

TRACTS AND TREATISES

OF

JOHN DE WYCLIFFE, D.D.

(1324-1384)

WITH

SELECTIONS AND TRANSLATIONS
FROM HIS MANUSCRIPTS, AND LATIN WORKS.

EDITED FOR

The Wycliffe Society.

ESTABLISHED 1844.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

BY

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Modernized, formatted, corrected, and annotated (in blue)
by William H. Gross www.onthewing.org © Sep 2008

NOTE: the name “Wycliffe” is variously spelled:
Wiclif, Wyclif, Wycliff, Wycliffe, and Wickliffe.

Scripture quotes in the notes are taken from the New King James Version,
Thomas Nelson, Inc. – Publishers.

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Modernization is based on Middle-English meanings, which was the vocabulary of Chaucer. Wycliffe’s translation of the Latin Vulgate is historically significant. Therefore, although modernized in part, his wording has been retained as much as possible, rather than substituting a current version. A biographical notice of Tyndale has this to say about Wycliffe’s previous translation (from the Parker Society’s *Tyndale, Doctrinal Treatises*, 1848):

“Wicliffe’s version also had this considerable defect, that whereas there was no one in Oxford in his days who knew anything of Greek, he could only translate from the Latin Vulgate; and consequently he had incorporated all of its erroneous renderings into his text. But besides this, the unsettled state of language, in our illiterate nation, had already made Wicliffe’s English among the things which were passing away. ‘The ghiftis and the clepyng of God ben without forthynkyng,’ or ‘He made us saaf bi waisschchyng of aghenbigetyng and aghen newing,’ (Wicliffe’s version of Rom. 11.29, and Tit. 3.5), would scarcely have been intelligible to Tyndale’s contemporaries, and would have sounded painfully uncouth to the next generation.”

In this modernized edition, [brackets] indicate additions to the text to aid understanding. But in many places, sentence structure has been substantially altered to preserve the intended meaning; a “small fix” wasn’t possible. In other places, the passive voice has been changed to active for clarity. Original page numbers are retained for citation purposes. Unreferenced pronouns and implied words are made explicit. Where God is referenced ambiguously, the pronouns are capitalized. Footnotes beginning “Originally,” provide Wycliffe’s wording; though some of his more interesting wording is retained in the text, and explained in the note. Robert Vaughan’s footnotes defining obscure words have been brought into the text for easier reading. Other words that were understood in 1845, but less so today, or whose meaning has changed, have been modernized or annotated. **Verse numbering** hadn’t been established in Wycliffe’s lifetime. Therefore they have been added to the text where he used only chapter numbers.

THE ORIGINAL EDITOR, Robert Vaughan (1795–1868), was an English Congregationalist minister, an academic, and a college head and writer. He came from a Welsh background. He was Professor of History in the London University, and then President of the Independent College, Manchester. He founded, and for a time edited, the *British Quarterly*.

OF INTEREST: About 1227 A.D., the division of the Bible into *chapters* was developed by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury. The **Wycliffe English Bible** of 1382 was the first Bible to use this division. In 1448, the Old Testament was divided into *verses* by a Jewish rabbi named Nathan. In 1555, Robert Estienne (Robert Stephanus, or Stephens), a printer from Paris, was the first to divide the New Testament into numbered verses. He used Nathan’s verse divisions for the Old Testament. Those chapter and verse divisions have been employed in nearly all Bible versions since.

— William Gross

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vii.

ADVERTISEMENT.

When it devolved on the Committee of the Wycliffe Society to decide on the subject of its first volume, they concluded that in effect that question was determined for them already by the illustrious name which the Society had adopted, and that they must commence the series with “The Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe.”

They well knew that one of the corresponding members of the Society was, by his previous researches, more fully qualified to engage in the work of preparing such a volume, than probably any other writer in the kingdom. The Committee accordingly requested the Rev. Robert Vaughan, D.D., to undertake the task, and the present volume is the result.

Its contents are divided into three parts:

The *first* is biographical, containing facts and observations concerning the life of Wycliffe.

The *second* part is analytical, supplying a critical account of the writings of Wycliffe that are still in manuscript, with numerous extracts, and also a notice of the *Dialogus*, with a translation from the original Latin of the more important chapters of that treatise.

The *third* part may be called *bibliothecal*, as it contains those tractates of the Reformer which have been already printed at different periods, and in various forms.

viii.

The first part therefore includes all that is known concerning the personal history of the Reformer, the result of a most laborious, extensive, and repeated examination of the extant writings of Wycliffe, and of all other materials which could be made available for the purpose.

Respecting the second part, Dr. Vaughan has thus written:

“In the extracts presented in the first section of the first book, I have not retained every obsolete word,¹ and in a few instances, an illegible or obscure sentence has been omitted; but those passages exhibit throughout, the substantial and idiomatic language of the Reformer, and cannot fail to make precisely that impression on the reader, which would be made by them if read from the original manuscript. It has not appeared to me necessary, or desirable, that I should affect greater accuracy in that portion of the work.

“The catalogue of the Reformer’s writings, in the next section, has been revised with much care, and will be found less imperfect than any one previously published. I speak of this catalogue as being only less imperfect than those which have preceded it, because no man acquainted with the subject can expect to see a perfect account of the writings of Wycliffe, distinguishing satisfactorily between the extant and the non-extant, and between the works certainly written by the Reformer, and those attributed to him on probable evidence only. In this connection, the obscure and uncertain may be diminished, but can never be wholly removed. In the hope of giving more completeness to this section, I have re-examined many of the Wycliffe manuscripts within the last year.

ix.

“There are two editions of the *Dialogus*: one printed without the name of the place or of the printer, in 1525; the other printed at Frankfort, in 1753. The latter is a reprint from the former. In both, the errors

¹ Dr. Vaughan’s footnotes, containing his definitions for such words, are included in the text. — WHG

of punctuation and typography are frequent, and the man who attempts any extended translation of the contents of that work, will be the least disposed to pass a hasty censure on this portion of my labor. That I have succeeded in giving the precise meaning of the author, in every instance, especially in the scholastic and metaphysical portions of his argument, is more than I dare promise myself; but I am satisfied that the reader may be confident in the general accuracy of the translation, and that, judging of the doctrine taught in the *Trialogus*, from the chapters given in the volume, he will be safe from all material error. Some chapters and parts of chapters even in this fourth book have been omitted, but the translations are complete on the subjects to which they relate."

In reference to the contents of the third part, it is only necessary to add that the treatise "Against the order of Begging Friars," and the next, entitled "A Complaint to the King and Parliament," were printed in Oxford in 1608, and edited by Dr. James, from which impression they are now reprinted. The piece entitled, "The Wyckett," is printed from the Norembergh edition of 1545; and the tract, "Why Poor Priests have no Benefices," and the other fragments, are transcribed from the first edition of Lewis's *Life of Wycliffe*, and Fox's *Acts and Monuments*.

It may be expedient to state in conclusion, that while the present volume is, in its typographical and general character, a fair specimen of those that will succeed it, yet in a literary point of view, it must to a great extent be regarded as introductory and unique.

x.

Nearly five centuries have passed away since Wycliffe flourished; and the spitefulness of rivals and the malignity of persecutors, the dim shadows of succeeding ages, the progress of the English language, and successive revolutions in the manners and maxims of society, have all combined to render the writings of the Reformer obscure, and to require the labors of an editor who would scrupulously examine and faithfully expound them. In a succeeding volume, the reader will find, according to the original plan of the Wycliffe Society, more of the author, and less of the editor; but in the present, the prominence of the editor was unavoidable; and the reader will doubtless feel happy in the company of so competent and experienced a guide.

Robert Ashton. } *Secretaries*

John Blackburn. }

Congregational Library, London,
February, 1845.

PART I. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE.

The biographers of Wycliffe all mention the year 1324 as that of his birth.¹ The place of his nativity still bears his name — a village about six miles from the town of Richmond in Yorkshire. The name of Wycliffe, like that of William of Wykeham, is evidently a local one, being written John of Wycliffe; and in England there is no locality bearing the name of Wycliffe beside the place above mentioned. From the time of the Norman Conquest,² the parish of Wycliffe had been the residence of a family bearing that name, who were lords of the manor of Wycliffe, and patrons of its rectory. During the lifetime of our Reformer³ there were two rectors of the parish who bore this name: Robert Wycliffe, presented to the living by Catherine, widow of Roger Wycliffe; and William Wycliffe, presented by John de Wycliffe. In 1606 the possessor of this ancient property lost his only son, and by the marriage of his daughter, his patrimony passed to a family of another name.⁴

ii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Dr. Zouch, rector of Wycliffe in the last century, in the inscription attached to the portrait of Wycliffe by Sir Antonio More, now an heirloom to the holders of that living,⁵ speaks of the Reformer without hesitancy — as “a native of this parish.” Birkbeck, a clergyman who officiated in an adjoining parish during the reign of Charles I, speaks no less decidedly on this point in a work entitled the “Protestant Evidence.”⁶ But our best authority is that of Leland, who wrote his “Collectanea” about a hundred and fifty years after the decease of Wycliffe; and mentioning the parish of Wycliffe, he describes it as the place where “Wycliffe the heretic was born.”

It is true that Leland himself has elsewhere given a somewhat different account. In his “Itinerary,” he makes mention of Spresswell, “a poor village, a good mile from Richmond,” as the place where the Reformer was born.⁷ But no trace of such a name can be found anywhere in the neighborhood of Richmond. Leland travelled for much of his information; but it is manifest from his errors in respect to Richmondshire, that he could not have visited that county more than very partially. Indeed, an author who could describe the rise of the Tees⁸ as being in a meadow near Caldwell, at least fifty miles from its real source, must be supposed liable to mistake on a point of this nature.

Spreswell may have been the name of the family mansion of the Wycliffes, or of some property belonging to them in the neighborhood; but we are more disposed to trust in the account given by

¹ Tanner, *Bibliotheca Brit.* 767. Lewis, chap. i. Baber ii.

² The [Norman Conquest of 1066, under William the Conqueror.](#)

³ “Reformer” is often reserved for the generation of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. But Wycliffe is known as the *Morning Star of the Reformation*. His refutations of doctrinal error were argued long before Luther. — WHG

⁴ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 229-324. Appendix i.

⁵ A “living” is a paid ecclesiastical office; a *benefice*.

⁶ Ed. Quarto, cent. xiv. p. 71.

⁷ *Itinerary*, v. 99.

⁸ [That is, the Tees River.](#)

Leland in his "Collectanea," than in that found in the "Itinerary," and to connect the birth of Wycliffe with the spot which was certainly the home of his family, and from which, beyond all reasonable doubt, he derived his name.¹

It must be admitted that the name of the Reformer does not occur in the existing records of the Wycliffe family. But this omission will not occasion surprise, when it is known that all the members of that family continued their adherence to the existing religious system, and that, according to the notions and feelings of the Middle Age, the man who made himself so conspicuous as the opponent of that system, would be regarded, in the language of the Reformer himself applied to such cases, as "slandering all his noble kindred, who were ever held true men and worshipful."²

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. iii

It will appear more probable that the Reformer spoke thus, from remembrances connected with his own history, if we bear in mind, that no examination of his writings has served to bring to light anything concerning his intercourse with his kindred. What Leland has said concerning Sperswell, accordingly, is not of sufficient weight to be allowed to disturb the uniform testimony both of tradition, and of the most trustworthy authorities on this subject.

Concerning the early years of Wycliffe, we do not possess a vestige of information. At the age of sixteen, we find him entered as a commoner in Queen's College, Oxford. This was in 1340, the year in which that college was founded. Queen's College owed its origin in part to the munificence of Philippa, the queen of Edward III, but still more to the praiseworthy zeal of Sir John Eglesfield, her chaplain. Eglesfield was a native of Cumberland, and the new college was designed chiefly for the benefit of students from the northern counties; a fact which may account for its being chosen in favor of a youth from the borders of Westmoreland and Durham.

In the age of Wycliffe, the means of education were extended far beyond the precincts of the cathedral or the monastery. Not only in the larger cities, but in every borough or castle, schools are said to have been established. Besides a school in the Abbey of St. Albans, in which every branch of knowledge then cultivated was taught, there was one in the same town under Mathew, a physician, and Garinus, his kinsman. Garinus was much celebrated for his knowledge of the canon and civil law; and the praise bestowed by Matthew Paris on this school, implies that there were many such in the kingdom. Not less than five hundred religious houses had made their appearance in England during the interval from the Conquest to the reign of John;³ and schools were generally annexed to those houses. It is certain, also, that so early as the year 1138, the instituting of schools in a manner distinct from the monastic establishments, had extended itself in some cases from towns even to villages. No person, however, could act in the capacity of schoolmaster until licensed by a clergyman; and the clergy, whether from jealousy or avarice, were often so exorbitant in their demands on such occasions, as at length to provoke the intervention of authority.

iv. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

¹ Tom. i. part ii. 329.

² MS. *On Wedded Men and Wives*, C.C.C. Cambridge.

³ King John was born in 1167 and died in 1216. He began his reign in 1199, and is most known for signing the Magna Carta in 1215. John was the youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine.

In a general council held in the Lateran church at Rome in 1179, and in another convened at Paris in 1212, all exactions for licenses to teach as schoolmasters were forbidden.

Even the studies at Oxford and Cambridge in those times were, for the most part, of an elementary kind, and the pupils were children. Such scholars were received into the schools which Wood describes as the “Nurseries of Grammarians,” until they became capable of ascending to “higher arts.” Children, however, would not often be sent from distant parts of the kingdom to the universities, merely for the sake of such elementary acquisitions as might be made with greater facility and equal effect nearer home. In the northern counties especially, the necessity for so doing was precluded. Edward I speaks of an establishment as existing in one of the border districts in his time, where two hundred young clerks ¹ were receiving education. In some such establishment, the northern students generally made such progress as qualified them when they came to the universities to enter upon those higher studies which were peculiar to those celebrated seats of learning. In the provincial schools, the Latin language was sedulously taught, as being in those times the only key of knowledge. When thus far instructed, the pupil passed to the study of certain approved works on grammar, rhetoric, and logic; and obtained some knowledge of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. These sciences, which, it will be observed, are seven in number, were supposed to be so explained as to present within their mystic circle whatever was deemed important, or even possible to be known. But it is not probable that the preliminary studies of the “young clerks” in such seminaries often embraced much beyond the study of grammar, their progress in the higher arts being reserved to the course awaiting them at the university.²

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. v

These facts may suggest to our imagination the manner in which Wycliffe had been occupied up to the time of his becoming a commoner in Oxford. But the connection of Wycliffe with Queen’s College was not of long continuance. Merton, to which he shortly afterwards removed, was a foundation of great celebrity. It could boast of some of the most scientific scholars of the age; it had supplied the English church with three primates;³ its divinity chair had been recently filled by the celebrated Bradwardine; and within its walls, the great schoolmen Ockham and Duns Scotus had put forth those powers, the fame of which filled all Christendom, and was supposed to be immortal. So great was the capacity of Scotus that, according to his eulogists, if the genius of Aristotle had been unknown, here was a disciple who could have supplied his place. His arrival at truth was rather with the readiness and certainty of tuition, than by the slow and doubtful processes common to ordinary minds. The Divine attributes he could describe as one descending immediately from the presence of Deity, and the nature of angels as though it were his own. The mysteries of Providence, he could explain as if apprised of all its secrecies; and the felicities of heaven he could set forth as if they had become the element of his own being. How natural that such a man should be described as *the immortal Scotus*, and the most powerful and ingenious of the sons of men! But his contemporary Ockham lived to better purpose. He

¹ *Clerks*: here it means clerics (clergymen), and specifically, seminarians (at the bottom of the paragraph). For the most part, “clerk” has been replaced with “cleric” throughout the text. – WHG

² Wood’s *Annals*, i. 105-107; ii. 712-717. Collier’s *Eccles. Hist.* i. 497. Tanner, *Notitia Monastica*, Preface. Matthew Paris, *Vit. Abbot. St. Alban.* 62. Baconi *Opus Majus*, Præfat. Brompton Chron. 1348. Hoveden, 589. Dupin, *Cent. XIII.* 92. Henry’s *Hist. Eng.* vi. 195-198. Robertson’s *View of Society*, sect. i. Hallam’s *Middle Ages*, ii. 24-29.

³ *Primate*: a senior clergyman and dignitary.

presumed to question the infallibility of Pope John XXII.¹ As a punishment of his temerity, he was compelled to seek the protection of Louis of Bavaria, emperor of Germany; and his publications in defence of the civil power as opposed to the undue pretensions of the ecclesiastical, if not friendly to his repose, contributed largely to his fame. One of his compositions is praised by Selden, as the “very best performance published concerning the limits of the spiritual and temporal powers.”²

Wycliffe appears to have felt the influence of the associations into which he thus passed, and to have given himself to the study of the scholastic philosophy with great ardor. Aristotle, according to that system, was the only safe guide to the meaning of St. Paul.

vi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Aided by the logic and metaphysics of that great master, there was nothing, either known or supposed to have being, which his disciples did not affect to describe and analyze. In attempting to establish any truth, it was common to state and refute the forms of error opposed to it; and debates conducted after the manner of a most technical and abstruse logic, became to the inmates of colleges much the same thing which the tournament had long been to knights, nobles, and princes. In subsequent portions of this volume, the reader will find sufficient illustration of the nature of this science, and of the skill with which the Reformer could avail himself of its weapons.

To his skill in the scholastic philosophy, Wycliffe has the reputation of having added a diligent study of the *civil* and *canon* law. The civil law was a system of jurisprudence which had descended from the times of the Roman Empire, and in part even from the times of the republic. It was adopted in various degrees by the nations of feudal Europe; but as it had been molded for the most part by men who acted in obedience to the will of a military despotism. However wise it may have been in some of its provisions, as relating to questions between man and man, it was in every way unfavorable to liberty as between sovereign and subject. The canon law consisted of the decrees of councils and of popes, and constituted an authority which not only took under its jurisdiction everything properly ecclesiastical, but often infringed upon the province of the civil power. Hence a spirit of rivalry arose between the courts of princes, and the courts of bishops; between the authority of councils, and the authority of parliaments; and between the supremacy claimed by princes in regard to ecclesiastical matters within their own dominions, and the pretensions of the pontiffs, as extending to the control of all such matters, in all the nations of Christendom. Thus it came to be a proverb, that no man could be a good canonist, without being a good civilian — the limits of the canon and the civil law being in many things so difficult to determine, that no one could hope to be expert in the defence of either, without possessing an intimate knowledge of both. But the causes which proved unfavorable to the dominion of the old Roman law, were highly favorable to the growing power of the church; and the sort of empire which the court of Rome labored to introduce by means of its canons, may be said to have come very much into the place of the old empire of the Cæsars.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. vii

¹ Pope John XXII was Pope from 1316 to his death in 1334. He was the second Avignon Pope (See note, [p. 69](#)).

² *Hist. Oxford*, ii. 89, 113. Lewis, c. i. Brucker, *Hist. Philos.* iii. 826, 828. Selden, *De Synedriis*, lib. i. cap. 10, p. 228.

In most of the nations of Europe, however, there were many laws and usages of Gothic or feudal origin, which were much too free or national in their character to accord readily with either of the systems referred to. This was eminently the case in England; and the writings of Wycliffe afford abundant evidence of the attention which he had bestowed on all these subjects. He clung with much tenacity to the authority of the civil power as his own just means of defence against the intolerance of churchmen; and often appealed to the laws of the land as a sufficient warrant, especially when sustained by Holy Scripture, for opposing all foreign usurpation within the realm of England, whether civil or ecclesiastical.

We do not know to what extent Wycliffe may have applied himself to mathematical studies, but his acquaintance with natural philosophy generally, as taught in those times, was considerable. His great distinction, however, among the distinguished men of his day, consisted in his manner of inculcating religious truth on the sole authority of Scripture, and in the strict exercise of the right of private judgment,¹ long before those terms had become as a watchword among us. It was this peculiarity which secured him the honorable appellation of the “Gospel Doctor.”²

It is not without considerable effort of imagination, that we can at all realize the test which must have been applied in those times, to the courage of a man resolved on pursuing such a course. Mosheim, in his *History of the Thirteenth Century*, remarks,

“The method of investigating the nature of Divine truth by reason and philosophy prevailed so universally, and was followed with such ardor, that the number of those who, in conformity with the example of the ancient doctors, drew their systems of theology from the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the fathers, and who acquired on that account the name of *Biblicists*, diminished from day to day.

viii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

It is true, indeed, that several persons of eminent piety, and even some of the Roman pontiffs, exhorted the scholastic divines with great seriousness and passion (and more especially those of the university of Paris) to change their method of teaching theology; and laying aside their philosophical abstraction and subtlety, to deduce the sublime science of salvation from the Holy Scriptures, with that purity and simplicity with which it was delivered there by the inspired writers. But these admonitions and exhortations were without effect. The evil had become too inveterate to allow for a remedy, and the passion for logic and metaphysics had grown so universal and so violent, that neither remonstrances nor arguments could check its presumption or allay its ardor.”³

To this course of things, however, Wycliffe had courage enough to oppose himself, and deduced his system of theology from the Holy Scriptures, in a manner which evinced as little dependence on the “writings of the Fathers,” as on the “logic and metaphysics of the schools.”

In the year 1345, a pestilence, the most destructive in the annals of the world, if we may credit contemporary writers, appeared in Tartary. Having ravaged various kingdoms of Asia, and spread itself over a great part of Lower Egypt, it passed to the islands of Greece, and making its way along every shore of the Mediterranean, fell with special violence upon the states of Italy.

¹ *Private Judgement*: reaching a conclusion as to biblical truth, on the basis of personal thought and insight. The believer is aided by the Spirit of Truth, and has taken into account the instruction of the church’s teachers; but he is otherwise to be unhindered by political or ecclesiastical pressure that would bind the conscience. The Reformers asserted this liberty of conscience under the terms *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* — by Scripture Alone and Faith Alone. — WHG

² *Hist. of Oxford*, i. 53, 92, 94. Lewis, c. l. Father Paul’s *Council of Trent*, lib. ii.

³ *Hist.* iii. 249, 250.

Even the Alps proved not to be a sufficient barrier against its inroads. It was felt in the most obscure recesses, and by every European nation. Two years had been occupied in its desolating progress, when, as the historians of the time relate, the continent of Europe was shaken from its centre to its borders by a succession of earthquakes. From June to December in the same year, England was visited with incessant rains. In the following August, the plague appeared at Dorchester; it soon reached the metropolis, and there, in the space of a few months, added many thousands to its victims. The infected perished, for the most part, in a few hours; the strongest failed after the second or third day. Wycliffe was now in the twenty-third year of his age. He saw the distemper passing from men to the brute creation, covering the land with putrid flesh; the labors of husbandry suspended; the courts of justice closed; the timid resorted to every device of superstition for security, and yet they perished around him, sometimes buoyant with delusion, and sometimes frenzied by despair.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. ix

It was said that only a tenth of the human family had been spared. Even grave men supposed that the earth had lost full half its population. Whether the man of twenty three, who was before long to become distinguished as a Reformer of religion, believed in one of these rumors or the other, we may be assured that enough became known to him, on the ground of unquestionable evidence, to place the calamity before him in deeply affecting aspects. From his frequent references to it later in life, we learn that the impression it made on his humane and devout mind, was deep and abiding.¹

The moral effect of this event was hardly less lamentable than the physical. The depravity of the people seemed to be maddened rather than subdued by their sufferings. The physician and the priest were often found alike, negligent of their duties. The husband was deserted by the wife, and even children by their parents; and plunderers employed themselves in rifling the dwellings which the malady had depopulated. It has ever been thus with humanity, in the same circumstances. In some instances, such visitations have been found to soften the heart, and to produce penitence; but in a greater number, their effect has been to give a greater force and desperateness to the selfish passions. When the pestilence passed away, the clergy who survived were unequal to the duties required from their order, and the same want was felt in every department of agriculture and handicraft. But the great lesson which the living appeared to have derived from what had befallen the dead, was the wisdom of exacting the highest possible remuneration for such services, sometimes at the rate of a tenfold increase. Laws, accordingly, were issued to repress this rapacity, both among priests and people.²

x. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

In reading of the lives of distinguished men, two departments of inquiry naturally engage our attention; the one relating to the degree in which such men have been influenced by their times — and the other, to the degree in which they have given the impress of their own genius and labor to their age. The effect on the mind of Wycliffe of the direful scourge referred to, appears

¹ Gio. Villani *Chron.* lib. xii. c. 83. Matteo Villani, lib. c. 4. Il Decamerone præmio. Knighton. col. 2599-2601. Walsingham, *Hist.* 198. Rot. Parl. ii. 234. Rymer, v. 655, 658, 693. Maitland's *Hist. London*, book i. c. 2. Barnes' *Edward III.* book ii. c. 8. Caxton's *Chron.* and Hollinshed, ad an.

² Johnson's *Canons*. 1362. "No rector shall give, and no curate shall receive, more than one mark above what had been yearly given for the same services *before the plague*."

to have been to possess him with very gloomy views in regard to the condition and prospects of the human race. At little more than the age of thirty, he seems to have looked on the state of society generally with painful foreboding, being equally affected by its manifest depravity, by its present sufferings, and by the prospect of the further retribution regarded as assuredly awaiting it.

The pestilence subsided in England in 1348. The earliest of the works attributed to Wycliffe bears the date 1356, eight years later. This piece is entitled the “Last Age of the Church.” We find in it a weakness of judgment, and the traces of an ill-regulated fancy, that our general idea in regard to the character of Wycliffe would not have taught us to expect. Thus the passage in the ninety-first Psalm, which speaks of “the terror by night” — of the “arrow that flies by day” — of the “pestilence that walks in darkness,” and of “the destruction that wastes at noon-day,” is described as setting forth successive stages in the history of the church. The “nightly dread” or the terror by night, denoted the time when those who slew the saints judged that they did God a service. The arrow flying by day was significant of the deceit of heretics. The latter of these tribulations was “put off by the wisdom of saints,” as the former was “cast out by the steadfastness of martyrs.” The pestilence walking in darkness points to “the secret heresies of Simonists;” and the mischiefs of this third tribulation will be so heavy, that “well shall it be to that man of holy church, that then shall not be alive.” The fourth tribulation, denoted by the evil which comes at midday, is the coming of antichrist. The authorities cited in favor of this view, beside the historian Eusebius, the venerable Bede, and St. Bernard,¹ are the abbot Joachim,² and the prophet Merlin.

In the same manner, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are allegorized, as the figure of twenty-two hundred years, and as having contained a prophetic meaning. A similar interpretation is given to the Latin alphabet, as relating to the times of the New Testament; and the conclusions deduced from those sources are said to be as certain “as that in the beginning God made heaven and earth.”

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. xi

But amidst dreams of this nature, we find indications of thought and feeling in regard to the state of society, the existing religious system, and the doctrines of theology, in harmony with those which occur in the undoubted writings of Wycliffe at a later period. In this curious production, the many evils existing, and the greater evils expected, are traced mainly to the character and conduct of a vicious priesthood. Upon that class of men especially, the judgments predicted are about to descend, and the only refuge for the sincere believer, is in turning from dependence on the offices of men, and in looking with humility and devotion to the compassion and grace of their Redeemer. “The vengeance of the sword,” he writes, “and mischiefs unknown before, by which men in those days shall be punished, shall fall for the sin of priests. Men shall fall on them, and cast them out of their fat benefices, and they shall say, ‘He came into his benefice by his kindred, this by covenant made before, he for his service, and this for money came into God’s church.’ Then each such priest shall cry, ‘Alas! alas! that no good spirit dwelt with me at my coming into God’s church!’”

¹ Bernard is Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) a French abbot and primary reformer for the Cistercian order.

² Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202), founded the monastic order of San Giovanni in Fiore.

In a preceding passage he predicts, on the authority of John of Salisbury and St. Gregory, that “The pestilent striking together of people, and hurling together of realms, and other harms, shall come to the earth, because the honors of holy church are given to unworthy men.” The tract concludes with the following illustration of a Hebrew tale.

“There was a stork that had a bird, and his bird was shut in under a vessel of glass; and when the stork saw his bird, and that he might not come to him, he brought a little red worm out of the wilderness, and with his blood he anointed the glass. Then the glass burst, and the bird flew his way. So our Lord, the Father of heaven, had mankind in hell, which was glazed, that is to say, it was as brittle as glass. To break it, he brought such a little red worm, which was our Lord Jesus Christ, as David says in the 21st Psalm, ‘I am a worm and no man,’ and with his blood he delivered man’s nature. Zachariah writes in the ninth chapter, ‘You truly with the blood of witness, or the testament, have led them out that were bound in the pit.’

xii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

So when we were sinful and children of wrath, God’s Son came out of heaven, and praying his Father for his enemies, he died for us then; much rather now, that we are made righteous by his blood, shall we be saved. Paul so writes to the Romans: He shall pray for us. Jesus went into heaven to appear in the presence of God for us. Paul went to the Hebrews. Which presence may he grant us to see, that lives and reigns without end, Amen.”

We may not feel at liberty to applaud the judgment of the author in the selection of his allegory in this case, but the devout perception and feeling of the above passage is not uninstructional.

In attributing this piece to Wycliffe, his biographers have been guided partly by its internal evidence, but still more by the fact that it happens to be bound up in a volume containing other pieces which are unquestionably from his pen. The evidence in regard to its authenticity, however, from both these sources is not such as to preclude all ground for suspicion on that point. Though from the contents of the document, as well as from the connection in which we find it, the evidence appears to me to turn strongly in favor of its having been written by Wycliffe. Bale has given it a place in his catalogue of the writings of our Reformer; and from his description of it, there is reason to think that more than one copy of this work was in existence in the time of that author.¹

In the year 1360, Wycliffe began his disputes with the Mendicants.² In Oxford, where this controversy originated, these new orders were possessed of great power, and numbered among them many of the most able men of the times. The indolence and worldliness of the regular clergy, by scandalising the more severe or consistent professors of the Gospel, had been the main causes of the rapid diffusion of the monastic institute some centuries earlier — a fault in one extreme, disposing many to error in an opposite direction. In the same manner, the great abuse of wealth on the part of the endowed priesthood, taught the Mendicants to throw themselves on a kind of voluntary system; while the general neglect of preaching in the case of the parochial clergy, was the reason assigned by the Mendicants for giving themselves almost wholly to that office as preaching friars.

¹ No biographer of Wycliffe had examined this MS. previously to the publication of the *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, but it has since been printed and edited with much care — with more care I may say than candour — by Dr. Todd.

² *Mendicant*: member of a religious order that originally relied solely on alms (charity); they begged for a living.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. xiii

The Mendicant friars associated a claim to the most important functions of the *clergy*, with stricter vows of poverty than had been adopted by the *monastic orders*; and thus they aimed to unite in themselves much of the reputation and power belonging to both those classes.

They made their appearance in Oxford in 1221. The causes which had given them such speedy popularity on the continent were no less powerful in this country. Some wise men, dissatisfied with the conduct of the older clergy, became the zealous patrons of these new fraternities. Their supposed separation from the corrupting influence of wealth, and their assiduity and ability as preachers, appeared to point them out as the sort of men especially demanded by the times. Among the persons by whom they were thus regarded, was the celebrated Grossteste, Bishop of Lincoln; but the men who were favorites for a while of that prelate,¹ became the objects of his bitterest censure before his decease. At a later period, their zeal to proselytize the young in the universities, exposed them to much suspicion and disaffection. Loud complaints had been urged against them in Paris, before Fitz-Ralph, who was chancellor of Oxford in 1333 and became archbishop of Armagh in 1347. He distinguished himself as an opponent of their opinions and encroachments. He denied the virtue of their voluntary poverty, censured their inroads on the province of the parochial clergy, and declared that, by their influence, the students of Oxford had been reduced, within his memory, from thirty thousand to not more than a fifth of that number. In 1357, Fitz-Ralph, better known by the name of Armachanus, submitted his complaints on this subject to the pope at Avignon. But the decease of this zealous prelate three years later, left his purposes unaccomplished; the event was hailed by the Mendicants as a triumph to their cause.

Wycliffe entered into the labors of Armachanus, and prosecuted the same object with even greater earnestness. None of the extant writings of Wycliffe against the friars can be attributed to so early a period as the year 1360. But his arguments against that class of men are of such constant occurrence in his later works, and are everywhere so much to the same effect, as to leave little room to doubt that the matter of the treatise published in this volume, under the title of “Objections to Friars,” presents the substance of the reasoning employed by him on this subject from the commencement of the controversy relating to it.

xiv. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

His language uniformly was that, if God might be said to have given the friars to the church, it was as he had given a king to Israel — as a punishment, and not as a boon.

“But a sanction was supposed to be imparted to the practices of the Mendicants by the poverty of Christ and of his apostles; and this circumstance had imperceptibly induced a habit of appeal to the sacred Scriptures, as to a decisive authority. The volume of inspired truth was thus brought from its obscurity, and was vested, though for mistaken purposes, with something of the homage due to it as the only competent arbiter of religious opinion. Those who were displeased by the obtrusive services of the friars, were thus naturally directed to the records of the Gospel, that the justice of these novel pretensions might thus be ascertained² or confuted; and the arguments opposed with most success to the peculiarities of these innovators, were derived from the source to which they had themselves been the first to appeal. It is scarcely to be questioned that we are considerably indebted to these facts for

¹ *Prelates* are the senior clergyman and dignitaries of the Roman church, including bishops, archbishops, archdeacons, etc., who have jurisdiction over an area, or over a group of clergymen and laymen.

² *Ascertained*: made certain or confirmed.

Wycliffe's early attachment to the doctrine which affirms the sufficiency of the Scriptures with regard to all the purposes of faith and duty — a doctrine in which the right of private judgment was obviously implied; and it will hereafter appear that no modern theologian has been more aware of the importance of these maxims than Wycliffe, or more successful in defending them. It is probable, indeed, that he was very far from discerning the ultimate result of his inquiries, when he first became known as the opponent of the new orders. But we have sufficient evidence to justify the conclusion that even then, these momentous sentiments had become familiar to his mind in a hopeful degree. The failure of Fitz-Ralph in his more limited project of reform, had left no room to hope for improvement, as to originate with the papacy, or as to be sanctioned from that quarter. And this state of things appears to have suggested to his successor in the contest, the necessity of a less sparing exposure of existing abuses in the church, and of a more vigorous appeal to the common sense of every class among the people.”¹

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. Xv

What distinguished the efforts of Wycliffe in this connection from those of Armachanus and others, was his setting forth the evils which he describes, as being the natural and necessary consequence of the rules which the friars had pledged themselves to observe. While other disputants were content to seek a reform of particular errors and abuses, Wycliffe sought nothing less than an extinction of the institute itself, as being repugnant to Scripture, and inconsistent with the order and prosperity of the church. Instead of supposing, as some good men had done — that the introduction of such agents would tend better than any other means that might be employed for that purpose, to stimulate and improve the character of the parochial priesthood — he insisted strongly that the removal of these intruders was absolutely necessary if harmony and vigor were to be restored to the ecclesiastical system. At the same time, he was careful to distinguish between the *institute* and the *men*, being equally concerned to “destroy their errors,” and to “save their persons.”

The men against whom the Reformer committed himself to this extent, were possessed of great power, and were so little accustomed to hear reproof with meekness, that in the language of their antagonist, “a lord would more patiently submit to a severe censuring of his least offence, than friars would hear the soft and mild reproving of their greatest sins.” Wycliffe, of course, had to lay his account with the utmost mischief that might proceed from the passions of such opponents. During nearly two centuries, the Inquisition had been pursuing its course of torture and destruction on the continent. And through the whole of that period, its odious business had devolved chiefly on the orders of St. Dominick and St. Francis. In addition to their power in this form, they were, in the language of Wycliffe, “the confessors, the preachers, and the rulers commonly of all men.”²

xvi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The year 1360 has been mentioned as that in which Wycliffe became distinguished by the part which he took in this controversy. In the following year, the master and scholars of Baliol College presented him to the living of Fyningham, a benefice of considerable value in the diocese

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 266, 267.

² “I have in my diocese of Armagh,” says Fitz-Ralph, “about two thousand persons, who stand condemned by the censures of the church, denounced every year against murderers, thieves, and such like malefactors, of all which number scarcely fourteen have applied to me, or to my clergy, for absolution; yet they all receive the sacraments as others do, because they are absolved, or pretend to be absolved, by friars.” — Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, ubi supra.

of Lincoln. In the same year we find the name of John de Wycliffe entered as that of the newly-elected warden of Baliol.¹ These facts seem to warrant the conclusion that his attempts to defend the regular clergy and the university, against the obtrusive zeal of the Mendicants, were highly estimated, at least by the parties most interested in his efforts.

But four years later we find the name of John de Wycliffe as that of the person filling the office of warden in Canterbury Hall in the same university. Canterbury Hall was founded by Simon de Islep, Archbishop of Canterbury, a prelate who appears to have acquitted himself with much credit in some of the most important offices in the church and the government. The new hall was designed for the benefit of eleven scholars, eight of whom were to be secular clergymen; the remaining three, and the warden, were to be chosen from the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury. But discord soon arose between the two classes of scholars; and Woodhall, the warden, sided with the monks. Islep saw the community on which he had lavished his patronage and his substance, being conspicuous for dissension rather than improvement. And so, availing himself of a provision in the founding of the institution, he removed the three monks and the warden, and supplying the place of the former by the same number of clerical scholars, he invited John de Wycliffe to the vacant office of warden. Islep died soon afterwards; and Peter Langham, the Bishop of Ely, who previously had been abbot of Westminster, and a private monk, was raised to the primacy. Woodhall and his expelled associates made their appeal to the new primate, alleging that the late changes in Canterbury Hall had been brought about by illegal and dishonest means. After the interval of a few weeks, the three monks were restored, and Woodhall was reinstated as warden. It was pretended that what had been done, had been done without the sanction of the founder, or that if such sanction had been given, it was in his last sickness, when he had ceased to be competent for such an office.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. xvii

The only appeal from the judgment of a metropolitan, in such a case, was to that of the sovereign pontiff; and appeal was made to him.²

But some doubt has been raised as to whether the John de Wycliffe of Canterbury Hall, was the same person who had been previously master of Baliol, and who is known to us as the Reformer. The decision of the pontiff, in the case submitted to him from Canterbury Hall, was unfavorable to the appellants. And as the enemies of Wycliffe have been forward to ascribe his zeal as a reformer to this loss of his wardenship, it appears to have been supposed, that service would be done to the reputation of Wycliffe, by throwing some doubt over the point of his ever having been in possession of the said wardenship. But slight incidents do not thus affect the course of great men. Minds liable to be thus influenced today, will be no less open to opposite impressions from opposite influences tomorrow, and will never evince steadiness in anything. Some difficulty indeed arises in accounting for the removal of a man from the office of warden in connection with the older and larger foundation of Baliol, to so small and recent an establishment as that of Canterbury Hall. But we do not know what may have happened at Baliol during the four years which intervened between the two appointments. And the fact that the founding of Canterbury Hall was a favorite project with the man who was "Primate of all England," may go

¹ *Life of Wycliffe*, i. 272, 273.

² The documents relating to this appointment and dispute may be seen in Lewis, Appendix, Nos. 1-9, or, in the *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. Appendix 2-10.

far to explain a circumstance which would otherwise seem improbable. It should be remembered, also, that the appeal in the matter of his wardenship was made in the spring of 1367, and that the decision of the pontiff was not given till the year 1370. Anthony Wood, Fox the martyrologist, and others, agree in ascribing Wycliffe's loss of his wardenship to the zeal which he had manifested on the side of ecclesiastical innovation, before the judgment of the court of Rome on that subject had been pronounced. The name of Wycliffe, as we have seen, is of local origin. That there should have been two distinguished men in Oxford, bearing the name of John de Wycliffe, is most improbable.

xviii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The confounding of the one person with the other would have been so natural, that in many instances care would have been taken to distinguish between them; and some traces of that distinction would have reached us. If a second John de Wycliffe flourished at the same time in Oxford, we seem shut up to the conclusion, that he must have been of the same family as the Reformer — a conclusion which it seems hardly possible to admit.¹

While the suit relating to Canterbury Hall was pending, a somewhat violent dispute arose between the crown of England and the court of Rome, concerning the tribute-money which King John had stipulated to be paid by himself and his successors to the treasury of the pontiffs. Urban demanded of the English monarch the annual payment of a thousand marks, as a feudal acknowledgment for the sovereignty of England and Ireland — those kingdoms being held in fee, it was said, of the successors of St. Peter. Since the decease of King John, this claim had been honored or neglected, as the favor of the pontiff was felt to be important or otherwise.

Thirty-three years had passed since the last annual payment of this nature was made. And the demand of Urban now was that the arrears for that interval should be sent to him, and that the annual sum should be regularly transmitted to him in the future. In default of such payment, the king was further admonished that he would be cited duly to appear and answer for such neglect in the court of the sovereign pontiff, who had become his civil no less than his religious superior.

Edward received this communication in 1365. The following year, he submitted the question to the decision of parliament. Since the reign of John, the powers of the English parliament, and especially of the House of Commons, had become such that all the greater and more distinctive principles of our constitution² may be said to have been called into vigorous exercise. The reign of Edward extended to fifty years,³ during which period more than seventy parliaments were convened.⁴

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. xix

¹ See *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 273, where I have touched on this subject; also a paper in the Gentleman's Magazine about two years ago.

² An "unwritten constitution," comprised of the Magna Carta, Acts of Parliament, court judgments, and conventions.

³ Edward III, b.1312 – d. 1377; reigned from 1327 till his death.

⁴ Parliament pronounced the legitimacy of Edward III as king; and yet the authority of parliament grew in an attempt to constrain his power. Because Edward III was involved in the Hundred Years' War and needed finances, he often circumvented parliament to raise taxes. In response, it was established that no law could be made, nor any tax levied, without the consent of both Houses and the Sovereign. — WHG

More than once it was solemnly enacted that one such assembly at least should be annually summoned. Edward, in the person of his chancellor, requested the advice of parliament with regard to the answer which should be returned to the claim made upon him and upon the nation by the pope. The prelates solicited a day for private deliberation. On the morrow, the lords spiritual and temporal, and the members of the Commons, declared unanimously, (1) that neither King John, nor any other sovereign, had power to thus subject the realm of England, without consent of parliament; (2) that such consent had not been obtained; and that, (3) passing over other difficulties, the whole transaction on the part of the king was in violation of the oath which he had taken on receiving his crown. By the temporal nobility and commoners, it was further resolved that, should the pope commence his threatened process against the king of England, as his vassal, all possible aid should be rendered, that such usurpation might be effectually resisted.¹

According to the ecclesiastical theory of the Middle Age, the church is the parent of the state, bishops are as fathers to princes, and the authority of all sovereigns must be subordinate to that of the successors of St. Peter. On the present occasion, men were not lacking to take this high ground in defence of this papal claim. In a treatise published by an anonymous monk, it was maintained that the sovereignty of England had been legally forfeited to the pope by the failure of the annual tribute; and that the clergy were exempt in person and property from all subjection to the authority of the magistrate. We may judge the celebrity of Wycliffe, at this time, from the fact that he is called upon by name to show the fallacy of these opinions.²

The Reformer was not ignorant concerning the motives of his anonymous antagonist in assailing him with this challenge. He assures us that he had reason to know that the hope of his opponent was to expose him to the resentment of the pontiff; and that, laden with ecclesiastical censures, he might be deprived of his preferments; and also to commend himself and his own order to the favor of the Roman court; and to augment the possessions of the religious orders generally, by placing the kingdom in greater subjection to the power of the popes.

xx. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

That he might guard himself so far as possible against the sinister purposes of his opponent, Wycliffe commences by describing himself as a humble and obedient son of the church, and as meaning to affirm nothing that may be reported to her injury, or that may reasonably offend the ears of the devout. The Reformer further describes himself as the king's particular cleric, from which it appears that he had received the honorary distinction of *royal chaplain*. The right of the king in connection with parliament not only to deny the tribute claimed by the pope, but to subject all clergymen to the jurisdiction of the magistrate in all civil matters, and in certain cases even to alienate the goods of the church, are all affirmed as doctrines shown to be just — both by the written law, and by the ancient practice of the realm. He does not deny that there may be much in the canons of the church opposed to such doctrines; but he insists that if truly examined, these maxims will be found to be in strict accordance with the claims of natural right, with the maxims of civil law, and with the precepts of Holy Scripture.

Having thus stated the grounds on which it would be practicable to work out a full vindication of the above doctrines, he abstains from pursuing that course. He chooses rather to set forth his views, as contained in the substance of a series of speeches, said to have been delivered by

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 278-280.

² This document is printed in Lewis, Ap. No. 30.

certain secular lords in reference to the demand lately made on the treasury of the king of England by the pope. By this method of reply, the humble Reformer may have hoped to shield himself under the authority of the said lords, against the resentment to which his opinions might otherwise expose him. The speeches which have been thus preserved may interest the curious reader as presenting a specimen of the manner in which our senators of the fourteenth century were deemed capable of treating questions demanding a good degree of information and discernment. What is reported from them in this document is not of course a complete account of the debate referred to, but a selection of passages designed to place the series of difficulties inseparable from the claim of the pope in the most lucid form, and in the smallest compass.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. xxi

To us, the paper is chiefly valuable as containing opinions which, by adoption at least, are those of Wycliffe himself, and which in the report made of them have lost nothing of their force — probably from coming into contact with the vigor and intrepidity of his own genius.

The *first* lord declared all feudal subjection to be founded in the necessary subordinations of political power. But no subordination of this nature, he maintained, could have been the origin of the alleged subjection of England to the papacy. And the pretension of the pope accordingly being without any foundation of feudal justice, the dependence introduced by King John should not be regarded as a compact that was at all proper to be continued. If the pontiff attempted to replace the lack of feudal law, in support of this feudal pretension, by resorting to force, the speaker expressed his readiness to place the question at issue, to trial by weapons.

The *next* speaker extended this line of argument. Feudal tribute, he observed, could not be justly demanded except by a superior, capable of affording feudal protection. The pope could not bestow such protection on those from whom he now demanded tribute and homage. Nor would it become him to employ himself in such matters, whatever might be his power in relation to them, seeing that the character which distinguishes his holiness should be that of chief in following Christ — the Savior of the world having been without a place to lay his head, and having taught his ministers in this manner by example — the superiority of which they should evince to all the interests of secular possession and authority. The great duty in this case is therefore said to be not only to resist this pretension to civil dominion on the part of the pontiff, but to insist that the cares of his holiness be restricted to the spiritual things that are proper to his office.

