worshippers were expected to bow to the host.¹⁸³ Eucharistic miracle stories proliferated and became the stock and trade of the friars.¹⁸⁴ For example, a guilty conscience could incur a horrifying vision of Christ in the flesh appearing on the altar instead of witnessing the host.¹⁸⁵ Wycliffe expressed great concern regarding these miracle stories and understood the doctrine of transubstantiation to be a catalyst for these practices. Wycliffe writes in his *De Eucharistia*, “solemn procession, people straining to get a look at the host in its monstrance like some sacred relic, friars pushing their eucharistic miracle stories; it is all the result of this unscriptural metaphysical impossibility.”¹⁸⁶ Wycliffe’s issue regarding “people straining to get a look at the host” reflects his concern for the laity. Margaret Aston points out that “lay understanding of the Eucharist was never very far from Wycliffe’s mind.”¹⁸⁷ Wycliffe says that idolatry will surely result when people fail to realize that “Christ’s presence is hidden spiritually in the sacrament.” Only when this principle is grasped can God be “rightly worshipped.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁰ Bernard, J. Cooke, *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 200.

¹⁸¹ John Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*. ed. Edward Peacock, rev. F.J. Furnivall (London: Trubner, 1902), 244-248. In the Internet Archive, accessed, February 15, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/instructionsfor00furngoog/page/n49/mode/1up?view=theater>.

¹⁸² Catto, “John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist,” 276.

¹⁸³ Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 284-292.

¹⁸⁴ Levy, *John Wycliffe’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 230.

¹⁸⁵ Catto, “John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist,” 277.

¹⁸⁶ Levy, *John Wycliffe’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 261.

¹⁸⁷ Margaret Aston, “Wyclif and the Vernacular,” in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 314.

¹⁸⁸ John Wycliffe. *De Eucharistia Tractus Major*, ed. Dr Johann Loserth (London: Trubner, 1892), I.15. In the Lollard Society online Archive, accessed July 27, 2022. https://lollardsociety.org/pdfs/Wyclif_de_Eucharistia.pdf

Wycliffe's phrase, "right worship" might seem at first glance to seem inflexible, however, "right worship" for Wycliffe was worship that focused on Christ. Wycliffe believed that "the real presence of God is hidden in the sacrament" and when the laity see only the visible sign, idolatry will inevitably occur.¹⁸⁹ Wycliffe's concern with the "rightness" of lay worship caused Wycliffe to see the *fides laica* (lay faith) as the source of much evil.¹⁹⁰ Jeremy Catto explains that from about the ninth century, the mass incorporated lay communion; however, the consecrated elements, reserved in church or carried in process, would retain and increase their importance as the focus of a separate cult.¹⁹¹ Similarly, when Thomas Ryan compared the worship of the early Church in the first millennium with that in the second millennium, he observed that the eucharistic presence of Christ was shifting from the community as the body of Christ to the consecrated elements.¹⁹² Bernard Cooke observes that laity were increasingly denied active participation in the Eucharist.¹⁹³ For them "the liturgy was a screen behind which God was hidden, and the Mass was a mystification and magic. The people were reduced to ignorance and inactivity. Doctrinal focus on transubstantiation added to people's isolation from the reality of Christ's presence, for both in theology and popular explanations of the Mass, it diverted attention from the ancient belief in the risen Lord's presence to the people, His body, the Church."¹⁹⁴ The Eucharist was reduced to a devotion which fed into the privatization of faith.

; Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 261.

¹⁸⁹ Wycliffe. *De Eucharistia Tractus Major*, I.15.

¹⁹⁰ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 275.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 276.

¹⁹² Ryan Thomas, "Sensuous History: The Medieval Feast of Corpus Christi as an Expression of the Sensus Fidelium," in *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 23.

¹⁹³ Cooke, *The Distancing of God*, 127.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 201.

This distanced people from one another and obscured the symbolism that Christians were meant to have for one another in Eucharistic communion.¹⁹⁵

In the first chapter we saw that in the twelfth century Peter Lombard's *Sentences* radically changed the understanding of the Church's relationship to the Eucharist when emphasis shifted from the true body of Christ being the Church to the true body of Christ being the Sacrament on the Altar. The Church's identity as the body of Christ was transferred from the community and tied to the consecrated elements. By the end of the fourteenth century the body of Christ was tied to a particular account of how Christ was present in the consecrated elements, and thus the Church's identity also became tied to this definition. The laity who comprised most Christians in the Church were left with no option. They had to choose the definition that Christ's Galilean body was present in the form of transubstantiation or risk being labeled a heretic.¹⁹⁶ Despite these risks, Wycliffe chose to challenge transubstantiation because he believed that it did not allow for "right worship."

It has been suggested that Wycliffe's eucharistic theology demonstrated a reduced understanding of the Sacrament,¹⁹⁷ however Wycliffe did not deny the importance of the Mass or the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁹⁸ He believed the reality had to be disentangled from the "sign" which he understood to be material being. He believed that the figurative mode of being by which the body of Christ existed in the Eucharist was a subtler and higher mode than merely material being. Wycliffe was convinced that transubstantiation collapsed the reality of Christ into the material sign resulting in an object of worship that was not Christ. The reality of Christ's presence for Wycliffe was a figurative dialectic of both the absence and presence

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 201.

¹⁹⁶ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 30.

¹⁹⁷ Rex, *The Lollards*, 46.

¹⁹⁸ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 14.

intrinsic to the sacramental sign. Wycliffe did not deny the importance of the Eucharist by denying transubstantiation but sought to endow it with a more real presence than which he believed was provided by transubstantiation.¹⁹⁹

Wycliffe's endeavor to endow the Eucharist with a higher and even more real presence contributed greatly to late medieval dialogue regarding the Eucharist. Wycliffe grounded his theological understanding of the Eucharist in Scripture and to this understanding added his metaphysical ideas to construct a figurative perspective that focused eucharistic worship on the reality of Christ. In the next chapter we will see that Wycliffe resisted the binary logic which had become entrenched in contemporary discourse concerning the Eucharist: the binary logic that either Christ's Galilean body is present in the sacrament or Christ's body is not present. Either the presence of Christ's body is the kind of substantial presence illustrated in contemporary worship of the host or there is not real presence at all.²⁰⁰ In the next chapter we will examine how Wycliffe's resistance to this binary led to his being labeled a heretic. We will see that Wycliffe's challenge to the doctrine of transubstantiation led to a dialogue of momentous proportions with his opponents.

¹⁹⁹ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 273.

²⁰⁰ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 61.

Chapter 3: The Implications of Labeling John Wycliffe a Heretic.

*Had Wycliffe not been deemed a heretic “he might have been remembered as one of a great triumvirate of Oxford scholastics along with Scotus and Ockham.”*²⁰¹

Anthony Kenny

In the last chapter we looked at John Wycliffe’s theology and metaphysics and saw that he was a man who capably engaged the greatest theological minds of his era. In this chapter we investigate the enormous puzzle of how such an accomplished man could come to be labeled the great heresiarch of the Middle Ages.²⁰² One writer has quipped that it is beyond the physical capacity of a lonely researcher to collect every single word of judgment passed upon Wycliffe by his opponents because there were so many of them.²⁰³ The declaration of Wycliffe as a heretic made it illegal to read or quote him. The declaration also extended to Wycliffe’s followers, and they risked excommunication and capital punishment at the stake.²⁰⁴

This chapter will contend that Wycliffe’s heretic label was unfair. Anthony Kenny also takes issue with the fairness of such judgment and speculates that had Wycliffe not been deemed a heretic “he might have been remembered as one of a great triumvirate of Oxford scholastics along with Scotus and Ockham.”²⁰⁵ We will see that the declaration of Wycliffe as a heretic had implications not only for Wycliffe but also for the laity. Many Church leaders saw the heresy label as an essential necessity to protect the faithful. These implications can be illustrated by comparing Wycliffe’s opponents’ reactions to his eucharistic dialogue in three different time

²⁰¹ Anthony Kenny, *Wycliffe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 105-106.

²⁰² Gordon Leff, “The Place of Metaphysics in Wycliffe’s Theology,” in *From Ockham to Wycliffe*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1987), 106.

²⁰³ Sean A. Otto, *John Wyclif: New Perspectives on an Old Controversy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 11.

²⁰⁴ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 166.

²⁰⁵ Kenny, *Wycliffe*, 105-106.

periods: during Wycliffe's lifetime (1470-1384), during the administration of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1397-1414), and during the time of Thomas Netter (1414-1430).

At the outset of this chapter, it is important to distinguish between *heresy* and *heterodoxy*. The thirteenth century bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, wrote that heresy is "an opinion chosen by human perception contrary to Holy Scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended."²⁰⁶ Grosseteste's definition highlights the early Church use of the word heresy where the word was strongly associated with choice. The word was a neutral descriptive term that was widely used to refer to a school of thought without any implied condemnation.²⁰⁷ However, in the Middle Ages heresy did not simply entail belief in one or more erroneous theological propositions, but also involved the refusal to recant such an erroneous belief when confronted by an authoritative teacher.²⁰⁸ Thus, from this Middle Age perspective, heresy was the opposite of submission. It is heterodoxy that is the opposite of orthodoxy.²⁰⁹

It is important to highlight the fact that heresy does not stand in opposition to orthodoxy, because it was common for presiding ecclesiastical judges to present heresy and orthodoxy as polar opposites in order to construct a sharp binary between the heretic and the orthodox. The term heresy then forms a facile way to sharply bifurcate the world between the righteous defenders of orthodoxy and the misguided, prideful, and even diabolical heretics.²¹⁰ Denial of transubstantiation was a common theological litmus test used to detect alleged eucharistic heresy. Frequently the accused were posed questions which required a yes or no answer.²¹¹ This binary allowed ecclesiastical judges to present their fellow Christians with a brutally clear

²⁰⁶ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 20.

²⁰⁷ Hornbeck, *Wycliffe Spirituality*, 1.

²⁰⁸ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 20.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 121; John A.F. Thomson, *The Lollards: 1414-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 70.

alternative. Does the Galilean body of Christ totally displace the bread or does it not? Does the material bread and wine not remain after the consecration or does it not? If the answer was “no” then the judge ruled that the respondent was outside of the Catholic Church.²¹²

In contrast to this dichotomizing notion of heresy, the now commonly accepted view is that heresy follows the understanding of the early church that it is a neutral descriptive term. The term orthodoxy is accepted by most theologians today to be a process of dynamic engagement with new ideas for doctrinal development.²¹³ This understanding of dynamic engagement with new ideas allows the Christian community to genuinely interrogate itself as to whether its existing ways of thinking are grounded in the realities of divine revelation or whether human innovations have displaced these realities.²¹⁴ There is a dynamic tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy where heterodox ideas may challenge accepted belief without destabilizing the core of Christian faith.²¹⁵ This tension provides orthodoxy with vital ways to examine itself and gives voice to those whom authorities might seek to silence through allegations of heresy.

Allister McGrath notes that much that was labelled heresy in the Middle Ages was not heresy, but rather a notion of power for political control.²¹⁶ McGrath suggests that “this politicization of the notion of heresy is perhaps best seen in the Church’s reaction to John Wycliffe.”²¹⁷ As we have seen Wycliffe was the first theologian to challenge the doctrine of transubstantiation and who also refused to recant. Nobody wanted to be a heretic, and nobody chose to be affiliated with what he or she thought was a heresy.²¹⁸ Although Wycliffe’s opponents sought to portray him as the “heretical other,” Wycliffe never thought of himself as a

²¹² Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 61. Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 38.

²¹³ Allister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 69, 221.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 69.

²¹⁵ McGrath, *Heresy*, 12.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 103.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 207.

²¹⁸ Hornbeck, *Wycliffite Spirituality*, 1.

heretic but rather contended that transubstantiation was a novel human innovation which was grounded neither in Scripture nor in Catholic tradition. Similarly, Wycliffe's followers did not self-identify as heretics, but rather saw themselves as followers of Christ, as they interpreted that injunction, by following Wycliffe.²¹⁹ In the few instances when they took the Lollard label, they wore it as a badge of pride – remembering Christ as “the most blessed loller that ever shall be.”²²⁰

The label of heresy was extremely common in medieval times. So much so that Peter Marshall writes that in the later Middle Ages “everybody in Christendom was, in someone’s eyes, by definition, potentially or actually, a heretic.”²²¹ Anne Hudson notes that one thing that is unusual about Wycliffism is that it is “a heresy that began as a product of academic speculation but that moved out of the academic world to become a popular movement. Academic heresies were, of course, numerous in this period, heresies of popular origin no less so; but Wycliffism both in its English and its Bohemian manifestations seem to be the only case of a propagation between the two worlds.”²²² We can see this propagation in England by examining the different ways Wycliffe’s opponents dialogued with Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas as these ideas moved out of the university and became popular among the laity. We will compare these dialogues in three different time periods.

3.1 Dialogue with Wycliffite Ideas During Wycliffe’s Lifetime (1370-1384).

²¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

²²⁰ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 209.

²²¹ Marshall, “Lollards and Protestants Revisited,” 317.

²²² Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 62.

Oxford university provided a relatively protective environment for academic discourse in the later Middle Ages.²²³ This freedom of expression at Oxford is seen in Wycliffe's dialogue with John Kynyngham and William Woodford. We recall from the last chapter that both Kynyngham and Woodford had expressed concerns regarding Wycliffe's interpretation of the Eucharist before Wycliffe formally published his eucharistic views in 1379. Similarly, Kynyngham argued against Wycliffe that "we should not imitate the manner of speaking that Scripture uses but expound the sense of Scripture by speaking accurately."²²⁴ Speaking accurately, for Kynyngham, meant using the scriptural interpretations agreed upon by a broad interpretative community that not only included the Fathers but current scholars and exegetes.²²⁵ Similarly, Woodford took exception to Wycliffe's understanding of Scripture. Woodford challenged Wycliffe's position that every truth is derived from Scripture. Woodford countered that if every truth is derived from Scripture, then the faithful need not believe any truth as necessary for salvation unless it was contained in Holy Scripture. He argued that the triune nature of God is not expressly stated in Scripture but is more necessary for salvation than many obscurities that are expressed in Scripture.²²⁶ Woodford also appealed to authorities that Wycliffe would not recognize. These included recent papal legislation, and some recent schoolmen such as Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure, John Pecham, Richard of Middleton, Petrus Aureolus, and Francis of Mayrone.²²⁷

²²³ Mishtooni Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," in *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 429.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 433.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 433-435.

²²⁶ Levy, Ian Christopher. "A Contextualized Wycliffe: Magister Sacrae Paginae," in *Wycliffe Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 50. Wycliffe, of course, was not presenting a universal principle designed to encompass the totality of Catholic doctrine, but rather saying that God would not have failed to recall clearly the perfect way of Christian purity in the Holy Scriptures.

²²⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 341.

