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Abstract

The philosopher and heresiarch John Wyclif and the Lollards, the religious radicals who followed, have always divided opinion. Held up as reformers and models of evangelical piety by some, for others they were heretics and insurrectionists. This thesis examines the hitherto neglected subject of responses to Wyclif and the Lollards in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It maps the historiographical landscape, examining writing about John Wyclif and the Lollards as it passed through the hands of writers situated across the denominational spectrum from nonconformist to Catholic, as well as general historians whose concerns were predominantly secular. It seeks to examine all the principal types of writers who entered the debate, including the abridgers and editors of Foxe's *Acts & Monuments*, general historians who followed the lead of Paul de Rapin de Thoyras and David Hume in the eighteenth century, and John Lingard in the early nineteenth, as well as confessional historians and polemicists who produced ecclesiastical histories. The range of genres widened during the nineteenth century to include popular evangelical novels and polemic, the writing of high churchmen like Dean Hook and Samuel Maitland and the first attempts at more academic analysis towards the end of the century.

It argues that throughout this time, writers have reimagined Wyclif and the Lollards in their own image, rendering them as heroes or villains to suit their own preconceptions. No-one was neutral or even displayed what we now understand as academic objectivity. To demonstrate this, it contextualises the historiography, showing how it was influenced by trends in wider society, both religious and secular; and how Wyclif and the Lollards provided historians with antecedents, allowing them to situate their own denominational or historical positions within a contextual framework and endow them with the authenticity of historical precedent.

The Historiography of the Lollards and John Wyclif, 1700-1900

Gregory L. Bailey

A thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham University

Department of Theology and Religion

2024

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Abbreviations

A&M	Foxe, John, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes touching matters of the Church,* London, 1570 edn., unless otherwise specified.
ECCO	*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.
ESTC	Electronic English Short Title Catalogue, British Library, London and Thorp Arch.
FZ	Shirley, Walter Waddington, *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858.
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* Online edition, edited by Lawrence Goldman, Jan 2008 (accessed 27th Nov. 2024).
PR	Hudson, Anne, The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
TAMO	*The Unabridged Acts and Monuments* (1570 edn.) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield 2011) www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/ (accessed 27th Nov. 2024).
Wing	Wing, Donald, compiler, Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America, and of English books printed in other countries, 1641-1700, New York, 945-1951.

Notes

The names assigned to religious groupings are notoriously slippery and themselves can carry loaded historiographical connotations. Here the term ‘Lollard’ has been used to describe the reform-minded individuals who followed John Wyclif chronologically, and most of whom adhered to many of his ideas. The adjective ‘Wycliffite’ has been used to describe his immediate successors, mostly from Oxford, as well as the texts produced by his successors after his death. ‘Catholic’ has been used to denote the church establishment prior to the Reformation as well as modern Roman Catholicism. Derisive terms like ‘Popish’ and ‘Romish’ have been used where appropriate to describe the attitude of contemporary historians. ‘Anglican’ has been used to denote the Church of England after 1700.

John Wyclif’s name has been spelt thus throughout, but the wide range of spellings in original quotations has been retained.

Internal cross-references are denoted in footnotes with a preceding ‘p.’

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my mother who, in 2011, started the whole thing by giving me some money and telling me not to spend it all on drink. Even during her final illness she would ask about the progress of my M.A., and it is a great sadness that she did not live to be able to take an interest in this project.

It would not have been possible had I not first done the distance learning course in Church History at Nottingham, which unfortunately no longer exists. I must thank Frances Knight and Tom O'Loughlin, who ran the course so ably and encouraged me in starting this, and Alan Ford who suggested the topic and has been unstintingly enthusiastic about it. There remained the matter of finding a supervisor. I asked Susan Royal who had just written her own thesis on earlier Lollard historiography; she suggested that I ask her supervisor, Alec Ryrie, and rather to my surprise he took it on, admitting to having 'a soft spot for the Lollards'. He has been a superb supervisor, interested, committed and engaged, ever encouraging and scarily well-organised. My friend Morgan Daniels was always impressed that I would send Alec 10,000 words on a Sunday evening and he'd be ready to talk about it on Monday morning. My only problem with Alec is that, having only taken up running half-way through this project, he was soon faster than me. I also need to thank my co-supervisor Mike Snape for his insights and suggestions on the later Victorian period. If I were to do this again, I would insist on more meetings with Mike, if only for the breadth and erudition of his knowledge.

I featured in the acknowledgements in Morgan Daniels' doctoral thesis and am pleased to return the compliment as Morgan has provided constant encouragement and has a much higher opinion of my writing than I do. I hope there are enough Marxists in it for him. Morgan was one of my two exceptionally meticulous proof-readers, the other being Michelle Bennett who has lived with this project for six long years and will be glad to hear I can finally tidy the office. Both Michelle and Morgan possess an eye for detail which I can only envy, and Morgan's knowledge of academic referencing standards and Michelle's exceptional understanding of grammar, punctuation and language are responsible for any polish this possesses. The mistakes, as they say, are my own.

Thanks also to those who read all or part of this and made many helpful suggestions. As well as those already mentioned, I need to thank the monks of the St Mary at the Cross monastery of Glasshampton in Worcestershire. Much of the work for this thesis was done on retreat weekends under their roof, and Brother Amos kindly read a lot of it. It is a nice irony that a thesis so concerned with John Wyclif, no friend of the friars, would have been written in part at an Anglican friary. Thanks also to the academics and others who have kindly given their time and answered my questions: Miriam Burstein, Michael Van Dussen, Tom Freeman, Birgit Meyer, Arvo Leppard, Simon Lewis, Justine Trombley and Bertie Warr.

We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.

Little Gidding,
T.S. Eliot

'The author ... has endeavoured to write in a clear, succinct ... stile; to arrange his materials with accuracy and precision, to expiate on the most interesting circumstances; and to entertain the imagination, while he informs the understanding.'

Tobias Smollett[1]

[1] *Plan of a Complete History of England*, 1757, 3. 'All obscure allusions are explained in notes at the bottom of the page'.

1 Introduction

1.1 A Study in Bias and Confusion

'On the feast day of St Thomas … John Wyclif, had prepared to deliver a sermon, in which he intended to spew out invective and blasphemy against the saint. But all of a sudden that creature of the devil, enemy of the church, disturber of the people, idol of the heretics, model for hypocrites, fomenter of schism, disseminator of hatred and fabricator of lies was struck by the judgement of God.'[1] Thus the monastic chronicler Thomas Walsingham of St. Albans described John Wyclif's final stroke. Wyclif died on 31st December 1384. Walsingham, writing in the early fifteenth century, inaugurated a tradition of invective, bias and polemic around Wyclif which would persist for centuries. Walsingham was just as rude about Wyclif's followers, writing of a sermon given by 'one of the shits to come out of that idol of abomination.'[2]

John Wyclif was a fourteenth-century philosopher and advocate for church reform and the Lollards were an amorphous group of reform-minded individuals who adopted radical ideas of piety and church and social reform, often inspired by his tenets. This study will investigate the ways they were represented, and misrepresented, by writers between 1700 and 1900. Wyclif and the Lollards have always been controversial, always divided opinion. This was true when they were active, and it remains true today with debates continuing about, for instance, their role in driving the Reformation and the evolution of Puritanism. This is a study of bias, conscious and unconscious, and the dissemination of myth. Reading the work of writers from a wide variety of religious and political backgrounds, it will examine how they projected their own confessional and philosophical positions onto Wyclif and the Lollards.

The two centuries between 1700 and 1900 witnessed widespread changes in the religious landscape in Britain. It was a time when denominational diversity came to be increasingly tolerated by the state. In the 1820s, barriers to nonconformity were removed and the Catholic Emancipation Act passed in 1829. Fissures widened in the Church of

[1] Thomas Walsingham, *Chronica Maiora*, translated by David Preest, 2005, 221.
[2] Ibid., 372.

England after the Nonjuring schism at the end of the seventeenth century. The Oxford Movement of the 1830s drove some Anglicans in the direction of Anglo-Catholicism, while at the same time the evangelical wing gained ground. The 1843 Disruption in Scotland split the national church in two when evangelical ministers seceded from the Kirk to form the Free Church of Scotland.[3] This fragmentation encouraged expression across a wide spectrum of opinion, and writers of every colour on that spectrum espoused widely divergent opinions on Wyclif and the Lollards. They attracted writers' interest both as early reformers and proponents of religious and social change. Either of these aspects could be lauded or condemned, depending on a writer's particular standpoint.

Following John Bale, Protestant writers of various shades sought to claim that Wyclif was 'the morning star of the Reformation',[4] foundational for their own denomination, while condemning the fourteenth-century church and papacy as corrupt, peddling superstition and responsible for brutal persecution. Some were suspicious of Wyclif's social ideas as dangerously seditious and many downplayed or ignored the more controversial teachings attributed to him. Catholic writers, by contrast, sought to discredit Wyclif by demonstrating that his ideas were heretical and disruptive, and the church hierarchy was the wronged party. Naturally these writers emphasised and exaggerated his controversial ideas.

The picture is further complicated when we consider the historiography of the 'Wycliffites' or Lollards who followed in his wake. They lacked Wyclif's intellectual credentials, often came from the lower strata of society and as such espoused more obviously disruptive ideas. Protestant writers from an evangelical or nonconformist background generally regarded the Lollards positively as exemplars of Protestant piety. Others, particularly those of a High Church persuasion, found them altogether too

[3] Rowan Strong (editor), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, Volume III 'Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion, 1829-c.1914', 2017, charts many of these developments, especially chapters 2, 5 and 7-10. Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century and English Society,* 1995, chapter 1, summarises the changes in the Anglican church. Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century England c.1714-1780*, 1993, discusses changing attitudes to Catholicism in the eighteenth century and Peter Nockles, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism', in *Perfecting Perfection: Essays in Honor of Henry. D. Rack*, edited by Robert Webster, 233-259, Wipf and Stock, 2015.

[4] See p.116 for the historiography of this phrase.

revolutionary; such writers were often as condemnatory of the Wycliffites as Catholic historians.

As well as the religious and political developments which left their mark on the historiography, this period also saw huge changes in education, publishing and the historical profession. At the start of the eighteenth century, possession of books was still limited to the wealthier section of society, but by the end of the nineteenth the rise of a prosperous middle class, mass literacy and changes in printing technology had led to an explosion both of academic works of history and mass-circulation novels and tracts. New universities were founded, and academic historians replaced the gentleman scholars who had written history in the previous century. Better historical methods were developed, making use of archival material and attempting more sophisticated analyses of the past. All these developments left their marks on the historiography of Wyclif and the Lollards.

The first chapter of Anne Hudson's *The Premature Reformation* is entitled 'The Problem of Sources'.[5] It discusses the problems for modern students caused by limitations of source material, the scarcity and limitations of surviving Lollard texts, and the fact that most source material was collated by those hostile to Lollardy. The problem, obviously, was worse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when most historians lacked access even to these limited sources. This would have been problematic for writers seeking objectivity, but for those promoting their own ideas, which was most of them, the scarcity left them free to express any idea or mythology which suited their preconceptions, largely free of awkward facts. Anyone writing about the Lollards was forced to depend on the monastic chronicles of Walsingham or Knighton, or Foxe's material in *A&M* and these sources could always be denounced as biased where the material did not fit. For historians writing about Wyclif, there was a corpus of Wycliffite tracts and sermons available in English, which was used by the more assiduous of them, though it is now known that little or none of it was written by him.[6] Wyclif's Latin manuscripts remained inaccessible in libraries in Prague and Vienna, not published until

[5] *PR*, 7.
[6] Anne Hudson, 'Wyclif and the English Language', in *Wyclif in his Times*, edited by Antony Kenny, Oxford University Press, 1986, 85-105.

the end of the nineteenth century. Most historians, though, did not use any original sources, proffering their own opinions, either unsupported or citing friendly earlier writers. Wyclif and the Lollards could appear as each writer wished; as persecuted Protestant martyrs, as precursors of reform, as a rabble of socialists, as heretics or as heroes.

1.2 The Historiography of the Historiography

Modern scholarly material on this historiography is scarce. Margaret Aston, writing in the 1960s, has to refer readers to Montagu Burrows' 1881 book *Wyclif's Place in History* for a 'brief treatment' of the subject.[7] Brief indeed: Burrows' book covers the historiography in fewer than ten pages, mostly concerned with nineteenth century material.[8]

Susan Royal's *Lollards in the English Reformation* (2020) studied the work of evangelical writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular the influence of *A&M*. Royal showed how evangelical writers appropriated the Lollards as precursors during the seventeenth century and this investigation will find the same tendency extended and exacerbated in the following centuries. She notes that radical groups like the Quakers, Fifth Monarchists and Baptists laid claim to Lollard antecedents, as did evangelicals in the Church of England.[9] Royal's book focused on the influence of the Lollard material in *Acts & Monuments*, arguing that John Foxe did not heavily 'whitewash' the material to de-emphasise Lollard radicalism. Many later historians looking to be positive about the Lollards continued to depend on *A&M* as a source, but it was less widely used by writers on Wyclif, who preferred to use Wycliffite texts to attempt to understand his ideas, though most of the works they used could not reasonably be attributed to his pen.

Royal concluded that 'Foxe's success in establishing the lollards as true martyrs meant that post-Reformation Protestants rarely questioned their martyrological value, but this meant that in the fractured religious climate of seventeenth-century England, competing religious groups mutually claimed the Lollards as spiritual forebears. … [T]he influence

[7] Margaret Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', in Margaret Aston, *Lollards & Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, Hambledon Press, 1984, 250, fn.
[8] Montagu Burrows, *Wiclif's Place in History*, 1884, 33-42.
[9] Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation: History, radicalism and John Foxe*, Manchester University Press 2020, 212.

of the lollards … is perhaps best seen not in the mid-1500s … but in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the evangelical church that Foxe had worked so hard to shore up began to fragment.'[10] Royal's approach was to trace the influence of the Lollards, as mediated by Foxe, across the *longue durée*,[11] and this study extends the examination into the next two hundred years, during which period we will find the trend continuing, as the religious landscape became even more fragmented.

There is some material on the twentieth-century historiography, for example Peter Marshall's book chapter 'Lollards and Protestants Revisited'.[12] For the period in between 1700 and 1900, however, little work has been published. Even work on the historiography of the wider Reformation during these centuries is scarce. John Drabble, in an unpublished doctoral thesis, 'The Historians of the English Reformation: 1780-1850', felt able to describe it as 'uncharted territory', saying that 'The area had never been surveyed'.[13] His thesis is concerned wholly with the sixteenth-century Reformation. Rosemary O'Day drew heavily on Drabble's thesis in her *The Debate on the English Reformation* (1986; 2014)[14] which is still the standard published work on Reformation historiography. Her book contains three valuable chapters on the years 1700-1900, but nothing on the historiography of Wyclif and the Lollards. There is even less on eighteenth-century historiography. Laird Okie produced a book on the *general* historiography of England, *Augustan Historical Writing* (1991), stating there that 'no sustained effort has heretofore been made to chart the evolution of English historiography in the first half of the eighteenth century or to explore the manner in which historical writing was affected by politics and ideology.'[15] Okie writes that the focus of scholars has been on a few 'big names' such as Gibbon and Hume which has resulted in a distorted picture.[16] He argues that the eighteenth century saw a revolution in historiography as an Enlightenment

[10] Ibid., 215.
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Peter Marshall, 'Lollards and Protestants Revisited', in *Wycliffite Controversies*, edited by Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, Brepols, 2011, 295-316. Marshall finds that 'political and ideological factors, as much as methodological and evidential ones, have shaped the historical record' and if that is true of the twentieth century, it is doubly so of those which preceded it.
[13] John Edward Drabble, 'The Historians of the English Reformation 1780-1850', Unpub. PhD thesis, New York University, 1975, 2.
[14] Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation*, 2nd edn., Manchester University Press, 2014.
[15] Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment*, Lanham, 1991, vii.
[16] Ibid., 1.

history started to replace the providential histories of the previous century in which 'God punished vice and rewarded virtue' and authors were 'partly compilers, weaving their own words indistinguishably with paraphrasings, plagiarisms, and transcriptions.'[17] This, Okie says, 'reflected the ascendancy of a secular, liberal Whiggism.'[18]

There is nothing specifically focussed upon the historiography of Lollardy between 1700-1900. A small amount has been published on Wycliffite historiography, most of it on the nineteenth century, as historians then, generally, were more interested in Wyclif than the Lollards. The most significant work on Wyclif is James Crompton's 1966 article 'John Wyclif: a study in mythology', which contains a summary of the scholarship on Wyclif.[19] Richard Rex's introduction to edition 90 of the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 'Reinventing the Reformation in the Nineteenth Century' (2014) includes material on Victorian historiography of the Reformation with a section on Wyclif where Rex concludes that 'Wycliffe and the Lollards were useful because they could be claimed alike by church and chapel' not least because of their distinctive Englishness.[20] Two important articles on the pre-1700 historiography of Wyclif are Margaret Aston's 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', which examines the reaction to Wyclif by Protestant historians of the Reformation period,[21] and Antony Kenny's 'The Accursed Memory: the Counter-Reformation Reputation of John Wyclif', an extension of Aston's analysis to attitudes to Wyclif by his Catholic critics.[22] All these authors emphasise the degree to which Wyclif was mythologised by subsequent historians. Crompton, by way of emphasis, puts this mythologising in his title. Aston writes along similar lines, that if we are to understand Wyclif 'it is necessary to begin with the removal of various layers of posthumous commentary and interpretation'[23] and for Kenny, 'Catholics, too, built up a partly fictional aura round the reformer's memory' as 'an evil spirit to be exorcised.'[24]

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[17] Ibid., 210.
[18] Ibid.
[19] James Crompton, 'John Wyclif: A Study in Mythology,' *Bulletin of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 42 (1966), 6-34.
[20] Richard Rex, 'Introduction: The Morning Star or Sunset of the Reformation', in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 90.1 (2014), 14.
[21] Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 243-273.
[22] Antony Kenny, 'The Accursed Memory: the Counter-Reformation Reputation of John Wyclif', in *Wyclif in His Times*, edited by Antony Kenny, Oxford University Press, 1986, 147-168.
[23] Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 243.
[24] Kenny, 'The Accursed Memory', 147.

However these studies are limited to historiography of the earlier centuries. Miriam Burstein's *Victorian Reformations* contains a chapter on Victorian fictional accounts of Wyclif and the Lollards. Burstein's interest is on how Victorian evangelical readings of the Reformation were reflected in novels produced, in the main, for young adults. She finds that for these writers the Reformation was 'tragically incomplete' as an assertion of Protestant principles.[25]

1.3 Methodology and Structure

The sources for this investigation are texts published in English between 1700 and 1900. Some earlier texts have been used to give important context, for examples the church histories written by Thomas Fuller, Peter Helyn and Gilbert Burnet in the seventeenth century. Unpublished work, for instance Jonathan Lewis' 1741 revision of his 1720 biography of Wyclif, has not been included, as it will not have had an influence on the historiographical debate. Books published in other languages have only been included where they have been translated into English and have had significant impact. The most important examples are Paul de Rapin de Thoyras' *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1724-1727), translated into English in 1727 by Nicolas Tindal and Gotthard Lechler's 1873 *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, translated by Peter Lorimer and first published in English as *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors* in 1878. The translated versions of both histories were influential and are examined in detail.

The amount of material on Wyclif and the Lollards increased vastly between 1700 and 1900. This investigation has attempted to be as thorough as possible for the eighteenth-century, using databases such as the *Eighteenth-century Collections Online* to identify as much of the significant material as possible. In the nineteenth century there was an explosive growth in published material and such an exhaustive approach would be impossible, so a degree of selection has been necessary. In two areas there was a vast amount of material: evangelical novels from 1860, and popular biographies of Wyclif around the time of the quincentenary of his death in 1884. In both cases the books tend to share many characteristics, and this study has concentrated on the most well-known

[25] Miriam Burstein, 'Counter-Medievalism: or, Protestants Rewrite the Middle Ages', in *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism*, edited by J. Palgrem & L. Holloway, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 148.

or innovative writers, for example the novelist Emily Sarah Holt and the popular biography of Wyclif by Rudolf Buddensieg.

***

The first half of this thesis examines the eighteenth-century historiography. Chapter 1 looks at accounts of Lollardy contained in the 'heirs to Foxe', abridgements of *A&M* which started to appear in the eighteenth century, and which have been generally dismissed as crude debasements of Foxe's book. Some were drawn closely from *A&M*, others departed more widely; all displayed an attitude of veneration and respect for John Oldcastle and the Lollard martyrs and a strong streak of anti-Romanism. These histories have been represented as crude anti-Catholic polemic, but this chapter shows that they were usually more sophisticated and scholarly.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the work of general historians of the eighteenth century. Historical writing developed greater sophistication, inspired by the growth of the wider Enlightenment and the market for books. Chapter 2 charts the roots of this process through the lens of early eighteenth-century writing about Lollardy, culminating in the influential histories written by Paul de Rapin de Thoyras and David Hume, whose *History of England* (1753) was hugely successful. Rapin was generally positive about the Lollards while treating them as political actors. Hume, on the other hand, dismissed them as religious extremists. Chapter 3 proposes that historical writers on the Lollards after 1750, can be categorised as either following Rapin or Hume. Rapinite historians are more sympathetic, treating Lollards as victims whereas the Humeites are more dismissive, regarding Lollards as disruptive 'enthusiasts', pre-empting an attitude which would become more widely held during the nineteenth century. Chapter 4 deals with strands of eighteenth-century writing from other confessional backgrounds, finding Catholics and nonjurors presenting Lollardy as seditious, whereas Evangelical and nonconformist writers laud the Lollards as precursors of the Protestant Reformation.

Chapter 5 turns to writing about John Wyclif and demonstrates that the same contrasts existed, Rapinites being rather more respectful whereas Humeites often bypassed Wyclif altogether. The history of the production of biographies of Wyclif runs throughout this thesis. The first was produced in 1720 by John Lewis. We will support the later view that

it was valuable as a source of Wycliffite material but lacking in historical analysis. We examine critique of Wyclif by Catholic historians and the many attempts by nonconformist historians to recruit or Wyclif as a precursor of their own traditions.

The second section deals with the nineteenth century. Chapter 6 argues that the terms of the debate were set by three influential historians, Joseph Milner, John Lingard and Robert Vaughan. Milner was an evangelical historian who sought to restore the role of the Holy Spirit in ecclesiastical history, looking for 'true Christians'. For him the Lollards qualified but Wyclif was an ambiguous figure, insufficiently evangelical. The root of this evangelical attitude can be found in *A&M*. Lingard, a Catholic priest, shifted the debate about Reformation history in general in his immensely influential *A History of England* (1819-30). His history trod carefully in making a case for Catholic emancipation, but we will show that he was less restrained about Wyclif and the Lollards. The Congregationalist Robert Vaughan wrote multiple biographies of Wyclif aiming to restore Wyclif to his pedestal as 'Morning Star of the Reformation'. His depiction of Wyclif as a proto-Protestant and patriot was the source of tropes which were used by many later Protestant historians.

The work of High Church Anglican historians is discussed in chapter 7 which shows how these writers developed the opinions of Humeite writers in the previous century. They also trod a careful path between approval and criticism of Wyclif, though *as* establishment figures were not enthusiastic about Lollards, whose reputation for sedition and revolt had crystallised by mid-century. Chapter 8 looks at writing from the opposite end of the spectrum, evangelical writing which painted Wyclif and the Lollards in gaudy colours. These books were aimed at a popular audience and contained virulent anti-Roman polemic while promoting evangelical protestant ideals. This writing lay in a direct line of descent from John Foxe and other early modern evangelicals. The same themes emerged in a new way in the later nineteenth century with the appearance of pious, popular fictional accounts, examined in chapter 9.

Towards the century's end, academic interest in Wyclif reached new heights. The Wyclif Society was founded in 1881 with the aim of (finally) publishing his original Latin works. Gotthard Lechler wrote the most thoroughly researched and complete biography of Wyclif to date in 1878. Chapter 10 shows that historical accounts of Wyclif were still

replete with mythology, scholars massaging and reinterpreting the facts to present the best possible version of Wyclif. The quincentenary of Wyclif's death in 1884 is discussed in chapter 11. There was an exhibition at the British Museum and official festivities which, we will show, were not as well-supported as is thought. The Lollards did not fit with late nineteenth-century sensibilities and were, by this time, neglected by historians. Chapter 12 shows that by 1880, Lollards were generally regarded as communists or socialists, another example of the historical group being reframed in anachronistic terms. Socialist and Marxist writers, at the same time, were claiming the group as forebears, reinventing them now as precursors of working-class combination. The final chapter examines George Macaulay Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wyclif* (1899), a book which pre-empted twentieth-century themes. Trevelyan reignited interest in the Lollards, an interest which has continued ever since.

1.4 A note on Wyclif's 'dominion in grace'

None of John Wyclif's ideas caused more confusion and controversy than his teaching on dominion (lordship or possession), or more specifically how he applied it to the practical questions of the relationship between crown and church in *De Civili Dominio* (1375-6). An earlier work, *De Dominio Divino* (1373-4) in which Wyclif defined and classified divine dominion, saying in essence that all lordship is derived from God, was uncontroversial. *De Civili Dominio*, by contrast, can be regarded as marking the start of Wyclif's career as a heretic, the list of condemned tenets in the papal bulls of 1377 all being taken from this work.

Wyclif's central argument is that all lordship derives from God. To be able to exercise dominion, one must be in a state of grace. A man in a state of grace possesses all the goods of the universe whereas a man in sin has no right to dominion or lordship.[26] Civil dominion is instituted by man but derives from the natural dominion granted by God. It can, therefore, only be exercised by the Elect, those in a state of grace.[27] Further, civil

[26] All the Elect own all the goods of the universe, therefore must own them in common. This gave rise to the regular accusations that Wyclif held communistic views. Takashi Shogimen, 'Wyclif's Ecclesiology and Political Thought', in *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, edited by Ian Levy, Brill, 2006, 231-2.

[27] Wyclif was 'exasperatingly reluctant' (Kenny) to say how we would know who is in a state of grace, and, indeed it is not possible, meaning that 'its practical consequence were reduced to nullity' (Leff).

dominion must be exercised by secular rulers, not by the church. 'The king is Christ's vicar.'[28] This corollary allowed Wyclif to argue that the crown had the duty to exercise dominion over the church and remove church leaders who were sinful.

These ideas were not new, being derived from those of the fourteenth-century scholastic thinker Richard FitzRalph, and before him Giles of Rome,[29] but Wyclif amended them so that they could be used as a weapon in the ongoing conflict between the English crown and the papacy. This doctrine was capable of being interpreted in multiple ways as we shall see. Hostile historians used the idea to argue that Wyclif preached sedition and sought to undermine social order. Catholic writers could make the case that Wyclif's ideas pre-empted Anabaptist antinomianism. Those who supported Wyclif often glossed over them. Some Anglican writers saw in the idea nothing more sinister than an attempt to redefine the relationship between church and state, one comparing Wyclif to Richard Hooker.[30] No-one who wrote about the idea understood it. Modern commentators remain divided as to Wyclif's intention, though it is now understood that the significance of this in Wyclif's canon of thought has been exaggerated and that it was superseded by his later ideas.[31] 'The last thing [he] envisaged was the weakening of authority.'[32]

[28] Shogimen, 'Ecclesiology', 231-2.
[29] Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, Manchester University Press, 1967, 546.
[30] This was Wyclif's Victorian cheerleader Montagu Burrows. See p.234.
[31] Gordon Leff wrote 'it is hard not to feel that its importance has been 'much exaggerated'. 'John Wyclif: The Path to Dissent', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52 (1966), 174.
[32] Ibid.

2 Accounts of Lollards in eighteenth-century derivations of *Acts & Monuments*

2.1 Introduction

> I must own indeed, that the Death and Persecutions of the Christian Martyrs, have most of 'em been already recorded by Mr. Fox and others; but then the Unhappiness is, that they are either dispers'd and scatter'd about in different Volumes, or lock'd up in obscure and obsolete language, or what's as bad, Buried in such large Volumes that in truth 'tis Impossible they should so well Answer the great end as one intire Methodical and Concise collection. Books of this Nature should be made as Publick as possible, and fitted even to the meanest Capacity.[1]

No complete edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* was published for over 150 years after that of 1684[2] but its ideas continued to be disseminated via abridgements and derivative versions. Often these were produced by anonymous editors; some acknowledged the debt to John Foxe but many used formulae such as 'abstracted from the best authors'.[3] Editors professed a variety of motivations: some sought to promote Protestant piety or warn against the evils of popery, but the stated intention for many, like the anonymous author of the 1702 work quoted above, was simply to make the material in *A&M* available to the Protestant in the street. This quotation encapsulates the situation at the time: copies of *A&M* were scarce, and even if one could acquire one, it was verbose and unwieldy.[4] Editors throughout the eighteenth century perceived a need to shorten

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[1] John Foxe et al, *The book of martyrs, with an account of the Acts and Monuments of church and state, from the time of our Blessed Saviour, to the year 1701*, London, 1702, ii-iii.

[2] Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-century England, c. 1714-80,* Manchester University Press, 1993, 28. Eirwen Nicholson, 'Eighteenth-Century Foxe: Evidence for the Impact of *Acts and Monuments* in the "Long" Eighteenth Century', in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, edited by David Loades, Scolar Press, 1997, 149.

[3] Henry Southwell's *The new book of martyrs; or complete Christian martyrology* (1765) boldly announces on the title page that it included 'every Thing worthy of notice in Fox's Book of Martyrs'. *The book of martyrs: or, the history of the Church* (1747) was 'extracted from the Three Large Volumes of the Famous Mr. John Fox and divers other Books'. On the other hand, the *Acts and Monuments of Church and State* (1702) states only that it had been 'abstracted from the Best Authors' and *The Book of Martyrs* (1764) uses the same phrase, presumably with a view to persuading purchasers that it was more than just an abridgement of Foxe's book.

[4] Haydon's assertion (*Anti-Catholicism*, 28) that the original version of *A&M* was 'very widely read in eighteenth-century England' has been convincingly challenged by Eirwen Nicholson ('Eighteenth-Century Foxe', 145) who demonstrates the 'limited availability of the original' which was a spur to produce the abridgements.

and simplify the material. This also presented an opportunity to re-frame it in a more theologically acceptable direction. Staughton, for instance, in 1791, produced his version because of the 'amazing ignorance which prevails in the minds of many.'[5] The editor of the 1764 *Book of Martyrs* wrote that people should 'imitate the examples of these Holy Men in past ages'[6] and Henry Bilton hoped that his book would provide many examples of people who had sacrificed their lives, 'yea, even Women'.[7]

Eirwen Nicholson dubbed these derivative editions 'Foxe's bastards',[8] and produced a bibliography of around fifty such works.[9] These books take different approaches to tackle the problems involved in summarising and presenting material from *A&M*. Some simplify it into edifying collections of martyrs' lives, permitting straightforward organization into small chapters. This was the approach taken by Henry Bilton in his 1720 book *The history of the English martyrs*. Matthew Taylor's *England's Bloody Tribunal, or Popish Cruelty Displayed* (1770) was structured in a similar fashion, expanded to include martyrs from other countries. S. Staughton's *A Selection of Remarkable Events in the Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Eminent Reformers and Martyrs* (1791) was another lives collection, but is much shorter, just including the biographies of those he considered most significant.[10] Other books were more 'consciously historical in intent' as Greenberg puts it.[11] Henry Southwell's *New and Complete book of Martyrs* (1765), which covered the entire period from the apostolic church, used a narrative historical format more similar to Foxe's, as did the anonymous 1764 book *The Book of Martyrs OR the history of paganism and popery*.

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[5] S. Staughton, *A Selection of Remarkable Events in the Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Eminent Reformers, and Martyrs, in the Christian Church*, 1791, iv.

[6] John Foxe, et al, *The book of martyrs: or, compleat history of martyrdom, from the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour, to the present times,* London, 1764*,* iv.

[7] Henry Bilton, *The history of the English martyrs,* 1720*,* vii.

[8] Nicholson, 'Eighteenth-Century Foxe', 149. Devorah Greenberg took issue with this 'deprecating sobriquet' since for her these texts were valuable in their own right, representing a new interpretation of *A&M*, or in Greenberg's words, 'circumscribed the text's meaning by their common subjectivity, which is not one that John Foxe or his community would/could have shared.' Devorah Greenberg, 'Eighteenth-Century "Foxe": History, Historiography, and Historical Consciousness' in John Foxe's Book of Martyrs', *TAMO*.

[9] Nicholson states that the list is far from complete but a search on the ECCO database has turned up few which are missing from her list. Nicholson, 'Eighteenth-Century Foxe', 172-177.

[10] Staunton's *Selection of Remarkable Events* is missing from Nicholson's list, but arguably does not belong on it, since, whilst a collection of lives of martyrs, it has little in common with Foxe's book.

[11] Nicholson, 'Eighteenth-Century "Foxe"'.

All these works include material on the Lollards, though in some it is scanty. Other abridgements were limited to the persecutions during the reign of Mary and thus are outside the scope of this investigation.[12] John Wesley's fifty-volume *Christian Library* (1750) included an abridgement of *A&M* in Volumes II-IV. The material is largely identical to that in *A&M*, at least as concerns the Lollards, Wesley's approach being to omit 'not only all the secular history; but likewise those accounts, writings and examinations of the Martyrs, which contained nothing particularly affecting or instructive.'[13] The result, for our purposes, is that Wesley's book is too similar to *A&M* to be a useful source: to use Patrick Collinson's terminology, it lies nearer to Foxe than 'Foxe', the Lollard material being lifted from *A&M* with updated language and some quoted documents removed.

These derivative works have received little academic attention outside the studies by Eirwen Nicholson and Devorah Greenberg,[14] and the analysis that has been done tends to dismiss them as popularizing polemic, degraded versions of *A&M*. For William Haller, the narrow focus on godly lives removed crucial context and consequently these editions displayed 'progressive corruption and vulgarization of the original for the propagation of an increasingly narrow Protestant piety.'[15] Thomas Freeman, in the *ODNB* entry on John Foxe (2008), said of these works that 'editors … preferred to cut away the sections of it that did not suit their purposes, retaining *only* sensational episodes of torture and death … between 1684 and 1832 the *only* editions of Foxe published were, through abridgement

[12] For example, the anonymous 1746 lives collection *Select History of the Lives and Sufferings of English Protestant Martyrs, chiefly under Mary* (which does include a chapter on John Oldcastle), and *The book of martyrs: containing an account of the sufferings & death of the Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary the First*. The latter appeared in multiple editions (1732, 1741, 1754, 1761, 1776), suggesting enduring popularity. The last two editions included a strongly anti-Catholic preface by the evangelical preacher (and proponent of polygamy) Martin Madan. Paul Wright's edition, *Fox's original and complete book of martyrs; or, an universal history of martyrdom*, 3rd edn., 1800, appeared in editions of 1784, 1794 and 1800, and was, according to Devorah Greenberg, one of the three 'major editions of the century', the others being those of Madan and Wesley ('Eighteenth-Century "Foxe"', *TAMO*). This was concerned chiefly with the reign of Mary, despite Wright attempting to justify the claim of completeness by adding brief material on the earlier period, in which the Lollards are covered in a single page.

[13] John Wesley, *A Christian library. Consisting of extracts from and abridgments of the choicest pieces of practical divinity*, Bristol, 1749-55, II.2.

[14] The Wikipedia entry on 'Foxe's Book of Martyrs' contains a section entitled 'The Book{s} of Martyrs', and given its style and content seems to have been contributed by Devorah Greenberg – emphasizing, for example, the ironic quotation marks in 'Foxe'. Here it is stated that 'Very little, still, is known about any of these editions … Characterized most recently as 'Foxe' … these Foxe-derived texts await researchers.' Accessed 5th November 2024. Likewise for Nicholson 'there is … an obvious need for a full study of this material.' ('Eighteenth-Century Foxe', 152).

[15] William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, Jonathan Cape, 1963, 252.

and enlargement, works that bore little relation to the original and were merely topical anti-Catholic screeds' (emphasis added).[16] This conclusion seems too sweeping. *Some* editions can be characterized in that way, but the majority did incorporate the lineaments of Foxe's book.

Foxe's material about the Lollards was summarized and adapted by eighteenth-century editors for their own polemical purposes: this chapter will examine what they opted to retain, what to omit and what to alter. One difficulty is how little of the Lollards there is in these books. What material there is, is dominated by John Oldcastle: there is more about his life than any other Lollard martyr. For example, Henry Bilton's collection includes seven Lollard lives,[17] but nine out of twenty-six pages are on Oldcastle. The only Lollards included in Matthew Taylor's edition are Oldcastle and William Taylor, martyred in 1423. Staughton's *Lives of the Primitive Fathers* has Oldcastle as its *only* Lollard life, squeezed in between Jerome of Prague and Luther.[18] The material on Oldcastle provides insights into the writers' attitudes, but that on other Lollard martyrs is scant and often repetitive so we will focus upon the material on Oldcastle, examining three areas which expose the problems and opportunities which confronted these writers. First, the question of *how* to abridge the mass of material in *A&M,* making it digestible and ensuring it served their intended purpose. The most significant difficulty here was with the vast amount of detail on Oldcastle's trial which, in *A&M*, comprised pages of verbatim reportage of the cross-examination on his suspect theological beliefs. The need to simplify and distil this material gave eighteenth-century editors the opportunity to represent Oldcastle's views as robustly evangelical. Certain areas of dogma which did not fit this model were quietly removed by some editors. Second, editors had to deal with the problematic suggestion of sedition arising from the 1414 rising. This damp squib was the single most significant event in Lollard history in terms of defining their later reputation, as any attempt to portray them as loyal precursors of English Protestantism was fatally undermined if they could be shown to be responsible for a seditious attempt to undermine the government.

[16] T. Freeman, 'John Foxe', *ODNB*.
[17] Also: Sawtrey, Badby, Claydon, Taylor, White, Man and Sweeting.
[18] This preponderance of material on Oldcastle reflects the coverage in *A&M* itself. In the 1570 edition, twelve pages (685-696) of volume V are dedicated to Oldcastle, and even more space, twenty-four pages (697-721) to a rebuttal of Nicholas Harpsfield who had used medieval chronicles in an attempt to refute the 1563 edition, suggesting that Oldcastle was responsible for fomenting sedition.

The notion that Oldcastle was a traitor by virtue of his involvement was problematic as was, more generally, Oldcastle's military background, which, for some editors, did not fit the model of an ideal Protestant martyr. Third, we shall investigate how these books characterized the fifteenth-century clerical establishment: how the Lollards were presented in contradistinction to their inquisitors and whether it is reasonable to suppose that the presentation of the clergy as venal representatives of a corrupt system was indicative of a strand of anti-Catholicism or anti-clericalism among these predominantly evangelical Protestant writers.

2.2 Oldcastle's trial

Given the length and complexity, one might say the unreadableness, of *A&M*, later editors looking to make it more accessible needed to devise ways to abridge it sufficiently to make it more readable whilst still projecting its evangelical message. The Oldcastle material in *A&M* is dense and awkwardly structured, with pages of detail about his trial, much of it repetitive. Oldcastle underwent two examinations: the first on 23rd September 1414, which in *A&M* is covered relatively briefly with a report that Oldcastle made a confession of faith on the points on which he stood accused: the eucharist, confession, images and pilgrimages. Oldcastle's statement does read rather like obfuscation. On confession, for example, he said that he believed every man should do penance for sin, without specifying whether this should be before a priest. The bishops wanted clarification on the matters that remained ambiguous, so the hearing was adjourned until the 25th. In the second session they questioned Oldcastle at greater length, especially on the eucharist, to discover whether he believed that *any* bread remained after the words of consecration. The second cross-examination was reported in minute detail by Foxe and is often heavily abridged by eighteenth-century editors. Some of Oldcastle's responses were at variance with contemporary evangelical stances, particularly regarding the sacrament of the eucharist. Oldcastle, like most Lollards, believed that after consecration, the host was transformed into Christ's body 'in the form of bread'. This view, similar to that later espoused by Martin Luther, was sufficiently heretical in the eyes of Oldcastle's judges for him to be condemned as a heretic, but *insufficiently* reformed for eighteenth-century evangelical editors, for whom the host remained bread,

the eucharist a memorial with no numinous quality.[19] Many eighteenth-century editors tweaked Oldcastle's words to make them adhere more closely to their own theological position.

The approach to the abridgement problem taken by Henry Bilton, in *The History of the English Martyrs* (1720), was an ingenious one which would be adopted by other editors. Bilton concentrates on the four points of doctrine in Oldcastle's confession of faith, condensing the verbose material of the second examination by relating it back to these points. Bilton discusses Oldcastle's questioning by John Kemp,[20] which helpfully comprised a similar list of doctrinal points: the eucharist, confession, the power of the keys, pilgrimages and images. This was a sensible choice as a microcosm of the debate since it included all the main doctrinal points and provided a narrative structure which was lacking in Foxe's account. On the crucial matter of the eucharist, Bilton subtly changes Oldcastle's reply. According to *A&M*, Oldcastle, presented with the orthodox view, said: 'Thys is not my beliefe. But my fayth is ... that in the worshipfull sacrament of the aultar, is very Christes bodye in fourme of bread.'[21] However in Bilton's account, Oldcastle simply said 'This is not my belief',[22] denying the presence of Christ in the sacrament *altogether*, a position which was more acceptable to eighteenth-century evangelicals. On the other points, Bilton adheres closely to *A&M*: his Oldcastle stating that confession to a priest was only worthwhile if the priest were a godly or learned man, commenting that many popes had not maintained the holy standards set by St. Peter and his immediate successors and stating that pilgrimages and the veneration of images had not been instituted by God. 'Then there arose a long Debate,' Bilton says, at a stroke removing swathes of the reportage in *A&M*.[23]

Bilton's editorial choices regarding the abridgment of this material from *A&M* were influential. Fifty years later in *England's Bloody Tribunal*, Matthew Taylor uses the same

[19] The Wycliffite position on the eucharist was close to that of Luther, whilst by the eighteenth century, evangelicals were aligned roughly to the view expressed by Huldrych Zwingli, for whom Christ was present 'according to his divine, not his human nature.' By the sixteenth century, most Lollards also took a similar anti-realist stance. Peter W. Stephens, 'The theology of Zwingli', in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, edited by David Bagchi & David Steinmetz, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 89.
[20] Described in *A&M* as a 'doctor of laws', Kemp was to go on to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1452.
[21] *A&M*, 691.
[22] Bilton, *English Martyrs,* 14.
[23] Ibid., 15.

approach, the questioning by John Kemp again serving to represent the entire second examination. Like Bilton, Taylor removes Oldcastle's annoying declaration of belief in the Real Presence; according to Taylor, Oldcastle replied 'that he did not believe that … the material bread … was turned into Christ's very body.'[24] The anonymous author of the enormous (five volumes) lives collection *The Book of Martyrs or compleat History of Martyrdom* (1764) was evidently so impressed with Bilton's version of the life of Oldcastle that he plagiarized it in its entirety.[25] Staughton's *Lives of the Primitive Fathers* (1791) only uses material from the second hearing, again focusing on Oldcastle's statements of belief. Staughton, like Bilton, utilises Oldcastle's replies to John Kemp to cover his doctrinal stances, but omits his statement of belief in the Real Presence; Oldcastle quotes Christ's words 'Take, eat, this is my body', omitting the next paragraph of Foxe's account which has Oldcastle repeating his belief that the sacrament was Christ's 'verye bodye.'[26]

Other writers utilised different abridgement strategies which entailed adhering less faithfully to the actual sequence of events as reported in *A&M* than Bilton had. The narrative could be simplified by merging the two hearings or removing one or other of them, while attempting to retain the essence of Oldcastle's answers. Richard Bateman in *The Book of Martyrs* (1747), was the only editor to insert extended analysis of his own. This was a revision of a seventeenth-century abridgement, Thomas Mason's *Christ's Victorie over Sathans Tyrannie* (1615). He inverted Bilton's approach and abridged the first hearing while reproducing Foxe's lengthy account of the second more or less in its entirety. Bateman felt no need to edit Oldcastle's assertion that the host after consecration was 'Christ's very body in the form of bread'.[27] Henry Southwell, in *New and Complete Book of Martyrs*, by contrast, focuses solely on the four points in Oldcastle's confession of faith, dismissing the second examination in a single sentence: 'many

[24] Matthew Taylor, *England's Bloody Tribunal: or, An Antidote against Popery* (1769), 8.
[25] John Foxe et al, *The book of martyrs: or, compleat history of martyrdom, from the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour, to the present times*, 1764, III.72-83.
[26] *A&M*, 689. S. Staunton, *A selection of remarkable events in the lives of the primitive fathers, eminent reformers, and martyrs,* 1791, 94.
[27] John Foxe, edited by Thomas Mason and Richard Bateman, *The book of martyrs: or, the history of the Church,* 1747-8, 412. Bateman, the rector of St Bartholomew's in Smithfield, wrote that it was a new edition of Mason's book 'render'd into modern English, with considerable improvments'. However, it differed significantly. Eirwen Nicholson missed this distinction, attributing the book to Thomas Mason. ('Eighteenth-century Foxe', 154 & 174.) See fig. i.

things were mentioned to him.'[28] The book takes the whiggish view of the Lollards as incompletely reformed, affirming that 'they had rather confused notions of the gospel.'[29] Presenting Lollardy as an inchoate version of contemporary Protestantism meant that Southwell did not need to amend Oldcastle's stated view on the eucharist; instead for him this just showed that Oldcastle was living during a less developed stage of the process of reform: 'Here we find lord [sic] Cobham acknowledging the real presence in the sacrament'. The glorious light was but beginning to dawn.'[30] For some editors, however, the trial details were evidently just too onerous to be troubled with and they simply omitted them. The *Acts and Monuments of Church & State* (1702) covers the trial in a single paragraph, stating that Oldcastle 'was Summoned and Examined Divers times' and 'his Answers were reasonable and sufficient', while the anonymous *Book of Martyrs* (1764), which was much more interested in the 1414 rising, contrived not to mention the trial or Oldcastle's beliefs at all.[31]

2.3 Sedition and the Lollard rising

Susan Royal pointed out that Oldcastle was 'an ideal emblem for religious reform' in the eyes of sixteenth-century writers,[32] as he combined a credible and articulate confession with high social status, his record being sullied only by the damaging allegations of rebellion. The evangelical writers Royal studied 'recast the relationship between lollards and sedition' in a way which would influence later readers.[33] The impact remains clear in the eighteenth century in books derived from *A&M*, whose editors had to deal with the problem of how to cleanse Oldcastle from the taint of treason. Margaret Aston rightly said that Oldcastle's alleged treason made him a 'troublesome martyr'.[34]

[28] Henry Southwell, *The New and Complete Book of Martyrs, or Christian Martyrology,* 1765, 245.
[29] Ibid., 244.
[30] Ibid.
[31] John Foxe et al, *The Book of Martyrs*, 1702*,* 312.
[32] Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation: History, radicalism and John Foxe*, Manchester University Press*,* 2020, 73.
[33] Ibid., 79.
[34] Margaret Aston and Elizabeth Ingram, 'The Iconography of the Acts and Monuments', in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, edited by David Loades, Scolar Press, 1997, 82.

John Oldcastle was both a nobleman and a soldier and possessed of the warlike temperament typical of his class.[35] Evidence of Oldcastle's martial instincts can be found in his treatment in *A&M*. Foxe did rebut the accusations of treason but saw no reason to conceal the facts of Oldcastle's military background. For example, when facing trial by the ecclesiastic authorities, Oldcastle asked whether he could instead undergo a trial by combat 'after the law of armes.'[36] This was a typical reaction for a fifteenth-century career soldier, reported happily by Foxe, but for most eighteenth-century editors it did not conform to the desired picture of Oldcastle as evangelical martyr, so most omitted it. The other tactic Oldcastle used in attempting to avoid trial was to ask leave to appeal to the pope, which one might reasonably feel was even more damaging to his godly reputation. However, Bilton, Taylor and Southwell reported Oldcastle's request despite omitting that for a trial by combat, even though they are adjacent in *A&M*. To the eighteenth-century evangelical mind, knightly aggression was damaging to a martyr's value as an exemplar of godliness. By contrast, some earlier editors had included it as a worthy trait. *Acts and Monuments of Church & State* (1702) presents Oldcastle as 'a famous warrior' – for the anonymous author, the request was just more evidence of his bravery.[37] In *The Book of Martyrs* (1747), Bateman often adds material to Mason's 1615 version, and here makes a virtue of Oldcastle's knightly character. His was the only version to quote, and, indeed, augment, Oldcastle's remarks on knighthood in his first confession of faith: 'In knighthood are all those who have authority from God, *not only to make humane laws, but to put them in execution for the discouragement of evil-doers; and to protect and encourage those who do well*.'[38] The italicized section is here added to *A&M*; for Bateman, a soldierly mien was desirable in a Christian hero.[39] Things had changed by the later eighteenth century when editors sought to diminish Oldcastle's military characteristics. Protestantism no longer faced the existential threats which called for a military hero; the enemies that Britain fought in the latter years of the eighteenth century could scarcely be seen as part of a popish conspiracy. It was more

[35] Margaret Aston, 'Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431', in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, Hambledon Press, 1984, 9.
[36] *A&M*, 687.
[37] John Foxe et al, *The Book of Martyrs*, 1702, 310.
[38] John Foxe, edited by Thomas Mason and Richard Thomas Bateman, *The book of martyrs*, 409.
[39] There are echoes of this in the biography of Oldcastle by William Gilpin, see pp.106-8.

important to emphasise Oldcastle's credentials as martyr and Protestant hero, rather than as a solider.

This was mirrored by the need to remove any suggestion that Oldcastle could be linked with sedition. When he was summoned for trial, according to *A&M*, he was cited as 'that seditious apostata, schismatike, that heretike, the troubler of the publibe [sic] peace, that enemie of the realme, and great aduersarie of all holy church.'[40] (Interestingly, this was prior to the rising, so Oldcastle had not at that stage committed any treasonous act.) Bilton removes all charges related to civil matters, just using the words 'that great Apostate, and Heretick, and Adversary of the holy Church.'[41] Similarly Henry Southwell has him described just as 'that great apostate and arch-heretic'.[42] All eighteenth-century editions take the same approach to this passage, stripping out the references to Oldcastle being a threat to the civil order; he was a rebel only in his stand against the church.

Of course, the most convincing treason charge which can be laid against Oldcastle was that he led the 1414 rising, a genuine, albeit quixotic, attempt to overthrow the king. Eighteenth-century editors used two strategies to deal with the rising, either ignoring it or treating it as a false rumour created by the clergy to influence the king against the Lollards. Both these approaches can be found in the pages of *A&M*. Foxe originally omitted the rising in the 1563 edition of *A&M*; however, in 1566 the Catholic controversialist Nicholas Harpsfield produced *Dialogi Sex*, a 'huge work' intended (in part) as a rebuttal of *A&M* which included a critique of the section on Oldcastle.[43] In later editions of *A&M*, Foxe included a twenty-one page rebuttal of Harpsfield, which treats the rising as a conspiracy invented by the clergy, abetted by medieval chroniclers.[44] The eighteenth-century editions which omit the rising are those which stick most closely to *A&M*. Since Foxe did not mention the revolt in his main Oldcastle section, neither do they. Reproducing the Harpsfield rebuttal would hardly have fitted their goal of making *A&M* more accessible: Foxe devoted twice as much space to it as the entire Oldcastle

[40] *A&M*, 686.
[41] Bilton, *The History of the English Martyrs,* 11.
[42] Southwell, *The New and Complete Book of Martyrs*, 244.
[43] T. Freeman, 'Nicholas Harpsfield', *ODNB*.
[44] Royal, *Lollards*, 76. *A&M* 697-718.

narrative. It was much easier, and better for Oldcastle's godly reputation, to leave it out. In this version of events Oldcastle was condemned as a heretic and imprisoned in the Tower, escaped and spent four years hiding in mid-Wales, before being apprehended and executed in 1419. This is the narrative used by Henry Bilton in 1720, Richard Bateman in 1747, Matthew Taylor (whose account is strongly based on Bilton's) in 1770 and Henry Southwell in 1765. Both Bilton and Southwell state that after his escape from the Tower he was 'outlaw'd as a Traytor'.[45] Taylor uses Foxe's formula that after being captured Oldcastle was adjudged a 'traitor to the king and realm'[46] and Bateman reports that he was condemned for both heresy and treason.[47] This is problematic, however, as the treason is impossible to explain without reference to the rising; Oldcastle had only been condemned as a heretic. The clerical court lacked the authority (or motive) to condemn him for treason. The ghost of the accusation of sedition rears its head despite editors' attempts to suppress it.

The other option was to present the rising as a clerical invention designed to discredit the Lollards. This approach was used by authors who were more willing to augment Foxe's material. The best example appears in the anonymous 1764 *Book of Martyrs*, the only book which wholly omits Oldcastle's trial; this editor was *only* interested in presenting the idea of a clerical conspiracy. According to this account, in 'about 1413 a pretended conspiracy (contrived by the Clergy) was said to be discovered'.[48] The motivation for the invention was the clergy's 'violent hatred' towards the Lollards, who wanted to deprive the church of its revenues. So they invented the story that Oldcastle and an army of twenty thousand Lollards were converging on London. On hearing this, the king assembled the army and went to St. Giles's Fields, to find only a few devout people at prayer among the bushes. Some were killed, others arrested and later tortured to extort false confessions. The account in *The History of the Lives and Sufferings of the English Protestant Martyrs* (1746) is similar. The clergy were concerned at the king's lack of enthusiasm for hunting Oldcastle down after his escape, and so they cooked up a plan to make Henry think the Lollards had 'a Design upon his Person'; again, motivated by

[45] Bilton, *The History of the English Martyrs,* 16; Southwell, *The New and Complete Book of Martyrs*, 245.
[46] *A&M*, 783; Taylor, *England's Bloody Tribunal*, 10.
[47] John Foxe, edited by Thomas Mason and Richard Bateman, *The Book of Martyrs*, 419.
[48] John Foxe et al, *The book of martyrs*, 11.

Lollards' avowed desire to strip the church of its revenues.[49] Listing reasons why the notion of a Lollard rising must have been a 'gross fiction', the author copied, verbatim, the words of Rapin in his *Histoire d'Angleterre*.[50] Oldcastle was too experienced a campaigner to undertake such a wild project, the number of men was too small, the king too judicious to let himself be deceived by such a plot. A very similar story appears in the Oldcastle chapter in Staughton's *Lives of the Primitive Fathers* (1791).

To present Oldcastle as an exemplar of evangelical virtue, it was crucial that his story be stripped of the stigma of treason. The germ of this idea can be found in the work of sixteenth-century writers including Bale and Foxe, but it was refined and taken further by the end of the eighteenth century by writers producing abridgements of Foxe's work. Whether the rising was ignored or discredited as a falsehood, Oldcastle emerges duly cleansed and able to take his place amongst the pantheon of evangelical heroes. Many writers chose to reinforce this by removing other references to his martial experience, leaving a personality closer fitted to the model of a humble martyr. That some writers accused the clergy of inventing the insurrection is in keeping with a strong strand of anti-clericalism which ran through most of these works, which we shall now turn to.

2.4 The clergy

Colin Haydon argued that these books underpinned transmission of anti-Catholic feeling, the writers 'ransacking' *A&M* for material for their 'No Popery' tracts and pamphlets.[51] Devorah Greenberg disagreed: for her, we should not be automatically equating these works with anti-Catholicism, since some were written with other purposes in mind including the promotion of tolerance and learned ministry.[52] It is difficult, though, to reconcile Greenberg's statements that 'explicitly anti-papist … motives for publication are … more rare than common in [these] printings' and that editors did not 'wave the red cloak of popery' with the evidence, since many of the editors of these works *did* state that fear of the advance of popery was their principal motivation

[49] Anon, *A Select History of the Lives and Sufferings of the Principal English Protestant Martyrs: Chiefly of those Executed in the Bloody Reign of Queen Mary*, 1746, 9.
[50] Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, 1728, translated by Nicholas Tindal, 102. See pp.40-5.
[51] Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 28.
[52] Devorah Greenberg, 'Eighteenth-Century "Foxe": History, Historiography, and Historical Consciousness in John Foxe's Book of Martyrs', *TAMO*.

for publishing. The Wesleyite Martin Madan, in his preface to the 1776 abridgement, warned readers that popery was still dangerous: currently it was like 'a lion chained up' but the danger had not gone away: 'Be assured that Popery is always the same, and so will continue, until it shall cease out of the earth.'[53] Henry Southwell, writing in 1765, issued a similar warning: 'The progress of Popery has so greatly increased, that there is an absolute necessity for using every effort to suppress such dangerous and contagious principles'.[54] Henry Bilton wanted to bring to people's attention the 'gross Idolatries and foolish Superstitions, to which their Fore-Fathers, in the Time of Popery, were inslav'd.'[55] Matthew Taylor, in the splendidly-titled *England's Bloody Tribunal* (1770) nailed his colours to the mast with the sub-title *An Antidote against Popery … Exhibiting a full View of POPERY with all its superstitious and horrid Practices*.[56] Taylor's main reason for going to print was '[t]he concern with which the Editor has read … of the many attempts … lately made by Popish Emissaries to spread the errors and superstitions of the church of Rome in these kingdoms.'[57] These writers are making explicit the link to the situation of their own times, worried about the danger they perceived of resurgent Catholicism overturning the established church in England.[58]

Since concern about the progress of popery was so important to these editors, they needed to demonstrate the corrupt state of the pre-Reformation church, a theme which dominates the material on Lollard persecution. The stories of most Lollard martyrs follow a common pattern, their patient suffering being contrasted with the evil of the persecuting clergy. In Thomas Bilton's book, Thomas Badby ended his life 'courageously … as a valiant soldier of Christ',[59] and William White 'patiently submitted to the Fire and ended his life in Peace.'[60] However, Bilton does not include virulent criticism of the clergy. Others were less circumspect. Matthew Taylor's *England's Bloody Tribunal* includes accounts only of the martyrdoms of Oldcastle and William Taylor, talking of the

[53] Martin Madan, *The Book of Martyrs, Containing an Account of the Sufferings & Death of the Protestants in the Reign of Queen Mary the First,* 1776, i.
[54] Henry Southwell, *The New and Complete Book of Martyrs,* 1765*,* iv.
[55] Bilton, *English Martyrs,* v.
[56] Matthew Taylor, *England's bloody tribunal*, title page. In another edition, this appears as *Popish Cruelty Displayed*, emphasising cruelty over superstition.
[57] Ibid., iii.
[58] See fig. ii(a).
[59] Bilton, *English Martyrs*, 8.
[60] Ibid., 20.

'unparalleled cruelties of those times.'[61] Henry Southwell, writing about the death of William Sawtrey, shows the clergy glorying in their cruelty: he was 'burnt to death … to the no small pleasure of the corrupted clergy.'[62] The pleasure the clergy took in the execution appears to be Southwell's own invention: there is no mention of this in *A&M*. However, neither A&M, *nor* its eighteenth-century derivatives, pay attention to the violent aspects of Sawtrey's execution. Foxe was more interested in the legal proceedings leading up to it,[63] and Southwell adopts the same approach. The suggestion that these editions contain only lurid descriptions of torture and violence is not supported by the evidence. The books concentrate on the honour of the martyrs and the malice of the clergy and not detail of the executions. Southwell's book contains more material than any other about Lollard martyrs other than Oldcastle and nowhere in it are there detailed descriptions of torture and death, though he takes every opportunity to criticise the cruelty of the clergy. Archbishop Chicheley he describes as 'a most violent persecutor'.[64] All persecutions were 'due to the pride and avarice of the priests.'[65] Writing about persecutions in Norwich in 1428, Southwell gets carried away with his own rhetoric, saying that 'sufferers sent up their souls in flames to God: there they will be held in everlasting honour, when the names of their persecutors will be consigned to oblivion; nay, when they will suffer under the hand of avenging justice, and those who they have persecuted will appear bright and unspotted before that God who sent his Son to redeem them.'[66]

The same pattern of clerical malice contrasted with the piety of martyrs can be found in the material on Oldcastle. Archbishop Arundel and the clerical establishment are always portrayed in an unremittingly unfavourable light, venal characters contrasted with the virtuous figure of Oldcastle. We have already examined the common suggestion that the 1414 rising was an invention of the clergy. Other examples of clerical malice abound. For the author of *Acts and Monuments of Church and State* (1702), the clergy were not only

[61] Taylor, *England's Bloody Tribunal*, 9.
[62] Southwell, *New Book of Martyrs*, 243.
[63] *A&M*, 636-640, contains four pages on the legal proceedings against Sawtrey and one sentence describing the execution. Southwell covers Sawtrey in a single paragraph, with the single sentence cited being the only detail of the execution.
[64] Southwell, *New Book of Martyrs*, 243.
[65] Ibid., 246.
[66] Ibid., 247.

'Men of blood … breathing slaughter',[67] but also cowards. He augments Foxe's story of the attempts to summon Oldcastle from his castle to come to trial by stating that they 'grew faint-hearted and durst not enter to deliver the Citation' in contrast to the bold and soldierly Oldcastle.[68] Henry Southwell, displaying his usual whiggish outlook, opines that 'the clergy indeed must have been dreadfully corrupt at that time … [w]hat condition can that country be in, that is under the dominion of priests?'[69] Richard Bateman, never averse to interweaving his own analysis into Foxe's material, suggests that Catholic institutions and dogma had come about as a result of clerical greed: 'Such monstrous doctrines … have sprung from the covetousness of the priests, who have been guilty of innumerable tricks, and established many ridiculous institutions for the sake of filthy lucre.'[70] Staughton in his *Lives of the Primitive Fathers* is another who overtly highlights the contrast between the virtuous Oldcastle and corrupt clergy: 'This courageous nobleman … fell a sacrifice to the unfeeling rage and barbarous superstition of the papists.'[71]

2.5 Conclusion

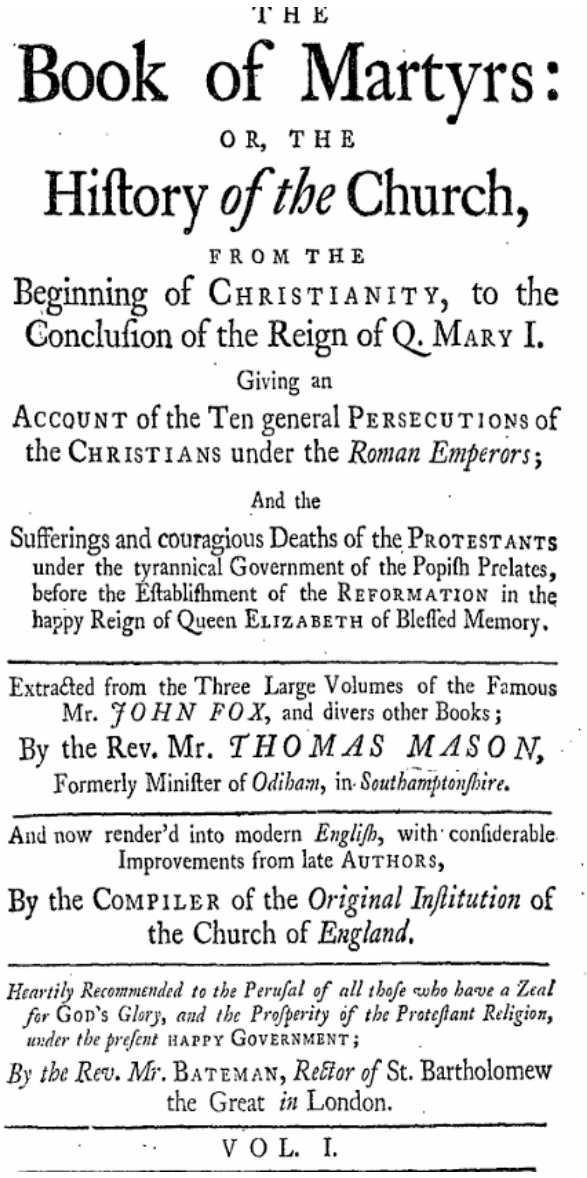
These books were produced by evangelical Protestants, in part to propagate their brand of Christian piety. They took Foxe's material on martyrs like Oldcastle, material in *A&M* which had *already* cast them in a suitably godly fashion and removed suspicious elements such as the suggestion of a tendency to rebellion, or Oldcastle's soldierly instincts. They refashioned Oldcastle's beliefs and personality to fit the model of Christian piety expected by readers living two hundred years later.[72] The John Oldcastle who appears in these eighteenth-century editions was little altered from Foxe's 1570 version but there are some important, though subtle, changes. His adherence to the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist is removed, allegations of his involvement in sedition ignored or refuted, his more 'medieval' characteristics airbrushed out. The nature of these changes shows that later editors sought to popularise and spread Foxe's book and provide exemplars of godly (and orthodox) lives,

[67] John Foxe et al, *The book of martyrs*, 310.
[68] Ibid., 311.
[69] Southwell, *The New and Complete Book of Martyrs,* 245.
[70] John Foxe, edited by Thomas Mason and Richard Bateman, *The book of martyrs,* 409.
[71] Staughton, *Lives of the Primitive Fathers*, 98.
[72] Royal, *Lollards*, 78-79.

but in so doing were careful to remain as close to the source as possible. While these editions cannot be dismissed as merely anti-Catholic propaganda, the strongly anti-Roman tone of many cannot be ignored.

Haller asserted that there was a *progressive* process of vulgarization of *A&M* over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,[73] but there is no evidence from the eighteenth century to support this suggestion.[74] The accounts across the century display a degree of homogeneity, with the only discernible chronological pattern being that the earlier editors were comfortable with the idea of Oldcastle as a military figure and later ones keener to play down his martial attributes. There is no evidence of the degree of vulgarisation increasing over time, which might have resulted if subsequent editors had relied upon previous abridgements. Rather, it seems they all went back to Foxe. For Eirwen Nicholson, these works have 'failed to excite the historian's attention', having been treated by Haller and subsequent writers as 'trashy ephemera'.[75] In fact, whilst often containing some virulently anti-Catholic material, these were often sophisticated attempts at abridging *A&M* and reflected the editors' earnest wish that his evangelical martyrology should reach a new audience. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the material would be increasingly often vulgarised in the way Haller mentioned.

[73] Haller, *Elect Nation*, 252.
[74] See Chapter 9 on how this did become more prevalent in the nineteenth century.
[75] Nicholson, 'Eighteenth-Century Foxe', 151.



THE

Book of Martyrs:

OR, THE

Hiſtory *of the* Church,

FROM THE

Beginning of CHRISTIANITY, to the Concluſion of the Reign of Q. MARY I.

Giving an

ACCOUNT of the Ten general PERSECUTIONS of the CHRISTIANS under the *Roman Emperors*;

And the

Sufferings and couragious Deaths of the PROTESTANTS under the tyrannical Government of the Popiſh Prelates, before the Eſtabliſhment of the REFORMATION in the happy Reign of Queen ELIZABETH of Bleſſed Memory.

Extracted from the Three Large Volumes of the Famous Mr. *JOHN FOX*, and divers other Books;

By the Rev. Mr. *THOMAS MASON*,

Formerly Miniſter of *Odiham*, in *Southamptonſhire*.

And now render'd into modern *Engliſh*, with conſiderable Improvements from late AUTHORS,

By the COMPILER of the *Original Inſtitution* of the Church of *England*.

Heartily Recommended to the Peruſal of all thoſe who have a Zeal for GOD'S *Glory, and the Proſperity of the Proteſtant Religion, under the preſent* HAPPY GOVERNMENT;

By the Rev. Mr. BATEMAN, *Rector of* St. Bartholomew the Great *in* London.

VOL. I.

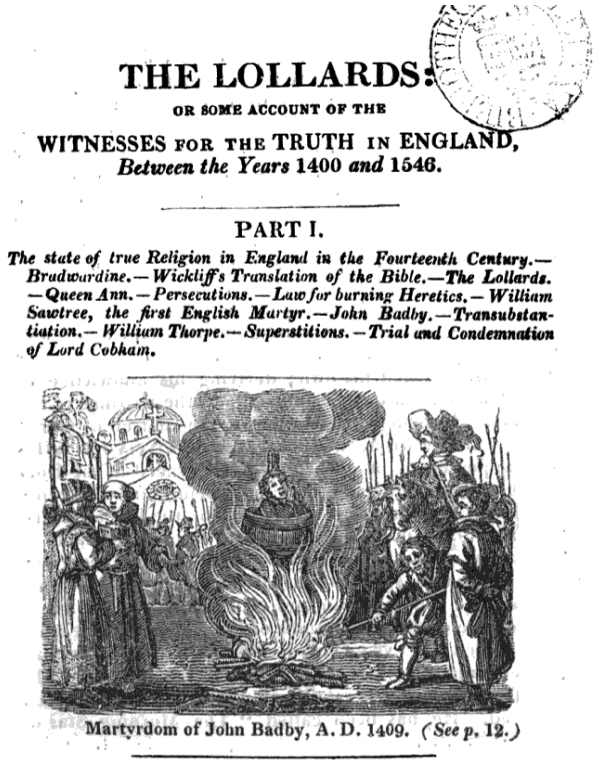
Fig. i.

The frontispiece of this martyrology is typical of the 'heirs to Fox', with its claims to completeness and citation of *A&M*. The provenance of this work is more complex than most. Mason had produced an abridgement in 1615, which in turn was 'render'd into modern English' by Richard Thomas Bateman, who added new material.

John Foxe, edited by Thomas Mason and Richard Thomas Bateman, *The book of martyrs: or, the history of the Church,* 1747.

Fig. ii(a) 'The Primitive Reformers to whom (under GOD) we are Indebted for the Glorious Light of the Gospel', in Matthew Taylor's *England's bloody tribunal*, 1770.

Wyclif (13) is depicted on the left, holding a book, with other reformers including Huss (2) and Calvin (15) who is sharing a joke with Beza (14). A friar, a pope and a spectral hound are all attempting vainly to extinguish the glorious light.


THE LOLLARDS:

OR SOME ACCOUNT OF THE

WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH IN ENGLAND,

Between the Years 1400 *and* 1546.

PART I.

The state of true Religion in England in the Fourteenth Century.— Brudwardine.— Wickliff's Translation of the Bible.—The Lollards. —Queen Ann.— Persecutions.—Law for burning Heretics.— William Sawtree, the first English Martyr.—John Badby.—Transubstantiation.— William Thorpe.— Superstitions.—Trial and Condemnation of Lord Cobham.

Martyrdom of John Badby, A. D. 1409. (See p. 12.)

Fig. ii(b). George Stokes, *The Lollards, or Some account of the witnesses for the truth in Great Britain*, 1825.

3 The Development of Enlightenment historiography 1700-1750

3.1 Lollard historiography before 1700: Fuller and Burnet

Ecclesiastical history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like *Acts & Monuments*,[1] was written from a partisan standpoint for a partisan audience. The writers frequently cited divine providence to explain events, which often played out in an eschatological framework. During the eighteenth century, as Enlightenment ideas took hold, the historiography began to change, becoming more analytical and academically rigorous. Two leading seventeenth-century historians, Thomas Fuller and Gilbert Burnet, produced books which showed first signs of these advances.