While it was shown in this manner, that the feudal tribute demanded could not be exacted on the ground of any feudal benefit supposed to be conferred, the *third* speaker declared that it could not be claimed with greater justice upon any religious ground, inasmuch as the influence of the pope and his cardinals was scarcely felt in England, otherwise than in conveying large portions of its treasure into the hands of its enemies.

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This nobleman was succeeded by a *fourth*, who stated that one-third of the property of the kingdom had become that of the church, and that the pope had long claimed dominion over all such property, and that by virtue of such a claim, the court of Rome exacted the first-fruits from every vacant benefice in England. It was observed that this interference of the pope in regard to temporal things, must be either as vassal to the king, or as his superior. If the former doctrine would be rejected by the court of Rome, then the latter should be no less spurned by the people of England. And it is accordingly recommended that a forcible check should be given to this

spirit of usurpation, which may otherwise be found powerful enough, in some interval of disorder, to extend the despotism already imposed on the church, in a measure equal to the state.

The remarks of the *next* speaker were no less pertinent. He professed himself curious to know the expressed condition on which this disputed tribute had first been granted. If it was granted that absolution might be conferred on the king, or that the papal interdict ¹ might be removed from the kingdom, then the whole transaction was a piece of simoniacal dishonesty, proper to be denounced by lords and churchmen. The gifts of the Christian priesthood had been freely bestowed that they might be as freely dispensed. But the pope, according to this view of his conduct, is heard to say, “I will absolve you only on condition that I receive so much money annually and forever!” If it should be said that the claim preferred had not been made on the ground of any spiritual benefit bestowed, but on the principle of a strict feudal subjection, then it is argued that a plea to dispose of the crown itself might some day be urged with as much appearance of justice.

By *another* lord it was observed that, supposing the land had ever been the just possession of the pope, his right to so dispose of the goods of the church as to barter an opulent kingdom for the trivial acknowledgment of seven hundred marks a year, was hardly consistent with an honest stewardship. Certainly, the functionary who could depreciate ecclesiastical property in this manner, might alienate it entirely; and so he must be an authority that is not to be greatly coveted in the relation of a feudal superior. The same speaker proceeds to state that “Christ is the supreme Lord, while the pope is a man liable to sin; and if he is in mortal sin, according to divines, he is unfitted for dominion.”

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And he concludes by observing, “manifestly, therefore, it is enough for us to keep ourselves from mortal sin to the service of one lord of the kingdom, to communicate our goods virtuously to the poor, and as in former time, to hold our kingdom immediately from Christ, who as chief Lord, teaches whatever is most lawful and perfect with regard to man’s authority.”

The *last* speaker exposed the injustice of the papal demand still more forcibly, as an attempt to visit the sins of the monarch on the freedom and property of the subject, even to remote generations. In the supposed compact, it is argued, the people were all certainly interested; and according to the good usage of the realm, the assent of all should have been obtained, in place of which, the seal of the king and of a few apostate lords had been deemed sufficient to bring thralldom ² upon a whole nation. The grant being one to which the kingdom had never been a party, is accordingly treated as a matter which it should never descend to recognise.³

Wycliffe speaks of having heard these speeches, of which he makes this report.⁴ But the reasonings of these secular lords are so pertinent, and for the most part so identical with opinions subsequently published and reiterated in almost every shape in the writings of the Reformer, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion either that the supposed debate is altogether a fiction, or at

¹ *Interdict*: An ecclesiastical censure by the Roman Catholic Church withdrawing certain sacraments and Christian burial from a person or all persons in a particular district.

² *Thralldom*: The state of being under the control of another person.

³ Lewis, Col. No. 30.

⁴ “The speeches,” he writes, “quam audiui in quodam Concilio a Dominis secularibus.” “I have heard in a kind of Council of the secular Lords.”

least that Wycliffe has given to the utterances of the speakers a strong colouring from his own views and impressions.¹

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His opponent had stated the claim of Urban in a form of logic from which the escape of an adversary was supposed to be impossible. He laid down as an axiom, that every dominion is granted on condition, and it is dissolved on a failure of that condition. He then proceeds to say that the pope, as supreme lord, presented the realm of England to King John, after it had been surrendered into the pope's hands, on condition that England should pay annually seven hundred marks to the Roman court. But this condition, he adds, has not been observed, and the king has thereby fallen from the true dominion of England. Wycliffe replied that the condition assumed in this agreement had been assumed falsely: for neither the king, nor those who acted with him, were competent to transfer the realm and the people of England to the pope in this manner. Having challenged the monk to show the contrary of this opinion, Wycliffe concluded by observing, "If I do not mistake, the day will come in which all exactions shall cease before such a condition will be proved to be either honest or reasonable."

In this manner, the parliament disposed of the arrogant claim of the pope to be regarded as the feudal sovereign of England. Some wholesome regulations were then made by the parliament with a view to protect the universities against certain mischiefs which had resulted from the conduct of the friars. It was determined that no scholar under the age of eighteen should be admitted into any mendicant order, that no document tending in any manner to the injury of the universities should hereafter be received from the pope, and that all differences between the mendicants and the older authorities in those seminaries should be decided in the future, in the court of the king, and without further appeal.² We have no direct evidence on the subject, but it is highly probable from the part which Wycliffe had taken in this controversy, that the suit of the universities against the friars was not conducted without his assistance. And this becomes more probable if we suppose he was present, as he states, when the parliament discussed the question of the tribute claimed by the pope in the manner described.

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The parliament referred to, it will be remembered, was the assembly convened in 1366. And Wycliffe, who was then warden of Canterbury Hall, was soon afterwards numbered, as we have seen, among the royal chaplains.

¹ This is especially observable in respect to the doctrine so often imputed to him, but so generally misunderstood, concerning the doctrine of "dominion founded on grace," — in other words, the doctrine which was said to declare every person in mortal sin as having forfeited all title to any worldly office or possession. But the doctrine of Wycliffe on this subject, whatever it may have been, he states as being that of St. Augustine and St. Bernard, and it will not accordingly be regarded by any man of sense and honesty, as being very favorable to anarchy. In the seventeenth chapter of the fourth book of the *Triologus*, he writes, that "a man may possess temporal things by a two-fold title — by a title of *original righteousness*, and by a title of *worldly righteousness*. Christ possessed all the good things of the world by the former title — as St. Augustine often declares; that it is by that title, the title of grace, that all things are the right of the godly. But possession in a *civil* sense, is widely different from a title of that sort." And Wycliffe never appealed to the former kind of title, to the disturbance of the latter, though he could sometimes speculate on the peculiarity of the former title as a theologian, and in the case of priests, never ceased to declare that the priest in mortal sin ceased *de facto* to be a priest. See *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, ii. 233-235.

² Cotton's *Abridgment of Records*, 102, 103. *Collier's Eccles. Hist.*, i. 560.

The reign of Edward the Third, who had now reached the fiftieth year of his age, is one of the most remarkable in English history. It was distinguished by military enterprise, but hardly less by general social advancement. The battle of Cressy belongs to the year 1346. The victory of Poitiers belongs to 1356. In the latter year, the king of Scotland was a prisoner in the Tower of London, and the king of France was placed at the head of the many illustrious captives in the hands of Edward the Third. It was natural that such successes should diffuse and strengthen the war passion among the people of England in those times. But much collateral benefit resulted from this course of affairs. During the reign of Edward, the pontiffs resided at Avignon,¹ and commonly being Frenchmen, together with their cardinals, the animosity against France disposed the people of England to regard the policy of the papal court as that of a power naturally allied to France, and to look at all its proceedings with a suspicion and disaffection which might not otherwise have been felt.² Moreover, the great expense that is inseparable from a protracted war, both in Scotland and throughout the provinces of France, the king was obliged to assemble his parliament every year. The effect of this was to greatly strengthen the power of such assemblies, to define parliamentary usage, and to familiarise the mind of the people to such a mode of government; while the redress of grievances almost always preceded new grants of money. Commerce also made great progress during this period, and in its train came a marked revival of taste, literature, and general intelligence.

xxvi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

John of Gaunt,³ Duke of Lancaster, was the patron of Chaucer and of Wycliffe. He is the only male member of the royal family whose name is conspicuously associated with the religion of those times. This prince was born at Ghent in the year 1340, sixteen years subsequent to the birth of our Reformer. At the age of twenty-two, as Earl of Richmond, he succeeded to the title of his deceased father-in-law, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, and to the estates which rendered him the most opulent subject of the realm. He unsheathed his sword in Scotland, France, and Spain, but is less known from his military exploits, than as possessing some taste for literature, and as having evinced a strong sympathy (up to a certain point) with the reforms contemplated by Wycliffe. It has been stated that Wycliffe dedicated a collection of his works to the Duke of Lancaster so early as the year 1368. But this is an error. There is a manuscript volume in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, containing several pieces from the pen of Wycliffe, and along the upper line of the first treatise in that collection, is an insertion describing the volume as consisting of the works of Wycliffe which were so dedicated. But this entry is made by a modern hand; and it is certain that the piece on which it was written was not composed earlier than 1380

¹ See note on [p. 69](#).

² From 1304 to 1378 the following popes succeeded each other, and all were Frenchmen. Clement V.; John XXII.; Benedict XII.; Clement VI.; Innocent VI.; Urban V.; and Gregory XI. By a variety of mean and selfish contrivances, having “no other end than the acquisition of riches, these inconsiderate pontiffs excited a general hatred against the Roman see [*i.e., the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in Rome*], and thereby greatly weakened the papal empire, which had been visibly on the decline since the time of Boniface.” Hist. iii. 316-318.

³ *John of Gaunt*, 1st Duke of Lancaster (1340-1399) was a member of the House of Plantagenet, the third of four surviving sons of King Edward III. His male heirs, the *Lancasters*, include Kings Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. He was one of the richest men of his era. He had influence over the English throne during the minority of his nephew, the future King Richard II.

— that is, subsequent to the papal schism.¹ This description, however, has been copied in a well-known printed catalogue of existing manuscripts, and has been widely adopted from that source.²

In 1371 an attempt was made by the English parliament to exclude churchmen from those high offices of state which up till then had been almost invariably sustained by them. At that time, the offices of Lord Chancellor, and Lord Treasurer, and those of Keeper and Clerk of the Privy Seal, were filled by clergymen. The Master of the Rolls, the Masters in Chancery, and Chancellor and Chamberlain of the Exchequer, were also dignitaries, or beneficed persons of the same order. One priest was Treasurer for Ireland, and another for the Marshes of Calais. And while the parson of Oundle is employed as surveyor of the king's buildings, the parson of Harwick is called to the superintendence of the royal wardrobe.³

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It is known, also, that the clergy often descended to much lower occupations, and gave themselves to such employments in a manner most inconsistent with the proper duties of their office. The attempt to put an end to this usage by authority of parliament, is attributed by historians to the secret influence of John of Gaunt. And concerning the judgment of Wycliffe as strongly opposed to it, the reader will find abundant evidence in the present volume.

“Neither prelates,” he writes, “nor doctors, priests nor deacons, should hold secular offices — that is, those of Chancery, Treasury, Privy Seal, and other such secular offices in the Exchequer. Neither should they be stewards of lands,⁴ nor stewards of the hall, nor clerks of the kitchen, nor clerks of accounts; neither should they be occupied in any secular office in lords' courts, more especially while secular men are sufficient to do such offices.”⁵

The prayer of the parliament, and a prayer in which its members appear to have been unanimous, was fully to the effect of the above language. Edward, on receiving it, replied that he would act in the matter with the advice of his council. But in the following month, William of Wykeham, the celebrated Bishop of Winchester, resigned his office of Chancellor, and the Bishop of Exeter ceased to be Lord Treasurer. It is hardly probable that the originators of this movement would have regarded their first effort as likely to be attended by a greater measure of success.

¹ The *Western Schism* or *Papal Schism* was a split within the Roman Catholic Church which lasted from 1378 to 1417. Three men simultaneously claimed to be the true pope. Driven by politics rather than any theological disagreement, the schism was ended by the Council of Constance (1414—1418).

² *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Angliæ et Hiberniæ*. Lewis, p. 20. *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 304, 305.

³ Cotton's *Abridgment*, 45 Edward III. Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 547. Collier's *Eccles. Hist.*, i. 438-460.

⁴ Priests were made tenants of church property, leasing it in return for services rendered. “The tenant priest's duties include celebrating mass and the daily office, tending the lights, and prayer; what he must improve and keep intact includes the fabric and contents of a holy place as well as fields, vineyards, and olive groves. The revenue that he enjoys includes offerings (and tithes if the church is a *plebs*) as well as rents; the acquisitions, some of which he may treat as his own and given in alms, will be either given as offerings or bought with offerings... [Leases] occasionally allow a tenant priest (or deacon) to appoint a serving priest, or even a successor: that is, to grant the church, property, and liturgical obligations to another priest by lease or benefice even beyond his own lifetime.” — Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church* (Oxford, 2006), p. 548.

⁵ MS. *Ecclesiæ Regimen*. Brit. Museum. Cott. MSS. *Titus*, D. i. The substance of this work is, no doubt, the production of Wycliffe, but the copy in the British Museum has been transcribed, and in one or two instances interpolated by the transcriber. Much of its sentiment and language will be found in the work on Prelates, and in other pieces.

This proceeding belongs to the year 1371. It was in the year preceding, that the papal court gave its judgment against the claim of Wycliffe with regard to the wardenship of Canterbury Hall. Against the last will of the founder, Woodhall and the three monks were restored, and two years later they rendered their illegal triumph secure by paying the sum of two hundred marks, as the price of obtaining a confirmation of the decision of the pope from the crown.¹

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We have no reason to suppose that Wycliffe was greatly disappointed by what had happened in this respect. We are not aware of a single reference to it in any of his subsequent writings.

In the year 1372, he performed his novitiate for the degree of doctor of divinity; that degree authorised him to open his own school, as a public teacher of theology in the university. In this capacity, he no doubt read many of those scholastic pieces still extant among his works; and from this time, the influence of his opinions began to be more sensibly felt in the university.

The next point with which the name of Wycliffe is connected in our history, relates to the abuses of the papacy in the matter of “provisors.” In the sixteenth year of Edward III, the recently-elected pontiff, Clement the Fourth, declared the two next vacancies in the Anglican church, which would amount to the annual value of two thousand marks. By provision, these would be the property of two among his cardinals. The moment was not favorable to such a proceeding. Complaints which had been often uttered on this subject, both by nobles and commoners, were now loudly repeated. Edward, in his letter to the pope, declared that the effect of this custom of provisors had been to transfer the property designed for the support of religion, to the hands of men who neither dwelt in the country nor understood its language, and who (while seizing on the emoluments of office) were alike unable and unwilling to discharge its duties. He declares this custom is alike at variance with his own prerogative, with the authority of the chapters, and with that of patrons in general. Accordingly, his claim is that this usage in respect to livings may be forthwith abolished.² But the redress of these grievances was difficult to obtain. In 1350 it was found necessary to pass the celebrated statute against “provisors,” and then in 1353 to provide a further enactment, well-known since that time by the word *premunire*. The first declared that the collation³ to any dignitary or benefice in a manner opposed to the rights of the king, the chapters, or the patron, was void; the second was directed against the custom of appealing on questions of property, from the decision of the English courts, to the court of the pontiffs.

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But in 1373 a complaint was still made against the evils resulting from these practices. The spoliation⁴ carried on under such pretexts, is said to be even greater than at any former period. Hence, to save the property of the realm, and to silence the murmurs of his subjects, Edward commissioned Gilbert, bishop of Bangor, Bolton, a monk of Dunholm, and William de Burton and John de Shepey, to lay his own complaint and that of his parliament, before the papal court. Gregory the Eleventh then filled the papal chair, and resided at Avignon. The change demanded was that, “the pontiff should desist in future from the reservation of benefices in the Anglican

¹ Lewis, 15-17.

² Walsingham, 161. Collier, i. 546, 547, 554.

³ *Collation*: bestowal or grant.

⁴ *Spoliation*: the act of stripping and taking by force.

church; that the clergy should henceforth freely enjoy their election to episcopal dignities; and that in the case of electing a bishop, it should be enough that his appointment be confirmed by his metropolitan,¹ as was the ancient custom.”²

In answer to this complaint, some fair promises were made. But from the spirit in which the English parliament returned to the subject in the same year, it is plain that the promise of amendment was regarded either as too restricted, or as not trustworthy. In the following year — the year 1374 — an inquiry was instituted as to the exact number of benefices in England which, by means of this custom of provisors, had passed into the hands of foreigners.³ As the result of this inquiry, a second embassy was appointed, to present a further and stronger remonstrance against these encroachments. The first name in the list of the persons now appointed, is that of the prelate who had been included in the previous commission, and the second is that of John de Wycliffe.⁴ Had the seat of the negotiation which followed been at Rome, or even at Avignon, it is probable that such nearer observation of the temper and policy of the papal court, would have given to the mind of the Reformer a strong impulse in the direction toward which it now tended. But the diplomatists met at Bruges. Wycliffe reached that city in August 1374; and in September of the following year, the result of the commission appeared in the shape of six bulls, addressed by the pope to the king of England, treating the questions then at issue between the nation and the papacy.

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In these documents it was provided that no person presently in possession of a benefice in England should be disturbed in such possession by any intervention of authority from the pope; that those benefices which had been disposed of by Urban the Fifth in anticipation of their vacancy, but which had not yet become vacant, should be left to be filled according to the pleasure of their patrons; that the titles of certain clergymen which had been questioned by the late pope, should be confirmed; and that all demand on the first-fruits of the livings to which those clergymen had been appointed, should be remitted; and also that an assessment should be made of the revenues derived by certain cardinals from livings in England, to effect the repair of the churches and other ecclesiastical buildings held by them, and which had been allowed to fall into decay — the extent of such assessment was to be determined by the verdict of a jury convened from the neighborhood.⁵

These provisions point with sufficient clearness to one class of abuses then prevalent in the English church, consequent on its relation to the papacy. It is plain that it was scarcely within the power of the king, or of the parliament, or of both conjointly, to protect the ecclesiastical revenues of the kingdom against the rapacity of the popes and their dependents. In the documents referred to, it will be marked that the only admission of error had respect to certain things done by the preceding pontiff — and *not* to any error in principle as regarded the practice of usurping the place of the crown, the chapters, and the patrons of livings, and alienating their legal property from them and from the nation, in favor of aliens and enemies. It is admitted that in certain cases

¹ *Metropolitan: an archbishop. He is the head of an ecclesiastical province or “metropolis” (a cluster of dioceses).*

² Barnes’s *Edward III.*, 864. Lewis, c. iii.

³ Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, i. 561.

⁴ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. Ap., No. x.

⁵ Rymer, vii. 49 Edward III., Sess. 1. Cotton’s *Abridgment*, ad an. 1376.

the last pope had not exercised this sort of power wisely; but the only solace to the impoverished nation is that, in future, these schemes of spoliation are to be conducted with more precaution and sagacity.

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It may be inferred from the continuance of the embassy which produced them, that these were the views entertained in England with regard to the papal letters. In April of the following year, the parliament again petitioned the king on this subject, and Edward replied that the matters in dispute were still in the hands of his commissioners at Bruges. But the health of the aged king was declining rapidly, and his power had waned in a degree not less observable. On the continent his authority and influence were almost annihilated. At home, faction brought its weakness and perplexities. The court of Rome, which never failed to perceive the advantage to be derived from delay, or the policy of seizing on some interval of weakness to embrace or extend its power, could not be brought to more than vague and partial reformation, always connecting such conditions with the points which it appeared to concede, that might furnish before long, a sufficient pretext for resuming whatever may seem to have been abandoned. The pope promised not to dispose of English benefices in the way of reservation, on condition that the crown would be found to abstain from all similar liberties with ecclesiastical property; and this was all the fruit of a negotiation of two years' continuance. It is probable that we are to ascribe the severity which subsequently marks the strictures of Wycliffe concerning the higher clergy generally (especially concerning the popes and their immediate coadjutors), to this insight into the spirit and policy of the papal court thus obtained. Two years of precious time expended to so little purpose, must have been anything but soothing in its influence on a man of such a temperament.

During his absence, however, the Reformer was not forgotten by his sovereign. In November 1375, he was presented by the king to the prebend of Aust, in the collegiate church of Westbury, in the diocese of Worcester. About the same time the rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, became vacant. Lord Henry de Ferars, the patron, was then a minor; consequently, it devolved upon the crown to appoint the next incumbent, and the royal patronage was again exercised in favor of Wycliffe.¹

xxxii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

In the meantime, the disposition of the Commons, and (we have reason to suppose) of the people at large, to indulge in loud complaint against the court of Rome, rather strengthened than diminished. We can suppose the statistics of the Commons in 1376 to have been somewhat inaccurate when they state that the kingdom, within the memory of the present generation, had lost not less than two-thirds of its wealth and population. But it is instructive to observe that the disasters, whether of war abroad or of disease and poverty at home — which were regarded as having changed the condition of the kingdom to such an alarming extent — are imputed mainly to the malpractices of popes and cardinals.

In the preamble to their petition, they state that the taxes paid to the court of Rome for ecclesiastical dignities amounted to five times more than those obtained by the king from the whole produce of the realm.

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 345, 346.

“For some on bishopric or other dignity,” they say the pope reserves, “by way of translation and death, three, four, or five times over. For money, the brokers of that sinful city — Rome — promote many caitiffs,¹ who are altogether unlearned and unworthy, to a thousand marks living yearly. Meanwhile, the learned and worthy can hardly obtain twenty marks: whereby learning decays, for aliens and enemies to their land, who never saw nor care to see their parishioners, have those livings; whereby they despise God’s service, and convey away the treasure of the realm, and are worse than Jews or Saracens.”

Against these customs they plead “the law of the church,” which requires that all such preferments should be disposed of in charity, “without praying or paying.” They further insist that it is the demand of reason, that establishments which owe their origin to devout and humane feeling, should continue to be subservient to religion and hospitality. And they are not afraid to add that, “God has given his sheep to the pope to be pastured, and not to be shorn or shaven; and that lay patrons, perceiving the simony² and covetousness of the pope, thereby learn to sell their benefices to mere brutes, no differently than Christ was sold to the Jews.” By such means, the pope is said to derive a revenue from England alone, exceeding that of any prince in Christendom.

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It is stated, accordingly, that “the pope’s collector, and other strangers, the king’s enemies, who are only lieger³ spies for English dignities, disclosing the secrets of the realm, ought to be discharged.” It is added, that the said collector,

“also being receiver of the pope’s pence, keeps a house in London, with clerics and officers belonging to it, as if it were one of the king’s solemn courts, transporting yearly to the pope twenty thousand marks, and most commonly more: that cardinals and other aliens, remaining at the court of Rome — of which one cardinal is a dean of York, another of Salisbury, another of Lincoln, another archdeacon of Canterbury, another archdeacon of Durham, another archdeacon of Suffolk, and another archdeacon of York, another prebendary of Thane and Nassingdon, another prebendary of York, in the diocese of York — all these, and diverse others, have the best dignities in England, and have sent over to them yearly, twenty thousand marks, over and above that which English brokers lying here have; that the pope, to ransom Frenchmen, the king’s enemies, who defend Lombardy for him, always, at his pleasure, levies a subsidy of the whole clergy of England; that the pope, for more gain, makes various translations of all bishoprics and other dignities within the realm;⁴ and that the pope’s collector has this year taken for his use the first fruit of all benefices; that it would be good, therefore, to renew all the statutes against provisors from Rome, since the pope reserves all the benefices of the world for his own proper gift, and has, within this year, created twelve new cardinals — so that now there are thirty, whereas there were customarily to be but twelve in all; and all the said thirty cardinals, except two or three, are the king’s enemies.”

It is further argued from these facts, that the popes, if left without check, may before long proceed to confer the civil offices and the states of the realm upon their creatures, in the manner in which they had “accroached” to themselves the appointment of heads to “all houses and corporations of religion.” As the only adequate means of protecting the country against a system of spoliation which doomed it to perpetual poverty, and which drained from it the emolument

¹ *Caitiff*: a cowardly and despicable person.

² *Simony*: traffic in ecclesiastical offices or preferments (buying and selling them).

³ *Lieger*: a resident ambassador; or here, a person who owes allegiance and service to the pope, not the king.

⁴ *Translation*: A transfer of a bishop from one diocese to another; *dignities* are high-ranking, paid offices in the church.

that should be as a bounty to its learning and intelligence, it is urged not only that the provisors of the popes should be sternly resisted in all cases, but that “no papal collector or proctor should remain in England, on pain of life and limb; and that no Englishman, on like pain, should become such a collector or proctor, or remain at the court of Rome.” ¹

xxxiv. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Such were the proceedings of an assembly which, from its enlightened public spirit, in regard to secular as well as to religious questions, obtained the honorable appellation of the “good parliament.” ² About six months intervened between the dissolution of that parliament and the meeting of another; and the opening of the next parliament is connected with a remarkable event in the life of Wycliffe. It is manifest that the doctrines of the Reformer were now widely diffused, both among the people, and among that class of persons from whom the representatives of the people in parliament were chosen. The clergy began to be alarmed. It was deemed expedient that something vigorous should be done to prevent the scattering of these seeds of religious change through the land. Courtney, one of the most imperious churchmen of the age, had been recently elevated to the see ³ of London. In the last parliament, this prelate had committed himself in a marked degree against the Duke of Lancaster, the known patron of Wycliffe. And the bishop now employed himself to rouse and concentrate the indignation of his order against the opinions and conduct of the Reformer. The houses of convocation met on third of February in 1377, a week after the opening of the new parliament. And one of its earliest proceedings was to issue a summons requiring Wycliffe to appear before it, and to answer to the charge of holding and publishing certain erroneous and heretical opinions. The nineteenth day of the same month was fixed for the hearing of his defence; and in expectation of his appearance, the place of assembling, which was the cathedral of St. Paul’s, was crowded with the populace. Wycliffe and the Duke of Lancaster had met recently at Bruges. The Duke was there to negotiate a peace with France, while the Reformer was employed in the matter of his treaty with the delegates of the papacy. When Wycliffe presented himself to the convocation in St. Paul’s, it was in company with John of Gaunt, and Lord Percy who then filled the office of Earl Marshal.⁴

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It was with difficulty that the authority, even of such persons, secured an avenue through the crowd for the approach of the Reformer to the presence of his judges. The disturbance thus occasioned, attracted the attention of Courtney; and the sight of Wycliffe, as sustained by the presence of two such powerful personages, was manifestly as unwelcome as it was unexpected. The following dialogue is given by Fuller, as having passed on the occasion:

Bishop Courtney. Lord Percy, if I had known what maisteries ⁵ you would have kept in the church, I would have stopped you out from coming here.

¹ Cotton’s *Abridgment*, 128. Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 561.

² *The Good Parliament* was seated from April 28 to July 10, 1376, the longest session of Parliament up to that time.

³ *See: the seat within a bishop’s diocese where his cathedral is located.*

⁴ *The Earl Marshal*, with the Lord High Constable, was charged with protecting the monarch.

⁵ *Maisteries or masteries* — persons of authority and influence; here it is applied to Wycliffe. Courtney, ironically, is accusing Percy of holding sway and power within the church, through Wycliffe as his agent. This is the very accusation made against the pope, of holding sway and power in the civil domain through his agents. — WHG

Duke of Lancaster. He shall keep such maisteries here, though you say no.

Lord Percy. Wiclif, sit down, for you have many things to answer to, and you need to repose yourself on a soft seat.

Bishop Courtney. It is unreasonable that one cited before his ordinary, should sit down during his answer. He must, and shall stand.

Duke of Lancaster. The Lord Percy's motion for Wiclif, is but reasonable. And as for you, my lord bishop, who have grown so proud and arrogant, I will bring down the pride, not of you alone, but of all the prelacy in England.

Bishop Courtney. Do your worst, sir.

Duke of Lancaster. You bear yourself so brag ¹ upon your parents,² which shall not be able to help you; they shall have enough to do to help themselves.

Bishop Courtney. My confidence is not in my parents, nor in any other man, but only in God, in whom I trust, and by whose assistance I will be bold to speak the truth.

Duke of Lancaster. Rather than take these words from him, I would pluck the bishop by the hair out of the church.³

These last words were uttered in an undertone, but sufficiently loud to be heard by some of the bystanders. Great pains had been taken by the clergy during the sitting of the last parliament, to conciliate the popular feeling, and to direct it against the duke — contemplating a suppression of the mayoralty of London,⁴ and other grave inroads upon the liberties of the citizens.

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The crowd nearest the place of this dispute, probably in great part consisting of the dependents of the clergy as well as persons who had been filled with suspicion and disaffection by the above means, raised their voices against the duke. The disturbance altogether became such that the meeting separated without anything being said by Wycliffe, or any of its proper business being entered upon.⁵

This meeting, it will be remembered, took place in February 1377. In the following June, Edward the Third expired; and in October of the same year, Richard the Second ⁶ assembled his first parliament. This parliament included nearly all the members who had constituted the “good parliament,” and they returned with more determination than ever to their former labor — the

¹ *Brag here means proudly, or boastfully.*

² His father was the powerful Hugh Courtney, Earl of Devonshire.

³ Fuller's *Church Hist.* b. iv. cent. xiv.

⁴ *Mayoralty of London* — The office of Lord Mayor of London was instituted in 1189. He was elected by the City, rather than appointed by the Sovereign. A Royal Charter providing for a Mayor was issued by King John in 1215 (the date of the Magna Carta). The title “Lord Mayor” came to be used after 1354, when it was granted to Thomas Legge by King Edward III.

⁵ Fuller's *Church Hist.* 185. Cont. Murim. 137. Walsingham affirms with indignation that the Londoners were nearly all Lollards. *Hist.* 191. Spelman, ii. 625.

⁶ Richard II, also known as Richard of Bordeaux, was King of England from 1377 until he was deposed on 30 September 1399. Richard, a son of Edward, the Black Prince, was born in Bordeaux during the reign of his grandfather, Edward III.

labor of concerting measures to prevent the court of Rome from draining the land of its treasure. As a remedy against evils which had up till then resisted every influence opposed to them, it was urged that procuring a benefice by papal provision, should be outlawed; and that the same penalty should be incurred by the man who farms any living in the English church, held by a foreigner. It was also urged that a proclamation should be issued requiring “that all aliens, religious as well as others, evacuate the realm by next Candlemas;¹ and that during the war, all their lands and goods should be applied to it.”² The war with France³ had for some time taken a disastrous course. The people had been heavily burdened to sustain it; and the victories which distinguished it, brilliant as they were, yielded no substantial fruit. The temper of the nation, accordingly, was that of irritation and bitter disappointment; and no power felt the effect of this popular disaffection more immediately or strongly than the court of Rome. The above language, set forth as the grave resolution of parliament, seems to indicate an almost desperateness of feeling on the subject of papal encroachment. And it was by this parliament that a question is said to have been submitted to the judgment of Wycliffe, to the following purport: —

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“Whether it would not be lawful in a kingdom, in case of necessity, and as the means of defending itself, to detain its treasure, so that it might not be conveyed to foreign nations, even though the pope himself were to demand the same, under pain of his censures, and by virtue of the obedience said to be due him?”

Wycliffe, as it may be supposed, answers this question in the affirmative. The paper setting forth the reasons of this decision, will be found among his works printed in this volume.⁴

In the month of June 1377, several letters were sent to England by the pontiff, concerning certain false and dangerous opinions said to be held and promulgated by John de Wycliffe, rector of Lutterworth, and professor of theology in the University of Oxford. One of these letters was addressed to the king, another to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and a third to the university.⁵ The purport of these letters was to require that measures be immediately taken to ascertain the opinions of the party accused; to condemn those that are found erroneous or heretical; and to prevent the diffusion of such doctrines by every means adapted to that end.

When the heads of the university were apprised that such a communication had been sent to them, the propriety of allowing it to be read, or of declining to receive it, became a matter of serious discussion. This hesitation may be attributed in part to the sympathy of many with the opinions of the Reformer, but still more probably to that feeling of jealousy in respect to all papal interference, which was so often manifested by the universities of the Middle Age. Walsingham, the monastic historian of the time,⁶ expresses his astonishment that any such hesitancy should

¹ *Candlemas*: feast day commemorating the presentation of Christ in the temple (Luk 2.22f).

² Cotton's *Abridgment*, 160-162.

³ *The Hundred Years War, 1337 to 1453*.

⁴ See [pp. 295, 296](#).

⁵ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. Ap. Nos. xi.-xv.

⁶ Thomas Walsingham (d. 1422) was a Benedictine monk at St. Albans Abbey, where he was superintendent of the copying-room. His writings are the source of much of our knowledge of the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V, and the careers of John Wycliff, and Wat Tyler (*Peasant's Revolt*). He was no relation to Sir Francis Walsingham, spymaster to Elizabeth I.

have been shown. But it is evident from the letters of the pope, that the persons holding the opinions of the Reformer in a greater or lesser degree, were known to be numerous and powerful, and that the execution of the papal mandates was expected to be attended with difficulty.

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The call made upon the hierarchy to be vigilant and resolute in this affair, was met by a more prompt and cordial response. Sudbury, now Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the Chancellor of Oxford, reminding him of the commands received from the pope, and requiring the execution of them with all diligence and faithfulness. The chancellor is especially required to obtain, by the assistance of the most orthodox and skilful divines, correct information in regard to the alleged heresies and errors, and to send along with his statement of the doctrines certainly propagated by Wycliffe, his own judgment respecting them, delivered under the university seal. Moreover, it was enjoined upon him that, as chancellor, he should cite the erroneous teacher, or cause him to be cited, to personally appear before his ecclesiastical superiors, in the church of St. Paul's, London, on the thirtieth day from the date of the citation.

This letter was written on the eighteenth of December, and early in the following year, 1378, Wycliffe appeared before a synod convened at Lambeth. On this occasion, the Reformer appeared alone. But though the distinguished men who accompanied him when he last fronted his enemies, were absent, the favor of the powerful, as well as of the people, was still with him. The citizens of London surrounded the place of meeting: numbers forced their way into the chapel where the synod was assembled, proclaiming their attachment to the person and doctrine of Wycliffe. The dismay produced by this tumult was augmented when Sir Lewis Clifford entered the chapel, and in the name of the queen-mother,¹ forbade the bishops proceeding to any definite sentence concerning the conduct or opinions of the Reformer. Walsingham, in relating this disastrous course of things, censures the pusillanimity² of the synod in the strongest terms. "The delegates," he remarks, "shaken as a reed with the wind, became soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of the whole church. With such fear were they struck, that you would think them a man who does not hear, or one in whose mouth are no reproofs."³ Such interferences with regard to matters of public interest, were not unusual in those times. A little previously, the queen-mother had interposed in the matter of the dispute between the Londoners and the Duke of Lancaster.

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The persons delegated "to entreat the citizens to be reconciled with the duke," were Sir Alfred Lewer, Sir Simon Burley, and this same Sir Lewis Clifford: and "the Londoners answered, that they, for the honor of the princess, would obey, and do with all reverence what she would require."⁴ Walsingham also relates that a similar tumult arose some four years later, during the trial of Ashton the Lollard.

But the historian who complains in such terms of the conduct of the synod, informs us that before its members separated, Wycliffe delivered to them a paper containing a statement of the

¹ The Queen Mother in 1378 was Joan of Kent, the widow of the legendary warrior-hero, Edward the Black Prince.

² *Pusillanimity*: contemptible fearfulness.

³ Spelman, ii. 625. Walsingham, ad an.

⁴ Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 559.

opinions imputed to him, with explanations annexed. These explanations were not deemed satisfactory. And though no further proceedings were instituted against him at present, he was commanded to abstain from teaching such doctrines, either in the schools or in his sermons.¹ This paper has been much misrepresented by the enemies of Wycliffe, and much misunderstood by his friends. The former have described his explanations as characterised by subtlety, timidity, and evasion; and the latter, by judging the several articles separately instead of regarding the document as a whole, have sometimes contributed to strengthening the prejudice thus created, rather than removing it. As the contents of this paper have been regarded as presenting the most vulnerable point in the history of the Reformer, we shall print it without abridgment, and shall add to it those observations which may serve to give a fair exhibition of its general and real meaning. It commences thus: —

First of all, I publicly protest, as I have often done at other times, that I will and purpose from the bottom of my heart, by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and as long as I have breath, to profess and defend the law of Christ so far as I am able. And if, through ignorance or any other cause, I fail in this, I ask pardon of God, and from henceforth I now revoke and retract it, humbly submitting myself to the correction of Holy Mother Church.

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And as for the opinion of children and weak people concerning the faith which I have taught in the schools and elsewhere, and which has been conveyed beyond the sea, by those who are more than children, even to the court of Rome — so that Christians may not be scandalised on my account — I am willing to set down my understanding in writing, since I am prosecuted for it. These opinions I am willing to defend even unto death, as I believe all Christians ought to do, and especially the pope of Rome and the rest of the priests of the church. I understand the conclusions, according to the sense of Scripture and of the holy doctors, and the manner of speaking used by them; this sense I am ready to explain. And if it is proved that the conclusions are contrary to the faith, then I am willing very readily to retract them.

I. The first conclusion is, *that all mankind, since Christ's coming, does not have power, simply or absolutely, to ordain that Peter and all his successors should rule over the world politically forever.* And this is plain, as it is not in the power of man to hinder the coming of Christ to the last judgment, which we are bound to believe according to that article of the creed, *from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.* For after that, according to the faith delivered in Scripture, all human polity will be at an end. But I understand that political dominion, or civil secular government, pertains to the laity who are actually living, while they are absent from the Lord. For the philosophers speak of such a political dominion. And even though it is styled as periodical, and sometimes *perpetual* (or forever), yet in the Holy Scripture, in the use of the church, and in the writings of the philosophers, the word *perpetuum* is commonly and plainly used in the same sense as *eternal*. And therefore I will afterwards suppose that term is used or taken in that more famous signification. For thus the church sings, *Glory be to God the Father, and to his only Son, with the Holy Spirit the Comforter, both now and forever [in perpetuum]*. And then the conclusion immediately follows on the principles of faith, since it is not in the power of men to appoint the pilgrimage of the church to be without end.

Wycliffe here contents himself with explaining the phrase “forever” scholastically, in its literal and most extended sense, and in that sense as being opposed to the known pleasure of God in respect to the duration of all earthly powers and relationships. But the reader will find, as he proceeds, that if the Reformer has deemed it sufficient under this article, to speak merely to the

¹ Bale describes this paper as *Answers to Objections*. Murimuth, Contin. 137. Walsingham, 206-208.

point of the *perpetuity* claimed for the papal supremacy, it was not because he had no other doctrine which he might honestly avow on that subject. But it was because other articles were to follow with which, in his view, it would be preferable to connect his more particular opinions relative to the *nature* of that power.

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II. God *cannot give civil dominion to any man for himself and his heirs forever* — in perpetuum. By *civil dominion*, I mean the same that I meant above by *political dominion*, and by *perpetual*, or *forever*, the same as I did before, as the Scripture understands the perpetual or everlasting habitations in the state of blessedness. I said, therefore, that God, of his ordinary power, cannot give man *civil dominion* forever. I said, secondly, that it seems probable that God, of his absolute power, cannot give man such a dominion, *in perpetuum*, forever, because he cannot, as it seems, always imprison his spouse on the way, nor always defer the ultimate completion of her happiness.

Here the same kind of argument occurs. It is merely saying that the natural power of God has been restricted to a given course by his moral purposes.

III. *Charters of human invention concerning civil inheritance forever, are impossible*. This is an incident truth. For we should not reckon as catholic all the charters that are held by an unjust occupier. But if this is confirmed by the faith of the church, there would be an opportunity given for charity, and a liberty to trust in temporalities, and to petition for them. For just as every truth is necessary, so every falsehood is possible on supposition, as it is made plain by the testimony of Scripture and of the holy doctors, who speak of the necessity of future things.

Under this article we have the same method of reasoning. But in a second paper, containing answers and explanations concerning these alleged errors and heresies, and made public by Wycliffe a short time after the meeting at Lambeth, the Reformer states, in regard to this conclusion, that it was a passing remark which arose in conversation with a certain divine who magnified such charters so far as to prefer their authority to that of the Scriptures. “To which,” he states, “I replied, it would be much better to attend to the defence and exposition of the Scriptures, since many such charters were necessarily the kind that could not be executed.” He complains accordingly that opinions were imputed to him from hearsay, or as reported by “children and weak persons.”

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But if the reader will pass on from the first three articles in this series, to the last, he will perceive that the Reformer had simply reserved his obnoxious ¹ doctrine on this subject, that it might be set forth more fully at the right point, and that he is chargeable simply with scholasticism, and not a timid concealment. In that article, he is described as saying that in certain cases an ecclesiastic, and even a bishop of Rome, may be corrected by his inferiors — and not merely by his inferiors among the clergy, but by the laity as well. He is described also as teaching that this may be done whenever the good of the church is thought to require it. Wycliffe does not disown this doctrine, offensive and alarming as he knew it to be. In support of this opinion, he assumes the pontiff to be a peccable brother,² sharing in common with other men, a tendency to what is sinful. And from this he infers that popes, in common with other men, are subject to the laws of brotherly reproof and correction. He accordingly writes, “If it is evident, therefore, that the

¹ *Obnoxious*: “offensive” in the sense that it would make him liable to sanctions, or expose him to harm.

² *Peccable*: liable to sin; subject to transgress the divine law.

college of cardinals are remiss in performing their service for the necessary welfare of the church, it is manifest that others, and perhaps principally the laity, may reprove and implead him, and bring him to a better life.” It is admitted that the impeachment of a pontiff is a grave business, not to be rashly entered upon. But it is added that, where ground for such a proceeding really exists, to shrink from the duty is not only to know that the pope is an offender, but to conclude that he is an offender beyond hope of recovery. In conclusion, he exclaims, “God forbid that truth should be condemned by the church of Christ, because it sounds unpleasantly in the ear of the guilty or of the ignorant — for then the entire faith of the Scriptures will be exposed to condemnation!” If the laity might be justly employed in impeaching a pontiff, and in bringing even the successors of St. Peter to a better life, of course the subordinate members of the hierarchy must be regarded as subject to the same kind of discipline. The right of the people also to judge in such a case as to what is or is not for the good of the church, is clearly assumed as the foundation of this doctrine. Yet the doctrine being avowed, committed to writing, and delivered into the hands of the papal delegates, we do not wonder that their counsel was that such opinions should “not be published in schools or pulpits.”

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It is also important to observe that it does not appear from any source, that Wycliffe had committed himself against the papacy previously to this time, in any stronger form than in the matter of the article referred to. Those of his writings that contain stronger expressions on that subject, I have shown elsewhere to be the productions of a later period.¹

IV. *Everyone being or existing in grace, justifying finally, not only has a right to, but in fact **has** all the things of God; or, he not only has a right to the thing, but for his time, he has by right a power over all the good things of God.* This is plain from Scripture, Mat 24,² because the Truth promises this to those citizens who enter into his joy: *Truly I say to you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*³ For the right of the communion of saints in their own country is founded objectively on the universality of the good things of God.

V. *A man can give dominion to his natural or adopted son ministerially only, whether that dominion is temporal or eternal.* It is plain from this, that every man ought to acknowledge himself in all his works to be a humble minister of God, as evident from Scripture: *Let a man so account us as the ministers of Christ.*^{1Cor 4.1} Indeed, Christ himself so ministered, and taught his principal apostles to so minister. But in their own country, the saints will give their brethren the dominion of goods, as is plain from their acting in the body, or their disposal of inferior good things by nature, according to Luke 6.38: *Good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.*

This article, and the preceding one, relate to an obscure topic, and they are not elucidated much by the sort of explanation attached to them. The doctrine to which they refer is that of “dominion founded in grace,” of which mention is made in a preceding portion of this work.

VI. *If God exists, temporal lords may lawfully and meritoriously take away the goods of fortune from a delinquent church.* That conclusion is correlative with the first article of the Creed, *I believe in God, the*

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, i. 381-388.

² **Mat 24:45-47** "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷ "Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

³ **Mat 25:21** "His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"

Father Almighty. I understand the word *may* as the Scriptures do, which grant that God *may raise up children unto Abraham* out of stones;^{Mat 3.9} for otherwise all Christian princes would be heretics. For the first conclusion, the argument is thus formed: If God exists, he is Almighty; and if so, he *may* prescribe that temporal lords take away the goods of fortune from a delinquent church; and if he does thus prescribe to them, then they *may* lawfully so take them away. *Ergo*, from this — by virtue of that principle — Christian princes have put that opinion into practice.

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But God forbid that from this it should be believed that it was my meaning that secular lords may lawfully take them away when and however they please, or by their bare authority; but that they may do it only by the authority of the church, in those cases and form limited by law.

Concerning the doctrine of Wycliffe on the subject to which this article refers, it is necessary to look to the sixth, the sixteenth, and the seventeenth articles together. In these articles, taken collectively, he is accused of teaching that all church endowments are left conditionally — that if the clergy fail to apply their wealth to the end which it was designed to promote, it must devolve on the magistrate to enforce such an application of it; and that in every such case, the civil power is not only authorised to do so, but if necessary to the reformation of the order, to deprive churchmen of their possessions entirely, and this is notwithstanding any censures from the church which might be fulminated against them. Such is the doctrine which Wycliffe is described as holding with regard to the enormous wealth of the clergy and of the religious orders. And in his paper given to the papal delegates, this doctrine — instead of being denied, evaded, or softened down — is fully avowed as a part of his creed. With the prelacy of England as his judges, and the papal power as their ally, he does not fear to add that if there is any difference between the obligations of the magistrate to secure the just application of civil or ecclesiastical endowments, his duty to that end in the latter case, is even more binding than in the former — inasmuch as the mischiefs consequent on any mal-administration in the matter of ecclesiastical endowments are more momentous. In the theory of Wycliffe, the last appeal in respect to all such questions was to the crown, and not to the mitre.¹ The temporal power of the pope was denied, not merely in respect to the property of the state, but in respect to the property of the church. In his view, the pontiff who claimed such powers aimed at usurpation. And the clergy who in any way ceded such power to the papacy, did so at the risk of a just allegiance to their sovereign and their country. It was natural, we repeat, that an injunction would have been given against the publication of such doctrines “in schools or pulpits.”