Although the theological views of Wycliffe's opponents differed from his, it is clear that Wycliffe's ideas influenced them. Wycliffe's ideas stimulated independent thoughts as they interacted with his ideas. David Aers rightly notes that in any "serious, sustained conversation, all who participate are changed in the process."²²⁸ Wycliffe's conversation with his opponents went both ways because arguments from opponents like Kynyngham and Woodford challenged Wycliffe to revise his own hermeneutical opinions.²²⁹ Wycliffe's interaction with Woodford and Kynyngham resulted in Wycliffe modifying his understanding of the literal interpretation of Scripture. Following the 1377 and 1378 disputes with Kynyngham and Woodford, Wycliffe would not defend the literal truth of every word of the scriptural text in the same way as he did before. He argued that where an individual text may be corrupt, the Word of God cannot be identified merely with a letter on a page.²³⁰ In his 1378 *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, he argued that "the Law of God subsists beyond the manuscripts,"²³¹ and derive their signifying power directly from the mind of the Divine Author.²³² In the years following Wycliffe's departure from Oxford, Woodford's criticisms of Wycliffe became intensely personal, and he called Wycliffe an 'unstable man' because Wycliffe had changed his views so often.²³³ Woodford's criticism seems unfair because he misapplied the term "instability." The ability to refine one's views through debate with others is not a sign of "instability," but rather is an indication of strength. Strength of character rather than "instability," was demonstrated by Wycliffe's ability to refine his views in response to his opponent's polemic.

²²⁸ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, viii.

²²⁹ J.I. Catto, "Wycliff and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356-1430," in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2, ed. J.I. Catto and Ralph Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 209.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 209.

²³¹ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 86, 99; Catto, "Wycliff and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356-1430," 209.

²³² Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 99.

²³³ *Ibid*, 341.

The writings of many of Wycliffe's opponents during this period in Wycliffe's latter life demonstrate a growing anxiety regarding the consequences of scholastic discourse in the world beyond the schools.²³⁴ This anxiety was a result of an acute awareness of the potential impact of the knowledge of scholastic language and terminology on the laity outside of the university.²³⁵ This anxiety came to a head in 1381 when Oxford University Chancellor William Burton convened a commission of twelve theologians and doctors which resulted in Wycliffe being forced to retire from Oxford University.²³⁶ The following year in 1382 a council at Blackfriars was convened by Archbishop William Courtenay which raised the stakes to the more serious level of official ecclesiastical condemnation.²³⁷ Courtenay determined that interference into the freedom of thought and expression within the university community was justified "only if the topic of controversy had wider ecclesiastical or political meaning, as in the cases of mendicant privileges, apostolic poverty, *dominium*, papal authority, and major points of doctrine, was the issue adjudicated outside the university."²³⁸ Two major points of doctrine that both the Oxford commission and Blackfriars' council found to be especially grievous were the belief that the substance of the bread remained after consecration and the idea that Christ is only present in the Eucharist "figuratively or tropically, not truly in His own proper corporal person."²³⁹ Although these proceedings clearly focused on Wycliffe's ideas and declared these ideas to be heretical,²⁴⁰ Wycliffe was not specifically named nor was he called a heretic.²⁴¹ Wycliffe was only officially

²³⁴ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 429.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 429.

²³⁶ Anthony Kenny, "The Accursed Memory: The Counter-Reformation Reputation of John Wyclif," in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 147.

²³⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 253.

²³⁸ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 430.

²³⁹ Herbert Workman, *John Wycliffe, A Study of the English Medieval Church*, Vol. 2. (1926; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 144-145.

²⁴⁰ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 254.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

declared to be a heretic at Constance in 1415, however the condemnations of Constance echo the condemnations of the 1382 Blackfriars's council and the 1381 Oxford commission.²⁴²

An influential member of the 1381 Oxford commission was John Tissington (circa 1300-1395). He was a Franciscan Friar and noted opponent of Wycliffe.²⁴³ Tissington spoke of the fragile intelligibility of scholastic discourse, which works well as a professional dialect among the initiated but crumbles when exposed to the harsh light of common understanding.²⁴⁴ He saw this dialogue to be especially dangerous with regards to the eucharistic error. He expressed concern that

heretics are openly teaching that the bread and wine remain in their nature after the consecration . . . believing the host to be no more than holy bread. Those “subtle searchers of scripture”, (whose knowledge of holy writ is so vaunted these days, though many think without good cause) might argue about the church's terminology. But where scripture is silent as to form and species, however there was a safe and certain tradition for the use of these terms, dating from patristic times . . . Terms, relating to how Christ was seen and felt in the sacrament, must be carefully safeguarded when speaking in the vernacular and before lay people, keeping strictly to the formula “in form and kind of bread.” Otherwise, the people, prone to idolatry and lacking ability to distinguish what was felt in a thing from what was felt through it, might fall into pagan error.²⁴⁵

The strong words “perceived threat of pagan error” and “prone to idolatry” highlights Tissington's concern to protect the laity from the perceived misuse of vernacular terms with regards to how Christ is understood to be present in the Eucharist. The Lateran IV phrase “in form and kind of bread” demonstrates the fact that there was no tolerance for any other understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist other than that laid out in the 1215 canon law regarding transubstantiation.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Kenny, “The Accursed Memory,” 147-148.

²⁴³ Workman, *John Wycliffe*, Vol. 2, 144.

²⁴⁴ Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 436.

²⁴⁵ Aston, “Wyclif and the Vernacular,” 309.

²⁴⁶ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 186-187.

A similar desire to protect the laity is seen in Archbishop Courtney's order that the chancellor of Oxford publish the Blackfriars's condemned conclusions in English and Latin. He specified that this was to be done for both clergy and people, "without searching explanation of terms."²⁴⁷ Courtney's desire to avoid explanation of terms reflected a difficult problem for those who mounted popular opposition to Wycliffite ideas, especially when this opposition was expressed in the vernacular. The dilemma was that any answer to Wycliffite arguments that used English was potentially a means of spreading the notions that this opposition was designed to suppress. Any answer could potentially arouse interest in the minds of laity yet untouched by these ideas.²⁴⁸

The secrets of sacramental theology were not for lay people. Belief in the Sacrament of the Altar for those outside the schools entailed accepting the real presence, but not questioning or seeking to understand the miraculous change that took place in the nature of the bread. Words like *transubstantiatio*, *accidens*, *substantia*, *subjectaire*, *quidditas*, belonged to quite another sphere of discussion and explanation from that of popular preaching. They were alien to vernacular religious instruction up until the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Not needed by laity, they had no English equivalents.²⁴⁹

Belief of the heart called for no understanding of words like substance and accidents, but for worship and devotion. The Sacrament of the Altar received at Easter by communion was "Christ's own body in likeness of bread." Their participation was an act of faith rather than comprehension.²⁵⁰ Duffy writes that "It was part of the power of the words of consecration that they were hidden, too sacred to be communicated to the "lewed," and this very element of

²⁴⁷ Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," 305.

²⁴⁸ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 430.

²⁴⁹ Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," 301.

²⁵⁰ Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," 301.

mystery gave legitimacy to the sacred character of Latin itself, as higher and holier than the vernacular. Moreover, since the words of Scripture and the liturgy came from God, they were held to convey power even to those who did not fully comprehend them.”²⁵¹ Just because people do not “fully comprehend” does not mean that this act of faith was blind faith. Rather it was a faith that understood that participation in the Sacrament of the Altar did not require that a person possess full knowledge of how Christ was present in the sacrament. Wycliffe himself referred to the implicit faith of the Church. He grounded this implicit faith in “the faith of Scripture” which he connected with the “faith of Christ.” He accepted what he believed to be the authority of Scripture that the consecrated host is really the body of Christ through “implicit faith.”²⁵² Wycliffe differentiated between explicit believing and implicit believing. He wrote that there are some truths that are clearly explained in Scripture which we believe explicitly, while there are other truths “that we believe with some confusion” which we believe implicitly.²⁵³ Notwithstanding the fact that there are truths of Scripture that we cannot fully comprehend, he firmly believed that the Holy Spirit wills that every Christian whether clergy or layperson should read all the books of the Old and New Testament in the vernacular.²⁵⁴

3.2 Dialogue with Wycliffite Ideas During the Administration of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1399-1414).

Wycliffe’s retirement and swiftly ensuing death allowed the official proceedings to rest for another decade. Although opposition often specified the doctrinal unacceptability of Wycliffe’s teaching, the style of debate remained that of normal academic controversy. Until the

²⁵¹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 217.

²⁵² Wycliffe, *Triologus*, III.31.

²⁵³ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, Supplement.

²⁵⁴ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, III.31.

end of the first decade of the fifteenth century, the mention of Wycliffe's name or a reference to an opinion which he had advocated was not necessarily accompanied by reference to heresy.²⁵⁵

During this period, Wycliffe's writings, especially the *Trialogus*, remained popular and Wycliffe's followers produced a growing plethora of articles, tracts, and sermons.²⁵⁶ Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1352–1414) was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1399 by Henry IV. He is known as a vigorous defender of the English Church from heresy and anticlerical threats.²⁵⁷ Arundel became greatly alarmed about the state of the university and the support he found within it for Wycliffe's views.²⁵⁸ In 1401, the statue *De heretic comburendo* (on the burning of heretics) declared heresy a capital offence that could involve torture. In 1407 and again in 1409 the archbishop imposed his *Constitutions*, consisting of thirteen articles which sought to suppress Lollard heresy by rooting out its causes. It prohibited unlicensed possession of vernacular Bibles and any writings associated with heresy, as well as other manifestoes of heresy. The *Constitutions* outlawed the possession of Lollard texts including the *Wycliffite Bible* and established comprehensive terms for the prosecution of Lollard suspects.²⁵⁹ A major motivation for Arundel's *Constitutions* was his anxiety regarding the state of the university and the support he found within it for Wycliffe's views.²⁶⁰ Arundel's *Constitutions* referred to the "great scandal of the university."²⁶¹ This perceived "great scandal" was a breakdown in the boundary between

²⁵⁵ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 430.

²⁵⁶ Kenny, "The Accursed Memory," 147.

²⁵⁷ Genet, Jean-Philippe, "Arundel, Thomas," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Oxford: James Clarke and Co, 2002), accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780227679319.001.0001/acref-9780227679319-e-249>.

²⁵⁸ Keen, "The Influence of Wyclif," 135.

²⁵⁹ Rita Copeland, "Lollard Writings." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

²⁶⁰ Keen, "The Influence of Wyclif," 135.

²⁶¹ Thomas Arundel, *Archbishop Thomas Arundel's Constitutions against the Lollards*, 1408, trans. Michael Marlowe, 2012, Constitution 11. Accessed April 18, 2022, <https://www.bible-researcher.com/arundel.html>.

the academic and the extramural.²⁶² It is significant that Arundel's response to Wycliffism made no attempt to respond directly to the Wycliffite challenge with direct theological counter arguments.

This strategy of not directly engaging Wycliffe's ideas is attested by the fact that one of Arundel's most serious attempts to meet the Wycliffite challenge was his official endorsement of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. The *Mirror* is a translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran meditations *Vitae Christi*. As its title implies, the text does not provide a direct answer to Wycliffite theology but represents instead an alternative form of edification to Wycliffite preoccupation with Scripture in a series of meditations.²⁶³ These meditations extol the mystery of the sacrament and defend the real presence against the logic of human reason and human sight.²⁶⁴ Like most other popular late medieval handbooks, miracle stories are emphasized in order to confirm transubstantiation.²⁶⁵ Gospel stories are not left to the individual reader to interpret, and transubstantiation is taught as part of the gospel message.²⁶⁶ This attempt to solidify the gospel message was a result of underlying anxieties regarding the possibilities for "scandalous ambiguity" in theological studies and the implications for the laity and for novices.²⁶⁷

The *Mirror* was an attempt to dispense with any ambiguity other than the interpretation that the real presence was the literal bodily presence. As was mentioned in the last chapter, a common criticism of Wycliffe is that he does not provide a detailed definition of how Christ is

²⁶² Kantic Ghosh, "Wycliffite "Affiliations": Some Intellectual- Historical Perspectives," in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 17.

²⁶³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 436.

²⁶⁴ Helen Barr, "The Deafening Silence of Lollardy in the Digby Lyrics," in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 250.

²⁶⁵ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 23.

²⁶⁶ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 439.

²⁶⁷ Ghosh, "Wycliffite "Affiliations," 17.

present in the Eucharist. Wycliffe's dialectic of presence and absence is arguably ambiguous. This arguably ambiguous definition is one of the reasons why the debate regarding Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge is so intriguing. Wycliffe does not seem to have been interested in providing a precise definition to a culture that was demanding an exact definition. Wycliffe does not give a clear answer why he did not give a more precise definition. Given Wycliffe's Christological and scriptural focus, it is likely that he did not want to propose a definition that would push him beyond the limits of what is laid out in Scripture.²⁶⁸ Arundel and Love sought to resolve the "scandalous ambiguity" through a tight definition of the real presence which taught transubstantiation as gospel. The average lay person who did not have access to the gospel text would have no method to determine if Love's message was compatible with the scriptural text. The popularity of Love's *Mirror* indicates that Arundel's attempts to rectify the "scandalous ambiguity" were not disappointed.²⁶⁹

One of the most remarkable paradoxes of Love's *Mirror* is its emphasis on the abandonment of both "natural reason" and the "principles of philosophy." Love argues that in order to grasp the miracle of transubstantiation it is necessary to abandon our natural reason against the heretics who falsely believe that the substance of bread is not turned into the substance of God's body, but remains still bread as it was before.²⁷⁰ For Love "the principles of philosophy" are exemplified by Aristotle who contradicts the doctrine of Holy Church that teaches that after consecration, "accidents" such as color and taste are present without their natural substance.²⁷¹ Similarly, Arundel's *Constitutions* is hostile to the scholastic debate

²⁶⁸ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 253.

²⁶⁹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 439.

²⁷⁰ Mishtooni Bose. "Orthodoxy and the Game of Knowledge: Deguileville in Fifteenth Century England," in *Europe After Wyclif*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael Van Dussen, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 239.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 240.

surrounding the manner in which God is the “determiner” or “limiter of all things.” The *Constitutions* states that God cannot be enclosed in “philosophical terminology.” This emphasis on the abandonment of “natural reason” is paradoxical because it puts Wycliffe and any of his remaining supporters on the same side as his opponents, suggesting that the very enterprise of academic theology had the potential to run counter to the defense of the faith.²⁷²

Arundel’s *Constitutions* is an important moment in the history of censorship.²⁷³ The establishment’s anxiety regarding the support in the university for Wycliffe’s views led to the banning of the reading of Wycliffe’s polemical works in the university²⁷⁴ and the translation of Scripture.²⁷⁵ The *Constitutions* decreed that “no preacher of the word of God, or other person, do teach, preach, or observe anything in relation to the Sacrament of the Altar ... but that hath been determined by Holy Mother Church.”²⁷⁶ The person who knowingly attempts to the contrary was to incur the sentence of excommunication. Furthermore, the person was “not to be absolved except at the point of death, unless he reforms himself by first abjuring heresy... If he undertakes to do this a second time, and so relapse, let him be declared a heretic.”²⁷⁷ In 1411 Arundel made an armed visitation of Oxford, after he persuaded Pope Boniface IX to revoke the exemption from bishop interference that had previously been enjoyed by the University.²⁷⁸ He imposed a new oath on all incepting as masters, that they would not uphold any of the two hundred and sixty-seven errors and heresies that his committee had uncovered in the writings of the

²⁷² Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 411.

²⁷³ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 48.

²⁷⁴ Arundel, *Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s Constitutions against the Lollards*, Constitution 6.

²⁷⁵ Arundel, *Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s Constitutions against the Lollards*, Constitution 7. Keen, “The Influence of Wyclif,” 135.