> [T]he poor Lollards were persecuted, with such cruelty, that the prisons were full of them; many forced to abjure, and such who refused, used without mercy, as in Mr Fox is largely related.[2]

Fuller's *The Church-History of Britain* (1655), the first complete narrative ecclesiastical history,[3] aimed at objectivity and made more thorough use of sources. Fuller's biographer, W. Brown Patterson, writes that in the *Church-History*, he combined the methods of Italian humanist historians and Reformation writers such as Foxe, producing an account 'not biased in matters of fact by his personal beliefs.'[4] Joseph Preston describes the book as 'well documented, critical and skeptical … a model of moderation'.[5] A Protestant pastor, Fuller wrote accessibly for lay people, and his new approach 'provided the foundation for historical treatments … by later writers.'[6] He eschewed the eschatological approach to history used by Foxe, seeking explanations for events in 'legal, political and constitutional developments.'[7] His history was criticized by

[1] Joseph H. Preston, 'English Ecclesiastical Historians and the Problem of Bias, 1559-1742', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32.2 (1971), 208.
[2] Thomas Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain*, 1655, IV.164.
[3] Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation,* 2nd edn., Manchester University Press, 2014, 48. W.B. Patterson, *Thomas Fuller: Discovering England's Religious Past*, Oxford University Press, 2018, 343.
[4] Patterson, *Thomas Fuller*, 161.
[5] Preston, 'English Ecclesiastical Historians', 206.
[6] Patterson, *Thomas Fuller*, 8.
[7] Ibid., 221.

contemporaries, though, for its very objectivity, by critics who wanted him to take the side of good over evil.[8] Detached neutrality was not what seventeenth-century readers sought in their history.

However, Fuller's writing on Lollardy is not neutral in the way that would be understood today as it possesses a strong streak of anti-Catholicism. Fuller writes that the persecution of Lollards began because Henry IV needed the support of the clergy to validate his shaky claim to the throne, and so enacted 'bloudy Laws, for the extirpation of poor Christians, under the false notion of Hereticks'.[9] William Sawtrey, the first to be burned, by Fuller's account, 'fought the first duel with fire it self and overcame it,' becoming the first of the English Protestant martyrs.[10] Fuller, aware of the anachronism implicit in this phrase, qualifies it by asking his readers' leave for this use of prolepsis. Listing the opinions for which Sawtrey was burned, Fuller concludes that his positions were at worst indiscreet rather than damnable, and 'not so hainous, as to deserve Fire and Fagot.'[11] However, the charge sheet included the denial of transubstantiation, the worst of heresies in the eyes of the hierarchy. Thus, 'their cruelty made Gods Table a Snare to his servants.'[12] Fuller finds more material for condemnation of Catholic practices when describing the process by which Sawtrey was deprived of priestly office. This was carried out in a series of steps, degrading him in rank stepwise from priest to deacon, deacon to sub-deacon etc. Listing the sequence in detail, Fuller concludes 'How many steps are required to climb up to the top of the Popish Priest-hood! … it is almost incredible, how many trinkets must be had to compleat a Priest, but here we behold them solemnly taken asunder in Sautres degradation.'[13]

Fuller was conscious that he wrote in the shadow of Foxe, stating humbly that it was his wish only to fill in the gaps Foxe had left, that 'my Church-History should behave it self to his *Book of Martyrs* as a Lieutenant to its Captain'.[14] However, Fuller's material on the Lollards, in particular on Oldcastle's rising, shows that to be disingenuous, since where

[8] Preston, 'English Ecclesiastical Historians', 206.
[9] Fuller, *Church-History*, IV.155.
[10] Ibid., IV.136.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., IV.157.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., IV, 231.

Foxe is categorical, Fuller acknowledges doubt. For Foxe, the rising was a fiction, invented to discredit the Lollards, but Fuller leaves the question open: 'I must confess my self so lost in the intricacies of these Relations, that I know not what to assent to. On the one side, I am loath to load the Lord Cobhams memory with causless crimes, knowing the perfect hatred the Clergie in that Age bear'd unto him, and all that lookd toward the reformation in Religion. Besides, that 20000 men should be brought into the field … is clog'd with much improbability. … On the other side, I am much startled with the Evidence that appeareth against him.'[15] He concludes: 'Let Mr Fox therefore be this Lord Cobhams Compurgator, I dare not.'[16] In acknowledging such doubt, Fuller displays more sophisticated historical understanding than many writers who followed him.

***

> The Clergy … were now more cruel and insolent than ever. And if any Man denied them any part of that respect … to which they pretended, he was presently brought under the suspicion of Heresy, and vexed with Imprisonment.[17]

Gilbert Burnet's influential *History of the Reformation in England,* originally produced in 1679, was the first, apart from *A&M*, to make wide use of original sources.[18] In the preface, Burnet critiques his predecessors' work, especially their use of sources. Foxe's history, despite the 'fidelity and exactitude' with respect to source material, was 'written in haste' and 'there are so many defects in it that it can by no means be called a Compleat History of these times.'[19] Thomas Fuller, Burnet says, acidly, 'affect[ed] an odd way of writing, [and] his Work gives no great satisfaction.'[20] He criticizes Peter Heylyn for not

[15] Ibid., 167.
[16] Ibid. It is likely that Fuller used Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, Hall having likewise been unwilling to commit himself on the matter, referring to a 'certain vnlawfull assemble … the iudgement wherof I leaue to men indifferent. For surely all coniectures be not true, nor all writynges are not the Gospell' (Edward Hall, *Chronicle: containing the history of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the succeeding monarchs*, 1809.)
[17] Gilbert Burnet, *The history of the Reformation of the Church of England,* 1679, 26.
[18] J. Moore, 'Gilbert Burnet', *ODNB*.
[19] Burnet, *The history of the Reformation*, preface, (b) 2. Susan Royal commented that 'Gilbert Burnet commended Foxe throughout his work' (Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation*, 55, fn.). He does cite *A&M* regularly but finds some deficiencies in it.
[20] Ibid.

citing sources: 'he never vouched any Authority for what he Writ, which is not to be forgiven of any who write of Transactions beyond their own time.'[21]

Burnet's book is mostly concerned with the Henrician Reformation, but he does credit the Lollards with laying its foundations. The new opinions had been circulating in England since the fourteenth century, so they were familiar when the new ideas arrived in the sixteenth. He writes that 'their Books came over into England, where there was much matter already prepared to be wrought on, not only by the prejudices they had conceived against the corrupt Clergy, but by the Opinions of the Lollards, which had by now been in England since the days of Wickliff, for about 150 years. Between which Opinions and the Doctrines of the Reformers, there was great affinity.'[22] In other ways, Burnet's work rehearses themes which would regularly recur in the eighteenth century. He is more interested in the persecution and punishment of Lollards than the substance of their ideas, drawing conclusions about the brutality and rapacity of the Catholic clergy. In part, such a stance was forced upon writers of this period by the nature of the sources, which comprised only accounts produced by the prosecutors: trial records and confessions, along with chronicles by hostile monastic historians.

This stance fitted the central thesis which Burnet, in common with many later writers, sought to convey: that the Church was corrupt, its leaders cruel and ruthless, and reform badly needed. Indeed, while historians' assessments of the Lollards varied, this view of the clerical establishment was widely held, tying in with the anti-Catholicism which was then widespread in England. The use of capital punishment for people holding heterodox opinions was one of the principal charges which could be used to demonstrate the Roman church's cruelty, and Burnet puts this at the centre of his account. Burning was chosen as a punishment for heresy to emphasise what a serious crime it was 'because Witches, Wizards and Sodomites had been so executed'.[23] Burnet attempts to show that the measure permitting the execution of heretics, *Heretico Comburendo* (1401), was illegitimate, as it had not been ratified by the Commons, another suggestion which others would repeat: 'it seems these Writs were not Enrolled. For in the entire reign of King Henry

[21] Ibid., (b) 3.
[22] Ibid., 30.
[23] Ibid., 24.

VIII I have not been able to find any of these Writs in the Rolls.'[24] Burnet describes the 1414 rising as a 'pretended' conspiracy, an excuse to imprison and execute Oldcastle and his followers.[25] It was followed by a severe Act of Parliament 'by which all Officers of State … were to be Sworn … to use their whole Power and Diligence to destroy all Heresies and Errors, called Lollardies.'[26] Burnet's section on the Lollards is brief, indeed he apologises to the reader for it as a digression, saying that it is 'material to the History that is to follow.'[27] Burnet sees the Lollards as foundational for English Protestantism, and the persecution launched against them as emblematic of the corruption of the Papal system.

3.2 Oldmixon, Goodwin and Echard

The intellectual developments known as the Enlightenment and the growth of an educated middle class with money to spend on books encouraged developments in historiography during the eighteenth century. Previous historical works had usually comprised anthologies or collations of material lacking a 'strict principle of organisation',[28] often with multiple authors. History was not taught as a separate discipline at the universities, professional historians did not exist, and books were often written by clergymen. However, the market for books expanded as literacy grew, giving rise to a revolution in English historiography. By 1750, when David Hume published his *History of England*, 'the central lineaments of Enlightenment historiography had already been established'.[29] Historical writing became more scholarly. Continuous narrative histories began to be produced by single authors and the 'secularization of historical enquiry' followed,[30] a process culminating in the production of the influential histories of Paul de Rapin de Thoyras in the 1720s and David Hume in the 1750s.

A Complete History of England, produced by a conger of thirteen booksellers in 1706, was 'among the most ambitious and expensive publishing ventures up to that time'.[31] It

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 25.
[26] Ibid., 26.
[27] Ibid., 24.
[28] Preston described the Reformation historian Thomas Strype as 'a scissors and paste historian.' 'English Ecclesiastical Historians', 210.
[29] Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment*, 1991, 2.
[30] Ibid., 4.
[31] Ibid., 28. The book was reprinted four times, with a second edition in 1719.

exemplified the 'anthology and compilation' approach, when the writing of history was considered too onerous a task for a single author.[32] The book comprised three volumes; Volume III was the work of one author, White Kennett, but the first two volumes were a cento compilation, mostly of earlier historical writing. The chapter on the period 'from the conquest to Edward III' reproduced Samuel Daniel's 1612-18 book *The Collection of the History of England*, and the next part, which covered the period up to the end of the reign of Henry VI was newly written 'in the style of Daniel'. The anonymous author was probably the whig historian John Oldmixon, who later claimed that he 'was the sole editor of the *Compleat History of England*'.[33] Laird Okie described Oldmixon as a 'perfervid Whig [who] glorified his Puritan and Whig heroes',[34] and when he wrote about the Lollards twenty years later, this is clear in Oldmixon's description of them as the spiritual ancestors of the Puritans, their reforming ideas in contrast to the state of the Church of England of his own time.[35] However, there is not a hint of this in *A Complete History*, which contains a straight account of the standard events in Lollard history, does not elevate the Lollards into Protestant heroes and is relatively neutral in its description of the actions of the clergy.

The Lollard material in *A Complete History* comprises the same collection of incidents that were quoted by most eighteenth-century historians, with the focus on the persecution of Lollards and the events leading up to the 1414 rising. The Lollard petition to Parliament of 1395 provided a useful list of Lollard tenets and was frequently quoted. The clergy feared an irresistible spread of Lollardy 'being grown numerous among the common people, and having gotten some Friends in the Houses, by which they were encouraged to attempt a Reformation of the Disorders of the Churchmen.'[36] Their concern led in 1401 to the passage of *Heretico Comburendo* and the burning of the priest William Sawtrey. 'This Act was no sooner past, but the Clergy put it in Execution upon

[32] ''tis thought a Design of such Consequence cannot be well executed by one Man; and therefore some have wish'd to see it carry'd on by a Society or Club of men of Parts and Learning.' John Milton et al, *A complete history of England: with the lives of all the kings and queens thereof*, 1706, preface, 1.
[33] John Oldmixon, *A review of Dr. Zachary Grey's Defence of our ancient and modern historians*, 1725, 57. This section (III) of the book was the only one which was authored anonymously. Pat Rogers, in *ODNB*, states that Oldmixon was one of the principal compilers of the *Complete History*. 'John Oldmixon', *ODNB*.
[34] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 75.
[35] See pp.79-81.
[36] Milton, et al, *Complete History of England*, I.272-3.

William Sauter, that it might be a Terror to all others; for being convicted of Heresie, and Relapse … and so the Act was sealed with Blood.'[37] Despite this, the movement continued to spread among the nobility, Oxford academics and the general population. In common with almost every eighteenth-century account, this book devotes more attention to the 1414 Oldcastle rising than any other aspect of Lollard history, concluding, in common with Bale and Foxe, that the conspiracy had been invented by the clergy to discredit the Lollards, the meeting at St. Giles' Fields being 'nothing else but a Religious Assembly' which the clergy 'improv'd into a Plot'.[38] Oldcastle's career evokes the greatest degree of disagreement between historians, this being a lodestone for how writers assessed the Lollards; either as persecuted martyrs or seditious rebels. In presenting the rising as a clerical invention, this account sticks to the standard of Protestant historiography since Bale. The cruelty of the punishment meted out to Oldcastle is mentioned, but there is no anti-Catholic polemic here, and while the tone is sympathetic towards the Lollards, there is none of the lionization of them as Protestant forebears which Oldmixon would put into his later histories.

If Oldmixon was the author of this section of *A Complete History*, there remains the question of why a writer with his nonconformist mindset would write such a neutral account. The chapter is described on the title page as having been 'All new Writ in Mr. Daniel's Method' and mimicking Daniel's style was obviously a selling point since Daniel was renowned as a historian at the time.[39] Oldmixon, then, a jobbing writer ('a Grub Street hack', according to Okie),[40] took on the task of writing a continuation of Daniel's history and emulated his style by eliminating polemic and adopting an even-handed treatment of the protagonists.

Thomas Goodwin (1650-1708?) was an Independent minister, the son of another Thomas Goodwin, one of the founders of Congregationalism.[41] His 1704 book, *The History of the*

[37] Ibid., I.283.
[38] Ibid., I.311.
[39] Daniel was one of the first writers to combine a thorough use of sources with a sympathetic yet disinterested analysis of individuals and wrote 'prose as lucid as anything the later seventeenth century could manage'. J. Pitcher, 'Samuel Daniel', *ODNB*.
[40] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 75.
[41] Christopher Allmand, 'Writing History in the Eighteenth Century: *Thomas Goodwin's The History of the Reign of Henry the Fifth* (1704)' in *Henry V: New Dimensions*, edited by Gwilym Dodd, Boydell & Brewer, 2013, 273.

Reign of Henry the Fifth displays another characteristic of pre-Enlightenment historiography by quoting sources at great length with little accompanying analysis, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. However, the book does exhibit some new developments in the way that it uses sources and for Christopher Allmand it represented 'a considerable advance on earlier approaches'.[42] Allmand describes Goodwin as a meticulous researcher who utilised a wide range of sources, both medieval chroniclers and more recent antiquarian scholars.[43] Goodwin did not consider that his job necessitated taking a personal stance on the matters under discussion: 'It is not the work of a Historian to dispute, but to relate Matter of Fact, and where the Accounts of it vary, to record 'em fairly and faithfully.'[44] On the matter of the Lollard rising, for instance, Goodwin leaves his readers to draw their own conclusions. He provides an extended account of Oldcastle's trial: thirteen pages including copious citations of material drawn from Bale and Walsingham. Where their accounts were contradictory, Goodwin draws attention to the differences, pointing out, for instance, how their accounts varied in the description of how the archbishop attempted to summon Oldcastle to his trial.[45] This use of sources, which might be regarded as fence-sitting on Goodwin's part, for Allmand is evidence of his critical approach.[46]

Goodwin's account of Oldcastle's trial is taken from Bale.[47] Like Fuller, Goodwin is not willing to commit to the reality of the 1414 rising. 'Whether it were real, or only pretended, and forg'd on purpose to render 'em detestable, I shall leave the Reader to judg.'[48] However, his coverage is meticulous, including a review of the historiography, reproducing accounts of the rising given by Bale, John Harding, Polydore Vergil, Robert

[42] Ibid., 276.
[43] Ibid., 277.
[44] Thomas Goodwin, *The history of the reign of Henry the fifth, King of England*, 1704, 32. I am grateful to Dr. Morgan Daniels for pointing out the similarity of Goodwin's words to the 'ADVERTISEMENT' in the first issue (11th Mar 1702) of the *The Daily Courant*, the world's first daily newspaper. This single-sheet periodical, published by Elizabeth Mallett, promised to 'relate only Matter of Fact; Supposing other People to have sense enough to make Reflections for themselves.'
https://www.ustc.ac.uk/news/the-daily-courant-and-news-culture-at-the-dawn-of-the-age-of-daily-papers accessed 27th Nov 2024.
[45] Ibid., 16.
[46] Allmand, *Thomas Goodwin*, 281.
[47] Goodwin, *Henry the Fifth*, e.g. 26 fn. Goodwin used John Bale's 1544 book *A brefe chronycle concernynge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ Syr Iohan Oldecastell the Lorde Cobham* as his main source.
[48] Ibid., 28.

Fabyan, a 1513 life of Henry V attributed to 'Titus Livius', and, at length, Thomas Walsingham. Goodwin presents all this material without a conclusion, very frustrating for a modern reader. 'Whether the Lollards were really guilty of thus conspiring against the Government … the Reader may judg as he pleases.'[49]

Goodwin, though, was an Independent clergyman and his sympathies did lie with the Lollards. His recommendation to readers to consult *A&M* is one indication of his inclinations,[50] as is his criticism of the clergy for persecuting Oldcastle; 'it was an intolerable Example of Injustice and Cruelty that a Nobleman … should by the Hatred of the Clergy be pursu'd to Ruin and Death.'[51] Goodwin praises Oldcastle for possessing both Christian and soldierly virtues, 'the fearless Spirit of a Soldier and the Holy Resignation of a true Christian'. This dichotomy was a common attitude in the eighteenth century.[52]

The first writer to produce a full narrative history of England was Laurence Echard, (c.1672-1730), the prebendary of Louth. His *History of England. From the first entrance of Julius Cæsar and the Romans, to the end of the reign of King James the first* appeared in 1707 with two later volumes covering the seventeenth century.[53] There has been disagreement as to his political stance; some contemporaries considered him a Tory, and for Okie he had 'a Tory bias',[54] but the Jacobite Thomas Hearne called his book 'a most roguish, Whiggish Thing'[55] and other scholars have found whiggish aspects to his writing.[56] Echard's principal interest in the book lies in the Saxon/Norman period and the seventeenth century, the period in between being covered relatively briefly. Despite his greater ambitions, Echard wrote in the pre-Enlightenment style with regular recourse to

[49] Ibid., 28-32.
[50] Ibid., 32.
[51] Ibid., 15.
[52] Ibid., 167.
[53] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 32-33. 'It was not an easy task in the early eighteenth century to write a complete history of England, and Laurence Echard courageously attempted to be the first to do so,' said Deborah Stephan. (Laurence Echard – Whig Historian', *The Historical Journal*, 32.4 (1989), 843.) Writing in the *ODNB*, R. Ridley states that Echard's history 'pleased nobody, especially not nonconformists, Catholics, radical whigs, or Jacobites' but remained the standard history of England until David Hume's in 1750. R. Ridley, 'Laurence Echard', *ODNB*.
[54] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 39.
[55] Quoted in Ridley, 'Laurence Echard', *ODNB*.
[56] Deborah Stephan, concluding that he was a whig, wrote that that his was an 'intriguing story of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and of a historian misjudged because he wrote in a time of changing historiographies.' Stephan, 'Laurence Echard', 843.

providence as an explanation of events. Laird Okie found that 'there is probably no eighteenth-century English history that stresses divine intervention in human affairs as much as Echard's.[57] His modus operandi, like his peers, was to 'compile rather than explain'.[58]

Echard's version of the Oldcastle story employs the approach to summarising the lengthy accounts of Bale and Foxe regularly used in the eighteenth century. He treats Oldcastle as heroic without belabouring his status as a martyr, retaining the more colourful aspects of the story whilst omitting theological detail. For a full history of England there was simply too much detail in *A&M*, so precis was essential. The choices writers make in such abridgements are telling. Echard emphasizes the political aspects at the expense of the religious. Oldcastle appears as a nobleman and warrior rather than heretic or reformer. Echard writes, for instance, that 'it was a strange Example of Injustice and Cruelty, that a Nobleman, endear'd to the King … should by the Hatred of the Clergy be implacably pursu'd to Ruin.'[59] After a sketch of Oldcastle's heroic personality, Echard details his speech to Henry V, with its memorable sound-bite describing the Pope as 'the great Anti-Christ, the Son of Perdition', followed by Oldcastle's offer to undergo trial by combat. This detail, demonstrating Oldcastle's martial instincts, was popular with early eighteenth-century writers but later it was usually omitted, as such behaviour came to seem altogether too medieval for an evangelical hero. Echard omits the trial detail, just stating that Oldcastle amazed the convocation with the 'Spirit and Courage' of his answers.[60] As for the rising, Echard echoes Foxe by treating it wholly as a clerical invention, a conspiracy they had devised because of their 'new Jealousies'.[61] It had to have been a fiction: St Giles's was 'overgrown with Bushes and unfit for Armies' and the Lollards apprehended there comprised only 'a Knight, a Minister and a Maltman.'[62]

[57] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing,* 35.
[58] Ibid., 39.
[59] Laurence Echard, *From the first entrance of Julius Cæsar and the Romans, to the end of the reign of King James the first*, 2nd edn., 1718, 474. His words echo those used by Goodwin (see fn. 51), suggesting that he used Goodwin as a source.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 479.
[62] Ibid.

Echard, writing a secular history of England, is most interested in Oldcastle as a noble hero, with little about him as a Lollard and Echard's history almost completely neglects other Lollards; even Hume has more to say about them. There is a brief and neutral reference to the bishops asking Richard II to return from Ireland to deal with the growing sect in 1395. There is nothing on *Heretico Comburendo*, nothing on the persecution, no suggestion that Lollards were heralds of reform: but neither does Echard condemn them as sectaries and innovators as some other Tory historians would. It seems that Echard, despite being a cleric himself, was not particularly interested in church history.[63]

3.3 Rapin

Paul de Rapin de Thoyras was a Huguenot who fought with William of Orange after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He moved to London and published his *Histoire d'Angleterre* in 1723-25, with the intention of explaining the English constitution to the French. After his death in 1725 his book was picked up by English booksellers. The demand for a good narrative history of England still had not been satisfied, so 'in changing political times and with an expanding audience with a wider class base, Rapin's *History* was a gift.'[64] It was translated into English by Nicholas Tindal and issued in monthly installments, becoming a best-seller. Further editions and new translations continued to appear into the nineteenth century.[65] As had happened with *Acts & Monuments*, the text gradually evolved to fit new circumstances, with extensive footnotes added and 'continuations' bringing it up to date.[66]

Rapin's book was the first to make a complete break with the foregoing historiographical tradition. As Jonathan Dent said, Rapin 'introduc[ed] many of the characteristics associated with Enlightenment historiography … [his book] consults a wider range of sources than its predecessors, interprets facts rather than lists them, treats sources

[63] Echard's book was primarily a constitutional history of England with special reference to the seventeenth century which entirely occupies the last two volumes. Much of the first volume looked at the Saxon/Norman era for the seeds of seventeenth-century conflict, an area of vigorous historiographical debate during the eighteenth century. Even his treatment of the sixteenth-century Reformation is brief: he presents it as wholly an act of state promulgated by Henry VIII.
[64] M.G. Sullivan, 'Rapin, Hume and the identity of the historian in eighteenth century England,' *History of European Ideas* 28 (2002), 150.
[65] Ibid., 151.
[66] For example, John Oldmixon, in 1741, produced *A supplement to Rapin's History of England: Containing the reigns of King William and Queen Mary, Queen Anne, and King George I*.

critically … and employs an increasingly secular tone.'[67] Goodwin had utilised the same thorough approach to sources, but Rapin added critique. Dent noted that a key difference between Rapin and previous historians was his de-emphasis of religion as an underlying causal factor, Rapin almost never referring to divine agency. '[I]t is Rapin's secularization of the historical cause that proved so influential for future Enlightenment … historians such as David Hume.'[68] For Laird Okie '[his] historical method marked a substantial advance … He consulted a wider range of sources and employed them more judiciously. He developed themes and tried to interpret the facts rather than simply list them. … Rapin's *History* possessed a secular, anti-clerical tone which distinguished it from the theistic … themes of previous histories. [H]e undermined the traditional chronicle-compilation form of historical writing.'[69]

Rapin's Lollard material shared territory with Echard's, both writers focusing on their impact on constitutional rather than ecclesiastical history. However, whereas Echard largely ignored the Lollards, Rapin writes about them in the context of the developing political contest between crown, clergy and Commons.[70] He emphasizes the politics of the Lollard movement and downplays the theological. Thus, he omits many of the standard events of Lollard history: there is nothing here about *Heretico Comburendo* and no mention of Lollards as martyrs or proto-Protestants. Like Echard, he mentions the 1395 petition to Parliament, important for both historians because it shows the Lollards making a direct challenge to the clerical authority. Rapin itemises their twelve demands to provide some insight into Lollard principles.[71] More importantly, Rapin alludes to the strength of the Lollards' political influence. They had significant support in the House of Commons, their petition having been pre-approved by several members. Thus, it exacerbated the tension between the Commons and the clergy who saw the dangerous possibility of calls for reform:[72] 'The Lollards had made Instances to set on Foot a

[67] Jonathan Dent, *Sinister Histories: Gothic novels and representations of the past from Horace Walpole to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Manchester University Press, 2016, 6.
[68] Ibid., 73.
[69] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 47.
[70] Despite the title claiming the book covered both civil and ecclesiastical history and the fact that it contains chapters on 'the State of the Church' this was not Rapin's first interest.
[71] Paul de Rapin de Thoyras, *The history of England, as well ecclesiastical as civil,* Tindal, N., (trans.), 1728, IV.466-7.
[72] Ibid., 467.

Reformation of the Church. As they had a great many Friends in the Kingdom, and even in the Parliament-House, the Clergy were afraid they would proceed upon this Reformation'.[73] The suggestions that the Lollards were a political group actively pursuing a shopping list of demands and that they were involved in the wider political dispute between Commons and clergy are typical of Rapin's approach. For him it was important to see the Lollards as a political grouping rather than the agents of God they are for Foxe. This notion of a Lollard 'party' was later taken up by many other historians, starting with David Hume.

The reigns of Henry IV and V were covered in volume five (of fifteen) of *The History of England*. Okie notes that Rapin 'possessed an anti-clerical tone',[74] which is true, yet his tone was not the same as that used in earlier books, such as some of the abridgements of *A&M*, where the clergy is described with apocalyptic language as 'antichristian' or 'devilish'. Rapin avoided this, and indeed was not generally judgmental about the clerical leaders; rather, in his book they are one other party with its own political interests. Laird Okie argued that Rapin's lack of interest in church history showed how he was influenced by Enlightenment ideas. His was a secularist approach.[75] Rapin regards the measures taken against the Lollards as those of a party protecting their wealth and privilege. Examples abound: 'The number of the Lollards which daily increased gave the Clergy *just Room* to fear, that in the end a Reformation might be set on Foot, which could not but be very detrimental to their Temporal interests.'[76] 'The Clergy could not doubt but these Attempts [to strip them of their lands] were the Fruits of the Doctrine of the Lollards … this was not one of the least Causes of the hatred they bore these Pretended Hereticks.'[77] The clergy are a political grouping acting rationally to protect their position. There is little or none of the censorious language which is often present in the work of many other writers, earlier and later.[78] Any anti-clerical commentary in (this section of) Rapin's

[73] Ibid., 419.
[74] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 47.
[75] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 60. 'The scant attention paid to ecclesiastical history was consistent with the Enlightenment's general disinterest in religious controversy.'
[76] Rapin, *History of England,* 15.
[77] Ibid., 100.
[78] According to Sullivan (*Rapin, Hume and the identity of the historian*, 152), Tindal's translation was 'larded with [his own] rabid footnotes about church history, papists and revealed religion.' A detailed study of all Tindal's footnotes has not been undertaken, but the ones in the section under review have been factual and show no evidence of rabidity.

History was indirect: one might argue that readers were being nudged in the direction of concluding that the clergy, motivated wholly by their temporal interests, were acting improperly with respect to their Christian calling, but this is nowhere made explicit.

Both Rapin's 'secularisation of the historical cause', as Dent put it, and his analytical approach to historiography are in evidence in his treatment of the story of John Oldcastle. Rapin passes over Oldcastle's trial in one curt summary sentence: 'As they could get no Answers from him, but what were directly repugnant to the established opinions of those Days, they pronounced him Heretick.'[79] Rapin is not interesting in Oldcastle's theological beliefs but has a lot more to say about the rising. He (like Foxe) considers it a conspiracy invented by the clergy to turn the king against the Lollards whose programme would cost them 'a good Part of their Estates.'[80] The reader is invited to conclude that the clergy was acting venally. They told the king that 'Oldcastle was in St. Giles's with twenty Thousand Lollards [and] that their design was to kill the King, the Princes his Brothers, and all the Lords … who were not their friends.'[81] The king, compelled to take this report seriously, found a few Lollards gathered there, 'Fourscore or a Hundred Men, among whom there was not a single Person of any Rank.'[82] Rapin seeks to prove that the rising was a clerical invention, using a line of argument which would be reproduced by many later sympathetic historians. Laurence Echard had made similar points, but Rapin is much more forensic, providing a host of arguments. It was impossible that such a large body of men could have gathered without being detected. Oldcastle would not have chosen a place like St. Giles's field as a mustering area, as it was overgrown with gorse. It was improbable that the rebels would have carried out the plan once they realized they only had a few dozen men. Oldcastle, as a 'Man of Sense' would not have lent himself to such a 'foolish and extravagant' project. Detailed enquiries never unearthed any other conspirators and of those who were captured so few were executed that the king cannot have believed them to be guilty. The Lollards' pacifist principles would not have permitted them to undertake an armed rebellion. It is a compelling series of arguments. No previous historian had provided so detailed a refutation of the suggestion. Foxe, in his

[79] Rapin, *History of England*, 93.
[80] Ibid., 100.
[81] Ibid., 101.
[82] Ibid., 102.

lengthy response to Nicholas Harpsfield, stuck to trying to disprove the accuracy of the monastic chronicles, and later writers using Foxean tropes either ignored or dismissed the rising. The collection of evidence in support of a line of argument is typical of Rapin's new approach to the writing of history. He concludes with a phrase which was to be quoted by many later writers: 'One can hardly conceive how a Prince so judicious as Henry, could suffer himself to be imposed upon by so gross a F[i]ction.'[83]

Jonathan Dent wrote that Rapin's history displayed whig characteristics in that 'representatives of the modern and progressive are constantly fighting against archaic and reactionary forces,'[84] citing Rapin's treatment of the conflict between King John and the barons, and exactly the same is true of Rapin's treatment of this conflict between clergy and Lollards, whom Rapin at least twice refers to as 'pretended heretics'. Rapin, analytical and progressive, with secular instincts, was an early representative of a new type of historian. It is ironic, then, that his arguments would be deployed by later evangelical writers who fused them with old ideas of the antichristian nature of the pre-Reformation clergy in less nuanced attacks. One such is Edmund Thomas whose *A Short View of the Conduct of the English Clergy* (1737) is a polemical anti-clerical tract which sought to show that the clergy had always been dedicated to pursuing their own interests 'contrary to that of the nation.'[85] Thomas cites Rapin approvingly where he was critical of the clergy but goes further. He uses the Oldcastle story as an example of clerical vice, blaming the clergy for inventing the rising: 'they fathered upon [the Lollards] a more absurd and senseless plot, than ever was invented by the most profligate delatores[86] employed by the cruellest of the Roman emperors.'[87] Thomas was prepared even to criticise Henry V, saying that he was in thrall to the clergy: 'The whole behaviour of Henry towards [Oldcastle] gives us no advantageous idea of the integrity of that prince … he could have no other motive that to gain the clergy to his interest.'[88] Rapin had mused on how as wise a king as Henry V could allow himself to be imposed on, but according to

[83] Ibid.
[84] Dent, *Sinister Histories*, 83-84.
[85] Sir Edmund Thomas, *A Short View of the Conduct of the English Clergy, so far as it relates to Civil Affairs*, 1737, 4.
[86] Accuser, informer.
[87] Ibid., 46.
[88] Ibid., 47.

Thomas, Henry knew that the idea of the conspiracy was absurd but went along with it to win the favour of the clergy. The clerical party was prepared to destabilise the state to further its own interests: 'The use the clergy have made of what power they have acquired under such princes has always been most insupportable to the laity.'[89] Other later followers of Rapin would also go further than he had in their criticism of the clergy.

3.4 Hume

David Hume's *History of England* (1754-1762)[90] was 'the most important and influential history of the British polity written in the eighteenth century.'[91] By 1750, no noteworthy new history had been produced for a generation, Rapin's having maintained its status as the standard work for thirty years.[92] Hume spotted this gap and started to work on a new book aimed at the growing educated readership, opining that history was 'the most popular kind of writing of any.'[93] In a letter in January 1753, he wrote that a new history was overdue: 'There is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of history. Style, judgement, impartiality, care – everything is wanting to our historians; and even Rapin … is extremely deficient.'[94] A 'vast market' for historical writing was developing and Hume's timing was good: his book was an instant success and he received 'unprecedented payments'.[95] Its success inspired many others; there was an explosion in historical titles, many written by obscure writers who are now forgotten, but Hume's remained the standard text well into the nineteenth century.

Hume's book continued the Enlightenment direction of historiography. According to Laird Okie, his writing displayed 'scornful contempt for the Middle Ages as an epoch of ignorance and barbarism', along with religious skepticism and anti-clericalism,[96] and all three of these attitudes are to the fore in his writing about the Lollards. All, in fact, are

[89] Ibid., 5.
[90] David Hume *The History of England*, new edn., 1763. The first volume, which appeared in 1754, dealt with the Early Stuarts, those covering earlier English history followed. (David Wootton, 'David Hume "the Historian"', *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton, Cambridge University Press, 1993 (2005), 281.)
[91] John Seed, 'The Spectre of Puritanism: Forgetting the Seventeenth Century in David Hume's *History of England*', *Social History*, 30.4 (2005), 282.
[92] Wootton, 'David Hume', 282.
[93] Hume, *Letters*, I.244.
[94] Hume, *Letters*, I.170.
[95] Wootton, 'David Hume', 281.
[96] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 196.

manifested in Hume's scathing dismissal of *both* the Lollards (as enthusiasts) and the established church (as superstitious). This dislike of religious enthusiasm and superstition alike drives and defines Hume's entire treatment. For John Seed, his antipathy to both sides reflected a central purpose of the book. 'One of the principal strategies of the *History of England* was to instruct Hume's polite reader to the horrors of enthusiasm and metaphysical parties and to reaffirm the social virtues of refinement, politeness, custom and tradition.'[97] Seed's analysis here refers to Hume's attitude to Puritanism, but the same ideas relate to Lollard 'enthusiasts' who, for Hume, were direct ancestors of the Puritans.[98] Thus, Hume writes of John Wyclif that he 'appears to have been strongly tinctured with enthusiasm, and to have been thereby the better qualified to oppose a church, whose distinguishing character was superstition.'[99] The word 'enthusiasm' had come to have extremely negative connotations for many eighteenth-century readers, denoting as it did 'the fury of the millennial sects'[100] which had found its ultimate expression in the chaos wrought by the Anabaptists of Munster, whose anarchic prescriptions threatened to overturn the accepted norms of society and morality. Later, it would be applied to the more radical groups of the Civil War period and nonconformist groups such as Quakers and Baptists.[101] To associate the Lollards with enthusiasm was to link them to anarchy and disorder. This approach was later adopted by many writers squarely in the Anglican mainstream, however for Hume the motivation was different, his attitude being driven both by his scepticism and his mistrust of clericalism. He damned both their houses.

Rapin had treated the Lollards as political actors, but Hume went further, directly referring to the Lollards as a party: 'There remained among the people only one party distinction, which was derived from religious differences … The Lollards were every day encreasing in the kingdom, and were become *a formed party*, which appeared extremely

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[97] Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, 82.

[98] Hume's attack on both the enthusiasm of dissenters and the superstition of the establishment church was the same strategy which had been used by Thomas Hobbes, attacking both by turns. J.G.A Pocock, , 'Enthusiasm, the Antiself of Enlightenment', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 60.1/2 (1997), 13. Hume's distaste for the Puritans is discussed in Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 200-1.

[99] Hume, *The History of England*, III.57. See p.97 for William Gilpin's critique of this and p.69 on enthusiasm.

[100] Pocock, 'Enthusiasm', 10.

[101] 'To the left of the great debate within the state religion,' wrote Pocock, 'arose the enthusiasms of the sects, insisting that the Spirit might at any time be active in the congregation … and stood in no need of the authority of hierarchy or magistrate.' Ibid., 12.

dangerous to the church and even formidable to the civil authority.'[102] It was his view, indeed, that they represented the *only* party distinction in England at that time, Henry V having succeeded in uniting all other groups behind him being 'ambitious to bury all party distinction in oblivion' after the disputes which had marred his predecessor's reign.[103] The fact that their distinctness was founded on a theological fault-line was almost incidental for Hume. Beyond that, Hume has little to say about the Lollards, omitting several incidents commonly reported by other historians. There is nothing, for instance, about the 1395 Lollard petition. Hume goes further even than Rapin in excluding all aspects of Lollardy outside their political impact. He (like Rapin) has little to say about their theological prescriptions; just including a list of teachings in his section on Wycliffe, which, he states, 'were nearly the same with those propagated by the reformers in the sixteenth century.'[104]

Hume, like Rapin, treated the clergy as a self-interested party, their response to heresy driven by the threats which they perceived to their worldly interests from Lollard innovations. This was why they manipulated the king and constitution. Hume does not directly condemn the clergy for these actions; rather, the criticism is implicit. Their campaign began when Wyclif began to spread dangerous ideas during the reign of Richard II, a time when the clergy lacked the tools with which to combat them, being 'more wanting in power than inclination to punish this new heresy, which struck at all their credit, possessions and authority.'[105] For Hume, the clergy were motivated to persecute heresy because of the threat to their temporal power, rather than concern about schismatic theological ideas. Since there was no law in England allowing them to prosecute heresy, they resorted to manipulation of the constitution to get legislation passed without the consent of the Commons, permitting sheriffs to 'apprehend preachers of heresy', an action which Hume condemns as 'a very extraordinary and unwarrantable artifice … surreptitiously obtained'.[106] This was later repealed by the

[102] Hume, *History of England*, III.93, emphasis added.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Hume, *History of England*, III.57.
[105] Ibid., III.59.
[106] Ibid.

Commons but 'the clergy had so much art and influence, that they were able to reinstate it.'[107]

Hume's attitude to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is pervaded with a whiggish critique that the time was not yet ripe for reform. Even though Lollard numbers continued to increase, they were unable to achieve their aims because people were not ready for reform, being intellectually immature. '[A]ffairs were not yet fully ripe for this great revolution; and the finishing blow to ecclesiastical power was reserved to a period of more curiosity, literature and inclination for novelties.'[108] It was left to the Commons to curtail the powers of the clergy 'by more sober and more legal expedients.'[109] Similarly, according to Hume, there had been no law against heresy prior to *Heretico Comburendo* because there had been no need for one as 'the ignorance and simplicity of the people … had rendered them unfit either for starting or receiving any new or curious doctrines.'[110] Hume says that the Lollards' 'programme' combined two distinct sets of ideas, Wyclif's theological innovations and calls for reform of ecclesiastical abuses. This duality prevented the Lollards from making progress, since while the population at large might have supported political reforms such as the abolition of tithes or clerical privileges, they were not interested in theological changes, again, because they were insufficiently enlightened. 'Common sense … had discovered to the people the advantages of a reform in discipline; but the age was not yet so far advanced as to be seized with the spirit of controversy, or to enter into those abstruse doctrines, which the Lollards endeavoured to propagate. The very notion of heresy alarmed the generality of the people: innovation in fundamental principles was suspicious. Curiosity was not, as yet, a proper counter-balance to authority.'[111]

According to Seed, Hume's attitude in the *History* was a result of his need to 'bury the dead', he, like the rest of the political establishment, being 'harassed by reminiscences' of the disruptions of the previous century.[112] That, along with his distaste for what he

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., III.60.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., III.96.
[112] John Seed, 'The Spectre of Puritanism: Forgetting the Seventeenth Century in David Hume's *History of England*', *Social History* 30. 4 (2005), 449.

regarded as the undeveloped state of the past and scepticism of religion explain the opprobrium in which he holds both the Protestant reformers, whom he describes as having been 'inflamed with the highest ENTHUSIASM',[113] and the Lollards, groups which he regards suspiciously as being altogether too religious.

3.5 Historical Abridgements – Smollett and Goldsmith

Encouraged by the success of Hume's history, there was a vogue for writing histories of England in the second half of the eighteenth century, lesser-known historians producing multi-volume works, which are discussed in the next chapter. Two eminent writers, Tobias Smollett and Oliver Goldsmith, were inspired by Hume's success to produce more accessible histories. Smollett, learning of the huge sales of Hume's *History*, determined to produce his own, which he did in just over a year in 1755-7, having instructed his servant 'to deny me to all those with whom I had no express business'.[114] Smollett's intention was to avoid the 'enormous bulk and prolixity' of previous histories and produce a work 'more easy in the purchase, more agreeable in the perusal, and less burthensome of the memory.'[115] Hume admired Smollett's work, but other critics detected Catholic or Jacobite leanings.[116] There is little of Wyclif and the Lollards in Smollett's book but what there is does display little sympathy for them. For instance, he describes Oldcastle's supporters as 'enthusiastic fanatics'. On the Oldcastle rising, he writes that they expected 'a vast number of apprentices'[117] to support it. His brief section on Wyclif, though, is a neutral summary. Smollett does not accept that Wyclif's campaign was motivated by desire for retribution after the loss of the wardenship of Canterbury Hall and maintains that he and his immediate followers 'affected a remarkable austerity in their way of living which impressed the vulgar.'[118] Dominion in grace carried no threat for Smollett; it just meant that 'every individual should do whatever seemed good in his own eyes, until he is apprehended by the civil magistrate.'[119] This strange summary which takes any sting out of it demonstrates the

[113] Hume, *History of England*, III.71-2.
[114] K. Simpson, 'Tobias Smollett', *ODNB*.
[115] Tobias Smollett, *Plan of a Complete History of England*, 1757, 1.
[116] *ODNB*.
[117] Tobias Smollett, *A complete history of England*, 1758, II.250.
[118] Ibid., II.127.
[119] Ibid.

haste in which Smollett's book was produced. Goldsmith was commissioned by a bookseller to write a simpler history than Hume's or Smollett's, an 'abridgement' and *The History of England* appeared in 1771.[120] Discussion of the Lollards is confined to a brief mention of John Oldcastle's misadventures, and the rising, intended, Goldsmith says, as Oldcastle's 'signal revenge of his enemies.' The brutality of his execution naturally excited 'the disgust of the people … against the clergy.'[121]

3.5 Conclusion

The first half of the eighteenth century saw the Enlightenment gather momentum and the arrival of new intellectual ideas which brought new approaches to historiography. The process was sporadic, and the books varied considerably in their approach to the analysis of historical trends. An important tenet of Enlightenment thinking was religious toleration, but this was not in evidence in writing about Lollardy prior to 1750, these books uniformly utilising strongly anti-Catholic rhetoric, condemning the clergy and papacy for barbarism and cruelty. This attitude was only to be expected in the era of the '15 and '45, when fear of Jacobitism backed by the power of Catholic France was at its height. Writing about the Lollards depicts them as victims of persecution rather than as active agents of religious change.

Rapin and Hume, the most important historians of the period, introduced more refined analysis. Rapin treats the protagonists in these conflicts as political actors and analyses them more dispassionately than previous historians. His treatment of the Lollards is generally positive. Hume, on the other hand, sceptical about religion, condemns both the Lollards and their persecutors. If anything, he is more suspicious of Lollard enthusiasm than Catholic superstition. During the second half of the century, this division of attitudes to Lollardy became more marked as more writers began to fear dissent and disorder more than resurgent Catholicism. We can categorise writers on Lollardy in the later eighteenth century according to whether their treatment broadly adhered to that of Rapin or Hume.

[120] Goldsmith, Oliver, T*he history of England, from the earliest times to the death of George II*, 1771.
[121] Ibid., II.127-8.

4 The History Boom 1750-1800: Rapinites and Humeites on Lollardy

Encouraged by the sales of Hume's *History of England*,[1] a slew of 'gentleman writers' started producing general histories of England, most of which claimed to be 'New' or different, whilst in fact all using a similar approach; normally starting from Caesar's invasion of Britain, they proceed reign by reign to the recent past, the template which had been employed by Rapin and Hume. The focus of these books was upon civil and political history, church history being fitted in as it impinged upon wider themes. Some dealt with ecclesiastical history in separate sections, giving their authors tricky structural problems. The books were similar in tone; inspired by Hume's Enlightenment history, they were stripped of providential explanations, possessed a secular cast and tended to espouse a whiggish view of history progressing rationally from chaotic past to orderly present. The writers, coming from the wealthier echelon of society, displayed a pro-establishment outlook. Whilst most of them were not themselves clergymen, they espoused the moderate Anglicanism that by this time was the dominant hue of the established church. The Enlightenment, in England, was a clerical and conservative movement.[2]

The attitude to Lollardy, and the persecution of Lollards, in these books, lays bare the writers' attitudes towards dissent, the clerical establishment and Catholicism. We can divide them into two groups, based on the degree of sympathy they have for the Lollards. Some follow Rapin in emphasizing the Lollards' positive qualities, others share Hume's view, mistrustful of their seditious instincts and lower-class roots. There is a strong streak of anti-Catholicism in all these works, manifested in criticism of the clergy in their actions against the Lollards; they come across as vicious, rapacious and unchristian.

[1] James Raven, 'Publishing and bookselling 1660-1780', in *Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, edited by John J. Richetti, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 13.
[2] Pocock, *Enthusiasm*, 11. B.W. Young makes the same point in *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England,* 3, stating that the English Enlightenment was 'decidedly clerical and intellectually conservative.' 'Students of the eighteenth century have been assured that England's Enlightenment lay in a confusion of developments, social, political, religious and intellectual.' Ibid., 4.

4.1 Rapinites

Rapin significantly influenced the historiography of the later eighteenth century with his secular tone, meticulous use of sources and thorough analysis.[3] He was positively disposed to the Lollards and critical of the clergy. This section will examine the work of five historians who took a broadly similar approach. These writers, like Rapin, were not Evangelicals and there is nothing in their work about the Lollards' putative role as proto-Protestants. It would be wrong to describe their work as wholly secular, some of them being themselves clerics, but they display little interest in the Lollard's theological and societal propositions. Rather, they emphasise the Lollard struggle against, and persecution by, the clergy. Rapin had shown the clergy behaving as a party, their actions being driven by partisan interests, and these historians follow. Most are more vehemently critical of the clergy and Roman church than Rapin and accordingly, pay more attention to the processes of persecution than to the Lollards themselves.

William Blennerhasset, of whom little is known, produced the earliest of these books, his *New History of England* being published in Newcastle in 1751, before even Hume's. Blennerhassett's declared aim was to produce an inexpensive history of England, retaining the substance of earlier work but without the 'prolixity'.[4] Ferdinando Warner was Rector of Queenhythe and enjoyed 'modest success as a historian.'[5] His *Ecclesiastical History of England*, 1756-7, was the first church history written by someone we might properly regard as an Anglican.[6] Warner bemoans 'the wretched ignorance of earlier historians' and their 'bigotry and prejudice'; their history was 'enriched … with a profusion of miracles and legends, formed to justify the errors and superstition of the church of Rome.'[7] The desire to strip providence from history fits the Enlightenment approach pioneered by Rapin, but in the hands of Warner, like most of

[3] Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing*, 47.
[4] William Blennerhassett, *A new history of England, from the time that the Phoenicians first landed in this island, to the end of the reign of King George I*, 1751, iv.
[5] N. Aston, 'Ferdinando Warner', *ODNB*.
[6] The nonjuror Jeremy Collier had produced *An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain* in 1708-14, see pp.70-2. Warner claimed that his was the first ecclesiastical history worthy of the name, discounting Collier's as being of 'extremely low character'. (*Ecclesiastical History*, ii). He quotes William Nicholson, bishop of Gloucester, who in his *Historical Library* had written that in Collier's book 'special respects are paid to the bishops and see of Rome and … his business … was to compromise the differences between the churches of England and Rome.'
[7] Ferdinando Warner, *The Ecclesiastical History of England, to the Eighteenth Century*, 1756-7, iii.

these writers, appears mostly in the guise of an attack on the 'superstitious' practices of the Roman church. Robert Henry was a Church of Scotland minister. His *History of Great Britain from the First Invasion of it by the Romans* (1771-93), was a massive undertaking conceived 'on a new plan', intended to cover all aspects of history, political, ecclesiastical, economic, cultural, in separate chapters for each era.[8] Unfortunately the project proved too much for Henry, who died before it was finished.[9] We also examine the work of two writers who published in the 1790s. John Gifford was a Tory political writer who yet took a distinctly whiggish approach to history and was a keen enthusiast of (the whig) Rapin.[10] His *History of England from the Earliest Times to the Peace of 1783* appeared in 1790 and Charles Coote's *The History of England from the Earliest Dawn of Record to the Peace of 1783* in nine volumes between 1791-8.[11]

In these books the influence of Rapin is evident from more than just the historiographical method and political analysis: several writers borrow directly from (Tindal's translation of) Rapin's history. Examples abound. Rapin had written that in 1395 the clergy were alarmed because 'the Lollards had made Instances to set on foot a Reformation of the Church.'[12] The phrase 'set on foot', appears in Blennerhassett's book: 'the number of Lollards, which daily increased … gave the Clergy just Room to fear, that, in the End a Reformation might be set on foot'[13] and Warner's: the Lollards 'gave clergy room to fear that in the end a reformation might be set on foot, which could not but be very detrimental to their power and wealth.'[14] However, despite such borrowings, most writers attempt to distance themselves from Rapin. It was common practice to justify one's new book by writing a preface detailing the flaws in existing work. The only one who openly

[8] Robert Henry, *The history of Great Britain, from the first invasion of it by the Romans Under Julius Caesar. Written on a New Plan*, 1771-93, I.vi.
[9] R. Sher, 'Robert Henry', *ODNB*.
[10] Gifford later produced a 'laudatory' biography of Pitt the Younger. (L. Stephan & A. Smith, 'John Gifford', *ODNB*).
[11] Structuring a book which included both civil and ecclesiastical history often proved difficult. Blennerhassett includes a section called 'The State of the Church' at the end of each chapter. Robert Henry's book has multiple chapters on different subjects for each century. The layout in Coote's book is even more awkward. He includes separate chapters on 'The History of the English Church' but the consequence is that much of the Lollard material straddles chapters. For example, he discusses the Lollard rising in the general history chapter, but Oldcastle's execution is covered in the church history section.
[12] Rapin, *History of England*, IV.424.
[13] Blennerhassett, *New History of England*, II.498.
[14] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.521.

acknowledges Rapin's merits was John Gifford, describing him as 'justly distinguished for impartiality and perspicuity',[15] though he had his doubts about Tindal's translation which he said was 'replete with Gallicisms … harsh and uncouth.'[16] Charles Coote was less polite. In his preface he states that Rapin's reputation was on the wane. Coote was writing in the 1790s by which time Rapin's book was seventy years old. He refers to Rapin's multiple errors and injudicious use of materials and even questions his impartiality.[17] Ferdinando Warner, whose material bears the closest resemblance to Rapin's, had a policy of not citing any sources.[18] There are, however, many references to Rapin in his book's voluminous index, some including little barbs such as 'an observation of his not just.'[19] There is no doubt, though, that all these writers, some writing decades later, were significantly influenced by Rapin.

They all follow him in their treatment of the Lollards, regarding them not as an active political group, but rather as passively suffering from the malicious actions of the clergy. This is the principal distinction between these authors and those we are characterising as 'Humeite', for whom Lollards actively sought political change. Apart from the persecution, burnings and other interactions with the clergy, discussion of Lollards by Rapinite authors concentrates on a few points deemed worthy of mention, in particular their growing numbers and the 1395 petition to parliament. All the writers include a list of the points in the petition which provides a useful summary of Lollard beliefs. Some amend or abridge the list to make it better fit their own preoccupations. The versions produced by Gifford and Henry are so similar, both also stating incorrectly that the petition was presented in 1394, that Gifford must have taken his account from Henry's.[20] Both writers tilt the petition in a more overtly anti-Catholic direction, stating that it included a complaint against 'the exorbitant power, excessive wealth, and profligate lives of the Clergy, which last they ascribed to their vows of celibacy.'[21] This is not in the

[15] John Gifford, *The history of England from the earliest times to the peace of 1783*, 1790, I.iii.
[16] Ibid., iv.
[17] Charles Coote, *The History of England from the Earliest Dawn of Record to the Peace of 1783*, 1791, I.v.
[18] Warner stated that he had 'omitted purposefully … any reference to the places from whence my materials have been collected' because it would 'break the thread of the story, and … make the pages inelegant and confused.' *Ecclesiastical History*, I.iii.
[19] Ibid., 638.
[20] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, IV.341; Gifford, *History of England*, I.428.
[21] Ibid.

the Lollards' petition, which was more concerned about the Church's departure from the rites and practices of the apostolic era.[22] Gifford and Henry add another item condemning the worship of images[23] and omit several of the points which were on the 1395 list: complaints about exorcism being akin to necromancy, clerics holding secular offices, death in war being against Christ's teaching and the production of unnecessary luxuries. No doubt they felt that these were obsolete or would have cast the Lollards in a poor light. Condemning war or the production of fine goods would not have played well with middle-class eighteenth-century readers. Charles Coote's version was abridged even further, simplifying the petition to a general attack on the Catholic clergy: according to him they complained 'of the luxury and profligacy of the clergy, and the absurdity of transubstantiation and other received maxims of the church.'[24] All three writers refashioned the Lollard petition, the only point at which they refer to Lollard ideas, to better fit them into their agenda of attacking the corruption of the Church. However, Blennerhassett, writing earlier than the others, and Warner summarise the petition accurately, as had Rapin.[25] The changes of emphasis and omissions made by Gifford, Henry and Coote are there to emphasise that the Lollard petition was against the clerical decay which they felt were still present in the Catholic Church of their own era.

The Church of Scotland minister Robert Henry, in his *History of Great Britain,* possesses a more evangelical tone. He is unusual amongst these writers in having made extensive use of *A&M* as a source. According to his account, the growth in Lollardy was brought about by Wyclif's 'poor preachers', who 'travelled up and down the country, in a very plain dress, declaiming with great vehemence against the corruptions of the church.'[26] Henry provides a list of areas where Lollardy flourished, also taken from Foxe.[27] Another source of information about Lollard theology was the interrogation of John Oldcastle,

[22] The second conclusion 'On the priesthood' stated: 'Our usual priesthood, the which began in Rome feigned of a power higher than angels, is not the priesthood the which Christ ordained to his Apostles. This conclusion is proved: for the priesthood of Rome is made with signs, rites, and bishops' blessings, and that is of little virtue.' https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/twelve-conclusions-lollards accessed 14th Nov. 2024.
[23] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, IV.341; Gifford, *History of England*, I.428.
[24] Coote, *History of England*, IV.40. This is not an accurate reflection of the complaint about transubstantiation in the petition, which was concerned with how it could incline people to idolatry.
[25] Rapin, *History of England*, IV.473.
[26] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, IV.339.
[27] Ibid., V.322.

reproduced in excruciating detail in *A&M*, however most follow Rapin and pass over this. Henry was an exception, including the text of Oldcastle's statement of beliefs on the eucharist, pilgrimages, images and confession. He describes it as a 'curious paper', stating that it was an itemisation of Lollard beliefs, 'cautiously expressed.' Henry reproduces the text of the bishops' response defining the orthodox position, under the same four heads, ruefully adding: 'Such strange things our ancestors … were obliged to believe, under the pain of being burnt to ashes!'[28] Henry does not mention the rising in this section on church history: confusingly, it is included in the corresponding 'Civil and Military' chapter. Henry questions the suggestion that Oldcastle had planned the rising: it was doubtful that Oldcastle would carry his understandable resentment as far as to 'form the criminal and cruel schemes imputed to him by the clergy.'[29] Henry again parts ways with Rapin at this point; where Rapin had gone to some lengths to prove that the rising must have been a fiction, Henry accepts that it occurred but expresses doubt that Oldcastle had been involved.

The other Rapinite writers omit, as had Rapin, the detail of Oldcastle's theological disputation with the bishops and, like him, suggest, with varying degrees of confidence, that the rising was a fiction. William Blennerhassett's book contains just a single paragraph on the process against Oldcastle, and little more on the revolt, closely following Rapin's account. Blennerhassett's conclusion – 'the Improbability of there being such a Conspiracy, made the King afterwards believe the Impeachment had been forged, as in Likelihood it was' – closely echoes Rapin's: 'It is therefore more than probable, that this Impeachment was forged, in order to render the Lollards odious to the King.'[30] Gifford merely notes that the trial took place and ended with Oldcastle's condemnation.[31] Regarding Oldcastle's involvement in the rising, Gifford says that doubt exists: 'On the justice of that imputation we are incompetent to decide; though the known rancour of the Primate against a sect he abhorred … induce us to believe that the accusation was merely formed to effect the destruction of … the virtuous chief of the

[28] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, V.322. These papers appear in *A&M* (1570), 686-8. Henry's version is a faithful reproduction.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Rapin, *History of England*, V.103.
[31] Gifford, *History of England*, I.440.

Lollards.'[32] Ferdinando Warner likewise omits detail of the trial.[33] Like Rapin, Warner discusses the rising *after* having stated that Oldcastle had fled to Wales, altering the sequence of events in a way which had the effect of exonerating Oldcastle from involvement, and allowing him to conclude that the rising must have been invented by the clergy. Warner's analysis of why the rising must have been an invention is similar to Rapin's, including his phrase 'How was it possible that the king, who had a very good understanding, could be imposed upon so grossly?'[34] Charles Coote writes in a similar way, dismissing the trial in one sentence, and, on the rising, conceding that 'Historians are greatly divided with regard to the reality of this plot'. With a spot of understatement, he writes that, having been condemned to death, 'it is natural to suppose, that [Oldcastle] felt some resentment against the clergy' but nevertheless concludes, like the rest, that the rising was most likely to have been a fiction.[35]

The similarity of all these treatments, both to one another and to Rapin, is striking. None of the writers is interested in the detail of the Lollard beliefs; whilst they are sympathetic to the Lollards and Oldcastle, there is nowhere here a paean to Lollards as heralds of reformation or holy martyrs. They are much more eager to condemn the clergy than to praise the Lollards. The anti-Catholic tone is widespread in these accounts, manifested in their criticisms of the pre-Reformation church in England and the Roman church. The Church appears as corrupt and wholly focused on accumulating wealth, its priority to defend its position, and the direct consequence was the brutal persecution of those, such as the Lollards, who threatened this. This had been Rapin's analysis, but these writers are less dispassionate, more apt to use strident language in their criticism. For example, in a chapter on 'The State of the Church of the Fifteenth Century', William Blennerhassett makes the entirely specious claim that 'the Christian Church had never been in so deplorable a Condition … The Justice and Mercy of God, and the meritorious Death of Christ, were become scarce Part of a Christian's Faith.'[36] He directs his ire on Rome in a way which Rapin and Hume had not: for him it was the 'Center of Pride,

[32] Ibid.
[33] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.531. Compare Rapin on Oldcastle's beliefs 'they could get no Answers from him, but what were directly repugnant to the established opinions of those Days.'
[34] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.532. See p.44.
[35] Coote, *History of England*, IV.51.
[36] Blennerhassett, *New History of England*, II.753.

Avarice, Luxury, Sensuality, and of all the most scandalous Vices' and its Cardinals were 'worldly-minded Men, who considered Religion only as a Means to Make their Fortune.'[37] He says little about those calling for reform, noting only that Wickliffites 'were much persecuted, and several burnt; but before the End of this Century, that Opinion was much increased.'[38] According to Ferdinando Warner, Rome and Avignon were 'the centre of avarice and sensuality, of pride and luxury … what they enjoyed was an irrefragable proof of their pride and tyranny.'[39] Robert Henry managed to connect criticism of their attachment to wealth and sacrilegious opinions: 'The clergy were at least as much attached to their riches, their honours, and their pleasures, as to their speculative opinions; and as unwilling to abandon their vices, as to renounce their errors.'[40]

John Gifford, writing in 1790, is less critical. Whilst condemning the clergy for their actions, his account is less stridently anti-Catholic, though he does refer to the 'intolerant principles of the Romish Church.'[41] He was inclined to a whiggish view, stating that the task of the historian was 'to trace the progress of his country from chaos to order, from rudeness to refinement'[42] and for him this process played out in the course of the Protestant Reformation. The history of the fifteenth-century church 'offer[s] nothing to the attention of posterity but a continued series of papal disputes and clerical persecutions. The genial sun of Toleration had not yet diffused it's [sic] beneficial beams over England.'[43] Charles Coote, also writing in the 1790s, condemns the burnings, whilst, like Gifford, comparing the toleration of his own era with this medieval brutality. 'To condemn a person to death of torture for the speculation of religious opinion, is inconstant with every principle either of reason or humanity.'[44]

The earliest of these books were produced in the decade after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, when fear of invasion or Catholic rule gave rise to a surge in anti-Catholic sentiment. According to Colin Haydon, the anti-Catholic consensus started to be

[37] Ibid., 754.
[38] Ibid., 757.
[39] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.537.
[40] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, V.547.
[41] Gifford, *History of England*, I.440.
[42] Ibid., vi.
[43] Ibid., 525.
[44] Coote, *History of England*, IV.41.

replaced by an increasingly tolerant spirit over the next thirty years.[45] There is some support for this in the historiography of the persecution of Lollards, Gifford and Coote in the 1790s writing in a less virulently anti-Catholic fashion than Blennerhassett and Warner in the 1750s, and speaking more approvingly of toleration, but there remains a streak of anti-Catholicism in the work of the later writers.

Beyond criticism of the clergy as corrupt, superstitious and in thrall to the even more corrupt and superstitious church of Rome, these writers follow Rapin in emphasizing that the clergy was a party faction whose priority was to preserve their wealth and status. The persecution of the Lollards was a consequence of the threat the clerical party felt Lollardy posed to their position. For Warner, the increasing number of Lollards by 1395 caused the clergy to fear a coming reformation 'which could not but be very detrimental to their power and interest'[46] and Gifford wrote in a similar vein that the increasing influence of the Lollard movement 'became so formidable as to threaten the power and opulence of the church with annihilation', prompting Arundel to determine 'to crush a sect which had had such strong reasons to fear and detest.'[47] Another Rapinite theme which most writers took up was how the Lollards became caught up in the wider political contest between the clergy and the Parliament. The House of Commons tended to side with the Lollards, whilst the monarch (in particular, Henry IV) was compelled to take the part of the clergy to retain their favour. Via this analysis, the Lollards emerge on the side of the people and their representatives against the repressive forces of the establishment. For John Gifford, indeed, the Lollards and the Commons were almost working together to check the power of the clergy: the Lollards were first emboldened to present their petition to parliament because of actions the Commons had already taken,[48] and Arundel's determination to eliminate the Lollards was exacerbated by the fact that 'their friends in the Commons had made repeated attempts on the possessions of the Church.'[49] Ferdinando Warner goes further, claiming that the majority of the House of Commons were Lollards, which seems unjustified.[50] He refers to an ongoing campaign

[45] Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, Chapter 5.
[46] Ibid., 521.
[47] Gifford, *History of England*, I.440.
[48] Ibid., 428.
[49] Ibid., 527.
[50] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.530.

by the Commons to limit the power of the clergy; they had petitioned the king to confiscate clerical estates.[51] The petition was rejected and the predictable outcome, according to Warner, was that the clergy came to feel that the Commons was a hotbed of Lollards and heretics.[52] Blennerhassett also emphasizes the rivalry between clergy and Commons, and that the king felt compelled to support the clergy.[53] For these historians, the position of the Lollards was defined in part by their place in the political struggle over church revenues; they became involved, and the persecution executed against them was a consequence. The Lollards were a passive group caught up in a wider political contest.

The result was the persecution and burning of Lollards. Rapin says little directly about this: he does not mention the passing of *Heretico Comburendo* and the subsequent burnings, but later historians all do. The demonstration of clerical brutality is central to their anti-Catholic case. Robert Henry refers to the 'unabating violence' practiced against the Lollards.[54] After the failure of the 1414 rising, he exaggerates that 'prodigious numbers of them were detected, thrown in prison, and cruelly harassed and persecuted.' He condemns those Lollards who recanted rather than face execution, saying that they 'chose rather to be hypocrites than martyrs', a suggestion which was to be common later among evangelically-minded writers.[55] However, the emphasis upon clerical brutality is common to all these historians. For John Gifford, *Heretico Comburendo* was 'a sanguinary and tyrannical act, equally disgraceful to the Clergy who applied for it, the Parliament which passed it, and the Monarch who sanctioned it with his consent!'[56] Charles Coote was another who finds proof of clerical brutality in the burnings. He goes further than Gifford, condemning the brutality of the entire era: *Heretico Comburendo* 'reflects disgrace on the age which produced it.'[57] For Warner, the statute was passed because of sponsorship by the king, who needed clerical support 'to keep the crown upon his head which he had usurped.'[58] By passing it, the bishops 'made themselves the

[51] Ibid., 526.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Blennerhassett, *New History of England*, II.516.
[54] Henry, *History of Great Britain*, V.340
[55] Ibid., 335.
[56] Gifford, *History of England*, I.526.
[57] Coote, *History of England*, IV.41.
[58] Warner, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.523.

only judges, where life was to be forfeited after the most cruel manner, in direct opposition to the canon of scripture.'[59] For the clergy to be complicit in delivering those whose only crime is 'an error in speculation' to 'a death the most abhorrent to human nature' was 'a cruelty which one shudders at.'[60]

4.2 Humeites

The writers discussed in this section have in common with David Hume a suspicious and critical attitude towards Lollards because of their 'enthusiasm'. This attitude was widespread among eighteenth-century intellectuals, religious enthusiasm being held responsible for much of the chaos of the previous century. 'We will never understand the long eighteenth century' wrote John Pocock 'if we do not understand that it lived with the memory of the civil wars as the nightmare from which it was struggling to awake.'[61] The Enlightenment itself had come about, according to Pocock, because of a widespread determination to avoid a repeat of the wars of religion, wars which were in large part a consequence of unchecked religious enthusiasm. Enthusiasm, according to the title of his 1997 paper, was 'the Antiself of Enlightenment'. 'It is therefore not surprising that a sustained polemic against enthusiasm began in the later years of the Protectorate and formed part of the discourse of restored England'.[62] Robert Ingram agreed: in his book on the career of Archbishop Thomas Secker writing that 'the eighteenth-century orthodox were particularly aghast at the radical assault on the religio-political order during the previous century and feared a reprise during theirs.'[63] He quotes Secker himself speaking in a 1734 sermon of the abandonment of 'real religion' for 'hypocrisy, superstition and enthusiasm.'[64]

This mistrust of enthusiasm and fear of a return to the chaos of the seventeenth century, then, coloured these writers' view of the Lollards: for them, Lollards were the spiritual ancestors of the radical Puritans of the sixteenth century and radical groups of the

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 524.
[61] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Within the margins: the definitions of orthodoxy', in *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Critical Response*, edited by Roger Lund, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 38.
[62] Ibid., 11.
[63] Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England*, Boydell, 2007, 72.
[64] Ibid.

seventeenth. They are suspicious of the Lollards' seditious and disruptive tendencies and (perceived) lower-class composition. There are few references to the Lollards as being early Protestants and very little discussion of their doctrine; these establishment writers are not interested in theology; they do not impute religious motivations to either Lollards or clergy. Like the Rapinite authors, they find the brutality of the persecution abhorrent and condemnation of the actions of the clergy is widespread, but this is not manifested in strongly anti-Catholic rhetoric; rather, the attitude of these writers is that the actions of the clergy were a consequence of the brutality of the times they lived in. They interpret the actions of the clergy, like both Rapin and Hume, as primarily motivated by their need to protect their position. The coming Reformation is part of the process of evolution from the barbarities of earlier centuries towards their own, more civilized, time.

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These writers were uncomfortable with the Lollards because of the chaos and disruption that their ideas threatened. They were members of the establishment, and many Lollard prescriptions would have overturned the established order, civil as well as ecclesiastical. So, these writers followed Hume in condemning the Lollards for the cocktail of their revolutionary instincts, intemperate zeal and religious enthusiasm. For instance, Hugh Clarendon, writing in 1770, said that the Lollards were 'neither capable of defending their tenets with sound arguments nor regulating their conduct with decency.'[65] This use of the word 'decency' nicely encapsulates his establishment attitude. He calls them 'outrageous and turbulent', more words guaranteed to shock the polite eighteenth-century mind.[66] George Spencer, whose history, published in 1794, seems to have been widely plagiarized from others, uses almost the same words. Thomas Mortimer, writing in 1765, makes the same point more succinctly, saying that 'the majority were hot and ignorant.'[67] Mortimer had, in 1758, produced a strongly-worded polemic against Methodism, *Die and be damned: Or An antidote against every species of Methodism and enthusiasm*, in which he charged nonconformists with having

[65] Hugh Clarendon, *A new and authentic History of England: from the remotest period of intelligence to the close of the year 1767,* 1770, I.384
[66] Clarendon, *History of England*, I.388.
[67] Thomas Mortimer, *A new History of England, from the earliest accounts of Britain, to the ratification of the Peace of Versailles, 1763*, 1764-1766, II.4.

'rendered christianity, an unintelligible jargon of enthusiastic mysteries',[68] little better than the 'superstition and error' of the 'Romish clergy'[69] so it comes as no surprise to find him displaying a critical attitude towards Lollardy. George Raymond, in his 1787 *New Universal and Impartial History of England*, declares that the Lollards had 'become so presumptuous as to preach, write and openly declaim against the established religion', describing them as 'disturbers of the public peace', their tenets 'repugnant to the tranquility of the state.'[70] For Raymond, even to preach against the established religion was 'presumptuous'. An associated concern for some was that the Lollards seemed uncomfortably composed of those from the lower end of society. George Spencer said that they were mostly illiterate,[71] and John Barrow, with a telling reference to the seventeenth century, said that 'men of sense condemned their zeal and levelling tendencies'.[72] Several use the word 'zealous', meaning possessing dangerous fanaticism: for Hugh Clarendon they possessed 'intemperate zeal.' They often use the same word to describe the clergy's rigorous pursuit of persecution.

