

RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY OR POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY? -- THE REACTION
OF THE ENGLISH CROWN TO WYCLIF AND HIS FOLLOWERS (1377-1414)

by

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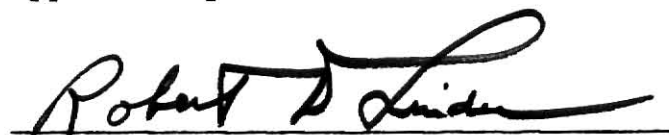
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. ENGLAND IN THE AGE OF EDWARD III	9
III. JOHN WYCLIF AND THE CROWN	26
IV. LOLLARDY FROM 1382 TO THE OLDCASTLE RISING	52
V. ORTHODOXY OR EXPEDIENCY?--THE PROOF	73
VI. CONCLUSIONS	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84

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Thanks to all who have made this work possible . . .

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To all of you, this work is cheerfully and gratefully dedicated.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In January 1414, Sir John Oldcastle (d. 1417), a knight of Herefordshire, attempted a revolution against the English Crown which, had it succeeded, would have made Oldcastle the Regent of England.¹ This attempt, which included plans for the capture of King Henry V (1413-1422) at Eltham in Kent and the takeover of the city of London, failed because spies in Oldcastle's camp betrayed his plot to the king and Henry made timely use of this information. While the number of Oldcastle's followers in this revolt has been placed as high as twenty thousand and as low as five hundred, there is no question that Oldcastle drew support from both nobles and commoners. That such a plot could be organized among followers living geographically as far from London as Bristol and Derby indicates that some kind of communication system existed among the rebels.²

Who were these rebels and what was the cause of this revolt? Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham from 1408-1414, was the recognized leader of Lollardy in England.³ This does not mean that all the Lollards in England supported Oldcastle's rebellion, nor does it mean that all of the rebels were Lollards. Nevertheless, the attempt was carried out in the name of Lollardy by a man who had escaped from the Tower where he was being held for Canterbury's archbishop, Thomas Arundel (d. 1414), because of his unorthodox religious beliefs. And so, from 1414 onward, the terms Lollard and traitor became almost indistinguishable

in the minds of many English people. Of course, the term Lollard had been a derisive one since Henry Crump, one of Wyclif's opponents, introduced it into English in 1382. Furthermore, the leaders of the medieval Church, both Rome and Canterbury, consistently maintained that the movement started by the secular cleric John Wyclif (1328?-1384) was a danger to the state as well as to the Church. But it was Oldcastle's rising which gave the Crown prima facie evidence that Lollardy, besides being heretical, was treasonous as well. As John A.F. Thomson noted, the Crown took a more active part in the persecution of Lollards after Oldcastle's abortive revolt.⁴

Medieval writers, therefore, linked the terms Lollard and traitor after the 1414 rising. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interaction of the Crown on one hand and Wyclif and his followers on the other, before Oldcastle's revolt to determine if this same concern for political expediency precipitated the Crown's actions, or if in the "Age of Faith," the Crown's actions were based upon religious zeal. February 1377, the public debut of Wyclif's religious nonconformity, provides the starting point for this study, although some events from the half century before this date which shed light upon the relationship between Wyclif and the Crown have also been included.

Much has been written concerning the early years of Wyclif's movement. The standard biography of Wyclif is Herbert B. Workman's John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church (1926). Many other authors have contributed interpretations

concerning this cleric, his movement, and its relationship to the Crown.⁵ Conflicting opinions are represented by George Macaulay Trevelyan's England in the Age of Wycliffe (1899) and Joseph H. Dahmus' The Prosecution of John Wyclif (1952). Trevelyan continually stressed the support given Lollardy in Parliament, particularly by the Commons, and further noted the protection afforded Lollards on the estates of some powerful English magnates. He said that "the Bishops had not ventured to face all this opposition for the sake of weeding the Church."⁶ Dahmus on the other hand stated bluntly that, "the government's attitude toward Lollardy [was] consistently hostile from king to Commons inclusive."⁷ Neither claimed that the Lollards received support from the kings of the period but while Dahmus stressed papal-regal cooperation as the basis for the Crown's anti-Lollard policies, Trevelyan noted more practical considerations on the part of the Crown. He implied, for example, that Richard II's return to England from his 1385 campaign in Ireland was due more to the hostile Irish environment than to the request of his bishops who feared an outbreak of Lollardy in England.⁸

However, more than any other work, H.G. Richardson's 1936 article, "Heresy and Lay Power under Richard II," was the inspiration for this thesis. Richardson studied the new powers given to the Archbishop of Canterbury by the Parliament of 1382. From this study, Richardson concluded that the English medieval Church had to give up some of its power over heresy trials in return for the Crown's aid in prosecuting heretics.⁹ Richardson

limited his discussion only to the specific changes in English heresy laws which this Parliament generated as a result of the archbishop's request. My examination of the last year of the reign of Edward III (1327-1377) and the reigns of Richard II (1377-1399), Henry IV (1399-1413) and Henry V (1413-1422) up to the Oldcastle rising, indicates that a "give and take" process was practiced constantly throughout the period under discussion and that the political benefit which the king could derive from the battle between the Church on one hand and Wyclif and his followers on the other was of more concern to the Crown than the suppression of heresy. Therefore, I shall put Richardson's specific conclusion into a more general framework.

While this thesis will attempt to broaden the scope of Richardson's more specific study, certain limitations are necessary. Richardson's work must not be overextended, as it considers more the relationship between the Church and the Crown rather than the connection between the Crown and the Lollards. In addition to the chronological limits already set forth, this thesis contains some built-in topical restrictions which, while they extend some of Richardson's conclusions concerning the Crown-Lollard relationship, will de-emphasize the connection between the Crown and the Church.

I have stressed in this study the roles of individuals both within and outside the Lollard movement who contributed either to the movement's growth or its suppression. Thus, the choice of persons discussed provides this study with a limit. The

examination of certain Lollard preachers, for example, does not mean that there were not other such preachers. On the other hand, I have not found geographical limitations useful. As the persons considered moved from parish to parish and diocese to diocese, I have tried to follow them rather than ignore their activities once they crossed a certain geographical border. While Lollards received different treatment from locale to locale, this thesis deals with the Crown-Lollard relationship, and thus the peculiarities of treatment which occurred due to the decisions of local bishops and administrators at the local level is not the subject of this discussion.

The topic which I have chosen for consideration provides a further limitation. As this thesis centers upon the Crown's reaction to Lollardy, the matters discussed are those which most directly affect the Crown-Lollard relationship. Thus, Wyclif himself is emphasized, not only because he was the founder of Lollardy, but also because of his relationship with the most important magnate of his time, John of Gaunt (1340-1399), the Duke of Lancaster. The Parliament of 1382, the "Lollard knights" at court, and the means by which Lollardy spread likewise are subjects which involve the relationship of the Crown and the Lollards, and are therefore included here. On the other hand, such incidents as the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 are minimized, as the role of the Lollards in this rising was slight.¹⁰ Likewise, the hair-splitting theological arguments of the Oxford scholars are scarcely mentioned, for although the Church was interested in such discussions, the Crown usually left such

disputes to the Church's watchful eye, so long as these debates remained academic exercises.

Chapter Two will provide some general background concerning the events and beliefs which probably were most influential in the formulation of Wyclif's thought. Religious protest such as Wyclif's usually originates when the institutional church is noticeably corrupt and may spread because of popular dissatisfaction or despair. Corruption of the Church, and popular dissatisfaction coupled with the horror of the Black Death were certainly influences which affected Wyclif's ideas, and Chapter Two provides some links between these ideas and the contemporary events in England.

Chapter Three discusses the events of Wyclif's life, emphasizing both his relationship to the Crown and those biographical facts in which the Crown would have had the most interest. Of course, the relationship between Gaunt and Wyclif receives considerable emphasis. Chapter Four considers some aspects of Lollardy from 1382-1414, again stressing incidents and problems in which the Crown's reaction to the Lollards was (or might have been expected to be) most pronounced. Chapter Five considers the evidence presented in light of the previous question--did the Crown act for reasons of orthodoxy or expediency? Finally, Chapter Six provides conclusions which the evidence seems to warrant. Following this general plan, I shall now consider those political and social elements of later medieval England which helped to form Wyclif's thought.

NOTES

¹The term "Crown" as used in this thesis means the king of England (or the regent when applicable) acting under the advice of his council(s). Sir Maurice Powicke in Medieval England, 1066-1485 (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1931), p. 103 best described the relationship of king and council members which together comprised the Crown:

The Crown as the source of justice and order still required advice. . . . The controlling body of king and advisers, as though moved by an instinct of self-preservation, adopted a systematic life of its own, and in this life the king's natural councillors never ceased to have their share. As individuals they had no definite right to be there, but they generally were there both in the king's council in Parliament, where they formed themselves into a House of Lords, and in the king's more permanent council.

For information on Oldcastle and his rebellion, see W.T. Waugh, "Sir John Oldcastle," English Historical Review 20 (1905): 434-55 and 637-58.

²John A.F. Thomson, The Later Lollards, 1414-1520 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 5.

³Oldcastle assumed the leadership of the Lollard movement sometime between 1410, when Archbishop Arundel warned him about his Lollard leanings, and his trial (September 23, 1413.)

⁴Thomson, Later Lollards, p. 5.

⁵Literature on the Lollards is voluminous. Of the more important recent scholars, A.G. Dickens and Margaret E. Aston deserve special mention for their in-depth observations on different aspects of Lollardy. Aston in "Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431," Past and Present 17 (1960): 1-44 provided a penetrating look at Lollardy as a force of social revolt. Dickens in Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) studied the later Lollards up to the Reformation in one area of England. Dickens preferred such an area study to consideration of the whole of England because the disparity of practice and belief among the various Lollard communities after the Oldcastle rising makes generalizations difficult. Another important Lollard scholar, Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, provided important insights into the governments of the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V and also considered the question of Lollards in high places in his book, Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). Of the older works, two of the most important are Sydney Armitage-Smith's John of Gaunt: King of

Castile and Leon, Duke of Aquitaine and Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Lincoln and Leicester, Seneschal of England (London: Oxford University Press, 1904) and Lewis Sergeant's John Wyclif: Last of the Schoolmen and First of the English Reformers (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893).

⁶George Macaulay Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), p. 331

⁷Joseph H. Dahmus, The Prosecution of John Wyclif (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. vi.

⁸Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe, p. 329.

⁹H.G. Richardson, "Heresy and Lay Power under Richard II," English Historical Review 51 (1936): 8.

¹⁰There is little doubt, however, that the Crown placed part of the blame for the Revolt of 1381 upon the Lollards. I discuss this in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGLAND IN THE AGE OF EDWARD III

The social and political conditions which worked to create Wyclif the Reformer, the Lollards and the Crown of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries did not suddenly manifest themselves in 1377. Rather, they gradually developed from early medieval times. But during the fifty years prior to the beginning of Wyclif's protest, those factors which most affected Wyclif's thought came to the fore. I will begin this discussion of Wyclif's England, therefore, by considering some aspects of the earlier years of Edward III's reign.

Events in England alone did not make the world to which Wyclif and his followers reacted. Nor were the political events occurring in England the only, or even the principal reasons for the birth and growth of Wyclif's discontent. Events from as far apart as Scotland and Rome, conditions as different in origin as the corruption of the clergy, the bubonic plague, the the Hundred Years' War, the rise of Parliament and the Avignon Papacy all helped to shape the world in which Lollardy began and grew. A general understanding of all these factors is necessary if the relationship between the Crown on the one hand and Wyclif and his followers on the other is to be seen in proper perspective. This chapter, therefore, will provide some links between occurrences in England in the age of Edward III and the thought of the Reformer.

With the exceptions of a brief constitutional crisis in 1341¹ and the senility of his last years, Edward III was a popular

monarch. Chivalric displays and successful military campaigning won for Edward the loyalty of his nobles and the obedience of his subjects. However one judges Edward himself, this king maintained an England which was at peace with itself. The wars which Edward and his barons fought were against foreigners, not the people of England. "Peace at home," wrote historian C. Warren Hollister, "and war abroad characterized the age of Edward III."²

Edward's wars made England look in two directions. To the north was Scotland, from which raiders periodically attacked the upper portion of England. Edward began to fight on this front as early as 1333, but it was not until 1346, at the battle of Neville's Cross, that the English won a decisive victory, capturing the Scottish king, David II.³ The young Wyclif may have seen English soldiers travelling north through his homeland of Yorkshire; he must have noticed the fear which the Scottish raids generated in northern England.