²⁷⁶ Arundel, *Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s Constitutions against the Lollards*, Constitution 4.

²⁷⁷ Arundel, *Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s Constitutions against the Lollards*, Constitution 4.

²⁷⁸ Genet, Jean-Philippe, “Arundel, Thomas,” accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.qe2a.proxy.mun.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780227679319.001.0001/acref-9780227679319-e-249>.

heresiarch.²⁷⁹ Up to the enactment of Arundel's *Constitutions* there were theological questions on which it was possible to write or speak. These were questions that would later be used by ecclesiastical judges to divide the "orthodox from the heretic." Questions regarding the Eucharist especially would be used by these judges as a litmus test to determine heresy.²⁸⁰ Heresy was a condemnation that could bring the maximum censorship. It is ironic that the Eucharist which Aquinas calls the "consummation of the spiritual life, and the end of all the sacraments"²⁸¹ whereby "a man is made perfect in union with Christ"²⁸² had become transformed into a test as to whether a Christian deserved capital punishment.²⁸³

Arundel's repressive techniques clearly had a major influence on Wycliffism. Some contemporary authors such as Duffy and Rex downplay, if not completely ignore, this influence. This is especially noteworthy given the dominance of their school of thought regarding the current understanding of late medieval English piety.²⁸⁴ Duffy's six hundred page *The Stripping of the Altars* does not once mention Arundel's *Constitutions* or *De heretic comburendo*.²⁸⁵ Rex does allow that Arundel imposed strict limits on vernacular translation but does not come close to recognizing the extent or the severity of Arundel's *Constitutions* regarding Oxford University and eucharistic worship.²⁸⁶ Rex does mention *De heretic comburendo*, however he says that it was a "customary medieval penalty," a law "perhaps more symbolic than draconian" that arguably "made no practical difference to the fate of heretics."²⁸⁷ It is unfair to downplay the

²⁷⁹ Keen, "The Influence of Wyclif," 136.

²⁸⁰ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 121.

²⁸¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.73 a.3 resp.

²⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.73 a.3 ad 3.

²⁸³ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 27.

²⁸⁴ Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, 4.

²⁸⁵ David Aers, "Altars of Power: Reflections of Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars*: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580." *Literature and History* 3, no. 2, (1994): 94.

²⁸⁶ Rex, *The Lollards*, 75.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 83.

obvious influence that these laws would have had on Wycliffism. Rex does admit the “virtual impossibility of surviving as a Lollard in Oxford after the implementation of the *Constitutions*.” This admission simply states the obvious, because few scholars today would dispute that Wycliffism disappeared from Oxford following Arundel’s censorship. What Duffy and Rex do not admit is the impact that these laws would have had on the number of Lollards available to the eye of history: what Duffy calls the “relatively small number of Lollards.”²⁸⁸

A commonly cited explanation for the “small numbers” of Lollards after the second decade of the fifteenth century is the Oldcastle revolt of 1414.²⁸⁹ Rex for instance, makes the execution of Oldcastle, the cover of his influential *The Lollards*. In the early years following Wycliffe’s death, Wycliffites received support from knights, perhaps some nobles, at the royal court, who sheltered them and provided them with opportunities to preach.²⁹⁰ One prominent Lollard knight, Sir John Oldcastle, went so far as to organize a rebellion against the crown. The rebellion was short lived, and Oldcastle and others were executed for heresy.²⁹¹ There is no doubt that Oldcastle’s rebellion greatly damaged sympathy towards the Lollard movement, especially from the gentry. After this rebellion hardly any gentleman, and not a single knight, can be identified as a Lollard.²⁹² Anne Hudson says that it is hard to resist wondering what would have happened, both to Oldcastle and even more to the Lollard movement if Oldcastle did not play hopelessly into ecclesiastical hands.²⁹³ Although this rebellion caused much damage to the Lollard movement, it is not the only cause for the “small numbers.” There were many Lollards that had nothing to do with this rebellion. East Anglia where Wycliffism was popular, for

²⁸⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2.

²⁸⁹ Rex, *The Lollards*, 57.

²⁹⁰ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 4.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 149.

²⁹² Rex, *The Lollards*, 71.

²⁹³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 117.

example, played little part in the Oldcastle rising.²⁹⁴ Another reasonable cause for the “small number of Lollards” is that we are seeing only the visible numbers of a larger movement that was forced underground by Arundel’s *Constitutions*.²⁹⁵

It seems that Arundel’s repressive techniques were effective only on the surface because in the decades to follow there is a growing recognition by the Church authorities that the ideas raised by the challenge of Wycliffism were too formidable to be contained by force alone. Thus, we come to the third stage of the established Church’s response to Wycliffism which was an extensive systematic examination of Wycliffe’s ideas by Thomas Netter (d. 1430).

3.3 Dialogue with Wycliffite Ideas During the Time of Thomas Netter (1414-1430).

Netter was Prior Provincial of the Carmelite order from 1414 until his death in 1430. He attended the Council of Pisa in 1409, and the Council of Constance in 1414. The fact that Netter was influential at Constance is significant because this council was the first time that canon law declared Wycliffe to be a heretic. Netter served on various embassies from the royal court and served as confessor to Henry V.²⁹⁶ Netter was one of Wycliffe’s most vehement opponents.²⁹⁷ It is important for us to examine Netter’s posthumous interaction with Wycliffe in some detail because his approach marked a new stage in the Church’s approach to Wycliffe’s ideas. Netter’s portrayal of Wycliffe has proven to be very influential in defining not only Wycliffe’s own positions, but the terms of the debate itself.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Thomson, *The Later Lollards*, 117.

²⁹⁵ Aers, “Altars of Power,” 94.

²⁹⁶ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 50.

²⁹⁷ Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 409.

²⁹⁸ Levy, “A Contextualized Wycliffe,” 53.

Netter defined the terms of the debate by starting with the predetermined assumption that Wycliffe was a heretic. In establishing heresy as his starting position, Netter entrenched a view that was already common, and which was to become even more prevalent in future generations. According to Netter, Wycliffe takes his place in a long line of heretics from Marcion to Pelagius, all of whom attempted to distort Scripture with their own mendacious expositions, exchanging its true meaning for its own false sense.²⁹⁹ So influential was Netter's apriori conclusion that Ian Christopher Levy coined the term "Netterization," which refers to the tendency to "read everything Wycliffe says as tending to some heretical end."³⁰⁰

Netter differed from Wycliffe's previous opponents in that he engaged Wycliffe's writing in a serious scholarly manner.³⁰¹ He differs from Woodford in taking a line which Anne Hudson feels that Wycliffe himself would have recognized as valid. Whereas Woodford argues by syllogism, by logic chopping and by reductions ad absurdum, Netter has a sense of history similar to that found in Wycliffe and attempts genuinely to confront the issues.³⁰² Netter's desire was to take Wycliffe's arguments and turn them against him. He said that "Wycliffe's arguments may be as harmful to their originator as Goliath's sword had been to him."³⁰³ Netter's massive *Doctrinale* (1427) was written some forty years after Wycliffe's death and detects no less than eight hundred errors in Wycliffe's books.³⁰⁴ The method of the *Doctrinale* is erudite with consistent quotations from Scripture and the Fathers. He consistently quotes Wycliffe or provides summaries of Wycliffe's ideas that are reasonable.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 53.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 55.

³⁰¹ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 446.

³⁰² Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 53.

³⁰³ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 425.

³⁰⁴ Kenny, "The Accursed Memory," 164.

³⁰⁵ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 52.

One reason why Netter engaged Wycliffe's ideas was because Wycliffe contended that the contemporary Church's departure from the original scriptural Eucharist was demonstrated by its inability to explain sacramental doctrine to believers.³⁰⁶ This challenge was undoubtedly repeated by Wycliffe's followers. Another reason for Netter's engagement was that in spite of the strong efforts to counter it, the influence of Wycliffe was indeed profoundly impacting the laity. The reality was that the teaching of Wycliffe and his followers had effectively equipped laypeople with new theological vocabulary.³⁰⁷ Margaret Aston writes that in 1370 it might have seemed "farfetched to the point of insanity" to suppose that a glover or skinner in the town of Beccles in Suffolk had from reading or hearing texts come to believe "that no priest hath power to make God's body in the Sacrament of the Altar, and that after the sacramental words said of a priest at Mass there remaineth nothing but only a cake of material bread."³⁰⁸ This was unthinkable because simple laypeople did not discuss such theology. However, what was unthinkable in 1370 had happened by 1430 and the authorities had to come to terms with the new phenomenon: a heterodoxy with the capacity to produce and circulate English theological writings for lay consumption. We have already seen that prior to the third quarter of the fourteenth century words relating to sacramental theology were not to be found in the English vernacular. Margaret Aston suggests that one of the more remarkable achievements of the Wycliffites is that in the course of a generation they changed all this.³⁰⁹

On one hand it can be said that Netter went further than any of his predecessors in his attempt to seriously engage Wycliffe. He was the first to take seriously Wycliffe's challenge and

³⁰⁶ Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," 313.

³⁰⁷ The use of the new theological vocabulary was not exclusively restricted to the works of Wycliffites, for it is also to be found in the writings of Chaucer and Trevisa as well. Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," 303.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

admit that the authority of the Church is subject to the authority of Scripture.³¹⁰ On the other hand, despite Netter's meticulous analysis of Wycliffe and his acknowledgement of the authority of Scripture, Netter was not so engaging of Wycliffe's ideas as might appear on the surface, nor was his acknowledgment of the authority of Scripture without considerable nuance. Some writers understand Netter's critique to be the definitive treatment of Wycliffe. Richard Rex for instance writes that "Thomas Netter had completed his monumental refutation of Wycliffe, and nobody afterwards thought the task worth repeating."³¹¹ Others such as Mishtooni Bose suggest that some recent analysis "has not been favorable" to Netter, in particular his theological method and positivistic understanding of the role played by textual interpretation in the establishment of mainstream tradition.³¹²

Netter's theological method on one hand anchors his theological defense with quotations from Scripture and the tradition of the Fathers; but on the other hand his defense is incomplete. As a rule, Netter does not directly address the problems raised by the Wycliffite challenge but rather seeks to transform Wycliffe into the heretical other and convert "Wycliffism into an extramural movement of popular radicalism."³¹³ Netter rarely addresses Wycliffe's metaphysics and philosophy.³¹⁴ As we saw in chapter 2, metaphysics played a major role in Wycliffe's faith seeking understanding. Netter rejects philosophy as a helpful aid to understand revealed truth but rather seeks simply to join Scripture with patristic exposition.³¹⁵ Netter's profound ambivalence towards philosophy is somewhat reminiscent of Arundel's low opinion of philosophy.³¹⁶

³¹⁰ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 119.

³¹¹ Rex, *The Lollards*, 88.

³¹² Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 438.

³¹³ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 174.

³¹⁴ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 441.

³¹⁵ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 195.

³¹⁶ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 441.

Philosophy and reason as a guide to revealed truth has been completely replaced by Netter's interpretation of scriptural and traditional authority.³¹⁷

Netter's method of appealing to the tradition of the Fathers has been referred by Kantik Ghosh as positivistic because his engagement with history does not allow him to question church authority's decisions.³¹⁸ In this way Netter's dialogue with tradition differs from that of Woodford's skeptical dialogue in the secure university setting where uncertainty and questioning were allowed to flourish.³¹⁹ Netter could not tolerate scepticism and uncertainty because he believed that the past in its essentials, survived in the ecclesiastical traditions of the present. This ecclesiastical tradition of the present was for Netter an authority that could not be questioned.³²⁰ The true Church consists of an unbroken tradition handed down by Christ and the Apostles through the subsequent hierarchy to the present-day Church which cannot err. Individual members within its tradition may err now and then, but the truth that is derived from the superior consensus of the greatest and holiest teachers over the centuries cannot err.³²¹ Wycliffe like Netter (and unlike the later Reformers) upheld the authority of canon law and the authority of church tradition. Where he differed was in the interpretation of recent papal decretals, including the recent introduction of transubstantiation by Innocent III. Wycliffe requested that recent canon law be interpreted in keeping with Holy Scripture and the wider tradition of the Church.³²²

Wycliffe understood the true Church to be grounded on Scripture and all people who are guided by virtue, faith, and contrition constitute a "priesthood of all believers."³²³ Wycliffe stood

³¹⁷ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 195.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, 183.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 185.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 183.

³²² Ian Christopher Levy, "The Narrowing of Eucharistic Orthodoxy: Wycliffites and Their Opponents." *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 41 no. 2 (2006): 139.

³²³ Copeland, "Lollard Writings," 2.

with the Church in its belief in apostolic succession, and canon law but granted primacy to the authority of Scripture.³²⁴ Wycliffe exalted Scripture as an eternal standard which he equated with the Wisdom of God, and thus the Person of the Word which was Christ Himself. This understanding was already deeply embedded in the medieval exegetical tradition in the writings of Henry of Gent (circa 1217-1293) and Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349).³²⁵ Wycliffe was not out of place from others of his day when he looked at the relatively recent changes into eucharistic theology and critiqued the merits of these changes in light of early church tradition and Scripture.³²⁶

Netter's method of scriptural interpretation posited that when Scripture was ambiguous, the understanding of the Church should be accepted. This approach can be seen in Netter's discussion of the words of consecration: "*Hoc est corpus meum.*" Netter submits that the nature of the 'bread' to which Christ refers is non-material by pointing to Corinthians 10:16,17. He reasons that since the bread is not material bread in the second passage (verse 17, where the body of Christ is clearly the Church), then the bread cannot be material in the first passage (verse 16, "the bread which we break"). He then appeals to Augustine who said that if the intent and circumstances of Scripture cannot be known, then the meaning "prescribed by faith" should be accepted.³²⁷

Netter suggests that the meaning "prescribed by faith" is the proper method to interpret the verb "to be" (*est*) in the words of consecration. We recall from the last chapter that Wycliffe said that in Scripture "to be" can mean "to figure." Netter cites an example that Wycliffe gives based on Genesis 41:26-27 where the seven ears of corn and the seven fat cows are said "to be"

³²⁴ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.10.

³²⁵ Levy, "A Contextualized Wycliffe," 38,39.

³²⁶ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 185.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, 197.

rather than “to signify” seven years of plenty.³²⁸ Netter claims that the faith of Scripture asserts that the seven ears of corn and the seven fat cows are the seven years of plenty. He says that Augustine notes that Scripture does not say that they signify those seven years, but that they are these years. Netter criticizes Wycliffe’s interpretative principle as contrary to the intentions of both Scripture and Augustine, for there is no authority to extend figurative modes of signification to parts of Scripture which must be understood “properly.”³²⁹ Netter’s reference to the “proper” understanding of the body of Christ is reminiscent of the binary logic that was discussed in the beginning of this chapter. For Netter there was only one “proper” logic. The only “proper” understanding was that Christ is present in the sacrament in his Galilean body. Any other understanding was not acceptable.³³⁰ Netter wrote his *Doctrinale* in 1421 after the 1415 Council of Constance when Wycliffe’s heretic designation was dogmatized in canon law. At this time Netter was clearly arguing on the side of the dominant consensus, however consensus alone is not sufficient to define the “proper” understanding of Christ’s presence in the sacrament.