The incident which most linked the Lollards with sedition was the 1414 rising, and what most distinguishes these writers from the Rapinite group is their conviction that a dangerous Lollard insurrection *did* occur. What else, they argue, could one expect from such a disruptive group? For these writers, with one exception, the reality of the rising provided evidence of both the Lollards' seditious inclinations and the genuine threat which they posed to the good order of the polity. They emphasise that the Lollards' growth was a threat not just to the ecclesiastical but also, increasingly, the civil authorities. For both groups of historians, the story of the rising was the most important prop for the historical case they were attempting to make: for the Rapinites, it demonstrated the duplicity of the clergy whereas for the Humeites it laid bare the seditious instincts of the Lollards. The principal fear of Humeites was how easily the peasantry might be persuaded to rise. According to John Barrow, leading Lollards 'heated

[68] Thomas Mortimer, *Die and be damned. Or an antidote against every species of Methodism; and enthusiasm*, 2nd edn., 1758, 17.
[69] Ibid., 15.
[70] George Frederick Raymond, *A New, Universal and Impartial History of England*, 1787, 211.
[71] George William Spencer, *A new, authentic, and complete history of England, from the first settlement of Brutus in this island, ... to the year 1795*, 1794, 270.
[72] John Barrow, *A new and impartial history of England, From the invasion of Julius Cæsar, to the signing of the preliminaries of peace, in the year 1762*, 1763, IV.112.

the minds of the common people with suggestions of the ease with which they could overthrow the government if they were united and so a large body of armed men came to St. Giles'.[73] Hugh Clarendon says the same: their leaders 'inflamed the minds of the common people with suggestions of the ease, with which they could subvert the government, if united.'[74] For Sydney Temple, writing in 1773, the rising was conceived and led by John Oldcastle himself: Oldcastle 'assembled his partizans, and began an open revolt against the government'.[75] George Raymond, in 1787, echoes Temple's words, adding that Oldcastle had been goaded into action because he was 'irritated' at having been condemned to the flames.[76] For Thomas Mortimer, a working-class rabble of twenty thousand of 'the meaner sort' flocked to support Oldcastle once they heard about his condemnation 'all ready to obey his orders' before being 'trapped in their own snare' as they arrived at the rendezvous.[77]

The (partial) exception is George Spencer. He belongs among the writers we are considering Humeite, because of his unsympathetic and condemnatory attitude towards the Lollards; for him they were ignorant and illiterate and possessed 'intemperate zeal.'[78] However, he was the only one of these writers to consider the rising a fiction, though he does not press the point to inveigh against the clergy, merely stating that, hearing that some Lollards had met at St. George's [sic] Fields, their enemies told the king that a large force had gathered 'with a design to kill his majesty'.[79] It is not inconsistent to consider the Lollards a dangerous rabble, and still think the rising a fiction. Spencer seems to have been the only eighteenth-century writer to combine these two attitudes. This, however, does not prevent him from condemning the Lollard agenda, indeed the authorities' actions in clamping down were, for him, entirely justified. Yes, the church needed reformation, but not the way the Lollards called for: 'this spirited action

[73] Ibid., IV.124.
[74] Clarendon, *History of England*, I.388.
[75] Sydney Temple, *A new and complete history of England, from the earliest period of authentic intelligence to the present time*, 1773, 174.
[76] Raymond, *History of England*, 221. These writers were unabashed about copying telling phrases from earlier historians: the only difference between Temple's and Raymond's words is that Raymond substitutes the word 'rebellion' for 'revolt.' The very fact, however, that he considered the phrase worth plagiarizing tells us that he must have felt it perfectly encapsulated the matter.
[77] Mortimer, *A New History of England*, II.5.
[78] Spencer, *History of England*, 219.
[79] Ibid., 22[2].

of the king checked for a while the very idea of heresy; and many who wished for the reformation of the abuses in the church, discovered their dislike to the speculative doctrines of the Lollards, which they imagined threw disgrace upon so good a cause.'[80]

Compared to Hume, this group of writers is more scathing about the clergy, more condemnatory of the persecution of the Lollards. Their understanding of clerical motivations, though, is the same as Hume's. For John Barrow the motivation was not religious, but rather their worry about the loss of power and wealth which would occur if there were a reformation: 'political rather than religious considerations, operated on this occasion. The spirit of reformation had brought their order and possessions to the very brink of ruin.'[81] Similarly, for Thomas Mortimer, the clergy was afraid the Lollards would 'set a very dangerous reformation on foot.'[82] This attitude led inevitably to the brutal persecution which they all condemn. Mortimer is typical, describing the writ they obtained authorizing the persecution as 'iniquitous and tyrannical'[83] and observing drily that 'toleration was never the characteristic of the Roman catholic religion'.[84] In a single sentence describing the burning of John Badby, Mortimer splendidly condemns both Lollards and clergy, and the inevitability of the coming reform: 'one Badby, a tailor, having, with an absurd zeal, declared publicly against the real presence in the sacrament, was singled out by the clergy for exemplary punishment, in order to curb that spirit of reformation which was daily gaining ground.'[85] John Barrow, writing in 1763, agrees that Badby's execution 'gives us a lively picture of bloody persecution on the one part, and absurd zeal on the other.'[86]

The idea of the Lollards as precursors of the Protestant reformers is mentioned by some writers, as a point of contrast to the superstition of the medieval church. That there was a need for reform is widely agreed. For Hugh Clarendon 'persons of learning saw the need for reform'[87] though the same persons of learning were those he says condemned the

[80] Ibid.
[81] Barrow, *History of England*, IV.150.
[82] Mortimer, *History of England*, I.650. Rapin's French idiom as translated by Tindal cropping up again.
[83] Ibid., 682.
[84] Ibid., 684.
[85] Ibid., 684-5.
[86] Barrow, *History of England*, IV.112.
[87] Clarendon, *History of England,* 384.

Lollards for their zeal. John Barrow perceives that at this time 'the spirit of Reformation was gaining ground'[88] and Thomas Mortimer uses the same phrase but goes further, stating that 'the most sensible part of the nation ... gave attention to their doctrines, which chiefly turned upon the great necessity of a reformation in the church.'[89] It is telling that, for Mortimer (as for Clarendon) the 'sensible' part of the nation, or 'persons of learning' did *not* include the Lollards; rather, this was a group of opinion-formers akin to the educated middle class of the eighteenth century. These rational observers who mistrusted both Lollard zeal and clerical abuse did not exist in the fourteenth century but were a projection of the views of eighteenth-century historians.

4.3 Conclusion

Many histories of England, often by obscure writers, appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century, some employing novel historiographical methods first seen in the work of Rapin and Hume. This section has examined the books which contain the most material on the Lollards. To understand this mass of material, the writers can be categorised according to the degree of sympathy they express towards the Lollards. There is little difference between the two groups when it comes to attitudes towards the fourteenth-century Catholic clergy: both groups condemn their unchristian attitudes, political manoeuvering and brutality. In fact, all these writers are *more* critical of the clergy than Rapin or Hume. Rapin treated the clergy as a self-interested party but his account does not contain violently-worded attacks, his critique is never made explicit. David Hume disdained the 'superstition' of Catholicism but is *more* negative about Protestants, blaming their zeal for the chaos of the religious wars.[90] The later historians pull no punches, being more aggressively critical about the clergy, displaying a strong streak of anti-Catholicism. This is most marked in the work produced in the 1750s when Jacobitism was still perceived as a threat. There are limited signs of the heat of this rhetoric easing by the 1790s, writers then more often talking about the importance of toleration. This tendency is entangled with a widespread whiggish distaste for the general

[88] Barrow, *History of England*, IV.112.
[89] Mortimer, *History of England*, I.684.
[90] Seed, 'The Spectre of Puritanism', 450.

brutality and chaos of the fourteenth century, making it difficult to tease out writers' motivations. Both factors were at play.

The Rapinite historians' attitude to the clergy underpins their attitude to the Lollards. Their work contains little of the lionizing of Lollard martyrs widespread in abridgements of *A&M*; there is nothing evangelical here, and the discussion of Lollard tenets is perfunctory. The Lollards serve more as a foil for writers' anti-Catholic attacks. The Humeites are more decisive in assessing the Lollards, but their judgements are negative; they, like Hume and many nineteenth-century historians, mistrusting their levelling tendencies. They inherited Hume's view of Lollards as enthusiasts without sharing his scepticism toward religion. In the nineteenth century, criticism of the clergy along anti-Catholic lines would become rarer amongst all but evangelical historians, but the bifurcation of assessments of Lollards would remain. Everyone writing about them until after the Second World War had to find a place for them on a continuum from ghastly rebels to praiseworthy martyrs.

5. Denominational Critiques

The last chapters examined the biases of writers producing general histories, a genre which developed radically during the eighteenth century. This chapter turns to writers from clearly-defined confessional standpoints who made no claim to objectivity and, when writing about the Lollards, sought to communicate strongly-held beliefs in supporting or condemning them.

5.1 Nonjuror, Jacobite and Catholic critics

'No government upon earth, however perfect, can get the better of enthusiasm, or remove a disaffection arising from points of religion'.[1] Critics of radical reforming groups had used the charge of enthusiasm against them in polemic from the early days of the Reformation. The word originally entered English in the sixteenth century as a disparaging term meaning 'false or pretended divine inspiration.'[2] Micheal Driedger linked it to Luther's use of the word *Schwarmer* to condemn 'Christian deviants.'[3] By the eighteenth century it was being widely used to denote excessive and misguided religious fervour and was regularly applied to the Lollards by critical writers. Hume had used the adjective about them and the historiography which followed him criticised their destabilizing, seditious inclinations. However, as we have noted, Protestant writers tempered their attacks: the Lollards were, at least, on the right track. Historians from a Jacobite, nonjuring or Catholic background felt no such inclination to stay their hands, finding the Lollards' distasteful enthusiasm corrosive and inextricably accompanied by a desire to undermine the civil state.

Nonjurors

Nonjurors occupied awkward terrain between Protestant and Catholic. Refusing to take the oath of allegiance to William III, they were tainted with Jacobitism and suspected of disloyalty to the Hanoverian crown. As such, they were no friends of dissent and nonjuror historians were strongly suspicious of the Lollards as exemplars

[1] Thomas Carte, *A general history of England*, 1747-55, II.675.
[2] *OED*.
[3] Michael Driedger, 'Anabaptism and religious radicalism', in *The European Reformations*, edited by Alec Ryrie, Palgrave, 2006, 212.

and precursors of dissent. The most significant church history by a nonjuror was Jeremy Collier's *Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain* (1708-14). Collier (1650-1726), a controversialist who became a bishop in the nonjuring Church of England in 1713, was best known for his campaign against immorality in the theatre,[4] which he felt was the result of the collapse of society into immorality following the usurpation of the king and the establishment of a government founded on rebellion. His was arguably the first complete ecclesiastical history of England.[5] After its publication, Collier was charged with being a Catholic sympathizer – however if he did harbour such sympathies he never acted upon them.[6] Another nonjuring historian who was accused of disloyalty to the Hanoverians was Thomas Carte, thought to have been Collier's assistant early in the eighteenth century.[7] His *General History of England* in four volumes appeared between 1747-54. Richard Fiddes, the rector of Halsham in East Yorkshire was not a nonjuror, but a very High Church Tory with similar opinions. He 'revered the memory of Charles I … [and] vigorously approved the tory measures to secure the Church of England against the encroachments of dissent'.[8] Fiddes' allegiance to the Hanoverian succession was 'unenthusiastic' and his attitude to nonconformity 'thoroughly hostile'.[9] Chapter five of his *Life of Cardinal Wolseley* comprises a survey of the church prior to the Reformation, including a discussion of the influence of Wyclif and the Lollards. For him, the English church of the time was harmoniously comfortable under the Roman umbrella: 'there appeared at this Time to be as perfect an Union of this Church with that of Rome, as had happened under any preceding Reign.'[10]

These writers all condemn the Lollards for their dissent and destabilising tendencies in both social and theological spheres, tendencies which arose from their unabashed enthusiasm. There is no suggestion that the Lollards anticipated the Reformation; any

[4] E. Salmon, 'Jeremy Collier', *ODNB*.
[5] According to William Hunt, in *ODNB*, 1887, Collier was ahead of his time, displaying a meticulous approach to research and his *Ecclesiastical History* 'a work of great learning, the first of its kind that had appeared, save Fuller's *Church History* [which] has not lost its value [and] recognises the necessity of basing history on original authorities by giving copious and minute references.'
[6] '*ODNB*.
[7] 'W. Hunt, Jeremy Collier', *ODNB*, 1887.
[8] R. Sharp, 'Richard Fiddes', *ODNB*.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Richard Fiddes, *The Life of Cardinal Wolseley*, 1725, 37.

Protestant principles the Lollards may have stumbled across were counteracted by their heterodoxy, what Collier calls their 'heat'. 'For tho' they are sometimes in the Right, and Point upon the Errors in the Roman Church, yet part of their Conclusions are plainly Heterodox … To take them at their best, they seem to have had more Heat than Light, and to have been govern'd by a Spirit of Enthusiasm.'[11] Analysing a 1407 Lollard text, *The Testimony of William Thorp*, Collier repeats the charge: ''Tis a violent Invective against the Hierarchy, and discovers a great deal of Heat, Ignorance and Enthusiasm. … [Thorp] insists mainly upon Reforming the Church to Apostolic Poverty, would have the Bishops and Priests work for their Livings.'[12] Fiddes concedes that some Lollard ideas did pre-empt Reformation principles: 'certain Truths were then in some Measure discovered … But as yet, they who were in Search of them, had but little Light; and … their Knowledge was confused and imperfect, like that of Men just creeping out of Darkness; the Truths they began to discover, were mix'd with several and great Errors.'[13] For him, too, it was their enthusiasm which made them so dangerous: 'the Growth of the Lollards and of their enthusiastick Opinions, had been formally apprehended so dangerous to the State, that … a Law was expressly made to suppress them'.[14]

All three of these writers make the central focus of their condemnation the Lollards' threat to civil society. Their tone is sharper than that used by the Humeite writers and they criticise specific Lollard principles in a way the Humeites do not. For Fiddes, the Lollards 'maintained Principles derogatory to the Prince, injurious to Society and Contrary to the Law then in Force.'[15] He directs his critique specifically at Lollard ideas, condemning some of the central principles in the 1395 *Twelve Conclusions*; their pacifism (Conclusion X), which 'renders the Supreme Magistrate … incapable of defending his Subjects', their opposition to unnecessary crafts (Conclusion XII), which Fiddes says would 'promote the great Bane of Society, Idleness', and their opposition

[11] Jeremy Collier, *An ecclesiastical history of Great Britain, chiefly of England*, 1708-14, I.598.
[12] Ibid, I.625.
[13] Fiddes, *Cardinal Wolseley*, 42. Compare Henry Southwell, for whom 'The glorious light was just beginning to dawn', (see p.19), and the illustration from Matthew Taylor's *England's Bloody Tribunal* where the glorious light is represented by a candle frustrating the efforts of Catholics to extinguish it. (figure ii.a.)
[14] Ibid., 39.
[15] Ibid., 35

to tithes[16] which was 'so weak and capricious, so reflecting on the Honour, Wisdom, and Justice of our Legislature ... that the Authors of it were very justly censured.'[17] Jeremy Collier also condemns the Lollards' pacifism, describing it as 'false doctrine'.[18] Thomas Carte, likewise, directly attacks the *Twelve Conclusions*, calling it 'a strong Conspiracy against the Doctrine, Discipline, and Revenues of the Church [which] contain[ed] scandalous Imputations upon the Clergy, together with several Conclusions destructive of the Hierarchy.'[19] Such ideas demonstrated that the Lollards were a dangerous, radical opposition who wanted to overturn not just the church but also the established order. ''Tis true, they had recover'd some ancient Doctrines, but then they were so unhappy [as] to blend these Truths with Capital Errors. Their Notion of Property and Church Power was wretched and dangerous ...They had no Regard for the Apostolic Succession of Priesthood ... and every honest Man might make himself a Magistrate.'[20]

Collier's treatment of John Oldcastle, taken principally from Walsingham's chronicle, centres on the rising. He tries to show how Oldcastle had sought to overturn society.[21] His coverage of the trial is brief, followed by an in-depth and critical account of the 1414 revolt. 'This Insurrection was no less than the Subversion of the Government. The Rebels intended to destroy the King, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, the Monks and Friers.'[22] If it had not been for the king shutting the city gates 'twas thought the *Londoners* would have re-inforced their Party to a very formidable Body.' The treatment differs little from that of Anglican writers opposed to Lollards, such as Thomas Mortimer, but was produced several decades earlier. Carte, like Collier, emphasizes the potential threat posed by the rising, declaring himself surprised by the sheer numbers Oldcastle was able to mobilise: 'prodigious numbers ... came from all parts of *England*, scarce any knowing what to do, but all ready to obey his orders.'[23] Collier had omitted Walsingham's unlikely estimate that there were fifty thousand

[16] Opposition to tithes was not mentioned in the *Twelve Conclusions*.
[17] Ibid., 38.
[18] Collier, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.598.
[19] Ibid., I.596.
[20] Ibid., 635. Emphasis added.
[21] Cited in Collier, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.632.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Carte, *General History*, II.676.

'servants and apprentices from London' ready to join the rising but Carte stated cautiously that 'some say there were that many'.[24]

These historians were suspected of harbouring Catholic sympathies and questions raised regarding their loyalty. Their attitudes to the pre-Reformation clergy are, accordingly, ambivalent. They support them for acting against dissent but feel that punishments were unnecessarily extreme. For Fiddes, the clergy was itself guilty of 'zeal', little better than enthusiasm. They were 'blameable indeed for disclosing too violent and unreasonable a Zeal against such Persons, whose Principles tended to a Reformation of Religion'.[25] Fiddes writes that persecution on the grounds of religious belief is wrong, but this is qualified: force was acceptable if the dissenters threatened social order. It should 'never … be used either for the Conviction of Men, or the Punishment of the Errors into which they may have fallen, provided such Errors do not affect the Peace or Well-being of civil Society.'[26] Collier writes in similar vein about Oldcastle's punishment for what were only subtle deviations from orthodoxy on matters of faith: 'persecuting these People to the Stake was carrying the Rigour of Discipline much too far. To drive them so close upon … so great a mystery [as the eucharist] was a very severe Usage.'[27]

Catholics

These historians were Protestants, however lukewarm their attachment to Protestantism. Eighteenth-century *Catholic* writing on the Lollards is scarcer. What there is, as one would expect, is yet more critical, placing even greater emphasis on the Lollards' disposition to propound treasonous ideas and foment revolution. Catholic writers, after all, felt no imperative to temper their invective on account of Lollards' Protestantism. Robert Manning mentions them in his 1720 defence of Catholicism, *Modern Controversy: Or, A Plain and rational Account of the Catholick Faith*.[28] The book comprises an explanation of Catholic doctrine and practices with an

[24] In 1340 the population of London was around 50,000.
http://www.demographia.com/dm-lon31.htm accessed 14th Nov. 2024.
[25] Fiddes, *Cardinal Wolsey*, 37.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Collier, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.635.
[28] Manning (1655-1731) was a half-Dutch Catholic priest who lived in England.

appendix intended to refute common criticisms of Catholicism. A section entitled 'Popery is not a bloody Religion' argues that attempts to depict Catholicism as inherently violent always resort to 'half a dozen old stories', such as the Gunpowder plot and 'Oates's Sham plot'.[29] Such hackneyed stories aimed to show that the Catholic church was instinctively cruel, imposing brutal punishments on members of groups like the Waldenses and Albigenses. However, Manning says, these groups deserved what they got, being guilty of both sedition and heresy, 'great disturbers of the Public peace, and pernicious Enemies of the *Church* as well as *State*.'[30] He puts the Lollards in the same category; they were instinctively seditious and responsible for inspiring the 1381 'Peasants' Revolt'. Wat Tyler, by Manning's account, was a Lollard: 'the Ring-leader of the English Lollards and the *Wyclifians*.'[31] John Oldcastle subsequently 'fell by the Hand of the common Hangman … for the same honourable Cause of *Rebellion* and *Treason*.'[32] Manning uses less nuanced arguments than Collier and Carte, but makes the same point, that the Lollards were revolutionaries who deserved a traitor's death. The pre-Reformation church had been a force for good, bringing about a well-ordered society – rebellion was much less common before the Reformation.[33] Manning does not credit the Lollards for pre-empting the Reformation; for him 'our beautiful reformation, in all its three changes, was Creature of the state.'[34]

John Milner summarises Wyclif's ideas as 'the most seditious and incendiary doctrines that ever were broached in these kingdoms.'[35] Milner (1752–1826) was an English Catholic bishop of the Transalpine, pro-Roman, persuasion. He was a controversialist, making enemies both among Anglicans and fellow Catholics for various 'spirited attacks'.[36] *Letters to a Prebendary* (1800) was a defence of Catholicism written in response to a *Reflections on Popery* by one Reverend Sturges, a prebendary of Winchester, itself a riposte to Milner's earlier book *Survey of the*

[29] Robert Manning, *Modern controversy: or, a plain and rational account of the Catholick faith*, 1720, 'Appendix', xlviii.
[30] Ibid., xlix.
[31] Ibid., l.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., xlv-xlvi.
[34] Ibid., 51.
[35] John Milner, *Letters to a Prebendary: being an answer to reflections on popery by the Rev. J. Sturges*, 1800, 70.
[36] J. Champ, 'John Milner', *ODNB*.

Antiquities of Winchester (1798) which, despite its innocuous title, included a 'trenchant attack' on the strongly anti-Catholic former bishop of Winchester, Benjamin Hoadly.[37] The Lollard material in *Letters to a Prebendary* appears in Letter IV, '*Persecution'*, where Milner, like Manning, defends the Catholic church against the accusation of promoting violence, or, that it was 'a sanguinary system, supported by swords and muskets, and surrounded with racks, gibbets, and fires [which accusation] has been chiefly successful in inflaming the minds of Englishmen with hatred against it and its professors: a hatred which they do not entertain for the unbaptized Quaker, or the antichristian Socinian.'[38]

This myth was popularized by 'the lying Acts & Monuments of John Fox, with large wooden prints of men and women encompassed with faggots and flames in every leaf of them.'[39] Catholic apologists regularly take a strongly critical line about *A&M* and its baleful influence. Richard Fiddes writes that Foxe was wrong to dignify some of the Lollards with the name of martyrs 'because their Sufferings may … proceed from an erroneous Persuasion.'[40] Foxe 'sometimes makes Martyrs and Confessors of Men who not only maintained erroneous Doctrines, but who gave just Occasion of Scandal by Expressing an irregular and indiscreet Zeal in Defence of them.'[41] In the same way, Jeremy Collier criticizes Foxe's material on Willam Thorp: 'However, after all this furious Zeal, false Reasoning and intemperate Railing, Fox gives Thorp the Character of a good Man and blessed Servant of God.'[42] For Milner, Foxe's 'blind zeal' against Popery cause him to 'overlook every consideration of … public benefit, in order to vilify the [Catholic] church.'[43] He notes that 'abridgements of this inflammatory work are annually issued from the London presses, under the title of *The Book of Martyrs*.[44]

Milner launches a frontal assault on Wyclif and Lollardy, making the unsupportable accusation that their tenets 'tend[ed] to the destruction of all religion, natural as well

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 57.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 37.
[41] Ibid., 38.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Milner, *Prebendary*, 72-73.
[44] Ibid., 57.

as revealed, and to general robbery, massacre and anarchy.'[45] The treatment of Wyclif by the church authorities proved that Catholicism was not instinctively a persecuting church: he had been left unmolested despite the dangerousness of his ideas. Milner attacks Wyclif's ideas about the removal of sinful clergy, dominion in grace, and suggestion that tithes should be only alms and includes a rag-bag of other ideas credited, often falsely, to Wyclif: ideas 'tending to the destruction of all religion … and to general robbery, massacre, and anarchy; such as, that God ought to obey the Devil; that all human actions happen by inevitable necessity; that all literary institutions, such as colleges & universities, are diabolical; that it is unlawful to pray in churches or to keep holy the Lord's Day.'[46] For all that Wyclif's true beliefs were hard to pin down, Milner's list contains some which are self-evidently ludicrous.[47]

Like Manning, Milner accuses the Lollards of involvement in the 1381 rising: indeed, for him it was a direct result of Lollard teaching. 'These rebellions, Sir, which nearly proved fatal to the kingdom, are as evidently traced to the revolutionary and equalizing doctrines of Wycliff and his followers as an effect is to a cause in any other instance whatsoever' and 'produced the rank harvest of insurrection, plunder, murder, and civil war, with which … the reign of Richard II was disgraced.'[48] John Ball, whom Milner describes as 'a professed Lollard priest' preached a sermon laced with Lollard tenets on Blackheath, fomenting the rising.[49] The 1414 Oldcastle rising could have been as serious as that of 1381, according to Milner, who repeated the story from Walsingham that the Lollards fixed notices on church doors in London stating that they had a hundred thousand men ready to take arms.[50] Oldcastle himself he describes as possessing 'the delirium of fanaticism', repeating Walsingham's allegation that he died prophesying that he might rise again after three days.[51] Milner says that it was only in response to these uprisings that the government was compelled to enact *Heretico*

[45] Milner, *Letters*, 71.
[46] Ibid.
[47] The more colourful of these are adapted from some of the propositions condemned by the Council of Constance, though the last of them is not among the forty-five on the Council's list.
[48] Milner, *Letters*, 72.
[49] Ibid., 73.
[50] Walsingham, *Chronica Maiora*.
[51] Milner, *Letters*, 74.

Comburendo, 'without any solicitation from either the pope or the clergy,'[52] whereas in fact the measure had been passed thirteen years before Oldcastle's rising. Milner hyperbolically concludes that it was only thanks to *Heretico Comburendo* 'that a single acre of land has been left in the realm for your support, or that of any other clergyman.'[53] For Milner, the persecution of Lollards was a necessary consequence of their dangerous ideas and revolutionary tendencies.

Milner, like Manning, and the non-jurors, focuses on Lollardy as a disruptive movement dedicated to the promotion of sedition: uniquely, though Milner's writing focuses most directly upon Lollardy's levelling tendencies. He describes Wyclif's ideas as 'equalising' and says that subsequent popular uprisings, 'are also to be ascribed to the pestiferous doctrines of these democratical reformers.'[54] Milner finds that the most dangerous aspect of Lollardy was its threat to the established order of society, encouraging dangerous democratic aspirations among the lower strata of society.

By way of contrast, the Irish Catholic priest Arthur O'Leary, writing at about the same time, displays an Enlightenment attitude of toleration, when mentioning the Lollards in his *Essay on Toleration, or, Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (1780).[55] This was 'one of the most radical and compelling statements in favour of religious and political forbearance published in late eighteenth-century Ireland.'[56] O'Leary cites the Lollards as one among many groups unreasonably persecuted for their beliefs. He criticises rulers down the ages who have 'made trifles capital' and 'enacted laws which torture the body for errors of the mind.'[57] The Lollards were another group who 'gave umbrage to the civil power by their seditious tenets, and insurrections.'[58] 'The fagot did not blaze in England until the Lollards began to overturn the state.'[59] The combination of immorality, speculative opinion and sedition always drew the ire of the magistrate but

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Arthur O'Leary, 'An Essay on Toleration', 321-389, in Arthur O'Leary, *Miscellaneous tracts on several interesting subjects*, 1791.
[56] J. Kelly, 'Arthur O'Leary', *ODNB*.
[57] O'Leary, 'Toleration', 364.
[58] Ibid., 367.
[59] Ibid.

'Heresy is of too indeterminate a signification, to become the object of legal vengeance.'[60] 'The response to the tract was overwhelmingly positive.'[61] In an exercise which sometimes feels like compiling a catalogue of rancour and bile, it is refreshing to come across a book like this, though it is, sadly, very much the exception.

5.2 Evangelical and Nonconformist writers

Susan Royal showed how evangelical Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, led by John Foxe, wrote about the Lollards; rather than downplaying their more radical ideas to make them acceptable for the mainstream Church, they absorbed and re-presented their radical godly notions whilst seeking to diminish their reputation as schismatics. This was a 'process of appropriation' which recognized that the Lollards' ideas were 'on the right track' but incomplete.[62] Royal found that any consensus broke down in the chaotic climate of the seventeenth century, a time when 'competing religious groups mutually claimed the Lollards as forebears.'[63] This section examines how the same themes can be found in the writing of evangelicals and nonconformists at the beginning of the following century, a time when the religious landscape in England continued to be fissiparous. Nonconformists in search of foundation stories still attempted to claim Wyclif and the Lollards as spiritual forebears; we shall examine the heroic attempts of the Baptist Thomas Crosby to show that they were proto-Baptists. The cruelty of the Roman Church, was, of course, a theme common to Protestant writers of all stripes. Some evangelical writers sought to prove that their actions were illegitimate by showing that they lacked a legal basis, never having been authorised by the House of Commons. Royal noted how evangelical writers shared the opinion that the English Reformation was incomplete, had never completed the task of restoring apostolic purity which Wyclif and the Lollards had initiated. This view remained widely held among nonconformists in the eighteenth century, now accompanied by nervous concern about back-sliding, the rolling-back of reform and creeping Romanisation of the Anglican church. The Lollards represented

[60] Ibid., 369.
[61] *ODNB*.
[62] Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation: History, radicalism and John Foxe*, Manchester University Press, 2020, 211-212.
[63] Ibid., 215.

authentic Christian principles and showed the way to reform; however, this process had not been completed and now was threatened by reactionary forces.

Premature Reformation

Such attitudes are dramatically displayed in the historical writing of John Oldmixon (1672/3-1742), a feisty and prolific whig polemicist and historian. We have encountered him already as one of the principal authors of the 1706 *Complete History of England*, in which he'd written in a neutral style about the Lollards.[64] However, Oldmixon had received a 'whig and protestant inheritance' from his family and had Presbyterian inclinations.[65] He produced histories of the Stuart and Tudor dynasties, *The History of England, during the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (1730) and *The History of England during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth* (1739). Both books include introductory sections summarizing earlier controversies over church governance which Oldmixon felt were foundational for the understanding of later history and in both he discusses the Lollards.[66] For him, the Church of England had never been properly reformed along the Presbyterian lines which he believed Wyclif and his followers had sought: 'the Reformation which was begun in England in the reign of Henry VIII, was not the same that Wickliff aim'd at.'[67] Oldmixon is unusual among eighteenth-century historians in taking an interest in the minutiae of Wycliffite doctrines, here listing thirty-seven, those he thought most pertinent for reformed churches of his day, though as he does not cite a source it is unclear where the list is derived from. He draws particular attention to ideas which had never been put properly into practice, particularly relating to Presbyterian church governance.[68] Wyclif had believed, he says, 'that in the time of the Apostles there were

[64] See p.35.
[65] *ODNB,* 'John Oldmixon'.
[66] John Oldmixon, *The History of England during the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart*, 1730, 1: 'all the Troubles and Misfortunes during [these] Reigns … were owing solely to the Spirit that animated this Controversy.'
[67] John Oldmixon, *The History of England during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth*, 1739, xi.
[68] Oldmixon, *Henry VIII,* iii.

only Two Orders, Priests and Deacons; and that a Bishop does not differ from a Priest.'[69]

He provides similar lists of the tenets of early Lollards like Sawtrey and Purvey,[70] contrasting their purity with the degraded practices of his own time, showing that the modern church was only partly reformed. Sawtrey's refusal to worship the Cross, for instance, displayed a more reformed attitude than that of the contemporary Anglican church, 'I leave it to the Readers to consider, whether the Cross in Baptism, Croziers, &c. are as much in a Reformation, as this article of Mr. Sawtree's, 300 Years ago.'[71] Oldmixon hypothesizes that the Lollards nearly brought about a fuller reformation of the church in 1395, when they presented their *Twelve Conclusions* to Parliament: a time when, he suggests, rather optimistically, that 'these Principles of a thorough Reformation were known and embrac'd by almost the Body of the Kingdom.'[72] The second of the *Conclusions*, which is critical of the hierarchy ('it is lamentable ... to see the Bishops mock and play with the Holie Ghost in making of their orders'), allowed Oldmixon to conclude that the reformation had not been taken as far as its Lollard authors had wanted.[73] In the introduction to his earlier history of the Stuarts, Oldmixon had declared that the Lollards would have felt that the church was not wholly reformed in the eighteenth century and that their spiritual descendants, 'the Reformed' continued to 'strenuously oppos[e] the retaining of any Semblance of the Papal hierarchy, Forms and Ceremonies', insisting upon a 'thorough Reformation, and a Conformity to the Protestant Churches abroad.'[74]

According to Oldmixon, the English Reformation was 'almost entirely of English growth', not inspired by Continental reformers but by 'Ministers of the Gospel, and Martyrs ... 150 Years before Cranmer's Time'.[75] This made it all the more puzzling to him that modern churchmen would seek to undermine the reforms:

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[69] Number 12 on Oldmixon's list (*Henry VIII*, ii). This is not, however, among the 45 conclusions condemned at Constance.
[70] Oldmixon, *Henry VIII*, vii. Oldmixon makes the same point in his *History of England during the reigns of the Stuarts*, 2.
[71] Oldmixon, *Henry VIII*, ix.
[72] Ibid., x.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Oldmixon, *Stuarts*, 2.
[75] Oldmixon, *Henry VIII*, xi.

> It is not strange that the Prelates and Clergy in the Depths of Popish Darkness should set their whole Souls on the Mammon of Unrighteousness, Lordly Pride, Filthy Lucre, Vain Pomps, Idolatrous and Superstitious Rites and Idle and Fanatical Ceremonies corrupting the Purity and Sincerity of True Religion … but it is very strange that Men, pretending to be Presbyters of the Church of England, a Protestant and Reform'd Church should so doat on such Abominations, as to labour to have them restor'd, and to have the chaste Spouse of Christ again defil'd with the Whorish Corruptions of the Heresies of Rome.[76]

Oldmixon contrasts the godliness of Wycliffite and Lollard tenets with the corruptions and errors of the church of the time. His tone is strongly anticlerical, and particularly critical of the monastic establishment. Oldmixon applies this analysis as a warning for his own time when the progress which had been made was in danger of being reversed or watered down by the return of Catholic trappings. Indeed, for him the process of reformation within the English church had never fully been completed.

The Independent minister Daniel Neal wrote his *History of the Puritans* (1732) to support the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts[77] and ecclesiastical liberty 'within their just and reasonable Bounds.'[78] The book was influential, remaining in print until the 1860s.[79] Neal opens his account of Puritan history with John Wyclif, not just 'the Morning-Star of the Reformation',[80] but also the direct ancestor of Puritans and Presbyterians. 'He maintained … most of those Points by which the PURITANS were afterwards distinguished … in the Sacrament of *Orders* there ought to be but two Degrees, *Presbyters*, or *Bishops* and *Deacons*.'[81] Wyclif 'was a wonderful Man for the Times in which he lived, which were overspread with the thickest Darkness of Antichristian Idolatry' stating that 'He preached and published the very same Doctrines for Substance that afterwards obtained at the Reformation.'[82]

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[76] Ibid.
[77] L.Okie, 'Daniel Neal', *ODNB*.
[78] Daniel Neal, *The history of the Puritans, or, Protestant non-conformists, … with an account of their principles*, 1732, xi.
[79] Laird Okie, 'Daniel Neal and the "Puritan Revolution"', *Church History* 55.4, (1986), 456. 'To study Neal's *History* is to gain insight into the historical and political ideology of early eighteenth-century Dissent.'
[80] Neal, *History of the Puritans*, 3.
[81] Ibid., 4.
[82] Ibid., 5.

Daniel Disney shared this opinion that the Church was incompletely reformed.[83] Disney, a dissenting minister from Lincolnshire, produced *A Compendious History of the Rise and Progress of the Reformation of the Church Here in England from Popish Darkness and Superstition* in 1715. Disney, like Oldmixon, was alarmed by the drift back towards Catholicism which he felt had been continuing since the Restoration. In October 1660, Charles II had issued the Worcester House Declaration which, if adopted, would have established a church system of 'primitive episcopacy' closer to Presbyterianism.[84] To nonconformist regret the proposals were not ratified by the Commons.[85] A feeling of disappointment was widespread, leaving, in the words of Barry Till, 'unfulfilled hopes … for the rest of the century',[86] and, indeed, into the next. Disney calls for a union of Protestant churches which would move the Church of England in the direction of Presbyterianism, much-needed according to Disney, as the Church of England had never been properly reformed: 'there is abundant Testimony to evince, that what was then done was not designed to be the utmost Boundary of the Reformation.'[87]

It is surprising, then, how little Disney's *History of the Reformation* mentions the Lollards, who would have furnished examples of godly piety seeking as they had for Oldmixon. He places them in the pantheon of Continental reforming groups like the Albigenses who had opposed the evils of Rome, but states that England was particularly blessed, because it was here that Wyclif arose and 'sounded the Alarm of Reformation louder than any that had been before him [and] preached and wrote

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[83] Several generations of the Disney family, of Swinderby in Lincolnshire, were landowners and clergymen, their moves from Anglicanism to non-conformity and back demonstrating the sometimes-blurred lines of clerical adherence at this time. Daniel Disney (1656-1734) founded a dissenting chapel. His son John, born in 1677, was educated in a dissenting academy, but 'betook myself to the Church of England upon principle and conviction'. John's grandson, also John, (1746-1816), like his great-grandfather Daniel, was a nonconformist, one of the 'Feathers Tavern petitioners' agitating for the repeal of the requirement for clerical subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. In 1782 he quit the Church of England and espoused Unitarianism.

[84] Barry Till, 'The Worcester House Declaration and the Restoration of the Church of England', *Historical Research* 70.172, (1997), 218.

[85] It is noteworthy that Samuel Pepys approved of the proposals, writing on 30th October 1660 that 'we did read over the King's declaration in matters of religion, which is come out to-day, which is very well penned, I think to the satisfaction of most people.'
https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1660/10/30/ accessed 14th Nov. 2024.

[86] Till, 'Worcester House Declaration', 203.

[87] Daniel Disney, *A compendious history of the rise and progress of the reformation of the church here in England, from popish darkness and superstition*, 1715, preface (a).4.

against the Villanies of the Popish Clergy'.[88] Disney states that Wyclif's doctrines were disseminated by Jan Huss 'into Germany' as the 'Morning Star in the midst of a cloud.'[89] In his 'compendious' history of the Reformation, though, the Lollards receive scarcely a reference and a writer not afraid to utilise extravagant polemic in describing the pre-Reformation church overlooks the opportunity to portray the English clergy as antichristian for their persecution of the Lollards.

Thomas Crosby

John Oldmixon and Daniel Neal found Presbyterian ideas in Wyclif's writing, but Thomas Crosby, a deacon in the Baptist church, made the most ambitious attempt to claim the Lollards and Wyclif as forebears. In *The history of the English Baptists* (1738), Crosby makes convoluted attempts to demonstrate that they were opposed to infant baptism. He is keen to recruit the Lollards as antecedents of Baptists, but cannot prevent doubts seeping into his argument: 'Whether they rejected the baptism of infants or not, has been doubted by some; but that they generally did so, is more than probable, from what is left on record.'[90] John Foxe did not help matters by editing his account to make it more acceptable to his contemporaries. According to Crosby, William Sawtrey, the first Lollard to be burned, might have been a Baptist, because he lived in Norwich where the Lollards were 'generally of that opinion',[91] but, Crosby suggests, Foxe air-brushed this out of his account. *A&M* reproduced eight charges against Sawtrey, not including any reference to the rejection of infant baptism.[92] For Crosby, Foxe elected to omit charges detrimental to the reputation of his martyrs, as this would have been at the time, infant baptism being a tenet of the established church. Foxe's editorial process, according to Crosby, involved eliminating the taint of Anabaptism from the Lollards – and it is undoubtedly true that this carried negative connotations in the sixteenth century which had largely disappeared by the eighteenth. Foxe also, according to Crosby, attempted to clear the Lollards of the

[88] Ibid., 9-10. Disney makes the clever observation that the very name Lutterworth means 'the pure Word'. Unfortunately, this is not true. The name of the town is thought to derive from Anglo-Saxon and mean, mundanely, 'an enclosure beside the River Swift.'
www.localhistories.org/lutterworth.html accessed 14th Nov 2024.
[89] Ibid., 10.
[90] Ibid., 23.
[91] Ibid., 21.
[92] *A&M*, 636.

charge of opposing infant baptism; he 'supposes that they were only slanders cast upon them by their persecutors.'[93] Crosby's summary of Lollard history is sketchy and omits some of the more important aspects. Again, the most notable omission is John Oldcastle, whose martial character does not chime with Crosby's efforts to find Baptist antecedents in Lollardy. Belief in infant baptism was not raised during Oldcastle's lengthy interrogation.

Crosby states that Lollards were falsely accused of denying the efficacy of *all* baptism because they believed that it is Christ who saves us, not water, and were condemned for rejecting the baptism of infants as needless ceremony.[94] In fact, Wyclif and the fifteenth-century Lollards rarely included infant baptism in their lists of objections to church practices, being more concerned about the eucharist, pilgrimages and confession. It was not among the *Twelve Conclusions* of 1395, was not mentioned in Oldcastle's trial, and was not included in the forty-five errors of which Wyclif was accused at Constance.[95] Wyclif and his followers did sometimes deny the absolute necessity of baptism, but this position was of marginal importance by comparison with the strength of their assault on the theology of the eucharist.[96] Crosby's valiant attempt to prove that eighteenth-century Baptists could trace a direct line of doctrinal descent from Wycliffe and the Lollards failed simply because the evidence for the case does not exist; in fact, he found himself unable to avoid undermining his own thesis by virtue of the strength of the counter-arguments he felt compelled to include. It would surely have been easier for him simply to exclude the Lollard material, or to consider them as forebears of the wider non-conforming movement. That he felt it necessary to try shows the strength of the perceived need among newer denominations to find worthy historical antecedents. It was with some relief that Crosby moved on to examination of sixteenth-century dissenters where 'I found their principles about baptism more fairly stated.'[97]

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[93] Crosby, *Baptists*, 24.
[94] Ibid, 24-25.
[95] Anne Hudson noted that baptism was a concern only to the 'more radical' Lollards 'who disputed the need for infant baptism.' *PR*, 291.
[96] David Coley, 'Baptism as Eucharist: Orthodoxy, Wycliffism, and the Sacramental Utterance in Saint Erkenwald', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 107.3, 2008, 333.
[97] Crosby, *Baptists*, 25.

The Lollards' clerical enemies

All writers in this tradition, of course, are stridently condemnatory of the Roman Church and English clerical establishment. They emphasise the idolatry which besmirched the Catholic church. Arthur Young's *An Historical Dissertation on Idolatrous Corruptions in Religion* (1734), whilst mostly concerned with non-Christian religion, 'the error-strewn religions of idolatry',[98] also discusses the Lollard persecution. The Roman church itself had succumbed to idolatry, fallen into the Devil's snare, with its 'Incense and Perfumes' and in due course had adopted all the idolatrous practices which Christianity was supposed to have dispelled.[99] By the medieval period, idolatry, in the form of image-worship, had become commonplace.[100] John Wyclif was the first to scrutinize these practices and his ideas achieved such traction that before long he was 'at the Head of a Multitude of Followers, rejecting the Invocation of Saints and Adoration of Images, as open Idolatry and Apostasy from the Christian Faith.'[101] Soon his followers were so numerous 'not only among the inferior Sort of People, but those of Quality and Learning' as to alarm the ecclesiastical authorities.[102] Daniel Disney goes even further, condemning the Roman church in such apocalyptic terms as to make it appear unrecognizable, more akin to a cabalistic cult: 'The Worship of our only blessed Lord and Saviour was lost in a depraved mixture of *Jewish* and Pagan Rites' with 'some Additions from the *Alchoran'* including 'Thousands of Magical Tricks and Exorcisms, Charms and Amulets and other Diobolical [sic] Fopperies.'[103] Transubstantiation, according to Disney, was a 'monstrous Figment.' They were not of God but from pursuit of 'filthy Lucre.'[104] Daniel Neal is another who blurs the boundaries between Catholicism and heathenism. The burning of dissidents was an 'Italian Drug from Rome' which the clergy had planted in the Church of England and 'the Papists learn'd it from the Heathen Emperors; and the most zealous Protestants of all Nations, have taken it up

[98] Ibid.
[99] Arthur Young, 1734, *An Historical Dissertation on Idolatrous Corruptions in Religion from the Beginning of the World*, II.258.
[100] Ibid., II.294.
[101] Ibid., II.295.
[102] Ibid., II.297.
[103] Disney, *Reformation of the Church*, 5-6.
[104] Ibid.

from them. Conscience can't be convinc'd by Fines or Imprisonments, or by Fire and Faggot.'[105] Neal rather exaggerates the perfidy of the clerical establishment, who, he maintains, 'according to the Genius of the Popish Religion, exercised numberless Cruelties upon the People. If any man denied them any degree of Respect … he was immediately suspected of Heresy, imprisoned and it may be put to Death.'[106] According to Neal, dissenters were 'his Majesty's most dutiful and loyal Subjects'[107] so it is not surprising to see that his history fails to mention the 1414 rising, and does not make much of the Lollards' role as ancestors of later dissent, tainted as they were by the tincture of rebellion.

Neal discusses the statutes for the suppression of Lollards, contending that *Heretico Comburendo* had never been properly authorised. If it could be shown that the persecution had not been legally authorized, that would prove the perfidy of the clergy and removes any culpability from the rest of the commonwealth. 'I find no mention in any of these Acts, of a Writ or Warrant from the King … By this Law, the King's Subjects were … left to the Mercy of the Bishops, and might, under Suspicion of Heresy, be imprison'd and put to Death, without … Trial by a Jury.'[108] Arthur Young, who had a law degree from Cambridge, goes into this in much greater depth in *Idolatrous Corruptions in Religion* (1734).[109] He argues that neither the 1382 *Heresy Act* nor *Heretico Comburendo* (1401) had been approved by the Commons. Rather, both were ordinances declared by the king and House of Lords, which meant that the measures did not reflect the will of representatives of the people. Young does not, however, make overt the conclusion to which this argument obviously leads, that the persecution of Lollards was only ever sanctioned by the clerical establishment.

People had been executed in England for matters of belief prior to the passing of *Heretico Comburendo* in 1401, condemned under common law for apostasy rather than heresy.[110] This state of legal affairs was unsatisfactory from the clergy's point of

[105] Ibid.
[106] Neal, *History of the Puritans*, 7-8.
[107] Ibid., x.
[108] Ibid., 7.
[109] Young, *Idolatrous Corruptions*, 302-316.
[110] Ibid., 302. Heresy then, Young says, quoting Stillingfleet, was 'the same [as] renouncing Baptism, or turning Jew or Turk, or using Sorcery.'

view when confronted by a full-scale outbreak of heresy, as they lacked the authority to imprison people under common law: they had to request permission from the Crown each time they wanted to imprison a heretic. Young argues that they realized they needed a new law to grant them additional authority but knew that they would not get it through the Commons. At the parliament of 1382, 'they resolv'd to bring their Design about by an Ordinance of Parliament, ordain'd by the King and Lords' so that they could require sheriffs to arrest heretical preachers. The measure was passed into law as the *Heresy Act* of 1382, but repealed in the same year due to claims it had not been passed by the Commons.[111] So 'the Bishops Power of convicting for Heresy [was] left as ineffectual as before.'[112] 'This was no Statute, not having the Consent of the Commons.'[113] The situation was repeated in 1401 when Henry IV was king. This time the clergy's aim was to pass *Heretico Comburendo* into law, but, again knowing that they would need to bypass the Commons, resorted to their established tactics and 'effected their End by an Ordinance of the King and Lords.'[114] Young wanted to clear the Commons from the taint of having been involved in passing an Act which permitted the burning of heretics, and to demonstrate its illegitimacy. He says that 'there is not the least Hint that the Commons ever consented to it.'[115] The legislation gave the clergy the power to imprison people for heresy, which, Young says with understatement, 'was very inconvenient to the Lollards.'[116] Demonstrating just how inconvenient it was, he details the burnings of Sawtrey and Badby. 'After this the Spirit of Popery, not Christianity, was to be seen in the Zeal of the Enemies to Lollardy.'[117] Despite the increase in persecution, however, the measure did not have the desired effect, as it merely drew attention to Lollard teaching, gaining them more adherents: 'Spectators inquired into the Foundation of those Principles in behalf of which they saw Persons

[111] P.R. Cavill, 'Heresy, Law and the State: Forfeiture in Late and Early Modern England', *The English Historical Review* 129.537, (2014), 275.
[112] Young, *Idolatrous Corruptions*, II. 311.
[113] Ibid., 309.
[114] Ibid., 322.
[115] Ibid., 326.
[116] Ibid., 330.
[117] Ibid., 331.

cheerfully suffer; and when Truth was presented to them, they could not but be charm'd with it.'[118]

Young's account is unusual in that it continues its discussion of Lollard history beyond the failure of the Oldcastle rising all the way to the sixteenth century. Most writers say little about the period after 1414, but for Young the following century was a time of continuing growth of Protestant teaching across the country, which kept up pressure for reform, accompanied by sporadic periods of persecution. He ascribes the lull in persecution during the reigns of Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III to the distraction of the civil wars which 'skreened them from Barbarity and Destruction.'[119] Their increasing numbers helped as well, as they often were gathered in sympathetic communities. However, the persecution increased during the reign of Henry VII, when 'Fires were almost continually lighted during his whole Reign.'[120] Even those who abjured were humiliated, being compelled to wear badges and make public confessions: 'some were condemned to publick Disciplines, and Fustigations.' These barbarities were even more common in the reign of Henry VIII: until the 'blessed Reformation from Popery', which Young saw as being the moment when 'the Court at last f[e]ll in with the general Bent of the Nation.'[121]

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 343.
[120] Ibid., 345.
[121] Ibid., 348.

6 The Eighteenth-Century Historiography of Wyclif

6.1 The seventeenth-century debate – Fuller and Heylyn

John Wyclif's theological and social ideas have been debated heatedly for over six centuries. Throughout that time, those of an evangelical or nonconformist bent have depicted him as a heroic reformer, battling the many abuses in the church, and those with traditional, establishment or high church mindsets have seen him as a dangerous prophet of misrule and instability. Every shade of opinion can be found among eighteenth-century commentators. However, Wyclif was difficult for historians to get properly to grips with. It was easy to praise or condemn the Lollards en masse; they could be painted in primary colours as martyrs or rebels. Wyclif's personality and ideas were more complex. One problem for his enthusiasts was that he was not martyred, or even made to suffer much, for his beliefs. Catholic writers would gleefully point out that he was no martyr and certainly no saint. He was not even obviously heroic, though some writers would portray him as such. His career involved a series of tetchy arguments with the authorities, and it is hard to avoid the suspicion that his crusade against the church establishment had its genesis in thwarted ambition, another point repeatedly levelled against him by critical historians. His doctrines seemed complicated and archaic in the eighteenth century, many having their roots in arcane scholastic theology. No-one could even properly agree on a dependable list of his ideas, and to further complicate matters, those ideas evolved over the course of his career. All the lists of Wycliffite doctrines had been compiled by his enemies: monastic chroniclers, the Papacy, church prosecutors and the Carmelite Thomas Netter.[1] Scarcely any of Wyclif's Latin works were available to historians, most manuscripts being held in continental libraries. Eighteenth-century writers had access to none of these. There *was* a body of Lollard tracts and sermons in English, most of which were attributed to Wyclif, but such attributions are thought to be false, these works having been produced by his early followers.[2] While they are sometimes a reasonable

[1] Margaret Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', in Margaret Aston, *Lollards & Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, Hambledon Press, 1984, 264.

[2] Christina von Nolcken noted that 'most, if not all, of the vernacular writings that have reached us were the work of Wyclif's followers' though they often draw heavily upon Wyclif's Latin works. Nolcken, 'Notes on Lollard Citation of John Wyclif's Writings', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39.2 (1988), 412. Anne Hudson, writing about English Wycliffite texts attributed to Wyclif, said that 'It is not clear that any of these

approximation to his teaching, it is inevitable that later writers modified and augmented his doctrines, often in a more radical direction. In short, Wyclif was, then as now, a difficult figure to write about. It is striking that no significant biography of him has been published since Herbert Workman's in 1926.[3] These pitfalls, however, did not prevent many eighteenth-century historians and polemicists writing about him extensively. When reading this material it is necessary to be mindful of all these difficulties, and also the layers of mythology which had grown up around his life and opinions since the fifteenth century.

Thomas Fuller and Peter Heylyn wrote influential works of Reformation history in the middle of the seventeenth century, anticipating arguments which would continue throughout the eighteenth. Fuller produced his *Church-History of Britain* in 1655, a work characterized by moderation; so much so that he was criticized for not taking sides.[4] According to John Drabble, 'The moderation which pervaded his work was … a combination of discretion and charity. … Above all it was an eminently sensible presentation of the past.'[5] Certainly, it remains easy to read. Fuller even includes 'jests' and light asides, rare leaven in ecclesiastical history of the time.[6] Fuller's contemporary Peter Heylyn, on the other hand, was a humourless Laudian; for Drabble he was a 'narrow ideologue who appraised all men, past or present, by Laudian standards'[7] whilst Joseph Preston observed that he 'accepted the proposition that historical writing is a partisan activity, and … one's opponents are assumed to be in error.'[8] Heylyn's history of the Reformation, *Ecclesia restaurata*, begins in the sixteenth century. However, provoked by

attributions has any force.' 'Wyclif and the English Language', in *Wyclif in his Times*, edited by Antony Kenny, Oxford University Press, 1986, 90. For Margaret Aston 'It remains to be proved that Wycliffe wrote anything in English.' 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 260.

[3] Wyclif's *ODNB* entry, by Anne Hudson and Antony Kenny, notes that 'H. B. Workman's biography published in 1926 remained the most extensive at the end of the twentieth century' and that 'A full modern account, relating individual works to their contemporary context, and exploring Wyclif's political involvement, remains a desideratum.' A. Hudson & A. Kenny, 'John Wyclif', *ODNB*.

[4] Preston, Joseph H., 'English Ecclesiastical Historians and the Problem of Bias', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32.2 (1971), 206.

[5] John Drabble, 'Thomas Fuller, Peter Heylyn and the English Reformation', *Renaissance et Reforme* 3.2. (1979), 182.

[6] Though, according to Drabble, these stylistic touches caused Fuller's work to fall out of favour as not showing the requisite gravity. Bishop William Warburton referred to him as 'Fuller the Jester.' He was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by Charles Lamb. 'Thomas Fuller', 182, fn.

[7] Drabble, 'Thomas Fuller', 175.

[8] Preston, 'English Ecclesiastical Historians', 208.

Fuller's suggestion that Laudian policies had given rise to the civil wars, he produced a book directly responding to Fuller's *Church-History*, *Examen Historicum: Or a Discovery and Examination of the Mistakes, Falsities and Defects, In some Modern History, containing Necessary Animadversions on the Church-History of Britain* (1659), which contains (among other things) a critique of Fuller's material on Wyclif.

Historical work from this era regularly cites the interventions of providence in directing human affairs, and so, for Thomas Fuller, Wyclif's opinions were propagated by the grace of God, who would not suffer the truth to be permanently hidden. We must attribute their spread 'to Divine providence … and to the nature of truth it self, which though for a time, violently suppress'd, will seasonably make its own free, and clear passage into the world.'[9] Fuller describes Wyclif as a 'Saint', an epithet which would attract the scorn of Heylyn and later Catholic writers, but also, characteristically balanced, notes drawbacks: 'He was a man, and so subject to errour, living in a dark Age.'[10] Attempting to arrive at an accurate list of Wyclif's opinions, Fuller rightly notes, is no easy task, as 'we meet with much variety in the accounting of them,'[11] bemoaning, in one of the light-hearted asides which would make his work unpopular in the eighteenth century, '[it is] as if Wicliffe's Opinions, were like the Stones on Salisbury-plain, falsely reported, that no two can count them alike.'[12] Fuller reproduces the list collected by Thomas Netter, Wyclif's 'greatest adversary', whilst expressing regret that the originals were not available.

Fuller sets out to rebut the principal criticisms levelled against Wyclif. Nicholas Harpsfield, in the sixteenth century, had charged Wyclif with having fomented the uprising of 1381, or at least of having 'sounded the first trumpet thereto', with his controversial idea that 'dominion is founded in grace' being 'the whet-stone of this sedition.'[13] Such slanders, Fuller says, have been attracted by Christians since Jesus himself was labelled King of the Jews. He gives a list of proofs that the suggestion was false: Wyclif was not charged at the time; John Ball was not accused of Wycliffism; the rebels had attacked the palace of John of Gaunt who was Wyclif's patron; modern Protestants 'abominate these

[9] Thomas Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain*, 1655, IV.129.
[10] Ibid. John Foxe had also acknowledged error in Wyclif, noting that 'some blemishes perhaps may be noted' in his opinions. (*A&M*, 544). Fuller goes a little further.
[11] Ibid., 130.
[12] Ibid., 131.
[13] Ibid., 141.

Rebels their levelling, and ignorant principles', etc. He accuses those who made this suggestion of hypocrisy: 'how many ingenuous Papists can charge Wicliffe of rebellion, in maintaining Dominion to be founded in grace, when the Grandees of their own Religion … maintain that Dominion is so founded in grace [in the Pope] that a King … may lawfully be deposed and murdered.'[14] Robert Persons, the Jesuit writer and critic of Wyclif[15] had 'snarled' that Wyclif was never made to suffer for his faith, and that John Foxe was therefore wrong to call him a saint: however, for Fuller, the very fact that he was not persecuted 'amounteth to little less then [sic] a miracle,' attributing his deliverance to God's providence.[16] Besides, concludes Fuller, the fact of his bones being subsequently disinterred and burnt means that his body was 'Martyred as to shame, though not to pain.'[17]

In his *Animadversions* on Fuller's *Church History*, Peter Heylyn responds with a Laudian view, a critical assessment which would be cited regularly by other hostile historians. Heylyn's critique is unsophisticated, largely limited to accusing Fuller of overpraising Wyclif and concealing the seditious nature of Wyclif's ideas, with no discussion of Wyclif's theology. For Heylyn, Fuller was so addicted to Wyclif and his followers that he 'Christen[ed] their Opinions by the name of Gospel.'[18] Heylyn's central critique was that because of the revolutionary nature of Wyclif's ideas they were 'contrary to peace and civil Order, … inconsistent with the Government of the Church of Christ.'[19] He charges that Fuller knew how dangerous Wyclif's ideas were and had deliberately obfuscated them

[14] Ibid., 142.
[15] See pp.110-111.
[16] Ibid., 142.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Heylyn criticises Fuller for having 'advanc'd Wickliffe's Doctrines to the name of Gospel.' (66) but it is not clear that that is what Fuller had intended. This comes in a passage in *Church-History* where Fuller discusses how God's providence had ensured the 'speedy propagation of Wicliffs opinions' by a number of happy accidents. 'We deny not these helps were instrumentally active … but must attribute the main to Divine providence, *blessing the Gospel*, and to the nature of truth it self, which though for a time, violently suppress'd, will seasonably make its only free, and clear passage into the world.' (*Church-History*, IV.129, emphasis added). Fuller responds to Heylyn's criticisms in *The Appeal of Iniured Innocence* (1659). On this accusation of having called Wycliffite doctrine 'gospel', he writes that Wycliffe had preached 'Christ's Gospel … in a purer manner than in that Age.' Fuller, it seems, was saying that Wyclif's doctrines would expedite the spread of God's truth, but his words were sufficiently ambiguous to give Heylyn an opportunity to make this charge.
[19] Peter Heylyn, *Examen historicum, or, A discovery and examination of the mistakes, falsities and defects in some modern histories occasioned by the partiality and inadvertencies of their severall authours*, 1659, 65.

rather than producing a proper list. Fuller had rather dodged the task of itemising Wycliffe's ideas, acknowledging how difficult they were to settle on. Heylyn argues that this was deliberate, to avoid having to reveal just how repugnant the opinions really were. 'We have expected that our Author would have given us a brief summary of Wickliffes Doctrines, that by seeing the Piety and Othodoxie of his Opinions, we might have thought more reverently … of him.' However, Fuller '[thought] it more agreeable to his Design to hold the Reader in suspense … the wheat of Wickliffe was so foul, so full of chaffe … that to expose it to the view, were to mar the market.'[20] This is unreasonable, as Fuller does quote the list of Wycliffite doctrines provided by Thomas Netter, hardly a source apt to put a positive gloss on them. Fuller and Heylyn delineated the poles of opinion on Wyclif, both writers being regularly cited in the following century by those seeking either to support or oppose Wyclif.

6.2 General Historians on Wyclif

In the early 1720s Daniel Defoe travelled to Lutterworth, as part of his 'tour through the whole island of Great Britain', curious to see the 'Birth-place of honest John Wyclif, the first Preacher of the Reformation.' It was a disappointing experience, however. 'When we came there we saw nothing worth Notice, nor did the People … know … that this great Man was born amongst them.'[21] Fortunately other writers found more to say about him.

'About this Time, the famous Doctor John Wicliff, a Man of an acute Wit, profound Learning, and great Judgment, publickly maintain'd several material Points and Propositions … against the Church of Rome; particularly against the Pope's Supremacy, the Infalibility of the Church and Transubstantiation.'[22] Laurence Echard, in his 1707 *History of England*, arguably the first true narrative English history, dedicates only two bland paragraphs to Wyclif, omitting discussion of his trials and writings. This was to be the approach in most eighteenth-century general histories, their writers noting his intellectual accomplishments and giving a brief list of tenets, usually emphasising his opposition to the Roman church, some providing sketchy detail of his career. Most used

[20] Ibid., 68.
[21] Daniel Defoe, *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain, divided into circuits or journeys*, 1724, II.132. See p.246 for a later example of Wycliffite tourism to Lutterworth.
[22] Laurence Echard, *The History of England*, 1707, 380.

the accounts in Walsingham's and other monastic chronicles, universally hostile toward Wyclif, which provided scant material for writers who wanted to paint him in a heroic light.[23] Some writers refer to his translation of the bible; almost none mention his other writing. There is little reference to his being the first reformer, no re-use of Bale's epithet of Wyclif as Morning Star of the Reformation.[24] Writers who supported the Lollard movement were probably discouraged from writing about Wyclif by the combination of his spiky personality, the complexity of his ideas and the paucity of complimentary contemporary material. In the nineteenth century, Wyclif would be reinvented as the evangelical father of English Protestantism, but in the eighteenth, he remained a more obscure and ambivalent figure.

The two most influential historians of the time, Rapin and Hume, had staked out contrasting positions on the Lollards, Rapin generally supportive and Hume more sceptical. In the English history boom after 1750, historians followed either Rapin or Hume in their attitude to Lollardy, but the differences are less marked in their writing on Wyclif. Rapin and like-minded historians tend to treat Wyclif as a great thinker and campaigner against the Roman church and provide some detail of his career. Hume was more ambivalent, concerned about Wyclif's enthusiasm and later 'Humeite' writers hardly mention him.

Rapin

Rapin de Thoyras uses bland, neutral language when introducing Wyclif in his *History of England* (1723-5), saying just that Wyclif 'began to publish his Belief, upon several Articles of Religion, wherein he differed from the Common Opinions.'[25] In his chapter on Edward III, Rapin covers Wyclif as briefly as Echard had, confining himself to the bald facts of Wyclif's career, but he goes into more detail in a separate chapter, 'The State of the Church'. Rapin asserts that Wyclif's career was 'the most important Matter, with Regard

[23] Walsingham's tone in *Chronica Maiora* may be judged by noting that there is a section entitled 'The ravings of John Wyclif', in which he refers to him as 'the old hypocrite himself, the angel of Satan and forerunner of Antichrist,' and jokes hilariously that he should not be called Wyclif but 'Weak-belief'. See also quotation p.1.

[24] Bale was the first to use this quotation from Ecclesiasticus 50:6 to refer to Wyclif, subsequently to be used by so many other writers that Margaret Aston commented that it has 'worn into a threadbare cliché'. 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 244-5.

[25] Rapin, *The history of England, as well ecclesiastical as civil*, 1727, IV.339.

to the Ecclesiastical Affairs of the XIV Century'. Despite saying that 'it will be necessary fully to show those Opinions, and the Zeal wherewith they were received by some, and condemned by others',[26] Rapin does not deliver on to this; he states that Wyclif was 'eminent for his Learning, Parts, and fine Genius'[27] but does not go into detail on Wyclif's opinions, perhaps experiencing the same difficulty in arriving at a definitive list which had bedevilled Thomas Fuller in the previous century. Rapin just reproduces the eight doctrines listed in Walsingham's *Chronicle*, noting with a degree of understatement that some opinions had caused certain writers to speak of him with contempt 'and even call him Heretick' but there is no detail and he dodges the matter by saying that 'it would be too long to examine here all these Opinions.'[28] Whether the list in Walsingham's Chronicle constitutes a reasonable summary of Wyclif's thought is open to debate, but Rapin's decision to use it illustrates the difficulty eighteenth-century historians faced when attempting to get an accurate understanding of Wyclif's ideas.

Rapin had taken pains to clear the Lollards from the charge of sedition and in the same manner seeks to disassociate Wyclif and his followers from involvement in the 1381 rising. 'There are some Historians who would fain father this Rebellion upon the Wycliffites … but without any Foundation. It is certain that Religion had no Hand in these Commotions' and 'Wickliffe was never charged with any thing on this score'.[29] Tindal's English translation of Rapin provides no citation, and in fact few eighteenth-century writers did directly accuse Wyclif of having inspired the rising, one exception being the Catholic Bishop George Hay, writing fifty years later.[30]

Historians who shared Rapin's positive view of the Lollards tended to handle Wyclif in the same way, asserting that he was a great thinker, lauding him for opposing the corruptions of the church, but avoiding the complexities involved in detailing his opinions. These

[26] Ibid., 465.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 467.
[29] Ibid., 393.
[30] See p.112. The Jesuit Robert Persons, writing in 1608, had indirectly linked Wyclif to the 1381 revolt, writing that '*Wickliff* … raised infinite Troubles, Garboils, and Tumults in our Country. As may appear by the lamentable Story set down by *Thomas Walsingham,* of the whole people put in commotion … by these kind of people, under their Seditious Captains *Jack Straw, Wat Tiler,* and the rest.' (Robert Persons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions of England … divided into three parts. The former two whereof are handled in this book*, 1608 (reprinted 1688), 184.

books were general histories of England, their authors usually content to produce derivative, abridged accounts. John Gifford, writing in 1790, is typical: Wyclif was 'renowned for piety and learning … a spirited reformer'. Gifford summarises Wyclif's tenets as being 'chiefly derived from the Scriptures, and from a studious attention to the practice of the primitive Christians.'[31] Charles Coote, in 1791, uses similar language, describing him as 'bold' and praising his learning.[32] Wyclif, according to Coote, 'dispel[led] the clouds of prejudice and error from the religious horizon.' Whilst accepting his greatness, like Rapin, none of these writers try to describe his ideas. Ferdinando Warner, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1756) describes Wyclif as a great philosopher, reproducing the eight doctrines from Walsingham but says, echoing Rapin, that 'it would be tedious to enter upon a particular detail of all the opinions laid to Wickliff's account.'[33] William Blennerhasset, writing in 1751, was another who took the dependable option of reproducing Walsingham's list, noting that his followers subsequently augmented his doctrines.[34] There is little here about Wyclif's writing: Warner and Gifford being the only writers of this group to mention that he translated the bible. They agree, though, that Wyclif's ideas outlived him and inspired the coming Reformation. Charles Coote writes that even though his ideas were condemned, his books burned, numerous converts spread his ideas in the midst of opposition.[35]

Hume

David Hume's attitude to Wyclif in his 1753 *History* combined a grudging acceptance of his abilities with a mistrust of the nonconformity of many of his ideas. Hume was a more sophisticated analyst of historical trends than most other eighteenth-century historians: his view was that the perceived corruptions of the Roman church evoked an inevitable social and intellectual reaction, and the rise of Wyclif's ideas was a consequence of that. Whilst many other writers highlighted the discontent with 'papal usurpations', Hume is the only one to suggest that Wyclif's response had been provoked by them and, in a sense,

[31] John Gifford, *The History of England from the Earliest Times to the Peace of 1783*, 1790, I.426.
[32] Charles Coote, *The History of England*, 1791, IV.37.
[33] Ferdinando Warner, *The Ecclesiastical History of England*, 1756, I.511.
[34] William Blennerhassett, *A New History of England*, 1751, II.492. Blennerhasset's brief account is let down by chronological errors. He states, for instance, that Wyclif was one of the group who presented the Lollard Remonstrance to Parliament in 1395, by when Wyclif was long dead.
[35] Coote, *History of England*, IV.40.

waiting to happen: 'The aversion entertained against the established church soon found principles and tenets, and reasonings, by which it could justify and support itself.'[36] The kingdom, he says, characteristically, was being 'weaned from superstition.'[37] Hume writes positively about Wyclif: he 'seems to have been a man of parts and learning' and was 'the first person in Europe, who publicly called in question those doctrines, which had universally passed for certain and undisputed during so many ages.'[38] He acknowledges that Wyclif's doctrines were 'nearly the same with those propagated by the reformers in the sixteenth century', though he 'carried some of them farther than was done by the more sober part of those reformers.'[39] Hume's problem, predictably, was with the low-church inclinations he detected in Wyclif, writing that 'Wickliffe appears to have been strongly tinctured with enthusiasm.' This was a red rag to Hume, yet he did conclude that it may have served one useful purpose, making him 'better qualified to oppose a church, whose distinguishing character was superstition.'[40] Hume's concern with Wyclif's enthusiasm along with his statement that his doctrines largely coincided with those introduced in the sixteenth century highlight his suspicions of enthusiastic tendencies on the part of those reformers too, supporting the criticism made by contemporary critics that Hume believed that all religious movements were prone either to superstition or enthusiasm.[41]

Those historians who shared Hume's view of the Lollards as enthusiasts are more circumspect about Wyclif than he and generally uncritical. These were establishment figures, who were happy to regard the effects of his destabilising ideas as being confined to the Roman church. Some hail Wyclif as the herald of the reformation; others pass over

[36] Hume, *The History of England*, new edn., 1763, III.56.
[37] Ibid., 55.
[38] Ibid., 56.
[39] Ibid., 57.
[40] Ibid.
[41] William Gilpin, in his life of Wyclif, takes issue with Hume's suggestion that Wyclif was 'tinctured with enthusiasm', saying that this is inconsistent with Hume's statement that Wyclif's doctrines corresponded with those of the sixteenth-century reformers. Gilpin says that Hume regarded all revealed religion as either superstition or enthusiasm, and his treatment of Wyclif seems to justify this. Was Hume saying that it was Wyclif's enthusiasm, not his rational arguments, that made him such a formidable adversary of Rome? Gilpin suggests that Hume's attitude to Wyclif was influenced by his anti-religious prejudice; had he been a philosopher, Hume would have admired him, 'but what in a philosopher is a manly exercise of reason, becomes in a modern reformer, irrational zeal.' *Life of John Wyclif*, 82-83, fn. For Hume's attitude to religion see J. Gaskin, 'Hume on religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton, esp. 315-316.

him without comment. John Barrow and Hugh Clarendon completely omit Wyclif; despite introducing their material on the Lollards by describing them as followers of John Wyclif, they write nothing about Wyclif himself. They condemn Lollards' levelling tendencies but display no interest in the theological underpinnings of these ideas.[42] Oliver Goldsmith in his 'abridgement' gives Wyclif a page. His summary of Wyclif's ideas includes the suggestion that the doctrine of dominion via grace means no more than that 'the church was dependent on the state'.[43] Goldsmith was probably the first historian to take the sting out of this doctrine this way, a treatment which was to become popular with Anglican writers in the following century.[44] Sydney Temple (1773) and George Raymond (1787), both cover Wyclif in one single, identical, paragraph, describing him as the father of the Reformation, 'the first in Europe who ventured to bring religion to the test of scripture and ecclesiastical antiquity'. They praise the austerity of his life, stating that he 'generally went about barefooted, in the habit of a pilgrim.' This is wishful thinking, ascribing to Wyclif the imagined traits of the idealised reformer. The story has its origins in Walsingham's chronicle but as a one-paragraph summary of Wyclif's career it does not pass muster.[45] These writers were simply not sufficiently interested in Wyclif to write about him in any detail, either omitting him completely or regurgitating cliches about his life.