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The next article in the pope’s schedule is omitted here, and No. VIII follows, which is here numbered the Seventh.

VII. *We know that it is not possible that the vicar of Christ, merely by his bulls, or by them together with his own will and consent, and that of his college of cardinals, can qualify or disable any man.* This is plain from the Catholic faith, since it behooves our Lord in every vicarious operation, to maintain the primacy. Therefore, as in every qualifying of a subject, it is first required that the subject who is to be qualified, is fit and worthy; so in every disqualification there is first required a deserving from some demerit of the person thus disqualified. And by consequence, such qualifying or disqualifying is not made purely by the ministry of the vicar of Christ, but from above, from elsewhere, or from some other.

¹ That is, the bishop’s headdress, worn as a symbol of his ecclesiastical authority.

This article, and the seven articles following, relate to one subject — the spiritual power of the clergy.

VIII. *It is not possible that a man be excommunicated to his damage, unless he is excommunicated first and principally by himself.* This is plain, since such an excommunication must be originally founded on the sin of the party damaged. From which Augustine, in his twenty-first sermon on the words of the Lord, says: *Do not misuse yourself, and man shall not get the better of you.* And to this day, the faith of the church sings, *No adversity shall do us any hurt, if iniquity does not prevail.* Notwithstanding, all excommunication is to be dreaded on many accounts, even though excommunication by the church is, to the humble excommunicate, not damnable but wholesome.

IX. *Except in the cause of God, nobody should excommunicate, suspend, or interdict anyone, nor proceed according to any ecclesiastical censure by way of revenge.* This appears from this: that every just cause is the cause of God, to which respect should chiefly be had. Indeed, a love for the excommunicate ought to exceed a zeal or desire for revenge, and an affection for any temporal things; since otherwise, even he that excommunicates, injures himself. To this ninth conclusion we add that it is agreeable to it, that a prelate should excommunicate in human causes, but principally on this account: because an injury is done to his God. 13.9.c. *inter querelas*.¹

X. *Cursing or excommunication does not bind, finally, except so far as it is used against an adversary of the law of Christ.* This is plain, since it is God who binds *absolutely* everyone who is bound, who cannot excommunicate unless it is for a transgression of, or prevaricating with, His own law.

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To this tenth conclusion we add that it is consonant with it, that the ecclesiastical censure be used against an adversary of a member of the church, notwithstanding that it does not bind *absolutely* but *secondarily*.

XI. *There is no power granted or exemplified by Christ to his disciples, to excommunicate a subject (chiefly) for denying any temporalities, but for the contrary.* This is plain from the faith taught in Scripture, according to which we believe that God is to be loved above all things, and our neighbor and enemy more than all our temporalities of this world, necessarily and because the law of God is not contradictory to itself.

XII. *The disciples of Christ have no power to exact by civil compulsion, temporalities by censures;* as is plain from Scripture, Luke 22.25-26, where Christ forbid his apostles to reign civilly, or to exercise any temporal dominion. *The kings of the Gentiles, he says, exercise lordship over them, but you shall not be so.* And it is expounded in that sense by St. Bernard, St. Chrysostom, and other saints. We add to this twelfth conclusion that, notwithstanding, temporalities may be exacted by ecclesiastical censures *accessorie* ² in vindication of his God.

XIII. *It is not possible by the absolute power of God, that if the pope or any other Christian pretends that he binds or looses at any rate, he therefore actually binds or looses.* ^{Mat 16.19} The opposite of this would destroy the whole catholic faith, since it imports no less than blasphemy to suppose that anyone can usurp such an absolute power of the Lord's.³ I add to this thirteenth conclusion, that I do not intend

¹ *Inter querelas*: among the complaints (that is, made against Wycliffe by the pope).

² Latin *accessorie*: supplementary, added to complete or make up for a deficiency.

³ John Gill (1697-1771) comments on Mat 16.19: "Peter is not the door-keeper of heaven to let in or keep out whom he pleases; nor has his pretended successor the keys of hell and death; these also are only in Christ's hands: ... This also is not to be understood of binding or loosing men's sins, by laying on or taking off censures and excommunications; but only of doctrines, or declarations of what is lawful and unlawful, free, or prohibited from being received or practised;" – WHG

by that conclusion to derogate from the power of the pope, or of any other prelate of the church; but I allow that they may bind and loose, by virtue of the Head.¹ But I understand the denied conditional to be impossible in this sense: that it cannot be that the pope or any other prelate, pretends that he binds or looses at any rate [or as he wishes], unless in fact he does bind and loose [by virtue of the Head]; and then he cannot be peccable or guilty of any fault.

XIV. *We ought to believe that a Christian priest only binds or looses when he simply obeys the law of Christ:* because it is not lawful for him to bind and loose except by virtue of that law; and by consequence, not unless it is in conformity to it.

In the preceding articles, the doctrine of Wycliffe in regard to spiritual censures, is said to be that they should never be employed as an instrument of revenge, and that they should never be used as means of extorting temporal contributions from the laity. And as they should not be employed alone for that purpose, so neither should they be used to that end conjointly with the authority of the magistrate.

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The Reformer admits this as his doctrine. And in the paper subsequently published, he repeats that the use of church censures, and of the authority of the magistrate to extort from the people a revenue for the priesthood, are customs unknown to the better ages of the church. They are to be numbered among the corruptions consequent to “her endowment under Constantine.”² He even proceeds as far as to say that a state of things might arise in which depriving the church of her wealth would be a much more Christian act than to have it bestowed upon her.

But Wycliffe did not restrict his complaints to the bad use which was frequently made of this sort of power; he questioned the validity of the power itself. He insisted that, in reality, no man is any the better for the benediction of a priest, or any the worse for the anathema of a priest. The judgment of man, in such a case, he accounts as nothing, except as it is in accordance with a previous judgment of God. In the thirteenth proposition, the assumption of an unconditional authority in the forms of binding and loosing — so that whatever is bound or loosed by a priest on earth, must be supposed to be bound or loosed in heaven — he has condemned as a tenet that is destructive of the whole catholic faith, as a usurpation of authority proper only to God, and as nothing less than blasphemy, inasmuch as God himself never bestows pardon unconditionally in this way. So the Reformer completely took man out of the hands of man in the concerns of religion; and thus he sapped the entire foundation of the received ecclesiastical system.

XV. *This ought to be believed as catholic, that every priest rightly ordained* (according to the law of grace) *has a power according to which he may minister all the sacraments secundum speciem;*³ *and by consequence, he may absolve from any sin the one who has confessed to him, and is contrite.* This is plain from this: that the essence of priestly power does not vary in its sufficiency — notwithstanding the fact that the powers of inferior priests are now reasonably restrained, and at other times (as in the last article) they are of necessity relaxed. I add to this fifteenth conclusion, that according to the doctors, every prelate has a twofold power, viz. — a power of order, and a power of jurisdiction and government; and, they are prelates as to this last, being of a superior majesty and government.

xlvi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

¹ *By virtue of the Head:* because of Christ; i.e., properly done in His name, as He specifies in Scripture.

² See note on [page 75](#) concerning pope Sylvester I, and the gifts Constantine gave to the Church.

³ *Secundum speciem:* the sacraments according to their kind.

The Reformer always maintained this oneness of priesthood in the church, and the consequent right of the humblest priest to be occupied in the discharge of every priestly function. Hence he censured the practice of restricting confirmation to the office of the bishop. (See [chapter 12](#) on Confirmation, from the *Trialogus*.)

XVI. *It is lawful for kings, in cases limited by law, to take away the temporalities from churchmen who habitually abuse them.*

This is plain from this: that temporal lords ought to depend more on spiritual alms, which bring forth greater plenty of fruit, than on alms for the necessities of the body. It may happen to be a work of spiritual alms to correct those clergymen who damage themselves, soul and body, by withholding the temporalities from them. The case which the law puts is this: when the spiritual head or president fails in punishing them, or the faith of the cleric is to be corrected, as it appears in xvi. p. 7, *Filiis*, 40 di.

XVII. *If the pope, or temporal lords, or any others, have endowed the church with temporalities, it is lawful for them to take them away in certain cases, viz. when doing so is by way of medicine to cure or prevent sins; and that is notwithstanding excommunication or any other church censure, since these donations were not given except with an implied condition.* This is plain from this: that nothing ought to hinder a man from doing the principal works of charity necessarily, and in every human action, the condition of the divine good pleasure is necessarily as it is in the civil law. *Collationis Decorandi*, c. 5, in fine *Collationis* 10. We added to this seventeenth article, God forbid that by these words, occasion should be given to the temporal lords to take away the goods of fortune to the detriment of the church.

XVIII. *An ecclesiastic, even the pope of Rome himself, may be corrected by their subjects, on some accounts; and for the benefit of the church, he may be impleaded¹ by both clergy and laity.* This is plain from this: that the pope himself is capable of sinning, except the sin against the Holy Ghost (as it is supposed), thus saving the sanctity, humility, and reverence due to so worthy a father. And since he is our peccable brother, or as liable to sin as we are, he is subject to the law of brotherly reproof. And therefore, when it is plain that the whole college of cardinals is remiss in correcting him for the necessary welfare of the church, it is evident that the rest of the body which, as it may happen, may chiefly be made up of the laity, may medicinally reprove him, and implead him, and reduce him, to live a better life. This possible case is handled in *Diss.* 40, *si papa fuerit a fide devius*.

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Just as so great a lapse should not be supposed in the lord pope without manifest evidence, so it should not be presumed possible that when he does so fall, that he should be guilty of so great an obstinacy as not to humbly accept a cure from his superior with respect to God. This is the reason why many chronicles attest to the facts of that conclusion. God forbid that truth should be condemned by the church of Christ, because it sounds ill in the ears of sinners and ignorant persons; for then the whole faith of the Scripture would be liable to be condemned.

It will be seen that in this document there is little referring to what may, with strict propriety, be described as theological opinion. But even in relation to such opinion, there is much implied, and implied with all the certainty of a direct statement, though little is expressed. Its chief value, however, consists in its presenting a clear and authentic record concerning the doctrine of Wycliffe at this period:

- in respect to the limits which should be imposed on the pretensions of the papacy;
- on the scarcely less extravagant claims of the clergy generally;

¹ *Implead*: to institute and prosecute a suit in court; to sue or prosecute at law; hence, to accuse; to impeach.

- on the authority of the magistrate in relation to the wealth of the church, and the persons of churchmen;
- on the legitimate means of securing for the clergy an appropriate revenue; and
- on the power supposed to belong to the priest with regard to the present character and future allotment of the worshipper.

From the inconsiderate and imperfect notices of this paper by most writers, we are left to suppose that its explanations were such as to furnish nothing which could awaken the fears or the displeasure of the contemporary clergy. But the silence imposed on Wycliffe by the synod to which the document was submitted, is evidence to the contrary. It was a professor of divinity whose zeal was thus employed to familiarise the mind of the nation with a doctrine which vested the laity with the right to judge, and even to correct, their spiritual instructors — extending this principle of reformation to the pontiff himself, as circumstances might demand. And could such a man be regarded by the ecclesiastics of the fourteenth century as a safe preceptor ¹ for youth? In setting forth the authority of the crown as that which should be final in determining the applications of ecclesiastical property, the Reformer became a teacher of doctrines against which synods, and councils, and the papal court, had directed their most powerful engines of destruction.

1. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

But so deeply laid was the fabric of the reigning superstition, that every attack of this nature on its mere outworks, must have rebounded on the head of the assailant, so long as its theory of spiritual power was allowed to remain unquestioned. This successful fiction — by placing the rewards and punishments of a future state at the disposal of the priesthood — served as a basement to the whole superstructure. And it should be distinctly remembered that it is against this doctrine, that the greater number of the conclusions which Wycliffe is accused of holding, are plainly directed. And in his explanations at Lambeth, even according to the showing of his enemies, not one of the propositions relating to that system of priestly fraud was for a moment denied, or in the slightest degree modified.

The clergy of the Middle Age are described as believing that the sentence of excommunication exposed the parties excommunicated to the fires of purgatory, and often to eternal torments. But if such was their faith, their frequent employment of that sentence to avenge some trivial offence, or to extort some paltry contribution, must be regarded as imparting a most odious aspect to their general character. The readiness, indeed, with which such censures were resorted to in those times, obliges us to suppose that the confidence of churchmen in the truth of this scheme was more apparent than real. To doubt this, must be to view them as sharing less in the nature of men, than in that of demons. On this subject, the religion and the humanity of Wycliffe spoke out too loudly to be misunderstood. He saw in the Romish polity and doctrine, a machinery artfully devised to raise ecclesiastics into the place of the Almighty, so as to connect the doom of impiety with everything which men should do contrary to their pleasure. In his noble effort to deliver the souls of men from this snare, Wycliffe exposes the inconsistencies, the worldliness, and the cruelty so manifest in the ordinary exercise of that spiritual authority which the clergy had thus assumed. The maxim — “By their fruits you shall know them,” was applied to churchmen no less freely than to the laity; and to rescue the popular mind from its subjection to this spiritual

¹ *Preceptor*: teacher at a university or college (especially at Cambridge or Oxford).

thralldom, men were urged to study the principles of their faith as set forth in Holy Scripture, and to judge for themselves with regard to the pretensions of all persons claiming to be honored as spiritual guides.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. li

In his comment on the articles contained in the preceding paper, which the Reformer published immediately after his appearance at Lambeth, he refers to the pontiff in the following terms:

“Let him not be ashamed to perform the ministry of the church, since he is, or at least ought to be, the servant of the servants of God. But a prohibition of reading the Holy Scriptures, and the vanity of secular dominion, and a lusting after worldly appearances, would seem to partake too much of a disposition towards the blasphemous advancement of Antichrist, especially while the truths of a scriptural faith are reputed to be tares, and said to be opposed to Christian truth by certain leaders who arrogate that we must abide by their decision respecting every article of faith — notwithstanding that they themselves are plainly ignorant of the faith of the Scriptures. But by such means, there follows a crowding to the court of Rome to purchase a condemnation of the sacred Scriptures as heretical; and from this come dispensations that are contrary to the articles of the Christian faith.”

The work in which the Reformer speaks this way, he described as “A sort of Answer of the Bull,” evidently meaning the letter addressed by Gregory to the university. In his closing paragraph he observes,

“I delivered these conclusions like a grain of faith separated from the chaff by which the ungrateful tares are set on fire. These, opposed to the Scriptures of truth, like the crimson blossom of a foul revenge, provide sustenance for Antichrist. The infallible sign of this is that there reigns in the clergy a Luciferian enmity and pride, consisting in the lust of domination, the wife of which is covetousness of earthly things. Together they breed the children of the fiend, for the children of evangelical poverty are no more.”

A judgment about the fruit thus produced may also be formed from the fact that many, even of the children of poverty, are so degenerate that either by what they say, or by what they do not say, they take part with Lucifer — not being able to stand forth in the cause of evangelical poverty, or not daring to do so, in consequence of the seed of the “man of sin”¹ sown in their hearts, or from a base fear of forfeiting their temporalities. But the statements which he had now published, he avows he is prepared to defend even “to death, if by such means he might reform the manners of the church.”

lii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

This escape of Wycliffe from the power of his enemies, and his reiteration of his most obnoxious opinions in still stronger terms, called forth an attack from an anonymous divine described by the Reformer as a “motley theologian:” — the purport of the whole piece appears to have been to vindicate the infallibility of the pontiff.² It seems this writer affirmed that the pope was incapable of mortal sin; and whatever his holiness ordains, was to be accounted true and just. In reply,

¹ **2Th 2:3-4** Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

² The doctrine of papal infallibility was asserted in the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870; it is said that it was the majority opinion at the time of the Counter-Reformation (Council of Trent 1545). This “motley theologian” asserted it far earlier.

Wycliffe observes that if this doctrine were admitted, the pope might exclude any book from the canon of Holy Writ; he might introduce any novelty into its place; he might alter the whole Bible; and make the very Scripture heresy, establishing as catholic what is opposed to the truth. The Reformer then refers to the efforts the pontiff had made to arm the authority of the prelates, the court, and the university against Wycliffe, because he ventured to question this assumption, and some other assumptions that were no less impious.

The remaining portion of this piece consists of two parts — the *first* containing a further explanation of certain articles in the series already objected to him, and to which his answers had been given; the *second*, consisting in a spirited exhortation addressed to his readers, to cast off the yoke, both secular and spiritual, which a foreign power had so long imposed on them.

The articles cited are the seventh, tenth, and thirteenth; and also the sixteenth and eighteenth. The sixteenth relates to the office of the magistrate with regard to the goods of the church. The eighteenth, to the correction of an offending pontiff, in extreme cases, by the authority of the inferior clergy, and even by that of the laity. In the instructions of the pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the primate is required to ascertain the real opinions of Wycliffe, but he is not to pronounce any definite sentence concerning them until the judgment of the papal court is known. In the course of this tract, the Reformer speaks of the delegates as waiting to receive this decision before proceeding to announce the fate of his conclusions. And he states for their information, that according to the report which had reached him, the doctrine which he had confessed in regard to the goods of the church, and the peccability of the pope, had been condemned as being heretical in a special degree.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. liii

From these articles, he proceeds to those which treat the power of ABSOLUTION. And presuming that the delusion respecting them would be that the pope and the clergy, in every case, generally bind or loose when they affect ¹ to do so, his indignation becomes impetuous. The man who would thus make himself equal with God is described as a blasphemer and a heretic, as a delinquent whom Christians should in no way tolerate — certainly not as their leader, since his guidance can only serve to conduct men blindfolded to destruction. Secular lords are therefore called upon to resist the arrogant claims of the pope. And they are to do so, not merely with respect to the heresy which the pontiff had imposed on them in declaring them incompetent to withdraw their alms from a delinquent church; nor merely because the same authority had declared it to be heretical to affirm that any distribution of the goods of the church by the court of Rome can be only ministerial or subordinate; but because that power had taken from them the liberty of the law of Christ, and brought in an Egyptian bondage instead. It is urged, therefore, that no fear of suffering, no thirst for gain, no love of distinction should prevent the soldiers of Christ, seculars as well as clergy, from appearing in defence of the law of God, even unto blood! Should the lord pope himself, or even an angel from heaven, promulgate doctrines conferring upon a creature a power of absolving that is unique to the Deity, it is asserted that every member of the Christian commonwealth should feel bound in such a case to exert himself to the utmost for “saving the faith.”

¹ *Affect*: a deliberate pretense or exaggerated display of doing something.

In the following manner, the Reformer reasons on the bearings of that spiritual authority which the churchmen of the day were so zealous to maintain.

“Let it once be admitted that the pope, or one representing him, does indeed bind or loose whenever he affects to do so, and how will the world stand? For when the pontiff pretends to bind all who oppose him in his acquisition of temporal things (either moveable or immoveable) with the pains of eternal damnation, if such persons assuredly are so bound, then it must follow as the easiest of things, for the pope to subvert or to destroy every ordinance of Christ, and to wrest ¹ for himself all the kingdoms of the world.

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And since Abiathar was deposed by Solomon for a lesser fault than this usurpation of a Divine power, Peter was reproved to his face by Paul, and indeed, many popes have been deposed by emperors and kings — what should be allowed to prevent the faithful from uttering their complaints against this greater injury done to their God? For on the ground of this impious doctrine, it would be easy for the pope to invert the entire order of the world — seizing, in connection with his clergy, on the wives, the daughters, and all the possessions of the laity without opposition. For it is their saying, that even kings may not deprive a churchman of anything, nor complain of his conduct whatever he may do; while obedience must be instantly rendered to whatever the pope may decree.” ²

The views of Wycliffe were thus clear and comprehensive in respect to the sources of false power in the church, and so he steadily and firmly directed the axe toward the root of that evil.

But men who live in the midst of such excitements, need a much greater measure of physical power than commonly falls to the lot of humanity. Judging from his portraits, we must regard Wycliffe, in this respect, as placed at great disadvantage if compared with Luther. The last eight or ten years in the life of our Reformer, must have been years of extraordinary labor. The far greater portion of his works known to us were manifestly written during that interval; while the almost ceaseless harassing to which he was exposed from the prosecutions instituted against him, must have made a still further, and perhaps a still greater, demand on his strength of body as well as on the resources of his mind. We have reason to think that the events of 1377 and 1378, together with the excessive labor to which he applied himself immediately subsequent to that period, laid the foundation of the malady which proved fatal some years later. The sickness which befell the Reformer at this juncture, was such as to leave little prospect of his recovery. Such also was the force of religious prejudice in the fourteenth century, that his old antagonists, the Mendicants, could not regard it as possible that a heretic so notorious as he, should suppose himself to be on the confines of a world to come, without the most terrible apprehensions in regard to the vengeance awaiting him there.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. lv

But while thus persuaded of their own rectitude, and certain that the doctrines taught by the Reformer could not be other than so many suggestions of the great enemy, it was thought that some advantage might be obtained if this dying member of the evil one could be brought to utter some sort of recantation. Wycliffe was in Oxford when this sickness arrested his activity, and confined him to his chamber. From the four orders of friars, four doctors (who were also called *regents*) were formally deputed to present themselves to their expiring enemy; and to these were

¹ *Wrest*: obtain by seizing forcibly or violently.

² Lewis, c. iv. 78-80.

added the same number of civil officers, called *senators of the city* and *aldermen of the wards*. When these persons entered the apartment of the sick man, he was seen stretched on his bed. Some expressions of sympathy were dropped, and some of hope concerning his better health. But it was presently intimated that he must be aware of the many injuries which the whole Mendicant brotherhood had sustained from his hands, having been the special object of attack in many of his sermons and writings. And as it was now manifest that death was about to bring his course to its conclusion, it was only charitable to hope that he would not conceal his penitence, but that, with due Christian humility, he would revoke whatever he had said tending to the disreputation of fraternities so eminent in learning, sanctity, and usefulness. Wycliffe continued silent and motionless until this address was concluded. He then beckoned his servants to raise him in his bed; and this done, he fixed his eyes on the persons assembled, and summoning all his remaining strength, exclaimed, "I shall not die, but live; and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars!" The doctors and their attendants looked confusedly at each other, and retreated in disappointment and dismay. They also lived to feel the truth of the prediction which had thus been sounded in their ears; nor will it be easy to imagine another scene more characteristic of the parties composing it, or of the times with which it is connected.¹

¹ Baleus, *De Script. Brit.* 369. Lewis, c. iv. 82. The indignation of Wycliffe against these orders may appear to some persons excessive, and as betraying more temper than judgment. But whatever may have been the learning or worth of some of the Mendicants in the times referred to, their vices generally, and the mischiefs resulting from them, were such as to call for severe reprehension. The following is Chaucer's description of one of this class of men, and it shows that the poet and the Reformer were of one judgment on this subject.

Modernized version of the *Summoner's Tale* (Sompner's Tale):

My lords, there is in Yorkshire, as I guess, / A marshy district known as Holderness,
 In which a licensed friar [a mendicant] went about / To preach—also to beg, no need to doubt.
 Now it so happened that this friar one day / Preached at a church in his accustomed way,
 Especially, above all other teaching, / Exhorting all the people with his preaching
 To purchase trentals [mass for the dead], giving, for God's sake, / That holy houses men might undertake
 To build for services, excluding where / A gift would just be squandered or where there
 Is no necessity of having people give – / Where clergy is endowed, that is, and live,
 Thank God, in wealth and plenty. "Trentals," he / Declared, "from penance bring delivery
 For dead friends' souls, the old as well as young, / All thirty masses being quickly sung—
 Not meaning in a frivolous kind of way, / Although a priest would sing but one a day.
 Get out their souls, deliver them," he'd call, / "For hard it is by meathook and by awl
 To get a clawing, or to burn and bake. / Make haste, get going at it, for Christ's sake!"
 And when this friar finished with his say, / With *qui cum patre* * he'd be on his way.
 When folks in church had given to him what / They pleased, he moved on, no more rest he got.
 With scrip and his tipped staff, all cinctured high [girded with a sash], / In every house he'd pore about and pry
 While begging meal and cheese or else some corn. / His comrade had a long staff tipped with horn,
 A pair of tablets made of ivory, / And a stylus that was finely polished. He
 Would always write the names down, as he stood, / Of all the folks who gave him something good,
 As if he meant to pray for them thereby. / "Give us a bushel, wheat or malt or rye,
 A bit of cheese or, by your grace, a cake, / Or what you will—we can't choose what we take;
 A penny for a mass, or half-a-penny, / Or give a slice of pork if you have any;
 A smidgen of your woolen cloth, dear dame, / Beloved sister—see, I write your name! —
 Bacon or beef, whatever you may find." / A sturdy fellow always walked behind
 Them as their servant, and he bore a sack / To tote all they were given on his back.
 No sooner was this friar out the door / Than he'd erase each name that just before
 He'd written on his tablets. All he'd do / Is serve the folks with trifles, fables too.

<http://english.fsu.edu/canterbury/summoner.html> — by Ronald Ecker and Eugene Crook

* *qui cum patre*: "[Who with the Father](#) and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God forever and ever, Amen."

Ivi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

One of the labors on which Wycliffe was intent at this time, was a TRANSLATION of all the books of the Old and New Testament, from Latin into English. This work he undertook, so that his countrymen, of every class, having the Scriptures thus made accessible to them in their own tongue, might be armed in the most effectual manner against the errors and superstitions of the times. It was a noble thought, and Wycliffe was the first Englishman who gave it lodgment. Before his time, portions of the Sacred Scriptures had been translated into English, and probably passed, in some instances, into the hands of wealthy and distinguished persons among the laity. But a translation of the whole volume into the language spoken by the people, that the highest and the lowest might alike be readers of the Bible in their own tongue, and that men might everywhere appeal to it as their ultimate authority in respect to all questions of truth and duty — that truly Protestant purpose — owes its origin in our ecclesiastical history, to the intelligence, the piety, and the intrepidity¹ of Wycliffe.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. Ivii

In the seventh century, Cedman,² an Anglo-Saxon monk, produced a composition which claimed the attention of his countrymen, as exhibiting the first application of their language to Christian poetry, and as the first attempt to set forth any part of the Sacred Scriptures in the speech of our forefathers.³ The poem, attributed to Cedman, bears all the marks of the antiquity assigned to it. It touches on the leading events of Old Testament history — such as the creation of the world; the fall of angels and of man; the deluge; the departure from Egypt; the entrance to Canaan — and some subsequent events. In the following century, Aldhelm,⁴ Bishop of Sherborne and Guthlaë, the celebrated anchorite,⁵ produced Anglo-Saxon versions of the Psalter. In the same age, the venerable Bede⁶ prefers his claim to the honor of a literal translation of St. John's Gospel.⁷

Iviii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

A manuscript copy of the Latin Gospels, a Saxon version, interlined, known by the name of the *Durham Book*, is attributed on probable evidence to about the time of Alfred. We possess another Latin transcript of the Gospels, with a Saxon translation, introduced in the same manner, known by the name of the *Rushworth Gloss*. This manuscript appears to be a production of the tenth century.⁸ Among the valuable manuscripts of Benet College, Cambridge, is a third copy of the Gospels in the Saxon tongue, written a little before the Conquest.⁹ And a fourth belonging to

¹ *Intrepidity*: resolute courageousness.

² Also, *Caedmon*; served under Hilda, c. 657–680.

³ Bede, Hist. lib. iv. c. 24.

⁴ Aldhelm (c. 639-709) – same century, and into the next.

⁵ *Anchorite*: someone who secludes himself from society for religious reasons.

⁶ Bede: (672-735) – English monk whose most famous work was *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

⁷ Vita Cuthberti. Baber's *Historical Account of the Saxon and English Versions of the Scriptures*, previous to the opening of the fifteenth century.

⁸ This is in the Bodleian, D. xxiv. No. 3964. It is so called from John Rushworth, Esq. of Lincoln's Inn, its former possessor.

⁹ That is, the Norman Conquest of England by William the Conqueror in 1066.

the same period, which appears to have been copied from the former, may be seen in the Bodleian Library.¹

But an ecclesiastic, who did more than all his brethren towards supplying his countrymen with instruction from the Scriptures in their own language, was Elfric.² This laborious scholar lived during the reign of Ethelred, and subscribes himself at different periods as monk, mass-priest, and abbot. In his epitome³ of the Old and New Testaments, composed for Sigwerd, a nobleman, we are informed that at the request of various persons, he had translated the Pentateuch, the books of Joshua and Judges, those of Esther, Job, and Judith, also the two books of Maccabeus, and part of the first and second books of Kings. In his own epitome of the Old and New Testaments, Cedman has not only made his selections from the Scriptures, but frequently added things to the sacred story from other writings.⁴ A copy of this work, printed with an English translation, by William l'Isle, in 1623, is in the Bodleian, and another has for some time been in my possession. It begins thus:

“Abbot Elfricke greets friendly Sigwerd. It is true, I tell you, that he who speaks by his doings is very wise; and the one who furnishes himself with good works proceeds well, both with God and with the world. And it is very plain in Holy Scripture that holy men employed in well-doing were held in good reputation in this world.”

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE. lix

Alfred is mentioned as having prefixed a translation of several passages from the Mosaic writings to his code of laws, and is said to have made considerable progress in a Saxon version of the Psalms a little before his death.

This, however, is the extent of our information on this interesting question, as connected with the Anglo-Saxon period of our history. The Anglo-Norman clergy were much more competent to have supplied the people with religious instruction in this form; but the example of their predecessors in this respect was slighted, or rather disapproved. Subsequent to the Conquest, the first attempt to translate any complete portion of the Scriptures into English, appears to have been made by the author of a rhyming paraphrase on the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, entitled “Ormulum.” Of nearly the same date, is a huge volume bearing the name of *Salus Animæ*, or, in English, “Sowle Hele,” in which the object of the compiler or transcriber seems to have been to furnish a volume of legendary and scriptural history in verse. He professes to set forth an outline of the historical portions both of the Old and New Testaments, but has introduced fragments of religious history with little regard to any principle of selection. The composition of this work is supposed to have preceded the opening of the fourteenth century. In Benet College, Cambridge, there is another work of the same description belonging to the same period, and containing accounts of the principal events recorded in the books of Genesis and Exodus. In the same collection, there is also a copy of the Psalms in English metre, which is

¹ Baber, lix. lx.

² Elfric (c. 955 – c. 1010) Benedictine abbot, considered comparable to Bede in the quality of his thought and his prolific writing.

³ *Epitome*: A brief abstract or synopsis of a larger work.

⁴ Baber, 3, lxii. lxiii.

attributed to about the year 1300; and two similar works, of nearly the same antiquity, have been preserved — one in the Bodleian Library, the other in that of Sir Robert Cotton.¹

But it is not until the middle of the following century that we trace any attempt to produce a literal translation even of detached portions of the Scriptures. It was about the year 1350 that Richard Roll, better known to ecclesiastical antiquaries as the *hermit of Hampole*, engaged in a work of this nature. His labors, however, were restricted to a little more than half the book of Psalms; and a devotional commentary was annexed to the Psalms which he translated.

IX. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Contemporary with this recluse, were some devout men among the clergy, who produced translations of such passages from the Scriptures as were prominent in the offices of the church; while others ventured to complete separate versions of the Gospels or Epistles. The persons thus laudably employed were certainly few in number; but parts of St. Mark and of St. Luke, and several of the Epistles, have descended to us thus rendered. It should be added that these versions, which are of various merit, are generally guarded by a comment.

Some Catholic writers have been disposed to deny that there was anything original in the conception of Wycliffe with regard to the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular language.² But the preceding statements will suffice to show in what form, and to what extent, that claim may be urged in favor of our Reformer. Knighton, a contemporary of Wycliffe, gives full expression to the different opinions which obtained in his own time on this subject.

“Christ,” says that historian, “delivered his doctrine to the doctors of the church, that they might administer to the laity and weaker persons according to the state of the times, and the wants of men. But this Master John Wycliffe translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it had formerly been opened to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine; and that which before was precious to both clergy and laity, is rendered, as it were, the common jest of both. The jewel of the church is turned into the sport of the people; and what was previously the principal gift of the clergy and divines, is made forever common to the laity.”³

So spoke the canon of Leicester on this matter. Nevertheless, if we may credit some modern Catholics, there was nothing new — nothing inconsistent with sound Catholic usage — in what Wycliffe had done in this respect!

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Not so, thought the English clergy, when assembled in council in 1408 with Archbishop Arundel at their head. Their enactment on this subject reads as follows: —

“The translation of the text of Holy Scriptures out of one tongue into another is a dangerous thing, as St. Jerome testifies, because it is not easy to make the verse in all respects the same. Therefore we enact and ordain that no one hereafter, by his own authority, translate any text of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue, or any other, by way of book or treatise; nor let any such book or treatise now lately

¹ Baber, lxii.-lxv.

² “The Holy Bible was, long before Wycliffe’s days, by virtuous and well-learned men, translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people with devotion and soberness well and reverently read.” — Sir Thomas More, *Dialog*. iii. 14. Lingard, *Hist. Eng.* iv. 267.

³ *De Eventibus*, col. 2644.

composed in the time of John Wycliffe aforesaid, or since, or hereafter to be composed, be read in whole or in part, in public or in private, under the pain of the greater excommunication.”¹

Before the Conquest, and during a considerable space afterwards, there was little evil to be apprehended from any attempt to translate the Scriptures into the spoken language of the country. The repose of ignorance was too profound to be readily broken, and the vassalage² both of the body and of the mind had been continued too long to allow being speedily disturbed. But in the age of Wycliffe, the augmented population of the country, the progress of commerce and of a representative government, and the partial revival of learning, had all contributed to improvement. And together with the bolder encroachments of the papacy, and the spirit of complaint and resistance which those encroachments had produced, proved eminently favorable to the zeal of our Reformer, as employed in applying the popular language to the pure records of the Gospel. His opponents, we have seen, were by no means insensible to the probable result of his efforts in this respect; and to his own discernment, that result was obvious in a much greater degree. Nearly twenty years had now passed since his first dispute with the Mendicants; and during that period, his writings disclose a growing conviction with regard to the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and with regard to the truth of the doctrine which we designate by the term — *the right of private judgment*.

lxii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The success, also, which attended his controversy with the friars, manifestly prepared him for his present enterprise. The effect of this, according to his enemies, was to make the truths of the Gospel better known to the laity, and even to females, than they had previously been known to the most distinguished among the clergy.³

Many passages illustrative of the arguments with which the Reformer opposed the clamours of his adversaries on this question, will be found in the ensuing pages. In one of his earliest vindications he writes thus: —

“Seeing that the truth of the faith shines more by how much more it is known; and that lords bishops condemn the faithful or true opinion in the ears of secular lords out of hatred of the person who maintains it; and that the truth may be known more plainly and diffusively — true men are under a necessity to declare the opinion which they hold, not only in Latin but in the vulgar tongue. It has been said, in a former *Looking-glass for Secular Lords*, written in the vulgar tongue, that they should wholly regulate themselves conformably to the law of Christ. Nor are those heretics to be heard who fancy that seculars should not know the law of God, but that it is sufficient for them to know what the priests and prelates tell them by word of mouth — for the Scripture is the faith of the church, and the more it is known in an orthodox sense, the better. Therefore, as secular men ought to know the faith, so it is to be taught them in whatever language is best known to them. Besides, since the truth of the faith is clearer and more exact in the Scripture than the priests know how to express it; and seeing (if one may say so) that there are many prelates who are too ignorant of the Scripture, and others conceal points of Scripture, such as those which declare the poverty and humility of the clergy; and seeing that there are many such defects in the verbal instructions of priests — it seems useful that the faithful should themselves search out or discover the sense of the faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which

¹ Wilkins’ Concilia, iii. 317. Walden, one of the antagonists of Wycliffe, affirmed, that “the decrees of bishops in the church are of greater authority and dignity than is the authority of the Scriptures.” — Doc. Trial. lib. ii. c. 21.

² *Vassalage: The state of a serf or slave.*

³ Knighton, De Eventibus, col. 2644.

they know and understand. Besides, according to the faith taught by the apostle in Hebrews 11, the saints by faith overcame kingdoms, and by the motive of faith chiefly hastened to their own country. Therefore, why should the fountain of faith not be made known to the people, using those means by which a man may know it most clearly? Therefore, the one who hinders this, endeavors that the people should continue in a damnable and unbelieving state.

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“The laws, therefore, which the prelates make, are not to be received as matters of faith; nor are we to believe their words or discourses any further or otherwise than as they are founded in the Scripture — since, according to the constant doctrine of Augustine, the Scripture is all the truth. Therefore, this translation of the Scripture would do at least this good: it would render priests and prelates unsuspected in regard to its words, which they profess to explain. Further, prelates, such as the pope, or friars, and other means, may prove defective. And accordingly, Christ and his apostles converted most of the world by making known the Scripture in a language which was most familiar to the people. For to this purpose, the Holy Spirit give them the knowledge of all tongues. Why, therefore, should the modern disciples of Christ not collect fragments from the same loaf, and following that example, open the Scriptures clearly and plainly to the people, that they may know them? For this is no fiction, unless it is to one who is an unbeliever, and desirous of resisting the Holy Spirit.

“The faith of Christ is therefore to be explained to the people in a twofold language, the knowledge of which is given by the Holy Spirit. Besides, since according to the faith which the apostle teaches, all Christians must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and be answerable to him for all the goods with which he has entrusted them, it is necessary that the faithful should know what these goods are, and their uses. For an answer by a prelate or an attorney will not then avail them, but everyone must then answer in his own person. Since, therefore, God has given to both clergy and laity the knowledge of the faith to this end — that they may teach it more plainly, and work in faithfulness according to it — it is clear that God, in the day of judgment, will require a true account of the uses to which these goods have been applied.”¹

Such were the motives of the Reformer in translating the Bible into English; and the achievement is one which, of itself, can never cease to associate a special honor with the name of Wycliffe.

lxiv. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

In the life of Wycliffe, the controversy relating to the translation of the Scriptures was soon followed by that relating to the EUCHARIST. Until about the middle of the ninth century, the manner in which the body and the blood of Christ are present in that sacrament was the subject of debate, or rather of a peaceful difference of opinion, among persons holding the highest offices in the church. But in the twelfth century, the advocates of the mysterious dogma, which then began to be known by the name of *transubstantiation*,² became numerous and powerful. The progress of this doctrine, however, was far from being uninterrupted. Among its opponents in those times, the most distinguished place must be allotted to Berengarius,³ a Gallic prelate, whose learning and genius were greatly above the character of the age. His doctrine was strictly that of the primitive church and of the existing Protestant communities. The zeal and ability with which he maintained it, called forth either the enmity, or the admiration, of the clergy through all the churches of the west. In the cause of his opinions, the disputant submitted to spiritual censure

¹ *Speculum Secularium Dominiorum*. MS. apud Ele. Usser. Lewis, c. v. 86, 87.

² *Transubstantiation*: The Roman Catholic doctrine that the whole substance of the bread and the wine changes into the substance of the body and blood of Christ when consecrated in the Eucharist.

³ *Berengar of Tours* (c. 999-1088) – French theologian; Archdeacon of Angers.

from the pontiff, and from a council assembled at Paris. And from the displeasure of the French king, which his zeal had provoked, followed the forfeiture of his episcopal revenues. The burden of such wrongs was probably lightened by remembering that his disciples in France, Italy, England, and especially in the German States, were many and increasing. But such, it appears, was the extent of the suffering which this advocate of truth and reason was prepared to endure in defence of his tenets. Thrice he was compelled to appear at Rome; and as often his doctrine was formally renounced, only to be avowed again as the prospect of impunity¹ returned. Towards the close of life, he retired from the agitated scenes which, for more than thirty years, had been familiar to him. And the remembrance of the indecision which had been allowed to sully his character, is said to have embittered his seclusion. But he died with a reputation of sanctity, and his doctrine never ceased to find disciples.²

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The Vaudois³ and the Albigenses⁴ never relinquished this doctrine, and were animated in their opposition to the doctrine of transubstantiation by the labors of Berengarius and his partisans. That the sectaries had adopted the heresy of that prelate,⁵ was often urged against them by their persecutors. And it is manifest, from certain fragments of their reasoning on this subject which their enemies have preserved, that supposing the assertion were correct, the disciples must be acknowledged as by no means unworthy of their master. From one of their adversaries, we learn that they were accustomed to appeal to the Apostles' creed, and to the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, as containing every essential article of Christian doctrine — expressing their surprise that in those summaries of religious truth, no reference was made to the matter of transubstantiation. They are also described as exposing the intrinsic and surpassing difficulties of that doctrine with a severity of criticism which must greatly have bewildered their antagonists, — urging with fluency, almost every question tending to involve the subject in contradiction and absurdity.⁶

¹ *Impunity*: exemption from punishment or loss.

² Mosheim, *Hist. Eccles.* ii. 555-569.

³ *Vaudois*: dissenters in southern France in the late 12th century, that adopted Calvinist doctrines in the 16th.

⁴ *Albigenses*: a sect in southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries. An offshoot of Manichaeism characterized by dualism.

⁵ *Heresy* is whatever is determined not to agree with the current orthodoxy of the ruling church; but it is not necessarily unbiblical.

⁶ “If the bread were to be changed every day into the body of Christ, it would be infinitely increased. They inquire also whether the bread ceases to be: then it is annihilated, and so it is spoiled. Also they ask how a body of so great a bulk can enter into the mouth of a man? Whether the body of Christ is eaten, chewed with the teeth, and, consequently, divided into parts? Whether the bread becomes the body of Christ? Because then it will really be the body of Christ; that is to say, something else than it is. Whether the bread becomes the body of Christ? Because, if so, then bread will be the matter of Christ's body; also after transubstantiation, the accidents remain: if so, they must be in another subject — for instance, in the air. But if it is there, then some part of the air must be round, and savoury, and white; and as the form is carried through diverse places, so the accidents change their subject. Again, these accidents abide in the same part of the air, and so solidity will be in the air; because they are solid, and consequently, the air will be solid. Hence it appears that these accidents are not in the air, nor are they in the body of Christ; nor can any other body be assigned in its place, in which they shall appear to be; and, therefore, the accidents do not merely seem to remain. Again, when the form or figure in which the body of Christ lies, is divided into parts, the body of Christ no longer continues in that figure which it had before; how, therefore, can the body of Christ be in every part of that host? Again, if the body of Christ is hidden in that little form, where is the head, and where is the foot? As a consequence, his members must be undistinguishable again. Christ gave

But we are principally concerned to know the fate of this doctrine in England. Our Saxon ancestors were in general sufficiently obedient to the opinions and customs of the papacy; and we may believe that the doctrine of transubstantiation was not unknown, nor wholly unapproved, by their spiritual guides. We have, however, the most decisive proof that the dogma so named, was not a part of the national creed in the tenth century.

lxvi. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Elfric, a contemporary of St. Dunstan,¹ and an ecclesiastic of much celebrity in his time, referred to the elements of the eucharist in one of his epistles, in a manner which incidentally but most distinctly repudiates the Catholic doctrine. This letter was addressed to Wulfstan, archbishop of York; and as its translation into the vernacular language was in compliance with the request of that prelate, it must be admitted as a document of no mean authority. According to this writer, “The housel (host)² is Christ’s body, not bodily, but spiritually. Not the body which he suffered in, but the body of which he spoke when he blessed the bread and wine, a night before his sufferings.” The apostle, he observes, “has said of the Hebrews, that they all ate of the same spiritual food, and they all drank of the same spiritual drink.³ And this was not bodily, he said, but spiritually — Christ not yet being born nor his blood shed, when the people of Israel ate that food and drank from that stone. And the stone was not bodily, though he said so. It was the same mystery in the old law, and they spiritually signified that spiritual housel of our Savior’s body which we consecrate now.”

In his homily, “appointed in the reign of the Saxons to be spoken to the people at Easter,” the doctrine of Elfric on this subject, and of the Anglo-Saxon clergy generally, is still more explicitly presented. The good abbot there repeats his allusion to the manna, and to the rock of the wilderness; and he speaks of the bread in the Christian sacrament as being no more the body of Christ, than the waters of baptism may be said to be the Holy Spirit.

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In describing the difference between the body in which Christ suffered, and the body which is hallowed in the bread, he states that the one was born of Mary, and the other is formed from a gathering together of many corns; and “therefore, nothing is to be understood in it bodily, but all is to be understood spiritually.” The bread, which is further described as having a bodily shape, is again contrasted with the body of Christ, which is said to be present only in the sense of a “spiritual might.” The body, moreover, in which Christ rose from the dead never dies, but the consecrated bread is temporal, not eternal. The bread is divided into parts, and some receive a larger portion and some a lesser; but the body of Christ, “in a spiritual mystery,” is undivided, and equally in all. The writer concludes this series of distinctions by observing that the signs appealing to the senses in the eucharist, are a pledge and figure of truth; while the body of Christ

his body to his disciples before his passion. Now he gave it to them either mortal or immortal; yet if he gave it immortal, it is certain then that it was mortal; and, consequently, while it is really mortal it was yet immortal, which is impossible.” — Alanus Magnus, *contra Albigenses*, cited in the Latin by Dr. Allin, in his *Remarks on the Churches of the Albigenses*, c. xvi. 146.

¹ Dunstan (909- 988) Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey in 943, Bishop of Worcester, Bishop of London, and Archbishop of Canterbury. His work restored monastic life in England and reformed the English Church.

² *Housel*: the bread used in the sacrament of communion (here called the *eucharist*).

³ 1Cor 10.1-4.

is truth itself. The authenticity of the document which speaks thus, is attested by the signatures of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and by those of the prelates suffragan ¹ to them.²

But though it is thus plain that the doctrine of transubstantiation was not a recognised dogma of the Anglo-Saxon church, it is not to be doubted that there was much in the ignorance and superstitions of those times that was favorable to that general admission of this tenet which followed immediately after the Conquest. The political influence of the pontiffs in this island was for a while materially impeded by that event. But Lanfranc, who filled the see ³ of Canterbury under the Conqueror, was the most distinguished opponent of Berengarius. And from that time to the age of Wycliffe, the doctrine of the eucharist, as expounded by Lanfranc, became that of the Anglican church.