Netter reveals his understanding of consensus when he looks at Wycliffe’s comments which we encountered in chapter 2, where Christ declares that John the Baptist is Elijah.³³¹ Netter says that though Christ called him Elijah using a trope, John the Baptist refused to do so, reserving the power of the trope to Christ.³³² Therefore, Wycliffe’s tropic sacrament is against the authority and intention of Christ and Scripture, and tradition is unified on this issue: Augustine, Hilary, and Chrysostom.³³³ This invocation of Scripture and Christ’s intention followed by a reference to the unity of tradition on this issue is characteristic of Netter.³³⁴

³²⁸ Ibid, 198.

³²⁹ Ibid, 199.

³³⁰ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 53.

³³¹ Matthew 11:14.

³³² John 1:21.

³³³ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 200.

³³⁴ Ibid, 200.

Netter's claiming these authorities against Wycliffe was hardly fair to Wycliffe because Wycliffe would also have accepted the authority of these ancient authors. Netter's concern highlights a dilemma shared by opponents like him, namely that both Netter and Wycliffe commonly drew from the same sources. These common sources included contemporary theologians as well as church Fathers. In this way Netter was as much in dialogue with himself as he was with Wycliffe.³³⁵ It was unfair for Netter to single out Wycliffe, because Wycliffe was hardly the only theologian to question the work of recent canonists.³³⁶ Notably Jean Gerson (1363-1429) acknowledged that the theologian's duties might bring him in opposition to papal authority. Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420) asserted that "theology is the most perfect and stable wisdom, whereas human law is imperfect, fluid, and unstable."³³⁷ Gerson and d'Ailly both served terms as Chancellor of the University of Paris.³³⁸ Both Gerson and d'Ailly, along with Netter were influential attendees at Constance – the council that declared Wycliffe to be a heretic.

Netter's appeal to a unified tradition embraces an underlying understanding that an individual cannot be allowed the freedom to decide which sections of Scripture are metaphorical or figurative.³³⁹ According to Netter, Wycliffe's idiosyncratic scriptural interpretations are much less certain than the testimony of the consensus.³⁴⁰ Netter's idiosyncratic allegations are unjust because as we have seen, Wycliffe commonly drew from the same sources as Netter did. Wycliffe believed strongly in the faith of the Church which he grounded in the faith of the Scriptures. In the next chapter we will see there is little evidence that Wycliffites withdrew

³³⁵ Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 450.

³³⁶ Levy, "A Contextualized Wycliffe," 37.

³³⁷ Ibid, 37.

³³⁸ F.L. Cross "Gerson, Jean le Charlier de," in *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), accessed July 19, 2022, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-2868?rkey=5D1Hh8&result=1>.

³³⁹ Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 200.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 183.

themselves from the contemporary Church. Netter's characterization of Wycliffe and his followers as exclusive and individualistic is typical of Netter's attempt to depict Wycliffe as the heretical other.³⁴¹

Despite the questionable fairness of his allegations, Netter's critique raises the fascinating question: who can interpret Scripture? Netter's debate underlines what was commonly assumed in the Middle Ages (and more recent times) that it was the Bishops in union with the Pope that articulated authentic church doctrine and it was expected that the faithful would adhere to it.³⁴² In the last chapter we noted that in the second millennium the laity were becoming increasingly alienated from personal involvement in the liturgy of the Eucharist and this became an activity exclusively reserved for the ordained.³⁴³ For the bulk of Christians, the Mass was something to be attended, not something that the laity needed to understand.³⁴⁴

This debate has resurfaced in the recent Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in its discussion of the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*. The term *sensus fidei*, refers to the sense of the faith of the individual believer, and the term *sensus fidelium* refers to the collective sense of the faithful. This discussion highlights recognition of the role of the whole people of God in the Catholic Church's ecclesiastical vision.³⁴⁵ The importance of this topic has been reaffirmed by the International Theological Commission's 2014 document *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* which explores the *sensus fidelium* in the eucharistic feast of Corpus Christi.³⁴⁶ Thomas Ryan writes that this document "has a retrospective character in that believers rely on the Scriptures and on the continuing apostolic tradition in their life of faith and in the exercise of the

³⁴¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 169.

³⁴² Hinze, Bradford E. and Peter C. Phan, "Introduction," in *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (Eugene, Pickwick, 2016), 7.

³⁴³ Cooke, *The Distancing of God*, 141.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 199.

³⁴⁵ Hinze, "Introduction," in *Learning from All the Faithful*, 7.

³⁴⁶ Ryan, "Sensuous History: The Medieval Feast of Corpus Christi," 22.

sensus fidei. Yet it is also prospective. It gives an intuition as to the right way forward amid the uncertainties and ambiguities of history, and a capacity to listen discerningly to what human culture and the progress of the sciences are saying ... Only in retrospect does it become clear that a development in fact was representative of the *sensus fidelium* that participates in the faith of the Church that does not err.”³⁴⁷ An example of this retrospective character is thirteenth century laywoman Juliana of Cornillon (1193-1258) who devoted her life to promoting the feast of Corpus Christi. Only in retrospect did it become clear that the *sensus fidelium* was at work.³⁴⁸ Almost six hundred years ago Wycliffe wrote that “the pope and all his cardinals have imagined too little about” the role of the laity’s participation in the Eucharist. The early Church commonly broke bread in their homes when neither apostle nor priest was present.³⁴⁹ Perhaps in retrospect we see an instance where the *sensus fidelium* was at work in Wycliffe’s doctrinal development.

Wycliffe was ahead of his times with regard to his concern for the *fides laico* (lay faith).³⁵⁰ He and his followers had provided the laity with the linguistic tools which enabled them to discuss and discern sacramental theology. Although today there is a growing recognition that the laity have an important role to play in doctrinal discernment of the Catholic Church,³⁵¹ in Netter’s Day, Wycliffe’s concern for the laity was a major reason why he was declared to be a heretic.

Netter’s preconceived tendency to read everything Wycliffe says as tending to some heretical end can be seen in his engagement with Wycliffe regarding the interpretation of the “*hoc*” in the words of consecration. Netter does not mention that the reference of the

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 22.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 26.

³⁴⁹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.10.

³⁵⁰ Catto, “John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist,” 275.

³⁵¹ Ryan Marr, “John Henry Newman on Consulting the Faithful,” in *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 30.

demonstrative pronoun “*hoc*” in the phrase “*hoc est corpus meum*” was a source of debate as discussed earlier. Netter simply insists that Scripture records that Christ had taken his very own body in his hands when he offered it to the apostles at the Last Supper. Netter insists that the “*hoc*” must refer to Christ’s literal body since Christ bore that body substantively.³⁵² Rather than attempting to refute Wycliffe by further engaging Scripture or by appealing to tradition, Netter employed his common method of characterizing Wycliffe as another Berengar whom he regarded as a fellow heretic.³⁵³ We recall from chapter 1, that Berengar taught that the bread remains in substance after the consecration and that his teaching was condemned at the time of his forced confession in the 1059 *Ego Berengarius*. It is true that Wycliffe did hold that the substance of the bread remained after the consecration, however, as was mentioned in chapter 1, Wycliffe also held that the Eucharist is simultaneously bread and body. This was something that Berengar would not allow given his strict separation of *sacramentum* and *res*.³⁵⁴ Netter refused to accept Wycliffe’s figurative interpretation for what it was, and failed to mention that Wycliffe did not maintain this separation. Thus, Netter unfairly labeled Wycliffe as another Berengar.

Netter’s critique of Wycliffe on the surface is a rigorous examination of Wycliffe’s doctrine that interacts with both Scripture and tradition. However, when one looks beneath the surface into Netter’s critique, one realizes that Netter does not dialogue with the real Wycliffe but rather with Netter’s overarching image of a heretical Wycliffe.

In 1428, forty-four years after Wycliffe’s death, and ten years after his formal declaration as a heretic at Constance, the body of Wycliffe was exhumed, burned, and the ashes were thrown into the river Swift. Netter notes with some relish that “the flames consigned the vile corpse to

³⁵² Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 350.

³⁵³ Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 441.

³⁵⁴ Levy, *John Wyclif’s Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 351.

hell, and the streams absorbed the ashes.”³⁵⁵ This grim ceremony was intended as the symbolic annihilation of Wycliffe, however neither this ceremony nor the *Doctrinale* could bring an end to Wycliffe’s eucharistic dialogue.

We have seen in this chapter that Wycliffe’s eucharistic dialogue was met by different strategies in each of the three time periods that we investigated. Many in the Church saw the heresy label as an essential necessity to protect the laity. Ironically Wycliffe too was attempting to protect the laity. Despite attempts to portray Wycliffe as the heretical other, Wycliffe and his followers successfully provided the laity with the necessary vernacular vocabulary in which to discuss eucharistic theology. We will see more of the influence of Wycliffe’s ideas in our next chapter where we will move from the portrayal of Wycliffe’s eucharistic dialogue as expressed through the voice of Wycliffe’s opponents, to conversations voiced by Wycliffe’s followers and the greater medieval community.

³⁵⁵ Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 407.

Chapter 4: Debate about Wycliffe's Eucharistic Theology among Medieval Christian Communities.

*Most studies dismissive of Wycliffism have pointed to variation as evidence of Wycliffism's decay. Variation is typically evidence of vibrancy and development. Decay is more commonly linked with stagnant uniformity.*³⁵⁶

Fiona Somerset

In the last chapter we contended that the significance of Wycliffe's eucharistic debate is evidenced by the profoundly strong reaction that was generated by Wycliffe's opponents as they responded in different ways to Wycliffe's eucharistic ideas. In this chapter we will argue that the positive impact of Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge can be seen in the many dialogues that were spawned in different medieval communities. Within the Lollard community we will see a rich variety of eucharistic dialogues and perspectives. This variety evidences the vibrancy of this community and its desire to develop doctrine. Their doctrinal views ranged from Wycliffe's understanding of the real presence to memorialist opinions. This spectrum of eucharistic views seems to have persisted into the English Reformation and is also seen in the Bohemian Reformation. Intense engagement with Wycliffe's eucharistic ideas within the greater medieval community can be witnessed in the dialogues of the *Upland* series, *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer's jokes. Studies of places like Tenterden where Wycliffism had been established for many generations, as well as examinations of different Wycliffite writings show that the practices of worship between Lollard and mainline communities were closer than we once thought.

³⁵⁶ Fiona Somerset, "Afterward," in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 322.

4.1 Wycliffite Dialogue Expressed in Wycliffite Writings.

Many historians have minimized the importance and impact of Wycliffism on late medieval discourse. The study of Lollard beliefs has been likened to the study of the beliefs of unicorns because it is not possible to study something that does not exist.³⁵⁷ Eamon Duffy's dominant *The Stripping of the Altars*, excludes Lollards in his account of traditional religion in England from circa 1400 to circa 1580, because he contends that the impact of Wycliffism on late medieval English culture has been grossly exaggerated.³⁵⁸ Following Duffy, Richard Rex says that Wycliffism became "a principled rejection of traditional religion" and soon forgot "Wycliffe's nuanced account of the Eucharist."³⁵⁹ John A.F. Thomson's detailed examination of trial records, *The Later Lollards*, acknowledges Wycliffism as a historical entity, however he depicts Wycliffe and his followers in a negative light. He depicts Lollards as people who are defined by their denial of traditional beliefs rather than affirming constructive alternatives.³⁶⁰ However, this negative assessment makes it unclear what attraction a religious movement that was overwhelmingly negative in its ideology could have for its adherents. We have to ask how such a negative ideology could motivate people to risk their lives and livelihood to disseminate Wycliffite ideas.³⁶¹

One reason for these dismissive and negative portrayals of Wycliffites is because scholars have typically relied on "extrinsic" accounts produced by opponents such as court trial records, rather than the 250 existing manuscripts produced by Lollards themselves. Fiona Somerset compares this to beginning research on Franciscans by reading antifraternal writings. She also

³⁵⁷ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 111.

³⁵⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2.

³⁵⁹ Rex, *The Lollards*, 60.

³⁶⁰ Thomson, *The Later Lollards*, 246.

³⁶¹ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 69.

compares this to basing a study of Christianity on what Muslims affected by the Crusades have to say about Christians.³⁶² These Lollard writings include the *Wycliffe Bible*, the *Glossed Gospels*, the *Floretum*, the *Rosurium*, and the *English Wycliffe Sermons* (EWS).³⁶³ Somerset, along with others, have attempted to offset this negative picture by reconstructing the positive spiritual ideas of these Lollard writers. One finding that has emerged is that the differences in spiritual and devotional practice between Wycliffism and the mainstream are not nearly as wide as previously imagined.³⁶⁴

This is demonstrated in Jennifer Illig's study of the Eucharist in the twenty-one EWS sermons that concern the Eucharist.³⁶⁵ These sermons emphasize correct attention to spiritual reception and proper participation in the Eucharist in the same way as mainstream texts.³⁶⁶ Illig's claim runs counter to the claim of Richard Rex that these sermons confirm the negative impression of Wycliffism conveyed in heresy trials. When the Lollard texts are not attacking the friars, prelates and papacy, their teachings "consist of entirely conventional encouragement to follow Christ, avoid sin, and perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy." "The only teaching ever presented on the subject of the Eucharist is the denial of transubstantiation (and in these sermons, Wycliffe's recondite eucharistic theology was reduced to a flatly figurative interpretation of Christ's words)."³⁶⁷

Rex is correct when he says that Lollards put great emphasis on following Christ and living a virtuous life.³⁶⁸ He is also correct in pointing out that Wycliffites commonly spoke out

³⁶² Fiona Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings After Wyclif* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

³⁶³ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 79.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁶⁵ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 259; *English Wycliffe Sermons*. 5 vols, ed. Anne Hudson and Pamela Gradon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983–1997). The EWS sermons will be cited in the footnotes in the form: EWS book. sermon number/line number.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

³⁶⁷ Rex, *The Lollards*, 60.

³⁶⁸ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 248.

against what they felt to be abuses in the contemporary Church and against certain recent papal decretals including transubstantiation. However, his assessment is not accurate when it reduces Lollard teaching to denial of transubstantiation. Never do these sermon writers say that a person should not participate in the Eucharist but rather the sermons encourage participation in the sacramental life of the Church. The Eucharist is repeatedly referred to with some reverence as the “Sacrament of the Altar.”³⁶⁹ The only negative language that the writers actually use about the Eucharist is in fact to deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. Just because this doctrine was rejected does not necessarily mean the entire practice of the Eucharist was rejected.³⁷⁰

A case in point is sermon 176 which distinguishes between bodily and spiritual presence. The writer explains that Christ had flesh here on earth, and that flesh can be identified with “God’s body in heaven.”³⁷¹ Because Christ’s flesh and blood are in heaven, people can only partake of them through spiritual eating.³⁷² “The bread of the sacred host is natural bread and is eaten bodily.”³⁷³ At the same time, it is “God’s body in figure” and is “God’s body in His nature.”³⁷⁴ These phrases draw from Wycliffe who referred to the Eucharist as the body of Christ “in its nature” which is the body of Christ “in heaven” and at the same time the figurative body of Christ.³⁷⁵ Contrary to Rex this interpretation was anything but “flatly figurative.” We have seen that late medieval discourses on the Eucharist had developed into a binary: either Christ was present in his whole earthly body or he could not be present.³⁷⁶ We have seen that Wycliffe developed a different model of understanding sacramental signs that rejected this binary by

³⁶⁹ see, for instance, EWS i. 46/61; iii. 176/59.