However, the chief military concern of Edward III was his war across the English Channel. The Hundred Years' War began in 1338. Using his alleged right to the French throne as an excuse, Edward invaded France.⁴ However, England and France fought for more tangible reasons than Edward's theoretical right to the French Crown. The two countries were at odds over Flanders. France had long tried to control this commercial center, which was a principal market for England's wool. Anglo-French tension was aggravated further by the fact that the French were supporting the Scots in their struggle with the

English. In addition, an order of Philip VI of France (1337) to seize Gascony meant the repossession of some old English fiefs by France. These factors, coupled with a venturesome Edward III and an English noble class eager for glory and booty, resulted in a war which came as no surprise.⁵

The cost of the Hundred Years' War to the English Crown was enormous. True, the Crown was not expected to reimburse nobles for money spent on adornments such as the gold-encrusted armor and silver-tipped arrows which the Duke of Gloucester thought appropriate to his rank or the all-white uniforms in which Sir John Hawkwood dressed his company of brigands. But the fact remains that the Crown laid out more money than came back into the royal coffers.⁶ "In fact," said economic historian M.M. Postan, "we know that even the wages and upkeep of troops, which according to most military contracts had to be paid quarterly, often remained owing by the king for many years after they had been incurred, and some were never repaid."⁷

The ordinary royal revenues were by no means sufficient to meet the expenses of the war, so the Crown attempted to tap other sources of funds. One of the chief reservoirs of wealth in England was the Church. But the bishops and abbots found themselves attempting to serve two masters, for both the Crown and the papacy were simultaneously demanding funds from the English Church. Bishop William Courtenay of Hereford, for example, threatened not to contribute the tenth voted by convocation in 1373 until the demands of the Roman Curia were re-

moved from the necks of the English prelates.⁸

There was more to the papal-regal tension than the competition for the money of the English Church. The pope, earthly head of the respublica Christiana, was in theory the final and impartial arbiter for the different Christian peoples. However, since June 1305, when Bernard de Goth had been elevated from the Archbishopric of Bordeaux to become Pope Clement V, the pope's role as universal peacemaker for Christians became questionable. Fearful of the chaotic conditions in Italy, Clement V chose to set up the Curia in Avignon rather than in Rome. While papal links with French interests were probably exaggerated, there is no question that the English feared that the popes used the money which flowed from England to Avignon to support the French war effort. From the English viewpoint, to give money to the pope was to aid England's enemy.

This fear of papal motives continued until 1378 when Pope Gregory XI brought the Holy See back to Rome. Indeed, Wyclif came to the attention of the papacy and the Crown twice as a result of this tension. The first time was in July 1374, when he was chosen as an English representative at the first Bruges meeting, which I will discuss more fully in Chapter Three. The second instance was reported by Thomas Netter (d. 1430)⁹ in the Fasciculi Zizaniorum:

The Reply of Master John Wyclif to a Query about
Papal Revenues, Addressed to Him by Richard II's
Great Council, 1377.

The query is whether the kingdom of England may lawfully, under the urgent necessity of her defence,

withhold the treasure of the realm from being carried abroad, even though the lord pope require this on pain of censure, and by virtue of obedience.

And leaving to men experienced in the law what ought to be said in this matter according to canon law, civil law, or English law, it only remains to state the case on this query according to the law of Christ.

First, every natural body is given power from God of resisting what is hostile to it, and of duly preserving itself as the philosophers knew. . . .

Since therefore the realm of England ought, in the language of the Scripture, to be one body, and the clerks, lords, and community its members, it seems that it has such power given from God, the more clearly in that that body is most precious to God in virtue and preeminent in knowledge.

Since therefore God does not give any creature power unless that power can be legitimately used, it follows that our realm can lawfully keep its treasure for its defence, in any case when necessity requires it.

Secondly, it is proved on the principles of the gospel. For the lord pope cannot claim treasure of this kind except by name of alms. . . . But the name of alms ought to be dropped in the specified case. . . . for all charity begins at home and it would be not a work of charity but of fatuity to send the alms of the realm to foreigners. . . .

Thirdly, the conclusion is proved by the law of conscience. For both kings and lords, who undertook the burden of governing their realms of lordships, are bound by the law of conscience to defend the prosperity and state of their realms, and the pious arrangements of their forefathers, which they could not do unless they safeguarded the alms of their forefathers, in the form in which they are piously founded in their wills. . . . For the secular lords of our realm gave all our possessions, from which the lord pope draws his money, not to any Church whatever but to the English churches under the form of providing for clerks, and making of private alms. . . . Therefore the temporal lords are held by the law of conscience to forbid extraction of treasure of this kind. For since the principal bond by which the realm is bound to God, without which there is no prosperity in the realm, is a pious priesthood, it appears that the withdrawal of this office of priest threatens¹⁰ to ruin the realm, and its translation to foreigners.

Thus, the coolness of the relationship between the English Crown and the papacy had its effect upon the founder of Lollardy. Wyclif chose to support an English king over a French pope.

The English war effort was successful from 1338, when the war started, to the battle of Poitiers (1356) at which Edward's energetic son, the Black Prince, captured the French king, John II (the Good), (1350-1364). Indeed, France had undergone several successive disasters which crippled its morale. At the battle of Crecy (August, 1346) the longbowmen of England decimated the French knights. Between this battle and Poitiers, the Black Death struck France.¹¹ Then, in 1358, the war-weary peasantry of France revolted. The struggle to put down the uprising left France helpless against the Black Prince's invasion of Burgundy. A peace treaty, signed in 1360, gave England control of large tracts of French real estate, although Edward III did not gain the French Crown.¹²

In the course of the next two decades, however, the impressive gains made by the English were lost. The inept King John of France, freed after paying a heavy ransom, died in 1364 and his astute son, Charles V (1364-1380) became king. Charles' army, ably commanded by Bertrand du Guesclin, continually harassed the over-extended English positions, until by the time of Edward III's death in 1377, only Calais, Cherbourg, a little area around Bordeaux, and a few Breton harbors remained in English hands. It was not until the reign of Henry V that England would again seriously prosecute its French wars.

The huge military expenditures of Edward III caused the Crown to rely more and more upon extraordinary taxation, and English law dictated that such taxes had to be approved by Parliament. In conjunction with the war effort, therefore, Parliament underwent significant development. While the nobles were willing to give the king their financial backing, the war seemed less appealing to the other groups represented in Parliament, such as the towns. It is interesting to note that as Wyclif's protests against war shifted from his belief in "just war only" to "no wars are just wars," the influence of his followers in the towns increased. A cause-effect relationship between Wyclif's shift in thought and the increased influence of Lollardy in the towns probably cannot be proved, but the possibility should not be ruled out.

At the start of the fourteenth century, the role of Parliament was relatively ill-defined, both as to its membership and function. By the end of the century, however, it had split into Lords and Commons and if, as Workman suggested, the Duke of Lancaster pushed the rats of Parliament around, the fact that the duke considered them at all is itself significant. During the fourteenth century, Parliament gained the effective right to make new laws, and English subjects (as represented in Parliament) gained the right of initiative. Although the monarch's power to make ordinances outside Parliament could not be denied, the extent to which he could change the law was greatly restricted. As early as 1315, the king was warned that new laws should not be made without Parliament. At the beginning of his

reign, Edward III was advised by his council that a change in law had to be approved by king, prelates, earls, barons, and other great men, and that in Parliament, the king stood equal, but not superior to his lords. In 1353 the Commons¹³ made a clear distinction between acts made in councils and acts made in Parliament. Bertie Wilkinson concluded that this action demonstrated that the supreme legislative body was to be Parliament.¹⁴ Thus, in Hollister's words:

By 1399 the parliamentary tradition had become sufficiently etched into the English political system to survive the anarchy of the fifteenth century, the discreet absolutism of the Tudors and the divine-right monarchy of the Stuarts, to become the fundamental institution in modern English government.¹⁵

By 1399, Commons had the power of the purse. Indeed, by the reign of Henry IV, Parliament was beginning to stipulate the exact purpose for which extraordinary tax money could be used and to scrutinize those ministers who misused their offices.¹⁶

What had these gains in the power of Parliament to do with Lollardy? While the exact relationship is difficult to determine with great certainty and precision, several events are noteworthy. It was to Parliament in 1382 that Archbishop William Courtenay of Canterbury had to appeal his case for more powers to prosecute heretics. And the fact that Commons protested the additional powers given to him (while Commons was adjourned) indicates that the religious orthodoxy of English citizens was not as important to Commons as was the protecting of its own legal standing. Thus, the increase of the power of Parliament meant that the Church would have to convince de jure represent-

atives of England (however unrepresentatively they were chosen in the fourteenth century) that prosecution of heretics was in England's best interest.¹⁷

Ministers of state were not the only office-holders whose records and actions were examined in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The ministers of souls--the bishops and parish priests, monks and mendicants (not to mention the papacy itself)--were also watched by an ever more aware English populace. Chaucer's Tales of Canterbury,¹⁸ read aloud to the nobility, told stories of clerical corruption--a monk who loved his merchant friend's wife, a prioress of suggestive appearance, a friar who bought begging "territory" from his order, and a pardoner who preached radix malorum est cupiditas¹⁹ and yet found it fitting to "have a joly wenche in every toun."²⁰ And the message of clerical corruption which Chaucer passed to the nobles was relayed to the other classes by such works as William Langland's Piers Plowman.²¹

The clergy did not suddenly deteriorate in the fourteenth century. Indeed, there are actually some signs, such as an increased interest in the education of bishops that, at least in the upper hierarchy, abuses were declining. Nonetheless, corruption was still widespread. Religious visionaries were not the only ones fighting clerical abuse in late fourteenth-century England. In London, for example, town corporations fought bloodless battles against the abuse of tithes. This abuse was one of Wyclif's chief complaints. While the degree of corruption is debatable, its existence was undisputable. It was

against this corruption that Wyclif's attacks were directed.

The papacy could not deal with the corruption of the members of the Christian body. The papacy's own survival was threatened at this time. The fact that the pope dwelt at Avignon since 1305 already had lessened English acceptance of the international character of the papal office. Then, in 1378, during the first year of Richard II's reign in England, the Great Schism occurred. The French cardinals, claiming that they were forced by the Roman mob to elect an Italian successor to Gregory XI, held their own conclave. The result was the election of another pope, Clement VII, who took up residence at Avignon. The Italian pope elected at Rome, Urban VI, remained there and proceeded to excommunicate all of Clement's followers. Clement did likewise to the followers of Urban. Papal claims to universality were certainly damaged as each of the Western Christian kingdoms chose which pope it would follow. The concern for England's welfare which Wyclif earlier displayed reached further development at the start of the Schism. England had sided with the Italian pope, while France backed Clement. Wyclif, though vehement in his condemnation of Gregory XI (a "horrible devil") cast his lot with his fellow Englishmen in warmly welcoming the election of Urban who was, after all, not French and not in Avignon. It was only the protracted scandal of the Schism coupled with Urban's indifference to reform that made Wyclif come to question the office of the papacy itself.²²

The man-made problems caused by war, corruption and competition among the various English and European power blocs were

augmented by natural disasters. The Black Death, which helped to cripple the French war effort, struck England in 1348. Perhaps as much as one-third of the population of England fell victim to the plague by 1349. It was only after about the mid-fifteenth century that England's population again began to slowly increase. The effect of the Black Death must not be overemphasized, however. As early as 1315-1317, in the wake of flood and famine, England's population began to spiral downward. The plague, however, quickened an ongoing process of population decline. Land profits and values fell with the rising wages caused by the shortage of farm laborers and the declining grain markets. To protect the upper classes, Edward III issued ordinances to limit the mobility of the farm workers, forcing them to continue to work their lords' lands. The breakdown of the economic basis of medieval life caused confusion and sometimes panic among the populace. This unrest and dissatisfaction made the people more susceptible to the preachings of those who claimed that the masses could have a better life. The Lollard preachers, like many other "free-lance" teachers, found the confusion of the populace good soil in which to sow new ideas. The effect of the plague upon the thought of Wyclif himself is discussed in Chapter Three.²³

By the time of Wyclif's initial religious agitation in February 1377, the events of the reign of Edward III had been incorporated into his thought and that of his followers. The corruption of the clergy, brought more clearly to the nobles' attention by Chaucer and to other Englanders by Langland, was

the chief complaint of Wyclif and the Lollard preachers. Edward's wars, most especially the Hundred Years' War, affected English thought in several ways. First, Englishers no longer could rely upon the papacy to act impartially. A French pope located in France could not (in English eyes) avoid siding with the French king. The demands for money which the pope made on the English prelates could not be paid by loyal English citizens, even though those citizens were also clergymen. For England feared that the pope was giving money to the French war effort. It was in answer to the pope's demands that Wyclif, responding to the Great Council's query of 1377, chose England over the papacy. It was due also to papal demands that he was sent as an English legate to Bruges. In addition, Wyclif's shifting belief in the legitimacy of war itself seems to have coincided with increased support for Lollardy in the towns.

The war was enormously expensive and the king, in order to finance it, had to come to terms with Parliament. While the rise in Parliament's power cannot be linked to events in the life of Wyclif, it is clear that Parliament's rise had effects upon the future of Lollardy. No longer could the king change law without Parliament. Thus, the clergy had to justify any increase in its power to prosecute heretics to representatives of the English estates. The king's personal conviction was no longer enough.

The Great Schism (1378) caused a relief from the fear that the papacy supported France. England and France now had their own popes, and the Italian Urban VI curried English friendship.²⁴

Even Wyclif was at first glad to see a non-French head of the Church. But as both popes protracted the Schism, Wyclif came to doubt the necessity of having a pope at all.

Finally, the effects of the plague upon the English society of the fourteenth century must be considered. The doubt and confusion caused by this natural disaster (1348) and the general economic depression of England made many willing to listen to preachers who taught of better times coming. Indeed, the time was right for the teaching of Lollard ideas.

Edward III's England formed the background from which emerged John Wyclif, the fountainhead of the Lollard movement. I shall consider next what little is known of Wyclif's early life, his alliance with John of Gaunt and his criticisms against the institutional Church, both Rome and Canterbury.

NOTES

¹This crisis concerned an appeal by Parliament which would have allowed the peers to judge the king's ministers for official malfeasance. Edward at first approved this measure, but later changed his mind, much to Parliament's dismay. See William Parsons Warburton, Edward III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), pp. 88-9.

²C. Warren Hollister, The Making of England, 55 B.C.-1399 (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1966), p. 203.

³May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 136.

⁴The Hundred Years' War actually lasted 115 years, although it was not fought continually. For Edward's right to the French Crown, see John Barnie, War in Medieval English Society: Social Values in the Hundred Years War, 1337-99 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 6-7.

⁵Hollister, Making of England, p. 204.