It is by no means surprising that a study of the sacred Scriptures, conducted through so long an interval and so devoutly, and which had led to the abandonment of so many received opinions, should have prepared the mind of the Reformer to question, and ultimately to reject, this most unreasonable tenet.

lxviii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

From the frequent mention of his doctrine on this subject in his sermons, it is probable that it had often been broached from the pulpit before attention was called to it in his lectures at Oxford. But in the spring of 1381 this new heresy was promulgated in the university.⁴ Twelve conclusions were then published, in which the Reformer challenged the attention of the great men in that ancient seat of learning to his exposition of this sacrament. In these conclusions, while admitting that the words of consecration conferred a peculiar, and even a mysterious dignity, on the bread and wine, Wycliffe declares that those elements are not to be considered “as Christ, or as any part of him,” but simply “as an effectual sign of him.” To the easy faith of the people in those times, and even of the learned, scarcely anything in religion was difficult of credence, once it had been sanctioned by the church. But to some minds, it was a matter of strange perplexity that the palpable qualities which had distinguished the bread and wine of the eucharist before consecration, should continue (to all human perception) precisely unaltered after that ceremony had been performed. To counteract this inconvenient verdict of the senses, the genius of the Mendicants struck out a new path in logical science. They affirmed that an accident,⁵ or the property of an object, such as the whiteness or roundness in the sacramental bread, may be supposed to remain after the bread itself had ceased to exist. This hardy subterfuge was deeply offensive to the discernment of Wycliffe. From the time when he began to examine this subject with his characteristic independence of thought, his writings abound with allusions to

¹ *Suffragan*: an assistant or subordinate bishop.

² The printed copy bears the following title: — “*A Testimonie of Antiquitie*, showing the ancient faith in the Church of England touching the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord, here publicly preached, and also received in the Saxon time, above six hundred years ago. Printed by John Day, beneath St. Martyn’s. *Cum privilegio Regiæ Maiestatis*. 1567.”

³ *See*: the seat within a bishop’s diocese where his cathedral is located.

⁴ Wood’s Hist. 188. Lewis, c. vi.

⁵ “Accident” is a philosophical term from Aristotle. It distinguishes between what is essential to an entity (*substantia*), and its accidents, or unessential attributes. In transubstantiation, the *essence* of the bread and wine are said to become the body and blood of Christ, while the *accidents* remain bread and wine. — WHG

it, and with special denunciations against the fraudulent temper betrayed in the above method of defending it.

In the conclusions published at Oxford, the Reformer declares that the bread and wine remain in the sacrament after the consecration, and describes the above argument in favor of transubstantiation as heretical.

It was in the nature of this doctrine that it should tend greatly to exalt the notions of the laity concerning the power of the priesthood. Men who could do such wonders as the priest was supposed to perform when he pronounced the words of consecration — to what else might they not aspire?

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It was a speculative notion which could not exist alone. It carried a mighty influence along with it. On this new ground the Reformer had to lay his account with new and most determined hostility. It also appears that at this time the religious orders possessed the much greater portion of the honors of the university, notwithstanding the attempts which had been made to reduce their influence. The chancellor, William de Berton, awed by the power of the enemies of Wycliffe (or being opposed to his boldness of opinion) became a party to the measures which were speedily adopted with a view to prevent the diffusion of the new doctrine. In a convention of twelve doctors, eight of whom were either monks or Mendicants, the Reformer was represented as teaching that in the sacrament of the altar, the substance of material bread and wine remains without change after the words of consecration; and that in the same venerable sacrament, the body and blood of Christ is not there essentially or substantially, nor even bodily, but figuratively or tropically — so that Christ is not there truly, or truly in his own bodily presence. It will be seen that the doctrine of the Reformer, as expounded by his judges, stood directly opposed to transubstantiation. Accordingly, it was agreed to describe these opinions as erroneous, and as opposed to the decisions of the church; and at the same time, to set forth what should be regarded as the true doctrine of the eucharist, which is said to be this:

“That by the sacramental words duly pronounced by the priest, the bread and wine on the altar are transubstantiated, or substantially converted into the true body and blood of Christ; so that after consecration, there is not in that venerable sacrament the material bread and wine which existed before, considered in their own substances and natures, but only the species of the same, under which are contained the true body of Christ and his blood, not figuratively or tropically, but essentially, substantially, and corporally — so that Christ is truly there in his own proper and bodily presence.”¹

lxx. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Wycliffe had challenged with discussion; he was met by the intervention of authority. It was resolved by this assembly of doctors, that the sentence of the greater excommunication, suspension from all scholastic exercises, and imprisonment, should be the penalty incurred by any member of the university who would inculcate, either in the schools or elsewhere, the

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, ii. App. Nos. 2, 3. Leland, De Script. Brit. 379. Sir Roger Twisden describes the above judgment concerning this doctrine, as “the first plenary determination of the Church of England” respecting it, and concludes on this ground, that “the opinion of transubstantiation, that brought so many to the stake, had not more than a hundred and forty years’ prescription before Martin Luther.” — *Historical Vindication*, pp. 193, 194.

opinions now published by Wycliffe. Even to listen to such opinions, was to become liable to this punishment.

The meeting which adopted these resolutions appears to have been privately convened. And we are told that the Reformer was in the room of the Augustinians, lecturing among his pupils on this very doctrine, when a messenger entered the apartment, who in the name of the chancellor and of the divines, his coadjutors, read the above sentence concerning the sacrament of the altar, and all persons who should favor the erroneous opinions recently made public on that subject. Wycliffe paused, as if taken by surprise, and in hesitancy with regard to the best method of meeting the hostility which had so suddenly assumed this formidable shape. But a moment was sufficient to recover his self-possession. He then rose, and complaining that authority and coercion should have thus been substituted in place of reason, he challenged any number of his opponents to furnish a fair refutation of the opinions which they had thus condemned. Wycliffe had often declared it to be the duty of the magistrate to protect the life, the property, and in all such cases as the present, the personal freedom of the subject. He now resolved to act on this maxim. The alternative placed before him was silence or imprisonment. And the chancellor was therefore informed that, since it had been determined to punish the persons who would avow the condemned opinions with civil penalties, it was his own determination to appeal from the decision of his present judges, to the protection of the civil power. *They* were looking to that power to suppress freedom of thought — *he* would look to it in support of such freedom.¹

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Some time, however, was to elapse before the meeting of the next parliament; and we may suppose that during that interval, the lectures of the Reformer were occupied with topics less dangerous to his personal freedom. The jurisdiction of the chancellor, moreover, was restricted to the university. It did not affect Wycliffe as rector of Lutterworth. And to the silence thus imposed on him at Oxford, we should probably attribute his great labors as an author, so observable during the subsequent period of his history.²

The summer of this year is memorable for the insurrection of the commoners under Wat Tyler.³ Sudbery, archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered by the insurgents, and in the following October, Courtney, bishop of London, was raised to the primacy. It will be remembered that this prelate had already distinguished himself as a haughty opponent of the doctrines of Wycliffe. Early in May in the following year, a new parliament was convened at Westminster. At the same time, Courtney adopted measures to convene a synod for the purpose of deliberating with regard to the course which should be taken in respect to certain strange and dangerous opinions said to be widely diffused, “among the nobility as well as among the commoners of this realm of England.” Accordingly, on the seventeenth of May a meeting was convened, consisting of eight prelates, fourteen doctors of civil and canon law, six bachelors of divinity, fifteen Mendicants, and four monks. The place of meeting was the residence of the Black Friars, in the metropolis.⁴

¹ Sudbury Register, in Wilkins, Concil. Brit. iii. 170, 171.

² That is, having his voice audibly silenced at Oxford, didn't keep his written voice from being heard everywhere.

³ Walter “Wat” Tyler (d. 1381) – a leader of the 1381 *Peasants' Revolt* in England. They demanded that each labourer be allowed to work for the employer of his choice, and sought an end to serfdom and other class distinctions. Many were inspired by the teachings of John Ball, who preached that all humans should be treated equally, as descendants of Adam and Eve.

⁴ That is, London.

And the course contemplated by the archbishop appears to have been, in the first place, to obtain a formal condemnation of the obnoxious opinions, and then to commence a zealous prosecution of all persons who, being suspected of such opinions, would hesitate to renounce them.

It happened, however, that the synod had scarcely approached the matters to be adjusted by its wisdom, when the city was shaken with an earthquake. The courage of some of the parties assembled was so much affected by that event, that they ventured to express their doubts whether the object before them might not be displeasing to Heaven. It began to be probable that the meeting would dissolve without coming to any decision. But the ready genius of Courtney gave a different meaning to the incident, comparing the dispersion of noxious vapours produced by such convulsions, to the purity which would be secured for the church as the result of the present struggle to remove the pestilent from her communion.

lxxii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The courage of the wavering being thus restored, twenty-four conclusions were read, as those which had been preached “generally, commonly, and publicly, throughout the province of Canterbury and the realm of England.” After the “good deliberation” of three days, it was agreed that ten of these conclusions were *heretical*, and the remaining were declared to be *erroneous*.

The doctrines described as *heretical* related,

- to the sacrament of the altar, as being perfected without any change in the substance of the bread and wine;
- to priests and bishops as ceasing to be such upon falling into deadly sin;
- to auricular confession as unnecessary;
- to ecclesiastical endowments as unlawful, and;
- to the claims of the pope, when he happens to be a depraved man, as being derived solely from the edict of Cæsar, and not at all from the authority of the Gospel.;

The propositions described as *erroneous* are those which declare,

- that a prelate excommunicating any man without knowing him to be condemned by God, is himself a heretic, and excommunicated;
- that to prohibit appeals from the tribunal of the clergy, to the tribunal of the king, is to withhold from the sovereign the allegiance due to him;
- that priests and deacons all possess authority to preach the Gospel, without waiting for the license of popes or prelates;
- that to abstain from preaching the Gospel for fear of clerical censures, must appear, in the day of doom,¹ as being under the guilt of treason against Christ;
- that temporal lords may deprive a delinquent clergy of their possessions;
- that tithes are simply alms, to be offered as the judgment or conscience of the laity may determine, and only as the clergyman is devout and deserving;;
- that the institution of the religious orders is contrary to Holy Scripture; and being sinful in itself, it tends in many ways toward what is sinful.²

¹ That is, Judgment Day.

² Wilkins, iii. 157. Lewis, c. vi. *The Gadstow Chronicle*, cited by Mr. Lewis, states that the earthquake mentioned in the preceding page took place about one o’clock in the forenoon of the Wednesday previous to Whitsuntide, about

The substance of these doctrines was no doubt maintained by Wycliffe and his disciples. But in the above statement, some of them have received a partial colouring from the ignorance or prejudice of the men who pronounced judgment on them.

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The form and pomp with which that judgment was given were often appealed to in vindication of the measures afterwards adopted to free the land from these religious tares. It is certain that the people of the metropolis were deeply infected with Lollardism;¹ and Courtney well knew that the same heresy had diffused itself widely in the university, which had been so long the residence of Wycliffe. In a letter addressed to the Bishop of London, having announced himself as legate of the apostolic see, as well as metropolitan of all England, the archbishop laments that many were in contempt of certain canons which had wisely restricted the office of preaching (whether publicly or privately) to those who are licensed by the holy see² or by their prelates. They were everywhere found preaching doctrines subversive of the whole church. They were “infecting many well-meaning Christians, and causing them to wander grievously from the catholic communion, without which there is no salvation.” The bishop is then reminded of the high authority by which the propositions referred to had been condemned as heretical and erroneous. And in conclusion, he is exhorted, in common with all his brethren suffragans of Canterbury — to admonish and warn that no man should henceforth hold, preach, or defend, the aforesaid heresies and errors, or any of them. To secure this object, it is enjoined that in future, neither himself nor any other prelate,

- shall admit any suspected persons to the liberty of preaching;
- shall listen in any degree to the abettors of such pernicious tenets;
- nor lean in any way to them, either publicly or privately;
- but rather resist the publishers of such doctrines, as serpents diffusing pestilence and poison;
- and that this course be pursued on pain of the greater excommunication — that being the sentence pronounced on all and every one who is found disobedient in these things.³

As this letter was not only sent to the Bishop of London, but to all the prelates suffragans of Canterbury, a copy must be supposed to have reached the Bishop of Lincoln, Wycliffe’s diocesan. We know that official documents were immediately addressed by that prelate to the abbots, and priors, and the different ecclesiastical officers, and to all the rectors, vicars, and parochial chaplains, throughout the district in which the church of Lutterworth was situated.

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May 30th. But this was probably a second convulsion, for it is certain that the synod assembled nearly a fortnight earlier. — Fox, *Acts and Monuments*. Edition by Pratt.

¹ *Lollards* (mumblers) was an epithet given to followers of Wycliffe. Typically they were poorly educated, only in English, and were seeking church reforms, motivated by Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible into English. — WHG

² The “holy see” is Rome.

³ Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, i. 569. Knighton, Coll. 2650, 2651.

That church is described as being in the deanery of Goodlaxton, in the archdeaconry of Leicester. Wycliffe was thus canonically admonished of his obligations in regard to the heresy of the times, but was not found in a condition to profit by such warning.¹

So that greater solemnity might be given to this crusade against heresy, it was arranged that during the ensuing Whitsuntide,² a religious procession would pass through the streets of London, with many signs of woe about it. On the appointed day, numbers of the clergy and the religious contributed to the edification of the profane laity by moving barefoot through the most crowded places, toward St. Paul's. There a Carmelite friar ascended the pulpit, and reminded the mourning multitude of their duty in that foreboding crisis, with regard to the church and her enemies.

We do not know in what degree the populace of London was affected by this spectacle; but in Oxford, the course of the persecutor was much impeded. At this time, one Peter Stokes, a Carmelite and a doctor of divinity, had distinguished himself in that university by the ardor with which he had opposed the new opinions. His conduct in this respect procured him the notice and patronage of the archbishop who, in a letter dated a week subsequent to the meeting at the Black Friars, commands the zealous Mendicant to publish the decisions of that assembly in all the schools of the university. In this document, which is nearly a transcript of that sent to the bishops, the primate refers,

- to the contempt of the episcopal office, that was observable in the conduct of the new preachers;
- to their doctrine, as being subversive of that faith in which alone there is salvation;
- to the great learning and wisdom of the synod, by which these novelties had been condemned.

Having declared that refusing the necessary aid for saving men from such destruction, must be to become chargeable with their blood, he commands that the persons maintaining the heresies and errors specified, be held in the strictest abhorrence under the penalty of the great anathema.³

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But it was of little avail to dispatch such instructions to the university, while its chancellor and a large portion of its members were the secret, if not the open, disciples of the doctrine thus denounced. That office, which in the preceding year had been sustained by William de Berton, was now filled by Robert Rigge, a scholar who exposed himself to much inconvenience and suffering on account of his known attachment to some of the Reformer's opinions. In the documents of this period, the name of Doctor Nicholas Hereford is also of frequent occurrence, as that of a principal follower of Wycliffe. Before the assembling of the late synod, this divine, to use the language of Courtney, had been "vehemently suspected of heresy." At this moment, however, Hereford is called by the chancellor to preach before the university; and the service which thus devolved upon him was deemed the most honorable of its class through the year. It was also at this time that a similar mark of approbation was conferred on Ralph Rippington, who was also doctor of divinity, and equally an admirer of Wycliffe; and the discourses of both are

¹ Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, i. 569, 570. Knighton, Coll. 2650. Lewis, c. vi.

² *Whitsuntide*: three-day holiday beginning the seventh Sunday after Easter; it commemorates the emanation of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles; now a quarter day in Scotland.

³ *Anathema*: A formal ecclesiastical curse accompanied by excommunication.

described as containing a fervent eulogy on the character and general doctrine of the Reformer. But this exercise of the chancellor's authority was instantly reported to the archbishop, and an expostulatory ¹ letter was suddenly dispatched, advising a more dutiful exercise of his authority. It required him, indeed, to loathe the opinions and fellowship of such "presumptuous men," and — so that his own freedom from heretical pravity may be above suspicion — to afford immediate aid to Peter Stokes, in giving all publicity to the letters which had been sent to the university. This was so that the reign of a sect, against which the king and the lords had promised to unite their authority, might at length be brought to its close.²

The allusion of the archbishop to the intentions of the government, was not unadvisedly made. Richard II was now in the sixteenth year of his age: the difficulties of his exchequer ³ were many and distressing, and the repeated efforts of his ministers to extricate the vessel of the state ⁴ seemed only to increase its perils. In the train of these perplexities came an insurrection such as had not been known up to that time in our history, and which appeared to menace the overthrow of every privileged order in the state.⁵

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The zeal and sagacity of churchmen such as the present archbishop, would not be slow in suggesting to the young king, that convulsions of this perilous nature were to be expected if such men as Wycliffe and his followers were allowed to continue their appeal to the unbridled passions of the populace. Amidst the manifest disaffection of the people, it became a point of great importance to propitiate ⁶ the clergy. Their influence might be used to allay exasperated feeling, and their wealth might enable the government to abolish, or at least to abate, that sort of taxation which had recently goaded the commoners into madness. Lancaster too, who during the recent commotions, had been employed in treating with the Scots on the border, had shared much in the resentment of the insurgents; and there were other causes which rendered him far from acceptable to the existing ministry. The juncture, accordingly, was favorable to a nearer alliance between the mitre and the crown.⁷

In these auspicious circumstances, the English clergy united in preferring ⁸ to the sovereign and the court, a series of complaints against the doctrine and practices of the followers of Wycliffe. With a view also to increase the odium so freely cast upon the disciples of the Reformer, they were now designated *Lollards* — a name which had long distinguished certain sectaries on the continent, to whom, in the manner of the times, almost everything degrading had been imputed. The persons in England now classed with those injured people, are described by the prelates, abbots, and friars (representing the orthodoxy of the times) as teaching that there has not been

¹ *Expostulatory*: An expression of protest, remonstrance or reproof.

² Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 507, 508.

³ *Exchequer*: The funds of a government.

⁴ *Vessel of the State*: a metaphor for the helm of government, as though it was a ship at sea.

⁵ Apparently referring to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

⁶ *Propitiate*: to make peace with, or appease.

⁷ A poetic phrase for "church and state."

⁸ *Prefer*: To present or submit (something) to an authority; proffer.

any true pope since the age of Sylvester,¹ and that the last to whom that name should be given is the existing pontiff, Urban VI:

- that the power of granting indulgences, and of binding and loosing, as claimed by ecclesiastics, is a delusion; and those who confide in it are deceived and accursed;
- that auricular confession is a superfluous service;
- that the bishop of Rome has no legislative authority in the Christian church;
- that the invocation of saints is an unauthorised custom;
- that the worship of images or pictures is idolatry, and the miracles attributed to them is so much fraud;

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- that the clergy are bound to reside on their benefices, and not to farm them out to others, and that the men who fail in such duties should be degraded as wasters of the goods of the church; and finally,
- that the pomp of the higher orders of the priesthood should be done away with in all things, and their doctrine in regard to the vanity of the world be enforced by example.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that doctrines at all of this nature could not have been widely disseminated without deeply irritating the men to whose pretensions they were so explicitly opposed. As the result of this appeal, the clergy obtained the sanction of the king, and of certain lords, to a sort of statute or proclamation, which occurs as the first in our history, providing for the punishment of the crime designated *heresy*. For this reason, and because it further discloses the activity and energy with which Wycliffe's poor priests were now prosecuting their plans of reform, we shall insert this paper without abridgment.²

“It is openly known that there are diverse evil persons within the realm, going from county to county, and from town to town, in certain habits, under dissimulation of great holiness, and without the license of the ordinaries³ of the places or other sufficient authority, daily preaching diverse sermons containing heresies and notorious errors, to the great blemishing of the Christian faith and destruction of the laws and estate of holy church, to the great peril of the souls of the people, and of all the realm of England. This is done not only in churches and churchyards, but also in markets, fairs, and other open places where there is a great congregation of people (as more plainly is found, and sufficiently proved, before the reverend father in God, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the bishops and other prelates, masters of divinity, and doctors of canon and of civil law, and a great part of the clergy of the same realm, especially assembled for this cause). These persons also preach diverse matters of slander to engender discord and dissension between diverse estates of the said realm. And these preachers — being cited or summoned before the ordinaries of the places to then answer to that for which they are impeached — will not obey their summons and commandments, nor care for their monitions,⁴ nor for the censures of holy church, but expressly despise them. Moreover, by their subtle and ingenious words, they draw the people to hear their sermons, and maintain them in their errors, by a strong hand and by great routs.⁵

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¹ Sylvester I: pope from 314 to 335.

² This has been modernized. – WHG

³ *Ordinary*: person with immediate jurisdiction in a case of ecclesiastical law, e.g., the bishop within a diocese.

⁴ *Monition*: a legal notification.

⁵ *Routs*: bellowing; shouting; clamor; an uproar; disturbance; tumult – essentially, inciting to riot.

It is therefore ordained and assented to in this present parliament, that the king's commissions be made and directed to the sheriffs and other ministers of our sovereign lord the king, or other sufficiently learned persons, and according to the certifications of the prelates thereof, to be made in the Chancery ¹ from time to time, to arrest all such preachers, and also their fautors,² maintainers, and abettors, and to hold them in arrest and strong prison till they justify themselves according to the law and reason of holy church. And the king wills and commands that the chancellor ³ make such commission, at all times, that by the prelates, or by any of them, he shall be certified and thereof required as aforesaid.”⁴

This document did not obtain the sanction of parliament; but invalid as it was in point of law, it did something towards rendering the magistracy throughout the kingdom the passive instruments of that “holy office” which the scheme of the archbishop was meant to set up in every diocese. So that the ones suspected throughout the nation might be placed under immediate “arrest and in strong prison,” the force at the command of the sheriffs was to be subject, in every place and at every season, to the bidding of the prelates. No process instituted was to terminate except as the parties accused would “justify themselves according to the law and the reason of holy church.” And if it is remembered that our statute book had not previously contained the remotest provision for punishing men on account of their religious opinions, the matured form in which this oppressive policy was introduced, must be viewed as indicating no mean confidence of strength on the part of the ruling clergy.

On obtaining the powers set forth in this instrument, the attention of the primate was first directed to Oxford. The synod which held its first meeting on the 17th of May, was again convened in the chamber of the Preaching Friars on the 12th of June. And Robert Rigge, the chancellor of the university, and William Brightwell, a doctor of divinity, appeared at the place of meeting to answer in respect to their recent conduct in favor of Hereford and Rippington; and also as to their opinion concerning the “aforesaid articles.”

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Rigge was a zealous advocate of the university, as an establishment which should be subject to the authority of the civil power, and not to ecclesiastical interference of any kind. The religious orders, on the contrary, were concerned that it should be subject to the authority of the primate as legate of the apostolic see. Wycliffe had maintained the doctrine embraced by Rigge. To what further extent the chancellor had embraced the opinions or sympathised with the spirit of the Reformer, we do not know. But before the synod, he was induced to declare his assent to the judgment which had been passed on the twenty-four heretical or erroneous conclusions in the former meeting; and Brightwell,⁵ after some hesitation, followed his example. It is hardly to be doubted that, in this act, both were chargeable with some concealment of their opinions, and perhaps deemed themselves justified in opposing something of the wisdom of the serpent, to the power of the wolf. It is certain that a letter was now delivered by the archbishop to “his well-beloved son in Christ, the chancellor of Oxford,” requiring him to publish the judgment of the

¹ *Chancery*: in England, the highest court next to the Parliament; its jurisdiction is chiefly in equity, not civil matters. At one time there were two distinct court systems: one under the king (civil courts), and one under the church (equity courts). – WHG

² *Fautor*: a patron, protector, or supporter.

³ *Chancellor*: here it refers to the head of the Chancery court.

⁴ Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 575, 576.

⁵ William Brightwell, a doctor of divinity at the university.

synod concerning the proscribed articles in all the schools and churches at the hours of lecturing and preaching. And to give greater notoriety to this proclamation, it was to be published in Latin and in the vulgar tongue. In this document, mention is expressly made of John Wycliffe, Nicholas Hereford, Philip Rippington, John Ashton, and Lawrence Redman, as being persons notoriously suspected of heresy. Referring to these persons, and to all who would in any way favor their persons or their doctrine, the primate says,

“We suspend the same suspected persons from all scholastic exercises, until such time as they have purified themselves before us; and we require that you publicly denounce the same to have been, and to be, suspended by us; and that you diligently and faithfully search after all their patrons and adherents, and cause inquiry to be made respecting them through every hall in the said university: and that, obtaining intelligence of their names and persons, you compel all and each of them to abjure their errors by ecclesiastical censures, and by any canonical penalties whatever, under pain of the greater anathema, which we now denounce against all and each who shall not be obedient to these instructions.”

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The primate also adds the following cautious provision:

“And absolving those who may incur the sentence of this instrument, we reserve wholly to ourselves.”

But the chancellor had scarcely left the place of meeting, when the suspicions of Courtney appear to have been awakened anew. In a letter dated on the same day as the above, and from the same place, he informs the same Robert Rigge, that he had learned from credible information, and partly from experience, his disposition to favor “the aforesaid damnable conclusions,” and his intention to molest, by his authority as chancellor, the persons who would oppose them in the schools of the university. In consequence of this information, the archbishop thus writes:

“We admonish you, Master Robert, chancellor as before named, the first, second, and third time, and peremptorily, that you do not grieve, hinder, nor molest judicially, publicly nor privately, nor cause to be grieved, hindered, or molested, nor procure indirectly by yourself or others, to be grieved, the aforesaid clerics, secular or regular, or those who favor them in the points determined in their scholastic acts, or in any other condition whatsoever.”¹

In explanation of this proceeding, it should be remembered that most of the ecclesiastics who had joined with the archbishop in these proceedings against the chancellor of Oxford, were members of the university. On returning to Oxford, the men who had sat in judgment on the chancellor, would become subject to his authority. And to protect these men against the probable resentment of “Master Robert,” the above monition was addressed to him by Courtney.

The synod, we have seen — which was assembled on the 17th of May, and re-assembled on the 12th of June — was again convened on the 18th, the 20th, and the 28th of the same month, and on the 1st and 12th of the ensuing month. In all these meetings, the prosecution of Hereford and his associates was continued.

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Wycliffe resided at this time upon his rectory, but he was a close observer of these proceedings. In one of his sermons, written at this juncture, he clearly refers to the measures in progress against Hereford, and against “Master John Ashton.” There is good reason to think that the Reformer was assisted by Dr. Hereford in his translation of the Scriptures, and that divine is

¹ Fox, *Acts and Monuments* i. 577-579.

supposed to have been the author of some pieces in English, designed to forward the contemplated reformation. Ashton was known through nearly half the kingdom as an itinerant preacher; and from the account given of him by his enemies, we must suppose that his ability as a preacher was of a highly popular and powerful description. He is said to have added some novelties of his own to the doctrines of Wycliffe. Knighton, who describes his appearing in coarse attire and with a staff in his hand, as an affectation of simplicity, bears testimony to the assiduity ¹ with which he frequented churches, and mingled in family circles, to secure the dissemination of his tenets. The same writer has preserved the outline of two sermons said to have been delivered by this pedestrian teacher, the one at Leicester, the other at Gloucester. In these discourses, we find the doctrine of Wycliffe with regard to the authority of the crown in relation to the church — the delusions and abuses connected with the spiritual powers assumed by the clergy — the corrupting influence of wealth upon the priesthood — the unscriptural origin of the hierarchical distinctions which had obtained ² among churchmen — the errors and absurdities involved in the doctrine of transubstantiation — together with much invective against crusades, which are especially denounced as being one of the chief fruits of the dispensing power so mischievously exercised by the clergy. So that neither the learning of Hereford, nor the zeal of Ashton, might be employed any longer in diffusing opinions so little in accordance with the existing order of things, both were summoned to appear before the archbishop, who in addition to the title of primate, is pleased to describe himself as “chief inquisitor.” ³

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In one of his parochial discourses, Wycliffe refers to this process as then pending. These proceedings he attributes mainly to the zeal of Courtney, whom he describes as “the great bishop of England,” and as being deeply incensed, “because God’s law is written in English to lewd men.” ⁴ “He pursues a certain priest,” says the preacher, “because he writes to men this English, and summons him, and makes him travel, so that it is hard for him to bear it. And thus he pursues another priest, by the help of pharisees, because he preaches Christ’s Gospel freely, and without fables. Oh! Men who are on Christ’s behalf, help now against Antichrist, for the perilous times have come which Christ and Paul foretold!” ⁵ The reader is left to imagine the sympathy with which the auditory of Wycliffe would listen to this impassioned language. But if we may credit the accounts of their persecutors, the efforts made by the men who were thus pathetically referred to, in hope of escaping from the strong hand of their oppressors, were made in vain.

But when the primate had committed himself to this struggle, it was important that he seem to have done it with suitable precaution and success. And the report transmitted to us is that Hereford and Rippington, after many attempts to evade any confession of their faith, at length admitted that the twenty-four conclusions censured by the synod are, with certain explanations, partly heretical, and partly false. They are described also as stating that they had not, in any instance, publicly avowed the tenets which were imputed to them in those conclusions. This confession, however, such as it was, proved so little satisfactory, that with respect to several

¹ *Assiduity*: great and constant diligence and attention.

² *Obtained*: prevailed or continued in practice.

³ Knighton, Col. 2655-2660. Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, 579, 580. Wilkins, *Concil. Brit.* ubi supra.

⁴ “Lewd men” – that is, laymen.

⁵ Homily, MS. Bib. Reg. British Museum.

articles, each member of the synod declared it to be “heretical, subtle, erroneous, and perverse.” But the accused could not be induced to present any further explanation, and the sentence of excommunication was pronounced upon them. And that it might operate more powerfully as a warning to the infected, it was pronounced with much publicity and form.

Ashton conducted his defence with great spirit, but refused to answer the questions of his judges on the conclusions set forth as containing the heresies and errors with which he was charged. He was repeatedly enjoined to make his communications to the court in Latin, so that no injurious impression might be made upon the mind of the laity who were present.

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But the consciousness of a bad cause betrayed in this injunction, excited the indignation of the accused, and turning to the crowd which his popularity as a preacher had brought together, he addressed them in their own tongue in such terms, that great noise and disorder ensued, and the archbishop hastened to bring the business of the day to a close. The refusal of Ashton to answer the questions put to him, was construed as proof of his guilt, and he was sentenced to undergo all the penalties which had been attached to holding to the censured articles.

Knighton, indeed, states that Ashton and Hereford delivered written confessions to the synod on the matter of the eucharist, setting forth the doctrine of transubstantiation in the fullest terms. But it is a suspicious circumstance that in the Courtney register, where so large a space is assigned to the account of these proceedings, no trace of such documents is to be found. In addition to which, in the paper which Knighton has published, as supplied by Ashton, he is made to declare that he had not, on any occasion, expressed doubt concerning the received doctrine on that subject — a statement which, according to what the historian who has adopted it has said elsewhere, was contrary to fact, and one that must have contained a falsehood in the greatest degree impolitic, inasmuch as it admitted to being so easily exposed. With regard to Hereford, also, his escape would not have been attributed, as it certainly was, to the powerful interference of the Duke of Lancaster, if his confessions had been such as to account for his release without any necessity for such interference. In 1387, Hereford was generally regarded as a disciple of Wycliffe; and as late as the year 1392, he solicited and obtained the protection of the court against the machinations of his enemies arising from that cause. Rippington ultimately complied with the demands of the church; and even Ashton so far satisfied his judges, as to be permitted to resume his scholastic exercises; but it is supposed that the latter died as he had lived.¹

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It appears from a discourse composed by Wycliffe about this time, that he was by no means ignorant of the attempts which were thus made to suppress the intended reformation of religion, by securing the aid of the civil power for that end. Commenting on the entombment of Christ, and on the vain efforts of the priests and the soldiers to prevent his resurrection, the preacher refers to the measures described above, in the following terms:

“Thus our high priests and our new religious fear them, lest God’s law be quickened, after all they have done. Therefore they make statutes stable as a rock, and they obtain the grace of knights to confirm them, and they well mark this with the witness of lords. And all of this is lest the truth of God’s laws, hidden in the sepulchre, break out for common people to know. Oh, Christ! Your law is

¹ Knighton, *De Event.* Coll. 2657. Walsingham, *passim*. The several documents in Fox, and Lewis c. vi.

thus hidden. When will you send your angel to remove the stone, and show your truth to your flock? I well know that knights have taken gold in this case, to help that your law may thus be hidden, and your ordinances be consumed. But I know well, that at the day of doom, and even before, it will be manifest when you arise against all your enemies!"¹

The man who addressed himself in these terms to the people of his charge in Lutterworth, well knew that each step in the progress of the pending prosecutions was preparatory to the meditated blow against himself. Should that blow be struck, and struck effectually, it would be well that his countrymen should know distinctly the opinions for which he suffered. Accordingly, It was at this juncture that Wycliffe published a summary of the most important of his tenets, in the form of a petition (or complaint) to the king and parliament. This work is among the treatises printed in this volume. The assembly to which it was addressed was assembled on the nineteenth of November 1381, and in this document, it supposed that it was already sitting. It appears also to have been known that the subjects with which the great men of the realm were about to be occupied, "both seculars and men of holy church," embraced the articles discussed in this paper.

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This bold and admirable production appears to have made the kind of impression on the parliament which it was designed to produce. In a petition to the king, the members of the Commons set forth the provisions of the spurious statute which had been recently obtained by the primate; and which — to effect the imprisonment of the new preachers and their abettors until [they became] obedient to the church — had made every sheriff in the kingdom the mere instrument of his diocesan. It required him to root out by the sword, the errors which neither the persuasions nor the terrors of the hierarchy had been sufficient to destroy. But inasmuch as this pretended law "was never agreed to nor granted by the Commons, but whatever was moved in it was moved without their assent," the prayer of the whole parliament is "that the said statute be disannulled."² The petitioners further declare it is "in no way their meaning that either they themselves, or those who would succeed them, be further bound to the prelates than their ancestors were bound in former times."³

But in those times, to procure the enactment or repeal of statutes, was a work of less difficulty than to bring the proceedings of the government into strict conformity with the decisions of parliament. From this came the custom that was so prevalent in the earlier history of our constitution, of confirming anew even its most acknowledged principles. It is not too much to say that the policy of the court of Rome greatly contributed to this bad faith, in the use made of its dispensing powers.

In his letters, Richard II had been made to threaten all who would hold the doctrine of Wycliffe, or in any way favor its abettors, with exclusion from the university, imprisonment, and confiscation. Although the monarch subsequently declared himself pleased with the repeal of the statute on which those instructions had been founded, the violent measures which that piece of fabrication had been devised to sanction, were still pursued, and with only too much success.

As we remarked, it was on the nineteenth of November, that the parliament and the convocation assembled at Oxford. The primate, in addressing the clergy as convened there, informed them

¹ Homily, MS. Bib. Reg. British Museum.

² *Disannulled*: to annul completely; to render void or of no effect.

³ Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, i. 576. Lingard, *Hist. Eng.* iv. 259.

that their first business was to grant a subsidy to the crown; and that their next object must be to apply some remedy to certain disorders which had too long disgraced the university, and the effects of which were extending to the community at large, in the diffusion of many dangerous and false opinions among them.

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Wycliffe was summoned to appear before this assembly. There were circumstances, however, which seemed to greatly narrow the ground of impeachment taken up against him at this juncture. By this time, the Reformer had given full expression to his obnoxious ¹ opinions in his different writings, and he had reiterated most of them in the address which he presented to the parliament now sitting.

But the meditated encroachment of the prelates had excited in the parliament, certain feelings of suspicion and resentment [against the prelates], which it was deemed prudent not to augment by any course of proceeding which might become the occasion for further umbrage.² On this account (it would seem), the convocation determined to restrict their prosecution of Wycliffe to a matter of doctrine, passing over the more questionable matters of polity and discipline. The article selected was that of the eucharist. The doctrine of Wycliffe on that subject was known to be directly contrary to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Duke of Lancaster is said to have advised the Reformer to submit in all doctrinal matters to the judgment of his order. This conduct on the part of the duke was highly praised by the clergy, but its only effect on Wycliffe was to call forth new evidence of his firmness and integrity. To have denied his doctrine on the eucharist, or simply to have abstained from teaching it, would have been to continue sheltered from the resentment of the clergy, by the favor of the nobleman of whose power the clergy still stood in much wholesome apprehension. To proceed in opposing the received doctrine on that sacrament, notwithstanding the counsel of the duke, was to front ³ the unrestrained malice of his enemies. The latter course, however, was his choice. We also learn something from a writer who has shown himself not a little solicitous to fasten the reproach of equivocation ⁴ upon the name of Wycliffe. He said not only that the Reformer proved to be as little influenced by the advice of the duke as by the command of the archbishop, but that in his public defence on this sacrament, “like an obstinate heretic, he refuted all the doctors of the second millenary.” ⁵

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To fully understand the zeal with which the Reformer assailed the doctrine of transubstantiation, the reader must bestow his best attention on the exposition given of that doctrine in the several treatises and chapters contained in this volume. The adoration of a piece of bread in the place of the Deity, Wycliffe denounced as idolatry. The conduct of the officiating priest, in pretending to remake his Maker, Wycliffe proclaimed as the last step of presumption and blasphemy. Let this pretension be admitted, and nothing remained to reason, or to the senses, which the same men might not introduce on the same ground, however much opposed to Scripture. The doctrine is

¹ *Obnoxious*: exposing to harm or injury; creating a liability.

² *Umbrage*: A feeling of anger caused by being offended.

³ That is, *to confront*; to face.

⁴ *Equivocation*: the act of being deliberately ambiguous or unclear.

⁵ Hist. 283. Wilkins, Con. Brit. iii. 171. The term “second millenary” (second millenium) refers to ecclesiastical scholars influenced by the Roman Church, following the Norman conquest of 1066 (see [p. lxiv](#)). – WHG

described, accordingly, as the master device of Satan, constructed that it might serve as an inlet to every abomination. Hence the opposition of Wycliffe to this doctrine was, in his view, a defence of the human mind, and of all freedom.

It was with such views, not lightly taken up but thoroughly formed, that Wycliffe appeared before his judges at Oxford. The assembly before him consisted of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Lincoln, Norwich, Hereford, Worcester, Salisbury, and London, with a numerous selection of doctors, together with the chancellor of the university, and many of the inferior clergy. Around him were assembled a crowd of the laity, as auditors variously interested in the object of the meeting. Before this array of power, Wycliffe stood alone and unfriended. The investigation related to a point of theological doctrine with which neither the parliament nor any secular personage, however powerful, could interfere without some appearance of impropriety. More than forty years had now passed since Oxford had first become the home of the Reformer; and during all those years, it had been more or less associated with all his purposes and labors. Before him it stood a venerable establishment, formed to nurse the intellect of his country, so that it might well acquit itself in the duties of philanthropy, patriotism, and religion. Hence, he had always been among the foremost to defend its jurisdiction, as independent of all foreign control, and especially against that control which proceeded from the prelates or from Rome. His hair was now grey, not perhaps from age so much as from those religious solitudes, and that mental activity, which appear to have always surpassed the strength of his physical nature, and of late, to have especially exposed him to the inroads of disease.

lxxxviii. FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS

In that city where he now had to front his enemies on such unequal terms, as one wholly in their power, admiring converts had often given loud utterance to their delight, as his voice was heard proclaiming doctrines dear to the purer ages of the church. Nor is it to be supposed that his numerous followers had become suddenly extinct. But at this moment, the ruling clergy had so diffused the terrors of their strength, that the Reformer, like another Elijah, ^{1Kng 19.14} stands apparently alone amidst the generation of his countrymen.

His defence, we have seen, was such that it extorted from his adversaries the praise of an unrivalled acuteness. His written confessions, which the same adversaries have transmitted to us, contain the most distinct statements of the doctrine which he had previously taught on the sacrament to which they relate. Two confessions were presented, one in Latin, and one in English. The Latin confession treats the question in a style which the more learned of his judges must have seen had been adapted to their taste, simply for the purpose of defeating them with their own weapons. The English document touches but distantly on the distinctions of the schools, and is framed to meet the popular apprehension. In the Latin confession, Wycliffe applies himself to demonstrate that “this venerable sacrament is *naturally* bread and wine, but *sacramentally* the body and blood of Christ.” It is alleged that there are six modes of subsistence which may be attributed to the body of our Savior: three of these may be affirmed of that body as it is present in the eucharist, and three of the state in which it exists in heaven. In the eucharist, the body of Christ is virtually, spiritually, and sacramentally present; but his substantial, corporeal, and dimensional presence, is said to be restricted to his mode of existence in the celestial state. The Reformer then repeats the doctrine maintained on this subject by himself and his followers; he denies the charge of their adoring the elements of bread and wine; and he observes that he had often exposed the fallacies of his opponents who, in citing the language of

the Fathers on this sacrament, were always disposed to confound the notion of a sacramental presence, with that of an identical presence.

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The result of this mistake is said to be the insane fiction of an accident without a subject, or of a quality without its substance — a notion which he denounces as dishonorable to God and the church alike.¹

It must be remembered by the reader, that to affirm the existence of bread in the eucharist *after* the words of consecration were pronounced, was to deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. In these papers, this affirmation is not only made, but reiterated, and with a plainness which is obvious upon the slightest attention. Nor did he deem it enough to set forth the most explicit statements of his own doctrine; he assailed that of his opponents in a manner fully as uncompromising as on any occasion in his history. It must be borne in mind, that the properties of whiteness and roundness pertaining to the sacramental bread, *before* the act of consecration was supposed to take place, were acknowledged as existing afterwards; but it was nevertheless contended that the bread itself had ceased to exist. Wycliffe knew well that this was the formal doctrine of the men who were now before him as his judges. However, he describes this doctrine as erroneous, heretical, and a mockery of human perception; as imputing blasphemy to Christ and to his saints; and of all the delusions allowed to spread themselves through the church since the fatal hour of Satan's enlargement, *this* is said to be the one most repugnant to the religion of the Bible. We know of nothing written by Wycliffe on this subject, previous to his appearance before the convocation at Oxford or subsequent to it, which is not in strict agreement with the statements made there. If the confessions referred to are compared with his *Wicket*, or with the chapters on this subject in his *Trialogus*, no room will be left for doubt on this point. He often speaks of the bread as being truly God's body, and as being exalted in some sense by the sacred use to which it is assigned; but he never resorts to such expressions in a manner inconsistent with his real doctrine, which is that the bread *remains* in the sacrament, that it is not transubstantiated, and that it is the body of Christ only in a sacramental sense.

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But though all this is clear as evidence can render it, Knighton speaks of the Reformer's confessions as a recantation. And Anthony Wood takes up the reproach, but contradicts the calumny in the same page by stating that "this confession was encountered by no less than six antagonists severally, immediately after its publication."²

From this period, and on the authority of letters obtained from the king, Wycliffe was made to desist from his labors in Oxford. But this was not till the seeds of his doctrine had been sown there with such profusion as never to be wholly eradicated. That the penalty inflicted on him was not weightier, must be attributed in part to his popularity, but much more to the favor which had been shown him by the learned and the powerful. Henceforward he is found amidst his duties at Lutterworth, employing himself in writing the greater number of those tracts and treatises which have come down to us from his pen.

¹ *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, ii. 112-120. Ap. ii., iii., vi.

² Hist. of Oxford, 189. *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, ii. 121.

It was about this time that Wycliffe was summoned by Urban to appear at Rome, and to answer before that court on the matters imputed to him. His declining health afforded sufficient ground for his refusing compliance with this citation. His letter on the occasion is printed in this volume. It contains some expressions of courtesy toward his holiness, but teems with that portion of the Reformer's doctrine which must have been most unwelcome to the race of men who claimed to be regarded as the successors of St. Peter.

We are now approaching the close of the life of Wycliffe, and it is manifest, that as the evening of his day was felt to be at hand, his zeal to purify the religion of the Bible as it was professed around him, his superiority to the fear of man, and his devout anticipation of the end of his course, all became more strongly marked features of his character. The substance of his language is this: to oppose the errors which time, and custom, and law had established, and to publish aloud the too long-forgotten truths contained in the Holy Scripture, was the imperative obligation of every Christian man. He declares this course to be binding on every such man, even though the evils incurred by pursuing it should be scorn, imprisonment, and death.

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He describes on many occasions the course of action which would be sure to bring such consequences along with it; and it is precisely that which his own daily conduct exemplified. The closing years of his life, accordingly, were passed in the full expectation that incarceration, and probably death at the stake, would before long be added to that contumely¹ and privation, which he had so largely incurred already. Every man who listened to his instructions, and every man who read his publications, must have known that no wrath could be more merciless than that which would be excited by such an exposure of those fictions in regard to the soul and the future world, by means of which the priesthood had contrived to secure for themselves their vast possessions, and their worldly dominion. But those fictions were nevertheless assailed; and the uses commonly made of them were denounced as an impious and selfish fraud — as most contrary to the religion of Holy Scripture, but in every way becoming to the practice of the children of Antichrist. While nations were called upon to reject much of that spiritual authority which their religious guides had assumed, their rulers were admonished that, if they hope to escape at the day of doom, it would behoove them to divest that class of men of their vain authority and needless wealth, which could only serve to constitute them being blind leaders of the blind, and to be the ministers of destruction rather than of salvation to the people.

It is not pretended, of course, that the views of Wycliffe on these subjects were in all instances characterised by comprehensiveness or impartiality. Nor can we undertake to justify the severe language with which he often denounces his opponents. But in this occasional one-sidedness, and in this strength of invective, we see the character of the age fully as much as that of the man. It may be that a mind which is calmer and more equally balanced in its judgments, would have been ill-suited to the kind of service which Wycliffe had to perform. Nearly all his opinions were substantially true; and they were held with a tenacity, and avowed with an intentness, becoming truth. When all fair deduction of this nature is made, enough remains to place him before us as the most extraordinary man of his times.

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¹ *Contumely*: A rude expression intended to offend or hurt; an insult or revilement.

Wycliffe knew the temper of his opponents sufficiently, to be aware that he owed the continuance of his personal liberty, and even life, to their weakness more than to their forbearance. But his anticipations that the time would come when their power would be equal to their inclination, were not to be realized. This fact admits explanation. It was known that the Duke of Lancaster, though he had not deemed it expedient to interpose on Wycliffe's behalf when the point at issue was a question of theology, he would probably do so if any severe measures were instituted in regard to him. The papal schism, moreover, absorbed the attention of the pontiffs: and disquietude in England had for some time rendered the factions who swayed its affairs, fearful of each other. Added to all these causes, and serving to delay the introduction of a more sanguinary ¹ policy, was the declining health of the Reformer. His days, it was presumed, could not be many, and the evil which he had done might be expected to die with him.