³⁷⁰ Illig, “Preparing for Easter,” 253.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 252.

³⁷² Ibid, 252.

³⁷³ EWS iii. 176/70,71.

³⁷⁴ EWS iii. 176/71,72.

³⁷⁵ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.1, IV.9.

³⁷⁶ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 54. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q.76 a.1 ad 2.

affirming that the body of Christ is present figuratively and really in the consecrated sign.³⁷⁷ Like Wycliffe, the writer does not seem interested in pursuing a precise definition of how Christ is present because he does not wish to give an explanation that would push him above and beyond the horizon of that observed in Scripture.³⁷⁸

The writers of two sermons for Easter Day, sermons E22 and 46, prepare the members of their audience for Easter communion by using language that focuses attention on the communion with emphases on the virtues and forsaking sin.³⁷⁹ Sermon 46 for example says that people should leave their “former sin” and “clothe themselves with the three virtues: faith, hope and love in order to receive the sacrament.”³⁸⁰ In this way these sermons are similar to contemporary writer’s sermons. John Mirk (circa 1382–circa 1414) was a contemporary writer who wrote a series of sermons in the vernacular to aid the clergy in directing lay people to properly prepare for Holy Days. These sermons were written about the same time that the EWS was written. Duffy notes that this was a time when there was much anxiety about the spread of Wycliffism.³⁸¹ In his Easter sermon, John Mirk connects the importance of the preparatory confession of sin and practice of the virtue of love when preparing to participate in the Eucharist. “I charge you ... that none of you today come to God’s table without being in full love for God’s people” and that “you desire to fully leave your sin.”³⁸² Thus the EWS and Mirk’s Easter sermons share common ground regarding their emphasis on virtue in their call to receive the Eucharist at Easter.

³⁷⁷ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 61.

³⁷⁸ Illig, “Preparing for Easter,” 253.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁸⁰ EWS i. 46/66-67.

³⁸¹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 28.

³⁸² John Mirk, *Mirk’s Festial: a Collection of Homilies*. ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Trubner, 1905), 131 / 76b:22-28. In the Internet Archive, accessed, June 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/mirksfestialcoll00mirk/page/n11/mode/2up?view=theater>.

Furthermore, both are organized around specific liturgical days and events such as the medieval traditional feast days.³⁸³

Comparing the similarities of Wycliffite sermons with contemporary sermons is at variance with traditional approaches, which have focused on the differences. Illig does not downplay the fact that there are significant differences between Wycliffites and the mainstream Church, nor does she attempt to reconcile these differences. However, Illig suggests that these differences need not be the first or only thing on which we focus when we read these sermons. When we focus on the similarities, we find that the practices of Wycliffites have been closer to the life and practice of the mainstream Church than we once thought.³⁸⁴ These similarities suggest that there may have been more dialogue between Wycliffites and the mainstream Church than we previously realized. These similarities may in part have catalyzed the eucharistic theological dialogue in lay communities. Constructive conversation is common when members of communities share points of agreement rather than when members are alienated from one another through disagreement.

In the last chapter we saw that some church leaders referred to this dialogue as “scandalous ambiguity.”³⁸⁵ Lollard writers were familiar with current academic debate.³⁸⁶ They would have been aware of the concerns regarding *Verba scandalosa* which are “offensive to the ears of the pious” because it was a phrase that was ubiquitous in fifteenth century polemics.³⁸⁷ We have seen, this “scandalous ambiguity” did not start with Wycliffe and his followers. It had been around for a long time. As noted in the introduction of this thesis the two great fourth

³⁸³ Illig, “Preparing for Easter,” 249.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 259.

³⁸⁵ Ghosh, “Wycliffite “Affiliations,” 17.

³⁸⁶ Somerset, “Afterward,” 321.

³⁸⁷ Ghosh, “Wycliffite “Affiliations,” 17.

century patriarchs Ambrose and Augustine had offered two different ways of viewing the reality of Christ's presence in eucharistic worship. Ambrose stressed the conversion of the elements and Augustine emphasized the outward sign.³⁸⁸ For a thousand years the Church had seen no contradiction between Augustine and Ambrose.³⁸⁹ Transubstantiation had been recently introduced into Lateran IV in 1215. In the years that followed, transubstantiation continued to have multiple definitions. However, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the definition formulated by Aquinas had become dominant. Any other formulation was regarded as "scandalous ambiguity."

In support of the doctrine of transubstantiation Church theologians often cited Ambrose's assertion that the host was converted into Christ's body to mean that the host is no longer bread. The writer of Sermon 166 takes exception to this interpretation and says that such writers misunderstood Ambrose.³⁹⁰ The writer complains that the contemporary Church interprets Ambrose through the light of their "invented accidents." Accidents is an Aristotelian term that had only recently become prevalent in church vocabulary in the past four hundred years since Aristotle had become popular in the West.³⁹¹ The EWS writer makes a valid point when he says that the contemporary Church misunderstands Ambrose when it applies Aristotelian reasoning to his doctrine of conversion, because Ambrose did not appeal to Aristotelian metaphysics in his original interpretation in the way that contemporary theologians applied Aristotle.

Kantik Ghosh asks a fascinating question regarding the interpretation of theological ideas. Ghosh asks, "what happens to the history of ideas - in this case, those belonging to the domain of philosophical theology - when they begin to participate in a "deregulated economy"

³⁸⁸ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 128.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 130.

³⁹⁰ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 151.

³⁹¹ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 154.

of popular, topical, and vernacular debate, relatively lacking in philosophical rigor and seemingly, without clearly articulated and generic conventions of style and signification?”³⁹² Ghosh turns to the Wycliffite tract, *de oblatione iugis sacrificii* to answer his question. This tract was written by an anonymous Lollard preacher.³⁹³ The tract challenges the theory of Lothario of Segni that was discussed in chapter 2. This is the theory that Christ consecrated the elements by an anterior benediction, and merely endowed the words “*hoc est corpus meum*” with operative force later, for subsequent consecrations. This tract’s challenge focuses on the meaning of the two “*hocs*” in the words of consecration used in the mass “*accipiter et manduciated ex hoc omnes; hoc est corpus meum*” (all accept and eat of this; this is my body). The tract refers to a contemporary view that the second *hoc* in this consecration formula should be replaced by *hic* (there or here).³⁹⁴ The tract contends that this view is risible because it is contrary to the logic of Scripture,³⁹⁵ that it is impossible for God to lie,³⁹⁶ and that it necessitates the annihilation of the bread.³⁹⁷ The tract’s points all draw from Wycliffe, however the tract lacks Wycliffe’s philosophical and academic rigor. For example, when the tract says that substituting “*hic*” for “*hoc*” would turn God into a liar, it does not clearly articulate why God would be lying.³⁹⁸ The result is what Ghosh calls a mix of “informed and static use of scholastic subtleties” along “with an attitude of pronounced anti-intellectualism.”³⁹⁹

³⁹² Ghosh, “Wycliffite “Affiliations,” 30.

³⁹³ Ibid, 20; *de oblatione iugis sacrificii* gives scarcely any indication of reception, intended audience and purpose. Anne Hudson has pointed out that since another long sermon by the same author makes reference to this tract, it seems to have been delivered to a congregation “pretty clearly not academic.”

³⁹⁴ Somerset, “Here, There, and Everywhere,” 129.

³⁹⁵ Ghosh, “Wycliffite “Affiliations,” 26.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 22.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 23.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 22.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 25.

Anti-intellectualism is a label that has commonly been given to Lollards. K.B. McFarlane epitomized them as “solemn if not well-meaning bumpkins.”⁴⁰⁰ It is true that some Lollards were middle and lower class, some uneducated, and some illiterate. John Claydon, for example, was illiterate and had to have his Lollard texts read to him.⁴⁰¹ The followers of William White were referred to by Margaret Aston as sometimes possessing the “limited intelligences of glovers and skimmers.”⁴⁰² It is true that when it came to interpretation of Wycliffe, the Lollards were faced with a great interpretive challenge because they lacked the exceptional philosophical and intellectual ability of Wycliffe. It would have been difficult for some of them to grasp all the details of Wycliffe’s subtleties and nuances. It is unfair to expect all of Wycliffe’s followers to possess his academic abilities, just as it would be unfair to presume all the followers of Aquinas possessed his intellectual prowess. Furthermore, we have seen that Wycliffism was a movement that was academic in origin and then moved out of the university.⁴⁰³ Many outside of the university would not have had the access to education as those Lollards who were in the university, however this does not mean that they lacked intelligence.

Helen Hudson refers to the 1389 trial of William Ramsbury as a situation where Wycliffe’s final position on the Eucharist may well have been beyond the comprehension of some laymen such as Ramsbury.⁴⁰⁴ Ramsbury confessed to the Bishop of Salisbury of performing an unauthorized version of the Mass. With reservation, Hudson suggests that Ramsbury might have been Lollard, however she notes that Ramsbury endorsed practices that

⁴⁰⁰ K.B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (1952; repr., Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 167.

⁴⁰¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 213.

⁴⁰² Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 99.

⁴⁰³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 61.

⁴⁰⁴ Anne Hudson, “A Lollard Mass.” In *Lollards and Their Books* (London, The Hambleton Press, 1985), 408.

Lollards would not have approved, such as celebrating the Eucharist by elevating the host.⁴⁰⁵

Richard Rex notes that Ramsbury also confessed to a “theological rationalization” of promiscuity and sexual immorality which led him to conclude that Ramsbury was a “rogue and a rascal.”⁴⁰⁶

The case of Ramsbury suggests that there may have been people claiming to be Lollards that understood little about what Lollards believed and practiced. It may have been that one of the reasons why Lollards wrote their texts was to educate people like Ramsbury who might try to incorporate non-Lollard practices into the movement.

Thus, while many of Wycliffe’s followers lacked his intellectual sophistication and ability, Hudson has shown that there are a number of Lollard works which are products of considerable scholarship. These include the *Floretum* and *Rosarium* which were designed as annotated references to supplement handbooks like the EWS. They were meant to be used for sympathizers outside the university milieu in which the ideas originated.⁴⁰⁷

In spite of these scholarly works, one of the reasons that some affix anti-intellectual labels on Lollards is because of the diversity of beliefs that arise in Wycliffite texts, trial records, and different Lollard communities. Lollards often diverged sharply from Wycliffe and differed widely from each other. Christopher Haigh saw so much diversity that he concluded that the Lollard movement “was not quite a figment of episcopal imaginations but was a highly amorphous phenomenon.”⁴⁰⁸ This diversity is well illustrated by the variety of Wycliffite views which existed with regards to the Eucharist. Most Wycliffite texts and trial accounts record

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 413.

⁴⁰⁶ Richard Rex, “Not A Lollard Mass After All?” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (April 2011): 214.

⁴⁰⁷ Anne Hudson, “A Lollard Compilation and the Dissemination of Wycliffite Thought,” in *Lollards and Their Books* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1985), 28, 29.

⁴⁰⁸ Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.

theologies in keeping with Wycliffe's understanding of the real presence.⁴⁰⁹ However, there are a multiplicity of exceptions.

One of these exceptions was Walter Brut, a layman whose 1380 heresy defense provides evidence that Wycliffe's Eucharist controversy had spread outside of the university at this early date.⁴¹⁰ Brut understood the Eucharist to be a participatory act of faith which sustains the Christian community.⁴¹¹ This participatory understanding stood in contrast to the official view that for lay people Christ's body was an item for observation rather than an act of participation. In contrast to the official understanding, Brut understood the reception of the host by the lay person to be essential rather than a supplemental adjunct to the Eucharist.⁴¹² In keeping with Wycliffe, Brut believed that every just layman is a priest.⁴¹³ Some of his views seemed more radical than Wycliffe's because he believed that women could preach publicly.⁴¹⁴ He proposed that since a woman, Mary, made the body of Christ in her womb, so also can women confect the body of Christ in the sacrament.⁴¹⁵ Brut's understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist differed from Wycliffe in that he believed that the bread remained bread while it became His body sacramentally as an eschatological memorial.⁴¹⁶

Other exceptions to Wycliffe's understanding of the real presence are found in the trial records of Kingston on Thames presided over by Bishop Richard Fox of the Diocese of

⁴⁰⁹ J Patrick Hornbeck II, "Wycliffe's Wicket and Eucharistic Theology: Cases from Sixteenth-Century Winchester," in *Wycliffe Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 272.

⁴¹⁰ David Aers, "Walter Brut's Theology of the Sacrament of the Alter," in *Lollards and their Influence*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 115.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴¹³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 99.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴¹⁵ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 44.

⁴¹⁶ Aers, "Walter Brut's Theology of the Sacrament of the Alter," 121.

Winchester between 1511 and 1512.⁴¹⁷ Fox's register documents that the community of Kingston of Thames, held a commemorative view of the Eucharist.⁴¹⁸ Similar statements about the Eucharist appeared among a second group of defendants who lived in a cluster of villages near the country town of Farnham.⁴¹⁹ What is interesting is that both these groups held Wycliffe's Wicket in high esteem.⁴²⁰ The Wicket is the only major Lollard text which articulates a fully commemorative or memorial theology of the Eucharist where the sacrament is simply a way for Christians to remember Christ's sacrifice.⁴²¹ J. Patrick Hornbeck II suggests that these two Lollard communities learned their commemorative views from *Wycliffe's Wicket*.⁴²² This suggestion advocates that possession of different texts in diverse Wycliffite communities yielded variations in eucharistic theology.⁴²³

Fiona Somerset notes that there has been a tendency in Wycliffite studies to view any variation in views as evidence of incoherence and doctrinal inconsistency. As a result, most studies that have been dismissive of Wycliffism have pointed to variation as evidence of decay.⁴²⁴ For example, Duffy is profoundly dismissive of Lollards when he contrasts them with traditional religion's "enormously strong, diverse and vigorous hold over the imagination" which showed "no particular marks of decay" up until the time of the Reformation.⁴²⁵ Fiona Somerset urges us to step back for a minute and look at the many entrenched debates over the historical

⁴¹⁷ Hornbeck, "Wycliffe's Wicket and Eucharistic Theology," 279.

⁴¹⁸ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 186.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴²⁰ Hornbeck, "Wycliffe's Wicket and Eucharistic Theology," 290.

⁴²¹ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 123; Hornbeck, "Wycliffe's Wicket and Eucharistic Theology," 293.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴²³ Although Wycliffe's Wicket is referenced in early Lollard writings, it is one of the few Wycliffite texts of which no medieval copy survives. Hornbeck, "Wycliffe's Wicket and Eucharistic Theology," 290. This raises the dilemma that the document can be arguably dated anytime between 1384 and about 1530. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 11.

⁴²⁴ Somerset, "Afterward," 322.

⁴²⁵ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 3,4.

role of Wycliffism. Variation is typically evidence of vibrancy and a desire to develop doctrine. Somerset rightly acknowledges that decay is linked with stagnant uniformity.⁴²⁶ It is the assertion of this thesis that it is the entrenchment and polarization in this debate that has produced a distorted understanding of the Wycliffite eucharistic controversies. Contrary to those who have dismissed Wycliffe, it is the diversity of dialogues induced by the Wycliffite eucharistic controversies that highlight the importance and constructiveness of this debate.