There were exceptions; some writers combining dislike of the Lollards with praise for Wyclif in his opposition to Rome and prefiguring of the Reformation. Thomas Mortimer, in his *A New History of England* (1765), was effusive. He had dismissed the Lollards as 'hot and ignorant', and had written against Methodism, yet praises Wyclif as anticipating the theology of the Anglican church. 'Certain it is, that John Wyclif was the first that ventured to oppose the errors of the church of Rome; and … he may justly be styled the first reformer, especially as the tenets he held were in fact the very same that afterwards constituted the most essential difference between the church of Rome and the reformed

[42] John Barrow, *New and Impartial History of England*, 1763. Hugh Clarendon, , *New and Authentic History of England*, 1770.
[43] Goldsmith, *History of England*, 1771, II.110.
[44] See pp.229-831
[45] Sydney Temple, *New and Complete History of England*, 1773, 173. George Raymond, *New, Universal and Impartial History of England*, 1787, 204. This idea appeared in *A&M*, Foxe stating that 'he and hys fellows vsually accustomed in theyr preaching to go barefote, and in simple russet gownes.' (547). Foxe cites Thomas Walsingham as the source of this, but amended Walsingham's account, in which it was Wyclif's *followers*, not he, who wore russet and 'were to go around barefoot, spreading his heresies.' (*Chronica Maiora*, 30).

church of England.'[46] Unusually amongst these writers he provides lists of Wycliffite tenets; the eight from Walsingham's chronicle, as well as those condemned by Archbishop Courteney in 1382, covering Wyclif's supposed positions on the eucharist, the power of the pope, confession and the matter of whether priests can hold temporal property.[47] George Spencer, writing in 1794, *also* reproduces the same paragraph used by Temple and Raymond, though it is hard to understand why, as he has a longer section on the life of Wyclif, inserted, quixotically, between his chapters on Edward VI and Mary. It has the air of an afterthought. His summary of the life of Wyclif owes much to Lewis' biography.[48] Spencer must have read the Wycliffite material reproduced in Lewis' book, since he comments that Wyclif left a lot of writings 'uncouth indeed to our ears, but elegant and well wrote for those times.'[49] He enthusiastically dubs Wyclif the English father of the Reformation, writing that 'our countryman Wickliffe [was] the spark which lighted Huss, and Luther, and Cranmer, and others, till it shone forth into that bright and glorious day, which we in this happy nation now enjoy.'[50] Spencer was writing in 1794 and his text displays an early sign of the idea of Wyclif as a patriot which was to become much more common in the nineteenth century.[51]

6.3 Biographies of John Wyclif

John Lewis

'I have endeavoured faithfully to represent Things as they really are; and, according to the best Light I could get, to write Dr. Wicliffe's Life as he lived it.'[52] John Lewis' 1720 biography, *The history of the life and sufferings of the Reverend and learned John Wicliffe*, was the most influential life of Wyclif published in the eighteenth century, remaining in print until the nineteenth.[53] Lewis was the rector of Margate and published a number of historical works including books of Biblical history and the history of Kent. Scott

[46] Thomas Mortimer, *A New History of England*, 1765, I.697.
[47] Ibid., 694.
[48] George Spencer, *A New, Complete and Authentic History of England*, 1794, 318.
[49] Ibid., 317.
[50] Ibid., 315.
[51] See p.181 and pp.215-8 for examples.
[52] John Lewis, *The history of the life and sufferings of the Reverend and learned John Wicliffe*, 1720, xvi.
[53] Lewis produced a revised version in 1741 which was not published.
https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/5958 accessed 14th Nov. 2024.

Mandlebrote describes him as a 'clergyman and antiquary'.[54] Reading this book, it is evident that he was at heart an archivist rather than a historian. Inclusion of lengthy material from sources was common historiographical practice at the time, until Rapin and Hume changed the way history was written; however, Lewis makes especially extensive use of quotations, presented without commentary, so much so that Thompson Cooper, writing the 1892 *ODNB* entry on Lewis, described his works as 'tedious compilations' though noting that they 'contain the result of much original research.'[55] Lewis' biography of Wyclif comprises seven chapters, 113 pages, on Wyclif's life and career, followed by a chapter detailing his tenets, a catalogue of works attributed to Wyclif and a final chapter on Wyclif's early followers. Lewis publishes his source material in an appendix. This collection of Latin records and documents was to prove a boon to later writers as many of them had previously been relatively inaccessible.

John Lewis was inspired to write Wyclif's biography, at least in part, as a response to the virulent criticism which had recently appeared from the pen of the nonjuror Matthias Earbery.[56] Earbery, in 1717, produced a translation of Antoine Varillas' 1682 work *Histoire de l'heresie de Viclef, Iean Hvs, et Jerome de Prague*, to which he affixed the incendiary title *The Pretended Reformers*. Varillas' book condemns the early reformers and Earbery augmented it with a critical preface. Lewis felt the need to respond to this so dedicated his preface to dismantling Earbery's arguments, which he calls 'a confused Mass of Ignorance and Scurrility'.[57] Lewis slates both Varillas ('infamous even among the Papists … for his want of common Honesty')[58] and Earbery, ('exceeding mad … against the

[54] S. Mandelbrote, 'Lewis, John', *ODNB*.
[55] T. Cooper, 1892, 'Lewis, John', *ODNB*. Nineteenth-century biographers of Wyclif agreed. Robert Vaughan, whose *Life & Opinions of John de Wycliffe* appeared in 1828, said that 'few persons have been known to read' Lewis' book, except for Wyclif's detractors, who mined it for material with which to traduce him (v.) and Charles Webb Le Bas, author *The Life of Wyclif,* 1832, described it as 'a laborious … compilation [which] possesses feeble attractions for the general reader.' (xvi).
[56] See pp.112-4.
[57] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, xii.
[58] Ibid., iv. According to Montagu Burrows, Varillas was 'a man who perhaps of all professed historians has … the worst fame for veracity.' (*Wiclif's Place in History,* New and Revised edn., 1884, 34).

Memory of this great Reformer')[59] and dissects, point by point, perceived factual errors and deficiencies in Earbery's and Varillas' critiques of Wyclif.[60]

Once one has teased out Lewis' opinions from the mass of facts and quotations, the version of Wyclif which emerges is of a moderate evangelical rather than a radical nonconformist, a student of scripture rather than a reformer of social structures. Lewis praises Wyclif as intellectually brilliant and dedicated to the study of scripture, arguing that his later personal experiences drove him to oppose the papacy and mendicant friars who had become corrupt and usurped the true church. As a result, he was prosecuted by the church authorities. What is omitted is as significant as what is included; there is nothing here about Wyclif's scholastic philosophy, no mention of him being a precursor of the sixteenth century Reformation and those prescriptions of Wyclif's which could be regarded as disruptive to civil society are omitted or dismissed as inventions of hostile contemporaries. Lewis' account of Wyclif casts him as faithful to the established order and dedicated to the service of the Christian people, conclusions which emerge more clearly in Lewis' discussion of Wyclif's tenets than his political career. This is Wyclif shorn of some of the rough edges, Wyclif as Lewis wanted him to be, both academic and deeply pious. He was 'reckoned inferior to none of his time in philosophy', but his 'favourite Study and chief Delight [was] the study of Holy Scripture'[61], a suggestion which would be repeated by other evangelical writers. He also says that at Oxford, whatever Wyclif said was 'received as an Oracle.'[62] Lewis stretches his sources, though, when he says that Wyclif 'was, by the common sort of Divines, esteemed little less than a God.'[63] Fuller had attracted the ire of Heylyn for describing Wyclif as a saint;[64] Lewis goes yet further with this uncharacteristic exaggeration. He saw himself as the defender of Wyclif's reputation and wrote the biography to defend Wyclif from Earbery's attacks. Eighteen years later, he

[59] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, vi. It is presumably these acerbic attacks upon Earbery that caused John Crompton to say of Lewis' biography that in it 'his sentiments were violent.' This remark is difficult to justify apart from in respect of the preface, since Lewis' book is otherwise moderate and considered, especially by the standards of eighteenth-century debate. Crompton also says that Lewis was 'primarily attacking Wyclif's Non-juring critiques and especially Matthias Earbery', which is also to overstate the case. While Earbery's attack on Wyclif did motivate Lewis, critique only appears in the preface. John Crompton, 'John Wyclif: A Study in Mythology' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society* 42 (1966-67), 14.
[60] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, v.
[61] Ibid., 3.
[62] Ibid., 18.
[63] Ibid., 3.
[64] See pp.91-2.

would write a defence of Wyclif against Thomas Crosby's suggestion that he was an Anabaptist.[65]

Lewis is scathing about the medieval church. 'The Papal Power … was now greater than ever. The Pope disposed of ecclesiastical Benefices, and Dignities, as he thought fit. Inasmuch that the best of them were enjoyed by Italians, Frenchmen, and other Aliens, who were some of them mere Boys; and not only ignorant of the English Language but even of Latin, and who never so much as saw their Churches.'[66] Wyclif was sent on an embassy to negotiate with the Papal court at Bruges in 1374, giving him the opportunity to see at first hand 'the Pride, Covetousness, Ambition and Tyranny of the Pope.'[67] On his return to England, Wyclif wrote of the Pope as 'Antichrist, the proud, worldly Priest of Rome, and the most cursed of Clippers and Purse-kervers.'[68] Lewis quotes his favourite Wycliffite text *The Grete Sentence of Curs Expouned* [69] to show how the Papacy sought to undermine the English King's authority, his regalie (royal prerogative). Naturally, the campaign Wyclif was now leading against the Papacy gave rise to a reaction: 'For this his speaking the Truth, Dr. Wicliffe soon met with a great deal of Trouble and Vexation.'[70] Lewis covers the prosecution of Wyclif, in the main, via substantial quotations, including the text of the 1377 Papal Bulls, lists of condemned tenets and, from Walsingham, the text

[65] See pp.119-21.
[66] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 28.
[67] Ibid., 34.
[68] Ibid. Unusually, Lewis does not provide a source for this memorable quotation: maybe he himself doubted its authenticity. It was, of course, not written by Wyclif, but nevertheless, was picked up by several later historians including Erasmus Middleton and Joseph Milner, presumably using Lewis' book as a source.
[69] 'It seems as it were about this Time that Dr. Wicliffe published his Book entitled *The Grete Sentence of Curs Expounded*. (Lewis, *Wickliffe*, 99). This is a Wycliffite text, probably written by one of Wyclif's earliest followers in the 1380s. It comprises a collection of anti-clerical diatribes spread across 29 chapters. According to Thomas Arnold, in *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, 1869, III.269, only one original copy exists, but a transcript, now in the Bodleian Library, was made for Lewis who made extensive use of it in his Wyclif biography, citing it repeatedly to support assertions about Wyclif's opinions. It was, however, almost certainly not by work of Wyclif. Arnold writes that 'With regard to authenticity, it seems to me impossible to come to any certain conclusion. The treatise does not appear in Bale's *Catalogue* [of the works of Wyclif], nor is it ascribed to Wyclif by any early writer; in fact, there is no external evidence whatever of its having been written by Wyclif … With regards to its style … it does not seem to me to be precisely that of Wyclif, but more appropriate to some fiery follower of his, who had reached a point of intense exasperation not exhibited in the undoubted works of Wyclif.' Lewis makes extensive use of this manuscript because he had access to a copy, and it provided a useful canon of Wyclif's opinions. It is unfortunate, then, that it was not written by Wyclif, though it can be considered an authentic record of early Wycliffite belief. The text only receives one brief mention in *Premature Reformation*, Anne Hudson's seminal study. (*PR*, 269).
[70] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 36.

of Wyclif's defence of his condemned conclusions of 1377. Crucial for Lewis was to emphasise that though Wyclif was a dedicated opponent of corruption in the church, he always supported the structure of civil society: 'Dr. Wicliffe [did] shew himself a great Defender of the King's Regalie, and the Power of the Temporal Lords, in Opposition to the papal Usurpations.'[71] Lewis suggests that Wyclif's campaign against papal abuses was one which would have been supported both by the civil authorities in England and the wider populace.

In the same manner, when examining Wyclif's ideas, Lewis is at pains to exculpate Wyclif from the critical accusations that he held destabilising or seditious principles: the version of Wyclif's opinions in these pages has him *not* opposing clerical possession, tithes or the holding of clerical office by those in mortal sin. Lewis tries to refute the charges made against him by the Lutheran Philip Melanchthon. These had been used to great effect by the Jesuit Robert Persons in the seventeenth century, who could argue that even Protestant reformers had opposed Wyclif's ideas.[72] Melanchthon had written that Wyclif was 'confused' about the eucharist, that he 'cavils sophistically against the Received Opinion of the Lord's Supper', 'foolishly confound[ing] the Gospel and Politicks', contending that priests may not own property, obliging ministers of the Church to be beggars, being 'mad in thinking that the Ungodly could have no Dominion', and 'wrangling downright seditiously about Civil Dominion.'[73] Lewis attempts to clear Wyclif from these charges. Against the suggestion that Wyclif taught that a man in mortal sin should not hold a clerical position, Lewis cited *Trialogus* where Wyclif quoted from Hosea 8:4: 'They made kings, but not through me; they were princes and I knew it not', arguing that *all* authority, spiritual or secular, is derived only from God. 'Wicliffe … expressly affirms that the effect of Christ's Ordinance is not taken away by the wickedness of those that minister it.'[74] This was a false charge, according to Lewis, but the enemies of Protestantism kept repeating it, trying to show that Protestant ideas would bring about a breakdown of society: 'to expose Protestants as Enemies to all Order either in Church or State … of very seditious

[71] Ibid.
[72] see pp.109-111.
[73] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 113-114.
[74] Ibid., 117.

and rebellious Principles.'[75] Key for Lewis is the need to refute the suggestion that Wyclif held seditious principles, so he writes that 'Dr. Wicliffe … always teaches Subjection and Obedience to Princes', another principle with impeccable biblical support.[76] He quotes *The Grete Sentence of Curs Expouned* 'Jesus Christ paiede tribute to emperor, and comaunded men to paie him tribute',[77] again showing that Wycliffe's ideas were not seditious.

Similarly, according to Lewis, Wyclif did *not* teach that priests must not own property and did *not* oppose tithes. Wyclif believed, he says, that priests should have an adequate livelihood and not be reduced to beggary. To suppose otherwise would have been to believe that Wyclif advocated policies which would have been destabilising, which was not where Lewis wished to place him. 'It seems very plain that it was never Dr. Wicliffe's Meaning, that the Clergy should have nothing of their own, but be reduced to a state of Beggary.'[78] Rather, Wyclif believed that ministers should not be *ostentatiously* wealthy. 'He disliked the Religious, &c, their having Lordships and Mannors.'[79] Likewise, Wyclif did not assert that tithes should be withheld from priests or 'detained by Parishioners and bestowed where they will at their Pleasure.'[80] All such opinions had been falsely attributed to Wyclif by his enemies to 'make him odious to the Civil Government',[81] and Lewis seeks to refute the suggestion that Wyclif held any of these destabilising positions.

Unfortunately for Lewis, the idea that temporalities should be removed from wrong-doing priests *was* a key plank of Wyclif's belief.[82] Lewis defends Wyclif against charges which had substance and therefore many of his intended refutations are unconvincing. Margaret Aston argued that many of Wyclif's ideas were difficult for later writers to reconcile with their picture of him as 'the evangelical doctor' and here we see Lewis struggling with just

[75] Ibid., 118. Lewis' analysis of Wyclif's teaching is supported by modern scholarship. Antony Kenny, *Wyclif*, 72, writes that Wyclif taught that a priest in a state of sin could still be of service to the church: 'A non-predestinate priest, even while he is in a state of sin, can validly administer the sacraments'.
[76] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 116.
[77] Arnold, *Select English Works of John Wyclif,* III.297.
[78] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 120.
[79] Ibid., 122. Again, Lewis cites *Great Sentence of Curse*: Chapter XVIII argues that priests should be supported 'in a reasonable and pore lifelode [livelihood], to teach the gospel … as diden Crist and his postlis [apostles].' Arnold, *English Works of John Wyclif,* III.312.
[80] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 123.
[81] Ibid., 121, fn.
[82] Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 267.

this problem. 'In some ways Wycliffe's Catholic opponents ... saw him more clearly than his new-style defenders.'[83]

For Lewis, the campaign by Wyclif and his followers to render the scripture into English was as great a provocation to the papacy as any of his other attacks.[84] Lewis, in contrast to many other eighteenth-century writers, correctly states that Wyclif did not personally undertake the translation,[85] but asserts that he was the author of the *Prologue*.[86] This, according to Lewis, was another instance where Wyclif acted on behalf of the people, as the clergy had kept God's Word from them: 'the Means of greater Knowledge had been so studiously hidden from the People, and the ignorance of the Laity was so advantageous to the Interest of the Clergy that the true Spirit of Christianity seemed to be wholly lost.'[87] Having made a translation available naturally brought more clerical enmity upon Wyclif: 'his Person was held in the utmost Hatred and Disesteem by the Clergy ... they reckoned this his making the Holy Scriptures common to the Laity, was an Invasion of their Rights and Powers, a Making them useless, and taking from them their chief Talent.'[88] According to Lewis, Wyclif was foremost a democratiser, striving to bring the Word of Christ to the people. The other way in which Wyclif was supposed to have disseminated his ideas to the wider population was via the publication of tracts and sermons in the vernacular, even though it is now known that few, if any, English works were written by Wyclif.[89] Lewis provides a list of hundreds of works ascribed to Wyclif, predominately reproduced from a catalogue produced by John Bale.[90]

Lewis saw Wyclif as an authentic reformer, evangelical and obedient, and his task as defending him from critics such as Matthias Earbery or those who would ascribe Calvinist or nonconformist attitudes to Wyclif.[91] His attempts to recast Wyclif's awkward opinions

[83] Ibid., 269.
[84] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 66.
[85] Margaret Aston wrote that 'it seems likely that [Wyclif's role in the translation] did not extend to more than inspiration, supervision, or partial supervision.' ('John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 260.)
[86] Erroneously, as the Preface has been dated to around 1396. (Ibid., 251).
[87] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 18-19.
[88] Ibid., 69.
[89] 'Of the large number of English tracts, treatises and sermons which have been fathered upon Wycliffe, some are demonstrably false, others extremely probably so, and none provably his.' Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 260.
[90] There are 255 works on the list Lewis reproduces from Bale, a mix of English and Latin works. Lewis appends a further list of 28 tracts 'said to be Wicliffe's ... they being all in English.'
[91] See below pp.92-7.

into a light more acceptable to the eighteenth-century establishment mindset meant he was forced to refute charges that Wyclif's ideas were potentially destabilising. He struggled with this, because most of these charges had some merit. Despite its flaws, though, this was the most detailed and meticulously researched biography that had appeared to date and would have a lasting influence into the nineteenth century.

Other Biographies

Lewis' work was the only book-length treatment of the life of Wyclif published in the eighteenth century. Other biographies appeared in collections of lives, often based closely on Lewis' book. In 1765, William Gilpin produced *The lives of John Wicliff; and of the most eminent of his disciples; Lord Cobham, John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and Zisca*, which includes one of the longer such treatments, running to almost ninety pages. Gilpin's book proved influential, regularly being cited by nineteenth-century writers. While it owes so much to Lewis' book that it could almost be regarded as an abridgement, the tone is markedly different. Gilpin simplifies Lewis' dense and difficult text and smooths away many of the contradictions and awkward aspects of Wyclif's life story, giving his book a more hagiographic cast. Similarly to Lewis' biography, a narrative of Wyclif's life is followed by an analysis of his doctrines and a list of works attributed to him.[92] Gilpin was a schoolmaster, and his book possesses a didactic tone, aimed presumably at a popular audience. The material is simplified as well as abridged. Where Lewis made use of extensive quotations from sources, Gilpin provides summaries, especially in the section covering Wycliffite beliefs, with no source citations.

Gilpin's intention is to make the story flow better and does provide a sense of direction which is missing from Lewis' book. To do this, he credits Wyclif's career progress with a degree of intent which almost certainly it lacked. This suggestion that Wyclif was following

[92] The material on Wyclif's opinions follows Lewis' closely, though where Lewis used extensive quotation from Wycliffite writing, Gilpin prefers precis. In speaking of Wyclif's view regarding the graft associated with the sacrament of Holy Orders, Lewis cited a comment in *Grete Sentence of Curs Expouned* chapter 6 regarding the exorbitant fees charged for ordinands to get their heads shaved: '3if it were nede, Þei my3tten be shavyn at a comyn barbour, and clippen all a 3eer for Þe money Þat here barbour takiÞ at onys.' Gilpin renders it thus: '[Wyclif] jocularly says, a man might have a barber to attend him a whole year for what he pays to have his crown shaven once.' (66). The corresponding material appears on p.129 of Lewis' *Wycliffe*, included because of its light-hearted tone. That this obscure passage appears in both Lewis' and Gilpin's books shows that Gilpin used Lewis as his main source. See Thomas Arnold, *Select English works of John Wyclif*, Clarendon Press, 1871, III.282-3 for the original passage in context. Arnold comments that the church did attempt to prevent such 'petty extortions'.

a programme originated with John Foxe who wrote that '[Wyclif] thought with himself that thys matter [of reform] shoulde be done by litle & litle.'[93] Similarly, Gilpin writes, Wyclif proceeded step-by-step with a premeditated plan of attack on the established church. Initially he alerted people to the abuses of the friars. His success 'warranted further progress' so he cautiously started to move against popery, 'with his usual caution', commencing with 'metaphysical disputations'.[94] Gilpin thus applies a whiggish analysis to Wyclif's career which emerges as a carefully planned assault on the corrupt practices and superstitious doctrines of the church. Robert Vaughan, in the nineteenth century, took this idea further.[95] Gilpin's whiggish attitude of superiority to the fourteenth century is evident elsewhere. He states, for example, that 'when we consider the uninlightened age in which [Wyclif] lived, we stand astonished at the force of genius which carried him so far.'[96]

Gilpin's Wyclif is a heroic figure. Unlike Lewis, Gilpin credits Wyclif with translating the bible in its entirety unaided, stating that Wyclif was 'the first, who translated the whole [bible] together.'[97] Gilpin finishes with a strongly hagiographic tone, concluding that Wyclif was 'one of those prodigies, whom providence raises up, and directs as its instruments to enlighten mankind. His amazing penetration, his rational manner of thinking, and the noble freedom of his spirit, are equally the objects of our admiration.' He was 'the great detector of those arts and glosses, which the barbarism of ages had drawn together to obscure the mind of man.'[98]

These themes of simplification, hagiography and a whiggish attitude to the past are to be found in other lives of Wycliffe published during the eighteenth century. Richard Rolt's *The Lives of the Principal Reformers* appeared in 1759. Rolt was a 'quintessential author' and historian with a whig slant.[99] He uses Lewis as a source for his Wyclif chapter, but this is a

[93] *A&M*, 545-6. See p.199.
[94] William Gilpin, *The lives of John Wicliff; and of the most eminent of his disciples,* 1765, 15.
[95] See p.142.
[96] Gilpin, *John Wicliff*, 22.
[97] Ibid., 36-37. The ECCO copy of Gilpin's book has been annotated in longhand to the effect that 'this vast undertaking had already occupied a large portion of his time from a very early period of his life', suggesting that this misconception was widely held. Lewis (*Wickliffe*, 66) refers to 'his and others undertaking to translate the Holy Scriptures in English', but elsewhere he refers several times to 'his translation'. The impression given by Lewis' book is that the bulk of the translation was undertaken by Wyclif alone.
[98] Ibid., 57.
[99] B. Rizzo, 'Richard Rolt', *ODNB*.

much briefer account. He gets around the tricky business of explaining Wyclif's doctrines, like many another eighteenth-century historian, by using the eight in Thomas Walsingham's chronicle, which do provide a reasonable summary of Wyclif's opinions on ecclesiology and lordship.[100] Rolt's effusive description of Wyclif's supposed English writing suggests that he did not read many of these texts: 'Wickliffe wrote with an elegance uncommon in that age, especially in the English language, of which he may be considered one of the finest refiners.'[101] Rolt might have been the first writer to make this outlandish claim which was repeated by nineteenth-century writers looking for reasons to praise him.[102] Rolt's conclusion, like Gilpin's, is reverential about Wyclif, whilst displaying whiggish derision for the time he lived in: 'The christian world has not produced a greater man in these last ages than doctor Wickliffe ... he was endowed with an uncommon gravity and sanctity of manners; from whence arose that vehement desire of restoring the primitive purity in the church in that ignorant and degenerate age. His most inveterate adversaries never presumed to call in question his excellent piety, and unblemished life ... every thing he says is grave, judicious, and exact.' 'He wanted nothing to render his learning consummate,' concludes Rolt, 'but his living in a happier age.'[103]

Erasmus Middleton, a Church of England clergyman and 'Methodist sympathiser'[104] was another who produced a collection of lives of reformers, *Biographia Evangelica*, the first volume of which appeared in 1779. His chapter on Wyclif is plagiarised from Rolt's, but Middleton's additions add an evangelical slant. He is yet more categorical in his damning of the practices of the pre-Reformation era. 'When we look back upon the days of barbarism, and the gross ignorance of the true light of the gospel, which prevailed ... before the Reformation; when we reflect upon the stupid ceremonies and abominable superstitions and cheats practiced by the monks and others ... We must stand

[100] Richard Rolt, *The Lives of the Principal Reformers*, 1759, 6. The eight tenets are: that the eucharist is only an emblem; that Rome is not the head of the church; that the Pope has no more authority than any priest; that the church may be deprived of its wealth; that a prince must deprive the church of its wealth if it misbehaves; that the rules of religious orders add nothing to the gospel; that the gospel is sufficient direction for any Christian and that no prelate should have prisons for punishing offenders against church discipline. *Walsingham, Chronica Maiora*, 30.
[101] Rolt, *Principal Reformers*, 4.
[102] See pp.221-3.
[103] Rolt, *Principal Reformers*, 10.
[104] A. Levin, 'Erasmus Middleton', *ODNB*. Middleton was one of six undergraduates expelled from Oxford in 1768 for attending Methodist meetings.

astonished, and, from the wonderful contrast of the times, may say; This hath GOD wrought.' Middleton exhibits a strand of patriotic English nationalism which had been unusual among earlier writers; 'GOD vouchsafed to honor England with the first dawning of the Reformation: And an Englishman was the first champion of that cause, which afterwards received the name of PROTESTANTISM.'[105] This idea of reform as a patriotic act would become much more common in the next century.[106] Middleton interposes a sentence of his own after copying what Rolt had written about Wyclif's opinions, in case readers might think Wyclif's tenets insufficiently reformed: 'it is rather wonderful that he should have the courage to proceed so far, than extraordinary, that he did not go farther, considering the prejudices of education, which the wisest and best of men ... seldom ... subdue.'[107] Middleton's glosses presage the more overtly evangelical and nationalistic analyses which were to become widespread in the following century.

6.4 Eighteenth-century critics

'It is impossible to explore here the ramifications of Wycliffite historiography as it passed through the hands and controversies of Roman Catholics, non-jurors, anabaptists and non-conformists, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,'[108] Margaret Aston wrote in her survey of the early Protestant historiography of Wyclif. Aston directed readers to the 'brief treatment' by Montagu Burrows' in his 1881 lecture series *Wiclif's Place in History*.[109] The following sections will attempt to fill the gap by examining the historiography of John Wyclif produced by Roman Catholics, non-jurors, anabaptists and nonconformists.

Catholic critics

The Lutheran reformer Philip Melanchthon criticized Wyclif in a letter to Friedrich Myconius, stating that he was ignorant of the doctrine of justification, and had foolishly confounded the gospel with politics.[110] This censure, John Lewis said, 'is well known, and

[105] Erasmus Middleton, *Biographia Evangelica*, 1779, I.1.
[106] See pp.215-8.
[107] Ibid., 11.
[108] Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 250, fn.
[109] Burrows' survey is brief indeed, running to four pages (*Wiclif's Place in History*, new edn., 1884, 32-36), and touches only upon Fuller, Collier, Earbery (not by name) and Lewis from this period.
[110] Quoted in Robert Persons, 1604 (reprinted 1688), *The Third part of a treatise intituled of the Three Conversions of England. Conteyning an examen of the Calendar or Catalogue of Protestant saints ... devised by Fox*, 186.

made great use of by the Papists.'[111] In particular, it was used by the Jesuit Robert Persons, in his book *A Treatise of Three Conversions*, which had been produced in 1604, but remained in print, a reprint having appeared in 1688. Margaret Aston described this as 'the most devastating and thorough early onslaught on the *Acts and Monuments*'.[112] Persons compared his task of responding to *A&M* to Hercules cleansing the stables of King Augeas, 'where 3000 oxen ... had donged many years ... And yet not so much dung perhaps to be found therein, as filth and impiety in this stable of I. Fox his new Saints and Martyrs.'[113] He accuses Foxe of canonising his own saints when creating his own sacred calendar. Against Wyclif's 'canonisation', Persons uses three arguments which have often been repeated by oppositional writers. Wyclif could not be considered a martyr as he was never persecuted for his faith, his reforming ideas were devised in a spirit of envy and desire for revenge, and his ideas had been condemned even by reformers like Melanchthon. The fact that Wyclif had not suffered for his faith was, according to Aston, a 'crucial difficulty'[114] which Persons latched onto, writing that '[Wyclif] died in his bed, and was neuer so much as imprisoned for religion.'[115] If one claimed (as Fuller had) that Wyclif achieved a form of martyrdom when his bones were burned forty years after his death, Persons scoffs, that meant 'that a man may be made a Martyr without sense or feeling, or without the consent or concurrence of his owne will, which is most absurd and ridiculous.'[116] Persons charges Wyclif with commencing his reforming career for the wrong reasons, saying that it was vindictiveness at having been deprived of the mastership of Canterbury House which had set him on the path of opposition: 'VVickliffe began his new opinions ... partly to reuenge himself of monks & friars, and of Popes themselues, and partly vpon hope of aduauncement.'[117] The most telling of Persons' arguments was that Wyclif's ideas were criticized by sixteenth-century reformers. This was important because, as Margaret Aston points out, such a line of attack sought to undermine 'the chain of Foxian continuity.'[118] Persons notes that Luther and

[111] Lewis, *John Wicliffe*, 113.
[112] Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 258.
[113] Persons, *Three Conversions*, 180.
[114] Aston, 'Reformation Reputation', 258.
[115] Persons, *Three Conversions*, 181.
[116] Ibid., 185.
[117] Ibid., 190-191. See pp.224-8 for a nineteenth-century attempt to get around this by finding a second John Wyclifs.
[118] Aston, 'Reformation Reputation', 259.

Melanchthon, whom Foxe also regarded as saints, spoke with contempt about Wyclif. 'But how one of these two Saints doth speake of the other, let vs heare out of Philipps owne words', writes Persons, triumphantly quoting Melachthon to the effect that 'Wickliffe was plainly out of his witts, when he did deny, that it was lawfull for Priests to hold any thing proper. Well then, a furious man that styrred vp sedition, and was ignorant of the very foundation of the protestants ghospell, to witt, of their doctrine of saluation by only faith (as both Melanchthon and Luther affirmed VVickliffe to be) with what spirit … doth our Apostata friar Bale call him … a morning starr.'[119]

Lewis writes that the papists had made great use of Melanchthon's critique of Wyclif. Another Catholic who did so was Nicholas French (1604-78), Bishop of Ferns, whose book *The Dolefall Fall of Andrew Sall* was first published in 1674, reprinted in 1749. French's discussion of Wyclif was closely based on Persons'.[120] Like Persons, French accuses Foxe of having canonized his own selection of saints and reprises two of Persons' criticisms: that Wyclif had been declared a martyr without having suffered, and that his ideas had been repudiated by later reformers. Additionally, according to French, Wyclif's ideas of clerical possession did not fit with the principles espoused by the eighteenth-century Anglican Church. Of the suggestions that ministers should not hold temporal possessions, or that temporal lords could confiscate church property, French asks 'Think you, that the Protestant Church-men of England agree to this Article?'[121] Wyclif could not be linked with the Anglican church, rather Foxe's new Church is made up of 'such Dung-hill Clouts as Wickliffians, Lollards, Albigensians, and the like'.[122] His section on Wyclif emphasises both his revolutionary instincts and theological errors: he was 'a furious Man that stirred up Sedition, and was ignorant of the very Foundation of the Protestant Gospel',[123] which seems an unreasonable objection given that Wyclif died long before that foundation was laid.

[119] Persons, *Three Conversions*, 187-8.
[120] Nicholas French, *The Dolefull Fall of Andrew Sall, a Jesuit … from the Roman Catholick and Apostolick Faith; Lamented by his Constant Friend*, 1674, 135. Sall had been Provincial Superior of the Irish Jesuits but converted to Anglicanism in the 1670s.
[121] Ibid., 132.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 133.

Both Persons and French had referred to the seditious potential of Wyclif's destablising ideas, but only in passing; this was less important to them than the personality flaws and theological errors they perceived in him. A century later, the emphasis was different. For George Hay, writing in 1779, Wyclif's ideas were dangerous because they encouraged insurrection. He draws a causal link between Wycliffism and the 1381 rising, writing that 'under the cover of religion, the most dazzling temptations and unbounded views are laid open to the populace'[124], and that John Ball, 'a Wickliffist priest' fomented the rising. Wyclif's opinions were 'contrary to the peace and tranquility of the state' and had the effect of 'raising up the people to sedition and rebellion.'[125] Even among Catholic writers, Hay is unusual in making such a direct link with the rising. Persons and French, writing in the previous century, had attacked Wyclif's theology and his hypocrisy but by the end of the eighteenth century, social instability was a more alarming spectre than religious heterodoxy, and so the most serious charge that could be laid on Wyclif's doorstep was that of being a fomenter of sedition and sower of disorder, matching the trend we have already observed in oppositional histories of Lollardy.

Nonjurors

> Can a worse Notion be entertained in the World, than that both Priests and Kings … lose all their Power … Could ever any Notion be more effectually contrived to expose the Church to Enthusiasts, and the State to Rebellion … Or what Peace would our Monarchs find when they live under the continual Apprehensions of being dethroned by the Saints? George Hay.[126]

Catholic writers attacked the Protestantising elements of Wyclif's work, but nonjuror critics were sometimes more constrained, being themselves Protestant. However, this did not deter Matthias Earbery from laying into Wyclif with as much gusto as any Catholic. Earbury was a nonjuring minister from Norfolk, renowned for the robustness of his opinions.[127] In 1720, he produced a translation of Antoine Varillas' *Histoire de l'heresie*, invective which inspired John Lewis to take up his pen in Wyclif's defence. Earbury's

[124] George Hay, *An Answer to Mr W.A.D.'s letter to G.H in which the conduct of government, in mitigating the laws against Papists, is justified*, 1779, 42. Hay (1729-1811) was the Vicar Apostolic of the Lowland Region in Scotland.
[125] Ibid., 131.
[126] Ibid., xxxiv.
[127] J.H. Overton in *The Nonjurors: Their lives, principles and writings*, 1902, described him as 'of the combative type' (211) and Henry Broxap said he was 'notorious for the violence of [his] language.' *The Later Nonjurors*, 1924, 311.)

declared purpose in translating Varillas' book was 'retrieving the Honour of the Reformation, which … has suffered very much.'[128] The Reformation in England had lost its way and taken too puritan a turn because the church was too ready to accommodate 'mad Enthusiasts', whilst simultaneously the state was too eager to constrain and regulate the church.[129] Both of these failures Earbery considers as having had their roots in Wyclif's ideas, particularly the theory of dominion in grace. His preface contains vivid condemnation. Wyclif's writing, he says, comprised 'wicked and abominable' notions founded on 'two main Pillars, viz. of Sacrilege and Rebellion.'[130] His greatest fault was that his ideas would disrupt the orderly structure of society. At the heart of Earbery's analysis is a list of forty heretical doctrines drawn from the chronicles of Walsingham and William Woodford.[131] The list includes a disproportionately large number related to Wyclif's ideas on lordship and church government,[132] ideas which according to Earbery would have led to chaos. For instance, the suggestion that the state could confiscate the possession of an errant church justified 'all the Sacrilege of Henry VIII's Reign, and give[s] a fair Pretence to have the same put in Execution this Day.'[133] Earbery's conclusion makes clear his view that the political consequences of Wyclif's canon of ideas would be disastrous: this was a 'levelling scheme'; a phrase guaranteed to make respectable eighteenth-century blood run cold:

[128] Matthias Earbery, 1720, *The Pretended Reformers*, iii.
[129] Ibid., iv.
[130] Ibid., xii.
[131] Ibid., xiii-xix.
[132] In all, Walsingham listed around a hundred condemned propositions in different places in his *Chronica Maiora*, covering all aspects of Wyclif's ideas including civil dominion, transubstantiation, condemnation of the church hierarchy and monastic orders, etc. Of these, Earbery reproduces thirty, along with an additional ten extracted from the writing of William Woodford. The majority (twenty-two) are concerned with politics, specifically relating to civil or ecclesiastical dominion, the rights of church office holders to wield power and the rights of lay lords to remove powers or property from the church. Six others relate to the sacraments, two to the primacy of scripture and three are critical of the church hierarchy. The remaining seven include miscellaneous topics including the notorious idea attributed to Wyclif that 'God must obey the devil' and an accusation that Wyclif taught his followers to go without shoes. The list shows that Earbery is more interested in critiquing Wyclif's politics than his theology. In particular, ideas founded on the doctrine of dominion in grace are scattered throughout Earbery's list: for example, number 3, 'Temporal Lords may lawfully take away the Temporals from an offending Church', number 4, 'if the Church does offend, a Temporal Lord is obliged … to take away her Temporals', number 20 'there can be no Lord, nor no Bishop, while they continue in a mortal Sin.' Earbery omitted all propositions relating to Wyclif's repudiation of transubstantiation, presumably because as an eighteenth-century Anglican, he did not consider this heretical and those criticising monastic orders were less relevant to an eighteenth-century audience.
[133] Earbery, *Pretended Reformers*, xxiii.

> If the Reader turns over these Articles … he will easily perceive the Spirit of those pretended Reformers: The Levelling Scheme was closely pursued. Moreover, a Vein of Policy and Cunning ran through the whole. The Bait was laid to bring Princes into the Story, and halloo them upon the Church; which they were likely to pursue when they were offer'd her Vitals for their Prey, and a Reward of their Chase.[134]

A more influential nonjuror historian was Jeremy Collier, whose *Ecclesiastical History of Britain* appeared in 1708-14. Collier's opinion of Wyclif was not much more favourable than Earbery's, though it is couched in more moderate language and his critique more subtle. According to Collier, Wyclif 'advanc'd several Tenents [sic] which were looked on as Novel and Heterodox' which are not 'altogether defensible.'[135] Collier uses a range of sources, all hostile to Wyclif: monastic chronicles, the works of Harpsfield, Netter and Heylyn. His method, as was common at the time, was to make points via copious source quotations with brief editorial additions. He deploys the sources cautiously, blending criticism with moderate assessments. Whilst critical of Wyclif's ideas, he acknowledges his personal merits, quoting Knighton to the effect that he was one of the leading divines of his time and a great philosopher.[136] Discussing how Wyclif's controversial career began, Collier recounts the matter of the loss of the wardenship of Canterbury Hall. Unusually among these writers, he concludes that Wyclif was ill-treated, but follows Persons in stating that this disappointment had set him on his course of reform: 'his being ejected upon an unjust Decision [made] him Project a Revenge.'[137] On Wyclif's tenets, Collier presents both sides, begrudgingly stating that 'tho' we may allow him some Gold in his Mine, yet 'twas not without a Mixture of coarser Ingredients.'[138] Wyclif's ideas proved popular for all the wrong reasons, Collier says, concluding sarcastically that 'Wickliff's setting People loose from Discipline, extending the Power of the Laity, and pronouncing the Revenues of the Church precarious, recommended his Scheme strongly.'[139] He concedes that Wyclif was not directly responsible for the 1381 rising, yet notes that it occurred when his doctrines were spreading, leaving his readers to draw the obvious conclusion for themselves.[140]

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[134] Ibid., xxv.
[135] Jeremy Collier, 1708-14, *An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain*, I.564.
[136] Ibid., 586.
[137] Ibid., 582.
[138] Ibid., 564.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 572.

Collier includes a list of other doctrines attributed to Wyclif, drawn from Netter's and Harpsfield's lists, including some oddments which almost certainly did not originate from Wyclif, such as the suggestion that 'the Methods of Life and Study, the Societies and Degrees' at universities were 'Inventions of Paganisme' and condemnations of church decoration and ceremonies such as 'the Hallowing of Bread, Water, Salt, Branches of Palms and First-fruits.'[141] More importantly, he discusses Wyclif's putative predestinarianism as derived from the doctrines listed by Harpsfield (in turn taken from Netter). In Collier's view Wyclif did incline to predestinarianism, which, he feels, was theologically and morally misguided, as it removed the possibility of human free will: 'he … makes all things proceed from absolute Necessity, And thus, 'tis impossible for a reprobated Person to repent in earnest.'[142] For Collier, the idea that men could be 'Fiends by Predestination' was 'crude and unaccountable … a more horrible Opinion that that of the Manicheans.' His critique of Calvinism includes the standard objection to predestination that 'those who are predestined to Bliss never sin mortally, whereas the rest who lye under Reprobation have that Malignity in every Action.'[143] This is a stirring attack on predestination, but Collier is tilting at windmills, for he is assigning to Wyclif views he did not espouse, and which would have been anachronistic in the fourteenth century.[144]

6.5 Nonconformist appropriations

For writers occupying the opposite end of the confessional continuum, of course, the notion that Wyclif might have been a proponent of predestination was reason for plaudit rather than brickbat. Daniel Neal begins his *The History of the Puritans* (1732-38) with Wyclif because he believed his ideas were the starting point of the later Reformation. 'He preached and published the very same Doctrines for Substance that afterwards obtained

[141] Ibid., 582-583. Since these tenets appear on Nicholas Harpsfield's list and not on any of the lists produced in Wyclif's time, it is probable that they were anachronistic additions by Harpsfield.
[142] Ibid., 584.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Antony Kenny (*Wyclif*, 31) notes that Wyclif was accused of being 'a rigid predestinarian' but continues 'in fact the theory of necessity contained in his philosophical writings was a carefully nuanced one; his system left as much room for human freedom as that of any comparable theologian. Wyclif's affirmation of predestination was no stronger than that of many Catholic thinkers, and he tried to show that it was perfectly compatible with a continuing belief in the freedom of the will.'

at the Reformation.'[145] It is likely that Neal was the first to describe Wyclif as the 'Morning-Star of the Reformation'.[146] Neal believed that Wyclif was the father of the puritan movement, a viewpoint he supports by cherry-picking from Wyclif's ideas and sometimes wholly restating Wyclif's ideas to fit this view. 'He maintained … most of those Points by which the PURITANS were afterwards distinguished; as, that in the Sacrament of Orders there ought to be but two Degrees, Presbyters, or Bishops and Deacons; … that we must practise and teach only, the Laws of Christ; … and, that to restrain Men to a prescribed Form of Prayer, is contrary to the Liberty granted them by God.'[147] This approach would be repeated by other nonconformist and evangelical writers eager to recruit Wyclif as a founding father for their own denomination. Linking a group with the great reformer lent it authority. 'Religious movements,' as Margaret Aston observed, 'need a father figure.'[148] Some of these attempts were more convincing than others, but all involved the anachronistic misattribution to Wyclif of ideas devised after his death.

Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) was, as a boy, an admirer of John Wesley, but converted at the age of eighteen to 'the extreme Calvinism of which he was the fiercest defender.'[149] Calvinism was a minority viewpoint in the Church of England by the end of the eighteenth century, and Toplady became known as a controversialist because of the passionate arguments he deployed in its support, getting involved in a pamphlet war with John Wesley which began after Wesley criticised the doctrine of double predestination. H. L. Bennett said of him that 'of the contemporary Calvinist writers Toplady was the keenest, raciest, and best equipped philosophically.'[150] Toplady's great work *The Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (1774) was written as a riposte to Wesley. It seeks, through historical analysis, to show that the English church had been founded upon Calvinist principles. The notion that humans possess free will and can by their own

[145] Neal, *History of the Puritans*, I.5.
[146] Ibid., I.3. (Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', 249). The idea had started with John Bale in 1548 who quoted Ecclesiasticus 50:6 'For he shone like the morning star in the midst of the cloud, and remained for many days as the faithful witness in the church.' John Foxe picked this up in *A&M*: 'Euen as the mornyng starre being in the middest of a cloud … so doth he shyne and glister in the temple and church of God.' *A&M*, 544. (Aston, op. cit., 245-6.) However, Neal seems to have been the first writer to call Wyclif the morning star *of the Reformation*.
[147] Ibid., I.4.
[148] Aston, 'John Wyclif's Reformation Reputation', 263.
[149] H.L. Bennett, 'Augustus Toplady', *ODNB,* 1899.
[150] Ibid.

actions decide their destiny, Toplady dismisses as 'the new system … of Arminius' which had infected the English church at the time of Archbishop Laud.[151] According to Toplady, Wyclif was part of this Calvinist history of the English church. He sets out to show 'how far this illustrious reformer ran, from the present Arminian system, or rather no-system, of chance and free-will.'[152] Toplady wanted to demonstrate that Wyclif, the great reformer, was a doctrinal forebear of Calvin, and to do that needed to show that Wyclif was an exponent of the doctrine of predestinarianism. Indeed, Toplady rather optimistically claims that Wyclif was no less an exponent of predestinarianism than Calvin himself, a statement which he does not attempt to support, he 'was not merely a Calvinist, but *more* than a Calvinist; and carried the Doctrine of Predestination to such an extreme Height, as even Luther, Calvin and Zanchius did not fully come up to.'[153]

By his own admission, Toplady cannot fully justify this when delving into the detail of Wyclif's theology. Wyclif's doctrine of predestination was articulated most fully in his *Treatise on Universals* (c.1372),[154] before the start of his political career, a time when his views were not regarded as unorthodox, and, as Antony Kenny has demonstrated, lay firmly within the bounds of scholastic tradition.[155] Toplady, bemoaning the lack of authentically Wycliffite texts,[156] is compelled to draw his conclusions about Wyclif's predestinarianism from the late work *Trialogus*, the only authentic book of Wyclif's readily available in the eighteenth century. From this, following Foxe, he extracts two propositions: 'The Prayer of the Reprobate prevaileth for no Man' and 'All Things that happen, do come absolutely of Necessity.'[157] The latter was one of the propositions condemned at Constance and was cited by Foxe. The most important evidence cited by Toplady in support of Wyclif's predestinarianism is a passage in *Trialogus* 3.IX where Wyclif argued that since all events are predetermined by God, all their consequences are

[151] Augustus Toplady, *Historical Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England*, new edn., 1793, I.ix.
[152] Ibid., I.181.
[153] Ibid., I.184.
[154] *De Universalibus* was the most important of Wyclif's Latin works *not* to have been edited by the Wyclif Society. An edition was produced by Ivan Mueller in 1984. Mueller states that the work is difficult to date but was probably produced around 1372 when Wyclif received his doctorate, well before the start of his political career. *John Wyclif,* 'Tractatus de Universalibus', edited by Ivan Mueller, Clarendon Press, 1988, xix-xxx.
[155] Kenny, *Wyclif,* 31-2.
[156] Toplady, *Historical Proof*, I.181.
[157] Ibid., I.177.

wholly necessary. Toplady translated this as: 'His determination concerning the Event took Place before the World was made: ergo the Event will surely follow. The Necessity … of the Antecedent holds no less irrefragably for the Necessity of the Consequent, And who can either promote or hinder the Inference That this was decreed of God before the Formation of the World.'[158] Toplady disagrees with one crucial point from this paragraph, where Wyclif asserted that 'His affirmation was, not accidental, but necessary; Toplady demurs, saying 'I can only meet the excellent man half-way' because God's actions cannot be bound, he cannot be a necessary agent.'[159] God, for Toplady, must be absolutely free. The argument comes down to the difference between contingent and absolute necessity. The scholastic view, shared by Wyclif, is that God exists outside of time, so he knows what is *going* to happen, which is different from *willing* it to happen. God cannot direct the will of those he has created: quoting Wyclif himself: 'the whole created universe … cannot drive a created will. […] Man has the freedom to walk away from that saving guidance.'[160] For Wyclif, sin must have its origin in the sinner.[161] Antony Kenny concluded that Wyclif's view on necessity was at one with the orthodox scholastic dogma which, in fact, did differ only subtly from the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination. Both state that the elect were predestined to heaven, but the scholastic view was that the damned were only foreknown by God as being hell-bound: their fate was known to, but not willed by, him.[162] Toplady was forced to part company with Wyclif at the point where he constrained God's will, showing his scholastic credentials by allowing free will to humankind. Toplady's conclusion that Wyclif pre-empted Calvin, then, cannot be justified on his chosen battleground of double predestination. Far from justifying his conclusion that Wyclif was more of a predestinarian than Calvin, Toplady is forced to disagree with him. The truth is that Wyclif's thought remained firmly rooted in the medieval, scholastic, tradition. Both Toplady and the nonjuror Jeremy Collier, coming

[158] Ibid., I.178. Toplady's version differs little in sense from a modern translation: 'whatever is designated to be going to be before the constitution of the world God determines this to be going to be or not to be going to be, therefore this will be as it is necessary in the antecedent, so it is equally necessary in the truth of the consequence. Who [else], I ask, could bring about or impede [a thing] when God has determined it before the constitution of the world?' (John Wyclif, *Trialogus*, edited by Steven Lahey, Cambridge University Press, 2012, online edition.)
[159] Toplady, *Historical Proof*, I.178.
[160] Wyclif, *De Universabilus,* quoted in Kenny, *Wyclif*, 34.
[161] Kenny, *Wyclif*, 35.
[162] Kenny, *Wyclif*, 40.

from opposite traditions, considered Wyclif a predestinarian, yet drew predictably different conclusions from that premise.

The most ambitious attempt to claim Wyclif as the founder of a dissenting tradition came from Thomas Crosby, a deacon in the Baptist church. In *The history of the English Baptists* (1738), Crosby wants Wyclif and the Lollards as direct forebears of the Baptists, which involves him in convoluted attempts to demonstrate that they were opposed to infant baptism, a conclusion frequently contradicted by his own evidence. His argument for John Wyclif having Baptist principles is weak: 'I am inclined to believe Mr. Wickliff was a Baptist, because some men of great note and learning in the church of Rome have left it upon record, that he denied infant-baptism'.[163] He says that Wyclif had been accused of other 'Anabaptistical errors; such as refusing to take an oath', and the opinion 'that dominion is founded in grace', though it is hard to see how the latter constitutes evidence of specifically Baptist inclinations.[164] Crosby candidly presents the counter-arguments. The same medieval chroniclers had also charged Luther and Calvin with opposing infant baptism, Wyclif's charge-sheet at the Council of Constance had not included opposition to paedo-baptism, and in *Dialogus* Wyclif wrote of the value of infant baptism. Crosby seems confounded by the strength of the arguments against his assertion, stating hesitantly that 'all this does indeed render it doubtful whether he was of that opinion', before brightening and concluding that the Papist chroniclers were the best placed to speak of people who lived in their own times'.[165] Maybe Wyclif had changed his mind after writing *Dialogus*; after all, 'few who set themselves to reform religion, see all the abuses in it at first; but most commonly add new opinions.'[166] Even if Wyclif did not himself deny paedo-baptism, what is certain, according to Crosby, was that he spread tenets which *would* give rise to its rejection, teaching that 'no rule or ceremony ought to be received in the church, which is not plainly confirmed by the word of God'[167] so that many of his followers were true Baptists. 'Our Wyclif', he says, was a major influence upon the later European reformation. The Hussites, as well, were (probably) proto-Baptists: ''Tis

[163] Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, 1734, I.8.
[164] Ibid., 9.
[165] Ibid., 10.
[166] Ibid., 11.
[167] Ibid., 12.

therefore most reasonable to conclude, that those persons were Baptists, and … baptized those that came over to their sect'.[168]

Crosby's arguments are far from convincing, but still inspired John Lewis to enter the lists again to defend Wyclif against this taint of anabaptism. His book *A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of Anabaptism in England, to which is prefixed Some Account of the Learned Dr. Wiclif, And A Defence of Him from the false Charge of his, and his Followers, denying Infant Baptism* appeared in 1738, the same year as Crosby's. The introduction comprises a discussion of Wyclif's life and work to show that he and his followers did not possess anabaptistical opinions. Lewis' purpose is to prove, as he had in his biography, that Wyclif was not an extremist or enthusiast but an orthodox reformer. His prime concern is to mount a defence against the 'false charge' that Wyclif denied infant baptism. Lewis tackles the task, as ever, in a thorough and methodical fashion. He uses the same sources he had in his Wyclif biography, principally *Trialogus* and English writings which were attributed to Wyclif, including *Grete Sentence of the Curs*. Lewis cites passages from *Trialogus* in which Wyclif took it for granted that infants would be baptised.[169] 'He is very plain,' Lewis says, 'in declaring it unlawful for the Faithful … wholly to omit Water-baptism, on a Supposition of being baptised with the Spirit.'[170] It is true that Wyclif was not opposed to infant baptism, or even particularly interested in it; in the fifteenth century, the issue of baptism was not one which attracted the attention of reformers.[171] While Lewis was not right when he says that 'none of the English Nation were known to be of this Opinion 'till about 1600', it is true that criticism of infant baptism was confined to radicals.

Lewis also examines whether Wyclif held the other 'Anabaptistical Errors'[172] which Crosby had credited him with, the refusal to take oaths and the belief that dominion is founded in grace. The first of these Lewis easily dismisses, referring readers to his biography of Wyclif: the concern about the swearing of oaths articulated in an English

[168] Ibid., 17.
[169] For example, in book IV, chapter 12 of *Trialogus*, Wyclif stated that 'we suppose without doubting that children baptized by rite of water would be baptized in the third baptism, since they have baptismal Grace' [modern translation] and that it is unlawful to omit water baptism.
[170] Lewis, *Rise and Progress of Anabaptism,* xviii.
[171] Anne Hudson noted in *PR* that it attracted 'little coherent redirection', 290.
[172] John Lewis, *Rise and Progress of Anabaptism*, 1738, xix.

Wycliffite source related to the hazard of committing idolatry when swearing oaths on saints rather than the holy trinity. However, Lewis, not surprisingly, had a more difficult time proving that Wyclif did not espouse the doctrine of dominion through grace, since this was a central plank of Wyclif's political thought. So, he rather glosses over it, citing Hugo Grotius to the effect that until God's kingdom arrives, we must live by human laws and follow human kings.[173] It is perhaps surprising that Lewis chose to raise the matter, since it would be hard to maintain that Wyclif did not hold this view, given the multiple references to the doctrine in *Trialogus* and the fact that the doctrine of dominion in grace is not, in any case, characteristic of Anabaptism.

The final part of Lewis' argument examines Wyclif's immediate followers. Was it the case that even if Wyclif did not 'overthrow the Practice of baptising Infants … yet many of his Followers did, and were made Baptists by it[?]'[174] No, says Lewis, because not only was Wyclif not an Anabaptist, but neither were any of his followers. Lewis reprises his original argument that *Trialogus* proves that Wyclif was not an Anabaptist, stating that, in *Trialogus* IV.12, he positively upheld the doctrine that 'by Baptism we are made Partakers in Baptismal Grace.'[175] In short, says Lewis, it is 'but an evil Surmise, and a fond Desire, to have Anabaptism of a more ancient Date than it really is.'[176] Lewis successfully makes his case, though whether it really needed to be made at all is questionable, given the self-confessedly weak nature of the arguments made by Thomas Crosby.

The Quaker John Gough spent the last eight years of his life working on *A history of the people called Quakers* (1789),[177] starting with the birth of George Fox in 1624. The introduction contains a brief history of the church in the preceding centuries, seen in the light of God's revelation. Gough examines the careers of a selection of reformers including Wyclif. There is no attempt in Gough's work, however, to appropriate Wyclif as foundational for Quakers; he is happy to begin the story of the Society of Friends with Fox. The brief account he gives of Wyclif's career is factual and accurate. It is possible,

[173] Ibid., xx.
[174] Ibid., xxi.
[175] Ibid., xxii.
[176] Ibid., xxiv.
[177] P. Lamb, 'John Gough', *ODNB*.

though, to discern a Quaker cast in Gough's version. He writes that Wyclif gained his knowledge of the true meaning of Christianity through diligent study of scripture and 'maintained that the New Testament was a perfect rule of faith and manners.'[178] Wyclif derived his doctrines from the scriptures and the practice of the primitive church. Gough emphasises those of Wyclif's teachings which fitted with this evangelical interpretation, principally his opposition to the corrupt church establishment and superstitious practices like transubstantiation, not mentioning his political ideas. This is what John Gough would have liked Wyclif to be, but it is a description of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century evangelical. Gough nudges Wyclif in an evangelical direction, rather than attempting wholesale appropriation in the manner of Toplady and Crosby. Eighteenth-century Quakers were, on this evidence, happy to acknowledge their distinctness and that they represented a new way in Protestantism.

Methodist writers were keen to appropriate the *memory* of John Wyclif by comparing him with contemporary leaders. Simon Lewis cites an anonymous pamphlet of 1740, *The Parallel Reformers; or the Renowned Wickliff and the Reverend Mr. Whitefield Compared*.[179] The pamphleteer compares George Whitefield to the 'pious and Illustrious' Wyclif. Both, he says, were men of 'Astonishing Eloquence', despite there being no evidence that this was true of Wyclif, stating that both Whitefield and Wyclif preached in 'open fields, Church Yards and Markets', and both 'exposed the absurd Doctrines, vicious lives and Insolent behaviour of the Clergy.' The centre of the pamphlet contains a large illustration, *The Parallel Reformers*, 'shewing by many parallel instances ye great resemblance between those pious divines.'[180] True to its word, the illustration lists a great many parallels, including that 'both were Champions for the same Faith.' Lewis cites another example, Jonathan Warne's *The Spirit of the Martyrs Revived in the Doctrines of the Reverend Mr George Whitefield* (1740).[181] Warne also compares Whitefield with the older generation of reformers: 'Wickliffe, John Hus and Luther', who, like Whitefield, 'were sent of God, did take all their Authority from God alone; and so were bold and confident …

[178] John Gough, *A History of the People called Quakers*, 1789, I.28.
[179] Simon Lewis, *The Struggle for True Religion: Anti-Methodism and Theological Controversy in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2021, 97.
[180] See figure iii.
[181] Ibid.

against the whole World.'[182] These Methodist writers use the memory of Wyclif to demonstrate the piety of their own leaders, in particular Whitefield. They did not need to take the kind of leaps with Wyclif's theology which Toplady and Crosby had; it was sufficient that he was a historic exemplar of similar evangelical piety.

Nonconformist writers of various stripes adhered to the standard Foxean view of Wyclif as a great reformer and campaigner against corruption and were keen to recruit him as a foundational figure for their own denomination. Their strategies varied. Some writers had to strive mightily and push Wyclif into unfamiliar positions to recruit him for their cause, with, be it said, limited success. It is impossible to alter the fact that Wyclif was not an Anabaptist or a Calvinist. A more successful approach was to regard him as a pious exemplar and reformer, as we have seen with our Quaker and Methodist examples. These writers were not afraid to amend Wyclif's personality and ideas to fit their own theological positions, and the picture of him in all these nonconformist accounts varies from the historical Wyclif; all that differs is the extent of that variation, and the degree of contortion writers are willing to undertake to make Wyclif fit.

6.6 Conclusion

Eighteenth-century opinion on Wyclif was as broad as that on the Reformation itself; not surprisingly, as he had come to be seen by many as the *fons et origo* of that movement. Across the board from Catholics to nonconformists, writers tended to endow Wyclif with their own feelings about the Reformation. The facts of Wyclif's life and career were, to most of these writers, obscure – as, to some extent, they remain. This did not matter – rather, it helped; Wyclif's comparative obscurity, and the distance since his time, allowed writers liberty to present the view of him which most chimed with their preconceived opinions. The tensions and contrasts between these writers' accounts highlight the arguments and fissures which existed in the religious discourse of the eighteenth century.

[182] Jonathan Warne, *The Spirt of the Martyrs Revived*, 1740, 14.

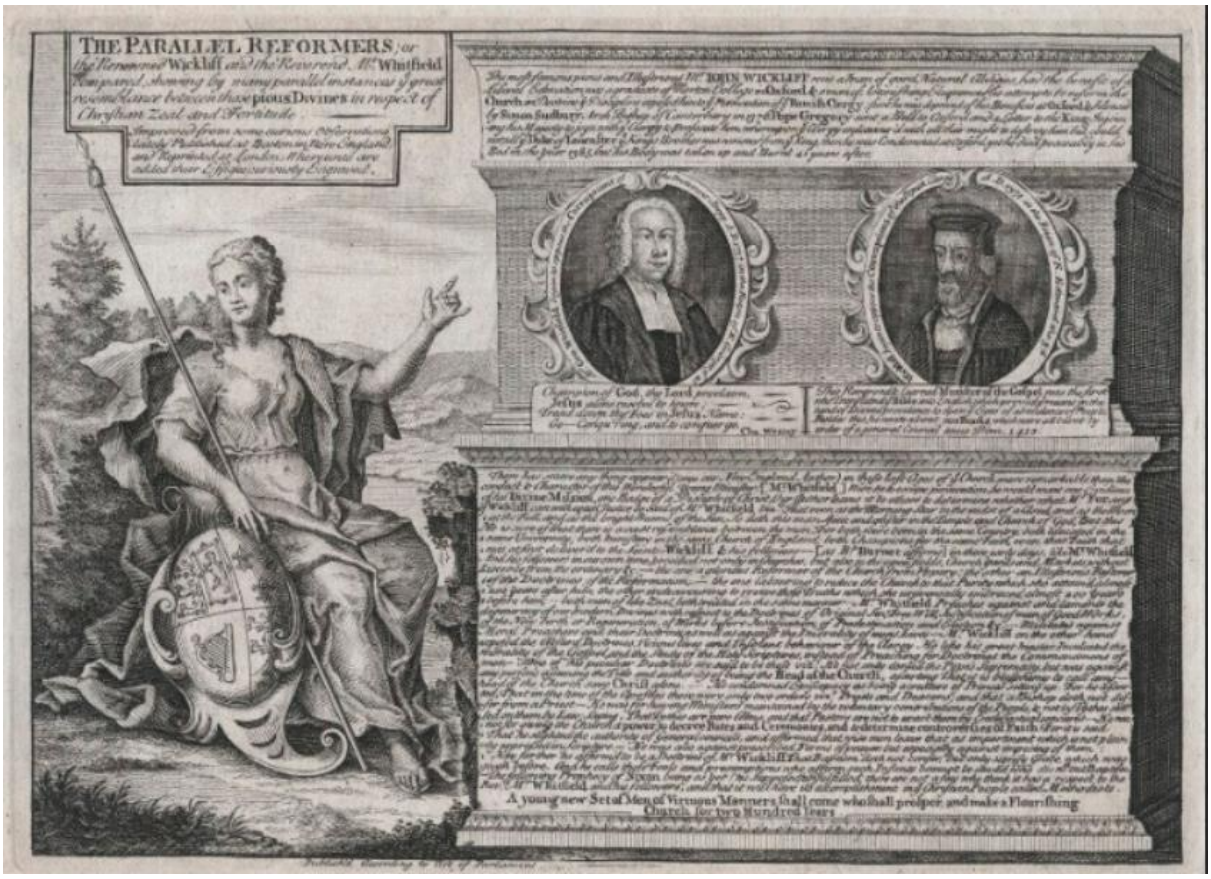

Fig. iii

The Parallel Reformers (George Whitefield; John Wyclif). The text compares the careers of the two reformers, concluding that ‘there is a vast resemblance between the men, … both Champions for the same Faith that … was first deliver’d to the Saints, Wickliff & his followers … the one labouring to reduce the church to that Purity which she attained almost 200 years after him, the other endeavouring to revive those Truths[.]’ The text draws many other parallels.

Unknown artist, etching and line engraving, 1740.
National Portrait Gallery, ref: NPG D43261.

Fig. iv

Above, John Wycliffe preaching to a crowd in Oxford; below, the burning of his bones in 1428 at the order of the Council of Constance. (44 years after his death, not 41 as stated.) The friar brandishing a crucifix as if to ward off Wyclif's message is mirrored by the dark figure with a pitchfork at the burning, where self-satisfied clerics chatter happily.

Unknown artist, etching, 10th July 1812,
Wellcome Collection ref: 43179i.

7 Milner, Lingard and Vaughan

This chapter examines the work of the three most important historians of our subject in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their work set the terms of the debate for the following decades, until historians became more professionalised after 1880. Joseph Milner was an Evangelical, his church history dedicated to seeking out true exemplars of Christian virtue. John Lingard was a Catholic priest, and the most important historian of England in the early nineteenth century. His history appeared in multiple editions until the 1850s and presented a view of English history which was slanted in a Catholic direction. Robert Vaughan, a Congregationalist minister, wrote deeply-researched biographies which would define Wyclif for the nineteenth century as a patriot and evangelical reformer.

7.1 Joseph Milner

Joseph Milner's influential *History of the Church of Christ* (1794-1809) sought to overturn the Enlightenment reading of church history and restore the place of God's providence. Milner makes his intention plain, writing 'Let not my reader forget, that his historian is always in quest of evidence of the true faith of the Gospel, exemplified in practice.'[1] Milner, the headmaster of Hull Grammar School, had emerged from a conversion experience as a 'mild Calvinist'.[2] He died in 1797 with the book incomplete; his brother Isaac produced Volume IV, covering our period, in 1803. Milner wanted to discover 'men who have been REAL, not merely NOMINAL Christians'[3] to demonstrate the working of the Holy Spirit in human affairs. This was a history in which the working of providence, excised by Enlightenment historians like Hume, was restored to a central place.[4] 'Unbelievers and sceptics do their utmost … to exclude God and his Christ from being … any supervising influence over those great events which prove favourable to the

[1] Joseph Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ,* 1803, IV.150.
[2] J.D. Walsh, 'Joseph Milner's Evangelical Church History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 10.2 (1959), 175.
[3] Milner, *Church of Christ*, I.ix.
[4] Milner devotes several pages to critique of Hume's Wyclif material, stating that 'His dislike of the Gospel of Christ is so perfect and complete, that wherever he finds sincerity in believing and zeal in supporting … its fundamentals … we expect in vain from him … the justice and impartiality of an upright Judge.' Ibid, IV.122.

propagation … of true religion.'[5] Milner had no interest in matters he considered to lie outside this territory such as church politics, conflicts between church and state, heresies and schisms. 'Nothing but what appears to me to belong to Christ's kingdom, shall be admitted.'[6] The work of previous historians, Milner sniffily concedes, had 'no doubt … given us much useful information' but 'give[s] a much larger proportion to the history of wickedness, than to piety.'[7] The result, as Bruce Hindmarsh noted, is a book which lies in the tradition of evangelical lives collections,[8] including, in effect, biographical chapters on Wyclif and John Oldcastle. Milner was unable to put Wyclif in the first rank of his godly Christians; he was too flawed, too entangled in politics, but in the Lollards, headed by Oldcastle, he finds true exemplars of Godly piety.

Wyclif

> 'Whoever carefully examines the original records, will be convinced that the merits of this Reformer have been considerably exaggerated.'[9]

Eighteenth-century Protestant writers, as we have noted, had problems with Wyclif; his ideas were complicated, and he was involved in political wrangles. This unease finds its strongest manifestation in Milner's book. Milner acknowledges that Wyclif had considerable merits, but for him these were outweighed by his flaws both as theologian and reformer; in essence, he was just not sufficiently godly. When assessing the merits of characters in church history Milner is concerned most with how closely they fitted what he saw as the ideal characteristics of godly members of the Church of Christ. It is understandable that the irascible, political and inconsistent personality of John Wyclif would be one with which Milner was uncomfortable. It was a conclusion that he struggled to reach: he *wanted* to appreciate Wyclif but could not overlook his defects: 'I know of no person … whose life and character have cost me more thought, and care, than Wickliff's. … I have been mortified to find, that I could not conscientiously join with the popular cry in ranking this man among the highest Worthies of the Church.'[10] John Foxe had

[5] Ibid., IV.xiii.
[6] Ibid., I.x.
[7] Ibid., I.xi.
[8] D. B. Hindmarsh., 'Joseph Milner',.*ODNB*.
[9] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.103.
[10] Ibid., IV.104-5.

considered Wyclif a worthy champion against the corruptions of the papacy but accepted that he was flawed, saying that 'In [his] opinions and assertions, albeit some blemishes perhaps may be noted'[11] and writes of him in a less effusive manner than he does on martyrs like Oldcastle. Milner's critique from an evangelical standpoint extends Foxe's attitude.

Milner's difficulties with Wyclif closely parallel the criticisms which had been made by Philip Melanchthon in the 1530s; not surprisingly, since, for Milner, the sixteenth-century German reformers represented an epitome of godly piety. Melanchthon had criticised John Wyclif for having been 'confused' about the Eucharist, having 'never understood the righteousness of faith' and 'foolishly confound[ing] the Gospel and politics [contending] that it is not lawful for priests to own property.'[12] On the Eucharist, Milner, like Melanchthon, finds that Wyclif's writing contains 'contradictions, and obscurities'.[13] Part of this confusion, of course, comes from the fact that Milner, in common with all writers of the period, employed a mix of sources, some written by Wyclif, some by his followers. In his evidence for Wyclif's views on transubstantiation he uses both *Trialogus* and *Wickliffe's Wicket,* the latter not written by Wyclif, so consistency cannot be expected. To complicate matters further, Wyclif's own ideas evolved over time. Milner concludes that Wyclif correctly opposed the 'papistical' doctrine of transubstantiation 'with all his might', but that there is doubt as to whether he maintained the true doctrine.[14] Wyclif's most serious failing, for Milner, is his omission of the doctrine, central to Protestantism, of justification by grace, which he finds little mentioned in Wyclif's writings.[15] It is hardly to be expected that Wyclif, writing in the fourteenth century, would have espoused ideas which bore close resemblance to those prevalent among nineteenth-century evangelicals, and his attitude justifies Walsh's conclusion that Milner lacked an understanding of the medieval mind.[16] Milner did not *seek* to understand the medieval

[11] *A&M*, 544.
[12] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.111-112 and see p.110-1. Robert Persons quoted these criticisms in the seventeenth century. John Lewis, in his biography, had made it a priority to counter them. See pp.103-4. Milner refers to Lewis' defences of Wyclif against Melanchthon's charges (reasonably, perhaps) as 'very unsatisfactory'. Ibid., 118.
[13] Ibid., 111.
[14] Ibid., 108-9.
[15] Ibid., 117.
[16] Walsh, '*Evangelical Church History*', 180.

mind: for him, there was only one standard of objective truth against which people from all eras should be measured.[17]

Milner was on safer ground accusing Wyclif of conflating religion and politics, a charge commonly made by hostile historians. Unlike most Catholics, though, Milner does not accuse Wyclif of fomenting sedition; rather, for him, a reformer had no business involving himself in these secular concerns. It was, in short, not godly. 'Let serious divines cease to immerse themselves in political concerns: Politics was the rock on which this great and good man split'.[18] Milner takes issue with Wyclif's prescriptions on church government, stating that his views erred in 'the extreme of excess', since he 'disliked ALL Church-endowments, and wished to have the clergy reduced to a 'state of poverty' via the right of parishioners to withhold tithes, a policy which Milner said would bring about 'confusion, fraud, and the encouragement of avarice.'[19] The idea also laid Wyclif open to the accusation of hypocrisy, as he had benefitted from the living of Lutterworth, so Milner concludes that Wyclif cannot have meant 'the whole of what he uttered in his warmth.'[20] After all, Wyclif had been a vehement critic of the mendicant friars. 'Are spiritual services of so little estimation, as to claim no reward from those on whom they are conferred?' asks Milner.[21] This misrepresents Wyclif's opinion, since Wyclif did not oppose the principle of tithing, proposing only that tithes be withheld where the benefice-holder were delinquent in his duty.[22] Milner disavows Wyclif's doctrine of lordship via grace and the implied right of temporal lords to disendow the church, stating that it was 'expressed in too indefinite a manner';[23] for him Wyclif held 'wild and irregular notions concerning property'.[24] Milner, in common with almost all Anglican historians of this period, was deeply uncomfortable with those ideas of Wyclif's which would have destabilised the church or society.