Some time before his decease, Wycliffe had availed himself of the assistance of a curate ² in discharging his parochial duties. Almost the only credible tradition preserved in the town of Lutterworth, illustrating the character of Wycliffe, describes him as most exemplary in the performance of his duties as a parish-priest. He devoted a portion of the morning in each day to relieving the needy, administering the consolations of religion to the aged, the sick, and the dying. Along with that originality and power of intellect which anticipated a reform of Christianity purer than the genius of Protestantism in the sixteenth century could attain, Wycliffe united that obscure condescension and assiduity which became the pastor of a village cure.

We scarcely need remark that this consistency, which was so observable in the character of our Reformer, will hardly allow for explanation except as resulting from deep religious principle. His sermons, fragmentary as they are, abound with expressions which show that he looked for the reward of his labors from a higher source than the favor of mortals. "If we hope to be rewarded in this life," he writes, "our hope of heavenly bliss perishes." In another discourse, he remarks,

"Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and to enlighten the world. And just as Christ, both God and man, came here with this intent, should not the truth keep his disciples —while standing thus for its defence — laboring even unto death? Christ and the Baptist, and many more, did not have their reward here for doing this, but in heaven they have bliss hidden from men." ³

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In this manner, the Reformer continued to preach and labor; and he is said to have been employed in administering the bread of the eucharist when assailed by his last sickness. The paralysis which then seized him deprived him at once of utterance, if not of consciousness. This happened on the twenty-ninth of December 1384; and on the thirty-first day of that month, his devout spirit passed to the world of rest. Many good men have prayed that they might be summoned to their home while occupied in such services. We do not know that Wycliffe ever presented such a petition, but we know that he was "taken from the evil to come."

"Thus prematurely," writes an eminent and liberal churchman, "was terminated the career of this extraordinary man. His days were not extended to the length usually allotted to our species. Ten more years of vigorous exertion might reasonably have been expected from the virtuous and temperate habits

¹ *Sanguinary*: marked by eagerness to resort to violence and bloodshed.

² *Curate*: a clergyman charged with the care of the flock; a pastor — though more commonly, an assistant to the priest.

³ MS. Homilies. Bib. Reg. British Museum, pp. 154, 174.

of an exemplary life. But the earthly tenement was probably worn out by the intense and fervid energy of the spirit within; and if his mortal existence is measured by the amount of his labors and achievements, his must appear to us as full of days as he was of honors. It now remains that we endeavor to form a righteous estimate of him, as he presents himself to our conceptions, through the haze and mist of ages. Unfortunately, he is known to us almost entirely by his writings. Over all those minute and personal peculiarities which give to any individual his distinct expression and physiognomy, time has drawn an impenetrable veil. To us he appears, for the most part, as a sort of unembodied agency. To delineate his character in the fullest and most interesting sense of that word, would be to write a romance, and not a biography. During a portion of his life, indeed, he is more or less mixed up with public interests and transactions. But our notices of these matters are but poor and scanty; and if they were more copious, they would probably do little towards supplying us with those nameless particulars to which biography owes its most powerful charm.

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With regard to the details of his daily life — the habitual complexion of his temper — the turn of his conversation — the manner of his deportment among his companions — his inclinations or antipathies — his friendships or his alienations — we must be content to remain in hopeless ignorance. The only circumstance recorded concerning him that falls within the description of an anecdote, is the reply with which he confounded the meddling and insidious friars who intruded themselves upon him, when they thought he was about to breathe his last. This incident is, indeed, most abundantly characteristic; and it makes us bitterly regret that it stands alone. A few more such particulars would have been quite invaluable. As it is, we must be satisfied to think of him as a voice crying in the wilderness, and lifting up through a long course of years, a loud, incessant, heart-stirring testimony against abuses which for ages had wearied the long-suffering of Heaven.

“Respecting his gigantic successor, Martin Luther, we are in possession of all that can enable us to form the most distinct conception of the man. We see him in connection with the wise, and the mighty, and ‘the excellent of the earth.’ We behold him in his intercourse with sages and divines, with princes and with potentates. We can trace him through all those bitter agonies of spirit through which he struggled on and on, till at last he seized upon the truth which made him free forever. But to us, Wycliffe appears almost as a solitary being. He stands before us in a sort of grand and mysterious loneliness. To group him, if we may so speak, with other living men, would require a very strong effort of imagination. And hence it is, that we meditate on his story with emotions of solemn admiration, but without any turbulent agitation of our sympathies.”¹

¹ Le Bas, *Life of Wiclif*, 294, 295. That is, we don’t know enough about him personally, to be able to share his emotional responses to his situation, or to intimately identify with him. – WHG

PART II. THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE.

Book I. On the Writings of Wycliffe Still in Manuscript.

SECTION I. ON THE PIECES WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

In this section, the attention of the reader will be directed in the first place to the pieces written by Wycliffe in English, and which for the most part were addressed alike to the clergy, to the opulent among the laity, and to the people at large. Even these pieces, though the most popular of the Reformer's productions, if they were printed entirely and to the letter, they would prove wearisome to most readers in our day, partly from the obsolescence of their language and allusions, and partly from the frequent repetitions of thought and illustration with which they abound. Such iteration of great principles served an important end in the history of the Reformer, but it cannot contribute to the agreeableness of his writings as read by men in different circumstances, and in a later age. My impression is that the attentive reader may form from the present volume, as correct a judgment in respect to the writings of Wycliffe, as would be acquired by an immediate perusal of the whole of his works. Nothing characteristic of those works, so far as my knowledge extends, is lacking in the descriptions of them given here, and the selections made from them here.

1. *Expositio Decalogi.* ¹ Wycliffe wrote several expositions of the Decalogue. One forms a part of the collection of treatises under the title of *The Poor Caitiff*; another, of much greater extent, in Latin, is preserved in the Bodleian Library. Similar thoughts and passages appear in all these pieces. From internal evidence, I conclude the piece from which the following passages are selected, to be one of the Reformer's earlier productions, of much the same period probably as the several tracts in *The Poor Caitiff*.

2 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

In the prologue to this exposition, Wycliffe laments that men should be found calling God *master*, and professing to honor "his Son from heaven," and for "forty, sixty, eighty years," be ignorant of his "ten commandments." He exhorts his reader, accordingly, in this way: "If you would be God's servant, begin and think how you first came into this world; how you were born of your mother with pain and sorrow, poor, feeble, and unable to help yourself. Think how you are set here in this wretched world, to sweat and toil for your sustenance. Think also that you will go out of this wretched world, as poor and naked as you came in; — and that you will have nothing with you of your goods, save your good deeds or your wicked." He then speaks of the "high bliss of heaven," and of "the pains of hell," as supplying motives for the obedience required. The signs of not being in deadly sin are said to be "when a man gladly and willingly hears the word of God; when he knows he is prepared to do good works; when he is willing to flee sin; when a man can be sorry for his sin." The great obligation of man is said to be that he should honor and love God supremely; but to this end it is necessary that he should,

¹ British Museum. MSS. Titus D. xix. In the Bodleian is a tract with the following title: — *Compendium X. Mandatorum editum a Majestro Jo. Wicliffe, Doctore Evangelicæ veritatis*. It is much used by Dr. James, in his "Apology for John Wickliffe."

“hear the commandments of God read, preached, and taught, and do according to them as God has bid. But what man is there now-a-days that dreads to break God’s commandments, or sets any price by the sweetest word or the sharpest word in all God’s law? Dear God, it is a wonder of all wonders on earth, that from the beginning of our life even to our last end, we are never weary, either night or day, to labor about worldly goods, pleasing to our wretched body, which will last here but a little while. But about the learning of God’s commandments, which will be food and nourishment for our souls that will ever last in bliss or pain — about such things, may we not labor truly to the end even one hour of the day?”

This introduction concludes with an expression of regret and sorrow that the conversation of “bishops, parsons, priests, and friars,” no less than that of the people generally, had respect everlastingly to trifles and vanities, “without a word of God or his commandments.”

In the exposition of the first commandment, men are exhorted to obedience to the Divine will, as procuring for them “a part in all the good prayers and good deeds of all saints, from the beginning of the world to the last end, and to the everlasting bliss of heaven.” The precise meaning of this passage is not easily determined. But from the manner in which Wycliffe expresses himself on doctrine of this nature in his undoubted works, and in works belonging no less certainly to the later period of his life, I am disposed to trace this obscurity of language on a point of so much importance, to the partial light which had fallen on the mind of the Reformer when committing it to writing. In the same connection, sanction is given to a worship of images, and to the invocation of saints.

EXPOSITION OF THE DECALOGUE 3

By these “dead images,” the laity, and especially the more ignorant, are said to learn “how they should worship the saints in heaven, after whom those images are shaped.” We know that the term “worship” was commonly used in the age of Wycliffe to denote nothing more than a decent reverence or homage, and had no necessary connection with the idea of worship in a religious sense. But the following passage from the same connection, while it points to these different uses of the term *worship*, leaves the word applicable in its higher sense to the regard which should be paid to saints: the man is said to have “a false god” who “worships or prays to an image made of man, with that worship and prayer that is due only *to God, and his saints*.” This piece bears internal marks of being from the pen of Wycliffe — its thoughts, illustrations, and language, are in many instances strictly such as we find in his other writings. But, for the reason stated, the above passages oblige us to attribute it to a comparatively early period in his history. This circumstance, however, adds to the interest of the work instead of detracting from it, inasmuch as we possess ample means of illustrating the opinions of the Reformer in his later years, while the lights relating to his doctrine at an earlier period are few and feeble. In the present treatise, we may trace many of the seeds of his ultimate principles, and above all, the eminently devout spirit in which he prosecuted his inquiries.

Thus the man who would be obedient to the command which requires him to duly honor God, is reminded that,

“He must steadily believe that Almighty God in Trinity— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one God — are the noblest object that may be. So that all power, all knowledge, all wisdom, all goodness, all charity, all mercy, is in Him, and comes from Him. Also, you must fear God before all things in this world, and break his commandments for no worldly good. Also, you must love God before all things, and labor earnestly to understand and know his will, that your will may be so ruled and set, that it may ever accord with God’s will. Have a mind also of the goodness of God, how

he made you in his own likeness, and how Jesus Christ, both God and man, died so painful a death on the cross, to buy man's soul out of hell and to the bliss of heaven, with his own heart's blood!"

All trust in amulets, or the devices of magic, is described as so much weakness and impiety. And the question is asked —

"Since men dread so much the pope's cursing, the bishop's cursing, and other priests' cursing, why do men not fear the rightful, the dreadful, and the terrible cursing that God gives to those who will not keep his commandments?"

4 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

In regard to the second commandment,

"all men and women who would be called Christians, and who live contrary to the living and teaching of Christ and of his apostles, take God's name in vain; for it is in vain for a man to say that he is a Christian, when he does not do the works of Christ."

Men are further chargeable with taking God's name in vain when they indulge in profane or unlawful swearing. He then cites certain canons which menace profane swearers: if they are ecclesiastics, with "degradation;" and if they are laymen, with "excommunication." And adding to that authority, the authority of our Lord in his sermon on the mount, he remarks —

"These are Christ's own words in his Gospel. And therefore, for love of him who shed his blood for you, beware from here on, night and day, of your oaths of swearing; and always, that you do not swear in vain; and much more, that you do not swear falsely. For a great cleric has said, he that swears falsely makes God false, for he makes God the author of falsehood."

Four excuses urged by profane swearers are then mentioned and refuted.

- It was pretended that even such mention of the name of God tended to keep him in the thoughts of men, and was so far good. In the same manner, it is replied that it must be good that a conspirator mentions the name of his sovereign, even if only to betray him.
- The force of custom was pleaded: "So the thief might say, I have had so long a custom of theft, that I cannot cease to steal other men's goods."
- The third excuse was that "God is merciful, and will hardly damn men for a light oath." But the parties making this excuse are reminded, "Since God is so great a Lord, and commands his liege men ¹ on pain of hell without end, to keep so easy a commandment as refraining his tongue from vain and false swearing, he is worthy to be damned the deeper if he breaks it. It was little for Adam to eat an apple in paradise *without* the forbidding of God. Nevertheless, for eating it *against* the forbidding of God, he and all mankind were justly condemned, till Christ bought them again with his precious blood and hard death upon the cross."
- The fourth excuse of the profane is that they swear in order to be believed. But such swearing is described as treachery towards God, and as poor evidence of trustworthiness toward man. Referring to the prevalence of this vice, even among the servants and retainers ² of the clergy, he exclaims, "Surely it is a wonder, apart from the endless mercy of God, that the earth does not open and swallow them quickly into hell for this treason and others beside!"

¹ *Liege men*: persons who owe allegiance and service to a feudal lord.

² *Retainer*: a person working in the service of another (especially in the household).

On the precept concerning the Sabbath-day, it is observed that this day should be kept by “three manners of occupation.”

FIRST, it should be kept in *thinking* —

“*Thinking* how God is ALMIGHTY. Why? Because He made all this world of nothing. Thinking He is ALL-KNOWING. Why? Because he governs all things most wisely. Thinking He is ALL-GOOD. Why? Because he makes all things turn to the profit of good men who faithfully love him.

EXPOSITION OF THE DECALOGUE 5

“Thinking He is ALL-JUST. Why? Because he rewards all good deeds, and punishes all trespasses in due time, and in due measure, both secret and open, and no creature may withstand his punishing, neither in earth, in purgatory, nor in hell. Thinking He is ALL-MERCIFUL. Why? Because He is readier to receive sinful men to grace who would truly leave their sins, than they are ready to ask for mercy.

“On SUNDAY, it should be a matter for our meditation, that creation was completed on that day, that Christ rose from the dead on that day, that knowledge and wisdom came to the earth by the descent of the Holy Spirit on that day, and that on that day, “as many clerics say, shall be doomsday ¹ — for Sunday was the first day, and Sunday shall be the last day.”

“And think heartily of the wonderful KINDNESS of God, who was so high and worshipful in heaven, that he should come down so low, and be born of the maiden, and become our brother, to buy us back by his hard passion, from our thralldom ² of the devil. He was beaten, buffeted, and scourged. He was crowned with a crown of thorns for spite; and when the crown, as clerics say, ³ could not sit fast and close down to his head, for the long and stiff thorns, they took staves and beat them down, till the thorns pierced the place of the brain. He was nailed hand and foot, and with nails sharp and rugged, that his pain should be more. And so at last he suffered a painful death, hanging full shamefully on the hard tree. And he did all this and suffered of his own kindness, without any sin of his own, to deliver us from sin and pain, and to bring us to everlasting bliss. You should also think constantly of how, when he had made you from nothing, you had forsaken him and all his kindness through sin, and would have taken yourself to the devil and his service, world without end, if Christ, both God and man, had not suffered this hard death to save us. And thus you should see the great kindness and all other goodness that God has done for you, and learn thereby your own great unkindness. And you shall thus see that man is the most fallen of creatures, and the unkindest of all the creatures that God ever made. It should be full sweet and delightful to us, to think thus on this great kindness and this great love of Jesus Christ.

The SECOND occupation proper to the Sabbath, is said to consist in *speaking*.

“This should be first in confession of sin, made immediately to God — confession of having lived a false, sensual, and unnatural life, neglecting the study and the observance of his will, in the manner of the brute.” This confession being made, Wycliffe’s counsel to the penitent is that he should “cry heartily to God for grace and power to leave all sin, and ever after to live in virtue. And after this, be about speaking to bring your neighbors to better living. And if they debate it, bring them by your power to love and charity and concord.

6 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

“If you are a priest, be a true lantern to the people, both in speaking, and in doing truly all things that belong to a priest. And seek wisely the ground, and the true office of priesthood, and do not be led

¹ *Doomsday*: Job 21.30; the day of Judgment and of the Lord’s wrath (Mat 10.15; Isa 13.9, 13; Rev 6.17).

² *Thralldom*: the state of being under the control of another person.

³ Originally “clerks” – Middle English for clerics.

blindly by the lewd customs of the world; but read God's law, and the exposition of holy doctors on it — study it, learn it, and keep it; and when you know it, preach it to those who are unknowing, and look evermore that your deeds be so rightful, that no man may blame you with reason.”

The THIRD manner of occupying the Sabbath-day, was to be careful to attend *public worship*; to endeavor to bring pure motives to the service of God. And that the mind may be in its best state for attending to the duties of that day, it is urged that there be little indulgence in the pleasures of the table. After public worship, says the Reformer,

“Visit those who are sick or suffering, especially those whom God has made needy by age, or by other sicknesses — the feeble, the crooked, the lame: these you shall relieve with your goods according to your power and their need; for thus bids the Gospel. But you shall not do so for strong and healthy beggars who are well-arrayed, whether they are laymen, priests, or friars. And so men should not be idle, but busy on the Sabbath-day about the soul, as men are busy on the week-day about the body.”

On the precept concerning the honor to be rendered to parents, it is remarked, that we have three fathers — our *natural* father; the *priest* by whose means we become the spiritual children of the church; and our *Father in heaven*.

The mutual obligations of children and parents, are judiciously explained and earnestly enforced. Says Wycliffe,

“Your second father is your spiritual father, who has special care of your soul; and thus you shall worship ¹ him — you shall love him before other men, and obey his teaching in so far as he teaches God's law; and you shall help him according to your power, that he may have a reasonable maintenance when he does his office well. And if he fails in his office, by giving an evil example, and in ceasing from teaching God's law, you ought to have great sorrow on that account, and tell him his fault meekly and charitably, between you and him alone.”

It will be seen from this extract, that Wycliffe had not proceeded so far at the time when this treatise was written, as to counsel, and even to strongly urge, as he did afterwards, withholding maintenance from priests who are habitually delinquent.

Concerning our third Father, the Reformer writes, “He is best of all,” and for His sake, His true children are prepared to meet all suffering, and even death itself.

ON THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES 7

On the remaining precepts, the observations are of a general nature, and present little that is remarkable.² But it is thus that the Reformer expresses himself at the close of the work:

¹ *Worship* here means to revere and respect.

² The passage following, on the precept, “you shall not kill,” resembles the extracts on the same subject, given in a subsequent page, from the work under the title of the Seven Deadly Sins. “Therefore, each man beware that he does not manslaughter, for we are all brethren, and the sons of God. But how shall he be hardy to stand before God, who has slain the son of God? It is a wonder how any man dare destroy that creature which God made in his own likeness. If a man of craft has so great a love for his work, that he may not let it be harmed, how much would you guess God loves that creature he made to his likeness?” The deed is further described as a “despising and scorning of the passion and the painful death of Jesus Christ, who died to save men's lives for the bliss of heaven.” The following glance at the common life of the fourteenth century, is perhaps worth transcribing. “But, alas for sorrow: if a man sits among men (or women now-a-days), and speaks of such things, or warns them of their oaths, many and fell [*i.e.*, *cruel*], of their cursing and swearing, and of their false leasings [*witnessings*] that they make of their neighbors, and so of other sins, they will shortly begin to grow heavy, and sorry, and essayed [*judged*] evil (if they might for the shame of it), and be full weary of his fellowship.”

“Many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they will be absolved of breaking all the commandments of God; and therefore they take no heed to keep them. I say to you for certain, though you hire priests and friars to pray for you, and though every day you hear many masses, and found chantries ¹ and colleges, and go on pilgrimage all your life, and give all your goods to pardoners — all this shall not bring your soul to heaven. But if you keep the commandments of God to your life’s end, though you have neither penny nor halfpenny, you shall have everlasting pardon, and the bliss of heaven!”

Christ said, it is added,

““Suffer for me as I have suffered for you,” ² for it behooves the members to follow the head. Jesus Christ is our head, and we are his members, if we do well. What apostle, martyr, confessor, or virgin, or saint, ever came to God without suffering? Then what shall we wretches say, that herein read the lives of saints which, through many torments, went to God joying and singing. We wretches bear falsely the name of Christian men, when only touched by a little short breath of our neighbor’s tongue, we lose charity and patience, and mindfulness of our death, of the quaking judgment, of the day of doom, of the everlasting pains of hell, of the everlasting joys of heaven!”

2. *De Hypocritarum Imposturis.*³ This is the first piece in order in a manuscript volume in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, including a series of the most interesting of the tracts and treatises published by Wycliffe in English. It consists of a commentary on the text, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” and it is meant to identify the mendicant orders with that sect of ancient religionists, in respect to their lack of sincerity. It begins with the words, “Christ commands his disciples, and all Christian men, to understand and flee the sour dough of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”⁴ The volume has been injured by damp, and nearly the whole of the first page is illegible.

8 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

In a remaining portion of that page, the Reformer speaks of the importance of “bringing men cleanly to the Gospel, and the peace and freedom of Christ’s order — that being the most perfect, and the easiest to win heaven by.” The treatise extends to twenty-two pages, double columns, in *quarto*.⁵ And from its reference to the papal schism, and to the disputes concerning the eucharist, it manifestly belongs to the later period of the Reformer’s life.⁶

“See now,” he writes, “where these friars break falsely all the commandments of God. If they choose to be ruled more after the ordinance of sinful men and idiots, than after the clean ordinance of Christ — and say that sinful man’s ordinance is better and truer for man, and more perfect, than the clean ordinance of Christ — then they worship false gods, and are heretics and blasphemers; and so they

¹ A chapel endowed for singing Masses for the soul of the donor.

² **Mat 24:9** “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. **Acts 9:16** “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

³ *The Deceit of Hypocrites.*

⁴ MS. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, pp. 1-22. Trinity College, Dublin. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 1-17.

⁵ *Quarto*: The size of a book whose pages are made by folding a sheet of paper twice to form four leaves.

⁶ On the death of Gregory the Eleventh in 1378, commenced a memorable schism in the papacy, the church having during the next half century two or three heads at the same time, each of the contending popes forming plots, and thundering out anathemas against his rival. See Mosheim, iii. 125-128. This it will be remembered was about six years before the death of Wycliffe; and from the reference to this event in the MS., as well as from its allusions to the disputes concerning the eucharist, the date of this production, as written sometime during the above interval, is determined.

break the first commandment of God. If they dread more, and punish more, for breaking sinful man's traditions, than for breaking the commandments of God; and study and love their private rules more than the commandments of God, then they worship, love, and dread sinful man, and maybe damned devils, more than God Almighty — for as Austin ¹ says, 'a man makes that thing his God, which he dreads most and loves most.'"

"If they hinder curates and poor priests from teaching man God's law by the hypocrisy and help of Antichrist's laws, dreading lest their hypocrisy be perceived and their winning and worldly pride laid down, they are cursed man-killers. And they are the cause of the damnation of all the souls that perish through their fault in not knowing and keeping God's commandments. If they preach principally for worldly muck ² and vainglory, and thus preach to be praised by men, and do not simply and plainly preach the Gospel of Christ for His glory, and for gaining men's souls, then they are corruptors of God's word, as Paul says." [Eph 4.29](#)

Of the clergy generally, he remarks that a schism having grown up in the papacy —

"One part holds with one pope, and the other with another pope, and each party says and teaches as belief, that this pope is true, and none other; and that all who do not believe so are accursed heretics, and outside of belief, and are bringing all others outside of belief. And yet in common they judge both parties as Christian men; and so they say one thing and do the contrary."

ON THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES 9

It is in the following terms that he exhorts men to Christian fidelity:

"It is cowardice in Christ's disciples, if they spare, for bodily pain and death, to tell openly the truth of God's law. And therefore Christ afterwards tells his disciples that they should dread God supremely, and nothing else. Truly, says Christ, 'I say to you, my friends, Do not be afraid of those who slay the body, and after these things have no more which they will do. But I will show you whom you should dread: dread him who after he has slain, has power to send into hell; and so I say to you, Dread him,' [Luk 12.5](#). Here Christ wills that men dread nothing principally, but God and his offence. For, if men dread bodily pains and death, and therefore cease to openly tell the truth, they are unable to regain with this the bliss of heaven; and if they openly and firmly say the truth of God, nothing may harm them, so that they keep patience and charity."

He then remarks that what our Lord spoke concerning the sparrows, was to "comfort his disciples" under suffering and persecution; and he adds that "nothing may come without his knowing and his ordinance, and that is all for the best." Christ, he writes, "makes us willing to die for his law by the reward of the bliss of heaven, when he says thus: that those who acknowledge me before men, man's Son will acknowledge him before the angels of God." Towards the close of the treatise, the Reformer indulges in much lamentation over the sale of benefices, said to be common everywhere, but most common at Rome, "where he who can bring the most gold will soonest be opened to great benefices." The men so introduced are described as setting "an example of pride, lechery, and other sins, hindering other true priests from teaching God's law. And this is one way of God taking greatest vengeance on sinful men: to allow such hypocrites to rule the people, and draw them to hell by withdrawing God's law from them." In common speech, such men were described as "able curates, and great men of holy church;" but the Reformer denounces such language as "Antichrist's blasphemy."

¹ That is, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) — WHG.

² Middle English derogatory term for money (*filthy lucre*, 1Tim 3.3; Tit 1.7; 1Pet 5.2).

Having censured the vices, not only of the mendicants, but of the regular clergy, he extends his rebuke to “secular lords.” These are also said to “fail foully in charity.” In maintenance of their worldly dignity, they will labor much, and fight valiantly.

“But to maintain God’s law, and to stand for the worship to which they are bound upon pain of losing their lordship, and their body and soul in hell without end, who is that lord that will truly speak, labor, and suffer meekly, despite persecution in time of need? Those lords ought to quake against doomsday, and against the time of their death, who labor more largely to maintain their little worldly lordship, and to seek their *own* worship, than they labor to maintain the rightful ordinance of Jesus Christ in his church, and to nourish and maintain Christian souls in good governance and holy life.”

10 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

Merchants, and all classes, are said to be affected by this insincere and worldly temper, “but the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is the most accursed and poisonous of all.”

3. *De Obedientia Prelatorum*. This is the next treatise in this collection. The English title is, *How men owe Obedience to Prelates*, ... It begins with the words, “Prelates slander poor priests and other Christian men, so that they will not obey their sovereigns, nor fear the curse, nor dread nor keep the law, but despise all things that are against their liking.”¹

On this account, they are said to be “worse than Jews and Pagans, and all lords, and prelates, and mighty men should destroy them, for otherwise they will destroy holy church, and make each man live as he likes, so that they may destroy Christendom the more.”

“But here poor priests and true men say they would meekly and willingly obey God and holy church, and each man on earth, inasmuch as he teaches truly God’s commandments, and profitable truth for their souls. And no more does any man owe to obey Christ, who is God and man, nor any apostle. And if any worldly prelate asks more obedience [than this], he is surely Antichrist, and Lucifer’s master — for Jesus Christ is the God of righteousness and truth, and peace and charity, and may not do anything against righteousness and truth, nor against the health of man’s soul, nor against charity, since he may not lie,^{Tit 1.2} nor deny himself.^{2Tim 2.13} How then should any sinful prelate, in good conscience, charge and constrain men to do anything against righteousness and the health of their souls? For Christ says in the Gospel of John, that the Son may do only that thing which he sees the Father do,^{Joh 5.19} and therefore Christ commanded all men that they should not believe in him, unless he did the works of the Father in heaven.^{Joh 10.37} Why then should Christian men be constrained by Antichrist’s clerics to follow their commandments, when they do no works of God, but works of the fiend? And thus Christ speaks to the Jews, and asks why they do not believe him if he says the truth. Therefore also, Christ says to the Jews, Which of you reproves me for sin? ^{Joh 8.46} And he would that each man had done so, if he might have done so truly. Therefore, at the time of his passion, he said to the bishop’s servant who struck him in the face, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil.’ ^{Joh 18.23} And thus, if prelates are vicars of Christ, they ought to follow him in this obedience, and ask no more of any man.”

ON OBEDIENCE TO PRELATES 11

¹ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class. C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 17—23. It does not appear that the itinerant labours of the persons so often mentioned in the writings of Wycliffe under the title of “poor priests,” had become such as to attract much attention from the ruling clergy until within some five or six years of the Reformer’s death: and throughout this work, “On Obedience,” there is so much said concerning the manner in which the bishops employed their authority to silence this new and irregular class of teachers, as to place it beyond doubt that this piece was written by the Reformer sometime within the space above-mentioned.

Wycliffe then complains that prelates should thus demand greater reverence and submission than had been claimed by the apostles, or by Christ himself, while their own life commonly bore so little resemblance to that of the Redeemer. He bids them remember that “Christ, God and Man, sought man’s soul, lost through sin, thirty years and more, with great labor, and weariness, and many pains, by many thousands of miles on his feet, in great cold, and storm, and tempests!” It is contended that his vicars should be conformed to this example, at least in some good measure. And it is demanded with some passion, “Why should a sinful idiot claim more obedience than Christ and his apostles did?”

It is maintained further, that no man should leave the greater duty in favor of the lesser; and the duty to continue to preach the Gospel must be more manifest, than the obligation to obey any summoning from prelates who would gladly prevent such preaching. This summoning by prelates, he insists,

“is not grounded in Christ’s life, nor in the life of his apostles, nor in reason, but in Antichrist’s power, through endowing the church with secular lordship, contrary to Holy Writ. Thus, instead of Christ’s meekness, and poverty, and charity, and true teaching of the Gospel, is brought in the worldly pride of priests, and simony, and covetousness, and dissension among Christ’s people, and tormenting them bodily by priests, as though they were worldly lords of the king’s liege men.”

Concerning such men (as putting forth such claims), he demands, “Where are more false Antichrists, more poisonous heretics, or more accursed blasphemers?” The maxim expounded in the next section is that “no man is obligated to put God’s biddings behind, and the biddings of sinful man before.” And since God bids every man to discharge his natural obligation to wife and children, all contrary bidding notwithstanding, every priest is bound much more to the discharge of his spiritual duties toward the flock committed to him, and not to “leave his sheep unkept among the wolves of hell.” Prelates may enjoin the contrary, but in such a case no prelate is to be obeyed. “Christ also says in the Gospel that if the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the lake.¹ These worldly prelates are blind in God’s law, both in knowing the law and in life; and accordingly, no man should be led by them, for dread lest they both fall hell-ward, for ignorance of the Holy Writ.

“By reason, also, and by man’s law, if a man is summoned by both the higher judge and a lesser judge, he shall be excused from the lesser by virtue of the higher. But each man is summoned first by God, to worship him with all his wit, and with all his might — and by virtue of this chief dominion, he is obligated to be excused from the lesser.

12 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

“Men of law say, and reason also, that it is worst of all to take doom under a suspect doomsman.² But these worldly prelates are suspected doomsmen *against* God’s servants, for they are enemies to the persons of Christ’s servants, and also to the cause of God. And the new religious assessors of these worldly prelates are more to be suspected than any other, for they put the decrees of the church and of their founders before the law of God. And thus they charge deficiency and evil on the author of Holy

¹ Mat 15.14; though modern translations say, “fall into a ditch.”

² *Doom*: to pronounce sentence; to “take doom” is to receive a judge’s sentence. The *doomsman* is the judge. Thus, receiving a sentence from a biased judge is “worst of all.” *Doom* is rendered accordingly throughout. – WHG

Writ, deceiving lords and ladies in matters of faith and charity, and making them trust that it is alms¹ to destroy true men who stand fast for God's law and true living. And thus the damnable ignorance of God's law, and the accursed life of these worldly prelates — firmly maintaining their own sin and the sins of other men — is the reason why poor priests and Christian men have been suspected of heresy, and counted enemies both of God's cause and of his servants.

“But if prelates would busily and truly study Holy Writ, and openly live well according to it, and destroy the open sin of other men, then poor priests and Christian men — without any summoning — would with great labor, and cost, and willingness, by land and by water, meekly come to them, and obey and revere them, as they would Peter and Paul. Let the world judge whether these divisions come from worldly prelates, ignorant and cursed in life, or from poor priests and true men who gladly desire night and day to know God's will and worship, and to do it before all things.

“As for cursing,² Christian men say truly that they dread it so much, that they would not willingly, or knowingly, deserve God's curse for any good in earth or in heaven; nor man's curse, in so far as it accords with the rightful curse of God. But with great joy of soul, they would rather suffer man's wrongful curse, than knowingly or willingly break any commandment of God, to win thereby all the worshipping of this world, and to keep their body in all good ever so long. And they would rather suffer slandering, and backbiting, and imprisoning, and exile, hanging, drawing, quartering, and burning, with the help and grace of God, than forsake the truth of Holy Writ, and the life of Christ.

“As to law, true men say that they will meekly and willfully fear and keep God's law to the extent of their knowledge and might; and also each law of man's making — in so far as they know that it accords with God's law, and reason, and good conscience. Christian men know well from the faith of Scripture, that neither Peter nor Paul, nor any creature, may lawfully do anything against the truth of Holy Writ, nor against the edification of holy church — that is, against the good teaching, governing, and amending of Christian souls. What power have these worldly prelates to make so many wicked laws, since God curses those who make wicked laws, and commands that no man shall add to his words, nor take anything from them, on pain of the great curse of God? [Rev 22.18](#)

ON PRELATES 13

That is to say, let no man add a false interpretation, or a false gloss to Holy Writ — for then, as Jerome says, he is a heretic. And let no man draw any truth away from God's words, for they include all necessary truth, all truth profitable for man's soul. And to this intent, Paul says in his epistle, even if an apostle, or an angel from heaven, preaches any other thing than is taught by Christ and his apostles, we must not obey.” [Gal 1.8](#)

Having insisted in such terms on the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, and the right of private judgment, as opposed to all church pretensions, he concludes this treatise by saying,

“Let worldly prelates cease to slander poor priests, saying that they will not obey their sovereigns, nor dread the curse, but despise the law — for in these three things they are clear before God and man, if right, and reason, and charity, are well sought.”

¹ “It is alms” — a charitable gift; here it implies praiseworthy. **Joh 16:2-3** “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.” ³ “And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

² This term is commonly used by Wycliffe to denote church censures.

4. *De Conversatione Ecclesiasticorum.* This is the next treatise in this series. Its purport is indicated in the words with which it commences — “Here it tells of prelates, that prelates leave the preaching of the Gospel, and are spiritual murderers ¹ of men’s souls.” ²

The former treatise related to the obedience which prelates usually demanded; the present relates to the duties devolving on that order of persons, and to their negligence in the matter of those duties. It is in this respect that this piece “On Prelates” is distinguishable from the piece “On Obedience to Prelates.” The strictures of the Reformer on this subject extend to forty-three chapters.

In the first chapter it is shown that our Lord and his apostles were devoted to the work of preaching, and were studious that their lives might commend their doctrine. “Christ,” it is said, “ordained all his apostles and disciples, both before his death and after his rising from the dead, to preach the Gospel to all men. And since prelates and priests, ordained by God, come in the stead of apostles and disciples, they are all bound by Jesus Christ, both God and man, thus to preach the Gospel.” Three things are said to be included in feeding the church in the manner intended by Christ in his injunction to Peter: the example of a good life; the true preaching of the Gospel; and a willingness to suffer death if need be, to render men stable in the truth and in the hope of bliss.

14 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

The case of Eli and his sons is cited, as showing the domestic and national evils which follow naturally in the train of an unholy priesthood. The language of Ezekiel on the responsibility of the minister of truth,³ is also adduced, as holding forth the same warning. Hence also the language of the apostle — “woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel.” ^{1Cor 9.16} And as Peter was called Satan when opposing himself to the death of Christ, ^{Mar 8.33} so may prelates be thus designated if they interpose themselves to prevent that salvation from coming to men, which the death of Christ has brought near to us.

“Christ,” says Wycliffe, “purged the temple with his own hands, as the Gospel tells, in token that if the priests were good, the people would soon be amended. And for this reason, true men say that prelates are more bound to preach truly the Gospel, than their subjects are bound to pay them tithes — for God charges that more, and that is more profitable to both parties. Therefore, prelates are more accursed if

¹ Originally, “manquellers.”

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 32-54. This work contains repeated allusions, in common with the preceding, to the conduct of the prelates, in persecuting the “poor priests” who went about preaching to the people. (Chap. vi., xvi., xxiii., xxvii.) In the thirteenth chapter there is a reference to the crusade carried on in Flanders under the command of Spencer, bishop of Norwich, in favor of Pope Urban. The bishop embarked on that enterprise in April, 1383, having raised a force for the purpose chiefly by means of papal pardons and indulgences. “All who should die at this time,” says Froissart, “and who had given their money, were absolved from every fault, and by the tenure of the bull, happy were they who could now die, in order to obtain so noble an absolution.” Hist. *ubi supra*. Wycliffe maintains indignantly that the spiritual weapons of religion should be used “to make peace,” and not, after this manner, “to make dissensions and war.”

³ For example, **Eze 34:10-11** ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I *am* against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”’ ¹¹ ‘For thus says the Lord GOD: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. **Eze 44:13** “And they shall not come near Me to minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of My holy things, nor into the Most Holy Place; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.

they cease from their preaching, than the people are if they cease to pay tithes, even while prelates do their office well.”

Matins,¹ masses, and chantings, are all described as “man’s ordinances.” But the preaching of the Gospel is of Divine obligation, having been enjoined by Christ, both before and after his passion.

In the beginning of the second chapter, the authority of the venerable Bede, of Gregory I, of Augustine, and others, is cited in support of the importance which the Reformer ascribes to preaching. Prelates who do not preach, and who prevent others from doing so, are described as monsters who refuse to feed their own offspring, and will not allow others to feed them. They are denounced accordingly, as “procurators to the fiend, enemies of Christ, and traitors to his people!”

In the third chapter, Wycliffe censures, with great freedom, the gay equipage,² the profanity, the gluttony, and drunkenness, of many among the prelates. He speaks of their establishments and general manners, which proclaim them members of the “devil’s church,” rather than of “holy church.” Prelates, he writes, “rob the poor liege men of the king, by false excommunications issued under colour of holy correction, but giving men leave to dwell in sin from year to year, and from one seven-year period to another, and commonly all their life, if they pay by year twenty shillings, or something more or less.” It is then calculated that if certain bishops lived as vendors of this art of merchandise for twenty years, they must amass not less than sixty thousand marks,³ “all robbed from the king’s liege men.”

ON PRELATES 15

In this manner, “these wicked prelates sell Christian men’s souls to Satan for money, for which souls Christ shed his precious heart’s-blood upon the cross;” and if secular lords endeavor to amend this state of things, then they are slandered, cursed, and their lands are laid under an interdict; “and thus almost all men are conquered for the fiend, and these prelates show themselves to be very Antichrists, procurators of Satan, and traitors to Jesus Christ and his people.” One prolific source of this corruption, is said to be the prevalence of simony. Most of these dignitaries enter upon their office by such means, and it is said to cling to them “as a leprosy all through” — a depraved priesthood, everywhere producing a depraved people. Lords and ladies who confer benefices on such men, and in such a fashion, are admonished by Wycliffe, that however plausibly such things may be done, the guilt of simony is upon them, and such proceedings will remain “to be judged in respect to both parties” in the last day.

In the fourth chapter, Wycliffe says,

¹ *Matin*: Time of morning service; the first canonical hour in the Roman Catholic Church.

² *Gay equipage*: showy belongings (velvet and lace clothing, gold scepters, silver chalices, etc.).

³ A *mark* was worth 13 shillings 4 pence: 12 pence to a shilling, and 20 shillings to a pound. Thus, 3 marks equalled 2 pounds; 60,000 marks equalled 40,000 pounds. In 1374, that would buy 2 horses per knight for 4000 knights (from Hodges’ list of medieval prices: <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medprice.htm>). – WHG

“Lords and ladies who hold curates in worldly offices,¹ away from the souls of which they have the care, are traitors. For God gives them lordship and presentation² of churches, that they should maintain His law, and help true priests in the preaching of His Gospel. And if they withhold curates (who are God’s treasure) in their worldly services, or prevent them from keeping Christian souls, which Christ bought with his precious blood, then they are foul traitors to Jesus Christ, and to the people whom they thus destroy.”

But if it is a great sin in the laity to thus bind the clergy to secular things, then it is a greater sin in the clergy to consent to be thus bound, and a greater sin still, when a cleric descends to add craft to worldliness, and to play the false confessor for gain. These “three treasons” are said to be frightfully prevalent. “But the simony of the court of Rome most harms, for it is most common, and done most under the colour of holiness, and most robs our land of both men and treasure.” The customary exactions of the Roman see are then described and censured, especially because those exactions, and the money spent in journeying to Rome, and the delays which kept men there, were all so much wealth lost to the kingdom. “When a lord has the gold for presentation, then the gold still dwells in the land. But when the pope has the first-fruits, then the gold goes out, and never comes again.”

But the purchase of benefices with money was only one form of simony. “Pardons, if they are worth anything, must be free; and to take money for them, is to sell God’s grace, and so it is simony.” Hence masses, and other services, “for which money is taken,” are spoken of as so much fraudulent invention, meant to give the priesthood the power of spoiling the people.

16 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

The history of Jeroboam, and the fall of Gehazi, and of Simon Magus, are cited as showing the displeasure with which simoniacal preachers are regarded by the Almighty. “The king and lords,” says the Reformer, “are charged by God to destroy this sin and others; and if they do not do it, they consent to it, and favor it.”

The following passage is from the seventh chapter of this work:

“Worldly prelates command that no man shall preach the Gospel, except at the prelates’ will and limitation; and they forbid men to hear the Gospel on pain of the great curse. But Satan in his own person never dared do so much despite³ to Christ or his Gospel — for he applied Holy Writ to Christ, and would have pursued his intent thereby. And since it is Christ’s counsel and commandment to priests generally, to preach the Gospel, and they must not do this thing without leave of their prelates who, in some cases, may be fiends of hell, then it follows that priests may not do Christ’s counsels and commandments without the leave of fiends! Ah! Lord Jesus, are these sinful fools, and maybe fiends of hell, more knowing and mighty than you, that true men must not do your will without leave from them? Ah! Lord God — all-mighty, all-knowing, and all full of charity — how long will you allow these Antichrists to despise you and your holy Gospel, and to prevent the health of Christian men’s souls? Endless, rightful Lord! You allow this for the sin generally reigning among the people; but endless, merciful, and good Lord, help your poor wretched priests and servants to love and reverence your

¹ In Roger Dymmok’s refutation of Wycliffe, he asserts that on many occasions, curates did not reside in their parishes, but served their lord in some temporal capacity, directing the lord in how best to administer his goods for the good of his subjects. Fiona Sommerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge U. Press, 1998, 2005), p. 118.

² *Presentation*: The act or right of offering a clergyman to the bishop or ordinary for institution in a benefice.

³ *Despite*: lack of respect; contemptuous disregard.

Gospel, so that they are not prevented from doing your worship and will through the false feignings of Antichrist and his fiends. Almighty Lord God, merciful and endless in knowledge, you allowed Peter and all the apostles to have so great a dread and cowardice at the time of your passion, that they all fled away through fear of death, and for a little poor woman's voice. And afterwards, by the comfort of the Holy Ghost, you made them so strong that they were afraid of no man, nor of pain, nor of death. Now by gifts of the same Holy Ghost, help your poor servants who all their life have been cowards — and make them strong and bold in your cause, to maintain the Gospel against Antichrist, and against all the tyrants of the world!"

In the two following chapters, the same subject is continued. Prelates are rebuked as men deriving their chief revenue from the sins of the people. It is because there are so many sins to be confessed, that "the rotten penny" is demanded continually. And by such means, "a proud name in the world, and great house-holding," are sustained. Clerical example, which should conduce to the edification of the people, contributes to their destruction in such a case.

ON PRELATES 17

Many of the sins of such men, "are so open, that no man needs to declare them; but men say that many prelates are full of sin against chastity, and of the most cursed species of it, such that it would be shameful to write it down; and so curates take their example from them, and subjects take their example from curates, both wedded men and single."

In the ninth and tenth chapters are the following passages:

"These prelates credit their own cursing, that is many times false, more than the most rightful curse of God Almighty. And hereby they mean, and show indeed (but falsely), that they are more than Almighty God in Trinity. For if a man is accursed by prelates, though wrongfully, shortly all men are taught to flee them as they would a Jew or a Saracen. And if that person dwells forty days under their curse, he will be taken to prison. But those who are cursed by God for breaking His commandments — such as proud men, envious, covetous, gluttons, and the unchaste — they are not punished thus, but held virtuous and manly [by these prelates]. So God's curse is set at nothing, while the wrongful curse of man is credited above the clouds. And yet, though a man is accursed by God, and by a prelate also, if he gives gold, then he will be absolved, even though he abides in his sin, and so is under God's curse.

"But see now the sinfulness of man's curse. If a *true* man displeases a worldly prelate by teaching and maintaining God's law, he is slandered as an *evil* man, and forbidden to teach Christ's Gospel; and the people will be charged on pain of the greater curse, to flee and not hear such a man, in order to save their own souls. And this is done under the colour of holiness; for they will say that such a man teaches heresy; and they will bring many false witnesses and notaries against him in his absence; and in his presence they will not speak a word. And they pretend, by means of this invented and false law, that if three or four false witnesses, hired by money, each say a thing against a true man, then he will not be heard, even though he could prove the contrary by two hundred."

In this manner, the Reformer pleaded for natural right, and liberty of conscience, against the abuses of power on the part of a worldly and vicious clergy. To concede that such methods of proceeding are just, he remarks, would be to concede the justice of the death inflicted on the martyrs, and on Christ himself, against whom it must, of course, have been easy to produce three such witnesses. By such means, indeed, it would be easy to prove "each king of Christendom forsworn,¹ and therefore not a king." But as the judgment of Elijah prevailed against that of eight

¹ *Forsworn*: formally rejected or disavowed, usually under pressure.

hundred false priests, so shall the judgment of one true man prevail against that of a host of prelates.

18 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

And if “the clerics of Antichrist curse the soul into hell, as they pretend, surely they are evil fathers, who thus violently curse their own children into hell — not for rebellion against God, nor against His law, but because Christian men withstand the prelates’ covetousness or pride, or because they teach and maintain the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In the next chapter, Wycliffe touches on the subject of prayer, on its nature, and its presumed efficacy. “Prayer,” he remarks, “stands principally in good life; and Christ speaks of this prayer when he says in the Gospel that we must ever pray. For Augustine and other saints say that so long as a man dwells in charity, so long he prays well.” Prayer is also said to “stand in holy desire,” and “in word.”