4.2 The Influence of Wycliffite Debate in the Greater English Lay Community.

Conversations triggered by Wycliffe's eucharistic debate were not confined to Lollard communities but were articulated in the greater medieval English community. This section will illustrate this point by discussing the dialogues encountered in the *Jack Upland* series, Geoffrey Chaucer's Lollard jokes, and William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. We will then examine the influence of Wycliffe's eucharistic dialogue on the Kentish town of Tenterden.

4.2.1 Jack Upland.

Jack Upland is a polemical text based on a series of hostile questions to a friar. It was written in the time of Chaucer in the 1380s and 1390s or shortly afterwards.⁴²⁷ The text is likely Wycliffite in origin and if not, its questions were taken over by the Lollards. These questions were answered in Latin by the Franciscan William Woodford. The tract itself was answered in English by a Dominican in what is known as *Friar Dawe's Reply*. This reply was in turn rebuffed in rough alliterative lines added to its margins known as *Jack Upland's Rejoinder*.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Somerset, "Afterward," 322.

⁴²⁷ Somerset, "Here, There, and Everywhere," 128.

⁴²⁸ Anne Hudson, "Jack Upland," in *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2003.

Jack Upland enters the debate over the complex theory regarding the meaning of the two “*hocs*” in the words of consecration encountered earlier in this chapter when we looked at *de oblatione iugis sacrificii*. Upland opens the debate with the question, why do friars slander true men (that is Lollards) for saying consecrated bread is “God’s body in the form of bread?” “Friars say it is an accident without a subject, and not “God’s body.” But Christ in the Bible said, “*hoc est corpus meum*” and other venerable doctors agree – so why do friars slander true men for saying this? Just who are the real heretics?”⁴²⁹ Friar Daw’s reply substitutes the “*hoc*” in “*hoc est corpus meum*” with “*hic*” (there or here). Therefore, the consecrated words read “here is my body,” rather than the commonly understood interpretation “this is my body.”⁴³⁰ The Upland writers claim that to say “*hic est corpus meum*” is simply a way to skirt the issue rather than to explain what Jesus meant when he said “*hoc est corpus meum*.”⁴³¹

Replacing the “*hoc*” with “*hic*” also avoids the Wycliffite allegation that the bread is annihilated. We recall that for Wycliffe and his followers, the Thomistic idea that the substance of Christ’s body inheres in the accidents of bread is tantamount to saying that Christ’s body is not this, or nothing. The bread was not annihilated if Christ was not holding material bread in His hands when He uttered the words of consecration.⁴³² Friar Daw emphasizes that there is nothing of the bread remaining after consecration: “Christ is there” in every part, but in such a way that He can neither be multiplied nor divided.⁴³³ The Friar was replying to the common Lollard argument that the body of Christ could not be divided.⁴³⁴

⁴²⁹ Somerset, “Here, There, and Everywhere,” 129.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 129.

⁴³¹ Ibid, 132.

⁴³² Ibid, 131.

⁴³³ Ibid, 133.

⁴³⁴ Helen Barr, “The Deafening Silence of Lollardy in the Digby Lyrics,” in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 249.

Fiona Somerset expresses doubt that friars really did go around affirming “*hic est corpus meum*” and thus changing the words of the Bible and she has difficulty accepting Upland’s claim that friars will not try to explain “*hoc est corpus meum*.”⁴³⁵ She also points out that Aquinas did not accept that substance is annihilated in transubstantiation.⁴³⁶ Despite these reservations, Somerset finds it significant that such a seemingly very minor grammatical point lay at the heart of a debate that was prevalent both within and without the university. Jack Upland’s dialogue resonated with an audience that had a heightened concern regarding the details of the debate about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. To these people what was at stake was not merely an esoteric semantic argument, but a debate regarding the presence of Christ in eucharistic worship. For late medieval people that had lost many friends and loved ones to plagues and wars, the presence of Christ provided tremendous comfort.⁴³⁷ Dialogues like those expressed in the *Upland* series presented these people opportunity to discuss and contemplate the presence of Christ Himself. They did so by debating an alternative understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist to the view presented by transubstantiation. This different understanding was precipitated by Wycliffe’s understanding of the real presence.

4.2.2 *Geoffrey Chaucer.*

The prevalence of this debate is highlighted by the fact that the father of English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer (circa 1340s–25 October 1400), made reference to this debate. The *Summoner’s Tale* contains a “scatologically outrageous” Lollard joke regarding the eucharistic debate. This joke is closely linked to the terms of the debate from the *Upland* Series -

⁴³⁵ Somerset, “Here, There, and Everywhere,” 134.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 132.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 129.

specifically the debate whether Christ's body could be divided.⁴³⁸ The debate regarding whether Christ's body could be divided was the debate surrounding the dimensions and location of Christ's intangible body.⁴³⁹

The *Summoner's Tale* tells the story of an unscrupulous friar who is using his position for monetary gain. He preaches a sermon and then makes many promises to a frail, sick, rich man (Thomas) in hopes to receive a gift. Thomas sees through this and eventually suggests that the friar can find his gift between Thomas's buttocks. As the friar looks there for his gift, Thomas presents him with a wind expulsion "of such a sound" from his back passage.⁴⁴⁰ The enraged friar then complains to a rich lord (Squire) about "this false blasphemmer who has dared charge me thus to divide what won't divided be."⁴⁴¹ This complaint by the friar is a reference to the argument that the body of Christ could not be divided.⁴⁴²

Somerset aptly writes that obviously Chaucer's allusion does not participate in the eucharistic debate in the same way as the Upland Series. It would be silly to attempt to subsume Chaucer, or even the Summoner, into the Wycliffite controversy.⁴⁴³ However, it is fascinating that Chaucer was familiar with the debate and also knew that his audience was familiar with the debate to the point that many would predictably smirk when they heard the joke. Chaucer implies that the debate was the fodder of everyday fourteenth century conversation as people made their pilgrimages to Canterbury.

Chaucer penned another Lollard joke in the *Pardoner's Tale*. Again, this relates to the Eucharist controversy. This joke pokes fun at cooks who strain and grind to turn substance into

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 134.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 137.

⁴⁴⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Summoner's Tale*, line 2151. In Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website, accessed, June 19, 2022, <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/summoners-tale>.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, line 2214.

⁴⁴² Somerset, "Here, There, and Everywhere," 137.

⁴⁴³ Ibid, 138.

accident.⁴⁴⁴ This joke can be construed in two ways: in a humorous view and a more serious one. In a humorous vein, Chaucer can be seen as mocking the eucharistic debate surrounding the Wycliffite claim that a subjectless accident is impossible.⁴⁴⁵ As with Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale* joke, it is again clear that Chaucer's audience is familiar with the details of this debate. There can be little doubt that the debate must have been widely known among the laity, particularly in the privileged circles of influence in which Chaucer moved.⁴⁴⁶ Although some might be put-off with the off-colorlessness of some of Chaucer's humor, it must be said that Chaucer's wit does take away from the tension that permeated this highly charged debate. The fact that Chaucer could make his jokes without fear of reprisal demonstrates the relative openness to discussion of the eucharistic debate in Wycliffe and Chaucer's day as compared with the decades that followed.⁴⁴⁷ In a serious vein Chaucer can be seen as understanding the social and theological anxieties that existed in both Wycliffism and mainstream religion.⁴⁴⁸ Chaucer wrote before 1401 which was the year that the first Lollard (William Sawtry) was burned, and it was the year that *De Heretico comburendo* was made law. These events of 1401, the year after Chaucer's death, took away from zest that popular writers like Chaucer might instill into the Eucharist debate.⁴⁴⁹

4.3.3 William Langland.

⁴⁴⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, line 538,539. In Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website, accessed, June 19, line 2022, <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/pardoners-tale>.

⁴⁴⁵ Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Lollard Joke: History and the Textual Unconscious." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 35.

⁴⁴⁶ Somerset, "Here, There, and Everywhere," 137.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 128.

⁴⁴⁸ Strohm, "Chaucer's Lollard Joke," 41.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 24.

Another late medieval author who seems to have been influenced by Wycliffe's eucharistic dialogue is William Langland (circa 1332-circa 1400).⁴⁵⁰ Langland's great allegorical poem *Piers Plowman* bemoans the corrupt present-day earthly Church and envisions the true heavenly Church.⁴⁵¹ The leading character in the poem is Piers Plowman (Will) who dreams of a church where church leaders are peers with the laity - where a good ploughman is a peer with a clergyperson and a ruler. Langland's poem sheds light on eucharistic dialogue from the perspective of a layman.

Robert Adams claims that Langland's understanding of the Eucharist is altogether conventional and pious. He urges that we limit ourselves to what Langland actually says about the Eucharist since the Eucharist is not much mentioned in the poem. He also points out that the poem has much more to say about the Sacrament of Penance than the Sacrament of the Altar.⁴⁵² In response to this claim we note that in the Middle Ages penance and the Eucharist often went hand in hand. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 decreed that "all the faithful ... should individually confess their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive that Sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter."⁴⁵³ We also note that the Sacrament of the Altar is hardly ignored in Langland's poem.

In contrast to Adam's position that Langland's understanding of the Eucharist was mainstream, many traditional writers have contended that Langland was Lollard. Part of the

⁴⁵⁰ Shannon Gayk, "Lollard Writings, Literary Criticism, And The Meaningfulness Of Form," in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 142.

⁴⁵¹ "William Langland," in *The Columbia Encyclopedia Reference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), accessed, June 19, 2022, https://search-credoreference-com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/content/title/columency?tab=entry_view&heading=langland_william&sequence=0.

⁴⁵² Robert Adams, "Langland's Theology," in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. John A. Alford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 98.

⁴⁵³ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 247.

rationale for this claim is because the word “lollare” frequently appears in Langland’s C text.⁴⁵⁴ They interpret “lollare” as meaning Lollard. Andrew Cole suggests that such a claim is anachronistic. It was a number of years after Langland’s C edition was written that “lollare” would become synonymous with Wycliffism. “Lollare” was a general term that referred to heretics, bad friars, and disreputable preachers who may or may not have been Wycliffite.⁴⁵⁵ Cole helpfully presents Langland as an early witness to Wycliffism who was neither Wycliffite, nor saw Wycliffism through the eyes of the established Church.

The poem’s opening vision includes a bleak representation of the Church and its hierarchy.⁴⁵⁶ A lady from heaven (Holy Church) finds the Church on earth fostering idolatry, false sacrifices and misbelief while allowing exchange for material profits to permeate all its practices.⁴⁵⁷ The result is Masses that lack devotion. Against this, Holy Church gives guidance to the plowman that the contemporary Church seems unable to provide. If you do not practice faith and love, “You earn no more merit in Masses.”⁴⁵⁸ Langland’s distinction between the true heavenly Church and the contemporary Church parallels the Wycliffite distinction between the true Church and the visible Church. Langland understands that the Eucharist is empty if it does not practice faith and love. Wycliffe likewise emphasises faith and love when he writes that “the sacramental bread is ... pounded into the heart with a sprinkling of faith from the gospels, and it is spiritually eaten in the baking fire of love.”⁴⁵⁹ Wycliffites believed that the real ground of spiritual truth is found in Scripture, and that all people - both men and women - who are guided

⁴⁵⁴ Andrew Cole, “William Langland and the Invention of Lollardy,” in *Lollards and their Influence*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 38.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 51-53.

⁴⁵⁶ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 33.

⁴⁵⁷ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C Version*. trans. George Economou (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), I.1-200.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I.6, 178.

⁴⁵⁹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.7.

by virtue, faith, and contrition constitute a “priesthood of all believers” who should not be dependent upon clerical mediation of the truths that are fundamental to salvation.⁴⁶⁰

Langland complains about a perceived lack of charity in the Church of his day. Daniel Thiery notes that in the latter Middle Ages, theologians associated the Eucharist with charity and stressed that it was one’s duty to ‘forgive and forget’ previous wrongs.⁴⁶¹ Parishioners could make themselves unworthy of eucharistic blessing by merely thinking vengeful or hateful thoughts.⁴⁶² Langland’s complaints about perceived lack of charity among the clergy paralleled similar complaints of Wycliffe. However, similar complaints were echoed by many other voices in their day.⁴⁶³

David Aers writes that Langland believes that “God’s body” must not be bread without clergy.⁴⁶⁴ Langland does not want to sideline the visible Church and its hierarchy despite the poem’s attention for the Church’s need for correction. Such a corrective is as Augustinian as it is Thomistic, for the introspective journey to God in Augustine’s writings is a journey that “is possible only through the agency of the Church.”⁴⁶⁵

The poem complains about wealthy people gnawing God while their neighbors are destroyed by hunger. At the same time, these wealthy people frequently talk of God.⁴⁶⁶ Langland’s singling out the rich demonstrates his understanding that all the laity participate in the Eucharist which he understands not to just be for the rich. He writes that we are all God’s brothers, beggars, and Lords.⁴⁶⁷ Gnawing God and talking of God, is perfectly compatible with

⁴⁶⁰ Copeland, “Lollard Writings,” 2.

⁴⁶¹ Daniel E. Thiery, “The Eucharist and the Clergy: Fostering Charity Incarnate,” in *Polluting the Sacred: Violence, Faith and the ‘Civilizing’ of Parishioners in Late Medieval England* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 79.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁶³ Somerset, “Afterward,” 331.

⁴⁶⁴ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 42.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁶⁶ Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, XI.40-41, 52-53.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XI.38, XII.114.

the refusal to discern the presence of God, signified by this sign.⁴⁶⁸ This is compatible with Wycliffe's concern regarding the danger that people only see the sign and fail to understand the reality of Christ's presence behind the sign. Worship of Christ for Wycliffe was incompatible with avarice, a vice which Wycliffe understood to be the polar opposite of love. Wycliffe taught that true worshippers of Christ must imitate Christ in His life of poverty and love.⁴⁶⁹

Thus, we see parallels between Langland's understanding of the Eucharist and the views of Wycliffe, as well as parallels with the views of the established Church. As an early witness to Wycliffe's eucharistic dialogue, Langland's concerns regarding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist are practical rather than metaphysical. He is concerned with the worthy reception of the sacrament rather than metaphysical arguments regarding the real presence.

4.3.4 *Tenterden.*

At the outset, this chapter observed that Wycliffism has been excluded from a number of major medieval English history texts including Duffy's influential *The Stripping of the Altars*.⁴⁷⁰ Duffy's central thesis states that within the diversity of late medieval religious culture (which excludes Wycliffism) "there was a remarkable degree of religious and imaginative homogeneity across the social spectrum"⁴⁷¹ Robert Lutton has challenged this view by investigating notions and practices of piety in the town of Tenterden which had been a Lollard center from the early fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century.⁴⁷² Lutton investigated traditional religion by examining testamentary data from the abundant number of wills that exist for this town. Lutton's

⁴⁶⁸ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 39.

⁴⁶⁹ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, III.19.

⁴⁷⁰ Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, 4.

⁴⁷¹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 3.