⁶Compare Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, "England and the Hundred Years War," Past and Present 22 (1962): 3-13 with M.M. Postan, "The Costs of the Hundred Years War," in M.M. Postan, Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 63-80. Postan's article is newer and fully analyzes McFarlane's argument. For the expenses of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and Hawwood in the war, see Postan, Essays, p. 71.

⁷Postan, Essays, p. 71.

⁸Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 11.

⁹Thomas Netter is the commonly held author of the Fasiculi Zizaniorum Magistri Ioannis Wyclif, ed. W.W. Shirley (R.S., London, 1858) which is hereafter cited as Fas. Ziz., although absolute proof of the authorship is lacking. Netter was provincial of the Carmelite Order in England, and confessor to King Henry V. According to Shirley's Introduction, the only manuscript which has come down to us was in the possession of John Bale, bishop of Ossory, and was used extensively by the martyrologist John Foxe. The Fas. Ziz. is actually a collection of documents connected by narrative, although from the time of Wyclif's death to 1428, the documents are given without the narrative.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 258. This translation is taken from A.R. Meyers, ed., English Historical Documents, 1327-1485 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 156-7.

¹¹Hollister, Making of England, p. 205.

¹²McKisack, Fourteenth Century, p. 149.

¹³The makeup of the House of Commons is explained in Bertie Wilkinson, Constitutional History of Medieval England, 1216-1399, 3 vols. (London: Longman's Green and Co. Ltd, 1958), 3:63-4, as follows:

The House of Commons whose separate session was first mentioned in 1332, was no homogeneous "estate." It consisted of "communities" with diverse interests and purposes, brought together by complicated forces, including political expediency, but existing in part to serve the interests of the regnum and the public good. The needs of government, including taxation and justice, exercised a powerful influence . . . but they alone would probably never have brought the knights and burgesses together in one "house." The decisive influence may well have been the concept of the common effort; . . . It was this, perhaps more than anything else, which in the end made them an intergral part of parliament, gave them a separate House, and crowned the edifice in 1376 by a speaker, expressing those interests before the king. Before the end of the fourteenth century, the recognition of those same interests had given them a place in the assembly approximating even to that of the Lords . . . the presence of the Commons in a full parliament, after the accession of Edward III [became indispensable.] "

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 333-4.

¹⁵Hollister, Making of England, p. 207.

¹⁶See Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 78-101, for a complete discussion of the reign of Henry IV and Parliament's role in it.

¹⁷The religious orthodoxy of the kings from Edward III to Henry V has never been questioned. Nonetheless, the enactments of the Crown were not always in line with the orthodoxy of the monarchs.

¹⁸Geoffrey Chaucer, The Tales of Canterbury: Complete, ed. Robert A. Pratt (Boston Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966). Pratt contends (p. ix) that Chaucer himself named his stories, The Tales of Canterbury.

¹⁹Ibid. C. 426.

²⁰Ibid. C. 453.

²¹See, for example, William Langland, Piers Plowman, eds. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 64, lines 56-62.

I fonde there of freres alle the foure ordres,
 Prechyng the peple for profyt of the wombe,
 And glosede the gospel as hem good likede;
 For coveytise of copis contraryed some doctours.
 Many of thise maistres of mendenant freres
 Here moneye and marchandise marchen togyderes;
 Ac sith charite hath be chapman and chief to shryve
 lordes.

This is certainly a similar view of the mendicants to that which is found in Chaucer's description of the Friar in the General Prologue of the Tales of Canterbury.

²²Wyclif called Gregory a "horrible devil" in his Tractatus de ecclesia, ed. John Loserth (London: Trubner and Co., 1886), p. 366. For the Avignon Papacy, see Guillaume Mollat, The Popes at Avignon, 1305-1378, trans. Janet Love (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1949).

²³For the decline in population, see Postan, Essays, pp. 186-213.

²⁴One of the better-known examples of Urban VI's friendliness to England culminated in the marriage on January 14, 1382 of Richard II of England and Anne, sister of Wenzel, king of Bohemia. This alliance, according to Thomas Walsingham, was arranged by the pope who feared that France might ally with Bohemia, and Wenzel would then acknowledge Urban's rival at Avignon. See Thomas Walsingham, Historia Anglicana, ed. H.T. Riley, 2 vols. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863-4), 1:452, hereafter cited as Walsingham.

Walsingham was a monk of the monastery of St. Albans and the earlier portion of his history is little more than a compilation of older material. As editor Riley noted, this chronicle is clear down to the beginning of the reign of Richard II--after that, it is quite confusing in parts. Walsingham's hatred of both John of Gaunt and John Wyclif are evident throughout his work. This bias is to be expected as Gaunt and Wyclif certainly did not act with favor to the regulars. In his book, The Prosecution of John Wyclif (pp. 16-7), Joseph H. Dahmus discusses in detail the bias of Walsingham, citing examples which seem to indicate that Walsingham invented causes for events

after they occurred. Dahmus concluded by asking his fellow scholars either to accept Walsingham in the monk's condemnation of both Gaunt and Wyclif, or to reject him altogether. This is quite different from the standpoint of older writers, such as Trevelyan and Armitage-Smith, who tended to agree with Walsingham on Gaunt, but then to turn around and condemn his view of Wyclif.

More recently, K.B. McFarlane came to Walsingham's defense. In Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights (1972), pp. 148-76, McFarlane noted that Walsingham's historical techniques were sharper than the better received and less biased medieval chronicler, Henry Knighton. While Knighton's prejudice is less evident, McFarlane noted that Walsingham was more careful in his facts. Thus, for example, the identity of the Palm Sunday preacher of 1382, listed by Knighton as John Aston, was actually (and correctly so reported by Walsingham) William Swinderby, according to Bishop Buckingham's register. Since this incident took place at Leicester, where Knighton was located, McFarlane questioned the reliability of Knighton as a witness, or whether he was in fact a witness at all! As Knighton and Walsingham are the only two chroniclers who spend much energy on the question of the rise of Lollardy, however, they must both be used as far as possible. In Walsingham's case, the monk's bias makes his historical judgement subject to question, and I have tried to find primary and secondary backing for any of his conclusions which I have adopted. On those occasions when Walsingham was the only source for the facts reported, I have noted the uniqueness of his report.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN WYCLIF AND THE CROWN

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major events of John Wyclif's life, with emphasis upon those experiences and facts which best demonstrate the reformer's relationship to the Crown. It is not intended as a complete biographical sketch of the founder of English Lollardy, nor will it analyze the hair-splitting theological speculations upon which Wyclif, in common with the main body of scholastic theologians, prided himself. Therefore, the links between Wyclif, his thought¹ and the Crown are the crucial considerations here. Nevertheless, any attempt to understand Wyclif must at least briefly consider the effects of his relationship with John of Gaunt and Wyclif's days at Oxford. Thus, Wyclif's life before he entered the Crown's employ merits some attention.

The early life of the founder of English Lollardy is, as Workman noted, shrouded in "a more than medieval obscurity; while the vague chronology of his life is in marked contrast to our exact knowledge of his teaching."² Indeed, until about the year 1372, when Wyclif first entered the Crown's service as a clerk, little can be positively determined about his life. Once in the government's employ, Wyclif's name appears more and more in contemporary documents, and the life of the reformer becomes somewhat easier to trace.

Wyclif was born probably in 1328 in Yorkshire's North Riding

and by 1363, he was the lord of the manor of Wycliffe (Yorkshire). John of Gaunt (1340-1399), Duke of Lancaster since March 31, 1361, was his overlord. This relationship between Wyclif and Gaunt continued throughout Wyclif's life, and may help to explain the continued cordiality between the duke and cleric. While Wyclif's personal responsibilities to the manor of Wycliffe were not very time-consuming (he spent most of his days at Oxford and Fillingham), he did owe Gaunt some duties. On May 17, 1367 for example, Wyclif was one of seven Yorkshire gentlemen commissioned to enforce salmon laws on Lancastrian land, so Gaunt must have known of him by this time.³ While the ambiguities of Wyclif's life make it difficult to determine how close he was to Gaunt, the Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem for this period indicates that the two men maintained a special relationship because of their positions; "the tenements in Wycliffe are held of the said John of Gaunt by Knight's service."⁴

Wyclif probably entered Oxford in 1346. He must have been ordained early in 1361, and received his first benefice, the college living of Fillingham in Lincolnshire, in May of the same year. His career at Oxford is somewhat of a mystery, since at least two other John Wyclifs were his contemporaries there. Queens, Merton and Balliol all have claimed him as a member.⁵ Wyclif was in fact the master of Balliol in 1360, although the date of his election is not known. He would by canon law have

had to resign this post when he accepted the living of Fillingham.⁶ He probably served his parish in person until August 1363, when he was granted a license of non-residence by his bishop, John Buckingham. In 1362, Wyclif received a papal appointment to the prebend of Aust in the church of Westbury-on-Trym near Bristol. This made Wyclif a pluralist, since he held the livings of Fillingham and Aust simultaneously. However, the papacy itself certainly was aware of this, and pluralism was a common practice of the time.⁷

Wyclif was cited in June 1366 for neglecting his duty as prebendary of Aust. The papacy provided this living in return for the upkeep of the chapel. Wyclif had no pastoral duties there, and the other four prebendaries of the church of Westbury who were his contemporaries (John de Bryan, Richard Michael, William de Hyndeley and Roger Ottery) were, like Wyclif, also absentees. Only de Hyndeley provided a vicar to perform his duties. Wyclif's negligence in fulfilling his contract, therefore, must be admitted, although the shortage of vicars resulting from the Hundred Years' War and the Black Death helps to explain such neglect.⁸

The Black Death, the effect of nominalism and the dispute over the wardenship of Canterbury Hall were among the more important challenges which Oxford underwent in the mid-fourteenth century which would have affected the reformer.⁹ The impersonal

nature of Wyclif's writings, however, makes it difficult to determine exact connections between the events at Oxford and Wyclif's thought.

Wyclif would have been at Oxford in July, 1349 when the Black Death struck. The colleges had low sanitation standards, even by medieval criteria, and the constant demands made by the king and chancellor to cleanse the filth from the university had little effect. At Balliol, classes were suspended for two or three years as a result of the plague and this, Workman noted, may account for the somewhat late date (1358?) at which Wyclif received his master's degree. Oxford did not recover from the effects of the Black Death until 1353, when a full lecture schedule was resumed.¹⁰

The nominalist philosophy of the English Franciscan William of Ockham (d. 1349) was in ascendance at Oxford during Wyclif's days there. Ockham called into serious question the old realist formula of Thomas Aquinas for uniting faith and reason. Nominalists believed that little or nothing of the supernatural could be ascertained by frail human faculties. Hence, faith alone could provide man with the answers he sought concerning God. This belief in the paramount value of faith is evident in the works of Wyclif, most especially in his uncompromising insistence upon the Bible as the source of Christian truth. But Wyclif's adherence to nominalism must not be carried too far. On the crucial subject of the Eucharist Wyclif's staunch support of the realist position is evident.¹¹

An argument over the wardenship of Canterbury Hall was one in which Wyclif was directly involved. This dispute was a microcosm of a larger battle between the secular clergy and the regulars. The Canterbury Hall dispute neither began nor ended the friction but was typical of the hostility which both sides displayed. In 1365, Archbishop Simon Islip of Canterbury (d. 1366) nominated Wyclif to be warden of Canterbury Hall. This position was occupied by a monk of Abingdon, Henry Wodehull, but Islip was not satisfied with Wodehull's service, and chose Wyclif, a secular, to replace him. By nominating and then appointing a secular cleric as warden, Islip was violating the constitution of Canterbury Hall, which provided that a regular cleric would always be the warden. Since Islip himself was the founder of the Hall, however, no opposition to Wyclif's wardenship was voiced until the archbishop's death on April 26, 1366.

Five months after Wyclif's appointment as warden, the monks of Canterbury Hall lodged an appeal with Islip's successor, Simon Langham, a Benedictine who had been prior of Westminster. The monks rightly claimed that the former archbishop had acted against the original statutes of the Hall. Langham, perhaps in part out of loyalty to his Order, deprived Wyclif of his position and replaced him with John de Ragingate, the second of three monks originally nominated. A month later, Langham reinstated Henry Wodehull. But Wyclif would not give up so easily. His refusal to accept Langham's decision caused the

archbishop to expel Wyclif and his three secular associates from Canterbury Hall. Wyclif next appealed to Pope Urban V, but the legality of the cleric's position was quite dubious, and the university did not come to his support. The pope upheld Langham and the appeal was dismissed.

The events of Wyclif's life thus far described occurred before he entered the Crown's service and, taken as isolated incidents, these occurrences give the present-day historian little reason to relate the events at Oxford to Wyclif's later life. Nevertheless, parallels between the reformer's earlier days and his later thought should be noted.¹² As already mentioned, the debates between the nominalists and the realists left their mark upon Wyclif's later ideas about the value of faith and the Eucharist. Additionally, while the effects of the horrors of the Black Death upon Wyclif are difficult to determine, his later insistence upon man's inability to know who was saved and who damned may have had its roots in the Black Death's arbitrary "selection" of its victims from among the upper and lower classes, clergy and laity. The unfavorable response to Wyclif's appeal to Urban V over the wardenship of Canterbury Hall certainly could not have boosted his devotion to the papacy, and possibly made his later attacks upon the papal office a little easier.

On the whole, however, the Oxford career of John Wyclif was little different from that of his contemporaries. It was not until his appointment to governmental service in 1372 that the Crown would first have noticed him. By 1374, he was well enough known to be appointed as an English representative to a

meeting at Bruges at which England and the papacy attempted to iron out some financial problems. At this point, contemporary documentation makes the direct relationship between Wyclif and the Crown easier to follow.