But prayer in word, “is worth nothing, unless it is done with devotion, and cleanness, and holiness of life. Ah Lord! Since prelates are so far from God’s law that they will not preach the Gospel themselves nor allow other men to preach it, how abominable is their prayer before God Almighty! Lord, since prelates do not know whether their prayer is acceptable or abominable, why do they magnify it so much, and sell it so dear? For the prayer of a layman who shall be saved, is without measure better than the prayer of a prelate who shall be damned.”

Vicious ¹ priests, it is observed, “need to have new laws made by sinful fools, to colour their sin by, and to greedily gather tithes when they do not exercise their office. For God’s law does not help them to that end, but condemns their pride, covetousness, and other sins.” He then combats the notion that the prayers of such men are heard “not for their own holiness,” but “by virtue of holy church.” And he replies to this “dreaming,” that it is “not grounded in Holy Writ. For God says generally that such prayer is abominable.” The offering of strange fire on the ancient altar ([Lev 10.1](#)), was a symbol of the offering of prayer without charity.

In the twelfth chapter, Wycliffe resumes his censure of the prelates who fine, curse, and imprison men for preaching the Gospel, and who grant absolutions to the most guilty, on payment of the required “rent to Antichrist.” Coercion, he maintains, “belongs to the ruler’s office, as Peter and Paul teach;” ² and all punishing of the body, and loss of goods, should come from the secular power only.

The thirteenth chapter exposes the frauds practised in the matter of indulgences. Prelates are said to “foully destroy Christian men by these invented indulgences or pardons.” Such men are described as holding out this promise of indulgence as procured “by virtue of Christ’s passion and martyrdom, and the holy merits of saints, who did more than was necessary for their own bliss.” But, it is replied, “Christ never taught this doctrine in all the Gospel, and he never used it; nor did Peter or Paul.”

¹ *Vicious*: here it means vice-ridden: ruled by vices (i.e., by immorality and evil-doing).

² [Rom 13:3](#) For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. [1Pe 2:13-14](#) Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good.

ON PRELATES 19

Some of these indulgences, it seems, were granted in terms extending over a thousand years. Wycliffe ridicules such grants by reminding those who value them, that “after the day of doom there will be no purgatory, and no man knows how soon that doom may come.” But the Reformer pushes his argument on this subject to a length which his opponents must have felt to be not a little inconvenient. “It seems that the pope and his are all without charity, if any soul dwells in purgatory. For he may with full heart, and without any other cost, deliver them out of purgatory.” Wycliffe argues that to confess the lack of an inclination to deliver them, must be to confess a gross lack of *charity*. And to confess the lack of *power*, must be to confess the hypocrisy which pretends to such power. Allusion is made to the manner in which these indulgences were dispensed in favor of the recent crusade in Flanders, conducted by Spencer, bishop of Norwich, when it was seen that their use was “not to make peace, but dissensions and wars.” The whole system of indulgences and pardons is denounced as “a subtle merchandise of Antichrist’s clerics, to magnify their counterfeit power, and to get worldly goods, and to cause men not to dread sin.”¹ “It is marvellous that any sinful fool dare grant anything on the merit of saints, for all that any saint ever did may not bring a soul to heaven without the grace and might of Christ’s passion.” In that passion, it is maintained, “all merits that are necessary” will be found, and the judgment of God hereafter will not be found to have been influenced by the caprice or the biddings of man. Wycliffe concludes this instructive chapter by praying that God would of his endless mercy “destroy the pride, covetousness, hypocrisy, and heresy of this feigned pardoning, and make men busy to keep His commandments, and to set their trust fully in Jesus Christ.”

From prelates at home, Wycliffe proceeds to touch on the pretensions of the great prelate abroad. He does this in the following terms:

“Also, prelates make many new points of belief, and say it is not enough to believe in Jesus Christ, and to be christened — as Christ says in the Gospel of Mark² — unless a man also believes that the bishop of Rome is the head of holy church. Certainly no apostle of Jesus Christ ever constrained any man to believe this concerning himself. Yet they were certain of their salvation in heaven. How then should any sinful wretch who does *not* know whether he will be damned or saved, constrain men to believe that he is the head of holy church? Certainly in such a case, they must sometimes constrain men to believe that a devil of hell is the head of holy church, when the bishop of Rome will be a man damned for his sins.”

20 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

In this bold manner, the genius of our Reformer separated the institutional and the moral, the political and the spiritual, in the religion of Christ — inculcating that no reverence should be evinced towards a mere office, if it is not allied with the spirit proper to it. The irreligious man who assumes a religious office, only becomes guiltier and more despicable in doing so. It is not difficult to see that this one principle included the germ of all subsequent revolution in religious usage and opinion. The Reformer heavily complains of the arrogance which required that the people should not presume to judge in respect to the life or doctrine of the clergy — while Paul from the third heavens, and Jesus Christ, both God and man, challenged such scrutiny from

¹ See pages 2, 3.

² **Mar 16:16** “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”

friends and foes. But the intention of this doctrine is said to be that men “may not reprove such persons for any sin whatsoever which they may do;” and that good men may not presume to preach the Gospel except as bad men give them permission. According to the right of private judgment — as held in fact though not in terms by Wycliffe — this was to place the authority of Satan before the authority of Christ.

Nor was it enough that this description of clergymen should claim exemption from all popular censure. They affected the same independence from the highest authorities, and this was in respect to civil matters no less than religious.

“Prelates most destroy obedience to the law of God, for they say that they are not to be subject to secular lords, to pay them taxes or to help the commoners; and they are not to be amended by their subjects (people) of their open sins, but only by the pope who is their sovereign; and he is to be amended by no man on earth, because he is the greatest of all.”

But the men who avow this doctrine are reminded that Christ paid tribute to a heathen emperor, and to his religion or church, when it was demanded of him, though “he had no secular lordship, nor plenty of tithes; and therefore much more should these rich priests” be made to comply with such demands.

In the twenty-second chapter, the Reformer resumes his strictures ¹ on the pretensions of the sovereign pontiff. He observes that it is said openly,

“There is nothing lawful among Christian men without leave of the bishop of Rome, though he is Antichrist, and full of simony and heresy. For of all priests, he commonly is the most contrary to Christ both in life and teaching; and he maintains more sin by privileges, excommunications, and long pleas; and he is most proud against Christ’s meekness, and most covetous of worldly goods and lordships.”

He is described as the head and representative of all the corruptions by which the ecclesiastical system was disfigured; and to subject the church to such a sovereignty, it is added, must assuredly be to subject her to the power of Antichrist.

ON PRELATES 21

In the two subsequent chapters, Wycliffe rebukes those martial prelates ² whose passions tended to destroy the men, body and soul, whom they should have saved; and he renews his lamentations that simony should be allowed to so greatly deprave both priest and people, and to transfer the wealth of the country to the coffers of its enemies.

In the twenty-sixth chapter he writes, “Prelates say that Holy Writ is not sufficient to rule holy church, and that the teachers of it are not profitable to the people.” But it is replied to this, that “it is the pride of Lucifer, and even greater pride than his, to say that the teachers of man’s traditions, comprised of sinful fools, are more profitable and necessary to Christian people than the preachers of the Gospel.” If Christ has not made his law complete, it is argued that this must be either because he could not or would not. But would it not “put a foul heresy on Christ” to say either of these things? This nevertheless is done — done “secretly to maintain their own covetousness and pride.”

¹ *Strictures*: Severe criticisms.

² A *martial prelate* is a warrior priest who leads an army into battle to kill enemy combatants. – WHG

In the two following chapters, it is lamented that, notwithstanding the clearness of such arguments, men are found “leaving Holy Writ and reason, for feigned dreams and miracles — and for sinful man’s traditions full of error.” Meanwhile, prelates convert secular lords into destroyers of men’s souls by converting them into the persecutors of men who preach the Gospel. In the thirtieth chapter Wycliffe remarks,

“Worldly prelates say that, since the people should worship Gregory, and Peter, and Paul and other true apostles of Christ, and as they themselves come into the place of apostles, the people should worship them in the same manner. But they take no account of how those apostles came to their state by God’s choosing and ordaining, and by holy life, and the true service which they did to Christian people, in the true teaching of the holy Gospel, both in word and deed.”

Referring to the reasonable claims of the clergy on their people, the Reformer observes, “It is good that Christian priests should have worldly goods for their necessary livelihood, and clothing (as Paul teaches), and reason.” But the inordinate wealth of the clergy is said to have so filled them with pride as to have rendered them the victims of lust, and to have raised a Bible made up of man’s traditions, in place of the true Bible.

In the remaining portion of this work, Wycliffe insists that it is just and scriptural to thus rebuke a vicious clergy. “Christ and his apostles reprov’d Pharisees, and Herod, and heretics, in their absence and before the people, as the Gospels and Epistles witness. And this was for our example, to be followed with charity and discretion.” If it were not so, a depraved priesthood might be left to “wax rotten in their lusts, rob the people, and destroy Christendom.” However agreeable such exemption may be to such men, it does not comport with the sense of public duty in some other men, that they should be left in the enjoyment of it.

22 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

Masses, pardons, and pilgrimages, are all described as “novelties,” the effect of which is,

“to make people believe that if a priest says a certain mass for a soul, it will shortly be out of purgatory, though God in his righteousness ordains that soul to abide there forty year or more, and though the priest himself is accursed for simony and pride. For as they falsely pretend, the mass may not be impaired by the priest’s sin. Prelates blaspheme against God, the Father of heaven, by taking to themselves the power which belongs only and especially to God — that is, the power of absolving sins, and the full remission of them. For they take on themselves principally to absolve, and to make the people believe they are absolved, when they have only absolved as vicars or messengers, to witness for the people, that God absolves on contrition, or else neither angel, nor man, nor God himself absolves — unless the sinner is contrite; that is, unless he fully sorrows for his sin.”

The treatise concludes thus —

“In these forty-three errors and heresies, men may see how evil prelates destroy Christendom — for this speech is from them and no other — and how they are the cause of wars, and of evil life in the people, and of their damnation. God of his might and mercy amend these errors and others, if it be His will!”

5. *Speculum de Antichristo*. This is the next piece in the collection under review. Its title in English is, *How Antichrist and his clerics frighten true priests* ¹ *from preaching Christ’s Gospel*,

¹ Originally, “feren treue priests.” (Middle English)

by four deceits. It begins with the words, “First they say that preaching the Gospel makes dissensions and enmity.”¹

In answer to this first “deceit,” it is said, that “Christ did not come to make peace for sinful men, by leaving them to live in their fleshly lusts, and worldly joy, at their liking.” Christ means his people to be in peace only as they are holy.

The second “deceit” is “that many men will be damned notwithstanding hearing the Gospel, and damned even more because they hear God’s word, and do nothing afterwards.” The reasoning cited on this point is of true Antinomian complexion, neutralising the precept by speculations about necessity. But it is contended that men should continue to pray and preach, even to enemies, assured that as they do so, “fewer will be lost, and more will be saved.”

FOUR DECEITS OF ANTICHRIST AND HIS CLERICS 23

Even concerning the reprobate, it is observed that,

“Sometimes they have compunction,² and leave their sins for a long while; and to them, that is better than all this world. God gives to each man free will to choose good or evil; and God is ready to give them grace if they will receive it. In this life they do many good deeds naturally.³ And because of them, they will have much reward in this world, and at last, less pain in hell. It is a great vengeance from God when he withdraws preaching from a community, not accounting them worthy to hear his word. And wherever there is a gathering of people, there is commonly some good done; and it is principally for those who will receive the word, that men preach it.”

But if none will hear, it is admitted that from such a people, following the apostolic example, the preacher should turn away. The reader will not fail to mark the moral discrimination which is blended with this treatment of a subtle theological question. It has been too much the practice of divines to estimate the moral and immoral among the unregenerate, by the same rule.

The third “deceit” is that,

“good men shall be saved even though there is no preaching, for God says they may not perish — while some wicked men shall never come to bliss for any preaching on earth. Here, true men say that as God has ordained good men to come to bliss, so he has ordained them to come to bliss *by preaching*, and by *keeping his word*. So as they must come to bliss, they must hear and keep God’s commandments; and preaching serves this end with them. Some wicked men will now be convinced by God’s grace and hearing of his word; and who knows the measure of God’s mercy, or to whom the hearing of God’s word shall thus be profitable? Each man should hope to come to heaven, and should force himself to hear and to fulfill the word of God. For since each man has a free will, and chooses good or evil, no man shall be saved except the one that readily hears and steadily keeps the commandments of God; and no man shall be damned except the one that willfully and endlessly breaks God’s commands.”

¹ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab iii. No. 12. Our only evidence in respect to the date of this piece, is from its general contents. It greatly magnifies the office of preaching, charges the friars with doing their utmost to deceive the people, and to “stop poor priests” from endeavoring to bring them out of their ignorance and irreligion; and it is altogether marked by the opinions, feeling, and language observable in such of the Reformer’s works as are known to be the production of his later years. We know of no work strictly of this complexion, that can be shown to have been written by Wycliffe in the early period of his history; but everything known to be from his pen during the last five or seven years of his life carries this impress.

² *Compunction*: A feeling of deep regret (usually for some misdeed).

³ Originally, “of nature” — they discharge many natural duties without being religious.

It is very difficult to ascertain the real opinions of the Reformer on topics of this nature as set forth in the Latin of his more scholastic pieces. The preceding observations furnish one of the most explicit expositions of his views that I have met with.

The fourth “deceit” is when it is said that, “men should cease from preaching, and give themselves to holy prayers and contemplations, because that helps Christian men more, and is better.” But in answer, Wycliffe says,

“True men say boldly that true preaching is better than prayer by the mouth or though it comes from the heart and from pure devotion, and that preaching edifies the people more. Therefore Christ especially commanded his apostles and disciples to preach the Gospel, and not to shut themselves up in cloisters or churches to pray, as some men do. Hence Isaiah cried, ‘Woe is me that I was still;’ and Paul says, ‘Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel.’ Devout prayer in men of good life is good in certain times; but it is against charity for priests ever more to pray, and at no time to preach — since Christ charges priests to preach the Gospel, more than to say mass and matins.”

24 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

These enlightened views concerning the paramount importance of preaching, exhibit the mind of Wycliffe some two centuries in advance of his age; but he cites Gregory and Jerome in support of these opinions, and as censuring customs which deprived society of the benefit of good examples, and led to much sin in the way of omission.

6. *Of Clerks Possessioners.*¹ We next come to this treatise. Its object is to expose the irreligion which, in the view of the Reformer, had resulted from the inordinate wealth and the secular jurisdiction of the clergy. It consists of forty chapters.²

In the commencement, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Bernard, are introduced as censuring the secular lordship of the clergy, declaring it to be opposed to the design and precepts of the Gospel. Clerics who live “a lustful and worldly life,” are said to declare that “the life and example of Christ are not a sufficient rule,” and in so doing, proclaim them as “strong heretics.” Such men are “traitors to God, to lords, and to the common people.” They show themselves traitors to God by deserting his law; they are traitors to lords, by cursing them unless they are prepared to maintain what is called holy church;³ and they are traitors to the people, by deceiving them, “teaching them openly, that they shall have God’s blessing, and bliss in heaven, if they faithfully pay their tithes and offerings to them.” These persons are described as preferring “the

¹ A *possessioner* means one of the beneficed clergy — the Black Monks of the Benedictine order for example. “Benedict had conceived of a subsistence community... but his own *cenobium* [monastery] was not wholly detached from the wider economy, collaborating with neighboring farmers in times of dearth (*Dialogues*, 2.19). The earliest Benedictine foundations required significant resources — territory, raw materials, infrastructure, personnel — to secure them in unstable regions; a growing recognition of the strategic and spiritual rewards of such foundations encouraged further endowment; ...by the twelfth century, the largest of them contributed as much to the regional economy, and in a number of cases on a national scale, as any city entrepôt [duty-free port].” James G. Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2011) p. 139.

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. This treatise speaks of priests as “living poorly and justly, and going about teaching freely God’s law,” (chap. xvi.) and it abounds in complaint that men are being persecuted for doing so. Its condemnation of all kinds of endowment, excepting the form of tithes and offerings, and its doctrine even concerning such revenues in the case of ecclesiastics who “trespass by long custom,” leave no room to doubt as to the late date of this remarkable production.

³ That is, unless they support the church, even when its teachings and actions are contrary to Scripture. Thus they demand loyalty to men rather than God. — WHG

smiles of sinful man, to the smiles of Christ, God, and man;” as coming in “under colour of saints,” and as living a life contrary to that of their professed patrons. And this fact is said to account for the attempts made by pretended devotees, to falsify the lives of their founders.

Some men of this class are said to attempt a justification for assuming their secular lordship by appealing to the example of Christ. [Wycliffe responds,] “But Christ says in the Gospel of St. John, that his kingdom is not of this world. And by worldly lordship, he had nowhere once to rest his head. Therefore it is heresy to put this secular lordship on Christ.” Worldly jurisdiction, he argues, must bring with it worldly and distracting duties, which Christ and his disciples did not know — those duties which must unfit men “for studying and teaching Holy Writ,” and unfriendly to “devotion, and prayer, and meditation, and heavenly sweetness.”

OF CLERKS POSSESSIONERS 25

Such occupations, indeed, cannot fail to ensnare men to “simony, covetousness, gluttony, and idolatry” — disposing persons professing deadness to the world, to a most worldly life; converting men who should be preachers of the Gospel, into preachers of fables; and teaching them to fight *against* the truth, and not *for* the truth.

It will be seen from these remarks, that under the title of “Clerks Possessioners,” Wycliffe included not only the beneficed and higher clergy, but also the opulent religious orders. But while monks and canons profess to take their model from the community of goods in the church at Jerusalem, they are described as destitute of the well-regulated temperance, and the Christian piety, in which that usage originated. Much complaint is made that the private rules of religious sects are made to be of more binding authority than the most manifest precepts of Christ; and that the delinquents who thus place the authority of man before the authority of God, should so commonly betray the nature of the training they receive in their secular offices by becoming persecutors “of good men following the example of Holy Writ, and living poorly and justly, and going about teaching freely God’s law.” Some fraternities among the religious orders are said to possess “many books,” and some copies of Holy Writ, which have come to them by gift or testament; “but they hide them from secular clerics,¹ and allow their noble books to rot in their libraries; and will neither profit themselves by studying them, nor leave them to other clerics that would; so that seculars and clerics may scarcely have a book of value.”

The men who thus subordinate learning, as well as religion, to their love of pomp and indulgence, are reminded that they cannot fail to know from their own laws, as well as from Holy Scripture, that whatever they possess as more than necessary for a decent “livelihood,” is not their own, but “poor men’s goods;” and they are admonished, accordingly, to cease their visitings of the great, and to become visitors of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow. The claim of the clergy to be exempt from the loss of their goods by any judgment from the civil power, even “if they should be trespassers by long custom,” is treated as arrogant and unjust. Otherwise “God’s law is false, which gives power to kings and secular lords to punish generally, no man excepted.”²

In the remaining chapters of this treatise, the Reformer exposes the folly of supposing that the existing race of clergymen would be found equal to the duties of “two lordships,” the secular and

¹ By secular clerks [i.e., [clerics](#)], the regular clergy are meant, as distinguished from the religious orders.

² [Originally](#), “out-taking no man.”

the spiritual, while Christ and his apostles were so careful to avoid such a weight and mixture of obligation.

26 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

He also laments the many instances in which the laws of God are “put aback,” and the laws of men advanced in their place; and all this so that priests may be sustained in pleading exemption from the authority of the civil power, and from the usual burdens of the state, and persecuting all good men who, by living a holy life and preaching truly the Gospel, reprove them for their sins. He concludes the piece, as was his custom, by a prayer. “God Almighty, stir up priests, lords, and commoners, to know the hypocrisy and treason of Antichrist’s worldly clerics, and to know and maintain the rightful ordinance of Christ, and the profit and freedom of the Gospel. Amen.”

7. De XXXIII. Erroribus Curatorum.¹ Its English title is, *How the Office of Curates is ordained by God*; and it begins thus — “For the office of curates is ordained of God, and few do it well, and many do it full evil.”² In the Cambridge Collection, this piece follows, “On Clerks Possessioners.” The term *curate* in this tract is used to denote the regular *parochial* clergy. This piece, accordingly, relates to the faults of the *inferior* clergy, just as the three preceding pieces related to the faults of their *superiors*.³ As may be expected, the same errors come again under review, and much of the same kind of reasoning is employed to expose and correct them. In consequence, it will be sufficient to cite a few passages. The following extract includes the whole of the first chapter: —

“For the office of curates is ordained by God, and few do it well, and many do it full evil. Therefore, we tell some of their faults, to amend them with God’s help.

“First, they are busier about worldly goods, than about virtues and keeping men’s souls. For the one who can best get the riches of this world together, and hold a great household and worldly array, is held to be a worthy man of holy church, even though he does not know the least point of the Gospel. And such a one is in full favor of the bishop and his officers. But the curate who gives himself to study Holy Writ, and teach his parishioners to save their souls, and who lives in meekness, penance,⁴ and busy labor about spiritual things, and seeks nothing of worldly worship and riches, is held to be a fool, and a disturber of holy church. He is despised and persecuted by high priests, and prelates and their officers, and he is hated by other curates in the country.

THE OFFICE OF CURATES ORDAINED OF GOD 27

And this makes many curates negligent in their spiritual cures, and to give themselves to occupation and business about worldly goods. But these negligent curates think full little how dearly Christ bought man’s soul with his precious blood and death, and how hard a reckoning he will make for those souls at doomsday. Certainly, it seems that they are outside the faith of Christian men. For they make themselves unready to come and answer how they came into their benefices; and how they lived, and

¹ [Faults of the Curates.](#)

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 103-116. The reference in the twenty-sixth chapter of this work to the objections made against the reading of the Scriptures by the laity in the mother tongue, fixes the date of the tract as written by the Reformer not more than two or three years before his death. The passage will be found in the text. The greater part of this work has been printed in the work entitled, *The British Reformers*, i. 123-141, published by the Religious Tract Society.

³ [Parochial clergy refers to the priests of a local church. Other clergy were either Major or Minor, here referred to as either Superior or Inferior. See the note on p. 227.](#)

⁴ The word “penance” is used by Wycliffe in the sense of contrition, penitence, or humility.

taught, and spent poor men's goods. For if they had this faith ready in their mind, they would begin a better life, and continue in it."

The following passage is from the twenty-sixth chapter: —

"They (the worldly clergy) are Antichrists, forbidding Christian men to know their belief, and to speak of Holy Writ. For they say openly that secular men should not intermeddle themselves with the Gospel to read it in the mother tongue, but attend to a holy father's preaching, and do the same in all things. But this is expressly against God's teaching. For God commands generally to each layman, that he should have God's commandments before him, and teach them to his children. And the wise man bids every Christian man, that all his telling be in the commandments of God, and that he have them evermore in his mind. And St. Peter bids us as Christians, to be ready to give a reason for our faith and hope to each man that asks for it. And God commands his priests to preach the Gospel to each man. And the reason is because all men should know it and rule their life according to it. Lord! Why should worldly priests forbid secular men to speak of the Gospel, and of God's commandments, since God gives them great natural wit,¹ and a great desire to know God, and love him? For the more goodness they know of God, the more they will love him — while worldly priests, from their own ignorance, sloth, idleness, and pride, stop Christian men from knowing God, and shut up from them the gifts which God has given to them. Since the beginning of the world, none have heard a higher craft of Antichrist, by which to destroy Christian men's belief and charity, than this blasphemous heresy: that laymen should not intermeddle with the Gospel."²

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The next passage is from the thirtieth chapter: —

"They do not take tithes and offerings according to the form of the Old Testament, distributing them in common to all priests and ministers of the church; nor according to the form of the Gospel, taking a simple livelihood, given from the free devotion of the people, without constraining, as Christ and his apostles did. But they take it by the new law of sinful men: one priest claims for himself all the tithes of a great country by a worldly plea, and by new censures; while he neither lives as a good priest, nor teaches as a curate, nor gives the residue to poor men, but wastes it in pomp, and gluttony, and other sins, and hinders true priests from doing the office laid on them by God Almighty. Surely it seems that these priests are not following God's law, but some ordinance of sinful men; and they would be masters of God, and lords over Christian people, since they never uphold the law of God. And as to tithes, they take them by violence and by strong curses, against men's good will; and they make the people lose patience and charity by their pleading, and do not perform their spiritual office well."³

¹ Strong natural discernment.

² "The fourth error is, that they think more of statutes of sinful men, than of the most reasonable law of Almighty God. For they fear the pope's law, and statutes made by bishops and other officers, more than the noble law of the Gospel. Therefore they have many great and costly books about man's law, and study them much; but few curates have the Bible and good expositions on the Gospel: they study them but little, and do them less. But would to God that every parish church in this land had a good Bible, and good expositions on the Gospel, and that the priests studied them well, and taught truly the Gospel and God's commandments to the people! Then good life would prevail, and rest, and peace, and charity; sin and falseness would be put away — God bring this end to his people!" — *British Reformers*, i. 125.

³ This subject has been touched upon in a preceding section of the treatise. "The ninth error is that they waste poor men's goods on rich furs and costly clothes, and worldly array, and feasts of rich men, and in gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery. For they sometimes pass great men in their gay furs, and precious clothes, fat horses, with gay saddles and bridles. St. Bernard cries, Whatever curates hold of the altar more than simple livelihood and clothing, is not theirs, but other men's." — *Ibid.* i. 127.

8. Of the Order of Priesthood.¹ It will be seen from these extracts, that the work on the Office of Curates breathes a spirit of earnest piety, and that it gives prominence to the soundest Protestant principle. This piece, which is next in succession, is of the same complexion, touching vigorously on the same evils, and pointing to the same remedy. The matter of this treatise is divided into twenty-nine sections, or chapters, but as in the preceding work, with more of the appearance of order than the reality of it. It concludes with the following devout appeal: —

“But good priests who live well — in pureness of thought and speech and deed, and in good example to the people, and who teach God’s law up to their knowledge, and who night and day labor fast to learn it better, and to teach it openly and constantly — are truly prophets of God, and holy angels of God. They are spiritual lights of the world, as God says by his prophets, and Jesus Christ in the Gospel, and saints declare it well by authority and reason. You priests: think on this noble and worthy office, and do it readily according to your knowledge and power.

OF GOOD-PREACHING PRIESTS. 29

Think also, you lords and mighty men who support priests, how dreadful it is to maintain worldly priests in their lusts, who neither know God, nor will learn [of Him], nor live holily in this noble order. For you may easily amend them without cost or labor, merely by telling them that you will not support them except as they do their duty, live well, and preach the Gospel. And certainly they would then do so. And think, you great men, if this were not a thousand-fold better than to conquer all the world? Hereby there should be no great cost to you nor labor, but honor to God, and endless good to your own selves, to priests, and to all Christendom. May God, for his endless mercy and charity, bring this holy end! Amen.”

9. Of Good-Preaching Priests. This begins in the following terms:

“The *first* general point of poor priests who preach in England, is that the law of God be well-known, taught, maintained, and magnified. The *second* is that great open sin, that reigns in diverse states, be destroyed, and also the heresy and hypocrisy of Antichrist and his followers. The *third* is that true peace and prosperity, and burning charity, be increased in Christendom, and especially in the realm of England, to bring men readily to the bliss of heaven.”²

Then follows a series of articles which expose and reprove existing abuses; and various means are dwelt upon which, if duly applied, might (with the Divine blessing) go far towards restoring to the Christian religion its primitive simplicity, purity, and devout feeling. Thus it is urged that “the accursed heresy of simony,” so inwrought with all the usages of the clergy, should be destroyed — destroyed alike “in benefices, orders, sacraments, and pardons;” and that “the ravening and extortion of prelates and their officers (which they do under colour of jurisdiction and alms) in maintaining sin for an annual rent and the like, be wisely and truly stopped; and that they are well chastised for thus robbing the king’s liege men.” It is also demanded “that clerics should be meek and obedient to worldly lords, as Christ and his apostles were; and that they not

¹ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 116-125. The doctrine of this work, concerning the duty of lords in regard to the wealth of the delinquent or indolent among the clergy, and the manner in which it sets forth preaching as compared with other priestly services, seem to determine its date as contemporaneous with the works immediately preceding.

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. The first sentence of this work shows that it was written in behalf of a class of men who, as we have observed before, do not become known to us until near the close of the life of the Reformer. Its doctrine throughout is that of Wycliffe when his views were most matured. If this and similar pieces are compared with the “Pore Caitiff,” or the “Last Age of the Church,” the reader will be sensible of the force of this kind of evidence.

be nourished in great sin by being exempted by the clerics of Antichrist, lest Christian kingdoms be destroyed because accursed sin is allowed and maintained.”

The next principle of the needed reformation laid down is

— “that Christian men fear more the rightful curse of God for breaking his commandments, than the wrongful curse of sinful men who curse men for truly preaching the Gospel, and for fulfilling works of mercy; for God blesses where they curse.”

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It is argued further

— “that Christian men of the realm should not, by simony, be robbed of the first fruits that go to the bishop of Rome; nor by the bishops at home for hallowing churches, altars, and such things;

— that Christian men should give more heed to Christ’s Gospel and his life than to any bulls from the sinful bishops of this world, or else they forsake Christ and take Antichrist and Satan for their chief governor;

— that no liege man of the king should be imprisoned for being wrongfully cursed by the prelates, while he is ready to justify himself by Holy Writ, and while he truly does his office; and

— that whoever does the most simony, and maintains the most sin, should be judged, known, and treated in the greatest degree as a heretic, as the adversary of Jesus Christ, and as Antichrist.”

Wycliffe then adds,

“If any man can prove by Holy Writ or reason that these points are false, poor priests will meekly amend them, and heartily ask all good men to help them in the true cause, for the honor of God, the health of their souls, and the salvation of Christian nations.”

But the Reformer has not concluded his intended series of innovations; he moves further:

— “That the alms of lords, given to prelates and the religious on certain conditions — namely, to feed certain poor men, and to other hospitalities, and to maintain a certain number of good priests — be wisely amended by the king and the lords, whenever those goods are turned into means of pomp, gluttony, lechery, and maintaining sin;

— That the poor commoners not be charged with taxes, while clerics, and mainly the religious, have a superfluity of gold and silver, and such vessels and other jewels, since all these goods are poor men’s goods, and clerics are not lords of them, but merely procurators to spend them faithfully, according to poor men’s need, as God’s law and man’s law witness;

— That the wasted treasure hanging on stocks and stones be wisely spent in defence of the kingdom, and relieving the poor commoners, so the people of our land are not brought to theft or lechery under the colour of pilgrimage, nor alms be drawn from poor needy men, bought with Christ’s precious blood;

— That the clergy of our land be restrained from pride, glorious array, and worldly occupation, and especially that our prelates and curates be charged by the king and lords to teach their subjects well by the example of a good life, and open and true preaching of the Gospel, as busily and readily as they ask for their tithes:

— That none of the clergy be hindered from keeping truly and freely the Gospel of Christ in good living and true teaching on account of any feigned privilege or tradition founded by sinful wretches;

SENTENCING OF THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 31

— That no priest or religious man in our land be imprisoned without an open trial, and true cause fully known to our king, or to his true council; or else worldly priests and the feigned religious may stop true men from preaching Holy Writ and magnifying the king's regalia, and may condemn the king's liege men without a defence;

— That fairs not be allowed on holidays, and never on Sundays;

— That adultery and open impurity not be allowed in great places in our realm, nor maintained for an annual rent, as that is utterly against God's bidding;

— That worldly clerics, and the feigned religious, not usurp the king's regalia, nor steal from him his holy power granted to him by God, for any cursing or hypocrisy, since they are bound to be true to the king, and to promote his worship and the profit of his land; and,

— That the king and lords govern themselves in their state as God ordained it: in great wisdom, might of men, and sufficient riches, to withstand wrong and misdoers; and in their lordships, to help poor men, the fatherless and motherless, and widows and aliens, and to honor and reward true men, and clerics living in meekness, willing poverty, and busy spiritual labor for the help of man's soul, as Christ and his apostles did.”

10. *The Great Sentence of the Curse Expounded.* This next piece is much more extended than the one preceding it; and throughout, it is in the same degree pregnant with the seeds of reformation. It begins with the words — “First, all heretics standing against the faith of Holy Writ are cursed solemnly four times a year, and also those who maintain or consent to heresy or to heretics in their errors.”¹

The matter of this treatise is distributed into seventy-nine chapters, and extends to nearly a hundred quarto pages. The reference in the sixteenth chapter to the war then going on in Flanders “for the love of two false priests, who are open Antichrists,” and some other allusions to contemporary events, show that this piece was written by the Reformer not more than two or three years before his death.² The points in this treatise, which engage the attention of the writer, are those which came before the people from quarter to quarter as this periodical anathema was pronounced in their hearing.³

The Reformer begins by defining heresy, on the authority of Augustine and other clerics, as “error maintained against Holy Writ.” But our worldly prelates, he remarks, maintain error against Holy Writ “in the matter of preaching the Gospel of Christ; and therefore they are themselves cursed heretics. For when Paul asks how men shall preach unless they are sent,⁴ they understand it to mean only those men sent by the pope, and other worldly prelates.”

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On this plea, it is observed, they not only silence many good men — causing the servants of God to depend for their liberty to preach on having approval from the children of the fiend — but even an angel from heaven would not dare to deliver the message of the Almighty to save men's souls, because some worldly priest has presumed to contravene the commandment of God. But

¹ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge.

² The further evidence in respect to date is in chapters iii. xv. xvi. xix. xxvi.

³ Four times a year, the general sentence of excommunication, or *anathema* (by bell, book, and candle), was pronounced against all thieves, murderers, and enemies of the Church — a *malediction*.

⁴ Rom 10.15.

whatever may be the doctrine or practice of the rulers of the church in this respect, “being sent by those worldly prelates is not enough, without being sent by God, as Paul says.” Nevertheless, “poor priests are slandered as heretics, accursed, and imprisoned, without being given a defence, for standing up for Christ’s life and teaching, and the maintenance of the king’s regalia.”

According to the “Great Sentence,” all persons were accursed who “spoil or take away any right from holy church, or defraud holy church of any endowment.” On this point, he remarks that

“Christian men, taught in God’s law, call holy church the congregation of just men for whom Jesus Christ shed his blood; and *not* the stones, timber, and earthly rubbish which Antichrist’s clerics magnify more than God’s righteousness and the souls of Christian men. True teaching is most due to holy church, and it is most charged by God, and most profitable to Christian souls. Therefore, insomuch as God’s word and the bliss of heaven in the souls of men are better than earthly goods, those worldly priests who withdraw from the great debt of holy teaching, are that much worse than thieves, and more accursedly sacrilegious than the ordinary thief who breaks into churches and steals chalices, and vestments, and however much gold.”

The fault and the just sentence of such men are illustrated by an allusion to feudal relationships. They hold their office to certain ends, such as Christ and the apostles had set before them. And inasmuch as they not only fail to perform the duties of that office, but prevent others who are able and willing to perform them from doing so, they are pronounced traitors to the lord, and their place is said to be forfeit.

The third chapter commences with the often-repeated complaint that the clergy so commonly applies the revenues of the church to the purposes of luxury, and neglects the poor. But the heaviest censure in this connection is directed against the pontiff.

“Certainly some men understand that the cruel manslayer of Rome is not Peter’s successor, but Christ’s enemy, and the emperor’s master, and poison under the colour of holiness, and that he makes most unable curates.”

Again —

“This evil manslayer, poisoner, and burner of Christ’s servants, is made by evil clerics to be the ground and root of all the misgovernance of the church. And yet they make blind men believe that he is head of holy church, and the most holy father, who may not sin!”

SENTENCE OF THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 33

Grosstete ¹ is mentioned as having been of a different judgment concerning the papacy in his day, and as having expressed that judgment to the pontiff himself, with an integrity and fearlessness ever to be admired. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters treat the simony connected with admission to orders, obtaining benefices, and administering the sacraments. The ecclesiastical system is said to be so constructed in all respects as to favor enriching the priesthood, and plundering the people. But while the exercise of every priestly function carried its tax along with it, some of its acts imposed a heavier burden than others.

“If men foolishly make a vow to go to Rome, or Jerusalem, or Canterbury, or on any other pilgrimage, we deem that of greater weight than the vow made at our christening to keep God’s commandments, to forsake the fiend and all his works. But though men break the highest commandments of God, the lowliest parish priest will soon absolve him. Yet any vows made from our own head, though many

¹ The celebrated Bishop of Lincoln.

times against God's will, no man shall absolve but some great worldly bishop, or the most worldly priest of Rome — the master of the emperor, the fellow of God, and the deity on earth!"

On the sale of masses, Wycliffe writes [sarcastically] —

"Ah Lord! how much our king and our realm is helped by the masses and the prayers of simonists and heretics, full of pride and envy, who so hate poor priests for teaching Christ's life and the Gospel."

But the following passage shows that until a year or two before his death, Wycliffe believed in the existence of an intermediate state, and that the devout intercessions of the living might be in some sense beneficial to the dead who had not passed beyond that state.

"Saying mass, with the cleanness of a holy life, and burning devotion, pleases God Almighty, and is profitable to Christian souls in purgatory, and to men living on earth, that they may withstand temptations to sins."

The following passage shows that he also still thought highly of the functions of the priest as exercised in consecrating the elements of the eucharist.

"Think, therefore, you pure priests, how much you are beholden to God who gave you power to consecrate his own precious body and blood of bread and wine, a power which he never granted to his own mother or to the angels. Therefore with all your desire, and reverence, and devotion, do your office in the sacrament!"

The eighth chapter commences with passages from St. Gregory, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and others, concerning the duties of the pastoral office. Suitable comment is made on these passages, and it is especially remarked that the men who have filled this office with the greatest success, have generally been men on whom it has been [compelled by God].

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It is said that no man should seek it, inasmuch as that would be to forget the admonition of Scripture — "No man takes this honor upon himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." When bishoprics were poor, and to become a bishop was to be exposed to martyrdom, it might have been well to aspire to such distinction. But in these later times, when the office is connected with great temptation to indulge in every sort of worldliness, a devout man may with good reason avoid, rather than seek, such an elevation.

Such persons are said to calumniate ¹ Christ and his disciples, as having failed to present a true pattern of life to their followers, so long as their own life presents an example so widely different from that which has thus been placed before them.

"It is a great sin to witness falsely against a poor man; it is a greater sin to so witness against a holy man; but most of all to do so with the name of Christ, the Head of all saints and the Lord of all lords. Also it is a great sin to lie and to defraud men of their temporal goods; much more is it a sin to deprive them of spiritual goods, of virtues, and good life, and most of all to deprive them of faith, and of the mirror of Christ's life, which is the ground of all well-being hereafter."

The passage following expresses Wycliffe's opinion respecting the middle-age usage well known by the name of "the rights of sanctuary." This consisted in extending the privilege of the Hebrew cities of refuge to certain ecclesiastical edifices; and that is not merely in respect to manslaughter, but to offences of all descriptions. The communities of such places are said to,

¹ *Calumniate*: charge falsely or with malicious intent; attack the good name and reputation of someone.

“claim franchise and privilege, that wicked men, open thieves, and man-slayers, and those who have borrowed their neighbors’ goods, and are in power to pay and make restitution, shall dwell there in sanctuary. And no man may impeach them by process of law, nor by an oath sworn on God’s body; and they maintain stiffly that the king must confirm this privilege, and such nests of thieves and robbery in his kingdom!”

In uncivilized states of society, some usage of this nature has generally obtained; but in the age of the Reformer, its abuses had become greater than its uses. Wycliffe regarded all such obtrusions of the authority of the priest on the province of the civil magistrate with suspicion. He remarks in this treatise, that a man has a better prospect of justice if cited before “the king or the emperor,” than if obliged to appear before any tribunal called a “Christian court.”

Hence few things excited more indignation in the Reformer than that the clergy — who were generally so disposed to invade the sphere of the magistrate — should set up a claim of exemption from his authority even in civil matters.

“Worldly clerics, and the feigned religious,” he writes, “break and much destroy the king’s peace and his kingdom. For the prelates of this world, and priests, more or less firmly say and write in their law, that the king has no jurisdiction or power over their persons, nor over the goods of holy church.

SENTENCE OF THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 35

And yet Christ and his apostles were most obedient to kings and lords, and taught all men to be subject to them, and to serve them truly and skilfully in bodily works, and to fear them and worship them before all other men. The wise king Solomon put down a high priest who was false to him and to his kingdom, and exiled him, and ordained a good priest in his place, as the third book of Kings tells us.¹

“And Jesus Christ paid tribute to the emperor, and commanded men to pay him tribute. And St. Peter commands Christian men to be subject to every ordinance of men — whether to the king as higher than others, or to dukes as sent by him — to the vengeance of evil-doers, and the praise of good men. Also St. Paul commands by the authority of God, that every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but from God. Princes are not to be feared by workers of good, but of evil. Would you *not* fear the power? Then do good and you shall have praising from them. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But surely, if you have done evil, *fear*, for he does not bear the sword in vain.²

“Our Savior Jesus Christ meekly suffered a painful death under Pilate, not excusing himself from Pilate’s jurisdiction by his own priesthood.³ And St. Paul professed himself ready to suffer death by sentence of the emperor’s justice, if he were worthy of death, as Deeds of the Apostles⁴ shows. And Paul appealed to the heathen emperor, to be under his jurisdiction and to save his life from the priests of the Jews. Lord! Who has made our worldly clergy exempt from the king’s jurisdiction and chastening? For since God gives kings this office over *all* misdoers, clerics (particularly high priests) should be most meek and obedient to the lords of this world, as were Christ and his apostles. They should be a mirror before all men, teaching them to give this meekness and obedience to the king and his righteous laws. How strong thieves and traitors they now are to lords and kings, in denying this obedience, and giving an example to all men in the land to become rebels against the king and lords. For in this they teach ignorant men, and the commoners of the land, in words and laws and open deeds, to be false and

¹ That is First Kings – at the time, 1st and 2nd Samuel were called 1st and 2nd Kings.

² 1Pet 2.13-14. Rom 13.1-4.

³ Originally, “by his clergy”: by any ecclesiastical pretext, or plea of priesthood.

⁴ That is, the Acts of the Apostles (the book of Acts).

rebellious against the king and other lords. And this seems [sanctioned] by their new law of decretals,¹ where the proud clerics have ordained this: that our clergy shall pay no subsidy, nor tax, nor upkeep of our king and our realm, without the leave and assent of the worldly priest of Rome.

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“And yet many times this proud worldly priest is an enemy of our land, and secretly maintains our enemies in war against us with our own gold. And thus they make an alien priest (and he the proudest of all priests) to be chief lord of the whole of those goods which clerics possess in the realm, and that is the greatest part of it! Where then are there greater heretics to God or holy church, and particularly to their liege lord in this kingdom — those who make an alien worldly priest an enemy to us, and the chief lord over the greater part of our country?

“And commonly the new laws which the clergy have made, are contrived with great subtlety to bring down the power of lords and kings, and to make themselves lords, and to have all in their power. Certainly it seems that these worldly prelates are more bent to destroy the power of kings and lords, which God ordained for the government of his church, than God is bent to destroy even the power of the fiend. For God sets the fiend a term during which he may work, and then no more. But He still allows His own power to last for the profit of Christian men, and the great punishment of misdoers. But if left alone, these worldly clerics would never cease until they had fully destroyed kings and lords, with their regalia and power.”²

The next chapter relates to the excommunication commonly pronounced against all perjured persons. And prelates, and the beneficed clergy generally, are admonished that they themselves are justly exposed to this sentence because of the many things in their conduct which are contrary to their oaths taken when entering upon their office. Another point against which this periodical anathema was directed, was the conduct of men who would in any way prevent the due execution of the “will of a dead man.”³ But our blessed Lord in his testament is said to,

“bequeath to his disciples and their successors, peace in themselves, and in the world persecution and tribulation for his law.”^{Joh 16.33} But worldly clerics shamefully break this worthy testament of Jesus Christ. For they seek the peace and prosperity of this world — peace with the fiend and with their flesh, and they will endure no labor for keeping or teaching God’s law. Rather, they persecute good men who would teach it, and so they make war upon Christ and his people, to obtain worldly muck,⁴ which Christ forbids to clerics. In the life of Christ, and in his Gospel (which is his testament), and in the life and teaching of his apostles, our clerics will find nothing but poverty, meekness, spiritual labor, and despising by worldly men (because such men are reproved for their sins). And they will find great reward in heaven for their good life, and true teaching, and cheerful suffering of death. Therefore, Jesus Christ was so poor in this life, that he had no house of his own, by worldly title, to rest his head in, as he himself says in the Gospel.^{Mat 8.20}

SENTENCE OF THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 37

And St. Peter was so poor that he had neither silver nor gold to give to a poor crooked man, as he witnesses in the book of the Apostles’ Deeds.^{Act 3.6} St. Paul was so poor in worldly goods, that he labored with his hands for his livelihood,^{1Cor 4.12} and suffered great persecution and watchfulness, and great thought for all churches in Christendom, as he himself says,^{Phi 3.8} and as it is said in many places of Holy Writ. And St. Bernard writes to the pope that in this worldly array — in plenty of gold, and

¹ Forged decrees, meant to sustain the more extravagant pretensions of the papacy.

² Chap. xi.

³ That is, his last will and testament; his bequeathal to his heirs.

⁴ Middle English derogatory term for money (*filthy lucre*, 1Tim 3.3; Tit 1.7; 1Pet 5.2).

silver, and lands — the pope is the successor of Constantine the emperor, and not of Jesus Christ and his disciples.¹ And on confirming this testament after rising from the dead, Jesus said, “As my Father sent me, so I send you,” [Joh 20.21](#) — that is, to labor, and persecution, and poverty, and hunger, and martyrdom!”²

Thus, in the judgment of Wycliffe, the church, and especially the clergy, should be regarded as executors to the will of Christ. And that will is strictly confined to its presentation in Holy Scripture. And the ecclesiastical persons of the age are charged with grossly violating their obligations in respect to that testament, both by their teaching and example.