⁴⁷² Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, 38.

findings challenge Duffy's thesis, because rather than displaying homogeneities of parochial belief, Lutton's study demonstrates heterogeneities and sometimes overt dissent.⁴⁷³

Lutton's study found that pre-Reformation Tenterden experienced a marked decline in the popularity of chantries, mendicant orders, and traditional practices of the Eucharist.⁴⁷⁴ Furthermore there were also positive changes in mainstream piety in Tenterden during this late medieval period. These changes included an increasing devotion to Christ, in the form of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, that seems to have eclipsed devotion to the saints.⁴⁷⁵ This cult was associated with increased emphasis on the primacy of the Scriptures.⁴⁷⁶ The relationship between these changes and Lollard dissent within the town remains uncertain, however it is very possible that these changes were in part due to long-term influence of Wycliffite inspired dissent.⁴⁷⁷

The Wycliffite heresy was embedded in the Tenterden area by the 1420's. Then it seems to have disappeared without trace from historical documents around 1450 but then remerged in the trial records of Archbishop William Warham in 1511-1512. Archbishop Warham was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1503-1532.⁴⁷⁸ Lutton says that lack of records makes it difficult to demonstrate the existence of an unbroken line of dissent, but it is very unlikely that its reappearance was accidental.⁴⁷⁹ The most influential of the Tenterden Lollards was the priest William White who was burned at the stake for heresy in 1428. White was probably an academic who wrote one or more Wycliffite texts.⁴⁸⁰ Lutton suggests that White's view of the Eucharist was memorialist. The trial records of 1511 suggest that the accused also held memorialist views.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 62.

⁴⁷⁵ Robert Lutton, "Lollardy, Orthodoxy, and Cognitive Psychology," in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 100.

⁴⁷⁶ Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, 72.

⁴⁷⁷ Lutton, "Lollardy, Orthodoxy, and Cognitive Psychology," 100.

⁴⁷⁸ Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, 236.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 149.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 150.

Given the similarity of their views, it is very possible that the defendant's memorialist views came from William White.⁴⁸¹ Other Wycliffite traditions established in the Tenterden area parishes by the 1420's include anti-sacerdotal views and unreceptivity to the cult of the saints. These activities were also prevalent in the trial records of 1511.⁴⁸² Again given the similarity of views of the later generation with the earlier generation, it is very conceivable that these opinions held by the later generation may have come from Wycliffite ideas that had been in circulation for a number of generations.⁴⁸³

Although Tenterden's Wycliffites like all Lollards rejected transubstantiation, they still seemed to have retained a belief in the value of the congregation of the parish.⁴⁸⁴ There is little evidence that Lollards in Tenterden or elsewhere in the country withdrew from normal church attendance.⁴⁸⁵ They undoubtedly were held in high esteem by non-Lollard parishioners. In all places from which Lollards came in Kent, including Tenterden, it seems that parishioners were reluctant to incriminate their heterodox neighbors. This is indicated by the fact that all the witnesses mentioned in trials belonged to heretical groups or households of those charged with heresy.⁴⁸⁶

Lutton's study of piety in the town of Tenterden advocates conclusions similar to those made earlier in this chapter. Lutton's observation that Lollards seemed to have valued their parish congregations is in keeping with Somerset's assessment that the differences between spiritual and devotional practice between Wycliffism and mainstream were not nearly as wide as previously thought. John A.F. Thomson has suggested that the reason why Lollards conformed to

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁸² Ibid, 194.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 169.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 169.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 170.

the normal practices of the Church was because Lollards were concerned with self-preservation and wanted to avoid detection.⁴⁸⁷ There is no doubt that Lollards were concerned with self-preservation, however another likely explanation for the conformity was the close relationships between the two communities. These close relations developed because of common ground between the two communities. These similarities kindled constructive dialogue between Lollards and their neighbours.

These similarities likely arose from close relationships of Lollards with their neighbors not only in their local parishes, but also in their social networks and workplaces. It is commonly believed that Lollard communities consisted of small groups of people who met in fear and secrecy, however evidence from Tenterden as well as other parts of Kent suggest that this was not the case. Patrick Collinson says that “Kentish Lollards whose heretical opinions in some cases went back for decades, held no such meetings.”⁴⁸⁸ Archbishop Warham’s 1511-1512 heresy investigations show that the majority who were tried were artisans from the industrial villages of the Weald. Collinson suggests that “they learned their lessons and shared their opinions one to another, at the loom, by the fireside, in the local pub, in the garden, in walking along the roads and even in the Church.”⁴⁸⁹

4.3 The Influence of Wycliffe on the Reformation.

This commonality between the Lollard community and the mainline Church suggests an answer to the question that Protestants have been asked so many times in the last five hundred

⁴⁸⁷ Thomson, *The Latter Lollards*, 19.

⁴⁸⁸ Patrick Collinson, “Night Schools, Conventicles and Churches: Continuities and Discontinuities in Early Protestant Ecclesiology,” in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 211, 219.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

years, “Where was your Church before Luther?”⁴⁹⁰ The similarities between Wycliffism and the early English Reformation suggest that Wycliffism to a certain extent may have been a bridge between the pre-Reformation Church and the post-Reformation Church. Helen Hudson comments that English accounts have often ignored the possibility of a medieval influence on the Reformation.⁴⁹¹ The debate over the role of Wycliffism in the English Reformation has been an ongoing controversy for most of the years since the Reformation,⁴⁹² and the complexities of this debate are outside of the focus of this thesis. However, this thesis would be incomplete if it left the impression that Wycliffism in England ended with the Reformation. Wycliffism seems to have been assimilated rather rapidly into the English Reformation. Sympathetic dialogue between the Wycliffite community and the greater community in certain geographical regions such as the Weald of Kent, provide a plausible explanation for the swift reception of both Lutheran and Swiss continental Reformation ideas in the sixteenth century.⁴⁹³ While direct continuities between Wycliffism remain elusive, the geographic continuities remain a compelling explanation for Wycliffite influence on reform in different parts of England.⁴⁹⁴ Heresy prosecutors found it hard to distinguish between old Lollards and new Protestants and continued to prosecute both kinds of heretics for the same reasons, especially denial of transubstantiation.⁴⁹⁵ Just as the debate surrounding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist was the most impassioned dispute prior to the English Reformation, so the debate surrounding the real presence was the most explosive issue in the early English Protestant Reformation.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁰ Marshall, “Lollards and Protestants Revisited,” 295.

⁴⁹¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 61.

⁴⁹² Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 204.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, 204.

⁴⁹⁴ Lutton, “Lollardy, Orthodoxy, and Cognitive Psychology,” 107.

⁴⁹⁵ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 192.

⁴⁹⁶ Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138.

Some of the most prominent men that were drawn to the new Continental reforming ideas lived in places with longstanding traditions of religious radicalism.⁴⁹⁷ William Tyndale (circa 1494-1536) was born on the border between Wales and Gloucester to the West of the river Severn – a region where there is evidence of the presence of individuals holding Lollard beliefs.⁴⁹⁸ Sir Thomas More believed that the key explanation for what he understood to be Tyndale’s shocking extremism was Wycliffism.⁴⁹⁹ J. Patrick Hornbeck points out similarities between Tyndale’s theological views and those of Lollards including the Augustinian distinction between visible and invisible churches.⁵⁰⁰ Robert Barnes was an outspoken early English Reformer who was burned at the stake at the time of the fall of Thomas Cranmer in 1540. Barnes came from the town of Bishops’ Lynn in Norfolk which was an area with a history of Wycliffism.⁵⁰¹ Barnes believed in the real presence,⁵⁰² and therefore has been described as an early English Lutheran.⁵⁰³ However, as we have seen, many of Wycliffe’s followers believed in the real presence. It is not clear how long before the mid 1520’s Luther’s views were known in England.⁵⁰⁴ Barnes may have acquired his views regarding the Eucharist from Wycliffite influence rather than from the new Lutheran ideas.⁵⁰⁵

Alec Ryrie claims that in the earliest years of the English Reformation there “was in fact no contradiction at all in being an evangelical and opposing denial of the real presence.” In the late 1530’s English evangelicalism was marked by its denial of transubstantiation. These

⁴⁹⁷ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 192.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, 192.

⁴⁹⁹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 505.

⁵⁰⁰ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 192.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 194.

⁵⁰² Corey D. Maas, *The Reformation and Robert Barnes: History, Theology and Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 52.

⁵⁰³ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 194.

⁵⁰⁴ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 473.

⁵⁰⁵ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 194.

evangelicals were divided into two camps: those who held to the real presence, and those who held memorialist views. Ryrie suggests that Archbishop Cranmer, Robert Barnes and Thomas Cromwell were in the second camp.⁵⁰⁶ Luther held to the real presence, and Wycliffe did as well. Although the “Swiss” ascribed to a memorialist view, many Lollards did as well. Wycliffism may very well have played a role in the popularity of these views at this early stage of the Reformation.

Patrick Hornbeck II says that while the role that Wycliffism played in the English Reformation remains a topic of debate, it is difficult to argue the formative role that Wycliffe’s ideas played in the Hussite reform movement in fifteenth century Bohemia.⁵⁰⁷ Marcela Perett has shown that Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas had a warm reception in Bohemia where they were brought by Peter Payne, a Wycliffite Master of Arts from Oxford in 1414.⁵⁰⁸ For details regarding the reception of Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas the reader is invited to read Perett’s “A Neglected Eucharistic Controversy: The Afterlife of John Wycliffe’s Eucharistic Thought in Bohemia in the Early Fifteenth Century.” It is fascinating that in Bohemia we witness the same phenomenon that we witness in England, namely that Wycliffe’s eucharistic ideas spawned a multiplicity of fruitful views and dialogues. Jan Hus had embraced many of Wycliffe’s ideas but not his rejection of transubstantiation.⁵⁰⁹ The Pikarts adopted a memorialist view, while the Ulaquits and Taborites adopted different understandings of the real presence.⁵¹⁰

It is these many conversations and rich varieties of views inspired by Wycliffe’s eucharistic polemic that endorse the main claim of this thesis, that the significance of Wycliffe’s

⁵⁰⁶ Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, 139.

⁵⁰⁷ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 196.

⁵⁰⁸ Marcela K. Perett, “A Neglected Eucharistic Controversy: The Afterlife of John Wycliffe’s Eucharistic Thought in Bohemia in the Early Fifteenth Century.” *Church History* 84, no. 1 (March 2015): 70.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

eucharistic challenge can be seen in the many dialogues that were generated through this challenge. This chapter has highlighted many of these dialogues. We saw these dialogues in the *English Wycliffite Sermons*, the Lollard tract *de oblatione, iugis sacrificii*, and the beliefs of Walter Brut. We also saw the influence of Wycliffe's eucharistic debate in the contemporary popular literature of William Langland, and Geoffrey Chaucer. It has been important to emphasize that Wycliffite practice did not differ from the established Church as much as we once thought because many influential studies have portrayed Wycliffism as negative and anti-mainstream. Wycliffism may have influenced the heightened late medieval Christocentric devotion in East Anglian towns like Tenterden. We also emphasize the wide spectrum of eucharistic understandings within the Wycliffite movement. Eucharistic understandings vary from real presence understandings to memorialist perspectives. This variety of understandings is seen in the early English Reformation and in the sixteenth century Bohemian Reformation. This rich variety of eucharistic understandings attest to the vibrancy and development of the many conversations precipitated by the Wycliffite eucharistic challenge. In the next chapter we will conclude by summarising and highlighting the main points of this thesis. We will suggest areas of research which could further illuminate our understanding of this extremely important topic of the influence of Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Affirming the Reality of Christ's Presence in Eucharistic Worship.

A man looking at the statue does not consider first whether the statue is formed of ash or oak wood, but contemplates whom the statue represents, so men contemplating the Eucharist should be concerned with Christ and not the bread and wine.⁵¹¹

Anonymous Wycliffite.

The primary claim of this thesis is that the significance of John Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge is evidenced in the many dialogues that were generated through this challenge. This thesis has demonstrated many of these dialogues from a wide variety of sources. The reader may legitimately ask why this thesis uses the seemingly non-specific data of dialogues rather than numerical data? The answer to this question is the reason why the now dominant school of English late medieval piety has been able to be so dismissive of the influence of Wycliffism. Most studies that have been dismissive of Wycliffism have indeed focused on numerical data. The reality is that despite our knowledge of many well documented Lollard cases, and even though we have plenty of evidence that Wycliffites were proficient in hiding from the authorities in the face of persecution, we have no way of knowing the actual number of people who ascribed to Wycliffism in pre-Reformation England.⁵¹² The method of this thesis of looking at conversations generated by Wycliffe's challenge provides an alternative approach to document the influence of Wycliffe on late medieval eucharistic worship.

In the first chapter we encountered the extraordinary phenomenon of a growing intolerance of imprecision in defining the eucharistic presence of Christ in the later Middle Ages. In the first millennium the two great Fathers Augustine and Ambrose had very different understandings of the sacramental presence, yet Christians saw no contradiction between these

⁵¹¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 282.

⁵¹² Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York*, 10.

two great patriarchs. First millennial Christians understood the Eucharist as the communal participation of the faithful in the body of Christ. In the second millennium most Christians increasingly became observers of a eucharistic ceremony rather than active participants in the sacrament.⁵¹³ Furthermore, we witnessed a radical change in emphasis where the true body of Christ was no longer understood to be the Church but rather the sacramental elements themselves.⁵¹⁴ By Wycliffe's day the presence of Christ in the sacramental elements had become precisely defined as transubstantiation.

In the second chapter we saw that transubstantiation was rooted in Aristotelian metaphysics. Many in the late Middle Ages thought that they could find a precise definition of the real presence in Aristotelian categories in a way that they could not find in traditional Platonic categories.⁵¹⁵ Accordingly, all theologians during this era had to come to terms with Aristotle in one way or another. Ockham's approach was to simplify Aristotelian categories by rejecting most Aristotelian categories including the accident of quantity and granted real status only to substance and quality.⁵¹⁶ This rejection of quantity forms the basis of Ockham's eucharistic theology because the rejection of quantity as a real substance meant that Christ's body does not need to possess dimensive quantity to exist under the species of the bread.⁵¹⁷ The qualities of the bread exist in the converted, and definitively present body of Christ while the substance of the bread has been annihilated.⁵¹⁸ This view brought Wycliffe into acute debate with Ockham because for Wycliffe annihilation was an unconditional impossibility. Wycliffe maintained that an accident could not exist without a subject. Ockham (and Scotus) agreed that

⁵¹³ Cooke, *The Distancing of God*, 127.

⁵¹⁴ Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 127.

⁵¹⁵ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 155.

⁵¹⁶ Courtenay, "The Reception of Ockham's Thought in Fourteenth-Century England," 93.

⁵¹⁷ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 216, 220.

⁵¹⁸ Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 109; Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 228.

an accident without subject was a logical impossibility, however, by virtue of God's *potentia absoluta*, the case of the Eucharist was different.⁵¹⁹ God can annihilate and uphold accidents at His will, because He can do anything.⁵²⁰ Wycliffe believed that such notions were incongruent with the dignity of the Eucharist and the just nature of God. For Wycliffe there is no aspect of creation which is not valuable and thus inherently worthy of preservation. Accidental truth could no more exist apart from substance than a creature could exist apart from God's preserving power.⁵²¹ Such notions essentially turned God into a deceiver, which was an absolute impossibility for Wycliffe.