[17] Walsh also comments that Milner's work contains 'no real conception of change and adaptation.' Ibid., 185.
[18] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.103.
[19] Ibid., 119.
[20] Ibid., 120.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Kenny, *Wyclif*, 51.
[23] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.98.
[24] Ibid., 103.

Robert Persons criticised Wyclif, or Foxe's treatment of him, because he could not be considered a martyr, having never suffered real persecuted for his faith. This spirit of martyrdom was central to Milner's definition of 'REAL' Christians as those who 'suffered gladly the LOSS OF ALL THINGS, THAT THEY MIGHT WIN CHRIST',[25] and in this he found Wyclif wanting. At his 1382 trial, Wyclif had produced clarifications of nineteen teachings condemned by the Pope. These clarifications have often been held up by Wyclif's critics as legalistic and evasive, Wyclif back-tracking.[26] To Milner, this was not the behaviour of a 'real' Christian. '[T]here appear … such sophistical methods of argument, and such evasive modes of speech, as are very incompatible with the character of a Reformer.'[27] Wyclif, Milner concludes, was deficient of the spirit of martyrdom.

Milner does acknowledge *some* good in Wyclif. His work translating the bible 'alone sufficed to render his name immortal.' It is surprising that Milner does not write more about this. For many another nineteenth-century historian, it was Wyclif's most important achievement, but Milner simply acknowledges the importance of the translation, which, like most historians of the time, he credits to Wyclif alone.[28] Nothing else, he says, contributed more to the spreading of the truth of Christianity.[29] For Milner, Wyclif had no influence on the sixteenth-century Reformation. Indeed, despite his greater enthusiasm for the Lollards, he does not treat them as harbingers of later reform either. Wyclif's 'knowledge of Christian doctrine … was yet so defective, so obscure, and so scholastical' that it could not have had any long-term impact. Philip Melanchthon himself had said that Wyclif lacked understanding of that most important idea, righteousness of faith.[30] Milner acknowledges that Wyclif, as a theologian, was 'greatly superior to his contemporaries' and if only he could have avoided 'the snare of … political speculation' would have been in the first rank of reformers.[31] Despite these flaws, Wyclif *was* an instrument of providence. 'Protestants … are bound thankfully to acknowledge … that

[25] Ibid., VI.ix.
[26] The next section will examine the detailed defences of these by Robert Vaughan.
[27] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.101. Milner's argument is again let down by misattribution. He states that Wyclif's views had been more robustly articulated in *The Grete Sentence of Curs Expouned*, the text extensively used by John Lewis which was not by Wyclif.
[28] Ibid., 104, 133-4.
[29] Ibid., 134.
[30] Ibid., 119.
[31] Ibid., 115.

such a character was providentially raised up at that very time it was so much wanted, and, that from his labours considerable benefit accrued to the Church of Christ.'[32] Did Milner consider Wyclif one of his 'TRUE Christians'? He equivocates, but Wyclif just clears the bar. He displayed 'more equivocation and artifice than are consistent with the simplicity of character which should mark a true disciple and follower of Jesus Christ; but … who can deny that, on the whole, he was a sincere believer in Christianity, and a zealous advocate for its essential doctrines?'[33]

The Lollards

> God honoured [Wyclif] with Evangelical fruitfulness, though it must be owned, that many of his disciples appear on the whole to have been better Christians than himself'[34]

The Lollards, for Milner, were unambiguously godly, 'real Christians'.[35] They have been accused of espousing the speculative tenets of Wyclif, but, according to Milner, 'did clear themselves of every reasonable suspicion of factious innovation.'[36] Milner's source for this conclusion was *Acts & Monuments*, the principal source for his Lollard chapter. Milner was misled to this biased conclusion by his sources. Many of the Wycliffite social and ecclesiological doctrines which he condemned came from texts written by Wyclif's early followers, some of whom took his ideas in more radical directions. This misattribution often gave rise to skewed judgements of both Wyclif and the Lollards. Milner's fundamental purpose in the book was to find 'real Christians'. He *wanted* the Lollards to fit into this mould, and, consciously or not, squeezed them into it by emphasising their godly attributes and actions and ignoring those which did not fit.

The bulk of Milner's Lollard chapter is concerned with John Oldcastle.[37] Oldcastle provided Milner with exactly what he was looking for; an apparently unambiguous exemplar of true godliness: 'This exemplary knight appears to have possessed the humility of a Christian, as well as the spirit of a soldier: for, he not only faithfully protested against the idolatry of the times … but, he also openly made such penitential declarations

[32] Ibid., 105.
[33] Ibid., 122.
[34] Ibid., 103.
[35] Ibid., 137.
[36] Ibid., 139.
[37] Twenty-seven pages on Oldcastle in the 37-page chapter on the Lollards, bearing out Hindmarsh's observation (*ODNB*) that Milner's book lies within the tradition of lives collections.

… of having broken God's commandments … together with a firm reliance on the mercy of God through the mediation of Jesus Christ.'[38] After a lengthy account of Oldcastle's trial, taken directly from *A&M*,[39] Milner concludes that 'the proud and ferocious spirit of an ill educated soldier seems to have been melted down into the meekness and humility of the christian [sic].'[40] Milner tweaks Foxe's text where Oldcastle did not seem sufficiently godly. During his trial, Oldcastle confessed that 'in my frayle youth I offended thee most greuously, in pride, wrath, and glottony, in couetousnes, and in lechery.' Milner draws a discreet veil over the exact nature of Oldcastle's youthful misadventures: 'How often in my frail youth have I offended thee by ungoverned passions, pride, concupiscence, intemperance.'[41]

He finds evidence in Walsingham's chronicle proving Oldcastle's godly credentials which had been missed by other historians. After his capture, Oldcastle was summoned before parliament to answer charges of heresy and treason, where, Walsingham records, he refused to accept the authority of the assembly, saying that 'It means absolutely nothing to me that I am being judged by you or put to death by men.'[42] Milner realised that Oldcastle was quoting from 1 Corinthians 4:3: 'But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment'. For Milner this showed that 'the knight who was thus persecuted for righteousness' sake [was] thereby demonstrating that the love of the Father was in him … this martyr for the Gospel of Christ steadily fixed his eyes on GOD'S JUDGMENT.'[43] Milner also lauds Lollard martyrs William Sawtrey (prosecuted for his 'open confession of Evangelical Truth')[44] and Thomas Badby (who 'died in defence of divine truth').[45] He omits all Lollard political activity. The Lollards are presented as godly Christians shorn of the taint of revolutionary intent. The 1414 rising he dismisses as 'a very remarkable transaction'. The Lollards had assembled 'for purposes of devotion' but the clergy took the chance to misrepresent their conventicle and Henry V had

[38] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.150.
[39] Ibid., IV.153. Milner says that he selected the most instructive parts from Foxe's account of the 'unmeasurably prolix' examination of Oldcastle.
[40] Historians in the early eighteenth century had emphasised Oldcastle's martial virtue, see p.38-9 on Thomas Goodwin. Milner's Oldcastle is a *Christian* soldier, with the rougher military edges removed.
[41] Ibid., IV.151, quoting *A&M*, 689, *A&M* (1563), 218.
[42] *Chronica Maiora*, 428.
[43] Milner, *Church of Christ*, IV.168-9.
[44] Ibid., IV.141.
[45] Ibid., IV.142.

listened.[46] For Milner, Henry was an able soldier but 'perfectly ignorant of religion' and under the sway of the clergy. He accuses Henry of 'desolating France, by one of the most unjust wars ever waged by ambition.' Whilst he was thus engaged, the clergy 'almost effaced the vestiges of godliness in the kingdom.'[47]

However, Milner goes further than just cleansing the Lollards of the suspicion of sedition: he does not mention *anything* of the political dimension of Lollardy. There is nothing here, for instance, on the 1395 Lollard petition, even though the twelve conclusions did not include the kind of political ideas which he most disliked. He had excoriated Wyclif just for being *involved* in politics. For the Lollards to be presented as godly members of the Church of Christ it was important that they had no political agenda. As a result, his account, like so many others', is skewed: it is impossible, for example, to argue that Oldcastle was not engaged in politics. His analyses of Wyclif and the Lollards, painting the latter as evangelical heroes in contrast to their flawed founder, are one-dimensional. In doing this, Milner locates himself firmly in the evangelical tradition. There is more than an echo here of Foxe's treatment of Wyclif and Oldcastle respectively. Foxe was not directly critical of Wyclif in the way that Milner was, but *A&M* certainly portrays Oldcastle in more glowing language than Wyclif. The ambiguities in John Wyclif's life and work were problematic for all evangelical historians.

7.2 John Lingard

John Lingard's *A History of England* was one of the most important works of history in the early nineteenth century. Lingard was a Catholic priest, one of the last to study at the college at Douai; he came to Ushaw College in Durham in 1808 and settled at Hornby, Lancashire, where he wrote his *History*.[48] This was a multi-volume work, covering the period since the Roman invasion, of the kind which had been common in the eighteenth century, but was becoming less so in the nineteenth, due to the daunting scale of the undertaking. The first edition appeared in eight volumes over 1819-30 and proved so popular that further editions were published throughout the century, the last with which Lingard was involved being the fifth, in 1849. Lingard wanted his work to be read by, and

[46] Ibid., IV.160.
[47] Ibid., IV.170.
[48] P. Phillips, 'John Lingard', *ODNB*.

acceptable to, Protestants and to make a quiet case for Catholicism. Peter Phillips wrote that this 'was a revisionist history: [Lingard] considered this dry clarity, with its appearance of impartiality, to be the best way of serving the Catholic cause.'[49] Lingard, being of the moderate, Cisalpine tendency within English Catholicism, wanted to show that Catholics posed no threat to the nation. As new editions appeared, Lingard rewrote some of the analysis of aspects of the Reformation to show Catholics in a more favourable light, becoming less circumspect following the achievement of Catholic emancipation in 1829.[50] In addition, his work displayed the developing new approach to historiography, using archives now opened to researchers for the first time. His aim was to go back to original source texts, writing that 'I did not hesitate … to impose on myself a severe obligation … to take nothing on trust, to confine my research … to original documents.'[51] He wanted to move away from the 'philosophical' approach epitomised by the work of Hume, which, Lingard felt, forced historical facts to fit preconceived theories. 'I have little hesitation in saying, that few writers have done more to pervert the truth of history, than philosophical historians' he wrote.[52]

Wyclif

Lingard describes Wyclif as an 'extraordinary man,'[53] who influenced the subsequent Reformation, opinions unusual for a Catholic writer, although he nowhere suggests that he regarded his influence in a positive light. Three times, Lingard uses the word 'apostle' of Wyclif, saying, for instance, that 'he declaimed against vice with the freedom and severity of an apostle.'[54] This acknowledges Wyclif's revolutionary energy, but also carries a suggestion of excessive zeal: David Hume's 'enthusiasm'. Lingard draws

[49] Ibid.
[50] According to Peter Phillips, 'revisions in later editions bring Lingard's intentions even more to the fore.' 'Re-evaluating John Lingard's *History of England*,' *British Catholic History*, 28.4 (2007), 529.
[51] John Lingard, *A History of England*, 2nd edn., 1823, I.iv. All references, unless otherwise stated, will be to the first edition. The material on Wyclif was almost completely unchanged in the first five editions. Lingard's work on the later Reformation broke new ground, Phillips praising his 'careful use of archive material'. ('Re-evaluating John Lingard', 531). According to John Vidmar, archives gave Lingard 'the materials to fashion a completely new approach to history.' 'John Lingard's History of the English Reformation: History or Apologetics?', *The Catholic Historical Review* 85.3 (1999), 392.
[52] John Lingard, *A History of England*, 1st edn., 1819-30, I.ix.
[53] Ibid., III.194.
[54] Ibid., III.193. Lingard uses the word in a sense which was more common in the nineteenth century: 'The chief advocate of a new principle or system; the leader of a great reform.' *OED*. Lingard refers to Henry V as possessing 'the zeal of an apostle' when trying to dissuade John Oldcastle from heresy. (Ibid., 334).

readers' attention to Wyclif's many personality flaws: he was vague and evasive in articulating his tenets, arbitrary and dogmatic in his opposition to the church and (indirectly) responsible for encouraging sedition and rebellion.

Lingard reiterates Catholic criticisms going back at least as far as Robert Persons. Wyclif did not display the eagerness for martyrdom expected of a reforming hero. '[T]he new apostle was in no haste to grasp the crown of martyrdom.'[55] Persons had found more evidence for Wyclif's lack of moral fibre in his apparent evasiveness when defending his condemned doctrines in 1377. This had been criticised by Joseph Milner and Lingard agrees. Wyclif had used 'quibbles and evasions which seem unworthy of a sensible or of an honest man.'[56] Beyond this cowardly evasion, Lingard finds Wyclif's tenets confused and confusing, though this conclusion was in part skewed by the patchwork of sources he draws upon. He writes waspishly that it is difficult to ascertain Wyclif's real tenets because 'he claimed the twofold privilege of changing his opinions at will, and of being infallible in every change; and when he found it expedient … could so qualify his doctrines with conditions, or explain them away by distinctions, as to give an appearance of innocence to tenets of the most mischievous tendency.'[57] Wyclif's ideas were often convoluted because of his scholastic background. He had 'intrenched himself behind so many unintelligible distinctions, that it will be difficult for the most acute logician to discover his meaning.'[58] Wyclif's notion of lordship in grace, for Lingard 'his favourite maxim', is a case in point. Lingard condemns this as 'a strange amalgamation of feudal and theological notions,'[59] but passes over it without linking it to the seditious tendencies of the Wyclif's poor priests, which seems an opportunity missed.

Lingard is most interested in Wyclif's (supposed) foundation of the order of itinerant preachers known as 'poor priests' and his conflict with the clergy. The former allowed him to link Wyclif to sedition, and the latter gave him the opportunity to recast the clergy as patient and tolerant, in keeping with his overarching intention of putting Catholicism in a positive light. For Lingard, the order of poor priests became Wyclif's priority in 1378

[55] Ibid., III.190.
[56] Ibid. See pp.144-8 for Robert Vaughan's contrasting analysis of these defences.
[57] Ibid., III.195.
[58] Ibid., III.196.
[59] Ibid.

after his dismissal from Oxford.[60] Lingard's attitude to Wyclif is not wholly negative, but he is unalloyedly critical of his followers. The preachers, for him, were the source of the rebellious and destabilising notions which spread among the common people. He calls them 'a body of fanatics' who 'soon became subjects of astonishment and complaint'[61] but acknowledges that their preaching proved attractive. 'Men crowded to hear the new preachers. The novelty of their manner … and the severity of their invectives against … the privileges of the clergy … won the assent of their hearers.'[62] For Lingard, this inflammatory preaching was one cause of the 1381 rising, as it turned the people against their rulers: 'their sermons were calculated to awaken in the people a spirit of discontent and insubordination, and to bring into contempt the established authorities, both in church and state.'[63]

Lingard is supportive of the fourteenth-century clerical hierarchy. He writes positively about the mendicant friars, whom he says had 'earned the esteem of the public' for good works.[64] Those who opposed them were motivated by jealousy. It was Wyclif's violent hostility towards the friars which began his career of dissent until eventually he opposed the entire clerical body: 'The pope, the bishops, the rectors and curates smarted successively under the lash.'[65] Wyclif condemned them for not imitating the poverty of Christ; however, Lingard notes that Wyclif himself had accepted the benefice of Lutterworth, observing archly that this was an action 'so contrary to the principles which he afterwards taught, that it is probable he had not yet determined to embrace the profession of a reformer.'[66] Wyclif's critique was excessive and lacked nuance. Lingard writes that, according to Wyclif, all the clergy were 'no better than liars and fiends, hypocrites and traitors, heretics and antichrists.'[67] Some, no doubt, were corrupt, but 'the zeal of the new apostle' – that word again – 'could make no discrimination.'[68] The problem, as ever, is that this critique is not based upon Wyclif's own writing but taken

[60] Ibid., III.191.
[61] Ibid., III.161.
[62] Ibid., III.197. See pp.255-9 for the late nineteenth-century characterisation of Lollards as socialists.
[63] Ibid., III.190.
[64] Lingard, *History*, III. III.158.
[65] Ibid., III.160.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., III.194.
[68] Ibid.

from an English Wycliffite text, *On Prelates*, which had been reproduced by John Lewis, but which was not by Wyclif. Of course, Wyclif did set himself against the clerical hierarchy, but the dramatic invective from *On Prelates* quoted by Lingard was not Wyclif's. Lingard ascribes other, later, Wycliffite opinions to Wyclif such as the idea that he 'loudly inveigled against the custom of singing in the churches', also taken from *Of Prelates*.[69]

He credits Wyclif, briefly, with having translated the bible, which, in the hands of his preachers 'became an engine of wonderful power'.[70] In this way, Lingard says, Wyclif did indeed inspire the latent Reformation because: 'a spirit of inquiry was generated, and the seeds were sown of that religious revolution, which in little more than a century astounded and convulsed the nations of Europe.'[71] No 'Morning Star' panegyric, but Lingard *does* credit Wyclif with directly influencing the process of reform. Whether that constitutes a good thing or not is left to reader to decide; Lingard was not prepared directly to criticise the Reformation, but his final sentence nudges the reader by emphasising its disruptive nature.

The Lollards

Lingard's treatment of Wyclif is focused on his conflict with the clergy, and it is the same when he writes about the Lollards, but dealing with them he is less equivocal, treating them as a wholly pernicious, even malevolent, movement. There are no material changes to the text in later editions: Lingard has no qualms about being strongly critical from the outset, though there is some augmentation of the material in the 1854 sixth edition. Lingard's version of events presents aggressive and intemperate Lollard preachers rousing the people against clergy who were unfailingly moderate and patient in response. The entire political establishment was united against them, successive kings and even the House of Commons being dedicated opponents of Lollardy, regarding them as a threat to civil order. The most significant aspect of Lollard campaigning was their assault on the clergy. Lingard emphasises this almost to the exclusion of all else, writing for instance that 'the spirit of Wycliffe had lost nothing of its original asperity by transfusion

[69] Ibid., III.197. Similar anachronistic attributions had been made in the eighteenth century, see p.113, fn.
[70] Ibid., III.198.
[71] Ibid.

into the breasts of his successors. His itinerant preachers still appealed to the passions and prejudices of the people, against the riches, and luxury, and the vices of the clergy, whom they described as the disciples & associates of Satan.'[72] The Lollards wanted to abolish the system of ecclesiastical finances: 'The people were advised, were even commanded, not to pay their tithes, and plans ... were obstinately pursued, to obtain the general confiscation of ecclesiastical property.'[73] In Lingard's reading of this dispute, it is unequivocally the Lollards who are the aggressors; the clergy remarkable for their patience and tolerance: they had been 'goaded with every species of provocation; and yet had exhibited the most exemplary forbearance.'[74] When Lollards were put on trial, their clerical judges exhibited similar patience. In William Sawtrey's trial, Archbishop Arundel made every effort to save him despite the 'contempt and insolence of his answers',[75] and with John Oldcastle it was the same: 'his conduct was as arrogant and insulting, as that of his judge was mild and dignified.'[76]

Lingard is unusual, by comparison with other Catholic and oppositional writers, in being so positive about the fourteenth-century clergy; most other historians of a similar persuasion tended to pass over their actions or condemn the persecution. This supports the suggestion that Lingard's history was a work of Catholic apologetics and reflects his extensive reliance upon the monastic chroniclers as sources. His assertion that the other arms of the state were anti-Lollard is unusual, most historians concluding that the sympathies of the Commons lay with the Lollards prior to the 1414 rising. But for Lingard, not just the kings Henry IV and V, but even the House of Commons were opposed to them. Lingard, though, writes that 'Henry [V] had partaken of the general alarm excited among the higher classes by the levelling principles of the Lollards, and, when he was only prince of Wales, had joined the lords and commons in presenting a petition to his father for the arrest and punishment of their preachers'[77] and that, during the reign of Henry IV, 'the commons had equalled, perhaps surpassed, the upper house in hostility to the

[72] Ibid., III.326. Some late nineteenth-century writers likewise saw the poor preachers as the main conduit of sedition, see pp.256-7, 262.
[73] Ibid., III.326-7.
[74] Ibid., III.326.
[75] Ibid., III.328.
[76] Ibid., III.335.
[77] Ibid., III.333.

lollards.'[78] In a lengthy footnote, Lingard attempts to disprove the suggestion that the statute of *Heretico Comburendo* had been passed without the consent of the Commons, going on to say (in the 1854 edition) that 'the usual assumption that the commons favoured the Lollards is contrary to the fact.[79]

Naturally, Lingard condemns the 1414 Lollard rising. Like many critics, he exaggerates its size and seriousness, stating that the Lollards possessed a sizeable army for John Oldcastle to command. He took from Walsingham's Chronicle the idea that they pinned notices on church doors stating that they had a hundred thousand men ready to defend their principles.[80] Once Oldcastle had escaped from the Tower, a major operation swung into action, led by the Lollard preachers: 'Emissaries were immediately despatched into the neighbouring counties: an army was secretly organised and thousands of fanatics held themselves in readiness to march to the metropolis.'[81] Twenty thousand, he says, thronged the roads into the capital, the object of their leaders being 'of the most dangerous tendency' before being thwarted by the king. This material is augmented in the edition of 1854, after Lingard's death, with some analysis of possible motives behind the insurrection: 'But what can have been the object of these misguided men? It was to remodel the state according to the doctrines of their sect.'[82]

Lingard's attitude to Wyclif and the Lollards is as hostile as might be expected of a Catholic priest. His is a clericalist reading of events: the principal focus of his attention being the Lollard preachers, whom he feels were central to the dissemination of Wyclif's ideas. The Wycliffite teachings he writes most about are those which attacked the clerical establishment. He regards Wyclif as a significant agent of change, an 'apostle', but Lollard preachers were no more than rabble-rousers bent upon undermining the church and fomenting rebellion. He does acknowledge that the movement attracted

[78] Ibid., III.330.
[79] Ibid., III.329, fn. and 5th edn. (1854), III.233, fn. This edition, published after Lingard's death, re-emphasises his argument that the statute validly passed through the Commons in the 1854 edition (and is correct in asserting that it did).
[80] Walsingham had stated that the Lollard force would 'rise against all those who were not followers of their sect', (*Chronica Maiora*, 390) but Lingard amends this to the rather more palatable statement that if force were employed against them a hundred thousand men would 'draw the sword in their defence.' Ibid., 333. At this time the population of London was not more than fifty thousand.
[81] Ibid., III.335.
[82] Ibid., 1854, 5th edn., III.238.

many lay supporters but shows no interest in their motivations; they had simply responded to charismatic Lollard preaching and were led into error and revolt. Lingard is regarded as producing a moderate Catholic reading of events, for being at pains to reconcile his writing to its intended Protestant audience, but this is not manifested in his work on Wyclif and the Lollards.

7.3 Robert Vaughan

In 1828, Robert Vaughan, a Congregationalist minister and historian,[83] produced *The life and opinions of John de Wycliffe, D.D*, the first major biography of Wyclif since Lewis's more than a century earlier. Most early nineteenth-century historians, led by Milner and Lingard, were unenthusiastic or downright hostile to the idea of Wyclif as a reformer. Vaughan felt driven to reinstate Wyclif as the first Protestant reformer, proving the case via study of texts which he thought had been written by Wyclif. 'It was a conviction that the labours of Wycliffe were more nearly connected with our religious independence … than is generally supposed' which motivated him to write; Wyclif was 'the equal of the greatest' of the sixteenth-century reformers.[84] Note his use of the word 'our'. Wyclif, according to Vaughan, was foundational for *English* Protestantism; he regularly refers to Wyclif as 'our reformer'. He was 'the first man who dared to advocate the free circulation of the scriptures in the vernacular tongue, the unalienable right of private judgement, and *our* complete deliverance from the wiles and oppressions of a papal priesthood.' (emphasis added).[85] Crediting Wyclif with inspiring the translation of scripture and leading opposition to papal claims was common currency; even high church Anglicans uneasy about many of Wyclif's ideas happily credited him with these achievements. However, for Vaughan, Wyclif was also the first to articulate the Protestant idea that individuals should arrive at spiritual judgements on their own authority. With his statement that Wyclif's work inspired England's religious independence, Wyclif, for Vaughan, was the *fons et origo* of the English Protestant identity.

[83] A. Gordon & R. Jones, 'Robert Vaughan', *ODNB*. A reputation which owed much to his biography of Wyclif.
[84] Robert Vaughan, *The life and opinions of John de Wycliffe, D.D.*, 2nd edn., 1831, I.xi.
[85] Ibid., viii. Emphasis added.

Inspired by the topic, Vaughan would produce two further books on Wyclif. He edited for the Wycliffe Society[86] *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe … with … Memoir* (1845), a collection of Wycliffite documents including a biographical introduction, and produced a second full biography in 1853, *John de Wycliffe, DD: a Monograph*.[87]

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> He thought with himself that thys matter shoulde be done by litle & litle. Wherefore hee taking his originall at small occasions, therby opened himselfe a way or meane to greater matters. *A&M*, 1570, 545-6. See p.199. fn.

The targets of John Wyclif's teaching evolved during his career, seemingly in reaction to different provocations. It was after his removal as the warden of Canterbury Hall in 1367 that he increased his attacks on the mendicant orders, his condemnation of the papacy became more marked after he served on an embassy meeting papal representatives at Bruges in 1374, and his assault on the doctrine of transubstantiation began after his condemnation and removal from Oxford in 1381. In these transitions, Foxe saw the outplaying of a premeditated campaign of reform by Wyclif; yet while it is the case that Wyclif became progressively more revolutionary, this was a reaction to successive vicissitudes rather than the outplaying of a preconceived plan.[88] However, most of the previous historiography, in particular, John Lewis' biography, did not take account of this evolution of Wyclif's thought.

Robert Vaughan's method was to make a thorough study of original texts, analysing the evolution of Wyclif's opinions to better understand his motivations. He claimed to have made a detailed study of Wycliffite texts in various academic libraries, travelling, he

[86] This Wycliffe Society was different from the better-known Wyclif Society founded by F. J. Furnivall and F.D. Matthew in 1881. See p.214.

[87] In the 1853 book, Vaughan writes that the 1828 book was 'the production of a younger man', and that he now felt he could do more with the materials he had painstakingly researched, to 'make the character of Wycliffe … better known among my countrymen.' Robert Vaughan, *John de Wycliffe, D.D., a monograph*, 1853, i.

[88] Kenneth McFarlane wrote that 'it would be difficult to be more mistaken' than to imagine that Wyclif's ideas constituted a programme of thought carried out according to a preconceived plan. Rather, his books contained 'what the moment … demanded. They were the strokes of a desperate fighter in a war of words.' He describes Wyclif's later writings as 'abusive and cantankerous.' McFarlane, *Wycliffe and English Non-Conformity*, 73.

proudly relates, more than two thousand miles.[89] By his own account, this scholarly research filled a gap. John Lewis' 1720 book was the only pre-existing full biography; however, Lewis, despite including some valuable material, had a 'very limited' knowledge of Wyclif's writing, making his book 'not only meagre, but confused'.[90] Vaughan's reputation as a researcher was acknowledged by his contemporaries. Charles Webb Le Bas, another early nineteenth-century biographer of Wyclif, credits him with 'a more complete and scrupulous examination' of the extant works of Wyclif than anyone before, saying that 'there seems no repository of ancient literature in the empire, which has escaped the industry of Mr Vaughan.'[91] Vaughan credits himself with being the first writer properly to date Wyclif's writings, allowing him to recognise how Wyclif's thought evolved. 'According to every previous account of Wycliffe, he was the same man in 1370 as in 1384, and the consequences of this capital error have been the utmost confusion and contradiction.'[92] According to Vaughan, this evolution followed a smooth, whiggish progression, from scholasticism to Protestantism: 'The mind of Wycliffe … exhibits a constant progression. The Wycliffe of 1375, was a less enlightened man than the Wycliffe of 1377; and the Wycliffe of 1384, was a character in which Protestant principle had become still more ascendent.'[93] Here is a suggestion of Foxe's idea that Wyclif had decided that this 'shoulde be done by litle & litle', though where Foxe had maintained that Wyclif's course was premeditated, Vaughan saw it as the result of the development of his ideas.

As for so many writers of this period, Vaughan's conclusions were drawn from English Wycliffite texts unlikely to have been written by Wyclif.[94] Vaughan's analysis is more sophisticated than Lewis', and his book more readable, but he uses many of the same sources. One of the texts he quotes most often is *The Grete Sentence of Curs Expouned*,

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[89] Robert Vaughan, *The Life and Opinions of John De Wycliffe, D.D.*, 2nd edn., 1831, v. Vaughan reiterates this detail in the preface to his 1853 biography, adding that this travel had been undertaken in 'those old stage-coach days,' wanting his readers to be aware of the sacrifices he made in the interests of research. Vaughan, *John de Wycliffe*, 1828, i.

[90] Ibid., ii.

[91] Le Bas, *Life of Wyclif*, vi-vii.

[92] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., I.xvi.

[93] Ibid., xv.

[94] Anne Hudson was reluctant to conclude that *no* work by Wyclif exists in English and suggests that he did 'give impetus' to the use of the vernacular, however the vast majority, at least, of English texts were not by Wyclif. (Anne Hudson, 'Wyclif and the English Language', in *Wyclif in his Times*, edited by Antony Kenny, Oxford University Press, 1986, 102.)

also a principal source for Lewis. Vaughan devotes fully twenty pages to this text in his 1853 book. Despite Vaughan's assertion that it expressed Wyclif's views 'fully, and forcibly,'[95] it was written by another hand.[96] According to Vaughan, after his retirement to Lutterworth in 1381, Wyclif 'began to pour forth an almost ceaseless stream of publications in the mother-tongue,'[97] imagining Luther-like activity producing Protestant tracts for the masses. This notion runs into the difficulty that the printing press had yet to be invented, but Vaughan gets around this via a flight of fancy in which Lutterworth becomes a thriving centre of book production, with teams of 'text-writers' churning out copies of Wyclif's latest.[98] Continuing in the same whimsical vein, Vaughan envisions the tracts being read by small groups 'now in the cottage of the "plowman", and now in the house of the … village artisan.'[99] Vaughan concludes that these texts written by Wyclif in his final years, 1381-84, contained his mature thoughts 'expressed with an earnestness of feeling, which seems to become only more intense as life is nearing towards its close.'[100] This hokum appears in Vaughan's 1853 Wyclif biography, being absent from the 1828 book and 1831 second edition, which does not support Vaughan's contention that this was a much-improved and more mature work.

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Central to Vaughan's project of showing that Wyclif was a true Protestant reformer was his analysis of the defences Wyclif wrote in response to the list of condemned principles produced by the papacy in 1377. We have noted how Lingard and Milner used the rather evasive nature of these responses to discredit Wyclif. Vaughan, in all three of his biographies, analysed them in fine detail, both to demonstrate the critics wrong and to better understand Wyclif's ideas.

In 1377, Gregory XI sent bulls to the English authorities, demanding Wyclif be prosecuted for heretical opinions. The bulls included a list of nineteen propositions taken from

[95] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., I.434.
[96] Arnold, in *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, 1869, III.267 states that 'there is no external evidence whatever in support of its having been written by Wyclif' and that its style did not seem to be that of Wyclif, but rather 'some fiery follower of his'.
[97] Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, I.405.
[98] Ibid., I.406. This must have been so, according to Vaughan, as otherwise Wyclif's translation of the bible could not have been produced so quickly.
[99] Ibid., I.407.
[100] Ibid., I.411.

Wyclif's *De Civili Dominio* which attacked church governance and the powers of priests. The propositions fall into three broad, but related, categories: the first five relate to the idea that dominion is conferred via grace; numbers seven to fifteen comprise attacks on priestly powers, in particular excommunication and Papal authority, and the remainder suggest that a delinquent church should be deprived of its possessions by civil magistrates.[101] Wyclif produced written defences for his Lambeth trial in March 1378.

> The paper presented by Wycliffe to this synod, has been much represented by his enemies, and much misunderstood by his friends. By his enemies, his explanations have been described as subtle, evasive, and timid. His friends, deceived apparently, by the confidence with which such assertions have been made, do not appear to have bestowed upon the statements of this remarkable document the patient attention necessary to a just estimation of its significance.[102]

Hostile historians had used the defences to show how, when put under pressure, Wyclif backtracked and took refuge in legalistic arguments. John Lingard, for instance, had written that Wyclif had made use of 'quibbles and evasions'[103] and Joseph Milner called them 'unnatural, forced, artful, and unmanly.'[104] Vaughan sets out to refute these attacks on Wyclif's intellectual and moral reputation whilst simultaneously looking for insight into Wyclif's ideas in the defences. He includes a detailed analysis of this text in both of his Wyclif biographies, twenty-six pages in the 1831 edition.[105] Unlike much of Vaughan's source material, this was unquestionably by Wyclif and had never been properly analysed. 'These [propositions], though scarcely noticed by historians, and equally neglected by Wycliffe's biographers, evidently belong to the most important peculiarities of his creed, and afford unquestionable proof of the vigour and intrepidity of his mind.'[106] Vaughan wanted to understand as well how Wyclif's beliefs had evolved over time, and

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[101] Jeffrey Dahmus ascertained that all the condemned propositions are taken from Wyclif's *De Civili Dominio*, many lifted verbatim and the remainder close precises. (*The Prosecution of John Wyclyf*, 51 fn.) Vaughan did not have access to that book, and speculates that 'The articles … appear to have been selected, partly from his writings, and in part from his divinity lectures, and from private conversations.' (Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, I.368.) This confirms that Vaughan did not have access to Wyclif's Latin works and that his sources were mainly just vernacular Wycliffite texts. The manuscript of *De Civili Dominio* was believed to exist 'only in a single copy, preserved at the imperial library at Vienna.' (R. Poole, editor, *Tractatus de Civili Dominio*, 1885, i.47)

[102] Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, 207.

[103] Lingard, *History of England*, IV.256-7.

[104] Milner, *History of the Church of Christ*, II.125.

[105] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., I.380-406.

[106] Ibid., I.369.

this document authentically identified the state of his opinions at this moment, after he had begun to attack the Papacy and church hierarchy, but before he had started to declaim against doctrine.

Vaughan defends Wyclif's responses by putting them into the context of Wyclif's scholasticism and accusing the critics of cherry-picking individual points from a whole which was consistent and harmonious. Vaughan finds in the material evidence of Wyclif's Protestantism; it emphasised the spiritual rights of the individual believer over the corrupt corporate church. The controversial idea that a delinquent church could be dispossessed via the theory of dominion in grace Vaughan dismisses as an insignificant part of Wyclif's thought whose importance critics had exaggerated.[107]

According to Vaughan, the critics had failed to consider that in his responses to the condemned tenets, Wyclif had employed the scholastic style of argument in which he was versed. The first proposition cited in the bulls was that mankind does not have the power to ordain that popes should rule over the world for ever. In reply to this, Wyclif focussed on 'perpetuity', stating that 'it does not lie within the power of men to decree that the pilgrimage of the church is forever.' This, for critics like Lingard and Milner, was a prime example of Wyclif's prevarication; he ignored the substantive part of the charge and quibbled about terminology. Vaughan contends that this is 'simply scholasticism, and not a timid concealment, with which he is chargeable.'[108] Vaughan himself was no enthusiast for scholasticism, describing its obscure debates elsewhere as 'a total waste of energy;'[109] however he appreciated that Wyclif 'never wholly abandoned the scholastic topics of discussion, nor its methods of reasoning.'[110] Wyclif's rather strange response to proposition one, therefore, was not evasiveness, but him employing the mode of reasoning he was accustomed to. Vaughan accuses critics like Lingard and Milner of picking out individual propositions from Wyclif's defence and ignoring others which would have clarified or completed his argument: 'They have not compared those parts with the whole, so as to judge of the whole *from* the whole. Nor have they made a

[107] Modern commentators agree with Vaughan, Gordon Leff writing that the importance of this doctrine has been 'much exaggerated'. 'John Wyclif: The Path to Dissent', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52 (1966), 174.
[108] Robert Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe, D.D.*, 1845, xlii.
[109] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., I.220.
[110] Ibid., I.248.

sufficient allowance for the difference in the mode of treating such questions which is familiar to ourselves, and the mode familiar to the learned among our ancestors some five centuries since.'[111]

Vaughan finds in this material further evidence for Wyclif's Protestant instincts. However, he is as guilty as Wyclif's critics of cherry-picking material to fit his preconceptions. He finds support for Wyclif's Protestant credentials in his opposition to the powers of Rome, safe territory for enthusiasts for Wyclif. Propositions seven to fourteen dealt with ecclesiastical powers: spiritual censure and the power of the keys, areas where Wyclif had set himself against papal power in a way which would read well to Vaugan's audience.[112] Vaughan concludes from studying this material that the application of Wyclif's ideas would have curtailed the spiritual and temporal powers of the priestly establishment, returning it to individual Christians: 'So completely did the Reformer take man out of the hands of man in the concerns of religion, and thus sapped the entire foundation of the received ecclesiastical system.'[113] Similarly, 'The substance of his teaching ... is, that men should render themselves familiar with what the law of God prohibits or enjoins; and confid[e] in their own judgment, instead of yielding their conscience to a priest.'[114] Vaughan's analysis of these propositions reinforces his narrative of Wyclif as a Protestant reformer. However, Vaughan summarises these propositions rather than quoting them directly, an approach which allows him to reinterpret what Wyclif wrote into something more explicitly Protestant. The idea of the primacy of the individual believer which Vaughan finds here was not explicitly stated in Wyclif's responses. Vaughan's conclusions can only be inferred from the *spirit* of the text.

On the awkward subject of the duty of civil magistrates to dispossess a delinquent church, Vaughan is forced onto the defensive. This idea is articulated in propositions six, sixteen and seventeen. In his responses, Wyclif distinctly drew back from what he had originally written. For example, proposition six states that 'If God exists, temporal lords

[111] Robert Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, 206-7.
[112] Of course, these propositions were largely ignored by critics of Wyclif looking for terms upon which to condemn him. Whereas those on the Protestant side of the debate on Wyclif were on their shakiest ground in his ideas on ecclesiology and lordship, their Catholic opponents avoided delving too deeply into the more questionable practices of the pre-Reformation papacy.
[113] Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises*, xlvii.
[114] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, I.395.

can legitimately take away the possessions of a church that falls into error.' However, in his response, Wyclif removed the sting from this by qualifying it: it was not his intention 'to argue that secular lords have the right to remove goods from the church when ever they want or on their own authority.'[115] It is hard not to see this as backtracking. According to Jeffrey Dahmus, Wyclif *had* backtracked because he realised that 'he had gone too fast'; such a policy would have been 'catastrophic' for the church.[116] Vaughan, however, took Wyclif's response at face value: it merely restated what Wyclif had always said, that magistrates could only dispossess the church 'by a devout reference to the law of Christ.'[117] According to Vaughan, this principle, far from being chaotic or revolutionary, was just another example of Wyclif condemning the excessive power of the papacy: 'It was thus that the reformer denied to the Roman bishops the sovereignty which they had so long claimed with respect to the property of every religious establishment in Europe.'[118]

Vaughan's analysis of these defences, repeated largely unchanged in the biographies of 1828/31, 1845 and 1853,[119] was a keystone of his argument defending Wyclif as a reformer sharing the same instincts as later Protestants. He emphasised the importance of individual conscience over rules imposed by the priestly establishment. For Vaughan this granting of religious independence was central to Wyclif's campaign.

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The same themes emerge in Vaughan's discussion of Wyclif's part in the translation of scripture. Again, for him, Wyclif's principal intention was to free the individual Christian from church control. 'He knew that to render the contents of the Bible familiar to the people, was to introduce a light which must impart a faithful colouring to the actions of men.' Vaughan links the project of making scripture available to laymen with the freedom

[115] Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises*, xliv., Wyclif likewise qualified the similar proposition seventeen, 'God forbid that its words should give any opportunity to temporal lords to take away [the church's] goods.'
[116] Dahmus, *Prosecution of John Wyclyf*, 53, states that this would have been 'a windfall for the legion of impecunious, rapacious barons'.
[117] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, I.388.
[118] Ibid., I.389.
[119] Another example of the more low-brow and cliched tone of the 1853 book can be found in Vaughan's depiction of the baffled clergy unable to understand Wyclif's responses. In another flight of fancy, Vaughan imagines a 'portly gentleman in prelatic vesture' struggling to understand. (Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, 210).

of the individual conscience. Wyclif, he says, was convinced of 'the sufficiency of scripture, and the importance of the *right of private judgement*.'[120] He credits Wyclif with inspiring not just religious reform, but also the revolution in attitudes which would be the final result of the rise of Protestantism. Wyclif 'vindicates his appeal to the right of private judgement, and urges ... the duty of a devout attention to whatever may promote their faith.'[121]

Vaughan expands his treatment of this topic in the 1853 book, no doubt feeling that he had not done this important subject sufficient justice. In the rewritten treatment, Vaughan contends that the project was conceived by Wyclif and was a wholly new idea. There had previously been translations of parts of scripture but a literal translation of the entire bible had never been undertaken.[122] Vaughan asks when Wyclif started work on translation, whether he had lived to see it finished and to what extent others assisted him.[123] Since bible translation did not appear on the lists of condemned items at Wyclif's trials, Vaughan concludes that Wyclif must have started work after retiring to Lutterworth, and, by analysing the prologue to the finished translation, concludes that he did live to see it completed.[124] He accepts that Wycliffe was assisted by others, including Nicholas Hereford, but finds that, because Hereford's work was less precise, Wycliffe was compelled to authorise a second, corrected, edition.[125] This was a central plank of Wyclif's overall project: 'It was the aim of Wycliffe and his followers, in this memorable achievement, to take man out of the hands of the priest, and to place his religion in the personal – in his personal responsibility, intelligence, and right feeling.'[126]

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[120] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 1831, II.46. Emphasis added.
[121] Ibid., II.50.
[122] Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, 336-7.
[123] Ibid., 346.
[124] Mary Dove concluded that it was likely that the translation was begun in the early 1370s and completed around 1388. Bible translation was not condemned at the trials because it was not then regarded as heretical. This changed after the 1381 revolt, when the authorities became more nervous about the people having ready access to scripture. Mary Dove, 'Wyclif and the English Bible', in *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, edited by Ian Levy, Brill, 2006, 388.
[125] Vaughan, *John de Wickliffe*, 1853, 356.
[126] Ibid., 360-1.

Vaughan examines the charge of inspiring sedition which had been laid against Wyclif, and, not surprisingly, finds him innocent. Noting that Wyclif's detractors had alleged that the insurgency of 1381 arose because of his teaching,[127] he says that it is predictable that they try to discredit Wyclif this way. The truth, though, was that Wyclif's ideas were more likely to restrain than to encourage insurgency. Indeed, it was the Catholic church which was more likely to inspire fanaticism, Vaughan citing the children's crusade and the flagellant movement, whereas Wyclif supported the existing civil order, or, as Vaughan neatly puts it, 'bowed with sacred submission when describing the legitimate claims of the magistrate.'[128] The actual causes of the uprising were economic and social, and similar disturbances had occurred in countries where there had been no call for religious reform.

Wyclif was accused of undermining the order of society via his doctrine of dominion in grace. Vaughan argues that this is scarcely to be found in his writings: 'amid the voluminous works of the reformer, one only has been cited as containing this alarming dogma',[129] and it occurs only two or three times among the vernacular works he investigated. Lingard had referred to dominion via grace as Wyclif's 'favourite maxim',[130] which, Vaughan says, could not be justified given its sparse appearance in his writings. It was quite clear from many examples in Wyclif's writing that he always respected the legal rights of property owners. Wyclif *did*, of course, believe in the dispossession of venal priests, an idea which 'brought upon him the reproach of favouring a disruption of the social system' and gave rise to the clergy twisting and exaggerating his ideas to discredit him, making it seem that these were 'revolutionary novelties, which must … prove as perilous to the possessions of the laity, as to those of the church.'[131] Vaughan's way of dealing with the more contentious teachings ascribed to Wyclif was always to paint them as reasonable. Wyclif's modest and reasonable notions were twisted by the clergy to his discredit.

[127] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., II.51.
[128] Ibid., 409.
[129] Ibid., 235. See p.10.
[130] Lingard, *History of England*, IV.196.
[131] Vaughan, *Life and Opinions*, 2nd edn., 237.

8 Anglican writers, 1800-70

8.1 Introduction

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, it seemed to some Anglicans that Catholic writers were winning the debate on the English Reformation. John Lingard's hugely influential *History of England* presented a narrative which reframed the historiographical debate in a Catholic direction. Henry Soames wrote in 1826 that 'It seems to [me] a matter entirely to be wished, that Romish histories should be fairly confronted by Protestant ones.'[1] Robert Southey's 1824 history *The Book of the Church* was written as a direct response to Lingard.[2] Modern commentators agree. John Drabble, whose 1975 doctoral dissertation 'The Historians of the English Reformation 1780-1850' (unpublished) remains the standard work, put Catholic historians at the front of his analysis, saying that Lingard and his contemporaries set the terms of the debate, and Protestant historians responded.[3] Rosemary O'Day, whose chapter on this period in *The Debate on the English Reformation* (1986) is based on Drabb3le's reading, took the same approach.[4] Anglican historians wanting to correct the balance and promote a Protestant view of history produced something of an outpouring of histories of the Church of England and the Reformation.

This chapter examines books in this tradition, most written between 1825 and 1840, with two later works. Most were penned by clergymen. Thomas Vowler Short (1780-1872), author of *The History of the Church of England to the Revolution of 1688* in 1832, was the Bishop of St. Asaph.[5] Walter Farquhar Hook (1798-1875), who wrote *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury* (1860), was the Dean of Chichester. Francis Massingberd, author of *The English Reformation* (1842), was rector of South Ormsby in Lincolnshire.[6] Henry Soames (*History of the Reformation of the Church of England*,

[1] Henry Soames, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, 1826, I.xi.
[2] G. Carnall, 'Robert Southey', *ODNB*.
[3] John Drabble, 'The Historians of the English Reformation 1780-1850', Unpub. PhD thesis, New York University, 1975, 2-3. Drabble wrote that the 'most obvious influence' on Reformation historiography before 1829 was 'the renaissance of the Roman Catholic party.'
[4] Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation*, 2nd edn., Manchester University Press, 2014, 67-76 and 81-85.
[5] A. Buckland & M. Curthoys, 'Thomas Vowler Short', *ODNB*.
[6] E. Venables & H. Matthew, 'Francis Massingberd', *ODNB*.

1826-8) held a succession of rectorships in Essex.[7] John Henry Blunt (*The Reformation of the Church of England*, 1868) was rector of Beveston, Gloucestershire. Charles Webb Le Bas, who wrote a biography of John Wyclif in 1832, was rector of St. Paul's, Shadwell. Two of the books were written by laymen. Sharon Turner's reputation as a historian was built on his work on the Anglo-Saxons. He produced a *History of England in the Middle Ages* in 1824.[8] Robert Southey's *Book of the Church* also appeared in 1824, while he was the Poet Laureate, a book which 'celebrated the emergence of an established church.'[9] Most of them belonged to the High Church tradition. Massingberd possessed a 'distinct but unembittered High Churchmanship'.[10] John H. Blunt had 'High Church views' which were reflected in his book.[11] Le Bas was associated with the High Church group the Hackney Phalanx.[12] These establishment men wrote to defend the church establishment against threats they perceived from Catholics and nonconformists and the worrying idea of disestablishment. None was directly associated with the Oxford Movement. Thomas Short 'was well acquainted with its leaders' and Walter Hook had some sympathy for its aims, but there were also 'clear areas of disagreement … valuing the church establishment and its sixteenth-century Reformers more highly.'[13]

As High Churchmen these writers possessed an instinct for continuity, downplaying the idea that the Reformation represented a radical break, that it entailed the foundation of a new church. Therefore, they had problems when writing about the distinctly *anti*-establishment figure of John Wyclif and, even worse, the Lollards, being forced to negotiate a path between support and condemnation. They needed to be positive about reform and were happy to condemn the corruption and superstition of the papal system, but could not bring themselves to be completely enthusiastic about

[7] R. Bayne & M. Lloyd, 'Henry Soames', *ODNB*.
[8] H. Loyn, 'Sharon Turner', *ODNB*.
[9] Southey writes that no institution has brought more advantage to Englishmen than its 'Church Establishment' by which the conditions 'of all ranks have been so materially improved.' (Robert Southey, *Book of the Church*, 1824, I.1.)
[10] Frances Knight includes sections of Massingberd's diary in *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society*, 1995, 141-150, which reveal him to possess a haunted and pessimistic nature. He found writing his book 'a burden'. He has this author's sympathies. Ibid, 142.
[11] T. Tout, & H.Matthew, 'John Henry Blunt', *ODNB*.
[12] J. Overton & M. Curthoys,'Charles Webb Le Bas', *ODNB*.
[13] G. Herring, 'Walter Farquhar Hook', *ODNB*.

Wyclif or the Lollards, who were awash with attitudes which they variously describe as 'levelling', 'enthusiastic' or downright seditious. They tend, with some exceptions, to treat Wyclif with the respect due to his reputation as the great reformer, acknowledging his reforming credentials whilst downplaying, or speaking with sad regret about his ecclesiological and societal proscriptions. They are less equivocal about the Lollards, feeling that, after the death of Wyclif, his followers morphed into a seditious *political* faction whose priorities came to bear less resemblance to his tenets.

Their treatment of the fourteenth-century church establishment reflects their instinctive support for continuity and the hierarchy. Universally hostile to the papal system, they express sympathy for the English church, unlike earlier historians who did not draw a distinction between the Roman and English clergy. Anglican writers in general empathise with their fourteenth-century forebears, feeling they had been duty-bound to maintain discipline in the face of threatening innovations. Some introduce a patriotic note. The roots of the discontent which Wyclif railed against lay in the demands of the *foreign* papal court which limited English independence. Wyclif, in this reading, is patriotically defending his country.

8.2 The Reformation and John Wyclif

Several of these writers are distinctly unenthusiastic about the Reformation. They do not show outright disapproval but do question the standard narrative of what reformation meant, emphasising the long-term continuity of the Church of England. Reluctant to criticise the pre-Reformation Church, they tend to see the Reformation primarily as the separation of the English church from Rome, rather than a wholesale uprooting of the existing establishment. This instinctive support for the clergy underpins a lack of sympathy for much of Wyclif's teaching and hostility to the Lollard movement, for them the precursor to Puritanism and nonconformity. Earlier Protestant historians had usually condemned the clergy for corruption and brutality, not differentiating between the English and Roman establishments. This sense of continuity in the Church of England chimes with their nationalistic reading; for them, the *Englishness* of the church establishment never changed. Dean Hook is a striking example, regarding members of the fourteenth-century establishment almost as

kindred spirits whose recourse to persecution was due only to the spirit of the age. Describing *Heretico Comburendo* as an 'execrable measure', Hook yet maintains that the clergy's actions were 'in some way understandable.'[14] This was a time, after all, when men were executed for forgery: it was Arundel's calamity, not his crime, that he was compelled to carry out such a law. Hook argues that to compare the actions of Courtney and Arundel with the Marian period is 'an entire misconception',[15] the fourteenth-century clergy being motivated primarily by 'public spirit' rather than vindictiveness.

Other writers agree, contrasting foreign Papists with an English establishment with whom they feel a degree of affinity. Francis Massingberd and Thomas Short assert that the English clergy sought to reform corrupt church practices. For Massingberd, desire for reform was 'universal' and Short writes of the many attempts to reform the church by separating from Rome.[16] For them, the English church was not intrinsically corrupt, but rather entangled with a corrupting foreign system. They sometimes utilise nationalistic language, Short stating that 'people were so accustomed to papal interference that they didn't complain that it affected the independence of the country'[17] and Massingberd describing the Lollard Nicholas Hereford as 'a true patriot'.[18]

Some argue that the Reformation did not actually change much. According to John Henry Blunt it was only an 'adjustment' and it was 'an absurd error' to suggest that it brought about the foundation of a new church.[19] Wyclif's teaching, on the other hand, was detrimental to orderly reform, encouraging 'that sectarian spirit known as Puritanism.'[20] More thoughtful, moderate reformers wanted to reform the church along 'conservative and constitutional principles'[21] but Wyclif's doctrines would push it in a radical and undesirable direction. Innovations were not welcomed by these

[14] Walter Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, 1865, IV.501.
[15] Ibid., III.89.
[16] Thomas Vowler Short, *History of the Church of England to the revolution, 1688,* 1845*,* 27.
[17] Ibid., 26.
[18] Francis Massingberd, *The English Reformation*, 1842, 133.
[19] John Henry Blunt, *The Reformation of the Church of England, its History, Principles, and Results*, 3.
[20] Ibid., 523.
[21] Ibid., 522.

writers. The nonconformists and Puritans who sprang up with similar ideas were charged harshly by Blunt: they 'knew little of history or theology', 'had strong hankerings after novelties' and 'were not scrupulous as to national or individual honour.'[22] Blunt is unusual in believing that nothing good came of Wyclif's influence, most historians feeling that Wyclif's role in inspiring reform was an ambiguous one. Francis Massingberd writes that 'the title … of Father of the Reformation must belong to him, as prototype of some part of the evil as well as of the good connected with that event'[23] and 'all that was done for reformation in England or abroad for the next half-century, … he was the doer of it.'[24] John Carwithen, more of an enthusiast for Wyclif than most, states rather gnomically that 'the progress of religious knowledge may be estimated from the support [and] the opposition, which he experienced.'[25] Dean Hook, despite deep reservations about some of his novelties, credits Wyclif with having been of foundational importance to the *theology* of the Reformation, the first 'who gave faith its subjective character'. Rather than being imposed, matters of faith were hereafter to be left to the individual; a 'grand position' according to Hook. Furthermore, Wyclif maintained that all truth must be deduced from the bible. These were both revolutionary, Protestant, ideas. 'Here was his principle. In the application of it he fell into many and great absurdities; but … we can understand the sympathy, which is felt with Wiclif on the part of Protestants, even when his communism [is] condemned.'[26] Charles Le Bas is another for whom Wyclif was a necessary evil. 'To mistrust these mighty energies may be to mistrust God's wisdom and providence. Of the instruments employed by Him for the gradual destruction of a corrupt system, Wiclif may surely be reckoned among the most formidable.'[27]

8.3 Wyclif's Career

No-one had produced a full biography of John Wyclif since Jonathan Lewis' in 1720, which, for all its flaws, remained the standard work until two arrived in close succession. Robert Vaughan produced his *Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe* in

[22] Ibid., 523.
[23] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 156.
[24] Ibid., 159.
[25] John Bayley Sommers Carwithen, *The History of the Church of England*, 1849, I.36.
[26] Hook, *Lives*, III.76.
[27] Charles Webb Le Bas, *The Life of John Wiclif*, 1832, 364.

1828 and three years later Charles Webb Le Bas's *Life of Wiclif* appeared in Harper's *Theological Library* series. Le Bas acknowledges both his fellow biographers in a preface, describing Lewis' book as 'a laborious and, upon the whole, a faithful compilation', adding, reasonably, that it 'possesses but feeble attractions for the general reader',[28] and saying of Vaughan that he had made a 'complete and scrupulous examination of all the extant works of Wiclif.'[29] Naturally, the portraits of Wyclif which emerge from these two contemporaneous biographies, one by a High Churchman, and one by a Congregationalist, differ significantly, and Le Bas damned Vaughan's book with faint praise, saying that 'In some respects, I have … found his work a most in valuable guide.'[30]

For Le Bas, Wyclif was foremost a turbulent spirit, yet a necessary one. He was like a force of nature, violent and dangerous, and yet a key part of God's plan. 'There is terror in the voice of the tempest … and yet these wild and fearful agencies may … be needful to prepare the hearts of men for the accents of the still small voice.'[31] Joseph Milner had reintroduced the workings of providence into historical analysis and here they appear in history written by an Anglican. Wyclif's vehement actions were only to be expected from one with such an 'excess of athletic vigour, and … fervid impatience of wrong.' Le Bas admires Wyclif for his intellect and reforming instincts but finds him flawed because of his tempestuous personality and instinct for wreaking destruction. He was 'better fitted for the business of demolition than of building up.'[32] Le Bas also finds a nasty whiff of nonconformity: 'If the reformation of our Church had been conducted by Wiclif, his work … would nearly have anticipated the labours of Calvin.' Episcopal government would have been discarded and the 'ritual solemnity' of worship exchanged for the 'fatalism which lurked in the scholastic works of the Reformer.'[33] For Le Bas, a foretaste of Elizabethan Puritanism could clearly be seen in Wyclif.

[28] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, vi.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., vii.
[31] Ibid., 364.
[32] Ibid., 365.
[33] Ibid.

Despite Le Bas' disquiet, he finds much to admire. Wyclif's crowning achievement was his part in the translation of scripture, an unambiguously meritorious undertaking. Le Bas praises Wyclif's virtues as a pastor, also safe territory, despite the lack of evidence in support of the idea. Le Bas argues that these aspects had been neglected because of the emphasis laid by historians upon Wyclif's role as the scourge of the hierarchy. A more careful reading of his writing, Le Bas says (without providing examples) reveals that 'the building up of holy principles and affections' was just as important to Wyclif as fighting corruption, and that his role as a 'reformer of Christian morals' had been unjustly overlooked. He should be honoured as the advocate of Christ as much as the antagonist of Popery.[34] Thus Le Bas clothes Wyclif in lineaments which make him a better exemplar for Anglicans. The result is a sometimes-awkward amalgam which demonstrates the difficulties these writers had with Wyclif.

Others, not writing biography, could just ignore the more problematic aspects of Wyclif's career. Some focus rather on his merits as a reformer, and some emphasise his Englishness. Thomas Short is a case in point. He can find only two material points of difference between Wyclif and the modern Anglican Church, his rejection of episcopacy and belief in purgatory. Short emphasises how closely Wyclif's ideas chimed with Protestant theology and barely mentions his social ideas. He defends Wyclif against Philip Melanchthon's criticism that he did not understand the fundamentals of Christianity, writing that Wyclif 'directs his hearers to look up to Christ and be saved, and to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit.'[35] Short is one of several writers who makes play of Wyclif's patriotism when he stood for England against Rome, describing him as a champion of Christianity and independence of the state.[36] Francis Massingberd, in *The English Reformation*, likewise presents Wyclif as a patriotic *English* reformer. For Massingberd, Wyclif reflected a wider public mood of opposition to foreign interference.[37] For Massingberd, the Pope was 'an Italian prelate' attempting to prosecute Wyclif, 'a subject of the English crown.'[38] Henry Soames also emphasises Wyclif's Englishness. In *History of the Reformation of the Church of*

[34] Ibid., 301.
[35] Short, *History of the Church of England*, 34.
[36] Ibid., 30.
[37] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 10.
[38] Ibid., 16.

England Wyclif again figures as an English reformer opposed to encroachments of Rome: 'The bulk of Englishmen will reflect with some satisfaction, that a countryman of their own was the first, who, after the full development and greatest prevalence of the papal system, first called the attention of men in superior life to the claims of Scriptural Christianity.'[39] For these the merit of his staunch resistance to Rome outweighed the damage of his levelling ideas. The most unhesitatingly enthusiastic was John Carwithen. The brief treatment in his 1829 *History of the Church of England* says nothing critical about Wyclif, who appears as a vehement critic of Rome and an evangelical preacher in the Protestant mould. He was a 'diligent and edifying pastor, preaching constantly'.[40] Acknowledging that he had a warm temper is the closest Carwithen comes to criticism and against that he sets Wyclif's 'fervent piety and unblemished morals'.[41]

Some Anglicans, though, cannot overlook Wyclif's dangerous ideas, believing that they encouraged dissent and nonconformity. John Henry Blunt, writing later than the others, in *The Reformation of the Church of England* (1868), speaks of the 'wild follies' of Wyclif and his peers being the consequence of the 'stolid opposition' of the church authorities to their ideas.[42] His namesake, John James Blunt, in *A Sketch of the Reformation in England* (1838), finds Wyclif a flawed thinker, a conduit for, rather than an originator of, old ideas, which had been kept alive for centuries by 'witnesses' like the Waldenses: Wyclif had only 'furnished a mouthpiece'.[43] However, he served an important purpose thanks to the vigour of his attacks on the papacy. He had the aggressive character required to combat the corruption of his time but was a destroyer rather than a builder. This echoes what Le Bas had written, and like Le Bas, Blunt sees providence at work. He contrasts Wyclif with Cranmer, acknowledging God's wisdom in raising each reformer at the perfect time: 'Cranmer's meek and gentle spirit would have been overborne by the almost irresistible torrent of corruption' in Wyclif's time, whereas Wyclif's 'daring and impetuous temper … would have left few or no materials

[39] Henry Soames, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, 1826, I.71.
[40] J.B.S. Carwithen, *History of the Church of England*, 1829, I.32.
[41] Ibid., I.35.
[42] J.H. Blunt, *Reformation of the Church of England*, 5.
[43] John James Blunt, *A Sketch of the Reformation in England*, 1838, 84.

for erecting a Church of England.'[44] However, Blunt could not look beyond the damaging consequences of Wyclif's ideas, comparing him to John Wesley. Both were 'carried further than [they] first meant to go.' 'Assuredly in [Wyclif] may be traced the elements … of the puritan.'[45] Walter Hook, in his *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury* (1859-1875), is yet another who sees Wyclif as a necessary evil. Acknowledging that he was 'one of the greatest men that our country has produced', Hook nevertheless felt that his 'moral courage amounted to rashness.' Here again is the suggestion that desperate measures were called for: 'a mere improvement in the administration of the Church could never have removed the gigantic mass of corruption by which [it] was depressed' and the church establishment of the time shrank from the task: 'Here their courage failed',[46] making a Wyclif necessary. The idea that Wyclif was a painful, but vital, medicine, to purge and cleanse the church, is a common one for many writers in this tradition.

8.4 Wyclif's Tenets – Theological

These writers are comfortable with Wyclif's condemnation of doctrines they agreed were errors. No Catholic doctrine was more obviously wrong, more rooted in superstition, of course, than transubstantiation and some concentrate on Wyclif's condemnation of this sacrament to the exclusion of more contentious ideas. Francis Massingberd points out that adherence to the doctrine had become the key test for heresy (as it was in John Oldcastle's trial). 'Thus did the Church of England rivet upon herself the chains of Roman superstition'.[47] For Henry Soames, Wyclif 'condemned the whole of those tenets and usages in the Romish religion which are not to be derived … from Scripture.'[48] Wyclif's efforts to throw out this superstitious and unbiblical sacrament are widely applauded. John Carwithen, a great enthusiast for Wyclif, ignores Wyclif's more troublesome notions, just declaring that Wyclif had 'confuted

[44] Ibid., 86.
[45] Ibid., 87.
[46] Hook, *Lives*, III.76.
[47] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 150.
[48] Soames, *History of the Reformation*, I.73-76, fn.

the popish doctrine of transubstantiation in favour of the true and ancient notion of Lord's supper.'[49]

Le Bas's chapter on Wyclif's teachings examines Philip Melanchthon's charges that his ideas were 'tinctured with Pelagianism' and that he did not recognise 'the grand doctrine of justification by faith' and concludes that Melanchthon had been wrong. In fact, this doctrine was 'the vital principle of Wiclif's theology. He tells us ... that the merit of Christ is sufficient to redeem man [and] that faith in him is sufficient for salvation.'[50] J.H. Blunt, though, demurs. For him, Wyclif 'was no Protestant' as he maintained the Catholic notion of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. 'His distinct views were political and social rather than religious', accord to Blunt, which fits with his wider analysis of the Lollard movement as predominantly 'socialist'.[51]

Some were nervous that Wyclif had flirted with predestination. Dean Hook, one of the most critical historians, writes that he 'He defines the Church, to be an assembly of predestined persons, and he has been understood to lean even to the doctrines of absolute necessity and fatalism.'[52] Others disagree. Le Bas concludes that 'I cannot find that he has advanced anything ... which should fix upon him the imputation of unqualified fatalism'[53] and for Francis Massingberd this was a calumny invented by Catholics: 'Romanists abroad have tried to prove him to be a forerunner of Luther and Calvin in denying the freedom of the will, and asserting a kind of fatal predestination.'[54]

8.5 Wyclif's Tenets – Social and Ecclesiological

All that was most problematic about Wyclif lay in his social tenets. These writers of the establishment are all chary about ideas which seemed to undermine social structures which they supported. Those more generally supportive of Wyclif ignore them, those more opposed condemn them, and the rest tread an uneasy path between.

[49] Carwithen, *Church of England*, I.35.
[50] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 321. Le Bas' main source for this was Thomas James' 1608 *Apologie for John Wickliffe*, which endeavoured to show that Wyclif's theology matched that of the (then) Church of England.
[51] J.H. Blunt, *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought*, 1874, 255.
[52] Hook, *Lives*, III.85.
[53] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 323.
[54] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 155.

Le Bas writes in the most detail, steering a path between praise and condemnation; yes, Wyclif's anti-establishment ideas were excessive, but they were conditioned by the tenor of his times: 'He was too violently agitated by the evil which, in his time, was done and suffered under the sun, to weigh and measure, with the necessary firmness of hand, the expedients necessary for its correction.'[55] This tendency was manifested in Wyclif's suggestion that there should be only two orders, priests and deacons.[56] Wyclif's prejudice against episcopacy was understandable as a response to the 'Caesarean pomp' of the 'retinue of the Romish priesthood'[57] but Le Bas is saddened that Wyclif had made the mistake of condemning it,[58] though his argument in support of episcopacy is limited to saying that it was legitimised by historical practice. Le Bas' attitude derives both from his antipathy towards nonconformity and his comfort with the conventions of Anglicanism. However, on Wyclif's teaching on 'unworthy churchmen', Le Bas is more forgiving. Wyclif was often condemned for saying that a man in mortal sin may not be a prelate or that temporal lords may seize the possessions of unfaithful churchmen, but such ideas have 'a more dangerous sound to modern ears' than they would at the time. Le Bas explains that this does not mean that Church property was at the mercy of every individual lord. Rather, what Wyclif had meant was 'that the endowments of the Church were at the disposal of the secular government.'[59] Redefined in this harmless way, the doctrine is much easier for nineteenth-century Anglicans comfortable with the idea of an established Church regulated by the state.

Le Bas gives Wyclif the benefit of the doubt regarding dominion in grace, saying that this 'watchword of rebellion [which] would be sufficient to fix dishonour on his memory, in the estimation of every friend of social order',[60] was actually rarely found in Wyclif's writings, and had been exaggerated in order to 'fix upon him the imputation

[55] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 365.
[56] In *Trialogus* IV.15 Wyclif wrote that 'in the primitive church … two orders of clergy were deemed sufficient [and] the same man was priest and bishop' and continues 'It seems to me that Christ commanded there to be priests and serving deacons; it is certain that Caesarian pride invented all the rest of the degrees and orders.'
[57] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 334.
[58] Ibid., 335.
[59] Ibid., 360.
[60] Ibid., 351.

of a deliberate revolutionist and spoliator.'[61] Wyclif had not proposed this dangerous argument, but had erred in expressing himself in language which 'was liable to the most mischievous perversion', going on to recall ruefully how the German Anabaptists had taken this destabilising idea to its murderous extreme.[62] 'That dominion is founded in grace, is a notion which probably lurks to this day in some of the dark corners of fanaticism.'[63] These ideas would later be twisted beyond Wyclif's intent by the Lollards.

Le Bas, then, divides Wyclif's ideas into three categories: those acceptable to nineteenth-century Anglicans (state rights over unworthy priests), those incautiously expressed and later manipulated or misstated by his enemies or extremists (dominion in grace) and those which were simply misguided (episcopal governance). What emerges is a picture which supports Le Bas' overall thesis. Wyclif was a radical thinker, too radical for comfort, perhaps, but one who was needed in those turbulent times.

Other writers who mention Wyclif's controversial notions tend to agree that he took them too far and that his zeal led him to court destabilising ideas in ecclesiology and even more unpalatable ones in the societal sphere. Dean Hook, the arch-establishment man, is unequivocal, saying that Wyclif's predestinarianism had led him astray, to an 'anarchical' definition of the Church as 'an assembly of predestined persons.'[64] John James Blunt agrees that Wyclif's ecclesiology would have had a widely destabilising effect. By teaching that 'tithes are mere alms which parishioners have a right to withhold' and that church endowments may be withheld by state officials, Wyclif was 'subverting the very principles upon which not only ecclesiastical property rests, but all property whatever, and annihilating an establishment at a

[61] Ibid. He cites Vaughan's biography in support of this. See p.150. The passage from *Trialogus* cited by Le Bas is couched in guarded terms: 'So Christ and his apostles, spurning lordship and civil possession, were content with a having only according to the first title. Thus the rule of Christ is that none of the disciples presumes to struggle for his temporal goods.' *Trialogus* IV Chapter 17. However, Antony Kenny cites a more unequivocal stance from *De Civili Dominio* where Wyclif argued that 'if a man is in a state of sin, every one of his actions is unjust; he cannot, therefore, … possess anything justly.' Kenny, *Wyclif*, 45.
[62] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 353.
[63] Ibid., 358, fn.
[64] Hook, *Lives*, III. 85.

blow.'[65] Francis Massingberd sought to undermine Wyclif's teaching on clerical endowments by showing that it was founded on an unsound reading of scripture. He quotes the Old Testament to the effect that the Levites received public endowments of land and tithes. Wyclif, understandably provoked by the clerical abuses of his day, had been 'carried by his zeal beyond the bounds of truth and soberness.'[66]

Another approach was simply to deny that Wyclif believed in the abolition of endowments. Henry Soames takes this position. Citing his favourite source, Pierre Allix, he says that modern critics like John Milner were just repeating false accusations from the sixteenth century.[67] Thomas Short writes that Wyclif had not proposed disendowment but rather had argued that if the church misused her wealth, then 'it became the duty of temporal lords to deprive the clergy of possessions which were not rightfully applied.'[68] This had the merit of allowing Short to argue that it was only the sinful church of his own time that Wyclif wanted to disendow (and not the more meritorious nineteenth-century Anglican church). Short (who had used Lewis' 1720 biography) is the closest of all these writers to representing Wyclif's actual teaching.

Wyclif's doctrine of dominion via grace was even more difficult for these writers, and they use the same mix of strategies, condemning it, ignoring it or denying that Wyclif had really said it. For Dean Hook, the doctrine would have had catastrophic effects: he claims, rather hysterically, that it could have led to religious revolution and that, confronted by the idea, clergy and laity had made common cause, 'calling upon the bishops to … silence an oracle, which cried havoc in the ears of the elect, and would have let slip the dogs of war and anarchy upon the world.'[69] Francis Massingberd, on the other hand, denies that Wyclif had ever maintained this opinion. It was an 'oft-

[65] J.J. Blunt, *Sketch of the Reformation*, 90.
[66] Massingberd, *The English Reformation*, 137.
[67] Pierre Allix in *REMARKS UPON The Ecclesiastical History OF THE Antient Churches OF THE ALBIGENSES* (1691) claimed that this was 'a horribly calumny of Walden', continuing 'They objected against him, that he had asserted that it was not lawful for any Ecclesiastical Person to have any temporal Revenue. But nothing is more false, for Wicklef only saith, that the Goods of the Clergy are temporal Things, what way soever they come by them; and that the Possession of them, is to be regulated by the Laws, as well as the Estates of Laymen.' Allix was a favourite source for Soames, whose research was constrained by the limited size of his library; he complains that 'without the inconvenience of going from home [I have] no access to books beyond what [my] own very limited collection will supply.' He would envy the modern researcher. (Soames, *Reformation*, I.xii.)
[68] Short, *History of the Church of England,* 33.
[69] Hook, *Lives*, III 85.

repeated calumny' which had been derived *reductio ad absurdam* from the argument which Wyclif had used when contending that the sinfulness of the papacy meant they should forfeit payments from English subjects. Massingberd compares this with the notorious 'perverse inference that God should obey the Devil' which had appeared on the list of Wyclif's condemned notions drawn up for the Council of Constance and which Massingberd says was 'an absurd blasphemy'.[70] Others steered well clear of the topic.