The next anathema was that pronounced on all persons who “falsify the king’s charter, or assist in that.” It is alleged that the lands of the clergy were granted to them by the king for certain specified purposes, and that clergymen commonly apply the produce of such lands to purposes opposite those specified. In doing so, they sin against the charter of both their earthly and their heavenly sovereign.

“Also they falsify the king’s charter by great treason, when they make the proud bishop of Rome — who is the chief murderer³ on earth, and the chief maintainer of it — the chief worldly lord of all the goods which clerics possess in our realm; and *that* is almost all of the realm, or the greater part of it. Since he calls himself the chief vicar of Christ, he should be the meekest and the poorest of priests, and the busiest in God’s service to save men’s souls, as were Christ and his apostles. Hereby these worldly clerics show themselves traitors to God, and to their liege lord the king, whose law and regalia they destroy by their treason — and show themselves in favor of the pope, whom they nourish in the works of Antichrist, that they may have their worldly estate, and opulence, and lusts, maintained by him.”

The sixteenth chapter commences with these words: “All those who falsify the pope’s bulls or a bishop’s letter, are cursed grievously in all churches four times a year.” Here Wycliffe proceeds to ask about this quarterly anathema ([see p. 31](#)): —

38 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

“Lord, why was Christ’s Gospel not put in this sentence by our worldly clerics? Here it seems they magnify the pope’s bull more than the Gospel. And in token of this, they punish the men who trespass against the pope’s bulls, more than those who trespass against Christ’s Gospel. And hereby men of this world dread the pope’s lead,⁴ and his commandment, more than the Gospel of Christ and God’s commands. And thus wretched men in this world are taken away from belief, and hope, and charity, and have become rotten in heresy and blasphemy, even worse than heathen hounds. Also a penny clerk,⁵ who can neither read nor understand a verse of his psalter, nor repeat God’s commandments, brings forth a bull of lead, testifying that he is able to govern many souls, against God’s judgment and the open experience of truth. And to procure this false bull, they incur costs and labor, and oftentimes fight, and send much gold out of our land to aliens and enemies. And thereby many are dead by the hand of our enemies to *their* comfort, and *our* confusion. Also the proud priest of Rome gets images of Peter and Paul, and makes Christian men believe that all which his bulls speak of is done by authority of Christ. And thus, as far as he may, he makes this bull, which is false, to be Peter’s, and Paul’s, and

¹ Said to Pope Eugene III (1145-1153); *De considerations* 4 3 in *Sancti Bernardi opera* III 454.

² Chap. xiv.

³ Originally, “manqueller.” – John 8.44.

⁴ The seal attached to papal documents.

⁵ *Penny clerk*: a clerk of accounts.

Christ's; and in doing that, he makes them false. And by this blasphemy, he robs Christendom of faith, and good life, and worldly goods.

“And if any poor man tells the truth of Holy Writ, against the hypocrisy of Antichrist and his officers, nothing else follows but to curse him, to imprison, burn, and slay him, without defence. It now seems that John's prophecy in the Apocalypse is fulfilled: that no man will be hardy enough to buy or sell without the token of the cursed beast.¹ For now, no man will do anything in the street without these false bulls of Antichrist, not having any regard for the worship of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost in men's souls, but having all regard for these dead bulls — bought and sold for money, as men buy or sell an ox or a beast!”

In the seventeenth chapter, the Reformer says: —

“The Gospel tells us that at doomsday, Jesus Christ will reckon generally with men for works of mercy. And if they have not done them, then as Christ bids, they will be damned without end.² But Christ will not then say a word about tithes. If indeed men grant that tithes are works of mercy and alms (such as feeding and clothing poor men), then certainly it seems that all this cursing by them is for their *own* covetousness, and not for the sins of the people, nor for any trespass by them against God. For then their curses would be most where there is most sin, and most contempt³ against God. But this is not done, as all knowing men can manifestly see.” The law, it is alleged, teaches that no man who is himself “rightfully cursed” may lawfully curse another. But the clergy who fail to discharge the duties of their solemn office are under the curse of the Head of the church, and are sinners “a thousandfold more” than are their people, when the people's great fault is that “they do not pay their tithes.”

SENTENCE ON THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 39

The Reformer expands this grave accusation in the following terms: —

“Christ said that the Son of man did not come to lose men's lives and souls, but to save them, as the Gospel of Luke witnesses.^{Luk 9.56} Why then do these wayward curates dare to curse so many men's souls to hell, and their bodies to prison, and to the loss of goods, and sometimes to death, for a little muck — while they themselves are cursed by God for simony done at their entrance into office, and for failure in preaching, and in their example of a holy life? Therefore, tithes are not due them, but only pain in hell. Oftentimes they are evil tormentors, and slay the soul bought with Christ's precious blood, which is better than all the riches of this world. Those who would damn others to hell by their cursing, for the sake of a little perishing clay, are not spiritual fathers to Christian souls,. Even pagan persecutors were content to torment the body, and not the soul forevermore. But these children of Satan search by all the means in their power, to slay the soul in everlasting pain! Certainly these wayward curates of Satan seem worse in this thing than the fiends of hell. For in hell they torment no soul except for everlasting sin; while these clerics of Satan curse souls to hell for a little temporal debt, which they will pay as soon as they are able — and oftentimes when it is *not* debt, except by long-standing error, and theft, and custom, brought in against God's commandments!”

In the next chapter, the Reformer insists that the clergy, in place of demanding tithes from the more needy of their flock, should employ their influence with the rich to procure relief for the necessities of the poor.

¹ Rev. 13.17.

² **Mat 23:23** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. **Jas 2:13** For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

³ Originally, “despite”: lack of respect; contemptuous disregard.

“Men wonder highly,” he observes, “why curates are so oppressive¹ to the people in taking tithes, since Christ and his apostles took no tithes as men do now. They neither paid them, nor even spoke of them, either in the Gospel or the Epistles, which are the perfect law of freedom and grace. But Christ lived on the alms of Mary Magdalene and other holy women, as the Gospel tells us. And apostles sometimes lived by the labor of their hands; and sometimes they took a poor livelihood and clothing, given by the free-will and devotion by the people, without asking or constraining anyone. And to this end, Christ said to his disciples that they should eat and drink those things which were set before them,^{Luk 10.7} and take neither gold nor silver for their preaching or giving sacraments.^{Mat 10.9} And Paul, giving a general rule for priests, says thus: ‘Having food and clothing to cover us, we are content with these things, as Jesus Christ.’^{1Tim 6.8} And Paul proved that priests who preach the Gospel truly, should live by the Gospel, and said no more about tithes.^{1Cor 9.14} Certainly, as tithes were due to priests and deacons in the old law, so bodily circumcision was then necessary for all men. But now, it is not so in the law of grace; and yet Christ was circumcised.

40 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

But we do not read where he took tithes as we do. And we do not read in all the Gospel where he paid tithes to the high-priest, or bid any other man to do so. Lord, why should our worldly priests charge Christian people with tithes, offerings, and customs, more than Christ and his apostles did, and more than men were charged in the old law? For then, all priests and deacons and officers of the temple were maintained by tithes and offerings, and had no other lordship. But now, a worldly priest who is more unable than others,² has by means of a bull of Antichrist, all the tithes and offerings to himself! If tithes were due by God’s commandment, then everywhere in Christendom there would be one mode of tithing. But it is not so. Would to God that all wise and true men would inquire whether it is better to maintain good priests in a reasonable and poor livelihood, by free alms from the people — teaching the Gospel in word and deed as Christ and his apostles did — than to thus pay tithes to a worldly priest who is ignorant and negligent, as men are now constrained to do by bulls and new ordinances of priests.”³

Wycliffe then demands to know who has given this coercive power to churchmen, seeing that Christ and his disciples did not have it. And he adds, “If the first ordinance of Christ and his apostles came again to Christendom, then Christian people would be free to take their tithes and offerings from wayward priests, and not maintain them in sin.” But at the same time, he said that they must contribute “reasonable livelihood to good priests; this would be much better and easier, both for priests and commoners, for this world and the other.”

In the beginning of the next chapter, there is mention of the council in London at time of the “earth-shaking,” an allusion which further shows that this treatise was written not more than two years before the decease of the Reformer. The clergy present on that occasion are said to have introduced a “new dispensation,” declaring it to be error to say that, “secular lords may at their doom (i.e., in the exercise of their own opinion or authority) take temporal goods from the church that trespasses by long custom.” To this Wycliffe replies, “If this is error, as these clerics falsely say, then the king and secular lords may not take a farthing or a farthing’s worth from a worldly cleric, even if he owed the king or his liege men ever so much, and may well pay it, but will not.” He insists that, on this principle, if the college of cardinals was to become an organised *banditti*, the authority of the king could not be exercised to curb their marauding.

¹ Originally, “charrouse.”

² By his ignorance, he is unable to “preach the Gospel truly,” and so is not “worth his wages.” (Mat 10.10)

³ Chap. 18.

SENTENCE OF THE CURSE EXPOUNDED. 41

If such men were to send money out of the land to however great an extent, the monarch must not suppose that it pertains to him to prevent such impoverishment of the realm. And if a body of monks, friars, or clerics, were to conspire to poison the king, the queen, and all the lords of the realm, “yet the king, with all the lords, may not punish such offenders with the loss of one farthing’s worth of their goods!” The same exemption, it is argued, might be pleaded were these persons to defile the bed of the sovereign, to devise the death of the king and queen, to attempt the extinction of all the gentle blood of the land, and to combine to make one of themselves “king of all the world.” It must be presumed that the sovereign may not touch the property of such persons, and it must be concluded that he may not touch their persons, seeing that they are held to be most sacred. To thus concede this clerical pretension, would at once sheathe the sword of the magistrate, and give license to all wickedness. But such men should know, he observes, that holy church does not consist of the clergy, “but of all men and women who shall be saved.” To take away the goods which worldly churchmen misapply, and give those good to men who will apply them to their scriptural uses, must be to do the good deeds that are proper to the vicar of God; and no king need fear the censures of the clergy in doing so.

In several of the remaining chapters, mention is made of the right of sanctuary claimed by “Westminster, Beverley, and other places;” and the abuses which had grown up in connection with them are forcefully exposed. It is remarked that the cities of refuge to which these places professed to be conformed, afforded shelter to the manslayer, and only when he had slain a man unintentionally — while these Christian sanctuaries became a hiding-place to wilful and known offenders, and to those who might make reparation for their crimes.

But it was not enough to thus prevent the course of civil justice. The magistrate was often censured because he could not be made to act unjustly.

“Then these worldly clerics curse the king, and his justices, and officers, because they maintain the Gospel and its true preachers, and will not punish them according to the wrongful commandment of Antichrist and his clerics. But where are fouler heretics than these worldly clerics, thus cursing true men, and stirring the king and his liege men to persecute Jesus Christ in his members, and to exile the Gospel out of our land?”

In many instances, however, the attempt to make such use of the civil sword was successful; and kings and lords were constrained to “torment the body of a just man, over whom Satan has no power, as though he were a strong thief, casting him into a deep prison in order to make other men afraid to stand on God’s part against their heresy.”

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Some observations on legal studies occur in this part of the treatise. The *civil law* is said not to be duly studied. And because “our people are bound by the king’s statutes,” these are accounted as more worthy of being studied and taught by the clergy. The emperor’s law, it is said, should be studied and its authority admitted, only in so far as “it is enclosed in God’s commandments.” It is demanded of those who profess to study the civil law, whether “for the reason they find in it,” the volume placed in their hands by the Author of reason, is not likely to better repay their labor in that respect? The pope, says Wycliffe, has forbidden the study of civil law; and for once he adds, “the pope’s intent is good.” But he observes, further, that the *canon law* is more hostile to

the religion of the Bible than the code of Justinian.¹ The whole of the twenty-fourth chapter relates to this subject.

In the next chapter is the following striking observation on one of the most disgraceful usages in the history of religious intolerance.

“All those who commune with accursed men, are cursed by our prelates, particularly if they do it knowingly. But by this sentence, it would seem that God himself is accursed, since no accursed man may exist in this life unless God knowingly communes with him, and gives him breath and sustenance, whether he is wrongfully cursed or rightfully. And if God is ready to give such a man grace and forgiveness of his sins if the man asks for it worthily, and even before he asks for it, this sentence seems too large, since our God may not be accursed.”

In this manner, the Reformer dealt with a practice in which men have been taught to assign religious reasons for doing violence to all the deeper instincts of our moral nature. It is one of the strong forms in which we read the demoralising tendency of religious bigotry.² The treatise concludes with the following earnest utterances: —

“Men greatly wonder why prelates and curates curse so fast, since St. Paul and St. Peter have commanded men to bless, and not to have a will to curse.³ And Jesus Christ blessed his enemies, and heartily prayed for them even while they nailed him to the cross.^{Luk 23.24} Still more, men wonder why they curse so fast in their own cause, and for their own gain, and not for injury done to Christ and his majesty — since men should be patient in their own wrongs, as Christ and his disciples were; and not suffer a word against God’s honor and majesty, such as by false and vain swearing, ribaldry, lechery, and other filth. But most of all, men wonder why worldly clerics curse so fast for breaking their own statutes, privileges, and wayward customs, more than for openly breaking God’s commandments — since no man is cursed by God except for doing so, whatever worldly wretches may blabber. And no man is blessed of God, and will come to heaven, unless he keeps God’s commandments. And particularly in the hour of death, however many thousand bulls of indulgence or pardons a man may have, and letters of fraternity, and thousands of masses from priests, monks, and friars, it shall be vain.

ON FINDING PRIESTS. — ON PRAYER OF GOOD MEN. 43

Let prelates and curates therefore leave these particulars in their censuring; for many of them are as false as Satan. And let them teach God’s commandments; and that God’s curse and the pains of hell are inflicted on men if they do not amend in this life; and what bliss men will have for keeping them, as thereby they teach truly Christ’s Gospel in word and in their example of holy life; and teach the mercy of God in the highness of his blessing. And thus they will help all to that end: in right belief, and hope toward God, and full charity toward God and man! God grant us this end. Amen!”

11. *De Stipendiis Ministrorum.*⁴ The treatise which concludes the prior passage is much longer than most of Wycliffe’s English pieces. The English title, *How men should find Priests*, is restricted to one full quarto page. It begins,

¹ *Code of Justinian*, formally *Corpus Juris Civilis* (“Body of Civil Law”): the collections of laws and legal interpretations developed under the sponsorship of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I from AD 529 to 565. The works did not constitute a new legal code. Rather, Justinian’s committees of jurists provided collections of past laws and extracts of the opinions of the great Roman jurists. (*Ency. Britannica*) NOTE: Justinian sought to restore the Roman empire, and reconquer the lost western half. Codifying ancient Roman law was part of that effort.

² *Bigotry* here does not refer to being intolerant towards sinners, which we all are (1Joh 1.8).

³ Rom 12.14; 1Pet 3.9.

⁴ The Stipend (wage) of Ministers.

Think wisely, you men that find priests, that you do this charity for God's love, and for the help of your souls, and the help of Christian men, and not for pride of the world, to have them occupied in worldly office and vanity.¹

It exhorts the laity to support worthy priests, and only such priests — admonishing them that if they furnish the means of subsistence to men of an opposite character, they will be found partakers in all the sin, mischief, and punishment attendant on the course of such unfaithful stewards. Men should be urged to the study of the Bible. And the aim of the clergy should be the scriptural edification of the people, not allowing them to suppose that religion can consist in being pleased with church singing, or in being attentive to mere ceremonies.

12. *De Precationibus Sacris.*² This tract bears the English title, *How the prayer of good men helps much, and the prayer of sinful men displeases God, and harms themselves and other men.* It commences with these words: "Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pray evermore for all necessary things, both to body and soul."³

It is taught in this tract, that the most effectual prayer is a holy life. To be holy without ceasing is to pray without ceasing. It was in this manner that the Reformer endeavored to beat down the popular confidence in the efficacy of prayer proceeding, as it too commonly did, from the lips of an unworthy priesthood. Prayer with a view to our own well-being, and intercessory prayer, are of inestimable value; but everything depends on the faith and piety of the heart from which it proceeds. Hence James speaks of the fervent effectual prayer of the righteous man as availing much. The prayers of truly devout ministers in behalf of their people, giving them victory over their enemies, was betokened in lifting up the hands of Moses, that Israel might prevail against Amalek.

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The lengthened life of Hezekiah; the shadow going back on the dial of Ahaz; the sun standing still in the time of Joshua; are all referred to as showing the efficacy of prayer when proceeding from a believing and devout mind. Christians are reminded also of the promise of Christ to be wherever two or three shall meet in his name; and of his assurance that if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, much more will our Father in heaven give his Holy Spirit to those who ask for it.

This description of the kind of prayer which is profitable, is followed by a description of the prayer which displeases God, and which brings with it harm rather than profit. Passages of Scripture are cited, in which the Almighty declares,

- that he will receive no sacrifice at the hand of the wicked;
- that the solemn feasts of such men are hateful to him;
- that the worshipper regarding iniquity in his heart cannot be accepted;
- that not every one saying to Christ, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of God; and
- that even the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.

¹ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge.

² [The Sacred Prayer.](#)

³ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dublin. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 125-131; and another copy, Class C. Tab. i. No. 14.

With these passages from Scripture, others are introduced from the writings of devout men in the history of the church. St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Chrysostom, are cited as teaching that the aroma and efficacy of prayer come from a holy life.

The plea that praying priests, if not heard on their own account, are still heard on account of the merits of holy church, is treated as a fraud devised by Satan since his loosening.¹ By this means the arch-enemy aims to deceive the people, and would perpetuate the corrupt character of the priesthood, by perpetuating the practice of paying for masses. This is the great point to which the argument of the piece turns — the folly of reliance on mere priestly services, where the priest is not a devout man — and the folly of relying on the prayer of a priest more than on the prayer of any other man, supposing both to be in the same degree men of piety.

Reference is made to a canon in which the pope requires that clergy and laity should separate themselves from any priest refusing to put away his concubine, or his wedded woman. And Wycliffe argues with great freedom, that if that circumstance is a just ground for separation from a priest, then the guilt of such a man is not greater than the guilt of the simonist, the envious, the covetous, and the utterly worldly — and that separation in the latter case, must in consequence be as justifiable as in the former.

This piece extends to nine quarto pages.

EIGHT THINGS WHICH DECEIVE. 45

13. *De Episcoporum Erroribus.*² The work begins with the words, “There are eight things by which simple Christian men are deceived.”³

The eight points on which much delusion is said to prevail among the people are enumerated, and these points are, 1. Holy Church; 2. Law; 3. Religion; 4. Obedience; 5. Cursing; 6. The goods and rights of holy church; 7. Commandment and counsel; 8. Deadly sin and venial.

Thus, in the first place,

“when men speak of holy church, they immediately understand it to mean prelates and priests, monks, and canons, and friars; and all men who have crowns,⁴ though they live ever so cursedly against God’s law. And they do not call secular men, *men of holy church*, though they live ever so truly after God’s law, and in perfect charity. Nevertheless, all who shall be saved in bliss of heaven are members of holy church, and no more.”

But in consequence of the false manner of speaking prevalent on this subject, simple men are taught to consider many as great men of holy church, who are in fact “enemies of it, and who are of the synagogue of Satan.”

In respect to “law,” the complaint is that by that term, men understand human statutes and regulations — forgetting the primary application of the term to those injunctions which man has

¹ Wycliffe took the binding of Satan as a literal thousand years (Rev 20.2), beginning at the Ascension (see [p. 199](#)) Thus Wycliffe believed Satan was loose in his own time. – WHG

² [Errors of the Bishops.](#)

³ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dublin. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 131-136; and another copy, Class C. Tab. i. No. 14. The contents generally of this work, in common with Nos. X. and XI., forbid, and on the same grounds, our ascribing it to an early period in the career of the Reformer.

⁴ Referring to the manner of wearing the hair peculiar to ecclesiastical persons.

received from his Maker. God is the great lawgiver, and it is to his enactments that all others should be subordinate.

The same error happens in respect to “religion.” By that term, men do not mean the system of truth and piety set forth in Holy Scripture, but “a religion made by sinful man.” Tradition has taken the place of Scripture. The authority of man has been placed before the authority of God. The teacher who may not err, has been superseded by teachers beset with every kind of infirmity. Accordingly, men do not now mean by “religion” what Christ and his apostles taught, but what worldly priests and prelates have substituted in place of such teaching.

“Also when men speak against prelates and religious, alleging Christ’s poverty and meekness and other virtues, they say that such teachings of Christ are his *counsels*, and not his commandments, and therefore the bishop of Rome — who is most contrary to Christ’s teaching and life — may dispense with them.”

In this manner, the authority of Scripture was displaced by the authority of Romanism, and religion underwent a corresponding change.

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It is observed further that,

“When men speak against sin, shortly they say, though this is sin, it is venial ¹ and not deadly; and venial sins are washed away with a *pater noster*,² with holy water, with pardons, with a bishop’s blessing, and in many other light ways, as men pretend. But true men say that in this life, without a special revelation, men do not know what sin is venial, and what is deadly, and that these terms, *venial* and *deadly*, are inventions of modern men, without authority of Holy Writ.”

It is repeated afterwards, that pardons, holy water, and similar observances, have been devised to sustain “the state, pride, and covetousness” of the clergy, and to “blind the people.” Every man, says Wycliffe,

“should have great and lasting sorrow for his sin, and a mind intent on Christ’s righteousness and wisdom, and on Christ’s passion, death, and mercy to forgive sin upon true repentance. And let each man put his full trust in God’s mercy, and in his own good life, and not in false pardons, nor in vanities, which men invent to avail after men’s death, for love of money [now]. For such things do not avail any man, but destroy those who trust in them.”

The fruit awaiting the good man hereafter, will be found to be exclusively the fruit of his own character, and of the Savior’s passion.

14. A Short Rule of Life. In this series is a tract for each man in general — and for priests, and lords, and laborers specifically — how each shall be saved in his degree. This tract commences with directions concerning the best method of cultivating a meditative and religious spirit. And these directions are followed by counsels of a moral and religious nature, addressed to the priest, the lord,³ and the laborer. The tract is interesting as exhibiting the manner in which the Reformer was accustomed to employ the sanctions of religion as a means of strengthening the bonds of civil society. It may be taken as a specimen of the manner in which Wycliffe had learned to address the lessons of morality and religion to the highest and the lowest, and it shows the

¹ *Venial*: warranting only temporal punishment; easily forgiven.

² *Pater noster*: reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

³ The term is used to denote master, superior, any person in authority.

devotional temper in which such service was performed.¹ His instruction to the humblest class is in the following terms: —

¹ The following extract contains the devotional *Introduction* of this tract, and the counsels addressed to the priest, and the lord, as printed in the work entitled *British Reformers*, published by the Religious Tract Society. The passages given in the text in this instance, as in all instances, are from my own papers. But as the gentlemen who made the collection referred to, were pleased to consult me on the subject, I feel less scruple in availing myself of a few passages from their publication in the way of notes.

“Think *first*, when you rise or fully wake, upon the goodness of your God; how for his own goodness, and not for any need, he made all things out of nothing — both angels and men, and all other creatures — good in their kind. The *second* time, think on the great sufferings and willing death that Christ suffered for mankind. When no man might make satisfaction for the guilt of Adam and Eve (and others more), nor might any angel make satisfaction for it, then Christ, of his endless charity, suffered such great passion and painful death, that no creature could suffer so much. Think the *third* time, how God has saved you from death and other mischief, and suffered many thousands to be lost that night, some in water, some in fire, and some by sudden death, and some to be damned without end. And for this goodness and mercy thank your God with all your heart, and pray him to give you grace to spend in that day and evermore — all the powers of your soul, such as mind, understanding, reason, and will; and all the powers of your body, such as strength, beauty, and your five senses — in his service and worship, and in nothing against his commandments, but in ready performance of his works of mercy; and to give a good example of holy life, both in word and deed, to all men about you.

Afterward, see that you are well occupied, with no idle time for the danger of temptation. Take food and drink in measure, not too costly, nor too lickerous [i.e., *sumptuous*], and do not be too curious [i.e., *particular*] about them. But what God sends you with health, take it in such measure that you are fresher in mind and understanding to serve God. And always thank him for such gifts. Besides this, see that you do right and equity to all men — to your superiors, equals, and subjects or servants. And stir all to love truth, and mercy, and true peace, and charity; and suffer no men to be at dissension, but to be in accord if you can, in any good manner. Also, most of all, fear God and his wrath; and most of all, love God, his law, and his worship. And do not ask principally for worldly reward, but with all your heart desire the bliss of heaven in mercy of God, and your own good life. And think much of the dreadful doom of the pains of hell, to keep yourself out of sin — and on the endless great joys of heaven, to keep yourself in a virtuous life. And according to your skill, teach others the same.

At the end of the day, think in what you have offended God, and how much, and how often — and therefore have complete sorrow, and amend it while you may. And think how many God has allowed to perish that day, in many ways, and to be damned everlastingly, and how graciously he has saved you — not for your deserving, but for his own mercy and goodness; therefore, thank him with all your heart. And ask him for grace, that you may dwell and end in his true and holy service; and for real love, and to teach other men the same.

“If you are a PRIEST, and especially a curate, live holily, surpassing other men in holy prayer, desire, and thinking, in holy speaking, counselling, and true teaching. And that God’s commands, his Gospel, and virtues, be ever in your mouth. And ever despise sin, to draw men away from it. And that your deeds be so righteous, that no man shall blame them with reason, but that your open deeds be a true book to all subjects and unlearned men, to serve God and do his commands thereby. For an example of good life, open and lasting, stirs lowly men more than true preaching by word only.

Do not waste your goods in great feasts of rich men, but live a humble life, from poor men’s alms and goods, both in food, and drink, and clothes. And give truly the remainder to poor men that have nothing of their own, and may not labor because of feebleness or sickness. And thus you shall be a true priest both to God and man.

“If you are a LORD, see that you live a righteous life in your own person, both in respect to God and man, keeping the commands of God, doing the works of mercy, ruling well your five senses, and exercising reason and equity, and good conscience to all men.

In the *second* place, govern well your wife, your children, and your household attendants in God’s law, and suffer no sin among them, in word nor in deed, that they may be examples of holiness and righteousness to all others. For you shall be condemned for their evil life and their evil example, unless you amend it according to your might.

“If you are a laborer, live in meekness, and truly and willingly do your labor, so that if your lord or your master is a heathen man, by your willing and true service, he may not grudge against you, nor slander your God, nor Christendom (Christianity), but rather be constrained to come to Christendom.

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And do not serve a Christian lord with grudging; and serve him not only in his presence, but truly and willingly in his absence — not only for worldly dread or worldly reward, but for the fear of God, and conscience, and a reward in heaven. For that God who puts you in each service, knows what state is best for you; and He will reward you more than all other lords may, if you do this truly and willingly for his ordinance. And beware, in all things, of grudging against God and his visitations:¹ in great labor, and long and great sickness, and other troubles. And beware of wrath, of cursing, and of speaking in passion against man or beast; and ever keep patience, and meekness, and charity, both to God and man.

“This is how each man ought to live in the three estates, to save himself and to help other men. And thus good life, rest, peace, and love, should be among Christian men; and they be saved, and heathen men soon be converted; and God be magnified greatly in all the nations and religions that now despise him and his law because of the false living of wicked Christian men.”

The preacher whose counsels were of this description, was not the man to become the agent of insurrection, after the fashion of John Ball and Wat Tyler, as some of his ingenuous opponents have insinuated. His doctrines as a Reformer were all meant to give stability to every just form of authority, and especially to the authority of the magistrate. But it is hardly surprising if amidst the boldest attacks on the false, the true (with which the false is commonly confused) should sometimes seem to be in danger.

15. *Three Things destroy the World.* This is the title of a tract consisting of five pages.² The three things complained of prove to be three classes of persons — false confessors, false merchants, and false men of law. The confessors intended are principally the mendicants; the lawyers are the men engaged in chapters and consistory courts;³ and the merchants are those who fall under the temptations that are common to men who are intent on buying and selling to get gain. The false confessor destroys the world by using his spiritual office as a means of worldly gain — seeking to enrich himself rather than to reform those who confess to him.

In the *third* place, govern well your tenants, and maintain them in right and reason, and be merciful to them in their rents and worldly mersements [i.e., *amerciments: fines*], and not suffer your officers to do them wrong, nor be extortionate to them. And chastise in good manner, those who are rebels against God’s commands and virtuous life, more than for rebellion against your own cause. Otherwise, because you love your own cause more than God’s, and yourself more than God Almighty, you would be a false traitor to God. Love, reward, praise, and cherish the true and virtuous of life, more than if you sought only your own profit. According to your skill and might, reverence and maintain truly God’s law and true preachers of it, and God’s servants in rest and peace. For thereby you hold to the lordship of God; and if you fail in this, you misdo against God, and all your lordship in body and in soul. And principally if you maintain Antichrist’s disciples in their errors against Christ’s life and his teaching — out of blindness, covetousness, and worldly friendship — then you help to slander and pursue true men who teach Christ’s Gospel and his life, and who warn the people of their great sins and of false prophets and hypocrites who deceive Christian men in faith, virtuous life, and worldly goods.”

¹ *Visitations*: bringing adversity or disaster upon someone.

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. MSS. Jamesii, Bodleian Library.

³ *Chapter*: An ecclesiastical assembly of monks. *Consistory*: A church tribunal or governing body.

Concerning the second class of offenders [i.e., church jurists and lawyers], it is said that —

“jurors, for a dinner or a noble,¹ will forswear² themselves, and do that so commonly, that even though a man possesses ever so open a right to a lordship, yet for a little money, against man’s law, and against God’s law, many will knowingly swear that it is *not* his. But among lawyers of the consistory, in their chapters, there is more sin and hypocrisy to show — for they bring men into their courts only to push them further aback, even though their right is ever so plain.”

OF FEIGNED CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE. 49

16. *Impedimenta Evangelizantium*,³ with the English title, *Of Feigned Contemplative Life*.⁴ If the business of the world has its temptations, so has the condition of the men who endeavor to separate themselves from it in the most rigid fashion. In this piece, the Reformer shows that asceticism was hardly more to his taste than worldliness. His complaint is that when a man insists on the paramount importance of preaching the Gospel, “the fiend blinds hypocrites to excuse the man from it by teaching a feigned contemplative life; and to say, since this is the best life, that the two may not be done together; for the charity of God, they need to leave the preaching of the Gospel, and live in contemplation.” But this reasoning is denounced as hypocrisy, and as manifestly contrary to both the example and the teaching of Christ and his apostles. Every true priest is like a prophet from the Lord; and he is bound, as St. Gregory has taught, to show the people their sins.

“In this manner, each priest shall be an angel of God, as Holy Writ says.⁵ Also Christ, and John the Baptist, left the desert, and preached the Gospel to their death. And this, therefore, was most charitable, or else they were not done out of charity, or they feigned a charity that might not be in them. And that may not be, since the one was God, and since no man after Christ has been holier than the Baptist, and he did not sin at all by this preaching. Also the holy prophet Jeremiah, hallowed in his mother’s womb, might not be excused from preaching by his contemplation, but was charged by God to preach the sins of the people, and to suffer hard pain for doing so; and so it was with all the prophets of God. Ah! Lord, since Christ, and John, and all the prophets of God, were needed by charity to come out of the desert to preach to the people, and to leave their solitary prayers, how dare these feigned hypocrites say that it is better to be still, and to pray over their own feigned ordinance, than to preach Christ’s Gospel? Lord! What a cursed spirit of leasing⁶ stirs priests to enclose themselves within stone walls all their life, since Christ commands all his apostles and priests to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel. Certainly they are open fools, and plainly act against Christ’s Gospel; and if they maintain this error, they are accursed of God, and are perilous hypocrites and heretics also. And since men are held to be heretics who act against the pope’s law— and the best part of the pope’s law says that every man coming into the priesthood takes the office of a beadle or crier, to go before doomsday, to cry to the people of their sin and the vengeance of God — why are those priests not heretics who leave preaching Christ’s Gospel, and who compel other true men to leave preaching the Gospel? [Especially] since this law is St. Gregory’s law, grounded openly in God’s law, and in reason and charity, and [these] other laws of the

¹ *Noble*: A medieval gold coin of England, valued in the 14th c. at 80 pence (6s 8d).

² *Forswear*: perjure; tell a lie under oath.

³ *Impediments to Evangelizing (to preaching the Gospel)*.

⁴ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 136-141. The piece under this title in the collection of treatises called the “Poor Caitif,” is an earlier and shorter work than that from which the above extracts are taken. British Reformers, i. 121-123.

⁵ **Gal 4:14** ...you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus.

⁶ *Leasing*: Middle English for hypocrisy, artifice, deceit, or faithlessness.

people are contrary to Holy Writ, reason, and charity, in order to maintain the pride and covetousness of Antichrist's worldly clerics?"

50 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

The great argument in favor of a contemplative life is said to be that it was the choice of Mary, as distinguished from her sister Martha, and that it was praised by Christ as "the better part." Wycliffe replies that this example might serve if priests were women; and in the absence of that consideration, it might have some weight if the Savior had not made his doctrine on this point much clearer in other scriptures. But granting the justice of the inference deduced from this passage, the Reformer maintains that the substance of the argument thus assumed is that, "Christ chose the worse life for this world, and has obliged all his priests to leave the better and choose the worse." In this manner, it is remarked, "these feigned hypocrites put error on Jesus Christ."

In answer to the argument urged in favor of the contemplative life from the scriptural injunctions to ceaseless prayer, the Reformer observes, "What Christ and Paul meant by prayer, is a holy life, and not the mere babbling of the lips, which no man may do without ceasing;" and since a disobedient life renders a man incapable of praying acceptably, "those priests who do not preach the Gospel, as Christ has bid, are not able to pray to God for mercy, but deceive both themselves and the people — and they despise God, and stir him to wrath and vengeance."

The mischiefs which are not done by the delusion which teaches men to deem a *contemplative* life preferable to an *active* life, are said to be in great part accomplished by the superstitious place assigned to church psalmody. Chanting and singing according to the "Ordinal of Salisbury" and other books of that nature,¹ are described as tending to call the attention of men away from the study of the law of God. And by unduly kindling the passions, they dispose many toward the indulgence of their vices, rather than toward the devout exercise of religion. "In all the law of grace," it is remarked, "God charges no such song, but devotion in the heart, and true teaching, and holy speaking in both tongue and good works." He further observes that this practice, like other novelties which have arisen from the folly and pride of man, came in by degrees. And men are admonished that whether it is by means of "song, or mass, or matins² to our lady," that their attention to the words of God is prevented, it will behoove them "to remember the sharp words of St. Augustine, who says, — 'As often as I like the *song* more than the *sentence* that is sung, so often I confess that I sin grievously.'"

OF FEIGNED CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE. 51

On the argument in favor of such practices, as being derived from the example of the Romish church, the Reformer observes that such examples are binding on us only as Christ and his apostles have given them a renewed obligation. The Moral Law belonging to the previous dispensation remains, but the Ceremonial Law has passed away. And with regard to the fact that the angels in heaven are described as singing, it is deemed enough to reply that they have "no conflict" to sustain, and that it is not their lot to dwell in "a valley of weeping." So much were men pleased with this part of the established worship, that in some places they were known to pay "many marks and pounds a year to proud priests and loose fellows," who were engaged in conducting it.

¹ *Ordinals*: books dictating the order of each Church service, with prescribed prayers, readings, songs, etc., in Latin.

² *Matins*: morning prayers or songs.

“But where,” it is demanded, “is there more deceit, than to suppose that they most honor God by such things, when there are forty or fifty in a choir, and three or four proud vicious fellows so play the most devout service, that no man can hear the lyrics, and all others are silent, and look on like fools.

Meanwhile strumpets and thieves praise Sir Jack or Hobb, and William the proud cleric, saying, ‘How finely they play their notes,’ and that ‘they serve God and holy church well,’ while they despise God to his face, and keep other Christian men from their devotion.”

Men who do not conform to services of this nature, are said to be punished more than men who fail in obedience to the commands of God. But the Reformer asks with indignation, “Was not the priest’s office ordained by God, before ‘Salisbury Use’¹ was made by proud and lecherous and drunken priests?” The Jews, it is remarked, were not nearly so much burdened with ceremonies as the Christian worshippers of these later ages, “though the old law must cease, to make room for the freedom of the Gospel.” His advice, accordingly, is that men should “study the ordinance of God, and live in Christian freedom, without heeding those novelties of sinful men, which only hinder priests from their better occupation.” At the same time, they were not to abuse this liberty, but to discard vain ceremonies, only that they might give themselves with more devotion to the duties of their Christian calling.

“Ah! Lord,” he exclaims, “if all the study and labor that men now have about ‘Salisbury Use,’ with a multitude of new and costly books, were turned into the making of Bibles, and in studying and teaching them, how much God’s law would be furthered, and known, and kept, where now it is hindered, unstudied, and unread! Lord! How rich men are excused, who spend so much in great chapels and in costly books of man’s ordinance, for fame and nobility in the world. And yet they never spend so much for the books of God’s law, or to aid men to study them, and teach them, though this would be incomparably better on all sides.”

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He concludes with stating that men who know the liberty of the Gospel, still join in the established formularies,² lest they offend “sick consciences,” devoting, however, all the time that may be prudently withdrawn from such services, to the discharge of more enlightened and more Christian duties. In doing so, they do not take council from the ruling clergy who, for the most part, are so given to worldly business as to resemble “bailiffs rather than bishops.”

17. *Comments on the Lord’s Prayer, and on the Ave Maria.* In the *Cambridge Collection*, the piece *On a Feigned Contemplative Life*, followed these two papers. The comments on the Lord’s Prayer extend to three pages, and those on the Ave Maria to four. They consist, for the most part, of complaint in respect to the lack of sympathy on the part of the clergy with the temporal and spiritual necessities of their people.

18. *How Religious Men should keep certain Articles.* Then follows a paper with a heading prefixed by a later hand, in the following terms. It begins, “Christian men pray meekly and devoutly to Almighty God, that he grant the grace for his endless mercy to our religious, both possessioners and mendicants,” etc.³ This piece fills six pages in the quarto volume, and is

¹ The **Sarum Rite**, or the **Use of Salisbury**, established in the 11th century, was a variant “use” of the Roman Rite, widely used for ordering public worship. It was abandoned after the Protestant Reformation (16th century).

² *Formulary*: a book or system of prescribed religious procedures, prayers, or doctrines — liturgies.

³ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. — *possessioners* are beneficed monks; *mendicants* live by charity.

presented in the shape of forty-four articles, a kind of summary of the doctrine of Wycliffe in relation to faith, polity, worship, and religion generally.

19. *De Dominis et Servis*; or in English — *Of Servants and Lords, how each should keep his degree*. This next paper in the collection begins, “Servants should truly and gladly serve their lords or masters, and not be false, nor idle, nor grudging.”¹ This piece extends to something more than twenty-five pages, and contains many valuable illustrative passages.

The Reformer, having inculcated the lessons of obedience in the language of Peter and Paul, proceeds to say —

“But here the fiend moves some men to say that Christian men should not be servants or vassals to heathen lords, since they are false to God and less worthy than Christian men. Neither [should they be servants] to Christian lords, for they are brethren in kind, and Jesus Christ bought Christian men on the cross, and made them free.”

But against this “heresy,” Paul and Peter are again cited, and their words are expounded in a manner which, if open to the charge of fault at all, is faulty on the side of teaching an undue submission to the will of the powerful.

ON CERTAIN ARTICLES, SERVANTS AND LORDS, ETC. 53

“Yet some men,” he observes, “who are without charity, slander poor priests with this error: that servants and tenants may lawfully withhold rents and service from their lords, when their lords are openly wicked in their living. And they invent and utter this falsehood against poor priests, to make lords hate them — and not to maintain the truth of God’s law, which they teach openly for the honor of God, and the profit of the realm, and the establishing of the king’s power, and the destroying of sin.”

The following passage explains the origin of this “slander.”

“This is a feigned saying of Antichrist’s clerics: that if subjects may lawfully withdraw tithes and offerings from *curates* who openly live in lechery or in other great sins, and who do not perform their office, then servants and tenants may lawfully withdraw their service and rents from their *lords*, who openly live a cursed life.”

The reply to this imputation is that withholding the means of support from professed ministers of religion in the supposed case, is a course of duty prescribed alike by Holy Scripture and by human reason; while in the case of the magistrate,

“Men are charged of God by Peter and Paul, to be thus subject to wicked lords. Christ and his apostles accordingly paid tribute to the heathen emperor; while we do not read that he or any apostle paid tithes to the wicked high-priests after the time that he began to preach. By the Gospel, and Christ’s life, and that of the apostles, priests have no such power to constrain men to pay them tithes” (as the magistrate has power to compel men to be obedient), “especially while they do not fulfill the duties of their spiritual office, but harm men by false teaching and by evil example. Even if they did their office well, and men would not pay tithes, they should not curse men, but suffer meekly, as Jesus Christ did.”

But if the people owe obedience to lords, lords owe justice, protection, and kind offices to those below them:

¹ MS. *ibid.* and Trin. Coll. Dub. pp. 156-167. This piece, it is plain, did not appear until the doctrine of the Reformer — by means of his other writings and of the preaching of his “poor priests” — had become so prevalent as to be much misunderstood or misrepresented. I would account it one of his quite latest works, probably called forth in great part by the Wat Tyler insurrection.

“We now see how lords should live in their state. First, they should know God’s law, and study it, and maintain it, and despise wrong-doing, and maintain poor men in their right to live in rest, and peace, and charity, and not allow men, under colour of their authority, to extort men, to do violence to men, or to hold poor men out of their right by strength of lordship.”

Kings and great lords should not give themselves to keeping many wives, but remember the evils which have come in the train of such indulgences. They should seek wisdom from on high. They should be a terror to the wrongdoer. They should be as eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; as “fathers to the poor; and the cause which they do not know, they should search out. They should break the jaws of the wicked, and pluck the spoil out of his teeth.”¹

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Magistracy, it is insisted, was instituted for these ends. And men who fill such offices without attending to their proper duties, should charge their account with meeting the displeasure of the Almighty, and with seeing their authority pass before long to more worthy hands.

In conclusion, the clergy who slander poor priests in the manner stated, are censured on account of their simony, their insincerity, and especially on account of their hypocrisy in vending their pretended pardons. “No pardon comes,” says Wycliffe, “but by God. For spiritual good begins and ends in charity, and this may not be bought or sold as marketing prelates say in these days. For whoever is most charitable is best heard by God, whether shepherd or layman, in the church or in the field.” As a whole, this piece is opposed throughout to all unjust pretension on the part of priests or magistrates, pointing out the delinquencies of both with the same freedom; while obedience, both in religious matters and in civil matters, is inculcated under the guidance of scriptural authority, and enlightened reason. The piece consists of twelve quarto pages. It abounds in the seeds of both order and advancement, in the ecclesiastical and in the secular.

20. *De Diabolo et Membris.*² The English title of this piece is — *How Satan and his priests, and his feigned religious, contrive by three cursed heresies to destroy all good living, and to maintain all manner of sin.* It begins thus —

As Almighty God in Trinity ordains men to come to the bliss of heaven by three grounds — by knowing the Trinity, by sad³ faith, by truly keeping God’s commandments, and by perfect and endless charity — so Satan and his worldly clerics, and his feigned religious (full of subtle hypocrisy), contrive to destroy all virtuous life, and justice, and maintain all manner of sin, by these three cursed grounds: — the *first*, that Holy Writ is false; the *second*, that it is lawful and advantageous to lie; the *third*, that it is against charity to openly decry prelates’ sins, and other men’s sins.⁴

We have seen that ecclesiastics,⁵ when the authority of certain passages of Scripture was alleged against them, were accustomed to reply that the literal rendering of such texts would lead to absurdity and untruth, and that by adopting a freer interpretation of such passages, they generally contrived to explain away their meaning. Wycliffe denounces this as “putting falsehood on Holy

¹ Job 29.15-17.

² [The Devil and his Members.](#)

³ *Sad*: [here it means steadfast \(Middle English\).](#)

⁴ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 177-184.

⁵ [Ecclesiastics: clergymen.](#)

Writ” — and it only concedes to clerics the liberty to thus destroy the certainty and truth of Holy Writ; and all motive to either religion or virtue, is said to be destroyed.

SATAN, HIS PRIESTS, AND HIS FEIGNED RELIGIOUS. 55

It is in this manner that this first heresy is said to be opposed to “all good living,” and to be favorable to the maintenance “of all manner of sin;” and its abettors are reproached as “feigning to be wiser than God.”

The Reformer expatiates ¹ largely on the charge that it is against charity to speak openly against the sins of prelates and other men. He argues that if this charge were true, it would follow that the teaching of Christ and his apostles, and no less the teaching of the prophets under the Old Testament dispensation, must be included in it, as nothing is more conspicuous in their preaching than the denunciation of sin — and not only of sin in general, but of classes and persons.

“Almighty God, full of charity, commands the prophet Isaiah to cry and not cease, and to show the people their great sins. Sin in commoners is great; sin in mighty and wise men is more; but sin in prelates is most, and it most blinds the people. True men, therefore, are bound by God’s commandment to cry out most against the sin of prelates, since it is the most sin, and harms the people most.”

The language of the Almighty to the prophet Ezekiel is cited as showing that the priest who fails to warn sinful men of their danger, will be held responsible for the souls which perish through such lack of fidelity.² Concerning those of the clergy who complained that their faults were exposed in their absence, Wycliffe observes, “Antichrist makes them so mighty, that no man dare speak against their open sins in their presence, unless he wants to be dead shortly.” Accordingly, to prohibit complaint in their absence, was to impose the most absolute silence concerning any of their evil deeds.

The following passage will indicate the notion of our Reformer in respect to the materials of which ecclesiastical councils were generally composed. On such occasions,

“worldly prelates make a congregation of themselves and of clerics assenting to them; some assenting for worldly favor, some for gold and the hope of benefices, and some for fear of the curse of losing benefices, of slander, or of imprisoning and burning.”

The assemblies thus constituted are described as doing their utmost to disparage the word of God, and to prevent the people from taking it as their guide. But it is maintained that everything thus alleged concerning the supposed insufficiency of Scripture, is so much imputation cast upon the wisdom or benevolence of its Author.