Thomas Aquinas's approach to Aristotle was very different than that of Ockham. Rather than simplifying Aristotelian categories, Aquinas relied heavily on Aristotle to interpret Augustine's concept of signs and Ambrose's concept of conversion. Aquinas believed that the whole substance of the bread is "converted" or transubstantiated into the whole substance of Christ's Body.⁵²² Although the whole substance of Christ's body is really present, its quantity is present only "concomitantly."⁵²³ The substance of the bread is not "annihilated" but rather the quality (appearance) of the bread is sustained uniquely by the quantity of the bread.⁵²⁴ Aquinas understood that for an accident to exist without its substance is an Aristotelian impossibility, however he believed that the quality of the bread is sustained miraculously.⁵²⁵ The ubiquity of this definition of transubstantiation put Wycliffe into debate with Aquinas. Although, Wycliffe had tremendous respect for Aquinas and did not confront him directly, he did not hold to Aquinas's understanding of transubstantiation. Wycliffe understood a figurative or sacramental

⁵¹⁹ Catto, "John Wycliffe and the Cult of the Eucharist," 272.

⁵²⁰ Keen, "Wycliffe, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," 8.

⁵²¹ Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context*, 61.

⁵²² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.76 a.1 ad 2.

⁵²³ Cross, "John Duns Scotus," 110.

⁵²⁴ Penn, "Wyclif and the Sacraments," 256.

⁵²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.75 a.1 ad 1.

understanding of the real presence which maintained a dialectic of both identity and distinction between sacrament and *res*. Aquinas's interpretation assumes an identity between sacramental sign and *res* as he held that the substance of the bread is entirely converted into the body of Christ.⁵²⁶

Wycliffe's approach to Aristotle was very different from that of Ockham and Aquinas. In chapter 2 we witnessed that Wycliffe modified Aristotelian metaphysics with a neoplatonic Boethian understanding of universals to form his dialectic of presence and absence. Wycliffe developed a complex predication theory to explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as habitual or figurative presence.⁵²⁷ It was also mentioned in chapter 2 that Alessandro Conti claims that Wycliffe's dialogue with Ockham was a major contributor of the late medieval dissolution of Aristotelian metaphysics. As far as I know, Conti's work has not specifically investigated Wycliffe's predication and supposition theory with reference to Wycliffe's eucharistic theology. An area for future research might be to specifically question whether Wycliffe's dialogue with Ockham, as it related to Wycliffe's eucharistic challenge, contributed to the late medieval dissolution of Aristotelian metaphysics.

Although some have contended that metaphysics formed the foundation of Wycliffe's eucharistic theology, this paper has contended that Scripture formed the starting point for Wycliffe's eucharistic theology. Wycliffe believed his figurative interpretation to be grounded in the scriptural words of consecration "*Hoc est corpus meum.*"⁵²⁸ Wycliffe also provided scriptural examples for his argument that "to be" can mean "to figure." We saw that Woodford, Kynyngham, Tissington and Netter commonly contested Wycliffe's views regarding scriptural

⁵²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III q.75 a.3 resp.

⁵²⁷ Wycliffe, *Trialogus*, IV.9.

⁵²⁸ Illig, "Preparing for Easter," 250; Mark 14:22.

authority. Scripture formed the basis of Wycliffe's faith and metaphysics served as a tool to help him understand this faith. It was his faith seeking understanding that led Wycliffe to develop a figurative interpretation to explain Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.

One common criticism of Wycliffe is that he does not detail a precise definition of how Christ is present in the Eucharist. One of the most common complaints from Wycliffe's opponents in the years that followed his death was that his teaching had introduced "scandalous ambiguity." Wycliffe's lack of precision is intriguing given the fact that Wycliffe lived in an age that demanded exactitude regarding the presence of Christ in the sacramental sign. What is even more intriguing is although Wycliffe did not give the precise definition that his culture wanted, the debate which Wycliffe's eucharistic ideas precipitated was one of immense proportions.

In the third chapter we saw that the Church's demand for an exacting definition for the eucharistic presence of Christ led to a binary: Either bread is transubstantiated into the Galilean body of Christ, or it is not? To maintain that it is not put you outside of the Catholic Church.⁵²⁹ It was Wycliffe's challenge to this binary that earned him the label as the great heresiarch of the Middle Ages. It has been useful to compare the Church's reaction to this challenge during three different time periods. In the first period during Wycliffe's lifetime (1370-1384) we saw intense debate with ideas in the comparatively protective environment of Oxford University and we saw growing anxiety as Wycliffe's ideas became popular among the laity. This anxiety came to a head in the 1381 Oxford commission which forced Wycliffe to retire from the university.⁵³⁰ In the second period during the administration of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1399-1414) the Church undertook a strategy of non-engagement and censorship. This non-engagement is seen in Love's *Mirror* which insisted that the laity was to believe in transubstantiation without

⁵²⁹ Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 61; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 38.

⁵³⁰ Kenny, "The Accursed Memory," 147.

questioning. The *Mirror* attempts to dispel “scandalous ambiguity” by presenting transubstantiation as the gospel. Arundel’s *Constitutions* established censorship laws that imposed excommunication and capital punishment on those found guilty of heresy. In the third period during the time of Thomas Netter (1414-1430) we saw that the ideas raised by Wycliffism were too formidable to be contained by force alone, so rather than employing coercion Netter undertook a detailed engagement with Wycliffe’s ideas. Netter consistently quotes Wycliffe or provides summaries of Wycliffe’s ideas that are reasonable, and he interacts with quotations from Scripture and the Fathers.⁵³¹ Netter’s engagement with Wycliffe highlights a dilemma shared by many of Wycliffe’s opponents, namely that both Netter and Wycliffe commonly drew from the same sources. These common sources included contemporary theologians as well as church Fathers. In this way Netter was as much in dialogue with himself as he was with Wycliffe.⁵³² Furthermore, Netter’s engagement is limited because he does not address Wycliffe’s metaphysics, and his style is positivistic in that it cannot allow any room for skepticism regarding recent papal decrees including transubstantiation. Above all, Netter demonstrated a stereotyping bias that sees everything Wycliffe wrote through the lens of his a-priori conclusion that Wycliffe was a heretic.

Many in the Church saw the heresy label as an essential necessity to protect the laity. This is ironic because Wycliffe too was attempting to protect the laity. Despite attempts to portray Wycliffe as the heretical other, an extraordinary accomplishment of Wycliffe and his followers is that they were able to effectively equip laypeople with the vernacular theological vocabulary necessary to discuss eucharistic theology.⁵³³ Wycliffe was concerned “that the Pope

⁵³¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 52.

⁵³² Bose, “The Opponents of John Wyclif,” 450.

⁵³³ Aston, “Wyclif and the Vernacular,” 303.

and all his Cardinals have imagined too little about” the role of the laity’s participation in the Eucharist.⁵³⁴ This concern was ahead of his time, because similar concerns are again being discussed today following the 1962-1965 Vatican II dialogue surrounding the role of the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*. This discussion highlights recognition of the role of the whole people of God in the Catholic Church’s ecclesiastical vision.⁵³⁵ “Only in retrospect does it become clear that a development in fact was representative of the *sensus fidelium*.”⁵³⁶ Perhaps in retrospect we see an instance where the *sensus fidelium* was at work in Wycliffe that led to doctrinal development regarding the Eucharist. This doctrinal development was facilitated when Wycliffe and his followers provided the laity with the vernacular tools to allow them to discuss eucharistic theology. The question as to what ways the *sensus fidelium* may have been at work when Wycliffe developed his eucharistic theology is an area which could be further developed through future research.

In the fourth chapter we witnessed a wide variety of dialogues in a multiplicity of different medieval communities that were generated by Wycliffe’s eucharistic polemic. It was important to describe these conversations in detail because the now dominant school of medieval piety totally minimizes the impact of Wycliffism on late medieval English piety.⁵³⁷ It was important to take time in this chapter to provide examples to show that the influence of Wycliffism on late medieval English worship was anything but minimal. We have seen that a major reason for these dismissive and negative portrayals of Wycliffism is because scholars have classically relied on accounts produced by Wycliffe’s opponents, especially court trial records, rather than the many extant Lollard manuscripts.

⁵³⁴ Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.10.

⁵³⁵ Hinze, “Introduction,” in *Learning from All the Faithful*, 7.

⁵³⁶ Ryan, “Sensuous History: The Medieval Feast of Corpus Christi,” 22.

⁵³⁷ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2.

When writers from this dominant school do acknowledge these Lollard manuscripts, they often take the view articulated by Richard Rex that, “The only teaching ever presented on the subject of the Eucharist is the denial of transubstantiation.”⁵³⁸ However, we have seen that although Lollards did indeed deny transubstantiation, denial of this doctrine was hardly their only teaching. We observed that the EWS details how a person should prepare to receive the Eucharist at Easter.⁵³⁹ Furthermore, we saw that there was significant overlap between the EWS and contemporary mainstream handbooks. Both emphasize the importance of confession of sin in preparing to receive the sacrament.⁵⁴⁰ Both are organized around specific liturgical days and events such as the medieval traditional feast days. Both focus on the presence of Christ in the sacrament. These similarities between Wycliffite and mainstream literature have shown that practices of worship between Lollard and mainline communities were more similar than we once thought. This similarity is an important observation because many have portrayed Wycliffe and his followers as the dissimilar heretical other. Despite the fact that many have sought to portray Wycliffe and his followers as the heretical other, Wycliffe and his followers did not self-identify as heretics, but rather also sought to follow Christ. Robert Lutton has suggested that Wycliffite influence may have contributed to the increasing devotion to Christ witnessed in Masses in pre-Reformation Tenterden. Further development of Robert Lutton’s innovative method of comparing testamentary data between regions is a future area of research that could help us delineate a possible relationship between Wycliffism and the heightened Christocentric devotion in pre-Reformation England.

⁵³⁸ Rex, *The Lollards*, 60.

⁵³⁹ Illig, “Preparing for Easter,” 249.

⁵⁴⁰ Mirk, *Mirk’s Festial*, 131 / 76b:22-28. In the Internet Archive, accessed, June 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/mirksfestialcoll00mirk/page/n11/mode/2up?view=theater>.

Another important area of commonality between the mainstream Church and Wycliffism is that both Mirk and the *EWS* emphasize the practice of virtue in preparing to receive the sacrament. Robert Langland's *Piers Plowman* also expressed concern that the Eucharist is empty if it does not practice the virtues of faith and love.⁵⁴¹ Likewise, faith for Wycliffe was a practice and a virtue.⁵⁴² He believed in the faith of the Church, and he believed in the implicit faith of the Church. Implicit faith meant that participation in the sacrament did not require that a person possess full knowledge of how Christ was present in the sacrament. Wycliffe grounded implicit faith in "the faith of Scripture" which he connected with the "faith of Christ."⁵⁴³ Wycliffe believed that the real ground of spiritual truth is found in Scripture, and that all people - both men and women - who are guided by virtue, faith, and contrition constitute a "priesthood of all believers" who should not be dependent upon clerical mediation of the truths that are fundamental to salvation.⁵⁴⁴

Wycliffe's understanding of the Eucharist, Scripture, church and faith raises fascinating questions for future research regarding how Wycliffe's eucharistic theology might have anticipated the Protestant Reformation. J. Patrick Hornbeck says, "it is all but impossible that Luther knowingly drew upon the ideas of Wycliffe."⁵⁴⁵ Although it is impossible to find direct evidence that Luther was influenced by Wycliffe there may be indirect evidence. There is much in Luther's eucharistic theology that seems to echo Wycliffe. Luther declared in 1520, "We are all Hussites." Anne Hudson said that "he might more accurately have declared, "We are all Wycliffites," as Hus himself in 1408 had stated his wish to be where Wycliffe was."⁵⁴⁶ Luther,

⁵⁴¹ Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, I.6, 178.

⁵⁴² Wycliffe, *Triologus*, IV.7.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, III.31.

⁵⁴⁴ Copeland, "Lollard Writings," 2.

⁵⁴⁵ Hornbeck, *A Companion to Lollardy*, 196.

⁵⁴⁶ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 60.

like Wycliffe, maintained that the substance of the bread remained after the words of consecration. Luther also held a high view of Scripture, believed in the “priesthood of all believers,” stressed the importance of faith, and believed in the real presence. Questions for future research include: How does Wycliffe’s understanding of faith in relation to his eucharistic theology compare with Luther’s understanding of faith in relation to his eucharistic theology? How did Wycliffe’s figurative understanding of the real presence of Christ compare with Luther’s understanding of the real presence? In what ways was Luther’s understanding of consubstantiation an echo of Wycliffe’s understanding of the real presence?

The purpose of this chapter has been to bolster the main claim of this thesis by demonstrating the rich variety of dialogues that were inspired by Wycliffe’s eucharistic polemic in a wide variety of medieval communities. Indeed, the durability of the ongoing debate that was precipitated by Wycliffe’s eucharistic controversy is a witness to the significance of his ideas. Ideas lose their force and go stale if they are not subjected to discussion.⁵⁴⁷ The fact that Wycliffe’s ideas did not lose their force or go stale is evidenced by the many dialogues that were generated by his eucharistic polemic. Within the Wycliffite community we have a broad range of views which range from Wycliffe’s figurative understanding of the real presence to strictly memorialist views. Most Lollards and most Lollard texts and trial accounts record theologies in keeping with Wycliffe’s understanding of the real presence. However, there are a multiplicity of exceptions. Walter Brut and William White provide examples of early Lollards who held memorialist views while Bishop Richard Fox’s 1511–1512 register provides examples of later Lollards who held memorialist views. Wycliffe’s *Wicket* presents an example of a Lollard text that articulates a fully memorialist theology of the Eucharist.⁵⁴⁸ This diversity of eucharistic

⁵⁴⁷ Keen, “The Influence of Wyclif,” 136.

⁵⁴⁸ Hornbeck, “Wycliffe’s *Wicket* and Eucharistic Theology,” 290.

understandings seems to have persisted into the early years of the English Reformation. The development of this same pattern of diversity in Bohemia further attests to the variety of dialogues stimulated by Wycliffe's eucharistic debate. Most studies that have been dismissive of Wycliffism have pointed to this variation as evidence of decay, however decay is a sign of stagnant uniformity. This variation is a witness to the vibrancy of Wycliffism and its desire to develop doctrine.⁵⁴⁹

It is remarkable that two of the fathers of medieval English literature, William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer, serve as non-Lollard witnesses of Wycliffite eucharistic dialogue. Their observations witness not only the extent to which the debate had spread within the greater medieval community, but also how much eucharistic worship meant to the people.

In fact, it is impossible to overstate how much the Sacrament of the Eucharist meant to medieval Christians. For the many people suffering in these extremely difficult times, who had lost many dear friends and family to plagues and wars, the presence of Christ provided indescribable comfort. For Lollards who suffered the heretic label yet did not self-identify as heretics, their identity in Christ defined their focus of worship.⁵⁵⁰ For Wycliffe who believed in the central importance of the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, the real presence of Christ defined his eucharistic worship. For us as twenty-first century Christians who may not always appreciate the central importance of the Eucharist in the life of the church as much as Wycliffe did, may this study stimulate us to desire Wycliffe's passion to focus not on the visible elements but on the true presence of Christ Himself. May we like Wycliffe and his followers truly understand that a man or woman "looking at the statue does not consider first whether the statue is formed of ash or oak wood, but contemplates whom the statue represents,

⁵⁴⁹ Somerset, "Afterward," 322.

⁵⁵⁰ Hornbeck, *Wycliffite Spirituality*, 1.

so men [or women] contemplating the Eucharist should be concerned with Christ and not the bread and wine.”⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵¹ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 282.

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