However, Wyclif's ideas were carried to more dangerous extremes by those who followed him, who credited him with tenets which went beyond what he had actually said. His reforming ideas were limited to the religious arena, other firebrands had taken them further. According to Robert Southey the partisans who followed Wyclif 'carried arms under their gowns … This temper, which fatally accompanied the Reformation, Wycliffe discouraged.'[71]

8.6 Bible translation

It is with a palpable sense of relief that these writers turn to Wyclif's part in translating the bible, something most can wholeheartedly support. It was an unambiguously good project free of any taint of sedition or heresy. Translation of scripture was essential for the foundation of a Protestant polity whereby God's Word was made open to every Christian rather than being a preserve of the priestly class. This also served as further evidence of Wyclif's patriotism as it was a service he provided not just for Protestantism but for England, as it punctured the papacy's hold over the country.

For John James Blunt, one of the more critical writers, this was Wyclif's one unqualified good: '[H]e gave to the people the pure word of God. The work whereby Wickliffe hastened the Reformation, was his translation of the Scriptures into his own mother-tongue.'[72] Most assert that Wyclif undertook the entire task himself. Walter Hook

[70] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 156. The historiography of 'God should obey the Devil' is involved. It does seem that Massingberd was right to say that this had been derived *reducto in absdurdam* from other teachings of Wyclif, though it has been confusing commentators for six hundred years. Massingberd was wrong, though to claim the same of the doctrine of dominion via grace.
[71] Southey, *Book of the Church*, 207.
[72] J.J. Blunt, *A Sketch of the Reformation in England*, 1838, 93.

writes that 'the Bible must be translated, and he translated it.'[73] Le Bas waxes lyrical. This 'poured a blaze of unwelcome light into those regions of darkness … to unseal the sacred Scriptures, was to let loose an element [which would] gradually loosen the grasp with which [evil Power] had well-nigh strangled the energies of the human mind.'[74] This, for Le Bas, was a patriotic act, an 'immortal service performed for his country.'[75] Henry Soames says the same: it was 'his noblest legacy to England … the good seed sown was firmly rooted'.[76] Robert Southey writes that Wyclif 'translated both the Old and New Testaments into the English tongue'[77] but Francis Massingberd did recognise that Wyclif was not unaided; he was the principal translator, being 'assisted by his friends'. Massingberd is another who emphasises how the translation was a boon for England, describing Nicholas Hereford as a 'Happy man and true patriot who … could refresh his own soul from the fountains of eternal life, which he was pouring forth upon his country!'[78]

There had been English translations of parts of the bible before Wyclif, but most of these writers state or imply that his was the first. John Carwithen writes that translation of the bible had never been 'published' in English before.[79] Others do recognise that some earlier translations existed. Robert Southey states that there had been several partial versions, but that they had become obsolete.[80] John Henry Blunt, ever critical of Wyclif, throws cold water on the whole idea. It was 'a widespread and erroneous notion' that this was the first translation. He turns the idea on its head; it was the 'lawless political principles of Wickliffe' and his followers which *created* the prejudice against vernacular translations of the bible, because now scripture could be quoted 'in support of rebellion and wildest heresy.' This forced Archbishop Arundel to control unauthorised translation in his *Constitutions* of 1408, which in due course motivated the commissioning of an authorised English translation.[81] Walter Hook

[73] Walter Farquhar Hook, 1865, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, III.76.
[74] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 218.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Soames, *History of the Reformation*, I.76.
[77] Southey, *Book of the Church*, 204.
[78] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 128.
[79] Carwithen, *History of the Church of England*, I.34.
[80] Southey, *Book* of *the Church*, 204.
[81] It should be noted, in the light of Blunt's argument, that the *Constitutions* only outlawed *unauthorised* translation. The relevant section of the *Constitutions* reads: '7. The translation of the text of Holy

shares the opinion that it was the *use* to which the translation was put which led to Arundel's ban. He notes that Wyclif had not been condemned for the translation as such. No objection would have been raised if Wyclif's intention had been limited to 'the edification and sanctification of the reader'; it was only when Lollards exhorted men to use scripture to 'sit in judgement on the church' that the authorities became concerned. 'When Wiclif … gradually propounded what he declared to be his deductions from scripture, the alarm was increased.'[82]

Most High Church historians approve of the translation of the bible, credit Wyclif with carrying out the work single-handedly, regarding it as a boon both for the coming Protestant religion, and for England, helping to free the country from the clutches of Rome. It is the one item on Wyclif's c.v. which they can wholeheartedly support. However, the most critical historians, John Henry Blunt and Dean Hook, were less starry-eyed; for them the translation was misused by Wyclif's followers, so that it had to be banned by Thomas Arundel.

There was, then, a spectrum of opinion on Wyclif amongst High Church writers. The accounts written by evangelical historians as chapter 9 will demonstrate, tended to vary little, but here there are different treatments and generalisation is difficult. Where these writers are able to express enthusiasm, they do so. The impression that most give is that they *want* to like Wyclif. There is almost unanimous enthusiasm for his opposition to Rome and his part in the translation of scripture. Division arises most in their discussion of his ecclesiological and civil ideas. There is an imperfect chronological correlation, with writers in the earlier part of the period more positive about Wyclif (Soames [1826], Carwithen [1829], Massingberd [1842] and Short [1843]), and later writers more critical (J.J. Blunt [1838), Hook [1859-1875], and J.H. Blunt [1868]). Le Bas' 1832 biography appears more balanced than some, but Le Bas himself was torn. Wyclif, it seems, was more important for establishment Anglicans

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Scripture out of one tongue into another is a dangerous thing: … Nor let any such book, pamphlet, or treatise now lately composed in the time of John Wicklif … be read … under pain of the greater excommunication, till that translation have been approved by the diocesan of the place, or if occasion shall require, by a provincial Council.'
Archbishop Thomas Arundel's Constitutions against the Lollards (bible-researcher.com) accessed 14th Nov. 2024.

[82] Hook, *Lives*, III.84.

as a Protestant champion in the decades when Catholic emancipation seemed a threat, particularly after the success of Lingard's *History*. Le Bas eagerly cites Lingard where he admits that Wyclif's bible translation had been an effective weapon in winning the hearts of the people.[83] Lingard had attacked Wyclif's ideas, and there was a strong incentive to defend Wyclif. By the end of the period, though, Anglican self-confidence had recovered and for high churchmen nonconformity had begun to seem more threatening.

8.7 The Lollards

The Anglican historians had no such hesitancy about the Lollards, whose dangerously radical politics outweighed any religious virtues they may have had. They all condemn them roundly as a party of revolutionaries, bringers of chaos and precursors of puritanism and nonconformity. For some, the Lollards morphed later into a primarily political grouping, whereas others believed that their priority remained religious reform.

John Henry Blunt, in his *Dictionary of Sects*, defines the Lollards, inaccurately, as 'partly a political party of socialists, and partly a school of anti-sacerdotalists.'[84] This remarkable textbook includes a useful family tree of English church parties, in which the 'Wycliffite party' appears as the parent of Puritans and grandparent of later nonconformists.[85] The Lollards, according to Blunt, were of diverse character, from the sincere reformer to the 'wild socialist visionary, whose opinions ... would have plunged society into chaos.'[86] For Walter Hook, another reactionary historian, after Wyclif died the Lollards turned into a predominantly political movement which called for radical reform. 'They made religion their plea, in order to swell the numbers of the discontented, but their actions tended to a revolution in the State as well as the Church.' He does, though, credit them with playing an important political role. They 'contributed to the elevation of the middle classes' and should be regarded as political

[83] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 218.
[84] J.H. Blunt, *Dictionary of Sects,* 252.
[85] Ibid., viii.
[86] Ibid., 255.

rather than religious martyrs.[87] Francis Massingberd was another for whom political reform became the Lollards' priority. They 'added more and more of political discontent to their religious opinions', and eventually an 'inclination to sedition.'[88] John James Blunt finds in the Lollards a foretaste of the turmoil which was to arise in the seventeenth century: here were the 'first fruits of those opinions and practices which, when coupled with politics … overturned both altar and throne.'[89] For Blunt, though, the danger of Lollardy lay foremost in the religious sphere. They were the forefathers of the coming dissenters, the dangerous puritan sects which (wonderful phrase) 'tumbled forth like bats out of their hiding-places at the first shock of the Reformation.'[90] John Henry Blunt agrees. They did not pre-empt the Anglican Reformation but rather 'laid the foundations of that sectarian spirit known as Puritanism, Nonconformity and Dissent.'[91] Robert Southey, too, feels that it was their *religious* ideas which were most dangerous and concludes that punitive action against them was essential: 'Undoubtedly the Lollards were highly dangerous … the greater number were eager for havoc, and held opinions which are incompatible with the peace of society. They would have stript the churches, destroyed the monasteries, confiscated the church lands, and proclaimed the principal that the Saints should possess the earth. The public safety required that such opinions should be repressed.'[92]

Charles Le Bas' material on the Lollards, though, is contradictory, in places reading as though he is striving for equitable treatment, while elsewhere his High Church instincts come to the fore. Maintaining that Lollard notions were 'well nigh subversive of all ecclesiastical discipline',[93] he does concede that the group served a positive purpose. Like Wyclif, they served as needful agents of change: 'if some intrepid spirits

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[87] Hook, *Lives*, III.94. In an extraordinary aside, Hook (writing in 1868) denotes his own time as 'one which cannot be denominated religious.' Rather, it was an essentially political age, and an age of political change. Hook compares the Lollards to the 'Socialists marching upon London', but does not condemn Socialism outright, foreseeing that 'it is not impossible that … a species of Communism may gradually prevail throughout Europe.'
[88] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 186.
[89] J. J. Blunt, *Sketch of the Reformation*, 90.
[90] Ibid., 88.
[91] J.H. Blunt, *Reformation of the Church of England,* 523.
[92] Southey, *Book of the Church*, 208.
[93] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 385.

had not been found, to burst through the privilege and custom of ages, the evils of corrupt and superstitious doctrine might have been eternal: and we might not, at this day, have been living under a system, which combines the blessings of a reformed religious establishment, with those of a liberal and enlightened toleration.'[94] This is an ironic conclusion, that the Lollards' actions had ultimately given rise to a nineteenth-century Anglican establishment of which they would surely not have approved. Elsewhere, though, Le Bas is no cheerleader for the Lollards, describing them as 'often violent, noisy and pertinacious'.[95] He, in common with most of the others, feels that the Lollards became more turbulent after the death of Wyclif.[96] He writes that the dangers posed by the group were exaggerated by the hierarchy,[97] but also, contradictorily, says that 'it can scarcely be denied, that the whole fabric of society was in some hazard from their principles.'[98] They might, indeed, have brought about antinomian chaos: 'by many of them the reign of the saints upon the earth was eagerly anticipated: ... their impatience, if not effectively curbed, might have broken out into wild and feverish commotion.[99]

8.8 The Poor Priests and sedition

Wyclif was widely supposed to have sent forth barefoot preachers in russet gowns, the 'poor priests', who were blamed by many hostile writers for spreading dissent and fomenting revolt. The preachers evoked a descent into cod medievalism by some writers. John James Blunt speaks of the Lollard 'traversing ... from town to town, preaching in churches and churchyards, in fairs and markets'[100] and Massingberd of preaching 'in town and country, market-crosses and stone pulpits',[101] appealing to the poorest class by conforming to their habits. Le Bas is suspicious of the whole notion,

[94] Ibid., 386.
[95] Ibid., 391.
[96] Ibid., 407; 'the waters [Wyclif] had sent forth ... [became] continually more impetuous and more turbid [and] their strength was, unhappily, increased by many a tributary torrent, which ... mingled its impurities with their tide.'
[97] Ibid., 408.
[98] Ibid., 413. Elsewhere Le Bas writes, of the Oldcastle rising, that 'nothing can be more incredible than the assertion ... that the object of the supposed conspirators was no less than the dissolution of the whole fabric of society.' (Ibid., 418.)
[99] Ibid., 413.
[100] J.J. Blunt, *Sketch of the Reformation*, 91.
[101] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 133.

as being too close to the mendicancy of the friars Wyclif had himself vigorously opposed. He couldn't countenance preachers out of establishment control. 'We have here the principles of a complete system of itinerancy, subject to no controls whatever, except the supposed direction of the Holy Spirit.'[102] He cites the Wycliffite text *Why Poor Priests have no Benefices* to explain that they opted for itinerancy because they wanted to be free to preach 'without the challenge of any human authority'.[103] Thomas Short agrees that the breakdown in ecclesiastical discipline the preachers sought could 'create a licentious freedom amongst the commonality'.[104] Again, the sinister shadow of antinomianism made these High Churchmen shudder. Charles Le Bas doubts their motives. '[W]e might be strongly tempted to doubt whether they went forth to their work in the genuine spirit of martyrdom.'[105]

Despite sharing the view that the Lollards harboured dangerously revolutionary sentiments, High Church historians, in common with all but the most partisan writers, usually exonerate the group from the charge of involvement in the insurrection of 1381, if only, in most cases, by omitting to mention it.[106] Henry Soames takes issue with the Catholic John Milner, who had linked the rising to the revolutionary doctrines of Wyclif and his followers.[107] Soames says that this was impossible, as the Wycliffites lived their lives according to the revelation in scripture, 'a textbook very ill-adapted for turbulent levellers.'[108] Le Bas is ambivalent. He opposes Lingard, who attributed the rising to Wyclif's idea of dominion in grace, saying that the causes were mostly economic factors, but concedes that the incendiary rhetoric of Wyclif and his followers did contribute to a widespread mood of discontent. 'One cannot deny that the language adopted by Wiclif or his itinerant preachers … did, frequently, burst through the barriers of sobriety and caution.' It may be difficult for us, he concludes, 'to frame … a complete vindication of such dangerous extravagance.'[109] It was absurd,

[102] Ibid., 374.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Short, *History*, 35.
[105] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 375.
[106] Twentieth-century writers continued to assert that he and his followers did not support the rising, but Anne Hudson in *PR* (66-9) notes that 'disclaimers of Wyclif's involvement may have gone too far.'
[107] See pp.76-7.
[108] Soames, *History of the Reformation*, I.77-78, fn.
[109] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 245.

however, to state that the rising was a consequence of Wyclif's 'doctrinal heresies'.[110] Sharon Turner likewise suggests that Wyclif's ideas played an indirect part: 'the latent spirit of discontent and desire of change … burst into action. The vassal peasantry thought the hour was come to end their bondage, the religious reformer, to make the improvements he wished.'[111]

Of course, the Lollards could not be cleared of involvement in the Oldcastle rising of 1414. Despite a general tone of disapproval, there is no consensus, though a common reaction is puzzlement in response to the variety of testimony and the motivations of the principals. Le Bas notes that there was no evidence of a plot, concluding that it was probably invented or exaggerated to 'alarm the mind of the king into anger.'[112] A page later, however, in a typical *volte face*, Le Bas says that 'it is scarcely possible to believe, that imputations so dark could have been *wholly* fictitious or unfounded.'[113] Most Anglican writers agree that the importance of the rising was exaggerated to discredit the Lollards. Thomas Short sums up the historiography: 'This tale is so variously represented that it is difficult to arrive at the truth.'[114] He considers that an assembly did take place, but that it was small, Cobham absent, and the tale used 'to inflame the mind of the king'. Using the same logic as Rapin a century earlier, Short concludes that the idea that the Lollards meant to bring down the crown 'involves an inconsistency and folly … for which no adequate cause can be assigned.'[115] Sharon Turner arrives at the same conclusion. Describing the rising as 'a mysterious transaction in which … the truth is difficult to elicit', he describes Walsingham's account as 'a series of supposition, rumour, private information, apprehension and anticipation', and concludes that the king had been influenced by 'some secret agents'. Robert Southey sits even more firmly on the fence. He, too, is bewildered by the contradictory accounts, describing the matter as 'inexplicably mysterious.'[116] Both the idea that fifty thousand apprentices were ready to join a Lollard rising and the

[110] Ibid., 246. These charges would be as absurd 'as it would be to ascribe the outrages of the Anabaptists of Munster to the theological opinions of Luther.'
[111] Sharon Turner, *History of England during the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn., 1830, II.471-2.
[112] Le Bas, *Wiclif*, 417.
[113] Ibid., 418.
[114] Short, *History*, 37.
[115] Ibid. As a twenty-first-century reader it is difficult to avoid the same thought. See pp.43-4 on Rapin.
[116] Southey, *Book of the Church*, I.380.

opposing scenario that the Lollards were simply present for a midnight prayer meeting he finds 'most improbable.'[117] Francis Massingberd, though, leans the other way. We are compelled, he says, to work through conflicting testimony to ascertain whether Oldcastle had been 'goaded by persecution, or misled by enthusiasm, into deeds disgraceful to the Christian name.'[118] It seems to him that persecution caused the Lollards to wish for a change of government: 'that Cobham had some designs against the government … admits of no reasonable doubt.'[119]

Dean Hook, characteristically, is more robustly critical. Most historians mention the difficulties in ascertaining what really happened, but Hook entertains no such doubts, specifying details which no other historian had mentioned. Despite John Oldcastle's exemplary military career and soldierly virtues, Hook says, 'he seems to have become imbued with the socialist doctrines inherent in Lollardism, and gradually to have sunk into political and religious fanaticism.'[120] He became 'simply a demagogue',[121] and his behaviour when being examined by the archbishop, held up as praiseworthy by so many historians from Bale and Foxe onwards, for Hook 'might be regarded as insolent or courageous',[122] leaving little doubt as to which of these adjectives he would have applied. Hook condemns the rising as 'open rebellion', its purpose to insert Oldcastle on the throne. His account tells of a mob of rapidly increasing size advancing towards London against the king, who only had a small force at his disposal. It was down to Henry's valour and skill as a commander that the day was saved. We have already noted that Hook is one of those writers most stridently critical of dissent, with strong sympathies towards the clerical establishment, and his account is striking, categorical both in his assessment of the risk to the crown, and his assuredness of the reality of the event.

These Anglicans were suspicious, to put it mildly, about the motives and beliefs of the Lollards. They were also uncomfortable with the idea of the Reformation as a dramatic break in the succession from the pre-Reformation to the contemporary Church of

[117] Ibid.
[118] Massingberd, *English Reformation*, 199.
[119] Ibid., p.201.
[120] Hook, *Lives*, IV.510.
[121] Ibid., V.30.
[122] Ibid.

England. It is, then, predictable that there is no suggestion in their writing that the Lollards were precursors of the coming church revolution. Few of them mention the idea even to reject it, though John Henry Blunt states that the Lollards were 'unworthy to be called religious reformers' as their religious dissent was just a part of their opposition to 'the established order in general'.[123] He quotes Charles Hardwick's 1856 book *A History of the Christian Church during the Reformation* to the effect that 'the rise, the progress, and the final triumphs of the English Reformation, were not sensibly affected by [Wyclif's] principles.'[124] Blunt ruefully observes that 'the spirit which had arisen amongst Wickliffe's followers was never laid,' and their legacy was the 'clouds of sectarianism' which followed.[125]

8.9 High Churchmen on *Acts & Monuments*: S.R. Maitland

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, most Anglicans had been united in the face of a resurgence of Catholicism.[126] High Church historians happily used *Acts & Monuments* as a principal source. Robert Southey in his *Book of the Church* and Henry Soames in *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* both 'relied heavily on *A&M'* while writing a conservative history.[127] Christopher Wordsworth went further. His multi-volume *Ecclesiastical Biography or Lives of Eminent Men connected with the history of religion in England* (1809) was a collection of lives taken from earlier sources; some, including those of Wyclif and Oldcastle, straight from *A&M*. Wordsworth (1774-1846) the younger brother of the poet William, was 'a

[123] J.H. Blunt, *Reformation*, 524.
[124] Ibid.; Charles Hardwick, *A History of the Christian Church during the Reformation*, 1856, 180.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Peter Nockles, 'Acts and Monuments: The Nineteenth Century Reception', *TAMO*. David Loades, in 'The Maitland Controversy', *TAMO,* explains that the attack by the Catholic Eusebius Andrews on *A&M* in *A Critical and Historical Review of Fox's Book of Martyrs* (1824-6) was 'understood (rightly) by evangelicals to be a fundamental attack upon the integrity of the protestant Church of England, and the project for a new edition of the *Acts and Monuments* arose directly out of that perception.' On the growth of party tensions in the Church of England, and their treatment by historians, Frances Knight, *The nineteenth-century Church and English society*, 1995, 2-13.
[127] Peter Nockles, 'The Changing Legacy of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in the "Long Eighteenth Century", 1995, 229. Southey's use of *A&M* is not overt, not least because he does not provide references. He confirms, however, that he made wide use of *A&M,* in a response to criticism by the Catholic historian Charles Butler, *Vindiciae Ecclesiae Anglicanae: letters to Charles Butler, comprising essays on the Romish religion and vindicating "The book of the Church",* (Southey, 1859, *Book of the Church*, 7th edn., v.)

high-churchman of the old school,'[128] his book intended for 'the benefit of the theological students … and the younger clergy.'[129] Wordsworth acknowledges the worth of *A&M*: 'All the many researches and discoveries of later times … have only contributed to place the general fidelity and truth of Fox's melancholy narrative on a rock which cannot be shaken.'[130] Wordsworth takes the material for these biographies directly from the 1583 edition of *A&M*, updating some (but by no means all) archaic spellings,[131] and omitting only content he considers immaterial, such as lists of names. The book's ninety page section on Wyclif is almost identical to the material in *A&M*. Wordsworth does augment Foxe's material, via the addition of copious footnotes of a factual and scholarly nature.

However, the religious landscape had changed by the 1830s. Opposition to Catholicism no longer provided a unifying force; indeed, the reverse was true. Evangelical Anglicans began to evince 'a more strident, albeit non-political anti-Catholicism'[132] whilst the Tractarian party seemed to be moving in a 'Romewards' direction. High Church Anglicans were made nervous by the advances they saw made by both Catholics and nonconformists, many fearing that Church of England's place as the established church was in peril. *A&M* now seemed unpleasantly tinged with dissenting and Puritan ideas. When, following a campaign by Anglican Evangelicals led by Edward Bickersteth, a new edition was produced in 1837-41 by the publisher Seely & Burnside, the first since the seventeenth century, High Church critics soon appeared, most notably Samuel Roffey Maitland, who appointed himself, in Peter Nockles's phrase, as 'critic-in-chief' of both Foxe's work and the nineteenth-century re-issue.[133]

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[128] R. Sharp, 'Christopher Wordsworth', *ODNB*.
[129] Christopher Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Biography*, 4th edn, 1853, I.xix.
[130] Ibid.
[131] For example, Foxe in his introduction to the section on Wyclif writes: 'This is certaine and can not be denied, but that he being the publike Reader of Diuinitie in the Vniuersitie of Oxford: was for the rude time wherein he liued, famously reputed for a great clerke, a deepe scholeman, & no lesse expert in all kinde of philiosophie.' *A&M*, 1583, 448. This is rendered by Wordsworth as: 'This is certaine, that he being the publike reader of divinitie in the university of Oxford, was for the rude time wherein he lived, famously reputed for a great clerke, a deepe schooleman and no lesse expert in all kinds of philosophie.' Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Biography*, I.169.
[132] Peter Nockles, '*Acts and Monuments*: The Nineteenth Century Reception', *TAMO*.
[133] Ibid. For Andrew Penny, Maitland 'is the most serious Foxe critic to date.' 'John Foxe's Victorian Reception', *The Historical Journal* 40.1 (1977), 114.

Maitland was the librarian of Lambeth Palace. He possessed a fussily precise academic mind and an acerbic pen along with a dauntless willingness to enter into vitriolic debates. He was a regular contributor to *The British Magazine*,[134] and it was principally in its pages that he conducted his attacks on *A&M*, lambasting both the Seely & Burnside edition for errors and inaccuracies and Foxe's original for its Puritan bias and poor historical method. He set himself against much Foxean dogma, in particular his lionizing of medieval dissenting groups as true Christians infused with primitive piety. Maitland wrote an article on the Lollards in the July 1842 edition of the *British Magazine*, seeking to topple them from the plinth upon which Foxe had placed them by demonstrating that, rather than being precursors of reform, they were firmly rooted in their own times, which he did by showing that they possessed a superstitious attachment to prophecy.[135] Maitland argues that they shared the strong belief in the supernatural which was then widespread. He makes the same case against sixteenth-century Puritans – and John Foxe himself, in an article entitled 'Puritan Thaumaturgy', also published in 1842,[136] writing that Puritans claimed to possess 'supernatural gifts'.[137] 'The Puritans were ready to defend the *Reformation* on the grounds of scripture and reason, but they were obviously delighted to believe that the Reformation had been predicted by a succession of prophets.'[138] By stating that these groups had a predilection for prophesy and 'thaumaturgy', Milner linked historical evangelicals and dissenters with new nonconformist groups which were arising in his own time who also used prophetic revelation. Groups like the Catholic Apostolic Church of Edward Irving, which first met in Scotland in the early 1830s, and the Plymouth Brethren, founded in Ireland in 1825, were founded upon premillennialist expectations, looking forward to the predicted second coming of Christ. Sheridan Gilley speaks of a period

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[134] *The British Magazine and Monthly Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Information, Parochial History and Documents Representing the State of the Poor*. Maitland took over as editor in 1838.
[135] 'Interest in Joachimite prophecy and feverish speculation regarding the chronology of AntiChrist's coming were both features of mainstream culture.' Alexandra Walsham, 'Inventing the Lollard Past: The Afterlife of a Medieval Sermon in Early Modern England,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58.4 (2007), 628-655.
[136] Samuel Roffey Maitland, 'Puritan Thaumaturgy', in *Notes on the Contributions of the Rev. George Townsend, M.A. to the new edition of Fox's Martyrology*, 1842.
[137] Ibid., 95.
[138] Ibid., 111-112.

of ‘turmoil’, a ‘crisis of Protestantism’ between 1830 and 1850, from which arose modern Adventist churches.[139] Writing about Maitland, Gilley’s conclusion was that he sought ‘a *Via Media* between two superstitious systems, that of Rome on the one hand and of popular Protestantism on the other.’[140] This attitude is on display in Maitland’s articles about Lollards and Puritans.

Maitland sought to undermine the Lollards’ reputation in two ways. As well as linking them to nonconformist radicals, he also tried to show their potential for wreaking chaos. His method was to show that the prophecies to which the Lollards were most addicted were those which predicted that they would rise to a position of power, accompanied by chaos and tribulations. He supports both elements of this argument with this single sentence from *A&M*:

> Item, the sayd William Wright deposeth that it is read *in the* prophecies *amonges the Lollardes* that the sect of Lollardes shal be in a maner destroyed: Notwithstanding at the length the Lollards shall preuayle and haue the victory agaynst all theyr enemyes.[141]

Prophecies were often employed for political ends and, according to Maitland ‘That our English Lollards were under their influence is beyond all doubt.’[142] By his account, the Lollards held secret gatherings at which they would instruct one another in the prophecies. These meetings had seditious intent: ‘the instruction … had a political aim, and was dangerous to the government and peace of the realm’.[143] Prophecies like those in Revelation often foretell violent revolution, Maitland writes, so the Lollards’ tendency to scour scripture for prophecies supporting their cause demonstrates their willingness to bring disorder.[144]

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[139] Sheridan Gilley, ‘Newman and Prophecy’, *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, III.5, 1985, 181. Also, Andrew Penny notes the growth of expectation of Christ’s return in the second quarter of the century. ‘Victorian Reception’, *The Historical Journal*, 112.
[140] Ibid. Gilley observes that while ‘Maitland was not strictly speaking a Tractarian; his scholarship and his sarcasm were alike acceptable to the Oxford Movement.’
[141] *A&M*, 1583, 689.
[142] S.R. Maitland, ‘The Lollards’, *British Magazine*, July 1842, 3.
[143] Ibid., 4.
[144] Ibid., 6. Thomas Newton, the bishop of Bristol, in 1757 published *The Dissertations upon the Prophecies Which have remarkably been fulfilled*, a thorough analysis of biblical prophecies, demonstrating how each had come true. Newton identified Wyclif and the Lollards, along with other dissenting groups throughout history, as the ‘true and faithfull witnesses’ of Revelation 11.3, ‘for there were protestants long before ever the name came into use.’ (III.120). ‘Some in every age … who should bear witness to the truth, and declare against the iniquity and idolatry of their times [and] preach the

He tries to identify the Lollards' favourite prophecies in a detailed analysis of the *Prognosticatio* of Johannes Lichtenberger (1488). Lichtenberger was a German astrologer whose book enjoyed widespread circulation.[145] It speaks of five great prophets, 'Ptolomeus, Aristoteles, Sibilla, Brigida and REYNHARDUS LOLHARDUS',[146] the latter, Maitland suggests, giving his name to the Lollards.[147] Lichtenberger's book mentioned that Lolhardus had produced a book of 'Revelations' but unfortunately only includes a few 'scraps' from it. Could this book, Maitland asks, be the source of Foxe's 'prophecies amonges the Lollardes'?[148]

Maitland was abler at research than presenting an argument. His articles contain lengthy sections of quoted material, but nowhere a proper conclusion, his readers being expected to tease it out themselves.[149] Maitland wants to make two points. First, the Lollards were enthusiastic consumers of apocalyptic prophecy. This was not particularly to impugn them, as *everyone* felt that way about prophecy in the fifteenth century. This allows Maitland to undermine the idea that Lollards were better Christians, truer believers, than their contemporaries.[150] Second, Maitland wants to show that the prophecies the Lollards were fondest of were those which predicted that they would bring chaos but eventually prevail. Maitland concludes (though one must get here by reading between the lines) that the efforts by the clerical establishment to suppress them were justified on the grounds of public order.

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sincere word of God.' (III.121). Newton, an orthodox Anglican bishop (N. Aston, *ODNB*), accepts that some Lollard preaching was incorrect 'for alas, who is there that holdeth the truth without any mixture or allay of error.' (III.173).

[145] Ibid., 8. Maitland states that it would have been easy to make this material more tedious, a challenge which we must be grateful that he did not attempt.

[146] Ibid., 10.

[147] Speculation about the etymology of the name 'Lollard' had long been a topic which fascinated historians.

[148] One reads 'Devotus reynhardus in spiritu videns sub rege Maximilano tribulationes cleri et ecclesii, propit in hec verba libro suo multarum tribulationum dicens 'esce erunt omnes volantibus ceni et bestiis terre.' ('The devout Reynhard, seeing in his spirit the tribulations of the clergy and the church under King Maximilian, prophesied these words in his book of many tribulations, saying: "They shall all be eaten by the flying creatures of heaven and the beasts of the earth".') Johannes Lichtenberger, *Prognosticato*, 1530, A (iii).

[149] In this his work resembles that of eighteenth-century historians like Echard.

[150] Maitland had already argued against the evangelical fondness for promoting medieval heretical groups such as the Waldenses as exemplars of primitive piety. *Facts and Documents Illustrative of the History, Doctrine and Rites, of the Ancient Albigenses & Waldenses*, 1832.

9 Evangelical writing 1830-1850

9.1 Introduction

As High Church historians grew nervous about the hints of Puritanism they found in the legacy of Wyclif and Lollardy, Anglican Evangelicals gravitated in the opposite direction, finding common ground with nonconformists. In the 1830s, writing in this tradition combined strident anti-Romanism with ascription of divine providence as an explanation for historical events. It often draws upon Foxe's version of history, with its millenarian eschatology, whereby the rule of the Antichrist began in the past, manifest in the actions of a corrupt papacy, and its promotion of heretical groups like the Lollards, by contrast, as exemplars of true Christianity. In such accounts, these dissenters were the witnesses prophesied in Revelation 11, their piety bolstered by martyrs' blood. Evangelical writers are less interested in John Wyclif, finding him and his ideas difficult to fit into this scheme. They could admire his opposition to Rome, but he inspired none of the passion with which they wrote about the Lollards.

In 1837-41, after a hiatus of 150 years, and following a campaign by Evangelical Anglicans such as Edward Bickersteth, the publisher Seeley and Burnside produced a new edition of Foxe's *Acts & Monuments*, edited by Stephen Reed Cattley and George Townsend.[1] This production had a material impact upon Reformation historiography. It removed the need for the popular abridgements which had appeared so frequently in the eighteenth century. Evangelical writers did produce works on the lives of martyrs, but the content was usually at a further remove from *A&M* than earlier works. They often contained anti-Catholic screeds of the kind which modern authorities like William Haller have written about. This chapter examines five books from this tradition. Their writers are relatively unknown. The books vary in length, style and purpose, but possess common elements: strong anti-Romanism, a providential view of history and, often, apocalyptic rhetoric. Like High Church writers, these evangelicals emphasise Wyclif's patriotism but ascribe patriotic motivations to the Lollards as well. Lollard martyrdom is of the utmost importance to these writers, the shedding of martyrs' blood being a necessary step in the defeat of AntiChrist. All five books owe a debt to *Acts and Monuments*. Two specify this in their very titles: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's popular 1837 work *The English Martyrology*

[1] Peter Nockles, 'The Nineteenth Century Reception', *TAMO*.

Abridged from Foxe[2] and the more scholarly three-volume work *Martyrologia; new book of Martyrs compiled from Foxe* (1848), a collaboration by the Primitive Methodist John Sundius Stamp,[3] who wrote volumes I and II and William Harris Rule, a Wesleyan minister who contributed volume III, 'Martyrs of the Reformation'. Two of the books are more obviously works of anti-Catholic polemic. George Stokes' *The Lollards: Some Account of the Witnesses for the Truth in Great Britain* (1838)[4] and Frederick Shoberl's *Persecutions of Popery: Historical Narratives of The Most Remarkable Persecutions Occasioned by the Intolerance of the Church of Rome* (1844) whose title leaves little doubt as to the thrust of the text. Thomas Price's *History of Protestant Nonconformity* (1836-8) belongs with the others by virtue of its tone and conclusions but is more a work of history than a martyrology.

9.2 Anti-Catholicism and apocalypticism

These books share a virulently anti-Roman tone. Some confine their condemnation to the historic Roman church, but others draw parallels with contemporary Catholicism and warn their readers of the dangers of a Romewards drift in the Church of England. Their language is extreme and colourful. Frederick Shoberl works himself up into a lather, writing that 'The Popes, their court and the clergy in general exhibited a corruption of morals, a depravity, a licentiousness, scarcely to be conceived' and that the English clergy possessed such 'gross ignorance, cruelty, covetousness, simony, vanity, pride, ambition, drunkenness, glutton and lechery' that there was a widespread feeling that the coming of the AntiChrist was at hand.[5] Some writers use apocalyptic comparisons. Charlotte Tonna writes of the medieval papacy: 'the Mother of harlots, stood forth, grasping the golden cup of her abominations, and already reeling under the intoxication of sanguinary power.'[6] She identifies the pope as the 'man of perdition' mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2. He possessed a rapacious thirst for blood and headed a blasphemous anti-church 'in the fearful plenitude of its wily, sanguinary and

[2] Nockles, 'Nineteenth-Century Reception'. Nockles asserts the popularity of this abridgement and says that Tonna had a 'love affair with the martyrology'; this was 'a labour of love.'
[3] There was another Methodist minister named John Stamp active at the same time, and to add to the confusion John Sundius Stamp is misnamed as John Sundins Stamp in some sources.
[4] *The Lollards* appeared as a 24-issue partwork. The title is misleading: this is an evangelical history of the Reformation, with emphasis on Protestant martyrs.
[5] Frederick Shoberl, *Persecutions of Popery*, *Historical Narratives of The Most Remarkable Persecutions Occasioned by the Intolerance of the Church of Rome,* 1844, 45.
[6] John Foxe, *The English Martyrology abridged from Foxe*, edited by Charlotte Elizabeth [Tonna], intro. by Edward Bickersteth, 2 vols, 1837, 4.

treacherous usurpations … drunken with the blood of [Christ's] saints.'[7] Others employ less overblown rhetoric but are just as critical of the doctrines and practices of the medieval church. John Stamp speaks of the 'horrid ceremonial of Popery in England', whereby 'the power of an inexorable and sanguinary priesthood' held sway over the lives of Englishmen.[8] For George Stokes, 'true religion barely existed in the fourteenth century.'[9] The bible was almost unknown, even to the clergy, and the church hierarchy were constantly inventing strange new ceremonies.

Stokes extends this condemnation into his own era, singling out for criticism Catholic addiction to ascribing divine status to the Virgin Mary.[10] All these 'errors and abominations' were later ratified by the Council of Trent and remained Catholic doctrine in the nineteenth century. Stokes finds such blasphemous tenets still in place in countries like Spain and Italy which remained in a 'degraded situation … as to spiritual knowledge.' Catholics and their sympathisers in the Church of England sought to impose the same upon England and by 'cunning craftiness' to 'lead us back to that system of doctrines, which once reduced our land to [that] unhappy state.'[11] Edward Bickersteth, in the introduction to Tonna's book, is another who warns of the danger of creeping Catholicism, telling his readers that they must 'awake out of the torpor and indifference into which we are sinking'[12] because 'Popery is unalterably bad [and] is reserved for destruction, not amelioration.'[13] Likewise, John Stamp writes that the 'Man of Sin' was trying to recover his 'tarnished glory': even members of parliament were abandoning the religion of their fathers, and 'individuals connected with the ecclesiastical hierarchy of England have … without hesitation renounced Protestantism and served at Popish altars.'[14] These anti-Catholic attitudes reveal the principal reason why Evangelicals wrote their books. The 1830s were worrying times, with Catholic emancipation and the rise of Tractarianism,

[7] Ibid., 3. Tonna also memorably describes the doctrine of transubstantiation thus: 'a cake of dough had been invested with the incommunicable glories of Jehovah.'
[8] John Sundius Stamp, *Martyrologia or Records of Religious Persecution, being a new and comprehensive book of martyrs of ancient and modern times, compiled partly from the Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, Volumes I and II, 1848, II.598.
[9] George Stokes, *The Lollards, or Some account of the witnesses for the truth in Great Britain*, Religious Tract Society, 1825, 1.
[10] Stokes does concede that most of the titles awarded to her were 'titles of mercy', but some were martial in nature 'and to her is ascribed precisely the powers which the heathens of old attributed to the goddess Bellona.' (Ibid., 17).
[11] Ibid., xii.
[12] Edward Bickersteth, 'Introductory Remarks', in Tonna, *English Martyrology*, xv.
[13] Ibid., xvii.
[14] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, I.iii.

which threatened to adulterate Protestant truth. They feared the gradual return of the alarming ceremonial, doctrine and what Bickersteth calls the 'outward splendour' of the Roman church.[15] These writers regarded themselves, as well as the Lollards, as the witnesses 'clothed in sackcloth' of Revelation 11:3.

Thankfully, though, divine providence intervened when God sent Wyclif and the Lollards to stand against all this. John Stamp sees in the advent of dissent the outworking of God's plan. 'It pleased God to raise up John de Wycliffe',[16] he says. That Wyclif avoided persecution was also due to divine action: 'God was graciously pleased to preserve his servant, who had always trusted in Him.'[17] Likewise, it was 'Under the Divine blessing', according to George Stokes, that Reformation arose in England.[18] Thomas Price states that Wyclif's followers were 'raised up by the providence of God'[19] thanks to the operation of the divine law that 'the suffering which moral evil engenders leads to its correction'.[20]

9.3 Lollard Patriots

Apocalypticism was invoked to support Lollard heroism as well as Romish venality. George Stokes' title *The Lollards: Some Account of the Witnesses for the Truth in Great Britain* identifies the Lollards as the 'two witnesses' of Revelation, who were killed by a beast from the abyss after giving their testimony, just as Lollards were martyred for speaking out. Thus, for Stokes, the Lollards 'were enabled to bear a powerful testimony to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.'[21]

England held a special place in God's plan. Edward Bickersteth, in the preface to Tonna's book, links English exceptionalism and divine providence: 'Especially have we cause to be grateful to God that our country, by being made the scene of the birth, education, and sufferings of our martyrs, became a holy land in the eye of God our Father.'[22] The idea that England was a consecrated place, made special because the process of reform was initiated there, is one which is articulated by several historians, sometimes combined with an emphasis on the foreignness of Catholicism. So, for Frederick Shoberl, himself of German descent, England was

[15] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, xviii.
[16] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.581.
[17] Ibid., II.590.
[18] Ibid., xii.
[19] Thomas Price, *The History of Protestant Nonconformity in England*, 1838, 5.
[20] Ibid., 10.
[21] Stokes, *The Lollards*, v.
[22] Edward Bickersteth in Tonna, *English Martyrology*, xv.

'peculiarly distinguished for the purity of its faith',[23] though he does not provide any evidence to support this assertion. John Stamp maintains (also without evidence) that there had always been a spirit of resistance to papal authority in England: since Anglo-Saxon times 'the imperishable seed of revealed truth had not lost its vitality',[24] which perhaps explains why it was in England that opposition to Rome first crystalised. As a result, England was singled out by Rome for persecution. The passage of *De Heretico Comburendo* in 1401, according to Stamp, was an act of vengeance directed at the English people. The measure 'completed the horrid ceremonial of Popery in England; nor could the humiliation of England be more abject, nor the power of an inexorable and sanguinary priesthood over the lives of Englishmen more assuredly established.'[25]

High Church historians had used the same language about Wyclif, performing patriotic service for England by opposing Rome. Both sets of writers invoke the idea of patriotism, of English reformers standing against the encroachments of foreign prelates, writing in a way which was not seen in the eighteenth century. The emphasis is different though. For evangelical authors, reforming Lollards were the main locus of patriotic activity, whereas for the High Churchmen they were beyond the pale and it was Wyclif whom they laud for his patriotism.

9.4 Lollard Preachers

The Lollards appear in these books both as preachers and martyrs. Evangelical writers talk about the 'poor preachers' supposedly inaugurated by Wyclif and imply that this preaching role was one adopted by many or most of his followers. George Stokes reprises the familiar image of the Lollard as an itinerant preacher of the Word: they 'travelled about the country, in the simplest manner, barefoot and in common frieze gowns, preaching in the market-places, and teaching the doctrines of truth with great zeal and much success.'[26] John Stamp, the Church Methodist, writes similarly: his Lollard preachers closely resemble eighteenth-century Wesleyans. According to him, the Wycliffites felt an obligation to preach, and 'went forth like the first disciples, from town to town … preaching the Gospel … never without a congregation, nor ever without a welcome. In the castle of the Baron as in the cottage of the poor man, they

[23] Shoberl, *Persecutions*, 40.
[24] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.579.
[25] Ibid., 598.
[26] Stokes, *Lollards*, 6.

gladly took the common fare.' He describes them as 'undaunted evangelists', and describes England as their 'circuit'.[27] As an example Stamp quotes a 1389 sermon by R. Wimbeldon which appeared in *A&M*.[28] Stamp details how this sermon attacked the clergy and berated the people for their sins.

For John Stamp, the Wycliffites were unfinished: they had been set on the right path, but their ideas were still not wholly mature. '[Wimbeldon] had not learned to offer mercy through faith in the Lamb of God.'[29] He concludes that 'One thing alone was wanting – a clear exhibition of Christ the Saviour of sinners by faith in his blood, the truth of which gave permanence to the Reformation of the sixteenth century.'[30] Representing the Lollards *en masse* as preachers, busily spreading the word among the common folk, served to reinterpret them in a more distinctly evangelising guise.

The wider population was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the church and receptive to the Lollard preachers' message. They were ready for reform, not least *because* of clerical attempts to suppress Wycliffism. The people came to sympathise with the Lollards both because of the manifest evil of the persecution and the widespread feeling that their ideas were right: the 'secret suspicion of the integrity of their cause.'[31]

9.5 Lollard Martyrs

The Lollards' role as martyrs was even more important to these writers. Most of these books were, at heart, martyrologies, seeking out examples of people who had died for their Protestant faith. The Lollard martyrs epitomised the values the preachers were spreading. The power of blood being greater than the power of words. Thomas Price writes that 'the dying martyr inflicted a more serious blow on the hierarchy, than the most active and zealous of their living opponents … the sufferings of the virtuous [are] the most efficient means of diffusing their principles.'[32] This idea was widely held amongst Evangelicals. It is most clear in Charlotte Tonna's book. By her own account, when her father had first showed her a copy of *A&M* before she could read, she had so loved it that she asked him if she could be a martyr: 'I mean, papa,

[27] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.586.
[28] *A&M*, 674.
[29] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.593-4.
[30] Ibid., 595.
[31] Ibid., 11.
[32] Price, *Protestant Nonconformity*, 11.

may I be burned to death for my religion as these were? I want to be a martyr.' Her father, she says, replied 'if the government ever gives power to the Papists again … you may very probably live to be a martyr'.[33] Tonna provides a horticultural metaphor, inspired perhaps by the parable of the sower in Mark 4: 'And now that precious seed, the blood of the martyrs, began evidently to strike out its roots … giving promise of a renovated church, that should blossom and bud, and fill the world with fruit.'[34] The English proto-martyr William Sawtrey, was, she says, full of evangelical virtue, possessed an unquenchable and zealous spirit, tried by 'false judges after the fashion of the inquisition abroad.' The flames 'waft[ed], as in a fiery chariot, the soul of this martyr to the bosom of his God.'[35] Tonna describes John Badby, burned in 1410, as 'an acceptable offering to the great Moloch of Christendom'; he believed in 'one God omnipotent' and was killed for opposing 'the supposed miracle of the wafer'.[36]

There was rather an unsatisfying paucity of detail on the earliest Lollard martyrs in *A&M*, something which could not be said of Foxe's material on John Oldcastle, which was so extensive that most writers had to provide a precis and could write much more about Oldcastle who provided plenty of valuable material. Shoberl, using Foxe and Southey as sources, paints a dramatic picture of Oldcastle's trial, complete with an imagined audience of hooting monastics: 'A multitude of priests, monks, and underlings … insulted him as he came for an execrable heretic and a man accursed before God.' He speaks of 'the taunts of this brutal audience, exulting in the anticipation of the inhuman catastrophe' and makes the bold claim that 'nothing nobler in its kind hath been imagined in fiction or recorded in history'.[37] George Stokes' account is similar; he writes of Oldcastle 'being exposed to the taunts and insults of a rabble of monks and friars'[38] who were 'thrown into confusion' by the power of Oldcastle's evangelical rhetoric. Charlotte Tonna also has the clergy stymied by Oldcastle's rhetoric: 'he answered so warily and wisely, that they were unable to wrest his words, or to gainsay his appeals to scripture.'[39] Oldcastle provided these writers with an ideal of evangelical virtue

[33] Charlotte Elizabeth [Tonna], *Personal Recollections*, 3rd edn., 1847, 15. https://victorianweb.org/authors/tonna/walker2.html accessed 14th November 2024.
[34] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, I.13.
[35] Ibid., I.20.
[36] Ibid., I.21. See figure ii (b) for the illustration of Badby's martyrdom which appears at the front of George Stokes' *The Lollards*.
[37] Shoberl, *Persecutions*, 51-2.
[38] Stokes, *Lollards*, 22.
[39] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, I.29.

which could be contrasted satisfyingly with the venality of his accusers. The heroic Oldcastle shames and baffles the clergy with his bold avowal of scriptural truths.

These writers, naturally, dismiss the 1414 rising as a ruse concocted by the clergy. Shoberl is firmly in the conspiracy theory camp, writing that this 'mysterious' business 'wear[s] all the appearance of a scheme devised by the clergy and their partisans to force the government into more active measures for crushing the detested Lollards.'[40] George Stokes shares this opinion: and finds another opportunity to draw a parallel with the early church. The Lollards 'like primitive Christians … met in small companies, and often at the dead of night. … [A] company was gathered … [and their] enemies … artfully availed themselves of this opportunity to excite the king's anger against them.'[41] Other writers are even more dismissive. John Stamp mentions that 'there is some indistinct, yet undoubted, account of several persons having been burnt in January 1414'[42] and Charlotte Tonna omits the rising altogether, just stating that, when Oldcastle was caught and executed, there was a conspiracy to make him out to have been a traitor: 'no pains were omitted to make it appear that he had suffered for treason against his lawful king, not for rebellion against the Roman antichrist. Volumes have been written to establish this point.'[43] These writers want to show that the Lollards were patriots and to emphasise that they were punished for heresy rather than treason. Shoberl states that 'they suffered for religious heresy not political incendiarism,'[44] quoting Le Bas, and John Stamp states authoritatively that the suggestion that Oldcastle was responsible for treasonable conspiracy, which 'careless or hostile historians have copied into their books' was 'utterly at variance with every known fact.'[45]

9.6 Wyclif

One would not arrive at a clear understanding of the life and work of John Wyclif from reading these books. The trend throughout the nineteenth century was that historians became more interested in Wyclif and less in the Lollards than had their eighteenth-century predecessors, but the opposite is true of evangelical writers. They do all mention Wyclif's career, emphasise

[40] Shoberl, *Persecutions of Popery*, 53.
[41] Stokes, *The Lollards*, 25.
[42] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.607.
[43] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, 35.
[44] Shoberl, *Persecutions of Popery*, 54.
[45] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.607.

his role as an opponent of papal and clerical corruption, and state that his doctrines were founded upon scripture. However, there is no mention, in most of these books, of his social and ecclesiological ideas or his activity as a scholastic philosopher. Even Stamp's more scholarly account alludes only to these subjects, being far more interested in his opposition to the papacy and foundation of the order of poor priests.

Charlotte Tonna regurgitates Foxe's suggestion that Wyclif's campaign of reform was premeditated. Having long mourned over the evils of contemporary doctrine, he first proposed 'questions logical and metaphysical … until by subtle advances he approached the main doctrines':[46] but Tonna's three-page section on Wyclif says nothing more than that he opposed Catholic doctrines, in particular transubstantiation. Other writers show Wyclif clad in evangelical garb, often emphasising that he was inspired solely by his devotion to scripture. According to George Stokes,[47] 'a firm attachment to the truths of the gospel was evidently the leading principle which actuated his conduct'[48] and Frederick Shoberl states that he derived his principles 'from a profound study of the bible,'[49] and asserting that 'he insisted that the Scriptures contain all truths necessary to salvation, and that in them only is to be found the perfect rule of Christian practice.'[50]

John Stamp and Thomas Price, whose works were aimed at more scholarly readers, both write more about Wyclif. Stamp was a Church Methodist,[51] yet his Wyclif espouses soteriology which little differs from the Arminian Methodism of Wesley with its emphasis upon Christ's vicarious atonement for human sin. Stamp writes that Wyclif appreciated 'the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ over both Church and State, … and maintained that the word of God alone suffices to teach men the way to salvation.'[52] He makes a direct comparison between Wyclif and John Wesley; both understood 'the higher obligation of obedience to the supreme law of Christ', and even ranks Wyclif above Wesley in reforming merit because of the more difficult environment

[46] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, 16.
[47] Stokes dedicates marginally more space to Wyclif: six pages.
[48] Stokes, *The Lollards*, 5.
[49] Shoberl, *Persecutions*, 44.
[50] Ibid., 45.
[51] 'Church Methodists', otherwise known as 'old planners' were those who were reluctant to sever Methodism's ties with the established Anglican church.
https://dmbi.online/index.php?do=app.entry&id=3289 accessed 14 Nov. 2024.
[52] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, II.582.

he faced. 'Wesley in his utmost zeal, could not have done more, and never did so much.'[53] High praise indeed. This is another example of the tendency common among nonconformist historians to attribute to Wyclif the doctrines peculiar to their own denomination, making him a font and origin for that denomination. Thomas Price emphasised Wyclif's rejection of episcopy, writing that he had maintained that according to 'the ordinance of Christ ... priests and bishops were all one.'[54] He did not effect a reformation but he 'made an extensive and permanent impression.'[55]

These writers have little to say about Wyclif's role in translating the bible. This may be because they use *A&M* as a main source and, surprisingly, this did not mention Wyclif's bible translation. Since these writers lay great emphasis on the importance of Wyclif's adherence to *sola scriptura*, one might have expected them to have made more of his role in the translation. Stokes and Stamp mention it briefly, the latter stating that no other work could equal the translation of 'the entire Bible from Latin' and noting that Wyclif was likely to have been assisted by 'some of his friends.'[56] Shoberl lauds it as Wyclif's 'most meritorious service' and yet, unusually, is critical of the translation, saying that it was 'so literal as to be sometimes obscure and even unintelligible.'[57] He concludes that it must have been widely distributed and influential since many manuscripts had survived the efforts at suppression. It is difficult for anyone to paint Wyclif as a model of evangelical humility; his doughty personality is the main reason why evangelical writers struggle to fit him into their model of piety, though Shoberl does try to square this circle, describing Wyclif as a 'humble but formidable adversary.'[58] The Lollards, or their version of them, provided a far more inspiring model of evangelical piety.

9.7 Conclusion

The authors of eighteenth-century 'heirs to Foxe' mostly strove to remain true to the original. The books discussed in this chapter draw upon Foxe as well, though they bear little resemblance to *A&M*. William Haller observed that such editions displayed 'an increasingly narrow Protestant piety'[59] and that is truer of these nineteenth-century works than earlier ones.

[53] Ibid., 586, fn.
[54] Price, *Nonconformity,* 4-5, fn.
[55] Ibid., 5.
[56] Stamp, *Martyrologia*, 591.
[57] Shoberl, *Persecutions*, 47.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Haller, *Elect Nation*, 252-3.

The books by Frederick Shoberl, Charlotte Tonna and George Stokes display a degree of evangelical bias largely absent from their eighteenth-century counterparts. This was, in part, because they were produced by evangelical or nonconformist writers who set out to promote the evangelical cause. Writers of other stamps had, by this time, stopped producing such lives collections, with the exception of Christopher Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Biographies* (1810). These works *are* virulently anti-Catholic. However, there is still no sign of the obsession with 'episodes of torture and death' Haller refers to. Tonna was obsessed with martyrdom, but hers was a hankering for the spiritual blessings conferred by a martyr's death. The deaths of Lollard martyrs are discussed in detail, but there are no gruesome descriptions pandering to a perceived public taste for shocking material.[60]

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, opinion about Wyclif and Lollardy became more polarised within the Anglican church, reflecting the wider breakdown of the consensus in the face of Catholic revival. Evangelicals became more conscious of the need to emphasise their case and more assertive in doing so. The new edition of *A&M* and the urgency with which evangelical writers sought to spread the word combined to give rise to a more polemical strand of historiography. In the hands of Evangelicals, abridgements of *A&M* gave way to more overtly sermonising histories and martyrologies. Wyclif and the Lollards being painted in evangelical colours. Wyclif appears shorn of his political ideas, more akin to a fourteenth-century John Wesley. The emphasis, in writing about the Lollards, is upon preaching and martyrdom.

Writers write for their audiences. High Churchmen, writing for an audience of clerics and graduates, produced much more history than Evangelicals who were writing for a more popular, less educated audience, including families and children.[61] To better reach this audience, evangelical writing turned in a new direction in the later nineteenth century, when there was a boom in pious fiction intended for families and as Sunday School prizes. The next chapter will examine how Wyclif and the Lollards appear in the phenomenon of the evangelical novel.

[60] This investigation is limited to writing about the Lollards. Haller had a wider subject, and of course it is possible that nineteenth-century popular accounts of the Marian martyrs had different characteristics.
[61] Frances Knight, *The nineteenth-century Church and English society*, 8.

10 Fictional accounts

10.1 Introduction

In the later nineteenth century, there was an explosion in fictionalised accounts of Christian history written by evangelical authors. With the passing of education acts in 1870 and 1880 leading to increased school attendance, literacy was increasing. Most of these books were aimed at children and families with the hope of teaching them about worthy or instructive Christian themes. The Lollards were a perfect subject. The fifteenth-century schismatics were transformed, as they had been by evangelical historians, to fit into the nineteenth-century conception of evangelical piety. The novels' writers had no difficulty with anachronism, unconcerned about historical accuracy if they could draw pious conclusions. They often use *A&M* as a principal source, treating it as an impeccable witness to events. Some did turn to the monastic chronicles but dismissed their content as biased polemic.[1] All that was important was to spread God's truth.[2]

In Emily Sarah Holts's *Mistress Margery* (1868), the Lollard priest and martyr William Sawtrey articulates ideas wholly founded in evangelical Protestantism, saying that 'God's love to sinners was such that he gave … His own dear Son, that their sins might be counted His, and that His righteousness might be accounted theirs.'[3] Likewise, in Frances Eastwood's *Geoffrey the Lollard* (1870), one character explains the idea of free grace: 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, except the sin of ingratitude … there is pardon there – free, full, absolute pardon … all that is required is that we ask for it, that we believe in it, that we trust in nothing else'.[4] In Grace Stebbing's *Denham Hall*, a curious tale in which children discover a lost biography of John Wyclif, Wyclif says 'absolutely and distinctly, that the sufferings and merits of the Saviour are the only ground on which the sinner can rest his hope of pardon.'[5] The novelistic form gave writers

[1] Miriam Burstein, writing in a blog post about Holt's use of monastic chronicles rightly said that her treatment of them 'often resolves into a hermeneutics of suspicion.' 'Evangelical historiography: a Victorian popular example', *The Little Professor*, 24 March 2004, The Little Professor: Evangelical historiography: a Victorian popular example (typepad.com).
[2] Ibid. In the same post Burstein provided other examples of Holt's unconcern for, or unawareness of, historical anachronism.
[3] Emily Holt, *Lady Margery*, 1868, 12-13.
[4] Frances Eastwood, *Geoffrey the Lollard*, 870, 292.
[5] Grace Stebbing, *Denham Hall*, 1890, 142.

the opportunity to promote evangelistic piety, with Lollard characters, both historical and invented, espousing such ideas. By the same token they make villains of the Catholic establishment, invariably portrayed as evil and corrupt.

10.2 Evangelical novelists and the Lollards

The first fictional treatments of the Lollards and Wyclif were written early in the century, though most appeared after 1860. All the authors were Evangelicals or nonconformists: there appear to be no hostile novels by Catholic or High Church authors.[6] Most were written by women, often from clerical families, usually obscure figures who left little or no trace beyond their books. One who did achieve a degree of fame was Emily Sarah Holt (1836-93), who possessed 'a total commitment to evangelical Anglican Christianity and was 'adamantly opposed to Roman Catholicism'. Holt was a prolific novelist, her books' popularity evident from their long print runs and regular reprints.[7] On the other hand, Emma Boultwood (1838-1909), who published as Emma Leslie, was less successful. The author of *Conrad: A Tale of Wyclif* (1880), Boultwood produced many novels, but was unable to support herself from her writing.[8] William Howitt of Heanor (1792-1879), author of *Jack of the Mill* (1848), was raised a Quaker, but aroused suspicion among fellow members of the Society of Friends because of his penchant for radical politics.[9] Grace Stebbing (1840-1936), who wrote *Denham Hall* (1885), came from a Suffolk family of Anglican clergymen.[10] William Oak Rhind, author of *Hubert Ellerdale*, was a school master in Kent and of Frances Eastwood (*Geoffrey the Lollard*) little is known.[11]

With their didactic approach and simplified treatments of history, these books were usually aimed at teenagers, young adults and families. Emily Holt's books were intended 'for girls aged about ten to sixteen' and often given away as Sunday School prizes. In *Gilbert Wright the Gospeller* (1877), Frederick Merryweather writes that he hoped 'that

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[6] I have depended upon the bibliography on the Lollard Society website compiled by Derrick Pitard https://lollardsociety.org/?page_id=172 (accessed 11 Nov 2024) and the list in Miriam Burstein's *Victorian Reformations* which coincides largely with Pitard's.

[7] B. Schnorrenberg, 'Emily Sarah Holt', *ODNB*.

[8] https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_author.php?aid=4109) (7th Aug 2023).

[9] P. Mandler, 'William Howitt', *ODNB*.

[10] https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_author.php?aid=2752 (7th Aug 2023), also see A. Burns, *ODNB*, on her father Henry Stebbing,

[11] https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_author.php?aid=5305, 'Frances Eastwood', (25th Nov 2024)
https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_author.php?aid=4530, 'William Oak Rhind', (7th Aug 2023).

this little tale may lead our young people to value … the inestimable privilege of a free Gospel.'[12] In several cases, the books' protagonists are themselves children: Eastwood's heroes in *Geoffery the Lollard* are two young brothers, Jack in Howitt's *Jack of the Mill* is a lively young lad at the start of the book and Holt's *Mistress Margery* a teenage girl when she discovers the Wycliffite gospel. Others, however, were written for adults. Oak Rhind's *Hubert Ellerdale* with its theme of clerical marriage and earnest discussion of Wycliffite sermons is clearly not aimed at children. Miriam Burstein noted that the historical and theological footnotes in Holt's books suggest that she wanted her books to be useful to parents as well as children.[13]

The Lollard characters stand as exemplars of Protestant piety deeply laden with a nineteenth-century notion of righteousness. Some authors attempt authentic flavour by incorporating details such as medieval recipes and costume, but the personalities of the heroes and villains reflect the time when they were written. Lollard characters articulate evangelical beliefs such as the dependence upon scripture as the unmediated word of God and the idea that grace and atonement for sin is freely given. It is true that germs of such dogma are to be found to some degree in medieval Lollardy, but in the novels fully fledged nineteenth-century evangelical ideas emerge from the mouths of fifteenth-century characters. On the other hand, social aspects of Wycliffite and Lollard teaching are ignored or downplayed. Frances Eastwood explains that the 'political aspect – though a very important one – I have avoided entering upon.'[14] Some engage with the 1381 rising but people involved in rebellion had to be differentiated from *real* Lollards whose battle was against sin rather than social inequality. Once Lollardy is redefined as evangelical, then those who were not evangelical cannot have been Lollards. The Lollards' orthodox opponents appear as villains, painted in gaudily hostile tints. They are usually depicted as sadistic, venal and manipulative. Sometimes this is brought into contemporary context with warnings that nineteenth-century ritualists wanted to bring back superstitious medieval practices like veneration of saints and pilgrimages.

[12] Frederick Somner Merryweather, *Gilbert the Gospeller*, 1877, viii.
[13] Personal correspondence.
[14] Eastwood, *Geoffrey*, 5.

10.3 Thomas Gaspey's *The Lollards*

The first fictional treatment was Thomas Gaspey's three-volume *The Lollards* which appeared in 1822. The book is markedly different to the later novels. Lollard characters are the heroes, but this is predominantly an adventure story. Gaspey was a novelist and journalist,[15] though he also produced historical work, including a later two-volume biography of John Oldcastle (1843).[16] Miriam Burstein described *The Lollards* as 'an awkwardly-written and awkwardly-plotted farrago.'[17] The novel tells the story of the adventures of John Oldcastle's two (fictional) children, Edward and Alice, combining descriptions of Lollard activities with romantic adventures.[18] While studying in Lutterworth, the pair meet Jan Huss, traveling with him to Prague and sharing various adventures on the way, for instance being captured by Welsh outlaws after a visit to Oldcastle's hide-out in the hills.[19] Gaspey has no qualms about using anachronisms. While in Prague, Edward learns of new technology, the printing press, returning to London to print 'prayer books and creeds',[20] Gaspey untroubled by the fact that this was before Gutenberg's development of the printing press in 1439.[21] Edward disguises himself by wearing an orange wig and dark glasses, an unlikely way to avoid attention in fifteenth-century London.[22] Meanwhile Alice accompanies Huss to the Council of Constance, witnesses his execution, and returns across Europe disguised as a pageboy named Florio. Burstein describes her adventures en route as 'homoerotic' which is overly strong, though some of the colourful encounters are clearly meant to be titillating;[23] one example being an episode where a French general's wife makes an amorous advance at 'Florio' just as her husband returns and Alice is compelled to make a hasty escape over

[15] C. Sutton & N. Banerji, Thomas Gaspey', *ODNB*.
[16] Gaspey's *The Life and Times of the Good Lord Cobham*, 1843, combines chapters on Oldcastle with others about the wider history of the time, volume 2 being largely concerned with Huss and Bohemia. The material on Oldcastle is taken mostly from *A&M*.
[17] Burstein, *Victorian Reformations*, 62.
[18] Oldcastle had five children by his first wife, three daughters and two sons, John and Henry (*ODNB*) but Edward and Alice are fictional.
[19] Thomas Gaspey, *The Lollards*, 1822, I.187-208.
[20] Ibid., I.265-7.
[21] Gaspey defends this in the preface, accepting that books were not printed in England until Caxton did so in Fleet Street in 1464, but stating that playing cards and woodcuts had been printed before 1430. He suggests that the technology was known at an earlier date but that it 'lay dormant'. Ibid., ix-xiii.
[22] Ibid., 83.
[23] Burstein, *Victorian Reformations*, 62.

the garden wall.[24] The tone of the middle volume of the novel is that of a romantic thriller with little of Lollardy about it, but volume three returns to the theme, dominated by the execution of Oldcastle and continued persecution under Archbishop Chicheley.

10.4 The boom in evangelical novels after 1860 – *Mistress Margery*

By the end of the century novels were appearing in significant numbers and evinced a more serious-minded, proselytising tone. The Lollard novels of Emily Sarah Holt epitomise the genre with themes of pious Lollards defying martyrdom and persecution. It is significant that in her *first* novel Holt chose to write about the subject. *Mistress Margery: A Tale of the Lollards* (1868) concerns the life of an evangelical martyr. Holt returned to the Lollards in *The White Rose of Langley* (1875), *Margery's Son* (1878), in which Lollardy is widespread at the Scottish court, and *The Lord Mayor: A Tale of London in 1384* (1885) where Holt depicts the Lord Mayor of London John Northampton as a Lollard.

Mistress Margery displays the characteristics of the genre. Margery Lovell is a talented young woman born into a family of provincial gentry who discovers evangelical truth after hearing a Lollard sermon given by William Sawtrey. She acquires a translation of John's gospel and is carried away by the joy and freedom of reading the word of God for herself. She had been taught that obedience to the Church came first, 'works always, Christ never', but as she reads, she realises that 'Christ alone seemed to be everything.'[25] After an arranged marriage to the unsympathetic Sir Ralph Marnell, Margery moves to London, and soon her Lollard sympathies come to the attention of the authorities. The Prioress of Kennington, Marnell's sister, comes to question Margery. Like all characters in Catholic orders in these novels, the prioress is depicted as worldly and corrupt. She is expensively and vainly dressed: 'she wore nearly as many rings as would stock a small jeweller's shop.'[26] Other clerical characters are even more unpalatable. Abbot Bilson, Margery's first inquisitor, is described as 'an unforgiving revenger'.[27] After an interview with Margery in prison, where she irksomely responds to his questions with quotations from scripture,

[24] Gaspey, *Lollards*, Vol. II, Chapter 12.
[25] Emily Holt, *Mistress Margery*, 1868, 26-27.
[26] Ibid., 72.
[27] Ibid., 145.

Bilson 'struck her furiously'.[28] He callously delays her trial until after the passage of *Heretico Comburendo* so that she can suffer execution, after which he is described as looking like 'a triumphant demon.'[29]

Margery identifies herself not as a Lollard but as a follower of Christ. When accused of being a Wycliffite, she replies 'I take my belief from no man. I crede the words of Christ … and concern not myself with Master Wyckliff or any other. I know not any Lollards.'[30] In other Lollard novels the protagonists are Lollards, but Margery identifies as an Evangelical and *not* a Lollard. This way, Holt can depict Margery as a true Christian, unencumbered by Lollard baggage, but means she must depart further from historical veracity and cannot depict other aspects of Lollardy, which explains why this is the only example of a protagonist who is so distinctly *not* a Lollard.

Margery is also unusual in that she is martyred for her faith. There are other examples where a central character dies, but martyrdom is a central theme in *Mistress Margery* in a way that it is not in other novels. This is the story of her journey from awakening to martyrdom and, apart from the bitterness of separation from her baby son, Margery welcomes martyrdom, speaking of the end 'with light spreading over her face.'[31]

10.5 Lollard journeys

The main dynamic in most novels is the principal character's journey towards evangelical truth. The protagonists are usually youthful at the outset, and encounter a mentor or guide, often a Lollard leader such as Wyclif or Oldcastle. They discover scripture in English and learn that salvation comes only from God's grace. The clerical authorities provide the antagonists, usually hunting down and imprisoning the heroes.

William Howitt's *Jack of the Mill* appeared in 1848. It combines exciting adventures with a Lollard conversion narrative. The eponymous hero is a bold teenage 'scape-grace' who heads off into the forest to seek his fortune. After a series of adventures, he is hired as a servant by a Lollard knight, who teaches him the Lollard message. Jack emerges as something of a Lollard Robin Hood, famed throughout the land for his 'ingenious

[28] Ibid., 132.
[29] Ibid., 142.
[30] Ibid., 112.
[31] Ibid., 105.

stratagems', stymying the leaden-footed forces of authority in the Lollard cause.[32] Jack travels to Bohemia in search of the Knight's long-lost son, joins the Hussites and has another series of picaresque adventures. In Frances Eastwood's *Geoffrey the Lollard* (1870), the brave hero and his bookish brother Hubert, the sons of a Lollard knight, are part of a Lollard guerilla movement, complete with safe houses and a bush telegraph system. Their adventures begin when they meet John Oldcastle and travel to London to 'labor for the Lord.'[33] Eventually the boys are captured and imprisoned in a convent at the mercy of a sadistic abbess. They manage to escape but the saintly Hubert dies because of his treatment, which is, the text emphasises, a form of martyrdom. The young hero of Emma Leslie's *Conrad* (1880) is a crippled Bohemian refugee who comes to London with his virulently anti-Lollard grandmother Ursula and falls in with a group of Lollard artisans, is taught to read, and in due course espouses the Lollard cause himself, going to Lutterworth where he hears Wyclif preach and falls in with John Oldcastle. Conrad, like Jack, travels to Prague on a mission to find a missing person, in his case his long-lost father, who was imprisoned in a Dominican monastery. He gets involved with the Hussites, and, like Alice in *The Lollards*, witnesses Huss's execution at the Council of Constance.

The hero of William Oak Rhind's *Hubert Ellerdale* is studying for the priesthood at Oxford when, like Conrad, he hears Wyclif preach and is converted. Hubert becomes a reforming priest with a parish in Kent; like Margery, his conversion opposed by his family. The main topic of *Hubert Ellerdale*, unusually, is clerical marriage. Hubert and his devout sweetheart Edith eventually wed. Hubert is loved by his flock for preaching the ideas of Wyclif, so they support his decision to marry, against 'the inhuman law that insists on celibacy … a libel on the purest half of our race.'[34] After being imprisoned and degraded from the priesthood, Hubert moves to Hull where they quietly hold Lollard conventicles for years, until, in the persecution following *Heretico Comburendo*, he is finally martyred.