Wyclif was appointed to the Bruges meeting (along with six others) on July 26, 1374, following Pope Gregory XI's (1370-1378) demand from the English prelates of debts which the pope claimed were long overdue.¹³ For their part, the English brought up their objections to the practice of papal appointment (the pope's alleged right to appoint persons to ecclesiastical offices) in England. This first meeting was unproductive, and a second was set up for the following September. Wyclif was not chosen as a member of the English delegation for the second meeting, even though his overlord and later protector, John of Gaunt, headed the delegation. It is possible that Wyclif's tactlessness in his opposition to paying English money into the pope's treasury insulted the papal legates and thus endangered the negotiations. If this is true, it would have been the first time that the Crown's practical view of politics was to clash with the idealism of the reformer.¹⁴

After two years in semi-retirement at Oxford, Wyclif was again called to government service (September 22, 1376). It was Gaunt himself who called Wyclif back to the Crown's employ. Usually, relatives of a prospective employee would arrange positions for their kin. While it was not unique to Wyclif's case, it was unusual for a clerk to enter governmental service by the personal summons of a magnate.¹⁵ The immediate occasion

for Gaunt's recall of Wyclif was the competition between Gaunt's party at court and that of the Black Prince, who died earlier in the same year (1376). This competition necessitated Gaunt's buildup of strength at court. Wyclif had proved himself bright and capable at Oxford and, as he was already socially linked to Lancastrian interests, Gaunt must have recognized a potential ally in the lord of the manor of Wycliffe.¹⁶

On February 19, 1377, Wyclif was summoned to St. Paul's Cathedral, London, to appear before an assemblage of prelates. While the exact reasons for the citation have not come down to us, it appears that Wyclif had been preaching views on clerical disendowment and excommunication which were considered suspect by the bishops.¹⁷ But it is also possible that the bishops' action was politically motivated. Wyclif's overlord and sponsor at court, the Duke of Lancaster, was strongly anti-clerical in attitude. The bishops, unable to attack the magnate directly, may have summoned Wyclif to embarrass Gaunt.¹⁸

Whatever the prelates' motives, they were probably surprised to find Gaunt accompanying Wyclif to St. Paul's. The duke's party also included the newly-appointed king's marshal, Henry Percy (d. 1406) and four theologians (one from each mendicant order) appointed by Lancaster to defend Wyclif. The street outside St. Paul's was crowded, and Gaunt's party had to push their way through the multitude.¹⁹ Once inside, Percy began to order people about and Bishop William Courtenay of

London (ca. 1341-1396), who had come forward to meet Gaunt's party, indicated that if he had known how insolently Percy was going to behave, Percy would not have been allowed inside. Gaunt retorted that he and Percy would do as they wished, with or without the bishop's consent.²⁰

Courtenay, Percy, Gaunt and Wyclif next moved into the Chapel of Our Lady. When the prelates and lords present were all seated, Percy invited Wyclif to sit. Custom at this time dictated that those cited to appear before ecclesiastical princes stood during questioning. Therefore, in telling Wyclif to sit, the king's marshal disregarded the usual procedure for such cases. Courtenay, already upset at Percy's boisterous entrance, objected to this breach of custom and heated words between the bishop and the marshal began. Gaunt entered the fray at this point, hurling abuses at Courtenay and being similarly assailed in return. Gaunt threatened to humble not only Courtenay, but the entire English hierarchy as well.²¹ The dispute continued and Gaunt stated that he would drag the bishop out of the church by his hair rather than accept any more argument from the prelate. At this point, the crowd outside broke into the church, either to protect their bishop or out of hatred of the unpopular Gaunt. Lancaster and his party (Wyclif included) were forced hastily to exit St. Paul's. The first attempt to question Wyclif thus ended with nothing accomplished.²²

The St. Paul's confrontation demonstrated certain facets of the relationship between Lancaster and Wyclif. First, it is

noteworthy that Gaunt chose friars to defend Wyclif. Friars, unlike monks, did not "possess" church lands. They, therefore, would have been the most logical allies of persons preaching or supporting plans for disendowment. That friars would support Gaunt and Wyclif in this confrontation, therefore, should come as no surprise. The fact that one friar from each of the four mendicant orders was chosen by Gaunt to support Wyclif indicates that Gaunt was attempting to drive home the idea that disendowment had a broad base of support from within the ecclesiastical community.

What of Wyclif's actions during the incident at St. Paul's? The arguments which Walsingham reported only involved Courtenay, Gaunt and Percy. If Wyclif did or said anything, the chronicler did not consider it important enough to mention. Nevertheless, the St. Paul's incident certainly had its effect upon the future career of the reformer. From this point onward, the monastic orders would more completely associate Wyclif and Gaunt as allies who worked for clerical disendowment. On the other hand, for a while at least, Wyclif would be bolstered by support received from the mendicants. Perhaps more importantly, the obscure academician Wyclif was now in the eye of both the Crown and the populace.

Walsingham to the contrary, Gaunt, unlike Wyclif, probably did not contemplate complete disendowment--his practical sense would have made him realize that this would actually hurt him politically. Gaunt had his friends among the upper clergy, and

such friends could be useful.²³ Indeed, more friends (like the amiable Simon Sudbury, Courtenay's superior) would increase the duke's power.²⁴ To identify with a religious idealist was, therefore, good politics for Gaunt. By uniting the ideals of Wyclif, the orthodoxy of the friars and the legitimacy of the king's marshal with his own de facto power, Gaunt sought to embarrass his opponents. He did not consider the crowd of London in his plans.²⁵ Nonetheless, with a senile Edward III on the throne, Gaunt's party in control at court and the king's marshal in his support, it is reasonable to say that the major political power in England, John of Gaunt, protected Wyclif at St. Paul's at least in part to consolidate his own adherents. In so doing, the duke (perhaps unwittingly) brought into the limelight an idealist whose importance would outlast that of his sponsor.²⁶ Wyclif did nothing that we know of at St. Paul's except gain a reputation and publicity.

In 1378, prompted by bulls sent to Archbishop Simon Sudbury of Canterbury (d. 1381) and Bishop Courtenay, the prelates again assembled to interrogate Wyclif. It is important to note that the political strength of Wyclif's ally, the Duke of Lancaster, was considerably weakened in the period between the St. Paul's incident and this second attempt to question him (March 1378). With the death of Edward III (June 21, 1377), the child Richard II, son of the Black Prince (d. 1376) and Joan of Kent (d. 1385) assumed the royal dignity. The great (king's)

council realized that if a regent were appointed, it would have been Gaunt.²⁷ Therefore, it appointed instead a "continual council" to direct the government during Richard's minority. This council was constituted in a manner which lessened Gaunt's power considerably.²⁸ Gaunt's power was no longer unquestioned.²⁹ Nevertheless, another influential person at court, the queen mother Joan of Kent, elected to interfere at the second "trial" of Wyclif to protect the cleric--just as Gaunt had done nearly a year earlier at St. Paul's.³⁰

This second appearance of Wyclif before the assembled bishops occurred at Lambeth, sometime before March 27, 1378.³¹ On the day of the trial, Sir Lewis Clifford, an emissary sent by Joan, appeared before the assembly and pompously told the prelates not to presume to pass judgment upon Wyclif. As I will show later, Clifford probably became a Lollard or at least a Lollard sympathizer several years after the Lambeth trial, and the fact that the sixteen executors of Joan of Kent's will included four suspected Lollards certainly raises doubts about her own theological leanings.³² Whatever Joan's religious convictions, the fact remains that she interfered against the assembled prelates in favor of a suspected heretic. Even if it was true, as Dahmus suggested, that Joan acted on behalf of her friend, John of Gaunt,³³ this does not diminish the fact that Joan assisted Wyclif. Rather, it only demonstrates more fully the favor in which prominent persons at court held Wyclif.

While the king's mother and the Duke of Lancaster had both spoken out in favor of Wyclif, no voices from the court as yet opposed him.

Unlike the St. Paul's incident, the teachings for which Wyclif was cited to appear at Lambeth are known. Pope Gregory XI sent a schedule of Wyclif's propositions with the bulls which he sent to Sudbury and Courtenay. The schedule reads as follows:

1. The whole human race without Christ does not have the power of simply ordaining that Peter and all his successors exercise political dominion over the world.
2. God cannot give civil dominion to a man, for himself and his heirs, in perpetuity.
3. Charters which man has devised concerning perpetual civil inheritance are impossible.
4. Anyone who is in that state of grace which finally justifies, not only has the right to, but in fact possesses, all the gifts of God.
5. Man can bestow both temporal and eternal dominion only ministerially to a natural son or to one of choice in Christ's school.
6. If God be, temporal lords may lawfully and with merit take from a delinquent church the blessings of fortune.
7. Whether the church be in such a condition or not, is not for me to discuss, but for the temporal lords to investigate; and if such be the case, for them to act with confidence and seize her temporalities under pain of damnation.
8. We know that it is not possible for the vicar of Christ simply by means of his bulls, or by means of them and his own will and consent of his college, to declare anyone fit or unfit.
9. It is not possible for a man to be excommunicated except that he be first and principally excommunicated by himself.
10. No one is excommunicated, suspended or tormented with other censures to his injury except in the cause of God.
11. Malediction or excommunication does not bind simply, but only in so far as it is used against an enemy of God's law.
12. Power from Christ or His disciples is not exemplified by excommunicating one's subjects, particularly for refusing temporalities, but the contrary.

13. The disciples of Christ have no power to strictly exact temporalities by censures.

14. It is not possible by the absolute power of God that, if the pope or any other pretend to loose or bind in any way, he does thereby loose or bind.

15. We must believe that only does he loose or bind when he conforms to the law of Christ.

16. This should be universally believed, that any priest, validly ordained, has sufficient power to administer any of sacraments, and, consequently, to absolve any contrite person from any sin.

17. It is permitted kings to deprive those ecclesiastics of their temporalities who habitually misuse them.

18. Whether the temporal lords, or the holy popes, or the head of the church, who is Christ, have endowed the church with the goods of favor or fortune, and have excommunicated those taking away her temporalities, it is nonetheless lawful, for the condition implied to deprive her of temporalities in proportion to her offense.

19. An ecclesiastic, indeed even the Roman pontiff, may lawfully be rebuked by those subject to him and by laymen, and even arraigned.³⁴

This schedule of teachings fits together well with the important subjects of authority and clerical disendowment, which are crucial to Wyclif's famous theory of dominion (stewardship). Dominion, according to Wyclif's Tractatus de dominio divino (1375-6), is a relationship in which one is said to have charge over his servant. Wyclif believed that God alone has true stewardship over creatures.³⁵

God, according to Wyclif, does not approve of stewardship held by the unjust, but His permissive will allows the wicked to hold the material benefits of the earth temporarily. The just man dominates correctly what he has charge over, but the unjust man merely occupies what really is not his. This connection of stewardship with the state of one's soul led Wyclif

to the belief that without grace there is no real stewardship.³⁶

But Wyclif was not merely an idle philosophical speculator. He spoke also on the more mundane application of his theory, as the schedule above indicates. Wyclif believed that all members of the Christian body should help each other. But in some cases, when the clergy was corrupt, the best help may be the removal of possessions from corrupt churchmen by the temporal arm.³⁷

The question of the right of earthly lords to take benefices from churchmen leads to Wyclif's view of authority. On the temporal level, Wyclif accepted a hereditary monarchy as the best form of government.³⁸ The king sanctions just laws in agreement with the law of God (the Bible), destroys laws opposed to God, compels his people to please God, and pacifies his country. These four elements, according to Wyclif, made up the king's justice.³⁹

The attacks upon papal power which are implied in the above schedule had their roots in Wyclif's interpretation of Pope Galasius I's (492-6) theory of the two swords. While Wyclif's writings concerning this theory are quite vague, his views have been summed up by Lowrie J. Daly as follows:

The royal power is greater (simpliciter) than the priestly power as regards the temporalities, although the priestly power is of a far higher order. If both powers should exist alone, without grace, the regal power is less and the sacerdotal power worse. Both powers are from God, although the emperor came first in time. If one were to ask in a given case of a living person (that is, bishop or king), which is in greater dignity, the answer would require special revelation.⁴⁰

In his Tractatus de officio regis, written about the time of the above schedule, (1378), Wyclif explains that the state of the priesthood is closer to God, since it is easier to merit heaven through it, but it also requires more sanctity of its members. "From these, noted Daly," and other considerations, he concludes . . . that the king is greater with regard to temporalities than any of his priests, greater even than the pope." (Italics mine.) Therefore, the king, according to Wyclif is superior to the pope in temporal matters.⁴¹

In spite of the interference of the queen mother's messenger and the fact that a crowd of Wyclif's supporters broke into the room where the trial was being held,⁴² the bishops questioned Wyclif on his propositions. Wyclif argued his case well--so well in fact, that he was permitted peacefully to leave Lambeth with no charges of heresy proved against him, much to Walsingham's disgust.⁴³ Nonetheless, in spite of this temporary victory at Lambeth, Wyclif was to soon suffer a setback--one imposed by the Crown in the interest of national tranquility.

At the end of Wyclif's response to the query posed by the king's council as to whether or not money could lawfully be withheld from Rome, Netter reported, "And here silence was imposed upon him [Wyclif] concerning the above by the lord king and the royal council."⁴⁴ It seems strange that the Crown would silence a man who was supporting the Crown's position on withholding money from Rome. The solution to this enigma can be found in connection with another event which occurred at about the same time--the case of John de Acley.