Emily Holt returns several times to Lollard themes. *Margery's Son* (1878) tells the life of Geoffrey, son of Margery Marnell, who forms a loveless marriage with Idonia Carew, a

[32] William Howitt, *Jack of the Mill*, 1848, 177.
[33] Frances Eastwood, *Geoffrey the Lollard*, 1870, 48.
[34] W. Oak Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 1881, 169.

lady at the court of James I of Scotland. The novel is predominantly concerned with events during that reign, culminating in James' assassination in a sewer tunnel in 1437, but Lollardy features significantly. The book imagines that Lollards were influential at James' court. *The Lord Mayor* (1884) concerns the career of John Northampton, twice Lord Mayor of London in 1381-3. In the novel, Northampton identifies himself as a Lollard even though there is no reason to believe that this was the case. He attends a sermon given by Wyclif, whom he invites back for dinner and a postprandial discussion of Lollard matters including the recent (1381) uprising. In both *Margery's Son* and *The Lord Mayor*, Holt blithely exaggerates Lollard numbers and influence, ascribing Lollard inclinations to political leaders who did not possess them.

Most of the villains in these stories are irredeemably bad. Sometimes, though, unsympathetic characters undergo their own conversion journeys inspired by the godly example of the hero. Margery's husband, Lord Marnell, was the first to alert the authorities that she was reading a banned book, but later the brutality of her prosecution makes him realise the truth,[35] and after Margery's death, is transformed, both spiritually and physically; his hair turning white, his figure thinner and his manner now 'remarkably quiet.'[36] Even the clerical oppressors can be converted. In *Geoffrey*, Father Paul Hyde, one of the confessors at the convent where the boys are incarcerated, is suddenly inspired with the truth after talking to the Hubert: for years he had been 'under the sleeping-draught which Popery always administers' but now realises the truth of 'man's utter depravity and God's just wrath' realising that 'not one sin had been lessened' by his holy and austere life. There is an illustration showing Hubert on his sickbed bathed in light, raising a beatific finger, while the black-clad Paul turns away in anguish, holding a crucifix up to Hubert as if to ward him off.[37] Characters not too deeply wedded to the evils of Popery can be redeemed, especially after witnessing the evil done in the name of the false religion.

[35] Holt, *Margery*, 140.
[36] Ibid., 174-5.
[37] Eastwood, *Geoffrey*, 242-6.

10.6 The clergy and Catholic church

In most cases, however, the Catholic clergy are treated unmercifully in the novels. The characters are corrupt and sadistic, devoid of redeeming qualities, with monastics painted in especially dark colours. We have noted the striking characterisation of Abbot Bilson, the demonic monk, in *Mistress Margery*. In *Geoffrey the Lollard*, Mother Beatrice, the Spanish prioress of the convent where the boys are imprisoned, is as bad. The description of her depravities makes shocking reading. She makes transgressors 'stand before some shrine till the offender fainted from weariness', starves them with minimal rations, 'or perhaps … the holy lady would herself apply the scourge to the naked back of the criminal, accompanying each blow [with] a passage in the life of a saint.'[38] Eastwood suggests that Beatrice derived sadistic pleasure from inflicting physical punishment: she 'quite enjoyed these little opportunities for doing good' and, when given the opportunity to discipline the two boy heretics, found this even more 'interesting' as they were of the opposite sex.[39] In *Conrad*, the Dominican friars of Prague are obsessed with the extirpation of heresy. 'No craft, no guile, no wickedness was too great for them.'[40] Members of the monastic orders are lampooned as over-fed hypocrites dripping with jewellery and sumptuous clothing. In *Geoffrey the Lollard*, friars attending a heresy trial are described as 'portly', showing evidence 'more of midnight wassail than of midnight prayer.'[41] In *Hubert Ellerdale*, a monk is described as wearing 'the finest fur … a gold pin … fashionable supple, long-toed boots.'[42]

The writers are scathing about Catholic dogma and traditions, dismissing them as superstition or idolatry. In *Margery's Son,* Emily Holt, in a characteristic aside, describes Geoffrey Marnell's wedding ceremony as 'medieval romps … not particularly decorous and very particularly babyish', going on to assert, speciously, that 'there is a considerable residuum of childishness in minds entangled in the trammels of Rome.'[43] The Protestant individual free thinker contrasted with the thoughtless scions of the papacy. The Puritans

[38] Ibid., 160-1.
[39] Ibid., 162.
[40] Leslie, *Conrad*, 205-6.
[41] Eastwood, *Geoffrey*, 71.
[42] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 31.
[43] Holt, *Margery's Son*, 87.

had done everyone a favour, she says, by abolishing these mindless festivities.[44] Geoffrey is rooted in orthodox religion, slow to understand the principles of his godly mother and wife. He is astonished when one of the Lollard characters prays in silence, without crucifix or rosary. Geoffrey had thought that prayers said in English would have no effect; it had to be Latin 'which the Saints and angels understood.' The idea of addressing God in person in his own tongue seems unforgiveable presumption.[45] In *The Lord Mayor*, Holt compares the Catholic practice of praying to the saints with heathenism. On the feast of the Nativity of Mary,[46] everybody worshipped statues of the Virgin.[47] Holt says that Catholics deny praying to images but 'exactly the same thing was … said by the heathen.'[48] Such attitudes are common. Emma Leslie in *Conrad* also writes of the worthlessness of prayers to the saints. Conrad's grandmother asks for prayers to Mary and the saints to intercede with God to let Conrad walk again. Conrad's Lollard mentor, Margery, says 'They *cannot!* They have no more power to hear and answer prayer than I have.'[49] Her suggestion that he should instead pray to God directly makes him 'shiver with a nameless fear and dread.'[50] Yet, by the end of the book, once Conrad's journey is complete, he realises the truth. One must go before God empty-handed.[51]

In *Hubert Ellerdale*, the very stones of the buildings of Oxford are recruited to serve as a reproach to the Catholic Church, as the purity of church architecture is contrasted with the corruption of the monastic orders: 'the old churches that raised their spires and towers through the town … had taken him back in imagination to the times … when religion was purer than now that rival popes cursed each other, and when monks, friars and priests were alike lost to all that was pure and Christ-like.'[52] That this is an anachronistic flight of fancy only serves to reinforce the fact of these authors' deployment of any rhetorical means to emphasise the corruption of the Catholic Church.

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 205-6.
[46] September 8th.
[47] Holt, *The Lord Mayor*, 206.
[48] Ibid., 208.
[49] Leslie, *Conrad*, 85.
[50] Leslie, *Conrad*, 89.
[51] Ibid., 249.
[52] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 52.

10.7 Wyclif and Oldcastle

Well-known Lollard figures regularly appear as characters in the novels, often mentoring the title characters on their spiritual journeys. John Oldcastle's soldierly mien and dynamism was ideal for inspiring nascent Lollardy in the heroes and holding the readers' interest. In *Conrad*, the eponymous hero meets the young John Oldcastle in Lutterworth.[53] Despite his foppish dress, Oldcastle already possesses Lollard inclinations[54] and helps Conrad physically and spiritually, getting some crutches made for him and inspiring him to oppose the church.[55] An older John Oldcastle appears in *Geoffrey the Lollard*, again acting as an inspiring and martial mentor. He meets Geoffrey and Hubert at their home in Wales, coaching them in the tenets of Lollardy. He warns them about the sacrament of the eucharist in an accurate summary of Wyclif's position taken from the account of Oldcastle's trial in *A&M*. They should avoid 'the great error either of declaring the elements to be absolutely changed into the flesh and blood of Christ, or … of denying his perfect spiritual presence.'[56] Such theological detail is unusual in the novels. Oldcastle encourages the boys to take up arms, physical and spiritual: 'Christ is making true his word that he came to send a sword into the world, and peace is the portion of the coward. The Lord give unto you a Christian warfare, a martyr's death, a victor's crown!'[57]

Oldcastle, then, stands for martial Christian virtue. Wyclif is a more distant figure, bestowing wisdom via lectures and sermons. In *Hubert Ellerdale*, Hubert attends Wyclif's lectures at Oxford. Oak Rhind repeats John Foxe's idea that Wyclif was revealing his ideas 'by little and little' in a planned programme, but now with an evangelical slant. 'At first … he had contented himself with … logical and metaphysical questions; but … had for some time left the cold atmosphere of conjecture and Platonic opinions, and boldly launched into the pure waters of Gospel truth.'[58] Emma Leslie's Conrad hears

[53] This was 1384, when Oldcastle would have been a child. His birth was in c.1375 (*ODNB*) but in the novel he is a young man.
[54] Leslie, *Conrad*, 120-3.
[55] Ibid., 127. 'So *thou* wouldst be a reformer, my little knave!'
[56] Eastwood, *Geoffrey*, 41.
[57] Ibid., 46.
[58] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*., 26. Compare this with *A&M,* 546: 'And first he assayled his adversaries in logicall and metaphisicall questiōs. … By these originalls, the waye was made vnto greater poyntes, so that at the length he came to touche the matters of the sacraments, & other abuses of the church … to reuoke and call backe the church fro her idolatrie … especially in the matter of the bodye and bloud of Christ.'

Wyclif preach a sermon denouncing Despenser's crusade and the papal schism. Much of it comprises an attack on the veneration of saints, a topic Leslie returns to repeatedly. Wyclif's critique is couched in evangelical tones: 'Trust wholly to Christ; rely altogether on His sufferings, and seek not to be justified in any other way than by His righteousness. … He is the best Mediator and best Intercessor.'[59] In *The Lord Mayor*, Emily Holt quotes what she says is a genuine Wycliffite sermon attacking the 'four sects' of wealthy priests, canons, monks and mendicant friars for lacking in every one of the characteristics of charity defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.[60] John Northampton, the eponymous Lord Mayor, invites Wyclif to supper and serves him an appetising menu including 'alaunder [minced mutton], kid, stewed beef, squirrel, and hedgehog'[61] before the two men discuss the recent uprising.

When describing Wyclif's physical appearance, several writers choose identical motifs, making his physiognomy combine the righteous strength of the reformer with the serenity and wisdom of the scholar. In *Hubert Ellerdale*, Wyclif is so enraptured by scriptural truth that his eyes, fiery and passionate when arguing with his enemies, become 'mild and gentle' and on his deathbed his face 'lighted up with a calm and holy peace [as if] an angel might be hovering about him.'[62] For Emma Leslie in *Conrad*, the focus is also upon Wyclif's eyes: he has 'a keen, penetrating gaze' and 'deep earnest eyes'.[63] In *The Lord Mayor*, Holt uses the same antithesis, describing Wyclif's features as 'at once strong and serene.'[64] Grace Stebbing in *Denham Hall* also makes great play of Wyclif's eyes, describing them as 'large and clear' and deepening to a solemn glow as he speaks of his duty as a shepherd of souls.[65]

Foxe's Wyclif moving from scholasticism to critique of dogma is closer to the historical Wyclif than Oak Rhind's Wyclif who jumps directly from scholastic metaphysics to a distinctly evangelical programme.

[59] Leslie, *Conrad*, 152.

[60] Holt, *The Lord Mayor*, 28-36.

[61] Holt's books abound with detail of medieval menus, clothing and customs, which she reproduces with relish to add colour. In *Mistress Margery* she tells us that 'our ancestors had none of our vulgar prejudices with respect to onions.' (32).

[62] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*., 92.

[63] Leslie, *Conrad*, 153.

[64] Holt, *The Lord Mayor*, 45.

[65] Stebbing, *Denham Hall*, 59, 69.

10.8 Popular Lollardy and sedition

While their treatments of many themes are similar, writers are divided on how to deal with the social tenets of Lollardy and the whiff of sedition which always surrounded it. All these stories emphasise, even exaggerate, the spread and appeal of Lollard ideas, but the novelists disagree about their impact on wider society.

In *Jack of the Mill*, the Lollard knight tells Jack about the rapid spread of Lollardy and the risks of such sudden popularity. 'Great was become the public noise and rumour of the Lollards. Their increase, their meetings, the schemes and plots attributed to them, were everywhere heard of.'[66] Later, some writers played down the rumours of Lollard 'schemes and plots' while agreeing about the sect's rapid spread. In *Hubert Ellerdale*, one character says that 'It is well known that half of us [Londoners] are Lollards'.[67] Oak Rhind takes this exaggeration further, stating that 'In nearly every county the Reformation spread like contagion', adding that 'the Reformers of that day were Protestants in all but the name [so] ... the mass of the people welcome[d] it with generous enthusiasm.'[68] Unusual even among evangelical writers in bestowing a capital R on the Lollard 'reformation', this amounts to wishful thinking, though the suggestion that half of the country were Lollards comes from a well-known comment in Knighton's *Chronicle*.[69] It emerges again in *Conrad*: 'in some counties of England complaint was made that every second man was a Lollard'.[70] In both *Margery's Son* and *The Lord Mayor*, Emily Holt ascribes Lollard inclinations to leading political figures: in the former it is rife at the Scottish court. Holt writes of the Scottish king James I that 'in his personal religious opinions he himself was partially, if not wholly, a disciple of Wycliffe',[71] and in the latter,

[66] Howitt, *Jack of the Mill*, 197.
[67] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 78.
[68] Ibid., 119-20.
[69] The *Chronicle* of Knighton, a work extremely critical of Lollardy, exaggerates how widely it had spread, most famously stating that (by 1382) 'a half or even the greater part of the populace supported their sect.' (*Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396,* edited by G.H. Martin, Clarendon Press, 1995.)
[70] Leslie, *Conrad*, 172.
[71] Holt, *Margery's Son*, 226. According to W. Stanford Reid, in 'The Lollards in Pre-Reformation Scotland' (*Church History* 11.4 (1942), 269-283), Lollardy in Scotland was limited mostly at this time to university students and English refugees and that 'the country was ... misgoverned by the great families, into whose ranks Lollardy apparently never entered', 269. Holt's idea that James I had Lollard leanings is founded in a rumoured alliance between John Oldcastle and some Scottish nobles. After the failure of the 1414 rising, Thomas Payne, a follower of Oldcastle, was captured in Windsor, where the young James was held hostage, and confessed that he had planned to free James and take him to Scotland. (Ibid., 273).

asserts that John Northampton, the Lord Mayor of the title, was a Lollard. There is no reason to believe that either of these suggestions has any basis in fact.[72]

These writers embrace the idea that the evangelical tenets which they perceived as underpinning Lollardy spread rapidly. In this reading, the people yearned to throw aside the Roman church and embrace Lollard 'Protestantism'. However, laying emphasis upon the popularity of Lollardy presents a problem because Lollards were often associated with violent disorder, with an unwelcome connection to the rising of 1381. In *The Lord Mayor*, Holt has John Wyclif deny that the rising had any connection to his teaching. John Ball had been 'preaching his doctrine for twenty years afore he ever heard of mine,' says Wyclif.[73] Holt makes no mention in this book of the economic complaints of the rebels: the Lollard (or evangelical) characters in her books confine their attention wholly to the spiritual aspects of Wyclif's teaching. For William Howitt, the revolutionary tendencies inherent in movements which challenged ecclesiastic authority risked evolving into antinomianism. In *Jack of the Mill,* Jack, arriving in Prague, is appalled to discover that Huss's followers have descended into a 'wild and motley mustering.' He realises that 'they no longer marched under the spirit of Huss but were guided by rapine and vengeance and … that licence into which the spirit of liberality … when let loose, unhappily so rapidly degenerates.'[74]

Emma Leslie in *Conrad*, on the other hand, engages directly with the economic and social aspects of Lollardy. For her, the campaigns for economic and religious liberty were entwined, though the latter was the nobler cause. She refers to 'the mixture of political and religious feeling that characterised the struggles for freedom'.[75] Some of the novel's artisan characters gather in a tavern to discuss 'liberty and taxes and land tenure', before extracting a copy of John Trevisa's translation of the gospel. ''Tis of liberty the book tells,' explains one of the characters.[76] Leslie differentiates between different categories of

[72] Holt, *The Lord Mayor*, 45. There has been some 'unfounded speculation' that Northampton was influenced by Lollardy, which may be because, like Wyclif, Northampton was patronised by John of Gaunt. The reality, though, was that 'Northampton's will reveals him as a person of … ultimately orthodox piety.' P. Strohm, 'John Comberton', *ODNB*.
[73] Emily Sarah Holt, *The Lord Mayor*, 1885, 46.
[74] Howitt, *Jack of the Mill*, 249.
[75] Leslie, *Conrad*, 5.
[76] Ibid., 37-38.

'Lollards': those who were no better than anarchists, those who sought redress for economic injustice and Evangelicals who were concerned with the nobler pursuit of freedom from sin:

> The discontented and seditious, those who … would raise a clamour against all law – these called themselves Lollards. Then there were those who had long sighed for civil liberty, but knew not that they were in bondage to sin … and often adopted illegal means to obtain redress for their wrongs. These, too, were Lollards. Then last … was the faithful band of earnest souls who had learned from Dr. Wiclif not only to be dissatisfied with the teachings and doctrines of the Church of Rome, but also to seek that pardon for sin which they had learned to feel was a more cruel bondage than the fetters and chains of outward observances which the Church called religion.[77]

Her Oldcastle expresses sympathy for those involved in the 1381 rising, which he describes as 'that foolish rebellion' because it was 'a noble struggle for freedom'[78] before comparing it to Wyclif's struggle to free men from the slavery imposed by the Church.

Oak Rhind in *Hubert Ellerdale* goes the furthest. For him, those demanding economic liberty were almost as worthy as those calling for religious reform. Hubert gets caught up in the revolt, witnessing 'scenes of rapine and bloodshed'.[79] If there is a hint of condemnation of the antinomianism associated with violent dissent here, it is muted. Oak Rhind is perfectly willing, in a way few other writers are, to draw a direct connection between Wyclif's ideas and the economic discontent underpinning the rising:

> Of this insurrection Wycliffe has been accused of being the cause, and perhaps not altogether unjustly. Ground down in abject slavery, barely treated as human beings, what wonder that the poor villeins should demand from their tyrannical masters their freedom, when they learnt from the religious reformers the doctrines of the Bible? Gradually they had awakened to the fact that in the eyes of God they were not mere beasts of burden. … Roused by such thoughts as these, what wonder that they should make a convulsive effort to throw off the chains of their slavery?'[80]

[77] Ibid., 181-2.
[78] Ibid., 124.
[79] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 149.
[80] Ibid., 152.

This is quite the opposite of Holt's *The Lord Mayor*, where John Wyclif repudiates the rising and denies any link between his teaching and the disorder.

10.9 The bible

The bible was critically important to evangelical writers. Their books focus on its purpose as a vehicle for conveying the word of God, and the crucial achievement of disseminating to the wider population who gained access to scriptural truth unmediated by priests or the institutions.

Scripture is often the catalyst which starts the characters' journeys. It is when Margery gets a translation of John's gospel that her evangelical odyssey begins. She acquired evangelical principles *instantaneously* once she reads the first verses of John 14: 'Never before had Margery read words like these … in the agony of her earnestness she cried aloud "O Lamb that was slain, hast thou not made ready a dwelling for Margery Lovell?"'[81] Holt emphasises how Margery absorbs scriptural truth rapidly and innocently: she had no teacher and 'took the words simply and literally.' Margery's acceptance becomes a lesson for nineteenth-century readers: 'Ah, how much better it would be for us if we would accept these blessed words as plainly, as unconditionally, as this poor untrained girl.'[82] Holt makes the same rueful criticism of modern congregations in *The Lord Mayor*, describing a crowd attentive to a scripture reading: 'when the Bible was little known, the text was a far more important portion of the discourse than to us, to whom it is so familiar that we are too apt to let it slip.'[83] Likewise, in Howitt's *Jack of the Mill*, the bible is instrumental in initiating Jack's conversion, after the Lollard knight tells him that this is 'of all books the most extraordinary, and … of all books the most true.'[84] Howitt, like Holt, mentions the dramatic impact of the bible upon someone unfamiliar with it, drawing the same lesson for contemporary readers. 'For us, who have been familiar with the Bible from childhood, it is quite impossible to represent to ourselves the astonishment and delight with which Jack went over this book.'[85]

[81] Holt, *Mistress Margery*, 25.
[82] Ibid., 58.
[83] Holt, *Lord Mayor*, 28.
[84] Howitt, *Jack of the Mill*, 135.
[85] Ibid., 137.

The physical books seen by Margery and Jack are precious objects to be treated with reverence. In *Conrad* one Lollard character swaps a bible for a suit of armour and considers that he has got the best of the bargain.[86] The essential task was to make scripture more widely available, and Wyclif's translation was the key to that. He is usually depicted in the novels as having completed the task alone. Oak Rhind in *Hubert Ellerdale* writes that every night 'this indefatigable worker was translating the Bible that was to rouse [England] from her moral torpor. Little wonder that his hair was white.'[87] In Grace Stebbing's *Denham Hall*, the task has proceeded so far that Wyclif and Hereford are working on translating the Book of Baruch while Wyclif is still at Oxford.[88] In Gaspey's *The Lollards*, Huss and Edward Oldcastle praise Wyclif's translation for its literary as well as theological merits: 'great was the patience and skill employed in turning the Scriptures … into a language like English', Edward speaking of 'the richness with which he hath endowed its language'[89] and praising his 'majestic modern prose.'[90] Conrad's strongly orthodox grandmother condemns Wyclif for democratising the bible: 'so that unlearned men may break the laws of holy church and read this book to the destruction of their souls.'[91] Leslie is unusual in crediting John Trevisa's part in the translation: ''tis of liberty the book tells, and it was penned by a godly priest of Cornwall, one John Trevisa.'[92]

The development of printing completed the process which allowed the English bible to spread, and this appears in some novels. We have noted how Thomas Gaspey in *The Lollards* anachronistically states that the Hussites had access to printing before 1415. Edward Oldcastle, informed of the invention by Jan Huss, marvels, comparing it to the miracle of the loaves and fishes.[93] The impact of printing is mentioned in *Geoffrey the Lollard*, a passage which demonstrates the importance of the democratisation of scripture for these writers. Father Paul, the monk who had converted to Lollardy, holds

[86] Leslie, *Conrad*, 45.
[87] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 71-72.
[88] Stebbing, Grace, *Denham Hall*, 73.
[89] Gaspey, *The Lollards*, I.187-8.
[90] Ibid., 190.The idea of Wyclif as a founding father of modern English gained wide circulation in the nineteenth century. See pp.221-3.
[91] Leslie, *Conrad*, 36.
[92] Ibid., 38.
[93] Gaspey, *The Lollards*, I.266.

a printed page of Mark's gospel 'with trembling hands'. It is a wonderous thing, he says, that they an entire bible can now be printed in a single day. This is yet another sign that 'the day of the Reformation is breaking … the chains which have kept thy precious Word from the people. … When each peasant can have his Bible in his hand, then shall arise men mighty to preach it. Then shall Rome tremble on her seven hills.'[94]

10.10 Martyrdom

Most of these novelists avoid writing in detail about martyrdom, perhaps thinking of their young readers. Some find ways to deal with the topic whilst steering around its brutal nature. In *Geoffrey the Lollard*, Geoffrey's scholarly brother Hubert dies *like* a martyr, but Emma Leslie separates the numinous aspect from the earthly reality by having him die due to illness contracted during his imprisonment. 'Cold, and damp, and hunger had done their work as effectively … as if the archbishop had immediately sentenced him to the stake.'[95] So, Leslie can write about the beauty of the martyr's death shorn of the unpleasantness of execution. Hubert's death becomes a caricature of martyrdom. As he 'entered the valley of death' his eyes were 'beaming with a holy light' and he wore a smile 'full of contentment and peace.'[96] In *Hubert Ellerdale*, the title character is eventually martyred, but his death is dealt with in a perfunctory manner in the book's final sentences.[97]

The one author to deal frankly with martyrdom is Emily Holt but even she anaesthetises it, quite literally in *Mistress Margery* where it appears miraculously painless. Margery's death is depicted as an ecstatic transfiguration. 'Margery stood on the pile of wood, with her hands clasped on her bosom, and her eyes lifted up to heaven. What means it? Does she feel no pain? How is it that, as the flames spring up, and roar around her, there is no tremor of the clasped hands, no change in the rapturous expression of the white upturned face?' Holt does not answer these questions, but we are clearly meant to conclude that this is due to divine intervention. Margery quotes scripture: 'Thus did

[94] Eastwood, *Geoffrey the Lollard*, 339.
[95] Ibid., 283. Eastwood is not alone among these writers in suggesting that the clergy would *personally* sentence Lollards to death, either through ignorance, or the desire to make them appear even more venal.
[96] Ibid., 297.
[97] Rhind, *Hubert Ellerdale*, 255.

Margery Marnell glorify the Lord in the fires.'[98] An illustration of Margery's martyrdom shows her much larger than life, her skirt aflame, gazing rapturously towards heaven whilst swarthy guards stoke the flames and clerics with furtive expressions cluster in the foreground.[99] Holt's other novels contain repeated references to martyrdom as a laudable end for evangelical Christians. In *The Lord Mayor*, martyrs are depicted as being even more glorious than run-of-the-mill Lollards, 'a small band of greater heroes, who feel fear and pain and yet walk into the cannon's mouth'.[100] In *Margery's Son* the heroic martyr is personified in Idonia Carew's brother Phillip. When an attempt is made to rescue him from prison, he refuses to leave, telling his rescuers that he has prayed for martyrdom; they should not weep 'because the palm-wreath of the martyr compasseth my brows about.'[101] The self-righteously devout Idonia is later forced to confront her conscience when her house is raided by troops looking for heretics, and she denies being a Lollard and submits to the Catholic church. It was impossible for her to give up her family 'and Satan took care to hide from her what she would resign as the alternative.'[102] For Holt, Idonia was wrong to put her family before her faith: 'She'd betrayed her Master, not for thirty pieces of silver, but for earthly love of others.'[103] The realisation is brought home bitterly in a bathetic conclusion when it is revealed that these were not heresy-hunting soldiers but a band of brigands trying to make money by blackmailing Lollards.[104] This in a chapter ironically entitled 'Tried in the Fire.' In Holt's writing martyrdom is depicted as heroic and painless, an aspiration and a duty for evangelical Christians confronted by a corrupt church.

10.11 Conclusion

Grace Stebbing's 1886 novel *Denham Hall* is a tale *about* historiography.[105] A group of young cousins visiting their grandmother during the 1760s discover a lost cache of Lollard tracts, a Wycliffite bible and a life of John Wyclif written by their grandfather in

[98] Holt, *Mistress Margery*, 171.
[99] See figure v.
[100] Holt, *Lord Mayor*, 57.
[101] Holt, *Margery's Son*, 183.
[102] Ibid., 336.
[103] Ibid., 338.
[104] Ibid., 348.
[105] The novel originally appeared in 1885 as *In Wyclif's Days or A Safe Hiding Place*, and a new edition, *Denham Hall: A Story of Wiclif's Days* was published in 1890.

1708, based upon the diary of Henry Fert, a Wycliffite 'poor priest'.[106] All these layers of historiography might be confusing, but all the characters, fourteenth-century reformers and curious eighteenth-century children alike, display the mores of late nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism. Stebbing uses the plot device of the children discovering the lost texts as a way of making the life of John Wyclif more palatable to young readers, interspersing passages from the biography with details of picnics, fireside meals and games with kittens. The device of the secret diaries allows Stebbing free reign to concoct conversations and incidents involving Wyclif and his inner circle which illumine their evangelical credentials.[107]

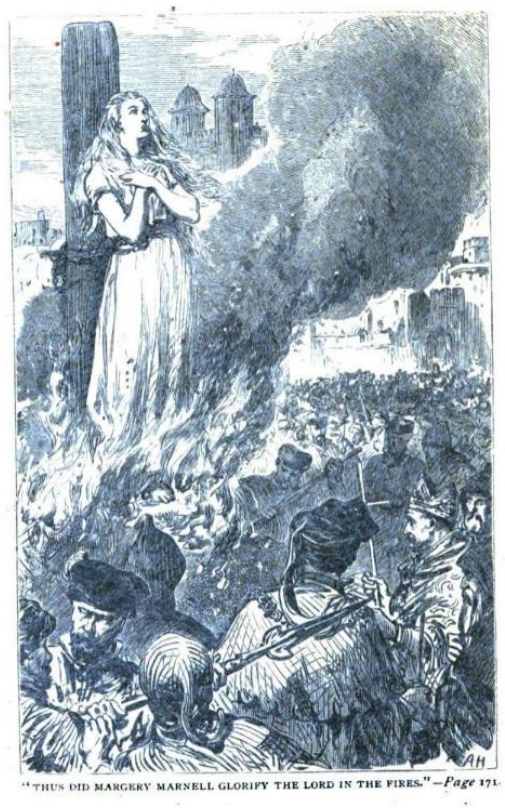
Stebbing is wonderfully wide of the mark in describing Wyclif as 'the country rector who dared to open the eyes of bishops and cardinals.'[108] He possesses a distinctly puritanical streak, combining displays of righteous anger, which come across as petulance, with a permanent state of meekness.[109] He complains in one passage about clothing fashions, 'the extravagance and folly of the present fashions in dress' representing evidence of a godless age.[110] In a bizarre episode, Wyclif's family come to visit Yorkshire, a bunch of 'swaggering knights' and he takes them to task for their fruity language.[111] When they say that a God of love would not 'damn men for a light oath', he piously responds that 'only for eating an apple … Adam and all mankind were justly condemned until Christ bought them back again with His precious blood.'[112]

Stebbing's re-imagining of Wyclif as an Evangelical, her preparedness to attribute to him her own opinions on moral and social questions, and her willingness to support this with invented historical material, constitute egregious massaging.[113] All the novels take similar liberties. Emily Holt ascribes Lollard sympathies to the king of Scotland and the Lord Mayor of London on the flimsiest of evidence, and her Lollards espouse nineteenth-

[106] Stebbing, *Denham Hall*, 137.
[107] Stebbing states that her main source was Le Bas' biography of Wyclif. (*Denham Hall*, 111, fn.)
[108] Ibid., 109.
[109] Ibid., 69 where Wyclif is described as 'our grand Reformer with his great, clear eyes, and his fearless bearing … and his meek humility.'
[110] Ibid., 88. This is from the 'secret diary' of Nicholas Hereford, which allows Stebbing to invent private conversations involving Wyclif.
[111] Ibid., 89.
[112] Ibid., 92.
[113] One can sympathise with young Eva Denham who asks, 'isn't there really a great deal made up about it all?' Ibid, 151-2.

century evangelical attitudes. Emma Leslie in *Conrad* differentiates 'true' Lollards from mere political agitators as the former sought pardon for sin before civil liberty. Hubert in *Geoffrey the Lollard* finds in Lollardy 'a way of relief for the sinning soul.' All these novelists, like the evangelical historians, re-imagine Wyclif and his followers in the lineaments of nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism, finding in Lollards the noble spiritual precursors they *wanted* to find. This was made easier by the scantiness of source materials. Kenneth McFarlane famously wrote that that the first task of an impartial biographer of Wyclif was the removal of 'several layers of rich brown protestant varnish'[114] and here, more than anywhere, we see a generous coat of that varnish being applied.

[114] McFarlane, *Wycliffe*, xii.



"THUS DID MARGERY MARNELL GLORIFY THE LORD IN THE FIRES."—*Page* 171.

MISTRESS MARGERY.

A Tale of the Lollards.

BY

EMILY SARAH HOLT,

AUTHOR OF "MEMOIRS OF ROYAL LADIES."

"I fear no harm, with Thee at hand to bless;
Life hath no ills, and death no bitterness.
Where, Death, thy sting? Where, Grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me."

—REV. H. F. LYTE.

LONDON:
JOHN F. SHAW & CO., 48 PATERNOSTER ROW.
1868.

Geoffry. *Page* 242.

CONVERSION OF FATHER PAUL.

Fig. v, Illustrations from Lollard novels. Above, Margery Marnell, 'glorifying the Lord in the flames.' The gigantic figure of Margery gazes rapturously heavenwards while swarthy clerics mutter ominously in the foreground. Left, the friar Paul is converted by Hubert: 'a few word from a sick child' and he sees the truth. '[M]an's utter depravity before God's just wrath' was suddenly clear to him. (245-6). He turns away from the beatific light cast by the child, trying to ward it off with his crucifix.

Emily Sarah Holt, *Mistress Margery: A Tale of the Lollards*, 1868. Frances Eastwood, *Geoffrey the Lollard*, New York: Dodd & Mead, 1870.

11 Wycliffite Studies, 1880-1900

11.1 Introduction

> A useful book could be written about the errors and misconceptions that later generations have associated with the rector of Lutterworth.[1]

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the professionalisation of the writing of history. The gentleman-scholars with whom we have become familiar were replaced by a 'cadre of salaried teachers and writers.'[2] Increased professionalism inspired a new approach to historical research, as historians began making use of the archives which were opening at the same time. As the supply of academic history increased, so did demand. The foundation of new universities, Durham (1832) London (1836) and Manchester (1851), meant that the consumption of history was 'no longer the province of a confined class.'[3] The last chapter examined how the increase in literacy and rise of Sunday schools after the 1870 Education Act brought about an explosion in evangelical fiction, and similarly this rise of a graduate class provided a pool of readers for the output of professional historians.

These developments had a dramatic impact on the study of Wyclif. It became increasingly obvious that previous biographies had suffered from having been written from inadequate source material. Most of the manuscript texts of Wyclif's works existed only in overseas libraries such as those in Vienna and Prague, a legacy of the transmission of his ideas to the Bohemian Hussites.[4] Earlier historians had to make do with *Trialogus*, the only work of Wyclif's to have been printed, and vernacular texts attributed to him from which they adduced conclusions about his beliefs. Historians increasingly bemoaned the lack of a definitive bibliography of Wyclif's writing, and the unavailability of texts.[5] The priority for students of Wyclif at the end of the nineteenth

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[1] James Crompton, 'John Wyclif, A Study in Mythology', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 42 (1966-67), 8.

[2] Michael Bentley, 'Shape and Pattern in British Historical Writing, 1815-1945', *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, edited by Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maiguashca & Attila Pók, Oxford University Press, 2011, 205.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Crompton, 'John Wyclif' 12.

[5] John Bale had produced the first attempted catalogue of Wyclif's works in 1548. Walter Shirley wrote that Bale was 'careless and uncritical' (Walter Waddington Shirley, *A catalogue of the original works of John Wyclif*, 1865, x.) According to Lechler, Bale listed 242 works by Wyclif but 'does not aim at systematic

century thereafter became to compile such a bibliography and make the texts widely available.

In 1850, Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden published the Wycliffite bible, the first time Wycliffite material had been made widely available. The prospect of publishing more texts was becoming more realistic with the opening of archives. Walter Waddington Shirley, later Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, produced the first volume of source material in 1858, editing *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Johannis Wyclif cum tritico*, a collection of Latin texts relating to Wyclif and his followers probably compiled by Thomas Netter in the late 1420s.[6] Shirley added a biographical introduction which was widely cited by later writers. In 1865 he produced *A Catalogue of the Original Works of John Wyclif* which James Crompton, in 1966, noted was still 'the most reliable guide to the [Latin] canon.'[7] It furnished the list which was used by the Wyclif Society when planning its editions of Wyclif's Latin works[8] and included a list of English works attributed to Wyclif. Shirley suggested that an edition of Wyclif's English writing should be produced and such a collection, including most of the works in Shirley's bibliography, appeared in three volumes in 1869-71, edited by Thomas Arnold, Shirley having died, aged 38, in 1866.[9] In 1880, Frederick David Matthew, one of the founders of the Wyclif Society, published the remainder of the English works from Shirley's catalogue in *The English Works of John Wycliffe, Hitherto Unprinted*. Matthew's book also includes a long biographical introduction.

At the same time, Lutheran academics with expertise in philology, interested in tracing the roots of the Protestant Reformation, started to take an interest in Wyclif as an intellectual forebear of Luther. The most thoroughly researched biography of Wyclif to

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arrangement'. His principal fault 'was the hasty way in which he picked up titles of writings of Wycliffe wherever he found them and gathered them together without a trace of criticism. Hence his catalogue is entitled to very little confidence.' (Lechler, *Wycliffe*, 480). The biographies by John Lewis and Robert Vaughan included bibliographical lists.

[6] 'A bundle of weeds … with wheat' (*FZ*, lxxviii). This was printed as part of the *Rolls Series* of archival texts.

[7] Crompton, 'John Wyclif', 17.

[8] Helen Spencer, 'F. J. Furnivall's Last Fling: The Wyclif Society and Anglo-German Scholarly Relations, 1882-1922', *The Review of English Studies* 65.272, (2014), 795.

[9] Crompton, 'John Wyclif', 17. Arnold (1823-1900) was the son of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby school, the brother of the poet Matthew Arnold and the grandfather of Aldous Huxley. He flirted regularly with Catholicism, was a friend of Newman and converted twice, a fact not missed by other Protestant writers.

date was published in Germany in 1873. *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation* was by Gotthard Lechler, the professor of historical theology at the University of Leipzig. It appeared in English in 1878 translated by the presbyterian priest Peter Lorimer under the title *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*.[10] Lorimer writes that Lechler was the first researcher to get access to the Wyclif manuscripts in the Imperial Library of Vienna: 'Never before has the whole teaching of the Reformer ... been so copiously and accurately set forth.'[11] This book was hugely influential, every historian writing about Wyclif at the end of the nineteenth making use of Lechler's work.

The Quincentenary of Wyclif's death fell on 31st December 1884.[12] A fitting commemoration was planned and evangelical enthusiasts for Wyclif eagerly seized the opportunity, a slew of popular accounts of his life hitting the presses in the early 1880s in the most prolific outpouring of enthusiasm for Wyclif there had ever been. Most of the books were derivative works, often crude abridgements of Lechler's, which emphasised and exaggerated the prevalent mythology of Wyclif as patriot and evangelical reformer. Montagu Burrows, the Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford,[13] delivered a lecture series in Oxford in 1881, later published as *Wyclif's Place in History*, which is best described as an encomium.[14] He repeatedly pressed for the publication of Wyclif's Latin works which were still sequestered in Continental libraries. Publication was essential for scholars to gain a proper understanding of Wyclif's work. The project finally began with the formation of the Wyclif Society in 1881. Its foundation was not directly inspired by the approaching anniversary, but its founders, Frederick Furnivall and Frederick Matthew, did use the occasion as an opportunity to attempt to attract subscribers. Furnivall was a polymath, an eccentric and an inveterate founder of literary societies. He recruited German editors, and the Wyclif Society would go on to produce almost forty scholarly editions of Wyclif's works until folding in 1925. The editors included Johan Loserth, who

[10] Lorimer's translation covered just the section of Lechler's book dealing with Wyclif and his immediate precursors. Lechler's original ran to fourteen hundred pages 'beginning far back in the medieval centuries' but Lorimer decided that translating the entire work was impractical. (Lechler, *Wickliffe*, ix.)
[11] Lechler, *Wycliffe*, ix.
[12] See chapter 12.
[13] A. Johnson & P. Slee, 'Montagu Burrows', *ODNB*. The election was apparently 'a surprise to him and others', but Burrows held the post for over forty years.
[14] Burrows had formerly had a career in the Royal Navy, and James Crompton memorably describes these lectures as possessing 'all the brio of the quarter-deck.' 'John Wyclif', 18, fn.

produced nine volumes, and Rudolf Buddensieg, responsible for five, including the first, *Polemical Works in Latin* (1883). Many of the books included lengthy prefaces which usually confined themselves to technical discussions of the manuscripts and content, but an exception was Buddensieg's introduction to *Polemical Works* which is more in the character of a popular biography. Buddensieg also produced a biography *John Wyclif: Patriot and Reformer* (1884) using much of the same material.

Academic and popular writers alike created mythologies of Wyclif's life and work, versions of him which suited the time. Wyclif's more unambiguously laudable achievements and characteristics were emphasised and embellished, his awkward ideas sidelined or smoothed away. He was widely praised for his 'patriotism' in opposing Rome and much emphasis was placed on his supposed work of translating scripture, itself seen by some as a patriotic act. Some even credited him with being a founding father of English prose to rank with Chaucer and Milton. The suggestion that his career as a reformer was motivated by frustrated ambition was removed via the convenient discovery of a 'second John Wyclif'. His theory of dominion, for many critics an incitement to sedition, was represented by some as nothing more alarming than a call for the separation of church and state, anticipating the Anglican settlement. This way, Wyclif could be shown to be an Anglican before the Reformation, sharing ideas about church governance with Richard Hooker.

11.2 Wyclif the patriot

Writers in previous generations had emphasised Wyclif's sanctity, intellect and reforming instincts, but in the later nineteenth century he was frequently lauded for his patriotism, a noble quality in late nineteenth-century eyes, though anachronistic when applied to the fourteenth century. According to this mythology Wyclif showed his patriotic love of his country when he assisted the crown in arguing against papal taxation, attacking the pope and papal court in strident tones. Some books emphasise Wyclif's supposed patriotism above his role as reformer in their titles. John Laird Wilson and Rudolf Buddensieg both produced books in 1884 entitled *John Wyclif, Patriot and Reformer*, Emily Holt's biography is called *John de Wycliffe and what he did for England* and J. Radford Thomson's *The Life and Work of John Wyclif* (1884) spells it out with a

chapter entitled 'Wyclif as a Patriot, Opposed to Papal Encroachments upon the Rights of England.'[15]

Lechler's biography contains a chapter entitled 'Wycliffe as a Patriot' which suggests that the early part of Wyclif's public career was motivated by patriotism. Earlier writers had, of course, written approvingly about Wyclif's opposition to the papacy, but none had spoken directly of Wyclif as a would-be liberator of England. Lechler divides Wyclif's career into three stages; initially purely academic, followed by a period in which he was involved in public affairs, and his final calling as a religious reformer.[16] During the middle phase, Wyclif became involved in the conflicts between the English crown and the papacy and was representative of the English spirit: 'it is Wycliffe the patriot we have to depict. He represents ... that intensification of English national feeling which was so conspicuous in the fourteenth century, when ... Crown and people, Norman population and Saxon ... eagerly defended the autonomy ... of the kingdom. ... This spirit lived in Wycliffe with extraordinary force.'[17] Lechler writes that Wyclif's works communicate 'the strongest impression of a warm patriotism'.[18] He finds in Wyclif's writing evidence of his devotion to English history, English law and deep concern for the liberties of the nation. Lest his readers think Lechler considered Wyclif narrow-minded, he contrives to render Wyclif at once cosmopolitan *and* patriotic in an analysis which perhaps was more convincing to a nineteenth century audience than it is now: Wyclif 'had at heart the welfare of all Christendom and indeed of the whole human race; but the strength of his cosmopolitanism was to be found in his deep and earnest patriotism.'[19]

Wyclif, according to Lechler, was both patriot and reformer: a 'Christian Patriot' in his words. As 'the patriotic defender of his country's interests' he showed those qualities which ... were to shape the ecclesiastical Reformer.'[20] What more could be asked of a hero for the 1880s? In 1371, an agent of the papacy, Arnald Garnier, arrived in England to

[15] J. Radford Thomson, *The Life and Work of John Wiclif*, 1884, 24.
[16] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 118. This subdivision of Wyclif's career into three stages was followed by later biographers, notably Herbert Workman whose 1926 biography is divided into sections entitled 'The Schoolman', 'The Politician' and 'The Reformer'.
[17] Ibid., 119.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 120.
[20] Ibid., 138.

collect revenues deemed due and a paper, attributed to Wyclif, appeared arguing against the validity of this taxation.[21] For Lechler, this text shows that 'Wyclif stands before us as a patriot who has the honour and interests of his country very deeply at heart.' Wyclif sought to protect England's wealth against external enemies (the French) while respecting the constitution, the document being clear that parliament is representative of the nation. Lechler also finds that it pre-empted the sixteenth-century Reformation by expressing that the State should protect the civil rights of priests of the national church, and even displays the 'evangelical spirit' which would become more manifest in the final phase of Wyclif's career as a reformer. Wyclif's patriotic stance on papal taxation is made consistent with his work as a reformer as 'the welfare of the kingdom depends on the religious beneficence of its people.'[22]

A particularly ardent exponent of this idea was another German, Rudolf Buddensieg. In his edition of *John Wyclif's Polemical Works in Latin* (1883), for the Wyclif Society, Buddensieg writes that these texts are 'a memorial to his patriotism.[23] Wyclif's patriotism was displayed in his 'battle for … English freedom with a foreign power.'[24] It was rare for editors of Wyclif Society editions to venture far from technical descriptions of the sources but Alfred Pollard and Charles Sayle, in the introduction to *De Officio Regis,* digress to praise Wyclif for the patriotism in his writing on the rights and duties of the King of England, calling it 'thoroughly patriotic, and … thoroughly constitutional'. This was displayed where Wyclif emphasised that the English king must be independent of both Pope and Emperor, that English common law was better than Roman, and that the first loyalty of Englishmen was due to their sovereign.[25]

Where the academic writers led, the authors of popular accounts naturally followed. The opportunity to laud the great reformer for his patriotism would have been irresistible in the 1880s. Emily Holt describes Wyclif as 'a patriot and statesman' before he became a

[21] Ibid., 137-8. This document, Lechler says, was not in any of the previous catalogues of Wyclif's works but 'bears unmistakable characteristics of Wyclif's manner.' Lechler does not name the document, citing shelf-mark 3929 at the Imperial Library of Vienna.
[22] Ibid., 139.
[23] Rudolf Buddensieg, *John Wyclif's Polemical Works in Latin*, 1883, xvii.
[24] Ibid., v.
[25] Alfred Pollard & Charles Sayle, editors., *De Officio Regis*, 1887, xxvi.

reformer of religion.[26] For the Congregationalist minister John Radford Thomson, Wyclif first came to public attention as 'a patriotic Englishman and a loyal subject'. Thomson applied his nineteenth-century mindset to the fourteenth, declaring that 'the national pride was touched, and the national spirit was roused' in response to papal claims.[27] Wyclif he describes, ludicrously, as 'the champion of English independence.'[28] Montagu Burrows was not one to miss the chance for colourful rhetoric, calling Wyclif 'the representative of the English mind in its unfettered national spirit'.[29] Several writers imagine Wyclif's physical appearance to emphasise his positive qualities. Burrows describes him as 'a keen-sighted Yorkshireman' with an 'eagle eye'[30] and Holt in a similar vein: Wyclif, bred in the 'grand, rugged hills of Richmondshire' was 'one of those sturdy Yorkshiremen, slow, shrewd and sure.' She speculates that he might have had Norse blood.[31] Like Burrows, Holt has firm ideas about Wyclif's eyes which she says were 'clear and penetrating.'[32] For Richard Storrs Wyclif had 'Saxon blood'[33] and shares the imagined picture of Wyclif with 'the penetrating eye, the firm-set lips.'[34] This imagining of him as a fierce-eyed, shrewd Yorkshireman reinforces the notion of him as a patriotic son of England standing up against foreign enemies, and has much in common with the fictional accounts of his life.

11.3 Bible translator and father of English prose

> Whether Wyclif himself actually translated a word of the surviving versions of the English Bible made in the late fourteenth century is dubious.[35]

Bible translation was so unambiguously a great achievement in the development of English Protestantism that nineteenth-century writers, looking for ways to reinforce the idea of Wyclif as a Protestant 'saint', were keen to credit it to him. They were inclined to

[26] Holt, *First Reformer*, 19.
[27] Thomson, *John Wiclif*, 25.
[28] Ibid., 27.
[29] Montagu Burrows, *Wiclif's Place in History: Three Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford in 1881*, new edn., 1884, 48.
[30] Ibid., 62.
[31] Holt, *First Reformer*, 5.
[32] Ibid., 68. This fixation with Wyclif's eyes was also common in evangelical novels including those by Emily Holt. See p.200.
[33] Storrs, *John Wycliffe*, 1880, 53.
[34] Ibid., 57.
[35] Anne Hudson, 'Wyclif and the English Language' in *Wyclif in his Times*, edited by Antony Kenny, 1985, 85.

suggest that Wyclif toiled away at the translation by himself irrespective of the lack of convincing evidence. This could be linked to the popular idea that he was an English patriot.

Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden's edition of the Wycliffite bible (1850) was an unquestionably scholarly work replete with footnotes and references.[36] The editors conclude that it was mostly Wyclif's work, and was the first translation of the whole Bible into English.'[37] However, the evidence they adduce in support of Wyclif's responsibility is thin, limited to stylistic similarities with gospel commentaries attributed to Wyclif (unreliably) by Bale. Indeed, elsewhere in the book, Forshall and Madden's conclusion is more nuanced: 'there can be no doubt that he took a part in the labour ... [which] ... must be attributed mainly to his zeal, encouragement, and direction.'[38] Lechler, writing two decades later, reduces Wyclif's role further, while still concluding that he did carry out some of it personally. Taking issue with Forshall and Madden, Lechler felt that the gospel commentaries could not be attributed to Wyclif.[39] He concludes that the Old Testament was translated by other hands but 'that the translation of the New Testament was Wycliffe's own work we may assume with a considerable degree of certainty'.[40]

Popular writers, of course, felt no need to use the careful words of the scholars. The merit of translating scripture was undeniable; any reader could appreciate that this was a needful and meritorious undertaking. They find in Wyclif's translation evidence both of his Protestant piety and patriotism. On 2nd December 1880, the Congregationalist minister Richard Salter Storrs addressed a large assembly at the Academy of Music in New York City.[41] His oration was published as *John Wycliffe and The First English Bible*, a slim volume which contrives to cram in a precis of English history, a catalogue of papal depravities and a potted life of Wyclif. The highlight for him was Wyclif's bible translation and here Storrs raises his rhetoric to new heights. The dissemination of vernacular

[36] This edition presented the 'early' and 'late' versions of the Wycliffite bible side-by-side in double columns.
[37] Madden and Forshall, 1850, *The Holy Bible ... made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers*, xxi.
[38] Ibid., vi.
[39] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 210.
[40] Ibid., 215.
[41] This opera house on 14th Street seated 4,000. It was built in 1854 and demolished in 1926.

scripture to the people was Wyclif's true life's work, 'the one weapon which that vast religious imperialism could not withstand.'[42] God's word would be made available to every peasant, because Wyclif 'had felt the inexpressible power of scripture to uplift, cheer and inspire the human spirit.' This was 'the greatest work attempted in its age … one of the most … momentous done in the world since Paul took his illustrious mission to the Gentiles.'[43] Storrs does concede that Wyclif did not do the *whole* work himself, however '[t]hat he did so largely, is undisputed.'[44]

The Congregationalist James Jackson Wray emphasises that the translation was foremost a patriotic act, helping England to break from the fetters of the papal court. With 'untiring diligence he shaped the grand Excalibur … the blade which was to cut a nation's way out of darkness into daylight, out of bondage into freedom.' This was a task Wyclif undertook to serve his country: 'Rolled up in that illuminated parchment lay folded, like a giant oak in the green cup of an acorn, all the future developments of the English race. … Thanks! Bold pioneer of a better time. England will not forget thee!'[45] He speculates mawkishly that the manuscripts were passed around eager peasant families whose eyes would 'not seldom be wet with tears at the sight of the name of Jesus in their daily dialect.'[46] John Charles Ryle, the evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, wrote in similar vein in *Light from Old Times* (2nd edn. 1898) that the translation was Wyclif's most important work. Wyclif had done the work himself, taking on a 'stupendous toil', and the result was 'the greatest national blessing': a vernacular bible was a patriotic good. 'Which are the countries where the greatest amount of ignorance, superstition, immorality and tyranny is to be found?', he asks. 'The countries in which the Bible is a forbidden … book – such countries as Italy and Spain.' By contrast, countries which enjoyed liberty and public and private morality are those 'where the Bible is free to all, like England, Scotland, and the United States … a free Bible is the grand secret of national prosperity, and … the surest way to make subjects orderly and obedient is to allow a free passage to the living waters of God's Word.'[47] This association of freedom and obedience, alien now, is characteristic

[42] Richard S. Storrs, *John Wickliffe and The First English Bible*, 1880, 63.
[43] Ibid., 67.
[44] Ibid., 68. Storrs' arguments are taken from Madden and Forshall.
[45] J. Jackson Wray, *John Wycliffe: A Quincentenary Tribute*, 1884, 175-76.
[46] Ibid., 179.
[47] John Charles Ryle, *Light From Old Times, Or, Protestant Facts and Men*, 2nd edn., (1898), 8-9.

of the period. Ryle concludes that Wyclif's translation deserves to be remembered 'by every English Christian, [and] every English patriot.'[48]

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Ford Madox Brown's painting *The First Translation of the Bible into English* (1847-1849) shows Wyclif standing at an outdoor pulpit reading from his translation while Chaucer and John Gower, described as his 'retainers', listen admiringly.[49] In the second half of the nineteenth century, some writers started to laud Wyclif as a founding father of English prose. The impression given by writers like Lewis and Vaughan who had studied English Wycliffite material is that they found it hard to digest. Perhaps the earliest instance of Wyclif's English being praised came from Richard Rolt, writing in 1759, who had referred to him as one of the finest refiners of the English language.[50] Thomas Gaspey, in his 1822 novel *The Lollards*, writes of the 'majestic modern prose' of Wyclif's bible translation.[51] Sharon Turner's *The History of England in the Middle Ages* includes a chapter on 'English language and prose composition' which includes analysis of Wyclif's impact on English. However, he finds that Wyclif's style was awkward, only achieving a higher level in the bible translation. Turner says, reasonably enough, that Wyclif was 'more illustrious for … justness of his ideas, than for the force or lucidity of his style.'[52] He ascribes the awkwardness of Wyclif's prose in both English and Latin to his scholastic background. Henry Hart Milman in his *History of Latin Christianity* (1854-7) put Wyclif on a literary pedestal, comparing Wyclif's literary influence with Chaucer's: 'As with his contemporary … Chaucer, rose English Poetry … so was Wycliffe the Father of English Prose.' Milman at least qualifies his encomium by noting that the language of his tracts was 'rude but idiomatic, biblical in much of its picturesque phraseology.'[53] Walter Shirley, in the introduction to *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* (1858) goes further; this extraordinary passage was influential: 'It is in his original tracts that the exquisite pathos, the keen delicate irony, the many passion of his short, nervous sentences, fairly overmasters the

[48] Ibid., 12.
[49] See figure vi.
[50] See p.108.
[51] See p.192.
[52] Sharon Turner, *History of England in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn., (1838), V.425.
[53] Henry Hart Milman, *History of Latin Christianity including that of the Popes to the Pontificate of Nicholas V* (4th edn.), 1867, VIII.158-9.

weakness of the unformed language, and gives us English which cannot be read without a feeling of its beauty to this hour.'[54]

Gotthard Lechler also suggests that Wyclif's work was foundational for English prose, but (like Turner) for his supposed bible translation rather than the vernacular tracts. 'Wycliffe's translation of the Bible marks an epoch in the development of the English language just as much as Luther's translation does in the history of the German tongue.' Lechler concedes that Chaucer's poetry had superior literary style but notes that this would appeal more to the educated poetry-reading class, whereas Wyclif's writing had more impact on the common man. 'That which is destined to develop a new language must be something which concerns closely the weal and woe of man … moral and religious truths, grasped with the energy of a genuine enthusiasm.'[55]

Authors writing for a popular audience happily clothe Wyclif in the raiment of a literary giant. Montagu Burrows, never one to avoid hyperbole, says that 'to Wiclif we owe … our English language. … In Wiclif we have the acknowledged father of English prose.'[56] According to Burrows, Wyclif was 'along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton … one of the four men who have produced the greatest effect on the English language and literature'.[57] Emily Holt in *England's First Reformer* echoes these ideas. She borrows Shirley's 'nervous'[58] to describe Wyclif's bible translation: 'Wycliffe rendered it into the clear, nervous English of his day, child-like in its simplicity, and often beautiful with a pathetic beauty.'[59] John Laird Wilson finds evidence of Wyclif's patriotism in his promotion of the English language. Along with Chaucer, Wyclif led the movement which saw English take over from French: 'the long struggle between Teuton and Norman … was nearing its close'.[60]

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[54] Walter Waddington Shirley, *FZ*, 1858, xlvi-xlvii.
[55] Godhard Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors,* 1878, 222.
[56]Burrows, *Wiclif's place in history*, 8-9.
[57] Ibid., 45.
[58] 'Nervous' at time was used to mean 'vigorous', of a person or literary style. Thanks to Michelle Bennett for this information.
[59] Emily Holt, *England's First Reformer: John de Wycliffe and what he did for England,* 1884, 96. In support of her case, Holt subjoins two passages from the Wycliffite bible taken from Matthew XI and Revelation XXII. It is hard to believe that anyone reading these passages would agree that the prose was simple and beautiful.
[60] John Laird Wilson, *John Wycliffe Patriot and Reformer*, 1884, 56.

Scholars who actually *read* Wyclif's prose, albeit in Latin, tell a different story. F.D. Matthew, having attempted to read *De Ente*, says 'that the double crabbedness of contractions and scholastic reasoning makes me unable to follow a good deal of [it]'[61] and R.L. Poole, editor of the Wyclif Society's edition of *De Civili Dominio* (1885) writes that 'there are digressions, meanderings, excursions, innumerable. … his formal treatment is of the poorest and most wearisome description.' He refers also to Wyclif's 'clumsy groping.'[62]

Earlier writers had written approvingly of the anti-clerical polemic in tracts they attributed to Wyclif and praised his bible translation, but it was new for the literary *style* of these productions to be praised. Writers wanted to find things to say about Wyclif which fitted him into a heroic mould, and he could appear both as a patriot and a giant of English prose. These could be linked: Wyclif was liberating the English tongue just as he liberated the English people. English had languished for centuries under the oppression of Latin and French while the people were oppressed by the papacy and the Norman ruling class. The sweeping statements in support of these ideas appear without supporting evidence; indeed, there was no evidence which could support them. The suggestion that Wycliffite vernacular texts are written in limpid English can be refuted simply by reading them. This was an exercise in vague wishfulness on the part of nineteenth-century cheerleaders for Wyclif.

11.4 The other John Wyclif

On 9th December 1365, Archbishop Simon Islip appointed Wyclif as Master of Canterbury Hall at Oxford, but after Islip's death, his successor Simon Langham dismissed him, appointing a monk, John de Redyngate to the post.[63] Wyclif was not to blame for his removal which was a consequence of the rivalry between secular and regular clergy at the university. Ironically, given his subsequent career, Wyclif appealed to the papal court, but this was rejected. Shortly afterwards. Wyclif's career in politics began, and he started writing critical attacks on the papacy and church hierarchy. Antagonistic chroniclers and historians, understandably, concluded from this chronology that his

[61] F.D. Matthew, *The English Works of Wyclif, Hitherto Unpublished*, 1880, xxiii, fn.
[62] R.L. Poole, *Tractatus De Civili Dominio*, 1885, xxi.
[63] G.R. Evans, *John Wyclif, Myth and Reality*, 2005, 105. In his analysis of the affair in *De Ecclesia*, Wyclif wittily dubs Langham 'Anti-Simon' for this reversal.

reforming career had its genesis in frustrated ambition. For example, the Catholic John Lingard wrote that Wyclif's 'feelings of resentment' gave rise to the 'bitter and envenomed invectives with which he afterwards assailed the Court of Rome.'[64] Given Wyclif's irascible and chippy personality, the suggestion does not seem unreasonable, but whatever the truth, it certainly provided a convenient means of attack for ill-disposed historians.

In 1841, however, a new discovery made it seem that this potential stain upon his reputation could be removed. William Courthorpe, clerk at the College of Arms, in an article in the August edition of the *Gentleman's Magazine*,[65] announced that he had discovered a *second* John Wyclif who was active at Oxford at the same time, and it was this other who had been appointed, and dismissed, as Master of Canterbury Hall.[66] The second John Wyclif, more properly (and hereafter) John Whyteclyve (or Whytcliff), became vicar of Mayfield, Sussex, in 1361. By an uncanny coincidence, Mayfield was the location of the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, where Islip had signed the deed appointing Wyclif. It is likely, then, that Islip had known Whyteclyve. Given the warm tone of the deed of appointment and the fact that the final syllable of the name in the deed was 'clyve', Courthorpe was convinced that it must have been he who became Master of Canterbury Hall in 1365. This, if true, was dramatic. It would clear Wyclif from the charge of having unworthy motives. As Courthorpe writes: 'Thus the most serious charge ever made against Wycliffe … is entirely removed, and the well-head of Protestantism cleansed from that pollution which, according to many writers, tainted it at its very source.'[67]

'This learned and acute investigation', to use Gotthard Lechler's phrase,[68] gained much traction in the middle of the century, notably at the hands of Walter Shirley, who supported and augmented the arguments in a 'long Excursus'[69] to his 1858 edition of

[64] Lingard, *History of England*, 4th edn., IV.159.
[65] *The Gentleman's Magazine* was founded in 1731 by Edward Cave, a.k.a. Sylvanus Urban, who was the first to use the word 'magazine' for a periodical. A. Barker, 'Edward Cave', *ODNB*.
[66] Courthorpe 'was a learned and laborious genealogist, and his works are critical and generally trustworthy'. Thomas Woodcock, *ODNB,* 1885.
[67] William Courthorpe, 'Elucidation of the Biography of Wickliffe', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1841, 146-8.
[68] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 105.
[69] Ibid., fn.

Fasciculi Zizaniorum. Shirley found a passage in *De Ecclesia* where Wyclif discussed the rightfulness of endowing charitable livings with property, or as Shirley succinctly puts it, 'that principle of the unlawfulness of perpetual eleemosynary endowments which formed part of Wyclif's theory of dominion.'[70] Wyclif used Canterbury Hall as an example without naming it. Shirley argues that Wyclif would not have written that way had he personally benefitted from the endowment. He notes that Knighton and Walsingham, writing about Wyclif in their chronicles, do not mention him having been Master of Canterbury Hall.[71] Unfortunately, however, William Wodeford, in a treatise entitled *Questiones* (1381) *does* mention that Wyclif had been driven from that position by prelates and monks.[72] Shirley gets around this difficulty via the rather flimsy argument that Wodeford was a young boy at the time of the Canterbury Hall affair, and speculates that the text 'must have been written in extreme haste.'[73] Shirley concludes: 'I venture to reject the current account which has identified the reformer with the warden of Canterbury Hall.'[74]

Almost twenty years later, a meticulous article by one 'Prebendary Wilkinson' appeared in the *Church Quarterly Review* which examined Shirley's arguments and refuted his conclusion, demonstrating conclusively that Wyclif *had* been the Master.[75] Arguing that the two names were distinctly different, Wilkinson points out that every record of Whyteclyve's name has a letter *t* in the first syllable, and no record mentioning Wyclif does. Shirley had said that the names were 'in medieval spelling, undistinguishable'[76] and Courthorpe had ignored the first syllable of the names altogether.[77] Wilkinson pointed out drily that there were some rules to medieval spelling and these 'did not count the insertion or omission of a dental as of no importance.'[78] Shirley had discussed the suggestion that Wyclif had been a fellow at Merton, Master of Balliol and taken rooms at Queen's, arguing that one man could not have been attached to so many colleges.

[70] Shirley, *FZ*, 527.
[71] Ibid., 524.
[72] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 106.
[73] Shirley, *FZ*, 524.
[74] Ibid., 528.
[75] Anon [Wilkinson], *Church Quarterly Review*, October 1877, 119-141.
[76] Ibid., 513.
[77] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1848, 147.
[78] *Church Quarterly*, October 1877, 122.

However, Wilkinson said that this was an anachronistic misunderstanding of the nature of Oxford colleges in the fourteenth century. Responding to Shirley's point regarding the passage in *De Ecclesia* where Wyclif mentions Canterbury Hall, Wilkinson argues that Shirley had misunderstood. Wyclif was not saying that eleemosynary endowments were unlawful, but rather that 'Islip … made a mistake, in the very act of doing good … because he did not guard against the device by which his pious intentions were frustrated. … So far from being a difficulty in the way of the writer being identical with the Warden, it is rather a strong proof of the fact.'[79] This is a scholarly refutation of Shirley's (and Courthorpe's) arguments and leaves no room for doubt that John Wyclif *had* been the Master. It was not Wilkinson's intention in writing this to diminish Wyclif's reputation. This proof did not, for him, devalue Wyclif. 'It is no discredit to a man that he finds out slowly by personal experience the defects of a system under which he lives …. If his actions are wise and moderate, and his teaching is reasonable, serious, and straightforward, the charge of personal motives and bitterness falls harmless to the ground.'[80]

Gotthard Lechler had already made many of the same arguments in the original German edition of his Wyclif biography in 1873, though the English translation by Peter Lorimer appeared after Wilkinson's article, in 1878. Wilkinson does reference Lechler's then untranslated book, observing that it 'deserves more notice than it has met with in England.'[81] Wilkinson's treatment was more detailed and includes original analysis of Wyclif's Oxford career. However, the key arguments and evidence first appeared in Lechler's German book. It appears Lechler's book inspired Wilkinson and he expanded upon it. The result, in any case, that the question was accepted (in academic circles) as settled.

Popular writers on Wyclif in the 1880s, however, were, reluctant to accept these apparently conclusive arguments. Montagu Burrows, the *most* partisan of writers on Wyclif, grudgingly concedes that recent discoveries had weakened Shirley's argument,

[79] Ibid., 136.
[80] Ibid., 120.
[81] Ibid., 121.

but disputes that Whyteclyve's name was always spelt with a *t* and Wyclif's never was.[82] For Burrows, it 'may possibly be too strong'[83] to claim, as Wilkinson and Lechler had, that the matter has been 'settled for ever.'[84] Emily Holt states as a given fact that there were two John Wyclifs at Oxford.[85] Like Burrows, she is unwilling to rule out the possibility that Whyteclyve might have been the Master of Canterbury Hall, stating that 'it is still to some extent an open question' and that 'there is strong circumstantial evidence on both sides'.[86]

The detailed research of Lechler and Wilkinson shows that there was no reason to believe that Whyteclyve had been Master of Canterbury Hall, or, indeed, at Oxford at all. The genesis of this idea, and the refusal of later Protestant writers to disown it even in the light of incontrovertible evidence, shows how eager they were to clear Wyclif from even the faintest suggestion of unworthy motives. This, despite the fact, as Wilkinson concluded, that it would be perfectly possible to accept that he *had* been the Warden, *had* been disgruntled at his dismissal and yet *not* consider these facts to be to his discredit. However, opponents of Wyclif have regularly made this accusation, and his supporters attempted to use the 'second John Wyclif' to neutralize it.

11.5 Wyclif and dominion

Protestant writers wanted to present Wyclif as an idealised reformer to suit the mores of the time: evangelical, patriotic, academic. Nothing in Wyclif's work seemed more difficult to fit into this scheme than his awkward theory of dominion, repeatedly used by

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[82] Burrows, *Wiclif's Place in History*, 55. Burrows' evidence for challenging this is documents found in the 'All Soul's archives' referring to Wyhteclyve as 'Wycclyve', restoring Shirley's argument that 'medieval orthography' was so unreliable as not to be depended on as evidence.

[83] Ibid., 54. It is noteworthy that Burrows incorrectly states that Lechler (and Lorimer) had been convinced by Wilkinson's article that Shirley's arguments were erroneous. In fact, as we have seen, Lechler's book was published in Germany four years before Wilkinson's article appeared and must be considered to have inspired it.

[84] Lechler, *John Wyclif*, 105, fn. added by Peter Lorimer states: 'It may now, however, be regarded as settled' and in an appendix added by Lorimer to his translation he states that it is now 'put beyond the range of reasonable doubt.' (Ibid., 476).

[85] Holt, *John de Wycliffe*, 14. This is almost certainly not correct. H.S. Cronin re-investigated the matter in a 'John Wycliffe, the Reformer, and Canterbury Hall, Oxford', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* VIII [1914], 72), and concluded Whyteclyve's 'excellence as a country parson, assuming he was excellent, little qualified him for [the Wardenship]' and, further, that 'there is nothing really to connect him with Oxford.' Holt also states that 'Some have supposed that the other John Wycliffe was a relative of the reformer.' This investigation has not found any sources which make this suggestion.

[86] Ibid., 17.

critics for centuries to support the suggestion that he had promulgated revolutionary ideas, fomented sedition, sought to overturn the order of society. Historians in this period who grasped this nettle tried to take the sting out of it; in their hands the idea of dominion in grace became nothing more sinister than a formulation of the relationship between church and state. Indeed, for some writers, Wyclif's idea of dominion anticipated the settlement which eventually emerged from the English Reformation, proving for them that he was an Anglican before its time.

Gotthard Lechler's analysis was influential but sidestepped the controversial aspect of Wyclif's theory of dominion and the discussion is brief. A glance at Lechler's table of contents shows where his priorities lie: his long section on 'Wycliffe's Theological System' begins with the 'Doctrine of God' and his emphasis, as might be expected of a German theologian, is upon the purely theological aspects. Just five pages of the 139 Lechler devotes to Wyclif's theology are concerned with dominion and this is limited to analysis of Wyclif's *De Dominio Divino* (c.1373-4), the first book of his *Summa Theologica*. In this work, Wyclif defined and itemised the categories of dominion, stating that all earthly dominion, lordship or possession is granted by God via grace, and Lechler observes that Wyclif made 'this idea of dominion the pole of his philosophico-theological thinking'.[87] Crucially, though, in *De Dominio Divino* Wyclif did not discuss the ramifications of the idea for the practice of civil and ecclesiastical government. That topic appears in Wyclif's *De Civili Dominio* (c.1375-6), conceived in response to circumstances such as the ongoing jurisdictional struggles between secular rulers and popes, and the debate about the requirement for monastic poverty. Here, Wyclif sought to extend the authority of the state and impose 'a ministry of humility in poverty' upon the church[88] and it was this assertion of the duty of secular lords to dispossess delinquent priests in *De Civili Dominio* which provoked the list of condemned propositions in the 1377 papal bulls and all the later accusations that he spread sedition and dissent. Lechler does deal with Wyclif's defences to the condemned propositions in his section on proceedings against Wycliffe but deflects the criticism. The first five propositions related to the theory of dominion, and it is self-evident that they were declared heretical

[87] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 256.
[88] Ibid., 257.

because of how they applied to the relationship between the papacy and civil authorities. The list of condemned tenets had, after all, been drawn up by the papal curia. Lechler, however, reduces their impact by stating that they 'refer exclusively to legal and municipal matters.' It has always been assumed, he says, that they relate to the dominion of the church, 'but this view ... rests entirely upon misunderstanding and prejudice.'[89] Lechler is, deliberately perhaps, missing the point. The reason that these propositions were placed at the head of the list was *because* the papacy wished to emphasise their importance, that they related to the relationship between state and church. If they could lead the secular authorities to conclude that Wyclif sought to undermine the wider foundations of society and property, that would be a beneficial side-effect; and in the event, this was to become the reading which would regularly be applied. In his treatment Lechler disregards its controversial aspects.

Some writers took the venom out of the doctrine of dominion by seeing it simply as an attempt to reorder relations between church and state. Walter Shirley, writing in 1858, describes the topic of dominion as 'as we should now call it, of Church and State.'[90] Shirley's account in *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* deals with it predominantly from a political rather than religious standpoint[91] and emphasises that these principles 'appeared to many to be subversive of the framework of society' so that ideas which were essentially political were arraigned as heresy.[92] They took a prominent position among Wyclif's condemnations, but his accusers should have taken account of Wyclif's statement that the notion was an ideal, incompatible with the current state of society.[93] One of the

[89] Ibid., 165-166. Proposition I states that Wyclif had written that 'it is above the power of the human race ... to confer upon St. Peter and his successors the political government of the world forever', which on the face of it baldly contradicts Lechler's point. However, Lechler argues that the name *Petrus* is intended to mean everyman and not the papacy, arguing that the Latin *Petrus et omne genus suum* would be a strange way to refer to Peter and his successors. This reads as quibbling on Lechler's part, but is supported by R.L. Poole in his Wyclif Society edition (1885) of Wyclif's *De Civili Dominio*, Vol. I, which was the source of this proposition. Poole adds a footnote stating that 'Peter and Paul are Wycliffe's analogues to the Caius and Balbus of grammarians.' (4).