De Acley was a Benedictine monk of Durham who had been appointed by his Order as the official apologist against Wyclif. The demands for disendowment which Wyclif was making were in opposition to the monks' interests and it is, therefore, not surprising that the Benedictines mustered an attack against the secular cleric Wyclif. But de Acley was never to fulfill his appointed task because his prior, on command of the continual council, cancelled de Acley's appointment. Thus, in Dahmus' words:

. . . both Wyclif and Acley received the same order--to keep silent--from the same group, the continual council. at about the same time--probably 1378--and for the same reason, national tranquility. Incidentally, Wyclif himself admitted that his suggestions might lead to civil war unless the people were first instructed as to their reasonableness.⁴⁵

The Crown had to make a choice. If the Crown allowed Wyclif or de Acley or both to speak out, the tranquility of England would be threatened. Therefore, both were silenced. Orthodoxy of religious beliefs played no part in the Crown's decision. The decision was political--to keep peace within England rather than to press its claims against the papal treasury or to maintain the religious orthodoxy of the English people.

On August 11, 1378, a dispute over the right of sanctuary again brought Wyclif into the limelight. The Keeper of the Tower, Sir Alan Buxhill, invaded the precincts of Westminster Abbey to seize one Robert Haulay who had escaped from prison. Haulay, together with another knight, John Shakyl, had captured a Spanish grandee, the count of Denia, at the battle of Najare (Castile), while they

were in the service of the Black Prince.⁴⁶ The count's son, Alphonso, was kept hostage by the two knights for ten years and was not redeemed.

By this time, the political situation had changed and the Crown, deciding that the hostage could be used for political advantage, demanded that Haulay and Shakyl turn Alphonso over to the government. They refused and were put into prison but in August 1378, they escaped and sought refuge in Westminster. Sir Alan Buxhill, under the Crown's direction, invaded the Abbey with fifty men.⁴⁷ Shakyl was taken by a ruse but Haulay was stabbed twelve times as he ran around the altar while mass was in progress.

Archbishop Sudbury delayed three days before excommunicating those guilty of the breach of sanctuary. Bishop Courtenay then published the condemnation at St. Paul's. Courtenay specifically excluded the king, Joan of Kent and Gaunt from the excommunication but both the Historia Anglicana and the Chronicon Angliae (true to the anti-Gaunt spirit of the chroniclers) indicated that the Londoners believed that the Duke was involved. In fact, Gaunt was not even in England at this time.⁴⁸

Upon his return, however, Lancaster appointed Wyclif to assist in preparing an official apology for the Crown. Wyclif mentioned in his Tractatus de ecclesia (winter, 1378) that he, himself, was not opposed to the principle of sanctuary, but felt that it could rightfully be violated if the welfare of the Crown required it.⁴⁹ This incident brings out once again the Crown's concern

for political expediency, in this case over and above what was, since the time of Edward the Confessor, the accepted right of a Christian on any of the Church grounds around Westminster--the right of sanctuary. Thus, to support its own position, the Crown was willing to use the views of a man whose beliefs had been the subject of recent inquiry. The Crown showed itself willing to disregard custom if political benefit could thereby be derived.

1378 marked an important watershed in Wyclif's career. His chief advocate at court, John of Gaunt, returned from the disastrous St. Malo expedition in utter defeat. 1378 also witnessed the election of a new pope, Urban VI, and the domination of the French clergy over the See of Peter was ended with the election of an Italian pope.⁵⁰

The chroniclers tell little of Wyclif's life after 1378. This comes as little surprise, for with the cementing of papal-regal relations, the political benefit which the Crown could derive from Wyclif was greatly reduced. Wyclif took rooms at Oxford in 1380, and probably spent the intervening time at Lutterworth. His attacks upon church abuses became sharper and he began to question not only the misuse of the papal office, but the necessity of having a pope at all.⁵¹ To the Wyclif of 1378-1380, the Church of God (which was not the same as the Roman church) was composed of a foreknown elect. It was also about this time (1380) that Wyclif began his theological dispute over the question of transubstantiation. As Dahmus noted, it was Wyclif's view of

the Eucharist that lost him the support of many of his earlier followers, in particular the Duke of Lancaster.⁵²

What of his clerical allies, the friars? At this time, the rift between Wyclif and the mendicants occurred. Whether he broke the alliance or, as Eduardo McShane argued,⁵³ the friars left him, is immaterial here. The fact is that with the denial of the Eucharist, Wyclif lost the political support of Gaunt and the Crown, and the theological support of the friars. The Crown could benefit from anticlericalism, but to deny the Eucharist could only split England from its new ally, the Italian pope, and disrupt internal unity. Wyclif's loss of the Crown's support, therefore, comes as no surprise.⁵⁴

In May, 1382, Wyclif's propositions were condemned at the Council of Blackfriars, called by the newly appointed successor to Archbishop Sudbury, William Courtenay. Nothing has survived to indicate Wyclif's whereabouts after 1381.⁵⁵ To the end, Wyclif seems to have been protected by John of Gaunt, although Gaunt no longer dabbled in Wyclif's theological speculations. Wyclif died an ill man in 1384. It remained for his followers, the Lollards, to carry on the work of which Wyclif was the fountainhead.

In summing up the events of Wyclif's life chosen for this discussion, certain conclusions are noteworthy. First, although the Crown supported Wyclif on several occasions, the relationship between the reformer and the Crown was one rooted in convenience rather than agreement. Thus, Wyclif's preaching about clerical disendowment was tolerated or even supported by the

Crown (St. Paul's and Lambeth are examples), up to the point that national tranquility or relations with the new, Italian pope was threatened. At that point, the Crown found it expedient to silence those whose preachings caused dissatisfaction (such as Wyclif and de Acley) rather than to allow national unity to suffer. Similarly, Wyclif was chosen to represent England at the first Bruges meeting, but he, alone of the commission, was not included in the second meeting. While the reason for his exclusion is debatable, the interpretation that Wyclif was excluded due to his tactlessness in dealing with the papal representatives is certainly a plausible one. This interpretation gains credence when considered in conjunction with Wyclif's response to the request of King Richard's council (1377), when asked if the Crown could lawfully withhold money from Rome. Even the support which Wyclif received from John of Gaunt, his overlord, had been rooted in practical politics, although Gaunt's protection of Wyclif at the end of the reformer's life certainly indicates that the duke dealt more honorably with his friends than the Crown did with its servants. Nevertheless, as Wyclif drifted more and more into theological speculation, even the patient duke would come less and less to the reformer's defense.

NOTES

¹A good, short work dealing with Wyclif's political thought is Lowrie J. Daly, The Political Theory of John Wyclif (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962).

²Herbert B. Workman, John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 1:3.

³Ibid., 1:44. The commission is in Great Britain, Public Records Office, Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward III, vol. 13 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1912), p. 429, hereafter cited as C.P.R.

⁴Great Britain, Public Records Office, Calendar of the Inquisitions post Mortem, Edward III, vol. 8 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), p. 401, hereafter cited as C.I.P.M.

⁵Workman, John Wyclif, 1:52. Workman discussed the claims of Merton, Queens and Balliol (1:63-5).

⁶Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 1.

⁷Workman, John Wyclif, 1:153.

⁸Ibid., 1:161-3.

⁹The degree to which each of these would have affected Wyclif is different. The effect of the Black Death would have left a greater mark on the school (and Wyclif) than the relatively minor dispute over Canterbury Hall, for example.

¹⁰Workman, John Wyclif, 1:82-4.

¹¹Wyclif assumed a completely anti-nominalist approach to the question of transubstantiation. He found it impossible to accept the nominalists' insistence upon the annihilation of the bread and wine. The belief which he did evolve was close to Martin Luther's consubstantiation and, like the sixteenth-century German reformer, Wyclif found the institutional Church opposed to any doctrine of remnants. Wyclif's doubts about transubstantiation probably began in the autumn of 1370, although it was not until about a decade later that he began to profess his beliefs publicly. See Workman, John Wyclif, p. xxxviii for the dating of Wyclif's Eucharistic beliefs. For his realist philosophy of the Eucharist, see, S.H. Thomson, "The Philosophical Basis of Wyclif's Theology," Journal of Religion 11 (1931): 86-116.

¹²For example, see above, p. 29. The parallels must be drawn with little help from Wyclif. His writings are so impersonal that it is difficult to determine where his ideas came from.

¹³See above, pp. 11-2. This was an extension of the same dispute in which Courtenay refused to pay the tenth voted by convocation (1373). See also Workman, John Wyclif, 1:220.

¹⁴Workman, John Wyclif, 1:245-7. Workman's argument is based upon Wyclif's life after the conference. Nonetheless, the document cited above, pp. 12-3, certainly goes along with Workman's interpretation, though written after Bruges.

¹⁵See Frederick Devon, trans., Issues of the Exchequer, (London: J. Murray, 1837) p. 200 for the commission. Gaunt sent Alan of Barley with this letter to Oxford to deliver it to Wyclif. Alan received five shillings for this service. See also Workman, John Wyclif, 1:278-9. For the procedure for clerical appointments in the royal administration, see J.L. Grassi, "Royal Clerks from the Archdiocese of York in the Fourteenth Century," Northern History 5 (1970) :12-33.

¹⁶The fact that Wyclif joined Gaunt's party at court proved Gaunt correct.

¹⁷Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 22.

¹⁸See Ibid. pp. 17-9. Dahmus opposes this thesis of political motivation on the part of the bishops. He believes that it was more likely hindsight on Walsingham's part that connected Wyclif with Gaunt on the question of anti-clericalism at this early date.

¹⁹The event surrounding the St. Paul's incident are taken from two accounts, Walsingham and E.M. Thompson ed., Chronicon Angliae (R.S., 1876), hereafter cited as Chron. Angl. This later work is somewhat milder in its treatment of John of Gaunt, although some scholars, such as Dahmus, believe that Walsingham wrote both. The Chron. Angl. is usually credited to "a monk of St. Albans," of which Walsingham was one. I have tried to incorporate into my account only those events which most experts accept.

²⁰Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 28.

²¹Chron. Angl., p. 120.

²²Ibid., p. 121 supports the view that it was Courtenay's popularity that caused the crowd's interference.

²³For Gaunt's views on disendowment see, Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, pp. 14-6.

²⁴According to Dahmus, it is probable that Gaunt was in large measure responsible for Sudbury's elevation to the See of Augustine. See Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 12.

²⁵The reaction of the London crowd was a variable that often made itself felt. At the Lambeth trial (1378) which I discuss later, the Londoners interfered in Wyclif's favor against the assembled bishops.

²⁶I can find no other explanation for the fact that Gaunt himself went to St. Paul's with the king's marshal, Wyclif and friars from each Order other than that Gaunt was demonstrating the wide support which adherents of clerical disendowment had.

²⁷Jacob Abbott, History of King Richard the Second of England (New York: Harper Brothers, 1858), p. 173 contended that the great council did not make Gaunt regent because the councillors feared that Gaunt would not relinquish control of the government when Richard reached his majority, or that Lancaster might have Richard killed and assume the royal dignity himself. Gaunt's support of Richard in the last years of his reign certainly indicates that the duke was not as treacherous as the council may have thought.

²⁸Harold F. Hutchison, The Hollow Crown: A Life of Richard II (New York: John Day Company, 1961), p. 26 and Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 56.

²⁹Gaunt was still, however, the most powerful man in England. See Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 70.

³⁰The account of the Lambeth trial is taken from Walsingham.

³¹The dating of the Lambeth trial is in dispute. See Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 66 for a discussion of the dispute.

³²Joan's will (December, 1385) included as her executors Sirs Lewis Clifford, John Clanvowe, Richard Sturry and William Neville, all of whom were Lollard suspects. Her will is in J. Nichols, comp., A Collection of All the Wills Now Known to Be Extant of the Kings and Queens of England, Princes and Princesses of Wales and Every Branch of the Blood Royal, from the Reign of William the Conqueror to that of Henry the Seventh Exclusive with Explanatory Notes and a Glossary (London: By the Compiler, 1780), pp. 78-82.

³³Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 70. Joan and Gaunt remained friends in spite of the political rivalry between Gaunt and Joan's husband, the Black Prince. Indeed, the antipathy between Edward and John probably did not extend beyond the political arena. Gaunt was, for example, chosen by Edward as one of his executors and protected Richard's right to the throne. See Peter Shaw, "The Black Prince," History 24 (1939): p. 12.

³⁴This schedule has been translated into English and printed in Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, pp. 49-50.

³⁵John Wyclif, Tractatus de dominio divino, (1375-6) ed. R.L. Poole (London: Wyclif Society, 1890), I,c,1: "Potest dominium sic describi: dominium est habitudo naturae rationalis secundum quam denominatur suo praefici serviente."

³⁶Daly, Political Theory of Wyclif, p. 70 says: "The connection of dominium with sin and the exclusion of the unjust man from true dominium are two of the most essential principles in the whole of Wyclif's political theory."

³⁷John Wyclif, Tractatus de civili dominio, 4 vols. (1375-6) ed. John Loserth and R.L. Poole (London: Wyclif Society, 1900-4), II, xii, 137.

³⁸Daly, Political Theory of Wyclif, p. 105.

³⁹Wyclif, De civili dominio, I, xxvi, 189.

⁴⁰Daly, Political Theory of Wyclif, p. 117.

⁴¹John Wyclif, Tractatus de officio regis, (1378), ed. A.W. Pollard and C. Sayle (London: Wyclif Society, 1887) p. 196.

⁴²Workman, John Wyclif, 1:308-9.

⁴³Walsingham, 1:356,363. See also, Chron. Angl., p. 183.

⁴⁴Fas. Ziz., p. 271.

⁴⁵Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, p. 72.

⁴⁶Great Britain, Public Records Office, Calendar of the Close Rolls: Edward III, vol. 14, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1913) pp. 337-9, hereafter cited as C.C.R.

⁴⁷Walsingham, 1:377-8.

⁴⁸Ibid. 1:376. Also, Chron. Angl., p. 207. Gaunt was at St. Malo during this incident. See Workman, John Wyclif, 1:317.

⁴⁹John Charles Cox, The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Medieval England (London: George Allen and Sons, 1911), pp. 48-56. See also G.H.W. Parker, The Morning Star: Wyclif and the Dawn of the Reformation, (London: Paternoster Press, 1965) p. 31.

⁵⁰David Wilkins, Concilia Magna Britanniae et Hiberniae ab Anno MCCL ad Annum MDXLV, 4 vols. (London: G. Roesling, 1737), 3: 130-1.

⁵¹See Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, pp. 80-1 for an analysis of the shift in Wyclif's thought.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.

⁵³Eduardo McShane, A Critical Appraisal of the Anti-mendicantism of John Wyclif (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1950).

⁵⁴The maintenance of national tranquility was more than usually important in an England of declining population and depression. Failure to maintain tranquility resulted in the famous Peasants' Rising of 1381. The Crown would have been careful not to excite the people, and a purely theological dispute such as the nature of the Eucharist certainly could not have been in the Crown's interest.

⁵⁵Wyclif rented rooms at Queens in 1381.

CHAPTER FOUR

LOLLARDY FROM 1382 TO THE OLDCASTLE RISING

By the time of his death on December 31, 1384, Wyclif had created the nucleus of a heretical movement which survived latently until the coming of the Henrician Reformation.¹ Originally centering around some of Wyclif's advocates and defenders at Oxford such as Nicholas Hereford, Philip Repington and John Aston, the movement gradually permeated the ranks of the lower nobility on one hand and the non-noble classes on the other. Lollardy had some of its greatest support among the merchants and artisans in the large cities, although it also extended into the countryside. This chapter considers four of the factors which enhanced the growth of Lollardy in its early years: the English translation of the Vulgate, the spreading of Lollardy by the "poor priests," the protection which Lollardy received at court, and the lack of cooperation between the Church and the Crown in the persecution of Lollardy. Throughout this discussion of these four topics, the relationship between the Lollards and the Crown will be the principal focal point.

Although parts of the Vulgate had been rendered in English prior to the "Lollard Bible," the two Lollard translations may well have been the first complete English versions.² Of course, vernacular Bibles were known in other tongues by this time. Edward III and Richard II, for example, both possessed French versions but, as Workman noted, French (like Latin) was fast

becoming a language of the cultured few.³ While scholars may never ascertain which Lollards were responsible for the Lollard translations, Nicholas Hereford probably had much to do with the first edition, while John Purvey, a companion of Wyclif's during the master's retirement at Lutterworth (ca. 1381), was probably a dominant influence over the second. Wyclif himself probably directed the entire project, but if he did any translating, it was probably confined to the first edition.⁴

The Lollards--unlike the Protestant reformers--based their translations directly upon the Vulgate. There was no known attempt by the Lollards to find Greek or Hebrew versions of the Scriptures. The Lollards wished the people to have the Word, but did not doubt that the Vulgate was the Word. Nonetheless, the two Lollard renditions were somewhat different from each other. The first was a word for word translation while the second was an attempt to clarify the meaning of the Vulgate for English readers.⁵ While the Church viewed with suspicion those possessing Lollard Bibles, the prelates apparently found no trace of unorthodoxy in the translations themselves.⁶ Such translations must have given the Lollards a credence with the populace which orthodox preachers, using fables in their sermons to attract crowds, must have lacked.⁷ Possession of such translations also provided the Crown with a means (however inaccurate) of identifying the followers of Wyclif.⁸

Arming themselves with the writings and inspiration (if not the personal leadership) of Wyclif, the Lollard preachers began to spread Wyclif's teachings across England. These preachers made headway in various locales.⁹ A loose chain of preachers, the so-called poor priests thus came into being, teaching doctrines which, at least nominally, had their origins in Wyclif's thought. I shall discuss the careers of three of the most famous of these early preachers--John Ball, Nicholas Hereford and William Swinderby. They were chosen because the relationship between the Crown and the early advocates of Lollardy can be easily discerned in the histories of these three men.

The first of these preachers is John Ball, "the half-crazy hedge priest,"¹⁰ who fanned the flame of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.¹¹ Ball actually preached radical ideas concerning disendowment (among other things) years before Wyclif had ever formulated his own doctrines. However, according to Netter, Ball admitted in a confession (which has not survived) that Wyclif was his teacher.¹² There is something in this alleged confession, noted Workman, of a weapon made to order for the Church, since Netter's report was made twenty years after Ball supposedly confessed his reliance upon Wyclif.¹³ Netter's report of a confession is unsubstantiated by other documentation. The only possible connection between Wyclif and Ball stemmed from the fact that both preached disendowment at the time of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

There is, however, no evidence that the Church attempted to link Wyclif and Ball before Netter's report. Nevertheless,

any sympathy which the Crown felt for Ball's idea of disendowment died in the revolt. And disendowment was also a key desire of John Wyclif. Indeed, Wyclif's champion, John of Gaunt, suffered considerably from the rioting (his palace, Savoy, was looted and burned) and if the alliance between the Duke and Wyclif was not completely destroyed, as Workman believed, it was at least tottering. The seculars and regulars ceased their bickering to provide a united front against the dangers of the revolt. The Church, as represented by Bishop Spenser of Norwich, aided the State in suppressing the revolt.¹⁴ Ball himself was captured at Coventry, taken to St. Albans, and hanged on July 17, 1381. In sum, the Revolt had disastrous effects upon Wyclif's plan for disendowment, even though the Lollards probably had little to do with it.

The second preacher for consideration here is William Swinderby, popularly called William the Hermit. He was the first of a number of partly-educated, usually unbeneficed priests who formed the main arteries through which Lollardy flowed to the common folk. Swinderby based himself at Leicester, where he preached in a school founded just outside the city walls by another Lollard, William Smith. Swinderby was violent in his condemnation of women as the occasion of sin, and the women of Leicester threatened, at least once, to stone the hermit from the walls of the city.¹⁵ The interest which Swinderby holds for this discussion concerns an appeal which he made following his condemnation by a Church court.

On June 14, 1391, Swinderby was summoned to Kingston to hear charges laid against him for preaching heresy. Swinderby had been preaching a number of unusual doctrines, including that a priest was allowed to preach in any diocese without the leave of his bishop, and that the pope could not grant indulgences.¹⁶ The ecclesiastical tribunal gave him until the last day of the month in which to prepare his defense. Swinderby attempted to evade some questions, while spiritedly assailing the Church's position on other points.¹⁷ The tribunal found Swinderby guilty of heresy, and when he failed to appear for correction, he was excommunicated.

Upon hearing of his excommunication, Swinderby appealed his case, not to a higher ecclesiastical authority as might be expected, but rather to the king's justices in Parliament, sending his propositions to the knights in Parliament to be shown to the lords.¹⁸ Such action indicates that Swinderby felt that the state might be more favorably disposed to him than the Church.

The final preacher considered here is Nicholas Hereford, a westcountryman, who was probably the most important of the first generation Lollards. From 1369 to 1375, Hereford was a fellow of Queens College, and he probably met John Wyclif there. His later activities indicate that he was not only an impulsive character, but an unstable one as well. This quality, noted McFarlane, was a characteristic which Hereford shared with many important figures in the early histories of most religious movements.¹⁹

In the spring of 1382, Hereford, together with another Lollard, Philip Repingdon (Repton), appeared at Gaunt's suburban residence at Tottenhall. The two Lollards had been suspended from Oxford because of their adherence to Wyclif's teachings and they wished to appeal their case to Wyclif's patron. While they were at Tottenhall, some doctors of theology also begged audience with the duke. They sought aid against certain heretics--most likely Hereford and Repingdon. The duke was amiable to the two Lollards at first since they had apparently convinced him that the destruction of Wyclif's movement would cause the Church's power to grow at the Crown's expense. During the discussion, however, the crucial question of the Eucharist came to the fore. At this point, the duke's position towards Lollardy rapidly shifted. Silencing both the two Lollards and the doctors, Gaunt proceeded to lecture the Lollards concerning the Church's interpretation of the Eucharist. It was from this point on that Gaunt no longer gave his support to the teachings of the Lollards.²⁰

Hereford's failure before Gaunt did not in any way silence the Lollard. On June 27, 1382, Hereford, Repingdon and another Lollard suspect, Thomas Hilman appeared before Archbishop Courtenay at the prelate's residence at Otford. For reasons unknown, Courtenay rescheduled the meeting for the following Tuesday at Christ Church (Canterbury). Only Hilman appeared as ordered, and the other two were excommunicated on July 1. Hereford, with singular optimism, next hurried off to Rome and attempted to convince Urban VI to reverse Courtenay's decision.

He even tried to prove to the pontiff that many papal claims were unfounded! Urban lost little time in casting Hereford into prison, although the Lollard later escaped during a popular riot.²¹

Hereford became an important figure in the question of the relationship between the Crown and the Lollards after his return from Rome. Through a study of his later career, present-day students can gain insight into the support which the Lollards held at court. Hereford was the most important Lollard prosecuted by Courtenay under the procedure set up by the Parliament of May, 1382. This procedure merits examination, for the lack of cooperation between the Church and the Crown in the prosecution of heretics can best be seen in a study of the laws governing prosecution. Therefore, I shall digress at this point from a continuation of the discussion of Hereford, and examine the process for prosecution set up by the Parliament of 1382. I shall pick up the discussion of Hereford again afterwards, as it was under the 1382 laws that he was prosecuted.

The Parliament of 1382 was held in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt. Even the anti-clerical elements, such as the Duke of Lancaster must have been angered at the actions of the peasants, and in so far as they associated the revolt with the spreading of Lollard teachings, these elements supported measures aimed at stopping the spread of Wyclif's ideas. Thus, the climate was right for Archbishop Courtenay to push for new measures against the wandering preachers who were spreading Lollardy.²² But the reason for Parliament's support of Courtenay's request

may well have been national tranquility rather than the suppression of heresy. Nevertheless, in spite of the fear which the Peasants' Revolt had generated, Parliament did not grant the Church the wide powers to suppress Lollard preachers which some of the patents might indicate.²³

Until the Parliament of 1382, the customary means by which a prelate could prosecute a suspected heretic was by obtaining from Crown officials a writ de excommunicato capiendo. Also known as the significavit, such a writ directed the local sheriff to arrest and hold the excommunicate in prison until such person reconciled himself with the Church. For a writ of significavit to be obtained, however, the Church must first have tried and sentenced the offender who must then have shown himself contumacious. Furthermore, the bishop had to let the suspect know forty days in advance that application for the suspect's arrest was going to be made. In theory, upon such notice, the suspect was expected to submit to the Church's correction. However, the suspect could just as well cross out of his diocese into another where the writ (which held force only in the diocese of issue) could not be utilized. Those wishing to escape from rather than make peace with the Church could move from diocese to diocese faster than the writs could catch up to them. The weaknesses of the significavit caused Courtenay to petition the king through Parliament for more effective means to persecute wandering Lollard preachers.²⁴

The archbishop duly notified Parliament that unlicensed preachers were creating dissatisfaction among the lower classes

in England. Thus, with the fear of another peasants' rising in Parliament's mind, Courtenay succeeded in gaining for himself certain extraordinary powers to deal with Lollard preachers. Nonetheless, his gain was coupled with new restrictions. The commissions which permitted prosecution under the new procedure were personal in nature. They were issued to individual bishops (at first only those of the Archdiocese of Canterbury) and lapsed upon either the bishop's death or change of office. The new powers, therefore, were piecemeal in nature. The specific and temporary nature of the new writs weakened their authority. Indeed, both the Church and the Crown must have realized the weakness, for the new procedure did not replace the significavit. A bishop could still use the older process if he so desired, or if he were not granted one of the new patents. If the intention of the Crown was to extirpate heresy, a more generally dispensed power would have been in order. The new process seems to have combined the Crown's fear of the peasants with the Crown's suspicion of increasing the Church's power.

The specific nature of the new powers was not the only way in which Courtenay's request was diluted. The new procedure provided a greater possibility of interference by the Crown. The king and his council maintained the final judgment in each instance in which the new process was used. The case of Nicholas Hereford illustrates the workings of the new writs.

Courtenay suspected that Hereford, upon his return from Rome, was hiding in Nottinghamshire. Accordingly, the archbishop petitioned the Crown to arrest and imprison him under the provision of the May 1382 Parliament. On January 17, 1387, about two weeks after Courtenay made his request, the Crown appointed John de Grey of Codenore, the sheriff of Nottingham, the mayor of Nottingham and others to arrest and imprison Hereford until he made peace with the Church.²⁵ Hereford was found and jailed, but Sir William Neville, one of the knights whom scholars associate with pro-Lollard sympathies, immediately petitioned the Crown to release Hereford into his custody "because of the honesty of [Hereford's] person."²⁶ The Crown granted this request. Thus, though Courtenay could now effect the arrest of heretics more easily, he no longer had control over each case. Friends of those imprisoned could gain from the Crown custody of heresy suspects. According to historian H.G. Richardson:

The price, therefore, that the Church paid for speedy process was to give the lay power the deciding vote; the alternative to acquiesce in the decision of the council was to proceed by way of excommunication and to obtain a writ de excommunicato capiendo, in fact to use a weapon that had proved practically useless where the need for action was most urgent.²⁷

Incidentally, although the first letters patent under the new procedure were issued by the Crown on June 26, 1382, the Commons had already adjourned on May 22. The Commons must not have heard of the results of Courtenay's petition for new powers and protested at Michaelmas when Parliament next met that a decision was reached which increased Courtenay's power without

the Commons' opinion having been taken into account. Although the Crown made no changes to the new procedure, Commons was told that the powers which the Crown had granted Courtenay in May 1382 would be voided.