[90] *FZ*, xvii.

[91] So much so that a critical reviewer in *The Athenaeum* felt moved to write that 'Mr. Shirley aims to represent the Reformer as a political rather than a great religious leader.' (2nd October 1858; No. 1614, 415.)

[92] Shirley felt that the prosecution was 'wholly political, a way to attack John of Gaunt through John Wycliffe.' *FZ*, xxvi.

[93] In Chapter XIV of *Civili Dominio*, according to Poole, Wyclif does assert that society is not yet ready for his proscriptions to be fully applied. (xxiv).

difficulties, according to Shirley, is that Wyclif, a scholastic thinker, 'had the habit of presenting his conclusions in a paradoxical form' which made them difficult for general readers, for example his notorious phrase 'God must obey the devil', the 'strange … phrase in which the reformer expressed the duty of submission to constituted authority.'[94] Wyclif's true intention was to recast the relationship between church and the state. God had never delegated supreme authority to any man, so the clergy should return to its ancient role prior to the Donation of Constantine, with poverty and independence. This, then, was an attempt to do what the reformers of the sixteenth century achieved via the doctrine of justification by faith but couched in the language of scholasticism. 'The emancipation of the individual conscience was the aim of both.'[95]

Frederick Matthew, in his *English Works of Wycliffe* (1880) like Shirley (and unlike Lechler) dealt with the reaction to the theory of dominion, stating (correctly) that it was important precisely *because* 'it has been the subject of more attack and misunderstanding than any other of his doctrines', and had given rise to accusations that he had 'used it to incite the population of revolt and pillage.'[96] Matthew points out that Wyclif had not invented the doctrine but rather had developed ideas articulated by Richard FitzRalph. Undoubtedly, the doctrine could have dangerous consequences and Wyclif's language was sometimes deliberately misinterpreted. Matthew, like Shirley, argues that it had not been Wyclif's intention to propose a reordering of society. Wyclif 'neither did nor could' propound a temporal 'rule of the saints' on earth. Society was not ready for such government, and there was the practical difficulty that no-one could decide which sins were mortal, who was in a state of grace, so it was impossible to determine when rulers gave up the right to exercise dominion. Therefore, 'there was no fear of his using this theory of dominion as a dangerous solvent of society. [Wyclif] constantly asserted the duty of obedience even to wicked rulers.' Again, echoing Shirley, Matthew quotes *Item quod Deus debet obedire diabolo*: words 'marked by the exaggeration of the Schools', but 'an emphatic way of saying that we must give to every one his due … the Christian must subject himself to those by who God's ordinances and allowance are placed over

[94] *FZ*, lxv.
[95] Ibid., lxvi.
[96] F.D Matthew, *Select Works of Wycliffe Hitherto Unprinted*, 1880, xxxii.

him.'[97] Both Shirley's and Matthew's treatments of the theory of dominion respond to the criticism of the idea, both detoxifying it with reference to the context in which it was developed, defining it as, in essence, a theory of the separation of church and state.

Writers of popular biographies tended to follow this lead. Montagu Burrows reaches the satisfying conclusion that this was just 'the modern doctrine of Royal supremacy' and 'the principle that ecclesiastics are subject to the fundamental conclusion of good behaviour.'[98] Wyclif's enemies had naturally presented this idea as revolutionary, as a general attack upon property, but 'his works are full of exhortations to obey superiors … there is a duty to obey even wicked rulers.'[99] The vastness of the theological conception reminded Burrows of Hooker, a comparison we shall return to in the next section. John Laird Wilson agreed that dominion was the 'basis … of [Wyclif's] whole theological system'[100] and asserted that Wyclif had drawn 'clean, clear, and distinct the boundary lines between Church and State',[101] but unlike his contemporaries acknowledged that Wyclif did hold 'opinions of a radical and revolutionary character.'[102] By contrast, Emily Holt, as we would expect, saw Wyclif as a model of her own evangelical Protestantism. Not mentioning dominion and using Arnold's *Selected English Works of Wycliffe* as her primary source, Holt states merely that 'Wycliffe's teaching concurs with that of the reformed Church of England. … Lords should rule Christ's Church and therefore when bishops and priests fail in their duty they should be put out of office.'[103]

Wyclif's theory of dominion via grace has proven problematic for every generation of writers. It is a slippery, difficult concept, couched in scholastic language and was often wilfully misinterpreted by Wyclif's detractors. Some Victorian scholars did have access to Wyclif's original manuscripts, but attempting to square the material they found there with the conception of Wyclif they wanted to present proved a difficult task. Gotthard Lechler got around this by ignoring the controversy and concentrating on the theological

[97] Ibid., xxxvi.
[98] Burrows, *Wyclif's Place in History*, 17-18.
[99] Ibid, 18. This is a reasonable summary of the arguments in Waddington's and Shirley's accounts, presented in Burrows' usual bluff manner.
[100] Wilson, *John Wycliffe*, 150.
[101] Ibid., 87.
[102] Ibid., 150.
[103] Holt, *England's First Reformer*, 160.

doctrines. Other writers, academic and popular, defanged the theory of the elements which had caused most controversy, and found ways to squeeze it to fit into an approximation of the nineteenth-century Anglican model of relations between Church and State. Similarly, they tried to find precursors of elements of contemporary Anglicanism in Wyclif's other ideas.

11.6 Wyclif and the Reformation

In 1855, Henry Hart Milman, the Dean of St. Paul's, in *History of Latin Christianity*, wrote that Wyclif's demands for reform had fallen far short of what was accomplished in the sixteenth century. He had sought to remove unscriptural and corrupt elements but proposed no new religious system as the sixteenth-century reformers did:

Wycliffe, after all, was not merely premature as a Reformer of Christianity, he was incomplete and insufficient. He was destructive of the existing system, not reconstructive of a new one. … He had swept away one by one almost all the peculiar tenets of medieval Latin Christianity … But Teutonic Christianity had to await more than two centuries and a half before it offered a new system of doctrine to the religious necessities of man. Lutheranism, Anglicanism, Calvinism, are forms of faith; from Wycliffism it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to frame a creed like that of Augsburg, Articles like those of the Church of England, or even those of Westminster.[104]

Later writers usually gave him more credit for prefiguring Reformation ideas, while still maintaining that his ideas represented a partial step. Gotthard Lechler noted that Wyclif's views had evolved; he had always possessed a 'reformational spirit' but his ideas for most of his career were 'ecclesiastico-political' and only in his final years had he 'dug deeper', realising that political changes alone were insufficient: 'the weed was not plucked out by the root.'[105] By this time, Wyclif had become the first person for centuries fully to recognise the 'Protestant principle' that scripture was an absolute standard of truth. This had led him to initiate bible translation and itinerant preaching and attack the 'Romish-scholastic doctrine of the Lord's Supper.' Wyclif by then had as his formal principle that 'Christ alone is our mediator, saviour and leader'. Luther's

[104] Henry Hart Milman, *History of Latin Christianity*, 1855, VI.137.
[105] Lechler, *John Wycliffe*, 435.

statement of this principle was 'an immense advance beyond Wycliffe', but nevertheless, Wyclif's thought possessed 'an intimate connection with the evangelical doctrine of Justification by Faith alone' so he must be credited with the status of a prophet.[106] Wyclif had concentrated and completed the work of earlier reformers and as such was 'the earliest personal embodiment of the evangelical reformer.'[107] The idea that Wyclif anticipated the sixteenth-century Reformation but fell short of it theologically was adopted by most writers in the 1880s. Rudolf Buddensieg wrote that Wyclif's ideas were 'conceived in the true spirit of the Reformation' and were transmitted to Huss, providing a link to the later German reformers.[108]

For most of these writers, the defining core of the Reformation was the theology of justification by faith and so the measure of Wyclif's status as a precursor was how closely his ideas approached it. Milman's suggestion that Wyclif's thought was incomplete is a judgement based solely on this comparison. However, the changes associated with the Reformation were, of course, not limited to theology and it would have been perfectly valid to judge Wyclif's influence with reference to his calls for political and organisational change, matters, of course, which provided the initial spark for Luther. Walter Shirley, writing in 1858, is of this opinion: for him, 'the true beginning of the English Reformation' was the publication of Wyclif's *De Dominio Divino*, wherein Wyclif appears as 'a reformer rather of the constitution than the doctrines of the church [though] the theological element is closely united with the political.'[109]

Montagu Burrows, of course, took things further. For him, Wyclif was, in essence, a nineteenth-century Anglican operating in the fourteenth century. Discussing Wyclif's theology of the Eucharist, Burrows says that, in arguing that the body of Christ is present spiritually in the sacrament, Wyclif's thought is aligned with that of Anglican divines like Richard Hooker and Daniel Waterland and 'the Articles and Formularies of our own Church'. He notes that Anglican doctrine was 'wonderfully similar … with Wiclif's'.[110] On the principle of justification by faith, Wyclif's doctrine was 'precisely that of the Articles

[106] Ibid., 436.
[107] Ibid., 437.
[108] Buddensieg, *Polemical Works*, xiii.
[109] *FZ*, xl. Presumably Shirley chose *De Dominio Divino* because it was the first book in Wyclif's *Summa*. It is not an apt choice, though, being concerned with the theology of dominion rather than church reform.
[110] Burrows, *Wiclif's Place in History*, 106.

of the Church of England', corresponding, as it did, with 'the modest doctrine of those Articles on the questions of Predestination, Free Will and Assurance.'[111] Here Burrows differentiates Wyclif's thought from the dangerous ideas of the hotter Protestants of Switzerland or Geneva: 'like the doctrine of our Prayer-book, Wiclif's standpoint cannot be identified with that of any Continental school.'[112] Having read (Lechler's account of) Wyclif's *Summa Theologica*,[113] Burrows was struck by the similarity of his theology to Hooker's. '[T]he grandeur and vastness of the conception of this series of works ... the independence of thought, and the majestic fairness of the treatment' reminding him 'irresistibly' of the 'similar work of Hooker, the great champion of our Reformed Church.'[114] Since Hooker could not have been familiar with Wyclif's writing, Burrows concludes, '[w]e are witnessing the coincidence of two great minds ... skilled in the same logical training, and endowed with the same reverence for the Bible.'[115] It would be absurd, Burrows accepts, to carry this too far: Hooker had to find his *via media* through lesser antagonists than 'the legions against whom the still greater Reformer stemmed his course.'[116] Yet, 'in both writers we ... find precisely the same principles traced and defended.'[117] In particular, Burrows focuses upon Wyclif's theory of dominion which he finds echoed in Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*.[118]

Burrows' conclusions matched his preconceptions: it must be remembered that he had not actually read *Summa Theologica*, depending instead on Lechler's summaries. We have already observed how Burrows lauded Wyclif as a patriot and a giant of English prose. His treatment of Wyclif's theology arose from the same desire to demonstrate how Wyclif was a very *English* reformer, with ideas closely aligned to those of the

[111] Ibid., 110.
[112] Ibid., 1o6.
[113] This was a series of twelve Latin works in which Wyclif articulated some of his central theses. Most were published by the Wyclif Society between 1886 and 1922. Burrows, writing in 1881, would not have seen any of the manuscripts so his analysis here is dependent on the second-hand account 'as sketched by Dr. Lechler' (ibid., 66).
[114] Ibid., 66.
[115] Ibid., 67.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 68.
[118] Burrows quotes passages from *Ecclesiastical Polity* which he says 'are carrying us in just the same way' as Wyclif, for example this quotation from Book VIII, Chapter vi.8: 'we are to hold it a thing most consonant with equity and reason that no ecclesiastical law be made in a Christian Commonwealth without consent of the laity as well as of the clergy.'

nineteenth-century Anglican church, concluding that 'from the view of a modern English Churchman, there was not much that was wanting.'[119]

[119] Ibid., 112.

Fig. vi.
Paintings by Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893).

Left, *The First Translation of the Bible into English (Wycliffe Reading His Translation of the New Testament to His Protector, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in the Presence of Chaucer and Gower, His Retainers)*, 1847-8. John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer listen admiringly to Wyclif's limpid prose.

Bradford Museums and Galleries, Accession number 1909-052

Below, *The Trial of Wyclif*, 1885-6. This is one of the 'Manchester Murals' commissioned for Manchester Town Hall, the only one which does not have a Mancunian theme,

inspired presumably by the quincentenary in 1884. The crowned man waving a sword is John of Gaunt. Wyclif is depicted standing. He was invited by Henry Percy to sit down which was, rightly, interpreted an affront, leading to complaints from Archbishop

Courtney and the assembly soon descended into a riot. (Jeffrey Dahmus, *The Prosecution of John Wyclif,* 28-29).

12 The Wyclif quincentenary commemorations

The five-hundredth anniversary of the death of John Wyclif fell on 31st December 1884 and was marked with a variety of public events. A flurry of popular biographies appeared in that year[1] and there was renewed attention from academics along with the ongoing efforts of the Wyclif Society to publish his Latin works. Modern historians noted all this activity and concluded that the quincentenary coincided with a widespread upswelling of popular enthusiasm about Wyclif.[2] This chapter will chronicle the commemorations, assess the degree of public enthusiasm, and show how, as ever, people on different sides of the religious divide saw Wyclif in different ways.

A committee of representatives from the various evangelical Chrisitan communities had been formed to co-ordinate the celebrations.[3] An exhibition of Wycliffite manuscripts was staged in the King's Library at the British Museum. Edward Maunde Thompson, then Keeper of Manuscripts at the museum, wrote the introduction to the exhibition catalogue.[4] The exhibition was mostly dedicated to celebrating the history of the Wycliffe bible which included eighteen pre-Wycliffe bible translations, thirty-five Wycliffite bibles or sections, and twenty-one gospel harmonies, commentaries and homilies attributed to Wyclif. Only a few other manuscripts were exhibited, 'illustrating the life of Wycliffe.'[5] A visitor to the exhibition knowing nothing of Wyclif's history would have left thinking that bible translation had been his sole work.

The main celebrations took place in London on Wednesday, 21st May 1884, comprising a sermon, a conference and a public meeting.[6] The sermon was preached by John Charles Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool, a man noted for his evangelical opinions, at the church of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe in Blackfriars. The conference, chaired by the Lord Mayor, was

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[1] See p.214.

[2] In particular, James Crompton in 'John Wyclif, A Study in Mythology' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 42 (1966/67), 18. The suggestion has been perpetuated by later writers including Helen Spencer. ('F.J. Furnivall's Last Fling', *The Review of English Studies* 65.272 (2014), 797-8.

[3] *Daily News*, London, 19th May 1884.

[4] Edward Maude Thompson (editor), *Wycliffe exhibition in the Kings Library*, 1884, iii-xix. This includes a formulaic narration of Wyclif's life. According to Thompson, Wyclif's most important achievements were instituting the order of poor priests and translating scripture.

[5] Ibid., 58.

[6] Wyclif died on 31st December, but May was presumably considered a more practical month for the events.

held in the Egypt Hall of the Mansion House. It was addressed by that inveterate cheerleader for Wyclif, Montagu Burrows, who dwelt upon Wyclif's patriotism, the patriotism of 'an Englishman of the Yorkshire type'. His speech ended in an appeal for subscriptions on behalf of the Wyclif Society, whose work, Burrows said, was crucial because 'no man had been more misrepresented than Wycliffe'.[7] Wyclif's English works, in particular, needed to be made more accessible, Burrows said, concluding with the rather optimistic hope that one day 'it would be as great a matter of shame to be ignorant of Wycliffe's works as it was to be ignorant of the works of Shakespeare or Milton. (cheers).' The public meeting that evening was held in Exeter Hall on the Strand. The Earl of Shaftesbury, chairing the meeting, said that the point of the celebrations was 'refining the mind and elevating the sentiment.' He was concerned that England was changing, and many did not welcome these celebrations. Had we come, he mused, to the 'Sunset of the Reformation?'[8]

A public meeting was held in Birmingham on 19th May, at the Lecture Hall in Needless Alley, at which the Reverend J. S. Owen praised Wyclif's patriotism. He described himself as dismayed at the size of payments made to Rome and referred to the mendicant friars as 'lazy hounds'. The Reverend A. J. Smith said that Wyclif was not only a sage, but also a saint. One wonders what Wyclif himself would have made of that.[9] A lecture on Wyclif was delivered to the Derby Working Men's Branch of the Church Association by Rev. H.S. Sheppard of Paignton. He concluded a laudatory account of the life of Wyclif with a vicious attack on Tractarians and Ritualists, stating that he would 'be very happy to contribute to a memorial … consisting of a gallows tree, with a noose round the neck of an effigy of Dr. Pusey, and the word "traitor" written across the face.'[10]

The anniversary was marked in Scotland near the actual date, on Monday, 29th December, with two major public meetings, one organised by the Scottish Protestant Alliance at the City Hall in Glasgow and the other, at the Free Church Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, chaired by the Lord Provost, Sir George Harrison, 'with speakers

[7] *The Times*, 22nd May 1885.
[8] Ibid.
[9] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20th May 1884.
[10] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 21st May 1884.

representative of various Reformed churches'.[11] A public meeting was held the following week at the Albert Hall in Aberdeen 'intended to represent the whole Protestant community'. The Lord Provost of Aberdeen, James Matthews, chairing the meeting, lauded Wyclif as 'one who had laid the foundation in England of that freedom of opinion and liberty of conscience' which was so prized today. Rev. W.S. Chedburn addressed the meeting on the topic of 'Wycliffe as Patriot' and the Rev J. Stark spoke on 'Wycliffe in Relation to Present Day Duties and Questions', concluding that 'Wycliffe proved himself … the sincere friend and true helper of the people.'[12]

12.1 Wyclif in three speeches

This section examines three speeches from the quincentenary events in more detail: the sermon delivered by the Bishop of Liverpool at Blackfriars, the address by James Campbell, M.P. for Glasgow, at the City Hall in that city, and a sermon delivered by the Bishop of Exeter at the Cathedral on 31st December 1884. These speeches were exercises in rhetoric at public commemorations, so it is not surprising that they espoused popular attitudes intended to resonate with the audience. There is an emphasis upon Wyclif's supposed patriotism and his bible translation. Whilst all three operate in the same broad frame of reference, praising Wyclif as a great Protestant reformer, the contrasts show the variety of ways in which Wyclif could be made to fit into different confessional moulds.

John Charles Ryle had been Bishop of Liverpool since 1880. He was a prominent evangelical and prolific tract-writer. His speech on Wyclif was briefly reported in *The Times* as concentrating on four aspects of Wyclif's life: his maintenance of the supremacy of Scripture, his revival of 'the Apostolic ordinance of preaching', his pronouncements against the errors of Rome and his bible translation. 'The preacher dwelt upon all these points at length', *The Times*' correspondent drily observes.[13] Ryle produced a book of lives shortly afterwards, *Light from Old Times, Or, Protestant Facts*

[11] *Glasgow Herald*, 30th December 1884. It was to have been chaired by Lord Aberdeen, but he sent his apologies at the last minute.
[12] However, Stark noted, he did not support the people when they 'ran wildly into lawless courses, as in Wat Tyler's insurrection' but waited 'til they came back to a better state of mind.' *Aberdeen Journal*, 10th Jan 1885.
[13] *The Times*, 22nd May 1884.

and Men, with a chapter on Wyclif, whose focus is upon the same four points so it seems likely that the ground covered is similar to that in his Blackfriars speech.[14]

For Ryle, the sufficiency of scripture was the heart of everything Wyclif taught, a principle which 'lies at the very foundation of Protestant Christianity.' 'The true Christian was intended by Christ to prove all things by the Word of God … These are his marching orders.'[15] Wyclif's inspiration of the poor preachers was another crucial contribution, according to Ryle, as it put preaching back at the heart of the priestly vocation. In a thinly-veiled criticism of current-day ritualists, Ryle bemoans how 'pretended "sacerdotalism" of ministers is one of the oldest and most mischievous errors which has ever plagued Christendom.' Sadly, there was a repeated tendency to 'exalt ministers to an unscriptural position' owing to their 'love of power and dignity' as well as the perhaps understandable preference among worshippers for a physical mediator over an invisible God.[16] Ryle's Wyclif evinced nineteenth-century evangelical virtues, championing the relationship between the individual Christian and God, mediated by vernacular scripture and the preaching of godly ministers.[17]

A very different Wyclif emerges from the speech given by the Bishop of Exeter on 31st December 1884. Frederick Temple, who preached a 'special sermon' after the afternoon service at the Cathedral, would go on to become Bishop of London, and, in 1896, Archbishop of Canterbury.[18] The sermon praises Wyclif for inspiring reform and translation of the bible, but the Wyclif it portrays is one who is part of the establishment, in place of Ryle's fiery evangelical. '[W]e, the Church of England' owed him a great debt because his greatest achievement was inspiring the Church in England to reform itself, despite the fact that 'his own opinions were not always what they would now hold to be true to the Catholic Church.' Like Ryle, Temple stressed the significance of Wyclif's teaching people to read and follow the bible themselves, but then added that 'the Church

[14] John Charles Ryle, *Light from Old Times*, 2nd edn., 1898, vi.
[15] Ibid., 4-5. See p.220 for Ryle's ideas about Wyclif's bible translation.
[16] Ibid., 7.
[17] Ryle's sympathies are clear in *Light from Old Times*. Three of the lives examined are of Puritans, who, for him, deserve more attention. 'Never … were men so … absurdly maligned as the Puritans. … [who] … have done more to elevate the national character than any class of Englishmen that ever lived.' (Ibid., xiv, xvi.)
[18] Temple would officiate at Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee and funeral and the coronation of Edward VIII. Earlier in life he had been the headmaster of Rugby school. His son would also become Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1942. H. Spooner & M. Chapman, 'Frederick Temple', *ODNB*.

might claim the power of interpretation, and rightly so.' Temple was, not surprisingly, an advocate of reform from within. He says that there were widespread calls for a church council to debate reforms, which led to the Council of Pisa in 1409. There is no real condemnation of the corruption of the Roman church in this sermon. Temple's Wyclif, though still a reformer, is a comfortable and unthreatening one. This Wyclif favoured controlled, evolutionary, internal reform and a comfortably moderate national church.

The speeches at the meeting in Glasow were different in tone, being delivered by local dignitaries rather than clergy. Scottish themes were to the fore and regular emphasis put on the superiority of Scottish religion over English. The speakers emphasised that Wyclif had inspired the Scottish Reformation as well as the English, and that their Reformation had been much closer to what he envisaged than that south of the border. There was also a more stridently sectarian tone than in the sermons in England. The chairman of the meeting, James Campbell M.P., opened proceedings by saying that Wyclif, despite being English, was a reformer for all Protestants.[19] The principal speaker was George Anderson, a businessman and Liberal M.P. for Glasgow.[20] He started his speech by decrying denominationalism, and immediately embarked on a virulent attack on the Roman Church. While he always sought to extend 'the fullest toleration and justice' to Catholics, he never missed an opportunity to 'denounce that aggressive spirit which it seemed impossible for them to lay aside (applause).' There had been, he conceded, an improvement since the time of Wyclif, when 'the vices that were too apt to attach to a celibate priesthood had reached their most degraded pitch.' There is, in fact, little of Wyclif in Anderson's speech.[21] He tries to show that Wyclif was the father of the Scottish Reformation, and that that reform had been completed, unlike the shoddy settlement in England. Wyclif's connection to Scotland could be traced through several channels including John Resby, one of his followers who fled to Scotland before being burned in 1407, and the Bohemian Paul Craw, burned at St Andrew's in 1431. Anderson returns to his favourite topic, the inferior nature of the English Reformation: '[O]ur Reformation ...

[19] *Glasgow Herald*, 30th December 1884.
[20] https://www.theglasgowstory.com/image/?inum=TGSA00013, accessed 25th Nov 2024.
[21] The Catholic priest Alexander Munro, in a letter to the *Glasgow Herald,* wrote that he had been 'amused by the general floundering of the speakers in their feeble attempts to show what they had got to do with Wycliffe or Wycliffe with them.' (2nd Jan 1885.) Having read accounts of these speeches, one feels he had a point.

was a far more complete one than the English one. (Hear, hear, and applause.) England was content to accept a sort of half measure, such as our brave Scottish forefathers scorned and rejected.' The bitter struggle of the Scots against the English Reformation was the same struggle Wyclif had originated. 'His contention was for a free Bible and for free right to interpret it, and it was that mainly for which our Covenanting martyrs suffered and died.'[22]

Throughout this study we have encountered instances of Wyclif being moulded or re-formed to suit the polemical needs of writers and historians of a wide variety of shades of opinion and nowhere is this better illustrated by these three hugely contrasting speeches. The evangelical John Ryle emphasised the evangelical aspects of Wyclif's teaching and used his speech to criticise ritualists for straying from the righteous path. The establishment Anglican bishop Frederick Temple gives us Wyclif as a champion of moderate reform who anticipated the contemporary Church of England. Scottish politicians Campbell and Anderson used their speeches to lambast Catholics and Anglicans; Wyclif's true legacy was the Scottish Reformation. Christina von Nolcken writing in 1984 for the sexcentenary, said that the quincentenary did not celebrate the historical Wyclif, but 'the Wyclif of English Protestant mythology',[23] which is undoubtedly true, though as we have seen, Scottish Protestants also claimed him.

12.2 The public and the quincentenary

However, beyond the interested inner circle of clerics and academics, the quincentenary seems to have passed almost unnoticed. Modern commentators have exaggerated the impact of the event, misled, perhaps, by the enthusiasm of the Wyclif Society's annual reports and the peak in Wyclif biographies. James Crompton wrote that the year saw a 'the crescendo of praise for Wyclif'[24] and made the contentious statement that 'in many ways ... the most important year of Wyclif's life was ... 1884'.[25] Similarly, Christina von

[22] *Glasgow Herald*, 30th December 1884.
[23] Christine von Nolcken, 'Wyclif in Our Times: The Wyclif Sexcentenary 1984', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 2 (1988), 143-154.
[24] Crompton, 'A Study in Mythology', 20.
[25] Ibid., 18.

Nolcken wrote that '[Wyclif] was just what 1884 wanted, and he was celebrated accordingly.'[26]

However, the notion of a 'crescendo of praise' is not supported by accounts in contemporary newspapers. Rather, the event seems to have been something of a damp squib. The London *Daily News* reports that the committee had suggested that commemorative sermons be preached in every church, but that this was 'not yesterday adopted in the metropolis to anything like a wide extent.' In the leading places of worship 'no actual reference to the topic was made ... and the same remark applies to most of the prominent Dissenting churches.'[27] *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* reported that the anniversary 'has been so badly worked that no one seems to know that this is the period fixed upon by the committee for celebrating services. Most of the London clergy, however, seem to have forgotten all about it.'[28] *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* recorded that 'an eminent committee [had] sent us all earnest invitations to keep up the anniversary' but that it had 'ended in what our American cousins call a "fizzle". We have had one lecture in Exeter on the great man, and one sermon ... And most of us totally forgot on the day when we should have remembered, the very name ... of the Morning Star of the Reformation.'[29] The *Newcastle Courant* reported the London events, adding: 'so far as we know, there is to be no celebration of the event in the north, and yet John Wyclif is claimed as a north-country man.'[30] In Scotland, too, enthusiasm was muted. The *Glasgow Herald* reported that there was 'a small attendance' at the public meeting at the City Hall.[31] Lord Aberdeen, who was to have chaired the meeting in Edinburgh, sent a letter of apology for absence two days before the meeting, rather suggesting that he did not consider it significant enough to be worth going.[32]

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[26] von Nolcken, op cit.
[27] *Daily News*, London, 19th May 1884.
[28] *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 26th December 1884.
[29] *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, issue 6112, 7th January 1885.
[30] *Newcastle Courant*, 16th May 1884. The article continues with a biography making great play of Wyclif's northern roots and concluding that the Reformation had been 'begun by a north of England man.'
[31] *Glasgow Herald*, 30th December 1884. The Catholic priest Alexander Munro, who had been present, gleefully agreed, noting that 'after such elaborate touting' the meeting had been 'small, very small, in every respect.' (*Glasgow Herald*, 31st December 1884.)
[32] *Aberdeen Journal*, 3rd January 1885.

The rector at Lutterworth, a successor to Wyclif, was Thomas Henry Tarlton, and he took the opportunity presented by the anniversary to appeal for funds for a new organ. In May, at the same time as the London events, a large party of nonconformists took a special train to Ullesthorpe and walked the three miles to Lutterworth, where bemused inhabitants turned out 'en masse' to watch. Tarlton showed them around the church before the party proceeded to the Town Hall for tea.[33] More Wyclif tourists visited Lutterworth for the actual anniversary in December and Tarlton gave more guided tours, despite the lack of memorials from Wyclif's time. These Victorian tourists would have seen the Wiclif Memorial, a bas-relief panel by Richard Westmacott, a prolific creator of public sculptures which was erected in 1837, atop an inscription honouring Wyclif as bible translator and reformer.[34] There was, however, no special service to mark the anniversary.[35] Tarlton did, however, write to *The Times* suggesting that a new organ for the church would be a 'fit memorial of its great rector.'[36] Tarlton did get his organ, but not until 1886.[37] It seems unlikely, though, that Wyclif would have agreed that this was a 'fit memorial' since he was suspicious of singing in church, feeling that it took people's minds off their prayers.[38]

[33] *Daily News*, 19th May 1884.
[34] See figures viii and ix. C. Dodgson & M. Busco, 'Richard Westmacott', *ODNB*.
[35] *Northampton Mercury*, 3rd Jan 1885.
[36] *The Times*, 30th December 1884.
[37] A.H. Dyson in *Lutterworth, The Story of John Wycliffe's Town*, 1913, records that 'The present organ ... was obtained with funds raised by public subscription in the year 1886. It cost £750 e[xc]lusive of the organ screen. The town is mainly indebted to the exertions of the Rev. T.H. Tarlton, the then rector, and Mr. M.C. Buszard, K.C. ... for a really fine instrument. It was built by M. Gern, a French organ-builder of great repute, and Lutterworth, for a short period during its erection, had the uncommon experience of a small band of foreign workmen quartered in its midst.'
[38] In *Opus Evangelicum* Wyclif quotes John Chrysostom on the subject of singing in church, concluding that the saint condemned it 'because the people who are singing as well as the people who are listening are distracted by the mental thought of the heavenly' and also because 'it is not based on faith in the scriptures'. (*Opus Evangelicum*, edited by Johann Loserth for the Wyclif Society, 1895, I.261, my translation.)

Fig. vii

In the week of the main events commemorating the Wyclif Quincentenary, the *Illustrated London News* devoted its cover to illustrations of memorials in Lutterworth. The door is that from which Wyclif's ashes were conveyed to the River Swift.

Illustrated London News, 24th May 1884.

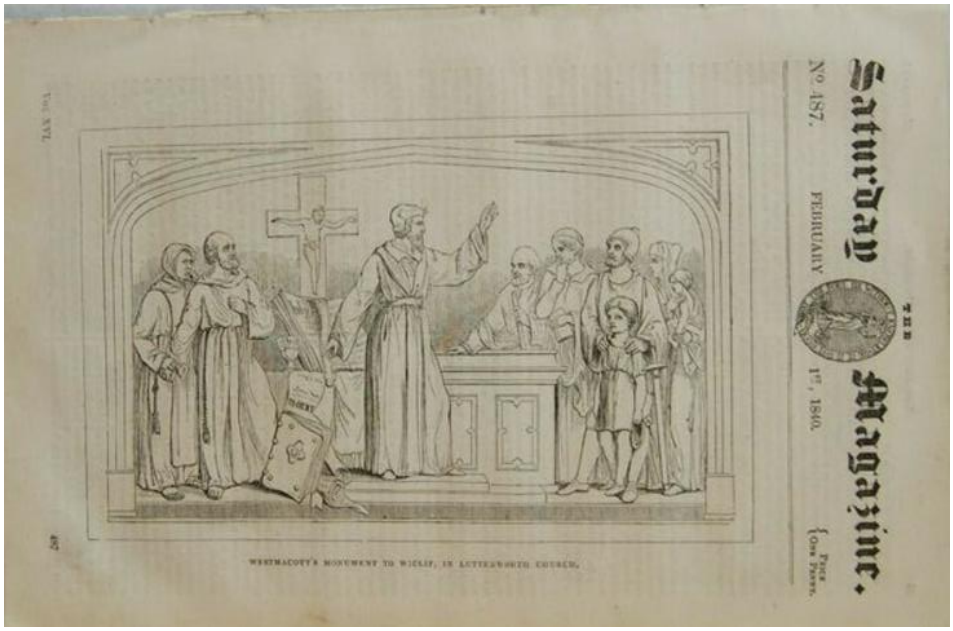

Fig. viii

The Wiclif Memorial in St. Mary's Church, Lutterworth by Richard Westmacott, erected in 1837.

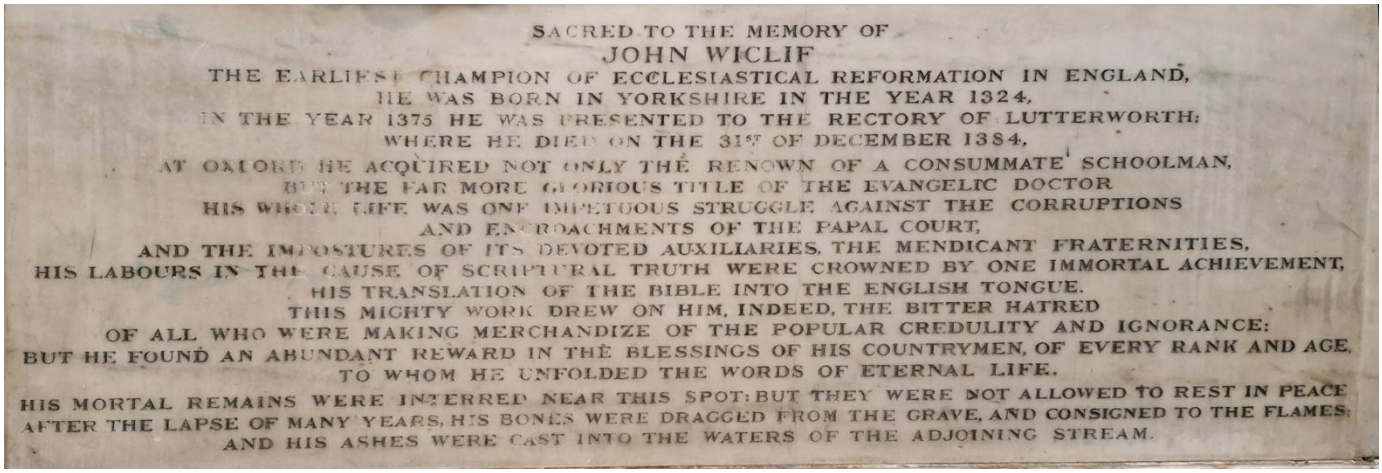

Fig. ix

Top left: St. Mary's church, Lutterworth, today.

Top right: Portrait of Wyclif hanging at St. Mary's, dated 1786.[1]

Bottom: Inscription from Wyclif Memorial at St. Mary's. (see fig. viii), referring to 'his translation of the bible' which 'found an abundant reward in the blessings of his countrymen.'

Phots in figs. viii and ix by the author.

[1] https://www.lutterworthchurch.org/history/wycliffe, accessed 18th Nov. 2024.

13 Wyclif and Lollards as socialists, 1880-1900

13.1 'A gigantic project of evil': Catholic criticism of Wyclif

In the 1880s Wyclif's star was high in the firmament, with an outpouring of tributes from Protestants of all stripes, and some Catholic critics felt impelled to respond. The 79-year-old Jesuit Joseph Stevenson wrote a biography entitled *The Truth about John Wyclif* (1885). This version of the 'truth' naturally contrasts sharply with the Protestant hagiography: in it, Stevenson is vituperative and unrelievedly condemnatory, presenting Wyclif as a heretic and a traitor engaged upon 'a gigantic project of evil.'[1] Stevenson's criticisms of Wyclif are predominantly religious and theological: Wyclif was a traitor to the Catholic church, blasphemed against its sacred teaching and failed as a parish priest. Another critic of Wyclif took a different tack. Edwin de Lisle (1852-1920) came from a wealthy Catholic family and became the Unionist M.P. for Loughborough.[2] In an 1884 book *Wyclif Begat George*, he attacks Wyclif for his social ideas, especially the theory of dominion which he perceives as 'socialist'. This assault was a response to the visits of the American social reformer Henry George during the 1880s. George campaigned for land reform and De Lisle's book claims that Wyclif's theory of dominion had pre-empted these socialistic ideas.[3]

Hostile historians had long argued that Wyclif's career as a reformer started after his disappointment at losing the wardenship of Canterbury Hall. Stevenson and De Lisle, nothing if not hostile historians, make great play of this controversy. For Stevenson, the

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[1]. Joseph Stevenson, 1885, *The Truth about John Wyclif*, 59. Stevenson comes across as a mild-mannered academic, at variance with the violent language in his book. He studied theology at Durham University, became an Anglican priest and worked as a librarian at the university, acquiring a reputation for being 'a warm and welcoming individual. His study of 'the minefield of Reformation history' led him to 'conclude that the Roman Catholic church was where he belonged' and he was admitted to the Society of Jesus at the unusually advanced age of 71. F. Edwards, 'Joseph Stevenson', *ODNB*.

[2] Gerald Roberts, 'English Catholics and Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 74.296 (1985), 458. De Lisle was the son of Phillips de Lisle, founder of Mount St. Bernard Abbey.

[3] Edwin De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George and Dollinger's Luther,* 1884. The book is dedicated to 'the men of Leicestershire' which seems to refer to the Leicestershire cricket team. De Lisle, who describes himself as a cricketer, had been 'musing' in the cricket field at Lutterworth, where maybe Wyclif himself had mused when 'he made it the dream of his life … to establish the equality of men.' (*Wyclif Begat George*, 16.) De Lisle's son John would play cricket for Leicestershire in the 1920s and Tim Phillips de Lisle edited *Wisden* in 2003.

affair 'gives us an insight into the character of the Reformer, and prepares us for much which is to follow.' This, he says, was the great turning-point in Wyclif's career. Stevenson pushes his case too far, saying that Wyclif was 'defeated, disgraced and ruined'[4] and it was these 'grinding disappointments' which inspired Wyclif to oppose the church. De Lisle agrees. 'It is unfortunate for those who would believe in the disinterestedness of his purpose that his first salaried appointment was taken from him after an ineffective appeal to … the Court of Rome.'[5] It was after this that 'the germ of his fundamental radicalism began to show itself in the insinuations of his favourite doctrine, that dominion is founded in grace.'[6]

A favourite theme of Stevenson's, and one rarely articulated by Catholic critics, is that Wyclif at that point should have remembered his 'sacred calling' as a parish priest. He was only too apt to neglect his pastoral duties whilst still retaining the 'rank and emoluments' of the post.[7] Worse, Wyclif had remained within the Catholic church whilst not himself believing in its rituals and doctrines.[8] He had desecrated his church 'by saying the Mass which he believed in his heart to be a blasphemous fable and a dangerous deceit.'[9] Wyclif was a hypocrite, and, worse, 'acted the part of the traitor and the spy'[10] as he remained within the Catholic church whilst undermining it. As a result, Stevenson finds it hard to understand why nineteenth-century Protestants had canonised Wyclif. 'He is a papist and a priest, but finds himself quite at home among the members of the Tract Society in London and the Free Kirk in Edinburgh.'[11] 'We must … watch the crowd as it hurries by to worship at the shire of the Saint of Lutterworth [and] … the credulous ones … subscribe to the fund of the Wyclif Society', he says, disgustedly.[12]

[4] Stevenson, *John Wyclif*, 25. Feelings, he says, exacerbated when Wyclif was overlooked for the position of Bishop of Worcester. Stevenson repeats an accusation made in the fifteenth century by Thomas Netter.
[5] De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George*, 22.
[6] Ibid., 23.
[7] Stevenson, *Truth about John Wyclif*, 27.
[8] Ibid., 28.
[9] Ibid., vii.
[10] Ibid., 33.
[11] Ibid., v.
[12] Ibid., vi.

Stevenson repeats the familiar criticisms that Wyclif had taught heresy and insurrection and had inspired the 1381 rising. He 'held heretical opinions, taught them, and maintained them until the last day of his unhappy life.'[13] Stevenson gives us Wyclif the Calvinist. He promoted predestinarianism, a doctrine of 'absolute decrees'[14] and his ideas inspired Jean Calvin, who 'borrowed his heresy from Wyclif.'[15] 'Wyclif, he writes, held that the sinner who is foredoomed by God … can never have true contrition for past sin; this … being reserved for the predestinate alone. … Could any system be devised better calculated to drive to despair the returning sinner[?]'[16] |Most of Wyclif's later followers did not properly understand the full extent of this heresy, which amounted to 'blasphemies … against the Three Persons of the Ever-Blessed Trinity, and … scurrilous obscenities with which he assailed various articles of faith and practice; truths, which Protestants and Catholics alike hold in respect and veneration'.[17]

Edwin De Lisle's criticism in *Wyclif Begat George* was different, being focused upon what he saw as the long-term effects of his theory of dominion, which Stevenson barely mentions. De Lisle, by contrast, mentions little else. This, for him, was Wyclif's 'fundamental teaching'; that 'to sin was to forfeit the rights of inheritance and grace.'[18] Wyclif, by this reading, was predominantly a social reformer who had been compelled, by the spirit of his time, to have 'clothed his political ideas and secular aspirations in the language of theology.'[19] De Lisle adopted this eccentric argument because the principle purpose of his book was to draw a direct line between Wyclif and the American socialist Henry George, who, in 1884, was engaged on one of his regular lecture tours of Britain and Ireland. George's book *Progress and Poverty* advocating land reform and mass

[13] Ibid., 108.
[14] Ibid., 114.
[15] Ibid., 113.
[16] Ibid. Stevenson cites *Trialogus*, IV.24, where Wyclif writes 'only the predestinate is contrite for past sins; by abbreviating their sorrow, the foreknown demonstrate absence of contrition.' Wyclif, in common with other scholastic thinkers, differentiates those predestined to heaven from the 'foreknown' whom God knows will be damned. In this, they followed Augustine. Wyclif was not anticipating (or inspiring) Calvin, who taught double predestination: God has predetermined who will be saved and who will be damned.
[17] Ibid., 110.
[18] De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George*, 5.
[19] Ibid., 19.

literacy, was published in Britain in 1880 and became a best-seller. It, and his personal appearances, were 'deeply inspirational to the mass of working-people.'[20]

According to De Lisle, George's ideas about the redistribution of wealth were descended from Wyclif, who had attacked the principle of hereditary property by maintaining that 'grace alone gave title to possess.'[21] For De Lisle, the root of Henry George's ideas could be found in Wyclif's theory of dominion. If the wealth of the rich were transferred to the poor, then 'the Gospel according to George is complete'. This is simply 'the modern version of the old heterodoxy, dominion by grace alone.'[22] The committee organising the recent Wyclif quincentenary commemorations would best have enhanced the understanding of Wyclif's teaching by distributing copies of George's *Poverty and Progress*.[23] The idea that sinfulness forfeits the right of possession, he says, was completely impractical, as then 'who could enjoy, in peace, the fruit of his labour?'[24] 'Imagine today if a Birmingham manufacturer cut a sorry figure in the Divorce Court and so his workmen would be entitled to seize his mills and factories and his palatial residence in the suburbs!'[25] This polemic, of course, does not stand up to scrutiny. Nineteenth-century social reformers like George were not seeking to link possession to personal godliness; Wyclif's ideas *were* grounded in theology and his advocacy of disendowment for those in a state of sin was limited to the church establishment. There was some suggestion in Wyclif's writing that the proceeds of disendowment could be used for the relief of the poor, but his tenets cannot sensibly be compared with nineteenth-century socialist calls for redistribution of wealth.

Stevenson avoids the hot potato of dominion, just repeating the old accusation that Wyclif had promoted sedition because his theories encouraged ignorant men to consider themselves as wise as their masters and teachers and the unavoidable result was that their respect for authority broke down.[26] 'The principles of insubordination and

[20] Peter D'A. Jones, 'Henry George and British Labor Politics', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 46. 2 (1987), 245-6.
[21] De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George*, 16-17.
[22] Ibid., 41-2.
[23] Ibid., 31.
[24] Ibid., 27.
[25] Ibid., 29.
[26] Stevenson, *John Wyclif*, 59.

lawlessness which are so prominent in the doctrines of John Wyclif [found] a ready acceptance with the uneducated masses [who] would easily understand his arguments when he told them they were at liberty to form their own opinions.' They 'made the practical results of his teaching known by fire, rapine, and bloodshed.'[27] De Lisle also mentions that once Wyclif's ideas began to spread, there was an accompanying rise in 'popular tumults and civil dissensions'.[28] Stevenson, unlike De Lisle, puts the effect on the Church and spiritual life at the centre of his argument. He had argued that Wyclif betrayed his church, and the spread of his social ideas had led to a fall in attendance at Mass, an assertion for which Stevenson had no evidence. The decline in respect inevitably spilled over into political causes, and soon found a leader in the person of John Ball, who had 'for many years embraced the doctrines of Wyclif.'[29] Stevenson concludes that the insurrection was 'a natural result of the teaching of John Wyclif' though Wyclif himself was at the time safe in his 'comfortable rectory'.[30] The principles Wyclif attempted to force upon the people of England were, in short, 'socialistic'.[31]

Stevenson and De Lisle both find socialistic tendences in Wyclif's ideas. Stevenson deploys this poisonous adjective also in a startling passage in which he talks about Wyclif's attack upon the 'sanctity of domestic life' which would have perished had his principles been applied.[32] This appears in a section about Wyclif's assault upon the sacrament of matrimony. Wyclif sought to reduce matrimony to nothing more than a civil arrangement. His ideas, if adopted, would have given rise to a state akin to the worst days of Münster. Stevenson shudders to contemplate the moral conditions prevailing in Lutterworth when Wyclif was rector, evidently considering him another John of Leiden, and concluding that 'the advocates of "Free Love" may now accept him as their high priest.'[33]

It might be felt that by invoking antinomian chaos and the breakdown of family life in rural Leicestershire, Stevenson set an unbeatable mark in hysterical hyperbole about Wyclif.

[27] Ibid., 60.
[28] De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George*, 28.
[29] Stevenson, *John Wyclif*, 61.
[30] Ibid., 81-2.
[31] Ibid., ix.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 120-1.

However, De Lisle went yet further in an extraordinary conclusion suggesting that Wyclif's ideas could bring about the end of religion. Wyclif would recognise as his children the Nihilists who 'want to … do away with the human race'. The final result would be that the people would reject any form of repressing order, and therefore would discard 'the thought of a Supreme Rule, the Living God.' Thus, 'the tendency of the Wyclif idea' would be the destruction of belief in God.[34]

13.2 The 'socialistic doctrines' of the Lollards

While biographies of Wyclif were pouring off the presses at the end of the nineteenth century, the Lollards fell completely out of vogue. Most writers simply ignored them, but for some they were figures of opprobrium. They were usually perceived as lower-class, rabble-rousers and 'socialists' who adulterated Wyclif's ideas and turned them into levelling schemes shorn of Wyclif's theology. This trend had been in evidence throughout the nineteenth century, reversing the historiographical focus of the eighteenth, when writers, in general had paid greater attention to the Lollards than Wyclif, in part, perhaps, because they seemed easier to understand. By the end of the nineteenth century, Wyclif had come to be widely regarded as a worthy reformer and patriot and the Lollards' reputation as a rabble of troublemakers, previously articulated mostly by Catholics and sceptics like David Hume, was more widely emphasised. Protestant writers who were passionate in praise of Wyclif, by this time wrote as viciously about his followers as Catholic critics.

Montagu Burrows is a prime example. He was the greatest of cheerleaders for Wyclif but describes the Lollards as fanatics who espoused 'levelling and socialistic doctrines',[35] and were responsible for bringing Wyclif's name into disrepute. Hostile historians such as Lingard and Dean Hook had been able to stigmatise Wyclif by association with the Lollards, suggesting, for instance, that his ideas had inspired the 1381 insurrection. The problem, for Burrows, was that an uneducated and lower-class element were attracted into Lollardy. Genuine Wycliffites, such as his immediate circle at Oxford and supporters amongst the gentry, needed to be distinguished from these wild spirits. It was not

[34] De Lisle, *Wyclif Begat George*., 52.
[35] Burrows, *Wyclif's place in history*, 13.

surprising that 'their ignorance and fanaticism should increase as the movement was driven into … secret channels, and that rank socialistic extravagances should grow up amongst them.'[36] Walter Shirley also differentiates between the worthy followers of Wyclif and this wider group: 'under the common name of Lollards was gathered every species of religious malcontent. Restless fanatics like Swynderby, … Socialist preachers like John Balle … all united in popular … estimation with the genuine disciples of John Wickliffe.'[37] The same ideas were espoused by the Jesuit writer Joseph Stevenson. For him, Wyclif's death made his radical followers more dangerous. Once 'the respect of the people for constituted authority, whether in Church or State' had broken down, 'every innovation in religion and politics was easy, and the descent from order to insubordination was natural and unavoidable.'[38] He suggests, without evidence, that the spread of Wyclif's ideas led to a fall in church attendance and disregard for the sacraments and gave rise to 'theories as to the rights of humanity [and] the limits of the obedience which the subject owes to the Sovereign … among the working men' and 'the the seeds of … mischief were widely sown.[39]

Charles Oman, military historian and high church Tory, implicated the 'wilder spirits' amongst Wycliffites in the 1381 rising, describing them as having 'pressed [Wyclif's] teaching to the advocacy of pure communism.'[40] Wyclif's ideas filtered down to 'the lower strata of the nation' where they chimed with 'oppressed and discontented men' who 'began talking to putting an end to all difference between man and man, and dividing all things equally between them.'[41] The economist and Liberal M.P. Thorold Rogers, in *Six Centuries of Work and Wages* (1891), an economic history of England, also argues that Wyclif's ideas had spread among the common people and encouraged levelling principles. He blames this process squarely on the 'poor priests'. In founding this preaching order, Wyclif had taken a step whose consequences got out of control, according to Rogers, as they evolved into dangerous rabble-rousers. 'Their violence of language, their contempt of authority, their advocacy of equality, in its coarsest and

[36] Ibid., 15.
[37] *FZ*, lxvii.
[38] Stevenson, *John Wyclif*, 126.
[39] Ibid., 128.
[40] Charles Oman, *A History of England*, 1895, 203.
[41] Ibid., 204.

homeliest form, soon distinguished them, and disgusted those who'd first favoured the movement.'[42] Rogers' memorable account goes on to blame rising discontent among the peasantry upon the poor priests who, by introducing them to the bible, 'had honeycombed the minds of the upland folk with what may be called religious socialism,'[43] teaching them that the 'first parents of all mankind lived by simple toil, and were the ancestors of the proud noble and knight, as well as of the downtrodden serf and despised burgher.'[44] This is an extraordinary assertion and completely unsupported. There is no convincing evidence that Wyclif founded such an order at all, and this catalogue of incendiary topics is an invention of Rogers' own. The suggestion is no more than an expression of his own preconceptions.

The only historian of the time to produce an even-handed treatment of the Lollards, not surprisingly, was Lechler, who deals with them briefly in a chapter at the end of his biography of Wyclif. Lechler differentiates between an 'inner circle' of Wyclif's immediate associates and a more diffuse group forming an 'outer circle'. Lack of historical evidence means we can learn little about the inner life of this latter group, which Lechler soberly states was 'characterised by striving after holiness, zeal for scriptural truth, uprooting of error and Church reform.'[45] Above all, they gained power by becoming familiar with the translated bible.[46]

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Just as antagonistic historians condemned the Lollards for their socialistic tendencies, so socialist historians claimed them as forebears, with equally little justification. The Chartist Thomas Cooper, whilst in Stafford gaol in 1845, wrote a poem, *The Purgatory of Suicides*, nine hundred stanzas long, which mentions Wyclif and the Lollards as early exponents of working-class struggle. Mike Saunders calls this poem 'one of the Chartist movement's most significant cultural landmarks.' The poem stands as an example of Chartists' inclination to find medieval exemplars of working-class struggle as evinced by

[42] Thorold Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, 1891, 251.
[43] Ibid., 254.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Lechler, *Wycliffe*, 443.
[46] Ibid., 444.

Saxon opposition to the 'Norman yoke' and priestcraft.[47] The short section which mentions Wyclif links his reform to Luther's, claiming a common Saxon heritage against the Roman hierarchy:

'Thou art our own, great Saxon! We descry
Our brave old Wickliffe's soul restored in thee;
And claim thee for our honoured land of Lollardy!

Honour, all honour to ye, glorious band
Who broke the bondage of the Priest of Rome!
Sires of our common Saxon fatherland,
England and Germany, a glorious home
Ye left us, - if ye will! – amid the gloom
"Lighting a candle" by your noble lives
And martyred deaths that, quenchless, shall illume
Our land for aye!'[48]

The Chartist Ernest Jones gave a series of lectures in 1850, *Canterbury versus Rome*, in which he talked about the fall of the Papal Church in England. He refers to 'the democratic Lollards' who preached 'the eternal gospel of equality, liberty, fraternity.' According to Jones, the Anglican established church had been 'built on the blood of the Lollards.'[49]

Friedrich Engels mentions the Lollards as one of many European dissenting movements in his 1850 book on the German Peasants' War. Engels, like the critics of the Lollards, differentiates their ideas from the 'middle-class' intellectual heresy of Wyclif: 'in south France, in England and Bohemia, we find the lower nobility joining hands with the cities in their struggle against the clergy and in their heresies' [whereas] 'a totally different character was assumed by that heresy which was a direct expression of the peasant and plebeian demands, and which was almost always connected with an insurrection.'[50] John Ball was an example of a heretic of the second type, taking Wyclif's ideas further in

[47] M. Sanders, 2021, 'Making Sense of Chartism's Multiple Medievalisms' in *Subaltern Medievalisms: Medievalism "from below" in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, edited by D. Matthews & M. Sanders, 2021, Boydell & Brewer, 95.
[48] Thomas Cooper, *The Purgatory of Suicides, A Prison-Rhyme*, Book 8, Verses VII-VIII, 1853.
[49] Ibid., 97-98.
[50] Friedrich Engels, 'Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg', 28. *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 1850. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/peasant-war-germany/index.htm.

the direction of socialism and insurrection. For Engels, all medieval heretical groups (including the Lollards) had a list of demands for social and economic reforms, such as seeking to 'make the nobility equal to the peasant' and 'abolish serfdom, ground rents, taxes, privileges, and at least the most flagrant differences of property', ideas which he felt were a natural consequence of ancient Christian doctrine.[51]

Karl Marx' daughter Eleanor wrote about the Lollards in a 1896 pamphlet, *The Working Class Movement In England*. She regards John Ball as a key preacher of Lollard ideas despite being loathed by Wyclif. His homilies calling for redistribution of wealth 'were repeated the length and breadth of the land'.[52] For her, as for other socialist writers claiming the Lollards as ancestors, the only important part of their message was the social and economic aspect; their religious status as heretics was of no interest, merely defining them as dissenters.

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Lollards were widely ignored by historians. What historiography there was had reduced them to little more than a footnote to Wyclif's career. Their social ideas and putative influence on wider dissenting movements were of more interest than the religious tenets that were the real substance which defined them as a group. Detractors and supporters alike readily, and anachronistically, defined them as socialists or communists. The twentieth century was to see a remarkable revival in their historiographical fortunes, along with a corresponding decline in interest in Wyclif. The first writer to look anew at the Lollards was George Macauley Trevelyan in the 1899 book with which we close, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*.

[51] Ibid., 29.
[52] https://www.marxists.org/archive/eleanor-marx/1895/working-class-england/ch01.htm accessed 14th Nov. 2024.

14 G.M. Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe*

'It is pleasant to turn from dreary annals of political contest to a thing more vital, the rise among the English of an indigenous Protestantism.'[1] Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe* appeared in 1899, based upon his fellowship dissertation.[2] Its structure is awkward, being a general history of England between the years 1376-1385, with some emphasis on Wyclif and the Lollards, and two additional chapters dedicated solely to the later history of the Lollards up to 1520. Trevelyan acknowledges that the 'Age of Wycliffe' of the title was vague and that the chapters on the Lollards were necessary as, 'without this continuation the Age of Wycliffe would lose half its meaning.'[3] The book is somewhat unbalanced as a result, but the point is valid: to get a rounded understanding of the Wycliffite 'movement' it *is* necessary to study developments during the later fifteenth century; but hardly anyone had. Few writers had dedicated space to the history of the Lollards after the Oldcastle rising and by the end of the nineteenth century the Lollards in general had fallen out of historiographical fashion while interest in Wyclif had reached a high pitch. Trevelyan's book was the first to reverse this trend and pre-empted the explosion of interest in the Lollards which would follow in the twentieth century.

According to Joseph Hernon, in a 1976 article coinciding with the centenary of Trevelyan's birth, this is 'Whig history at its best, viewed through a self-confident Liberal faith'.[4] For David Cannadine, it 'was a zestful work of confident youth, and the jauntiness of the prose sometimes reads like a parody of Macaulay.'[5] Trevelyan considered this period crucial because for him it was foundational in the emergence of modern England, as the rise of religious dissent and the upheaval of the 1381 rising 'bespoke the rise of English national consciousness.'[6] He writes that 'Wycliffe and the Lollards represented the struggle for liberty of thought against the power of the Church over men's minds.'[7]

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[1] George Macaulay Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, 1899, 291.
[2] D. Cannadine, 'G.M. Trevelyan', *ODNB*.
[3] Trevelyan, *Age of Wycliffe*, vii.
[4] Joseph M. Hernon, 'The Last Whig Historian and Consensus History: George Macaulay Trevelyan, 1876-1962', *The American Historical Review* 81.1 (1976), 71.
[5] *ODNB*. Thomas Babington Macaulay was Trevelyan's great-uncle, and he recognised that his own views differed little from Macaulay's. (Hernon, 'The Last Whig Historian', 69.)
[6] *ODNB*.
[7] Hernon, 'The Last Whig Historian', 70.

Trevelyan was a radical agnostic, having imbibed this viewpoint at Cambridge. Writing to his brother Charles, Trevelyan said that democracy was 'all in all my religion ... [it] is I think the corollary of the teaching of Christ.'[8] Prosperity, education and intellectual freedom were more important to Trevelyan than piety and this mindset explains his focus on the social impacts of Wyclif's ideas, at the expense of his theological attitudes, in reality a more significant part of his thought.

Trevelyan also overlooks, or ignores, the medieval context of Wyclif's thought. Against all the evidence, he asserts that Wyclif 'was not an academician'. Even among the plethora of dubious claims made by historians about Wyclif, this stands out. If there was one thing Wyclif most assuredly *was*, it was a dyed-in-the-wool intellectual. Trevelyan needed to prise Wyclif out of his role as scholastic thinker to remould him as a man for all times, claiming that 'instinct and feeling were the true guides of his mind, not ... close reasoning.'[9] Removing Wyclif from his context made it impossible to understand him, but, as this study has shown, Trevelyan was far from being the first historian to do that.

The Wyclif of *England in the Age of Wycliffe* is the founder of a new Protestant religion, 'the originator of a school',[10] whose worship was 'essentially Protestant'.[11] His importance was his influence on England's progress into a free and advanced nation: 'Wycliffe, in spite of some crudity of thought and utterance, was the only man of his age who saw deeply into the needs of the present and the possibilities of the future, and his life had an incalculable effect on the religion of England, and through religion on politics and society.'[12]

This was achieved, in the main, via preaching and the foundation of the order of 'poor priests'. Trevelyan barely mentions bible translation, emphasising the importance of the poor priests for the dissemination of Wyclif's tenets. He, and his followers, repudiated the importance of ceremony and sacraments; for them the sermon was their 'special weapon' and 'distinguishing mark'.[13] However, Trevelyan believed that Wyclif erred in his

[8] Ibid., 69.
[9] Trevelyan, *Age of Wycliffe*, 170-1.
[10] Ibid., 173.
[11] Ibid., 177.
[12] Ibid., 169.
[13] Ibid., 177.

insistence on apostolic poverty for his preachers. The insistence on absolute poverty put off the well-to-do and the educated: 'few young men were found willing to sell all they had' observes Trevelyan, drily. This meant that the preachers were recruited from the lower classes, and ill-educated.[14] 'To connect blessedness with a state of poverty and ignorance was an error which should have died with St. Francis'.[15] Trevelyan regretfully concludes that 'the religion became almost exclusively one for the lower classes.'[16]

These ideas echo those of Thorold Rogers, who also claimed that the recruitment of uneducated preachers into Wyclif's order had undermined his message, though for Rogers the ill-effects were much more marked.[17] Like Ernest Jones,[18] Trevelyan finds similarities between Lollards and Chartists, comparing the 1414 rising to the 1848 demonstration on Kennington Common, emphasising, though, that the former was driven by purely religious motivations.[19] Trevelyan portrays Wyclif as a social reformer, his followers agents of change, but, unlike Rogers or Jones, is categorical that they were *not* revolutionaries, emphasising that Wyclif and his followers preached only against clerical endowments, never lay property. Like many writers before him, he had to swallow the thistle that was Wyclif's theory of dominion via grace. He finds the theory a 'curious metaphysical juggle' because Wyclif having argued 'in favour of communism' by stating that all things are owned in common by the righteous, 'makes a right about face', asserting that the good must leave the bad in possession and 'a wicked master must be obeyed.' The unfortunate effect of this inconsistency was that Wyclif was seen to have given 'his blessing to the theory of communism [which] was welcome news to agitators throughout the country.'[20] However, Trevelyan gets around the difficulties by arguing that this was an intellectual dead end which he dropped when he moved on to the real work of reform of the church and 'lost all interest in his old theories about possession, and, as he became more revolutionary in religion, became more conservative in social and political questions.'[21] Wyclif continued to emphasise that temporal lords had a right to

[14] Ibid., 306.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 339.
[17] See p.257.
[18] See p.258.
[19] Trevelyan, *Age of Wycliffe*, 338.
[20] Ibid., 199.
[21] Ibid.

their property but the clergy did not and 'of communism we hear not another word.'[22] Much of this misrepresents Wyclif's thought,[23] but the important thing for Trevelyan was to show that Wyclif and his followers were orderly agents of progressive change rather than disruptive agitators or, worse, communists. Wyclif sent out the poor priests 'to preach … not communism, or revolt of any sort against lay lordship.'[24] 'Lollardy had no connection with socialism or even with social revolt. … We possess reports of proceedings against scores of Lollards … yet I have been unable to find, between the years 1382 and 1520, only one case of a Lollard accused of holding communistic theories.'[25]

There are inconsistencies in Trevelyan's book; betraying, perhaps, that this was a post-graduate thesis. He changes his mind between the main body of the book, when discussing Wyclif, and the final two chapters on the Lollards, on two important ideas: the extent to which Wyclif was imbued with scholasticism, and how far it was his intention to found a new religion. Trevelyan had disassociated Wyclif from scholasticism; however when discussing the Lollards he observes, rightly, that 'in their hands the subtlety and scholasticism of Wycliffe's doctrines were abandoned'.[26] He says that Wyclif had 'sketched out a new religion',[27] but his later conclusion is more subtle: 'Wycliffe, though he was fighting the Church, liked to think that he was only converting it.'[28] These changes of emphasis perhaps indicate that Trevelyan's own understanding was deepening as he wrote.

A curious aspect of the book is Trevelyan's unexpected enthusiasm for martyrdom, which is difficult, today, to square with his progressive attitude to history. His writing about it is similar to the work of evangelicals like Charlotte Tonna and Emily Holt.[29] He (like Holt) is critical of the first generation of Wycliffites for their reluctance to become

[22] Ibid.
[23] Trevelyan was right to point out the contradiction between Wyclif's idea that the elect hold property in common with the necessity to obey wicked lords. Antony Kenny, deadpan, wrote that 'It cannot be said that Wyclif teases out the relationships between these different laws in a way which would provide useable criteria for resolving conflicts between them.' (Kenny, *Wyclif*, 48.)
[24] Trevelyan, *Age of Wycliffe*, 199.
[25] Ibid., 340.
[26] Ibid., 316.
[27] Ibid., 173.
[28] Ibid., 319.
[29] See section 9.5.

martyrs.[30] 'The good impression they had made … would … have been greatly strengthened, if they had shown that unbending spirit, that joyful defiance of death, that power almost superhuman of enduring torture, by which their successors in the end won the battle against authority.'[31] That a historian who was agnostic, more interested in social progress than religious truth, and suspicious of the mess and violence he associated with the medieval period would write this way about martyrdom tells us something of the spirit of his era. It is instructive to compare Trevelyan's view with that of David Hume, another historian who was sceptical about religion. Hume was dismissive of Wyclif as 'tainted with enthusiasm' and regarded the Lollards as a rabble of insurrectionists, whereas for Trevelyan they played a key role in England's progress by building and sustaining an 'indigenous Protestantism', an idea which Hume would not have supported. While Hume's view was not shared by all his peers, this contrast demonstrates how the intellectual environment had shifted between 1750 and 1900.

[30] Missing the fact that execution was not available for heresy in England until 1401.
[31] Trevelyan, *Age of Wycliffe*, 319.

15 Conclusion

> History is a narrative in which happenings and people are turned into events and characters. … No story … is ever an innocent or objective representation of the outside world. All story is fiction, and that must include historiography. … Historiography … is also ideology.[1] Phillip R. Davies.

The Evangelical Charlotte Tonna wrote of John Oldcastle at his trial that he 'kept in perfect peace and self-possession, by having his mind stayed upon his God … publicly humbling himself into lowly prostration and tearful contrition.'[2] The Catholic John Lingard, describing the same scene, said that Oldcastle was 'arrogant and insulting', his judges 'mild and dignified.'[3] This is a perfect example of, to borrow the title of an essay collection by Paul Ricoeur, the 'Conflict of Interpretations' which has been evident throughout investigation. Historians of the heretic, hero, apostle or patriot John Wyclif and his seditious, loyal, evangelical followers the Lollards have amply demonstrated the truth of Philip Davies' words. No-one has written about them without using value-laden words. The contentious and controversial nature of the ideas they espoused, the blurred and imprecise nature of those ideas, and the lack of proper historical evidence meant that interpretations varied wildly and were applied to schisms and disputes centuries after they lived.

Not only that. Wyclif and the Lollards stood for principles, or took positions on, many matters which evoked passionate feelings among writers of later centuries. Protestantism. Evangelicalism. Englishness. Opposition to foreign religion. Salvation. Everlasting life. They, and their ideas, could be used to support causes of critical importance to these writers, to justify their ideas and prejudices, to clothe them with historical precedent.

But of course, in this case, most historians who wrote about Wyclif and the Lollards were not interpreting *texts*. Or, if they were, they were using secondary material; often Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* or accounts written by enemies of the Lollards. The dearth of

[1] Phillip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel': A Study in Biblical Origins*, T & T Clark International, 1992, 3.
[2] Tonna, *English Martyrology*, I.34.
[3] Lingard, *History of England*, 3rd edn., 1825, V.5.

reliable source material means ‘interpretation’ was replaced by the creation or propagation of myths. Writers had no choice but to utilise vague or unreliable sources which allowed them to cast their subjects in whatever light they saw fit. They could laud or villainise them, happily unfettered by the existence of inconvenient facts. Their very shadowiness meant writers could lather their favoured hobby horse.

It was perfectly possible, for instance, for one side to be convinced that the Oldcastle revolt of 1414 was entirely fictitious, invented by the clergy to discredit the Lollards, and for the other to be equally certain that a sizeable Lollard army was marching on London determined to dethrone the king. Some writers did acknowledge that the facts about the rising were difficult to ascertain (as they still are) but most blindly touted the line which best fitted with their predetermined position. It was the same with Wyclif’s position on dominion in grace. Since no-one really knew what he believed, and in any case his belief changed over time, this irksome political philosophy could be located where one liked on the spectrum from rabid sedition to simple common sense. Wyclif could be recruited as a founding father for the Protestant denomination of one’s choice, his ideas adjusted or edited as required to turn him into a Calvinist, an orthodox Anglican, a Baptist or Quaker. There was a continuum between sedition and piety. No-one claimed the Lollards as pillars of the establishment. If you held them up as pious forebears of Protestantism you ignored the suggestions of them as agents of disruption, and vice versa. Historians most often ignored those parts of the historical record which did not chime with their interpretation of choice rather than deny or seek to disprove them.

This study includes writing of many different types. Some intended as objective history, many deliberately polemical. We have seen that all the writers, through this entire two-hundred-year period, were affected to some degree by bias, their own prejudices and preconceptions and those of the wider society in which they operated.

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The long chronological view taken in this study has also permitted us to discern wider trends in the historiography. We have considered Wyclif and the Lollards together, but the relative importance which writers assigned to the heresiarch and his followers fluctuated over time. In the eighteenth century, writers of general and ecclesiastical

history had a lot more to say about the Lollards than they did about Wyclif, whose ideas were complex and contradictory. This tradition began with Bale and Foxe in the sixteenth century, for whom the Lollards fitted much better into the desired model of evangelical piety than did Wyclif, and was continued in the martyrologies and general histories produced in the eighteenth century. This was an age where Catholicism retained a potent threat and uncomplicated Protestant role models were sought. The same attitude was displayed by Joseph Milner in his search for 'true Christians' at the start of the nineteenth century. However, the balance shifted shortly after 1800 with academic attention starting to be focussed on Wyclif, and the development of something of a Wyclif 'industry' by the time of the Quincentennial. Wyclif was being recruited and reinvented as a *patriotic* founding father of Anglicanism. At the same time, the Lollards' star waned as fear of the Catholic threat diminished, and nervousness of mob rule and socialism increased. The Lollards were increasingly associated by establishment and mainstream historians with chaos, disorder and antinomianism. However, they never lost their place in the loyal hearts of Evangelicals, for whom the glory of martyrdom for Protestant truth never tarnished. The wind was to shift again in the twentieth century as university historians opened new vistas in 'Lollard studies' by analysing their texts and sermons, while Wyclif was once again sidelined.

These shifting fashions in Lollard and Wycliffite study reflect a plethora of developments over our two-century period of study. In these movements, we can discern changing attitudes to Catholicism and organised labour on the part of the establishment and educated class. The historiographical shifts betoken extensive changes in British society over this period, in particular with respect to the expansion of education. Books in 1700 were still rare, expensive and difficult to produce. By 1900 they were commonplace. The steady increase in literacy rates over this period drove changes in the business of publishing, the first sign of this being the huge popularity of Hume's *History of England* in the 1750s and the subsequent explosion in the production of multi-volume histories. The nineteenth century saw this process continuing so that by the 1870s huge numbers of evangelical novels were being produced and given away as Sunday school prizes. At the same time, the modern university system was being created and the profession of academic historian came into being. These trends are clearly reflected in the texts

examined in this study, in, for instance, the plethora of evangelical novels lionising the Lollards, or the dedicated effort put in by historians and editors to smooth and re-present Wyclif into familiar Anglican lineaments.

One could choose any historical topic and chart its historiography and find that historians' treatments often tell us as much or more about their own times as they do about their topic of study. Wyclif and the Lollards, however, have provided a particularly rich collection of examples, both because of the paucity of sources and the divisive nature of the individuals concerned. *No-one* who wrote about them was able to view Wyclif and the Lollards wholly dispassionately. It would be arrogant to suppose that this study has fared any better at achieving objectivity than did those whom it has tried to study. Examining the work of such a range of writers, historians and polemicists has allowed us to analyse them against one another bringing out their individual prejudices and inconsistencies. Distance in time lends clarity too, so these are easier to perceive today than when the books were written. If anyone reads this in future centuries, its own biases will undoubtedly be clear.

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