In sum, the powers under the new procedure were restricted and probably given more from fear of another Peasants' Revolt than out of a sense of religious duty. That Courtenay was able to use the new writs to scatter the Oxford Lollards attests less to regal-clerical cooperation than it does to Courtenay's personal efforts. Indeed, Richardson's analysis of the price paid by Courtenay for extraordinary powers to deal with unlicensed preachers is correct in that the Crown now had the deciding vote. However, it would be a mistake to follow Richardson in the belief that the Crown used this vote arbitrarily against the spirited archbishop. In the short run, Courtenay gained for himself a quicker means of fighting Lollardy. In the long run, he lost for the Church much of its power over heretics. His personal victory does not alter the fact that now the Crown, as well as the Church, was directly involved in the procedure for prosecuting heretics--with the Crown having the upper hand. Although in some cases the Church and Crown cooperated in dealing with Wyclif's followers, the Church would find that the Crown could also protect Lollards from the Church if it so desired, as the case of Nicholas Hereford indicates. This lack of cooperation between the Church and the Crown can better be

seen in an examination of the histories of the Lollard knights.²⁸

Scholars derive the influence of Lollardy among the members of the lower nobility from two chief sources, Henry Knighton and Thomas Walsingham, the prejudice of whom has already been discussed. After his discussion of William Smith (the Lollard associate of Swinderby), Knighton noted other Lollards:

There were also knights [milites] Thomas Latimer, John Trussell, Lewis Clifford, John Peachy, Richard Sturry and Reginald Hilton. . . ²⁹

This list was placed between the discussion of Smith and a consideration of the effect of Lollard preachers under the year 1382. The list appears to have been relatively unimportant to Knighton, as he mentioned the knights and then changed the subject abruptly. This might indicate that the knights listed were commonly known as Lollards. In any event, Knighton made no attempt to prove their connection with Lollardy--he merely asserted it.³⁰

Walsingham also noted Lollardy among the knightly class. His list, which began a section of the Historia Anglicana entitled, "Ruina Militum Lolardorum," included William Neville (the same courtier who protected Hereford), Lewis Clifford, John Clanvowe, Richard Sturry, Thomas Latimer and John Montague. Walsingham continued by giving an account of the deathbed repentance of a Lollard priest in Montague's household, implying that through such priests, Lollardy was spread to the courtiers.³¹ Under the year 1395, Walsingham again mentioned the Lollard knights,

carefully omitting those who had died between 1382 and 1395.³² Finally (1404) in his description of some anti-clerical measures discussed in Parliament, Walsingham mentioned that the speaker, Sir John Cheyne, was an enemy of the Church and a renegade deacon! Cheyne is, on the basis of this afterthought, associated by scholars with the other Lollard knights.³³

The most important scholarship done in examining the evidence for Lollardy in the knights whom Walsingham and Knighton listed has been that of W.T. Waugh and, more recently, Kenneth Bruce McFarlane,³⁴ who came to almost opposite conclusions as to the "Lollardness" of these knights. Of the three knights whom both chroniclers mention, Waugh asserted that the only possible Lollard was Sir Thomas Latimer. McFarlane, taking Waugh's arguments into account, not only believed that the three knights appearing on both lists (Thomas Latimer, Lewis Clifford and Richard Sturry) showed Lollard tendencies, but he also accepted at least Lollard sympathies (if not outright Lollardy) in the cases of William Neville, John Clanvowe, John Montague and John Cheyne-- in short, all those mentioned by Walsingham.³⁵ With the evidence at his disposal, McFarlane concluded:

The apostles of heresy really did enjoy for something like thirty years the support and protection of a group of devout and influential laymen quite unconnected with the Duke of Lancaster.³⁶

The fact that these knights were not connected with John of Gaunt is important. If Gaunt had influence over them, one might conclude that Lancaster's power, rather than their own

personal convictions, caused them to act in favor of the Lollards, as Gaunt himself did when he thought that he might benefit from such action. But all the evidence indicates that the Lollard sympathies of these knights did not flow from Gaunt. A complete discussion of the careers of these men would merely repeat the work of Waugh and McFarlane. Some instances of the seven knights' lives are considered here, however, since the case for Lollard sympathy at court after 1382 is based in large measure upon the Lollard tendencies of these courtiers. Common to all seven knights are two facts: by the early 1380's, all of them were attached to the court and all of them prospered there.³⁷

Historians have associated these seven knights with Lollardy for various reasons. Of the seven knights, the case for Lollardy in Sir Thomas Latimer is the strongest. On May 2, 1388, six years after Wyclif's teachings were condemned, the king's council sent for Latimer to answer charges concerning his possession of certain Lollard books. McFarlane noted that this event fit with a government drive against the Lollards of Nottingham, which was a short-lived campaign against a heresy which the knights of Richard's Chamber favored.³⁸ It was probably Latimer who forced his humbler neighbors to come and listen to the notorious Lollard preacher Robert Hook, who preached within the parish church. Latimer stood by armed to protect the heretic. This account from Knighton was (in McFarlane's opinion) probably true.³⁹

Of Sir William Neville, I need say no more than to reiterate

his protection of Nicholas Hereford in 1387.⁴⁰ The evidence of Sir John Clanvowe's sympathy to Lollardy is more complete. Most importantly, Clanvowe himself admitted his affinity to Lollardy. A written document attributed to him discussed the primacy of the Scriptures, but omitted all mention of confession, pilgrimage, the veneration of the saints, the effectiveness of the sacraments and the concept of the priesthood. While such omissions are, of themselves, no proof of Clanvowe's Lollardy, these topics were those most under attack by the Lollards at this time.⁴¹

The case for Sir Richard Sturry's Lollardy is, admittedly, one of guilt by association. But in addition to his close connection with the other Lollard knights, both Walsingham and Knighton included him in their lists of Lollards. Sturry is also found as an executor of Joan of Kent's will.⁴²

The case of Sir John Montague again involves Nicholas Hereford. Hereford remained with Sir William Neville until the knight's death.⁴³ He then came to stay at Montague's residence at Shenley. The harboring of a notorious heretic certainly casts doubt upon Montague's orthodoxy.⁴⁴

McFarlane based his cases for the Lollardy of Sirs Lewis Clifford and John Cheyne upon an examination of their wills. Although these documents certainly emphasized their writers' feelings of their own unworthiness, contempt for the earthly, and an absence of pomp, two factors seriously weaken McFarlane's thesis. First, Courtenay's successor to the See of Augustine, Thomas

Arundel, a vigorous persecutor of Lollardy, used the same formula for his will as did these knights. No one could seriously argue that Arundel was a Lollard. Secondly, Cheyne's will requested that "£7 worth of groats and pence are to be dealt on the day of the funeral to poor needy men there to pray for my soul."⁴⁵ Such prayers for the dead were not characteristic of the Lollards.

On the other hand, other evidence which McFarlane did not emphasize points to these men's Lollard sympathies. Clifford, as already noted, was the messenger who 'pompously' interfered at Lambeth (1378). How much of this pomp was due to his own conviction cannot be determined. But he, Neville, Sturry and Clanvowe were executors of Joan of Kent's will. Interestingly, Sir John Oldcastle's father-in-law was also one of Joan's executors.⁴⁶ If Clifford was not a Lollard, he certainly kept odd company.

In the case of John Cheyne, there is other evidence which possibly indicates connection with heresy. In January 1414, during the Oldcastle Rising, John Cheyne and William Beauchamp (another executor of Joan's will) were imprisoned at the king's order.⁴⁷ After the rising, they were released. We know of no reason for their imprisonment, but it is quite possible that Henry V suspected them as supporters of Oldcastle. They were arrested, detained and released without any reason given.

Of the four topics which were chosen for discussion in this

chapter, the following conclusions are warranted. First, the Lollard translation of the Bible gave to the Lollard poor priests certain advantages over their orthodox opponents, and also certain handicaps. The populace, probably had more respect for preachers who taught from the Bible than those who taught from fables. However, even though the Lollard Bible contained no heresies, the mere possession of Lollard books was a suspect act.

Second, the Lollard preachers made headway in various locations, organizing themselves into loose chains through which Wyclif's message was spread. Such men as John Ball (whose alleged confession connected him more with Lollardy than did the actual events of his life), Nicholas Hereford and William Swinderby were prosecuted by the Church for their preaching. In the case of Swinderby, it is noteworthy that he sought and expected protection from the same organ, Parliament, that the Church had more and more to work with to gain the Crown's support in anti-Lollard measures. Nicholas Hereford, Wyclif's most important early follower, is interesting to the student of Lollardy not only because of his personal contributions to the Lollard movement, but also because his life demonstrates both the support Lollardy received at court, and the lack of cooperation between the Church and Crown in prosecuting heretics.

Prior to 1382, a writ significavit was needed to arrest and detain heretics. This writ proved nearly useless against the wandering preachers spreading Lollardy. But the new powers

which Archbishop Courtenay was able to obtain from the king and Lords in Parliament were quite restricted. These powers were personal in nature to each bishop requesting them, and the Crown maintained the deciding vote in each case. Thus, Courtenay could have a Lollard such as Hereford arrested, but the Crown could put individuals so arrested in the custody of courtiers. In effect, arrest under the new procedure could be diluted by the Crown's interference. This, therefore, is the third conclusion--that there was little cooperation between the Church and the Crown in the prosecution of heretics.

Finally, the protection which the Lollards received at court merits attention. Again, from a study of Nicholas Hereford, historians can see some of the courtiers (William Neville and John Montague) as protectors of Lollard preachers. Indeed, an examination of the chroniclers, Knighton and Walsingham, even considering the bias of these writers, indicates that several of the lower nobility who worked for the court were at least Lollard sympathizers. It is difficult to believe that such men could have hidden their sympathies from the Crown.

NOTES

¹The story of the blending of Lollardy with Protestantism in the north of England is told in A.G. Dickens, Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959). For Lollard activities during the Reformation, see Margaret E. Aston, "Lollardy and the Reformation: Survival or Revival?," History 49 (1964): 149-70.

²Workman, John Wyclif, 2: 155-6.

³Ibid., p. 156.

⁴Peggy Ann Knapp, "John Wyclif as Bible Translator: The Texts for the English Sermons," Speculum 46 (1971): 713-20.

⁵Ibid. See also Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Non-Conformity (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 118.

⁶Knapp, "Wyclif as Translator," 713-20.

⁷Workman, John Wyclif, 2:220 went so far as to state that the Lollards in failing to use popular preaching methods, failed to win over the masses of the people. Workman used the fact that Wyclif's sermons were rarely re-issued while those of orthodox preachers were as proof for his point. Of course, such evidence is of dubious value, as the Church controlled the written word. See Michael Wilks, "Reformatio Regni: Wyclif and Hus as Leaders of Religious Protest Movements," in Derek Baker ed., Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) pp. 109-30, for a more realistic view of Wyclif's failure. Wilks contended that it was Wyclif's eucharistic beliefs which were the major reason for his failure.

⁸See Workman, John Wyclif, 2: 149-200 for a complete and still relevant discussion of the Lollard Bible. See also David C. Fowler, The Bible in Early English Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976).

⁹Wyclif based himself at Lutterworth while the "poor priests" roamed the countryside preaching.

¹⁰McFarlane, John Wycliffe, p. 72.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Fas. Ziz., pp. 273-4.

¹³Workman, John Wyclif, 2: 237.

¹⁴Henry (De)Spenser of Norwich (1370-1406) was the same man who burned the first Lollard martyr, William Sautry in 1399.

¹⁵McFarlane, John Wycliffe, p. 104.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 133. In addition, Swinderby was protected from the stake in early 1382, by John of Gaunt. There is no reason to doubt Knighton's chronicle on this point, since Gaunt as yet was friendly to the Lollard cause. Gaunt's first obvious disillusionment with the Lollards occurred later in 1382 at Tottenhall. See p. 57.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 110.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 126.

²²Courtenay never mentioned Lollard preachers specifically. He always spoke of wandering preachers, but his later actions to prosecute Lollard preachers leaves no doubt about who he had in mind.

²³See Dahmus, Prosecution of John Wyclif, pp. 124-5 for an example of such a patent.

²⁴H.G. Richardson, "Heresy and Lay Power under Richard II," English Historical Review 51 (1936): 5.

²⁵C.P.R., Richard II vol. 3, p. 316. It was about two weeks prior to this that Courtenay made his request.

²⁶C.C.R., Richard II vol. 3, p. 208. See also, McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, p. 199.

²⁷Richardson, "Heresy," : 8

²⁸The term Lollard Knights comes from an article by W.T. Waugh, "The Lollard Knights," Scottish Historical Review 11 (1913-4): 55-92.

²⁹Henry Knighton, Chronicon Henrici Knighton, ed. J.R. Lumby, 2 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottswode, 1889-95), 2:181.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Walsingham, 2: 159. Walsingham went on at this point to describe Montague's removal of religious images from his residence--a definite Lollard characteristic.

³²Compare Walsingham, 2: 159, 2: 216.

³³Ibid., 2: 266. That Cheyne was actually a deacon is taken from Walsingham's phrase (describing Cheyne) "diaconus fuerat ordinatus" (he had been an ordained deacon.)

³⁴Waugh, "Lollard Knights," and McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings.

³⁵See McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, pp. 149-50. Of these mentioned by Knighton, he noted that Sir Reginald Hilton cannot be identified, Sir John Peachy was a minor at the time, and Sir John Trussell, though a lawless man, was orthodox in his religious beliefs.

³⁶Ibid., p. 143.

³⁷Ibid., p. 171.

³⁸Ibid., p. 193.

³⁹McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, p. 196.

⁴⁰See above, p. 61.

⁴¹McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, p. 205.

⁴²See above, p. 49, n. 32.

⁴³Walsingham, 2: 159.

⁴⁴Ibid. Walsingham went on here to describe the repentance of a Lollard priest in Montague's household.

⁴⁵McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, p. 211.

⁴⁶Nichols, A Collection of All the Wills, p. 30.

⁴⁷Waugh, "Sir John Oldcastle," 645.

CHAPTER FIVE

ORTHODOXY OR EXPEDIENCY?--THE PROOF

The facts which have been presented in the first chapters of this thesis indicate the absence of any consistent policy on the part of the Crown towards Wyclif and his followers. There is truth to this indication. The Crown gave implied (if not direct) support to Wyclif at both St. Paul's and Lambeth. The presence of the king's marshal at the former incident and Joan of Kent's interference at the second, certainly demonstrates a measure of court support for the man who would become the founder of the Lollard movement. If the Crown had opposed Wyclif's ideas, John of Gaunt and Joan certainly would not have defended the cleric.¹

On the other hand, and at about the same time (ca. 1378), the Crown assumed a more neutral position between the champion of reform and the Benedictine monk John de Acley, spokesman for the possessioners. By silencing both Wyclif and de Acley, the Crown's position appears to have been indifferent to the religious debate going on at the time. Then, in 1382, the Crown's view on the Lollard question shifted once again, when the king and Lords granted to Archbishop Courtenay extraordinary powers to prosecute wandering preachers within his province. But this grant of new powers, given in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt, gave the Church only limited control over heretics once arrested.² In addition, there were courtiers, such as Sir Thomas Latimer and Sir William Neville, who demonstrated pro-Lollard sympathies. These courtiers could not have hidden their beliefs from the Crown.³ And although the Crown allowed Courtenay to arrest

Lollards such as Nicholas Hereford, the same Crown would also allow the "Lollard knights" at court to maintain heresy suspects in these knights' custody, thus nullifying the effect of the arrests.

But perhaps the case of William Swinderby best exemplifies this outwardly inconsistent tendency of the Crown. Swinderby appealed to the king in Parliament. This appeal, which was sent through the Commons, to the Lords and the king, was for the removal of the excommunication placed upon him by canonical court. It was through the same procedure, through the same organs of government that Courtenay requested his additional powers over heretics. Thus, both the Church and the Lollards felt that the Crown would come ultimately to their respective support. And, perhaps even more interestingly, both the Church and the Lollards did, in fact, receive the Crown's blessing in some of the situations presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Therefore, the position that the Crown had no consistent policy towards Lollardy has some basis in fact.⁴ Indeed, even the chronological ordering of events discloses no pattern to the Crown's activities, since the Crown supported and suppressed Wyclif and his followers in different instances at almost exactly the same time. If therefore, there was a plan in the Crown's apparent inconsistency, the chronological ordering of facts does not bring such a plan to the surface.⁵ Indeed, the events discussed in this thesis certainly demonstrate no consistency on the part of the Crown.

It is now time to consider the question posed at the beginning of this thesis--did the Crown act for reasons of religious orthodoxy or political expediency? If either reason can be shown to account for the inconsistent behavior of the Crown in dealing with the Lollards, that reason will form the basis upon which a statement of a Crown policy will be determined. Thus, if all of the Crown's actions, no matter how unplanned, can be linked with maintaining the religious orthodoxy of the English populace, then a policy of maintaining such orthodoxy will have been shown. Or, if the evidence presented demonstrates that the Crown's actions were based principally upon the Crown's self-interest, a policy of expediency will have surfaced.⁶ I shall first consider the evidence for a policy of religious orthodoxy and then, that for a policy of political expediency.

The facts previously presented indicate that the Crown could not have been primarily concerned for the religious orthodoxy of the English people. The direct interference of Joan of Kent at Lambeth, by which the queen mother attempted to prevent the assembled prelates from determining the orthodoxy of Wyclif's propositions (1378), the Crown's ignoring the existence of Lollard supporters at court and the dilution of the powers requested by Courtenay to extirpate heresy (1382) certainly demonstrate that the beliefs of the people were not of primary concern to the government.⁷

What of the second possibility? Did the Crown act out of a sense of political expediency? The evidence indicates that it did, and for three primary reasons: (a) to increase the royal treasury; (b) to maintain national tranquility, and (c) to keep a check upon the power of the Church in England.

The Crown's desire to increase the funds of the royal treasury (a constant interest of government) was keenly felt during the Hundred Years' War, particularly during the war's active phases. As the French army under du Guisclin won back more and more land, the English Crown needed more and more funds to stop French offensives. Thus, it is not surprising that the Crown did not oppose Wyclif's position on clerical disendowment which he took to St. Paul's (1377) with the Duke of Lancaster and the king's marshal. Indeed, the presence of the king's marshal indicates that the Crown supported the cleric. For whatever the Church would lose of her wealth through the preachings of Wyclif, the Crown would certainly gain. The king's need for funds would have been satisfied in part if even some of the Church's wealth found its way into the royal treasury.⁸

In the same vein, Richard II's Council (1377) had no qualms about asking Wyclif, whose orthodoxy was at least questionable after the St. Paul's incident, if the Crown could lawfully withhold money from the papacy. In English eyes, the pope was helping to support the French war effort. Indeed, even previously (1374) at Bruges, the English Crown showed that it would

not give the pope the money he demanded without a fight. But as the active phase of the war drew to a close, the reformer's cry for disendowment was heeded less and less by a Crown which now had another pressing problem--national tranquility.

The long term effect of the Black Death, which hit England in 1348 was a rapid decrease in population. This decrease caused a drop in the price of grain. Additionally, drastic economic measures, which Edward III initiated to assist the upper classes, and which included statutes forcing laborers to remain on their lords' manors, caused popular discontent.⁹ The national tranquility which was carefully preserved in the reign of Edward III, broke down suddenly in 1381 when the peasants revolted.

Even before the revolt, however, internal peace showed signs of strain. As Dahmus noted, fear that popular discontent would lead to civil strife, led the Crown to silence both Wyclif and de Acley in 1378.¹⁰ Thus, as the Crown acted earlier to increase its treasury, now it acted to preserve order. Both were cases of expediency. By 1378, national tranquility was threatened, and to preserve it, religious debate would be silenced.¹¹

The request of Archbishop Courtenay in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt, for more powers to prosecute heretics than were afforded by the significavit, was carefully geared to appeal to the fears of the gentry and the Crown that the peasants were still dissatisfied.¹² Courtenay was granted additional powers by those who had suffered most by the riots. The Commons was

not present.¹³ Nonetheless, the Crown carefully maintained the final decision in each case of presumed heresy. As the case of Nicholas Hereford demonstrated, this last vote option was powerful indeed.¹⁴

In maintaining the final decision over heresy suspects, the Crown demonstrated that it desired to maintain control over the growth of power of the Church within England. Indeed, as time went on and the Church pushed more and more for the prosecution of Lollards, the Crown simultaneously stepped up its own interest in this area which was formerly of concern only to the Church.¹⁵

The evidence of the relationship between the Crown and Lollardy, therefore, indicates that the Crown maintained a recognizable policy in dealing with Wyclif and his followers. This policy was not based upon the religious beliefs of the Lollards or the Crown's desire to maintain the religious orthodoxy of Englanders. Rather, the policy of the Crown towards the Lollards was rooted in political expediency. Insofar as the Crown could gain funds, internal peace and control over the Church in England, the Crown would support or ignore the preachings of Wyclif and his followers. When Lollardy became embarrassing or detrimental to the Crown's political aims, however, the Crown reacted to suppress the heretics.

NOTES

¹See above, Chapter Three, pp. 33-41 for a summary of these incidents.

²Above, Chapter Four, pp. 59-61.

³McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings, p. 221.

⁴Above, Chapter Four, pp. 55-6.

⁵The best example of this simultaneous support and suppression is the case of Wyclif and de Acley. But also illuminating is the request of Richard's Council (1377), above, Chapter Two, pp. 12-3 asking Wyclif to comment as to whether the Crown could withhold money from the papacy. Although Wyclif's reply would have well suited the Crown, the cleric was silenced due to the more pressing issue of national tranquility. The Crown's action seems to have been haphazard, but actually demonstrates keen political acumen. An example of this process of simultaneous support and suppression is evident in the actions of John of Gaunt towards the Lollards Repingdon and Hereford at Tottenhall in 1382 (See above, Chapter Four, p. 57). Gaunt showed here the same tendency as did the Crown--to support the Lollards when his cause could derive benefit from them and to suppress them when he could not.

⁶I have chosen not to restate each event already discussed. Rather, I have noted certain key events which exemplify my point.

⁷Indeed, the Haulay-Shakyl incident certainly indicates that religious considerations took a back seat to sound political decisions in the later fourteenth century. See above, Chapter Three, pp. 42-4 for a discussion of this incident.

⁸See above, Chapter Three, pp. 33-5, for a discussion of the incident at St. Paul's (1377).

⁹The most important of these statutes was The Statute of the Labourers (1351). This document is reprinted in A.S. Meyers, ed., English Historical Documents, p. 993.

¹⁰Dahmus, Prosecution of Wyclif, pp. 71-2.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Richardson, "Heresy," p. 5.

¹³Above, Chapter Four, pp. 58-62.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁵This progression is clearly seen in the final vote given the Crown by the new heresy procedure of 1382. It is evident in its final stages in John A.F. Thomson, Later Lollards, p. 5.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates that events of the later medieval period concerning the English Lollards and their relationship to the Crown, although outwardly linked to the question of religious belief, were more a demonstration of the Crown's attempts at self-preservation and benefit than the maintenance of the "proper" faith of the English citizenry. If the age was, indeed, an "Age of Faith," it was faith not only in the power of Christ, but also in the power of Edward, Richard, Henry and the other rulers who, together with their advisors, constituted the English Crown. Both the Church and the Lollards recognized and believed in the power of the Crown, and both the Church and the Lollards received aid and suffered criticism (or worse) from the king and his entourage of noble advisors in the different situations which have been presented above.

The Lollards, as heretics persecuted by the Church, could have expected little consolation from a Crown which worked in collusion with the Church. But no such Crown ruled later medieval England. Rather, the Lollards asked for help from the Crown-and they sometimes received it. And the Church, in order to gain power to prosecute the Lollards, had to bargain with the Crown for such powers.

The work done by H.G. Richardson, who showed that the additional powers given Courtenay in 1382 actually weakened the

Church's hold on heresy proceedings, can now be expanded. The evidence indicates that the bickering for power between the Church and the Crown was constant during the period under discussion. And the Crown controlled the bargaining table. When it was to the Crown's advantage, the Church was supported and the Lollards suppressed, as was the case in the period following the Peasants' Revolt.¹ But when, as in the case of de Acley or the Crown's toleration of Lollard courtiers, the Crown had nothing to gain by attacking the Church's opponents, the Crown remained aloof or supported the anti-clerical elements.

After the revolt of Sir John Oldcastle in 1414, the prosecution of the Lollards became a cooperative effort between the Church and the State. From the viewpoint of the Crown, the Lollards had proved themselves traitors, and deserved the prosecution which treason merited. Such prosecution was not, however, a radical shift in Crown policy towards the followers of Wyclif. Throughout the early history of the Wycliffite movement, the Crown's relationship with Wyclif's followers was based upon the Crown's self-interest. The prosecutions of the Lollards after 1414 were really the continuation of the Crown's policy of expediency.

NOTES

¹See above, p. 55.

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RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY OR POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY? -- THE REACTION
OF THE ENGLISH CROWN TO WYCLIF AND HIS FOLLOWERS (1377-1414)

by

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After the revolt of Sir John Oldcastle, leader of English Lollardy, in January 1414, the terms Lollard and traitor became almost indistinguishable in the minds of many English people. The purpose of this thesis is to consider the relationship of the English Crown to the Lollards from the time of the public debut of John Wyclif's unorthodox religious beliefs (February 1377) to the Oldcastle rebellion, to determine if the Crown's actions were based upon a desire for religious orthodoxy in England, or for political expediency.

Such events as the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, the periodic Scottish raids, and the debates between the representatives of the realist philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the nominalist views of the English Franciscan William of Ockham, formed the background from which emerged the secular cleric John Wyclif, the fountainhead of the Lollard movement.

Wyclif and his followers, whose protests included issues of moral reform such as the refusal to pay tithes to negligent churchmen as well as theological issues, such as the denial of transubstantiation and papal authority, were (at different times) both supported and suppressed by key figures in the English government. A better understanding of the workings of the English Crown can be gained if some logic for the Crown's apparently haphazard actions concerning Lollardy can be determined.

The 1936 study by H.G. Richardson, "Heresy and Lay Power under Richard II," English Historical Review 51, indicates that in order for the Church to gain more than customary powers to prosecute Lollards, she had to give the Crown the final vote in each heresy case. This "give and take" process, which Richardson limited to the special powers given to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1382,

was in fact practiced constantly throughout the period of this study. Indeed, the Crown seems to have consistently acted to insure that the powers of the Church did not get out of hand. Cases presented in this thesis indicate that the desire to protect and expand its prerogatives were of more concern to the Crown in the period 1377-1414, than the suppression of unorthodox ideas. While the Church and the Crown sometimes worked together for the prosecution of the Lollards, there were clearly other cases when they did not. The Lollards themselves realized that the Crown was not always (or even predominantly) anti-Lollard. As a result of this realization, the Lollards themselves appealed their condition to the king in Parliament, just as the Church presented her side. And if the king was sometimes willing to listen to the Church leaders, he was also sometimes willing to listen to those courtiers who espoused the Lollard cause. Only with the revolt of Sir John Oldcastle did Lollards become public enemies.