In this tract, Wycliffe censures the manner in which the religious orders sometimes attempted to recruit their forces from among the young and unwary.

“It is an accursed fraud,” he exclaims, “to draw young children who have but little discretion, to these new feigned religious, by gifts, and by promises of worldly lordships, honor, and sureness of bodily

¹ *Expatiate*: to elaborate; to add details to an account or idea; clarify the meaning of something.

² **Eze 33:6-7** ‘But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.’ ⁷ “So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.

welfare, more than by telling them of willing poverty, and penance, and despite,¹ and of forsaking all things. All this is simony and heresy, if it is well sought.²

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But it is a more accursed falsehood still, to steal young children from their friends, and by false deceits make them to be professed, sometimes against their will, and not to allow them to leave their vain order — though they know they are unable to do so.”

The following sentiment also, bearing in mind when and where it was uttered, will be seen as one of great force and interest. “Christian men should know that whoever *lives* best, *prays* best; and that the simple paternoster³ of a ploughman who has charity, is better than a thousand masses of covetous prelates and the vain religious!” The piece concludes thus:

“Almighty God in Trinity, destroy these nests of Antichrist and his clerics, and strengthen all manner of men to maintain the truth of Holy Writ, to destroy falsehood, and to openly preach against the hypocrisy, heresy, and covetousness of all evil prelates, and priests, and feigned religious, both in word and deed; for then good life and truth, and peace, and charity shall reign among Christian men! Jesus Christ! For your endless mercy, grant us this end! Amen!”

21. For three Skills, Lords should constrain Clerics to live in meekness: wilful poverty, discreet penance, and spiritual labor. This is the title of another English tract. It begins thus —

Open teaching of God’s law, old and new, open example of Christ’s life and of his glorious apostles, love of God, dread of pains and God’s curse, and hope of great reward in the bliss of heaven, should stir all priests and the religious to live in great meekness and willing poverty, according to the Gospel; and to discreet penance and labor; and to stop pride, covetousness, and fleshly lusts, and the idleness of worldly men; and to run fast to heaven by the right way of God’s commandments.⁴

On the duty of the laity, and especially of men in authority, they are to be employed in endeavoring to bring both the clergy and the people generally into this better state. Wycliffe expresses himself as follows:

“Kings and lords should know that they are ministers and vicars of God to avenge sin, and to punish wrong-doers, and to praise good-doers, as Peter and Paul teach.⁵ And to this end, St. Isidore⁶ teaches in the law of the church, that it is the office of the king and lords, by fear, and by bodily rigour, to

¹ *Despite*: lack of respect accompanied by a feeling of intense dislike.

² *Well sought*: eagerly or heartily pursued.

³ *Paternoster*: the Lord’s Prayer in Latin; translates as ‘our father.’

⁴ MS. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 184-193. This treatise and the preceding bear all the marks of belonging to a late period in the life of the Reformer, but we have no means of determining their date with precision.

⁵ **Rom 13:3-4** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. **1Pet 2:13-14** Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

⁶ Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) Archbishop of Seville, regarded as the last of the Fathers of the Church, “protector of the monks,” and “the last scholar of the ancient world.” He assembled extracts of many books from classical antiquity that might otherwise have been lost.

constrain men to keep the law of God, when they will not so do by the preaching of priests. And God shall ask a reckoning of worldly lords, whether holy church is increased by their governance.”

Having referred with his usual freedom to the faults of the clergy, Wycliffe adds,

“These sins worldly lords are in debt to amend; for otherwise they do not love God, since they do not execute God’s commands, and do not avenge the wrong and despite ([disrespect](#)) done to him.

FOR THREE SKILLS LORDS SHOULD CONSTRAIN CLERICS. 57

Also Paul says that not only men doing sin are worthy of death, but also those who consent to it; and since lords may amend these great sins of pride, covetousness, extortions, and simony in clerics, they are damnable with the sinners themselves unless they do so. And since adversities and wars come for sins reigning which are not amended, till those sins are amended, lords should have neither respite nor peace. For lords have their lordship from God to destroy sin, and to maintain righteousness and holy life, and no man so withstanding God’s law shall have peace. If then they do not pay this rent to God, they should well know that God must punish them as he teaches in his law. And certainly, if lords did this office well, they should surely come to the bliss of heaven.”

These observations all relate to the first “skill,” or reason, why lords should constrain clerics in the manner proposed; namely, a dread of the consequences which must follow negligence in this particular.

The second reason that should dispose them to make such use of their station and influence, is the great gain in respect to piety, and the peace proper to it, that would thus accrue to clerics, lords, and commoners. It is stated, that at present,

“prelates and great possessioners are so occupied in their hearts about worldly lordships and pleas of business, that they may not be in exercises of devotion, in prayer, in thought on heavenly things, on the sins of their own hearts, or on the sins of other men, or in the study and preaching of the Gospel, and visiting and comforting poor men.”

He then ridicules the idea that “rich clerics of the Chancery, of the Common Bench, of the King’s Bench, and in the Exchequer, and those who serve as justices, sheriffs, stewards, and bailiffs,” should be priests in a condition to reprove the worldliness of the laity. Such men, moreover, not only fail in the duty which they owe to their respective churches, but these persons especially are the ones who are likely to “set an idiot for vicar or parish priest, who cannot and may not do the office of a good curate — and yet the poor parish finds him, and no tongue in this world can tell what sin and wrong comes by this.”

The third reason that should constrain lords to this course is the great strengthening of the state, which must follow from such a purification of the church and from putting such discountenance ¹ on every form of irreligion and immorality. In this manner especially,

“the poor commoners would be discharged from heavy rents, and wicked customs brought in by covetous clerics; and from many heavy tallages [[i.e., taxes](#)] and extortions by which they are now burdened and robbed. And thus, by restoring lordship to secular men (as due by Holy Writ), and by bringing clerics to meekness, and willing poverty, and busy spiritual labor (as Christ and his apostles lived), sin would be destroyed in each level of holy church; and holy life would be brought in, and secular lords would be much strengthened; and the poor commoners would be relieved; and good government, both spiritual and worldly, would come again.”

¹ *Discountenance*: disfavor; showing disapproval of the behavior by discouraging it legally.

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With regard to the censures which may be fulminated ¹ against them, in attempting this thorough and greatly needed reformation, they are reminded that the wiser among them well know that,

“even if all the clerics on earth curse them because of their labor, they may with a clean conscience bring clerics to this holy life, exemplified and commanded by Christ, and restore secular lordships to secular men. As this would be according to God’s laws, God and all angels and saints will bless them for this righteousness. The curses of these men harm no one, nor their interdicts, nor any censure which Satan may invent. Almighty God, stir our clerics, our lords, our commoners, to maintain the rightful ordinance of Jesus Christ made for clerics, and to dread the curse of God, and not the curse of Antichrist, and to desire speedily the honor of God and bliss of heaven, more than their own honor and worldly joy. Amen!”

22. Of Wedded Men and Wives, and of their Children also. This piece commences — “Our Lord God Almighty speaks in his law of two matrimonies, or wedlocks.” ² Matrimony in the first sense, is said to be that which subsists between Christ and his church, which ends in bringing his redeemed children to heaven. Matrimony in the second sense, is that which takes place “between man and woman by just consent, according to God’s law.” Marriage in this latter sense was approved by God in paradise, by Jesus Christ when on earth, and by his apostles, one of whom has mentioned “forbidding to marry” as a mark of the heresy which would arise in the last days. ^{1Tim 4.1-3} But while this “bodily matrimony” is spoken of as a “sacrament,” it is in the following terms that Wycliffe speaks respecting the constrained celibacy of the clergy.

“Since fornication is so perilous, and men and women are so frail, God ordained priests in the old law to have wives, and never forbid it in the new, neither by Christ nor by his apostles; rather, he approved it. But now, by the hypocrisy of the fiend and of false men, many bind themselves to priesthood and chastity, and forsake wives according to God’s law. Nevertheless, virginity is so high and so noble, that Christ did not command it generally, but said, he who may, should take it. And St. Paul, therefore, gave no command of virginity, but gave counsel to those who were able to do so. ^{1Cor 7.1-9} Thus priests who keep clean chastity, in body and soul, do best. But many, on account of these new bonds needlessly made, assume this charge indiscreetly, and slander themselves foully before God and his saints.”

OF WEDDED MEN AND WIVES. 59

The Reformer censures those who marry women for their wealth, who are unsuitable in age, thus exposing themselves to great temptation and many evils. He reproves parents also, who constrain their children to marry against their inclinations. And in the conjugal relation, while assigning government to the man, he enjoins considerateness and affection in all things, using the language of Peter and Paul.

On parental duty he writes,

“Paul bids that the father nourish his children in the love and chastening of God. And God commands in the old law, that fathers should teach their children God’s commandments, and the wonders and miracles which he did in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the waters of Jordan, and in the land of promise. And much more are fathers and mothers held to teach their children belief in the Trinity, and in Jesus Christ: how he is truly God, without beginning, and was made man through the most burning charity to save mankind, by strong penance, hard treatment, and a bitter death; and also,

¹ *Fulminate*: to come on suddenly and intensely.

² MS. C.C.C. Cambridge.

all the common parts of Christian belief. Parents who support their children knowingly in sin, are worse than those cruel fathers and mothers who killed their children, and offered them to stocks.”¹

Baptism, and repeating a paternoster, will not avail for such children. They must repent, and keep the commandments of God, if they would be saved from being “deep damned in hell.” It is added —

“There are three faults seen many times in wedded men and women. The first is that they sorrow for their children if they are naked or poor, but they consider it nothing that their children are lacking in virtues; and with much labor and cost they obtain great riches, and high estates, and benefices for their children, oftentimes to their greater damnation. But they will not seek for their children the goods of grace, and a virtuous life; and they will not allow them to retain such goods freely proffered to them, but rather hinder them as much as they may. And they say that if the child inclines himself to meekness and poverty, and flees covetousness and pride, and flees from the dread of sin, to please God, that he will never be a man, and never cost them a penny. And they will curse him if he lives well and teaches other men God’s law to save men’s souls. For by doing so, they say, the child draws many enemies to his elders, and he slanders all his noble kindred, who were ever held true men and worshipful.”²

23. How Antichrist and his Clerics labor to destroy Holy Writ, and to make Christian Men unstable in the Faith, and to set their ground in Devils of Hell.

60 ON THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE IN MANUSCRIPT

The tract with this title begins —

As our Lord Jesus Christ ordained to make his Gospel steadfastly known³ by the writings of the four Evangelists, and maintained against heretics and men without belief, so the Devil plans by Antichrist and his worldly false clerics, to destroy Holy Writ and the belief of Christian men, by four cursed ways or false reasonings.⁴

These four ways are —

“*First*, that the church has more authority and more credence than any Gospel. *Secondly*, that St. Augustine says he would not believe in the Gospel, unless the church taught him so. *Thirdly*, that no man now alive knows which is the Gospel, unless it is by the approving of the church. And *fourthly*, if men say that they believe that this is the Gospel of Matthew or John, they ask, ‘Why do you believe that this is the Gospel?’ since whoever believes this, has no cause unless the church confirms and teaches it.

“First, they say that Nicodemus, and many more, wrote the Gospel of Christ’s life, and his teaching, and the church put them away, and approved these four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then the church might as well have put out these four Gospels, *and* approved the other, since it was in the free-will and power of the church to approve and condemn what they would, and to approve and accept what they liked; and therefore men should believe the church more than any Gospel.”

Wycliffe says in reply —

¹ *Stocks*: An instrument of punishment consisting of a heavy timber frame with holes in which the feet (and sometimes the hands) of an offender could be locked.

² That is, his virtuous life will expose theirs as having been unvirtuous, despite their reputation.

³ Originally, “sadly known” – Middle English usage.

⁴ M.S. C.C.C. Cambridge. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 173-177.

“First, what these forecasting ¹ heretics understand to be the church, is the pope of Rome, and his cardinals, and the multitudes of worldly clerics, assenting to his simony and worldly lordships above all kings and emperors of the world. For otherwise it would not be to their purpose to thus magnify the church. True men, then, say that the clergy which first existed — knowing men, and holy of life — were stirred by the Holy Ghost to accept these Gospels, and not to charge Christian people with more, since these are enough and profitable to the full. And those four witnesses were accepted by the Holy Ghost for many reasons, which we may not now tell. But certainly the church might not have put away these Gospels, and accepted the other, for then it would have acted against the judgment of God, and against the truth of Jesus Christ, and against the charity of the Holy Ghost.”

But the Divine illumination which enabled the earlier ministers of the church to thus distinguish between the genuine records of inspiration and all spurious writings, is said to have been sadly lacking in the clergy of later times. Speaking of the contemporary priesthood, Wycliffe observes,

ANTICHRIST AND HIS CLERICS DESTROY HOLY WRIT. 61

“Jesus Christ says his Gospel is an everlasting testament; but these men would destroy it with a stinking blast from the mouth of Antichrist. Lord! How can Christian men dare maintain such heretics against God’s teaching and the peace of Christian people? Such heretics are fully unable to rule prelates, and lords, and commoners, to shrift ² in preaching and praying, and to do other points concerning their souls’ health. For they destroy them in faith and good life, so that their own pride, and covetousness, and lusts may be borne up; and they draw to hell all men who are ruled by such false confessors, false preachers, and false counsellors.”

Wycliffe then proceeds to what he describes as the “SECOND WHEEL” in the machine of this adversary.

“They bear upon Austin,” he writes, “that he says he would not believe in the Gospel, unless the church says it is true. Men answer that Austin says to this intent, that he would not believe it unless Christ, head of holy church and saints in heaven, and the apostles of Christ that are holy church, said and approved the Gospel. And this understanding is fully true, and according to the letter of Austin. But they understand it this way: that unless the cursed multitude of worldly clerics approve this as the Gospel, Austin would not believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

But to make the church consist in a degenerate priesthood, to the exclusion of the body of the faithful, and to reason this way on that assumption, is said to make everything valuable in the religion of Christ depend on approval from men who have shown themselves its enemies —

“But whose heresy,” he exclaims, “might sooner destroy the belief of Christian men? — and God forbid that Austin should be found in poisonous heresy. It is accursed falsehood, therefore, to slander Austin with this accursed error, colouring their own false understanding and heresy using the name of this holy doctor. For by this cursed wheel, Antichrist’s clerics condemn the faith of Christian men, and the commandments of God, and points of charity, and bring in their own wayward laws. Therefore, Christian men should stand to the death to maintain Christ’s Gospel, and the true understanding of it obtained by a holy life and great study — and not set their faith or trust in sinful prelates and their accursed clerics, nor in their understanding of Holy Writ. For with their worldly life and pride, they are unable to see the truth of it.”

“See now,” the Reformer proceeds to say, “the THIRD WHEEL of Satan’s chair. — They say that no man can know what the Gospel is, except by the approving and confirming of the church. But true men say

¹ *Forecast*: To contrive or plan beforehand.

² *Shrift*: Grant remission of a sin (from “shrive” – to confess and be absolved).

that, to their understanding, this is full of falsehood. For Christian men are certain of belief by the gracious gift of Jesus Christ — that the truth taught by Christ and his apostles is the Gospel — even though all the clerics of Antichrist say the contrary ever so fast, and require men to believe the contrary on pain of cursing, imprisoning, and burning.

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And this belief is not founded on the pope and his cardinals — for then it might fail and be undone as *they* fail and are sometimes destroyed. Rather, [it is founded] on Jesus Christ, God and Man, and on holy Trinity. And so it may never fail except by the default of the one who would love God and serve him, and fails in these two points. For Almighty God and his truths are the foundation of the faith of Christian men; and as St. Paul says, no man may set another foundation besides that which is set, that is Jesus Christ.^{1Cor 3.11} Therefore, though Antichrist and all his accursed clerics are buried deep in hell for their accursed misery, and pride, and other sins, yet the Christian's faith does not fail. And plainly, that is because they are not the ground of it, but Jesus Christ is the ground of it. For he is our God, and our best master, and ready to teach true men all things that are profitable and necessary for their souls."

"The FOURTH WHEEL of Belial's cart is this: If Christian men say they know by belief that this is Christ's Gospel, these malicious heretics ask, *Why* do you believe that this is the Gospel? But true men ask them in return, why *they* believe that God is God. And if they give a good sufficient cause, we give the same cause why we believe that this is Christ's Gospel. But they say, whatever the prelates teach, teach that openly, and maintain it steadfastly — it has as great authority, or more, than Christ's Gospel. And so they would destroy Holy Writ, and Christian faith, and maintain that whatever they do is no sin. But Christian men take their faith from God by his gracious gift, when he gives them knowledge and understanding of truths that are necessary to save men's souls by grace, and to assent in their heart to such truths. And men call this *faith*; and from this faith, Christian men are more certain than any man is of mere worldly things by any bodily wit.¹ And therefore Christ most reproves the defect of belief, both in the Jews and his disciples. And therefore Christ's apostles most prayed to have stability in the faith, for it is impossible for any man to please God without faith.^{Heb 11.6} And so Christ prayed principally that the faith of Peter and of the other disciples, might not ever fail.^{Luk 22.32} And God's law tells how by faith saints worked all the great wonders and miracles that they did. And if Antichrist says here that each man may feign that he has a right faith, and a good understanding of Holy Writ, when he is in error, let a man truly seek the honor of God in all things, and live justly to God and man, and God will not fail to give him anything necessary, either in faith, or in understanding, or in answer against his enemies."

This piece concludes thus:

"May God Almighty strengthen his little flock against Antichrist, to seek truly the honor of Christ and the salvation of men's souls; to despise the feigned power of Antichrist; and willingly and joyfully suffer reproof in the world for the name of Jesus Christ and his Gospel; to give a good example to others to follow; and to conquer the high bliss of heaven by glorious martyrdom as other saints did before! Jesus, for your endless might, endless wisdom, endless goodness and charity, grant to us sinful wretches, this love! Amen!"

FALSE GLOSSES MAKE GOD'S LAW DARK. 63

In this examination of the writings of Wycliffe, I have followed thus far the manuscripts in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, from which all my extracts are taken, except in the instance of number fifteen — the piece entitled, "Of Feigned Contemplative Life." My extracts from that treatise are taken, for the most part, from the manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin.

¹ Knowledge by the senses.

24. *De Dominis Divino.*¹ The piece thus described, begins, “Since false glosses make God’s law dark, and hinder secular men from sustaining and keeping it, each man should be aware of such false glosses.”² The false glosses of which complaint is most made, are those resorted to with a view to sustain the present endowed state of the church. In this tract, as in many of the preceding ones, Wycliffe denounces the sort of endowment referred to, as contrary both to the Jewish and the Christian law. The effect of attempting to sustain religion by such means has been to subject the clergy generally to the influence of covetous and worldly passions. And with such examples before them in the priesthood, secular lords take license to conduct themselves oppressively towards their tenants; “and so this endowing against God’s law, does harm to lords, and clerics, and commoners — both bodily harm, and harm in their souls.” The Reformer accordingly urges that men should retrace their steps in this particular; and that the church should be freed from this form of incumbrance and mischief, notwithstanding all the laws which may exist in its favor, whether of church or state. If it is alleged against this bold counsel, that the system thus menaced has been approved by many holy men, and that its sanctity has been further established by a host of miracles, Wycliffe replies,

“Here men should know that many such appearances often come from the fiend, for man’s first sin. So as St. Paul says, the fiend has power to make himself appear as an angel of light.^{2Cor 11.14} And so it is an untrue man that would trust such signs as much as he trusts the faith of God’s law. And so it is no belief, that all those men who are hired by the pope are to be held as saints.³ And few men know how those wonders, which we call miracles, came about — whether from good or evil. For we know well that the fiend often does much good. We stand stable in our belief, for that may never fail.”

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Wycliffe extends his censure from these points to the conduct of the clergy in claiming exemption from the authority of the civil magistrate. He affirms that it was the ancient law and the practice of the kingdom, for secular tribunals to take cognisance of all civil offences on the part of the clergy. In judging all such questions, the laity, it is maintained, are in every respect as fully fit as the priesthood.

25. *De Papa Romana, or Schisma Papæ.*⁴ The tract which sometimes has these titles, begins, “For this uncouth dissension that is between these popes, seems to signify the perilous times that Paul said would come.”

The writer commences by referring to the circumstance of this schism in the papacy, as favorable to a free discussion of questions relating to the church. He speaks of the present as a fitting occasion on which to sever from the papacy, and from the clergy generally, their ill-gotten lordships and endowments. He thus concludes the first chapter:

“Trust in the help of Christ on this point, for he has begun to help us graciously, in that he has crushed the head of Antichrist, and made the two parts fight against each other. For no doubt it is the sin of the popes, which has been so long continued, that has brought in this division. And so if both these heads last, or one by itself, then the last error shall be worse than the first.^{Mat 12.45} Emperors and kings should

¹ *De Dominis Divino*: The Lords of the Divine (sarcastically put).

² MS. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class. C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 188-193.

³ That is, these men are not saints just because the pope says so; nor are they the arbiters of truth. – WHG

⁴ *The Pope of Rome, or Papal Schism*. MS. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. pp. 193-208. The first sentence of this work fixes its date as subsequent to 1378, and No. xxiii. manifestly belongs to the same period.

therefore help in this cause, to maintain God's law, to conquer their own heritage, and to destroy this foul sin — saving persons. And then peace would be established and simony destroyed."

In the second chapter it is stated that the advocates of this kind of change are said to be "heretics, wicked men, and the few against others." Wycliffe adds, "It is a comfort that these three reasons mean nothing." The third chapter commences with a reference to the pretended infallibility of the pope, on which the Reformer observes — "Here the children of the fiend should learn their logic and their philosophy, that they not be heretical in a false understanding of the law of Christ." The election of cardinals or princes is declared to be of no value, if it is not in accordance with the law of God. The only proper appointments to priesthood or government in the church, are the appointments of virtuous, able, and holy men. Concerning the power of binding and loosing that is assumed by the clergy, it is said that —

"There is no greater heresy than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sins if he gives money; or if a priest lays his hand on the head and says that he absolves you. For you must be sorrowful in your heart, and make amends to God, or else *God* will not absolve you."

OF PERFECT LIFE. 65

In the next chapter, the subject is renewed. "This confession which is made to man, has often been varied with the varying of the church. For first, men confessed to God, and to the common people, and this confession was used in the time of the apostles." But since that kind of confession among Christians — confession to God, and to one another — has given way to the practice of confession to a priest, great mischiefs have followed. Priests are commonly lacking in the qualifications necessary to wisely discharge the duties which thus devolve on them. The whole argument on this subject is given in the boldest and most vigorous style, tending to expose the folly of the confidence generally placed in the efficacy of priestly absolution, and the special absurdity of the popish doctrine concerning the supposed supererogatory ¹ merits of priests, and also the uses to which the clergy affected ² to apply them. Accordingly, His advice is — "Confess to God,³ in constancy and contrition, and God may not fail: he will absolve you."

26. *Of Perfect Life*, is one of a series of short pieces known by the title of *The Poor Caitif*. Some account will be given of this afterward. It commences thus — "Christ, not compelling, but freely counselling each man to a perfect life, says thus..." The language cited is that of our Lord in the ninth chapter of Luke, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take his cross, and follow me." On which the Reformer thus comments: —

"Let us forsake what we have made ourselves by sin, and dwell as we are made by grace. If a proud man is converted to Christ, and is made meek, he has forsaken himself. If a covetous man ceases to covet, and gives away his own things, he has denied himself. If a lecherous man changes his life to chastity, he has denied himself. As St. Gregory says, 'He denies himself, who forsakes and withstands the unreasonable will of his flesh.' The cross of Christ is taken when, for the love of truth, despisings are not forsaken;^{1Cor 1.28} when the flesh is punished by abstinence;^{1Cor 9.27} when compassion and pity toward our neighbor is truly kept;^{Mat 22.39} when a man is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him,^{Gal 6.14} setting aside the joy of it.^{Heb 12.1-2} It is not enough to bear the cross of a painful life, unless men follow Christ in virtues — not by the steps of bodily feet, but by meekness, love, and heavenly desire. Meekness makes a good soul to Christ, what Martha was to him.^{Joh 11.5} As St. Bernard says,

¹ *Supererogatory*: doing more than is required, so as to merit greater reward.

² *Affect*: to make a deliberate pretense or exaggerated display of something.

³ Originally, "Shrive to God;" *shrive* has come to mean the priestly absolution of sin, not merely its confession.

‘Love makes a soul the spouse of Christ.’ Heavenly desire raises the soul on high, and makes it forget the world, and all the likings of it. ^{Joh 2.15} He takes the cross, and is ready to meet all peril for God, and if need be, to die rather than forsake Christ. ^{Mat 10.39} And whoever does not thus take his cross, and does not thus follow Christ, is not worthy to be his disciple, nor to possess him, as he himself says.” ^{Mat 10.38}

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But men are cautioned against such a reliance on the mercy of God, that it may dispose them to delay repentance, and to heap sins one upon another; since St. Austin says: —

“The most merciful Lord forgives sin for men flying to penitence, but he does not make us so sure of the Lord’s mercy, that we keep to our sins. Nor do we say, ‘While the strength of the flesh endures, that we may have our covetings now, and at the last minute we will do penance for our sins — for the Lord is merciful, and he will not mind our sins.’ ‘I beseech you,’ says St. Austin, ‘do not think so, for it is the highest folly to think such things.’ Therefore we hasten to repentance, and the Last Day is ever before our eyes. We restrain our bodies from vice, and from evil covetings, and we ever let our heart think on heavenly things. Lord Jesus! Turn us to you, and then we shall be turned. Heal us, and we shall be truly holy. ^{Jer 17.14} For without grace and help from you, no man may be truly turned or healed. For those who turn to God today, and turn away tomorrow, are but scorners — doing penance today, and turning back to their former evils tomorrow. What is turning to God? It is nothing but turning from the world, from sin, and from the fiend. What is turning from God? It is nothing but turning to the changeable goods of this world, to the works of the fiend, and the lusts of the flesh. To be turned from the world, is to treat as nothing, and to put out of mind, all its joys and mirths, and to meekly suffer all its bitterness, slander, and deceits, for the love of Christ. It is to leave all occupations that are unlawful and unprofitable to the soul; and to be dead to every such thing that the world worships and loves.”

He concludes by observing that Satan frequently presents occasions for temptation before those men who are most eminent in holiness, and who are least likely to be influenced by them.

“But he studies to blow against us all manner of temptations and tribulations, by how much he sees that we have escaped his power by the mercy of God. For he seeks nothing so much as to separate a man from the pure and everlasting love of Jesus Christ, and to make him love failing things, and the uncleanness of this world.” ¹

27. Of the Seven Deadly Sins. The work under this title begins thus: “Since belief teaches us that every evil is only sin, or comes from sin, sin should be fled as all manner of evil.” ²

This treatise extends to eighty quarto pages, and after the above initial sentence, it proceeds thus:

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS. 67

“And since nothing is fled by the wisdom of man, except as the harm of that thing is known, every true man should know sin well, and so he should know the fruit of it. All manner of evil is only sin, or else the pain which comes only from sin. Pain comes from sin in five manners. Pain comes to Christ, to buy man from sin. Pain comes to the condemned, to avenge sin. Pain comes to God’s children, to purge them from sin. Pain comes to many men to keep them from sin. Pain comes to other men to show that

¹ These extracts are from the MS. Class C. Tab. v. No. 24. in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. The substance of the piece has been printed in *The British Reformers*, from a copy in the British Museum.

² MS. Bodleian Library. Archiv. A. 83. There is a short tract under this title among the Wycliffe MSS., in Trinity College, Dublin. Class C. Tab. v. No. 6. pp. 35-38. The allusion toward the close of this extended treatise to the popes, as encouraging all mischiefs and bloodshed of a crusade, in support of their worldly pretensions, settles the date of this work as being not earlier than 1383.

God hates sin. And so, as God is the best thing in the world, sin is the worst thing in the world. And so, while all other things are God's creatures, sin is made without God, as St. John says.

"God may not bid man to sin, for His own goodness. Sin may not serve God, even though it may profit. The sin of our first father might not be bought away, except by God and man, who is above the angels. If you would flee death and pain in any manner, then flee sin more; for pain is a good medicine which Christ himself took to heal man of sin. For the righteousness of God may not suffer sin, unless He punishes it; and this was the cause of the pain which Christ suffered for man." ^{2Cor 5.21}

Wycliffe then states, as he has done in the "Poor Caitif," the "Trialogus," and several other works, that the sin which is never forgiven — the sin against the Holy Ghost — is that of the man who dies in a state of impenitence.

"Sin," he proceeds, "is called deadly, because it brings death to the body and soul, and that is without end. And sin is called venial,¹ because God's Son forgives it. But men should be at war with *all* sin because of its peril, since they do not know deadly sin from venial — inasmuch as they never know whether this sin will ever have an end, or whether this man will be damned through being hardened in his sins."

After these introductory observations, the Reformer proceeds to enumerate and describe the different "manners of sin that come to man."

The first sin mentioned is PRIDE, which is said to arise sometimes separately, and sometimes otherwise, as from "the gifts of grace; the wit that God has given; gifts in kind, such as bodily strength, or bodily beauty; or from the goods of fortune, and the riches of the world." All these gifts are said to be from God, and each man should possess them in humility, endeavoring "meekly to serve his God, according to the gifts he has from Him." The craftsman should know his occupation, and the scholar should be conversant with human learning; but the knowledge of Holy Scripture is a science with which all men should be acquainted. Every man must know the will of God, in order to do it; and he must do the will of God, in order to be happy; "so each man here must con² divinity — some more, some less — if he would be saved."

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The more men strive to hide this "science of God," the more it increases. The friars oppose themselves to the diffusion of this knowledge, and would gladly convert these spiritual treasures into articles of merchandise; "but since this science is freely given to men, it should be freely delivered; and because the telling of God's law would be most profitable to his church, the fiend is full busy in preventing such spiritual profit."

In the next section, [PRIDE IN APPEARANCE,] the Reformer censures the costume of the age as fanciful, costly, and often injurious to the body, as well as to the mind. If the force of custom is pleaded, his answer is that the force of the reasonable should be stronger, and that "to conform to the world, is to conform to an enemy."

The next topic is the folly of FAMILY PRIDE. To be related to Christ and his church, is the highest dignity.

"We should have joy from *this* kindred, and not from earthly kindred, for those would sometimes be beggars, or servants, or fools. And therefore Jesus Christ came only from poor kindred, and would not

¹ *Venial*: warranting only temporal punishment.

² *Con*: to know, as in *ken*; to commit to memory; learn by heart; come to understand.

make them rich in the world, except in virtues. He was not ashamed of the poverty of his kindred; but has taught us to be glad in the kinship of virtues; for joy in such kindred is the bliss of heaven.”

The PRIDE OF WEALTH is next referred to, as being little more reasonable than PRIDE OF FAMILY. To hoard wealth, is to sin. To be employed in distributing it, however wisely — as when we endeavor to abate the force of evils which would never have been known if sin had not entered into the world, and similar service relating to what is merely temporal — is to be in danger of withdrawing our attention injuriously from what is more immediately spiritual. Hence, it is said that the clergy should have “food and clothing necessary for them; and they should consider themselves paid with this, for more would tarry ¹ them.”

In the ninth section of this treatise, the author divides the church into three parts: preachers, defenders, and laborers. He speaks of the apostles as the “spiritual knights” of the Gospel; and of Christ as “going into all the world, not to fight with the cold arms of the body, but with the arms of charity.” He then states that the only gradation, rank, or office known in the church of Christ, in its earlier history, was that of “priests and deacons, living clerics’ lives. By ordinance of Christ, priests and bishops were all one. But afterwards, the emperor distinguished them, and made bishops into lords, and made priests their servants, This was the cause of envy, and it quenched much charity. And so, if possessioners were brought to that state which Christ ordained for his clerics, then men would have charity, both with secular clerics, and also with religious.” ²

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It has been the work of the fiend, he observes, to change this simpler state of things into one of “many colours, such as secular and religious; and both have many parts, such as popes, and cardinals, and bishops, and archdeacons; monks, canons, hospitallers,³ and friars. And each of these orders loves his brother more than he loves a man of another strange order, and he will defend his order by personal affection.” Amidst such separations of men into classes and sections, it is “no wonder,” says Wycliffe, “if charity is put away.” ⁴

¹ *Tarry*: delay or keep them from their duties.

² *Secular clerics*, Vaughn says this refers to the regular clergy, as distinguished from the religious orders (monks). But clergymen also served in secular occupations and offices, as distinct from church offices (see [p. xxvii](#)).

³ The Order of Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, a Catholic military order, that absorbed the property of Knights Templar when that order was dissolved.

⁴ “Touching holy orders, he held that there were but two — viz. of deacons and priests, so do we.” — “James’s Apology for John Wickliffe, showing his nonconformity to the now Church of England,” Oxford, 1608.

To illustrate the cause of Wycliffe’s irritation, the terms *friar*, *monk*, and *priest* are flexible. A priest may be monastic, religious, or “secular” (also called “diocesan”), but they are all *clergy*. A priest may be connected to a diocese, to a religious order, or to a monastic house (an abbey or priory/convent). All priests, whether diocesan or religious, take vows of celibacy, and of obedience to their superiors: a diocesan priest promises obedience to his bishop; a religious priest (like a Dominican or Franciscan) vows obedience to his superior, usually called a “provincial”; a monastic priest vows obedience to his abbot (if he lives in an abbey) or his prior (in a priory). Diocesan priests do not take vows of poverty and *may* possess and inherit property. Priests vowed to a religious order (like the Franciscans, Dominicans, etc) or a monastic community (like the Benedictines or Cistercians) *do* make vows of poverty, surrendering any income they generate through their works, to their superiors.

The word “friar” means “brother.” The word arose with the creation of the mendicant orders in the late Middle Ages, most predominantly by Saint Francis of Assisi (Franciscans) and Saint Dominic (Order of Preachers, or

In the section following, it is remarked that “just as virtues in priests quicken the church, sins and vices in them make the church venomous.” But the heaviest charge to be brought against the clergy is said to be, that to please some great men “they hide God’s law, and persecute priests for preaching the truth.” The parties thus opposed to religion are said to be no less opposed to humanity, combining to plunder and oppress the commonalty of the land.¹

The preceding observations respect the *first* of the three classes into which the church is divided, namely, the *preachers*. The observations following, are addressed to the two remaining classes, described as *defenders* and *laborers*. The former consists of lords and knights, and the latter of the body of the people. They are observations pointed especially against the irreligion and inhumanity attendant on the practice of war. The war carried on in Flanders in favor of Pope Urban is referred to,² and it appears to have disposed the mind of Wycliffe to the tone of expression observable in this part of the work. He complains much about the conduct of the clergy in this respect. He observes,

“They should be laborers for peace; but in word and deed they favor war, taking it as law that it is right to annoy³ an enemy in whatever way we can. But the charity of Christ bids the contrary. The virtue of charity should be most in clerics, but envy is most in them when they are turned to evil.”

The advocates of war made their appeal to the Old Testament. The reply of Wycliffe was, “In the old law, men fought with God’s enemies, to avenge God’s injuries, and for no other cause; and neither will men now, if their fighting is lawful.” Men, he contends, should war as the Israelites

“Dominicans”). These “new religious” were no longer tied to monasteries and convents, but went out among the people to preach and to pray, to educate and to serve the sick.

A “priest” who is part of a mendicant religious order is also a *friar*; a priest who is part of a conventual/monastic community (contemplative/stationary) is also a *monk*. But monks and friars need not be priests. Some monks and friars see their vocations as religious, content to simply be brothers within their order or community; they do not pursue the priesthood.

The word “monk” comes from the Latin word for hermit, meaning “solitude.” Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547) is considered the founder of Western Monasticism. It is possible for a priest to be neither “secular”, nor “friar”, nor “monk” but still be “a religious.” A Jesuit priest, or a Pauline priest, or a Salesian priest, is fully a priest and will make the same vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to their religious superiors as friars and monks, but they are simply priests of their respective communities. <http://aleteia.org/2015/12/07/>

¹ *Commonalty*: a class composed of persons lacking clerical or noble rank.

² Flanders fought for Urban VI. During the AVIGNON PAPACY (1309-1377), seven successive popes resided in Avignon rather than in Rome. This absence from Rome is sometimes called the “BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY of the Papacy.” This situation arose from the conflict between the Papacy and the French crown. In 1376, Gregory XI abandoned Avignon and moved his court to *Rome*, ending the Avignon Papacy. Following Gregory’s death in 1378, the Romans rioted to ensure the election of a Roman for pope. The cardinals elected a Neapolitan, **Urban VI**. He was suspicious, reformist, and prone to violent outbursts of temper (“The Mad Pope”). Many of the cardinals who had elected him soon regretted their decision: the majority removed themselves from Rome to Anagni, where they elected **Clement VII** and reestablished a papal court in *Avignon*. This second election threw the Church into turmoil and gave rise to the WESTERN SCHISM. Secular leaders had to choose which claimant they would recognize —

Avignon (**Clement VII**): France, Aragon, Castile and León, Cyprus, Burgundy, Savoy, Naples, Scotland and Owain Glyndwr’s rebellion in Wales;

Rome (**Urban VI**): Denmark, England, **Flanders**, the Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, Ireland (English Dominion), Norway, Portugal, Poland, Sweden, Republic of Venice, and other City States of northern Italy.

³ *Annoy*: to molest or harm, as a wolf might do.

did, only when commissioned as they were. Attention to this rule would bring the fulfilment of the prophecy, “Men shall break their swords into ploughshares, and learn war no more.”

“Yet Antichrist argues to keep men fighting, though humanity teaches that men should *not* fight. Their saying is, ‘Since an adder, by his nature, stings a man that treads on him, why should we not fight against our enemies, for otherwise they will destroy us?’ What man that has wit cannot see this fallacy?

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Well I know that angels withstood fiends; and many men with the right of law withstand their enemies — and yet they do not kill them, nor fight with them. And wise men of the world hold it well to thus vanquish their enemies without striking; and wise men of the Gospel vanquish by patience, and come to rest and peace by suffering death. Well I know that worldly men will scorn this sentence; but men who would be martyrs for the law of God will hold with it.”

The argument of Wycliffe seems to involve, to the full, the Quaker principle on the subject of war. He admits that God has “approved that knights should defend His law by strength,” but he insists that God has not granted them permission to “kill any man.” It was said, “But the pope approves crusades;” and the answer was that such a fact proves nothing, unless it can be proved that the pope is nearer infallibility than Peter.

“Christ is a good shepherd, for he puts his own life for saving the sheep. But Antichrist is a wolf of ravening, for he always does the reverse — he puts many thousand lives in place of his own wretched life. By forsaking things which Christ bids priests to forsake, he might cease all this strife. Why is he not a fiend — though a priest — who fights in this cause, stained foul with homicide? For if manslaying in others is odious to God, it is much more odious in priests, who should be vicars of Christ. And I am certain that the pope and all the men of his council cannot produce a spark of reason to show that he should do this.”

Wycliffe, it is plain, was not insensible to the difficulties attendant on the principle which he thus advocates. But he appears to have been prepared to abide by the worst supposable consequences of it, rather than consent to see the substitution of the war principle, in any shape, in its place. What is called the *right of conquest*, he treats as only so much robbery on a larger scale. If the Almighty were to “bid conquest,” such a title might become valid, and not otherwise.

“Lord!” he exclaims, “what honor falls to a knight that he kills many men? The hangman kills more, and with a better title. It would be better to be butchers of beasts than butchers of our brethren, for this [latter] is more unnatural.”

Many would probably complain of his strong language on this subject, especially as applied to the popish crusade. His answer was that the men are sharers in evil deeds if, by a “cowardly silence,” they fail to oppose them. His desire was that priests should “all give themselves to a heavenly life, as angels sent from God to draw men from the world,” instead of being more beset with the seven deadly sins than other men.

THREE THINGS TROUBLE THE REALM. 71

28. *Vita Sacerdotum*.¹ This piece begins, “This peril of friars is the last of eight that fall to man in this way.”²

¹ *Vita Sacerdotum: The Life of Priests*.

² MS. Bebl. Bodl. Archiv. A. 3072.

In its commencement, Wycliffe mentions the clergy as attempting to vindicate their claims to ecclesiastical endowments, by appealing to the provisions of the Jewish law in that particular. But the reply given, as on many similar occasions, is that the Levitical priesthood were wholly destitute of endowments in the sense intended. The provision made in their case was that they should not be possessed of landed property in any shape, and that they should depend wholly on the current tithes and offerings of the people. Such was the arrangement made in respect to the support of the priesthood under the old law. Secular lords are reminded that they are competent to reduce the Christian priesthood to the same condition, and that it behooves them to do so.

This tract consists of eight quarto pages. It contains an allusion to the council in London, which had condemned the doctrine of Wycliffe, as opposed (in the above sense) to ecclesiastical endowments. It also contains the following passage, which is equally decisive in respect to the late date of this production: "Either God's law is false, or else the realm of England will be punished sharply for persecuting poor priests, only for saying that Antichrist¹ should be ashamed of their manner of life, and that the bread of the altar is truly God's body, as the Gospel says, and as common faith holds."² In attempting the needed reformation, "some should help by prayer, some by good speech, some by worldly power, and some by good life."

29. *De Blasphemia contra Fratres.* The copy of this work in the Bodleian Library has the following title, *De Tribus Blasphemiis Monachorum*.³ Its initial words are, "It is said that three things disturb the realm, especially heresy."⁴

This work is much more extended than the preceding — it numbers forty pages. Wycliffe commences by defining the word *blasphemy* as used in this treatise. The term is used in respect to God, in the same sense as the term *slander* is applied to man. And the blasphemies charged against the friars are especially three — the errors inculcated by them in regard to the eucharist; their pleading the example of Christ as sanctioning their practice of mendicity;⁵ and their conduct in pretending to dispense pardons and indulgences to the people, for money.

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Men are said to blaspheme "when worthiness that is proper only to God, is put to a poor creature; when imperfection is put upon God; and when dignity is denied to God that must be accorded to Him from his great lordship." If blasphemy, in these senses, "is scattered among many men, this heresy is most common with the friars."

¹ Antichrist is used in the collective (plural) sense here for all those popish clerics who lead openly sinful lives.

² This tract is an indictment of the practices and doctrines of Rome; and Wycliffe opposes transubstantiation. So this statement cannot be understood to support it in any way. But to defend those "poor priests" who are being persecuted, Wycliffe makes the case that they are persecuted for agreeing that the bread is the body of God in Christ, just as Scripture states: "This is my body..." (Mat 26.26). But that is *all* they are saying, and *all* they will agree with. They refuse to say more, and so they are persecuted for saying only what Scripture says, not what the pope says. See the next tract for a more exacting distinction.

³ *De Blasphemia contra Fratres: The Blasphemy Against the Brothers; De Tribus Blasphemiis Monachorum: The Three Blasphemies of the Monks.*

⁴ Archiv. A. 83. The discussion in this work opposed to the doctrine of transubstantiation is evidence of its late date. It is not probable that it appeared earlier than in 1380, or at furthest in the year preceding. See *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe*, vol. ii. chap. iii.

⁵ *Mendicity*: beggary.

In regard to the first point, the eucharist, he writes, “We say surely from our faith, that the white round thing which the priest consecrates — like the unconsecrated host — and which is broken and eaten, is truly God’s body in the form of bread.” He cites St. Augustine as teaching that the bread remains bread after consecration, as opposed (accordingly) to the received doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that after the words of consecration, the bread does not remain bread, but is transubstantiated into the body of Christ. This is truly the doctrine of transubstantiation: that the bread ceases to be bread, by becoming the body, soul, and divinity of the Savior. The friars, as the advocates of this doctrine, are described as precluding men from exercising their senses in respect to religion, as well as from the just use of their higher faculties. The strongest of the senses, according to philosophers, are touch and taste; but if friars are to be credited, men should not allow any place to the role of these senses in the matter of the sacrament.

Against the absurdity of this doctrine, Wycliffe pours forth his strongest invective. The men who hold it are said to be more stupid than “Jews or Pagans;” and no more capable of explaining what they mean than the brute.

“I wish to God that the clerics of Antichrist who teach our belief, and give more credit to the words of Ambrose than those of the Gospel, would give us leave to so interpret St. Ambrose. When he says that after the consecration,¹ the sacrament should not be considered bread, the saint means, as he often does, that this should not be known afterwards as *principally* bread. For thus (in this sense) St. Ambrose says the thing that was bread, is now God’s body — and we may well know that Ambrose does not say that the bread goes to nothing, as Antichrist says.”

The sacrament, he repeats emphatically, “is Christ’s body, and bread also;” and then adds, “so thus it is that this bread turns into Christ’s body, and so the substance of the bread offered upon the altar is turned into the substance of Christ’s own body, as St. Ambrose says, and neither shall it be brought to nothing, for these are not contrary.” On this subject, we should confide in the law of Scripture and reason, more than in any law from popes and cardinals — “so that if we had a hundred popes, and all the friars were cardinals, yet we should trust more to the law of the Gospel than to all this multitude.”

THREE THINGS TROUBLE THE REALM. 73

The following passage is an instance of the manner in which Wycliffe opposed the experience of the plain man to the subtleties of this church doctrine. “Since bodily eating was bid by Christ, and this bodily eating might not occur unless there was bread, then this bread lasts after the consecrating.”²

The second article sets forth, as we have seen, that the practices of the begging friars are according to the example of the Savior. One instance adduced by the mendicants, in support of this conclusion, was that Christ solicited water from the woman of Samaria. In answer, it is observed that the persons who make such use of this passage should look to the context, where it

¹ Originally, “after the sacreding...” i.e., making sacred, or consecrating.

² “Here we may see how falsely the fiend beguiles the church by this false principle, that if the most part of such men (men forming church councils) assent to a sentence, then all holy church shall know that as gospel.” — Ibid. Wycliffe then remarks that the faith which served the church a thousand years while Satan was bound, has not suffered since he has been loosed — hence these councils. “We ought to know that Christ may not fail in any ordinance or law sufficient for his church; and whoever reverses this sentence, blasphemes against Christ.” — Ibid. [Archiv. A. 83].

appears that our Lord had sent his disciples into the city, not to *beg* bread, but to *purchase* it. It was usual to allege the language of the Savior to Zaccheus for the same purpose. But it is replied that our Lord spoke to Zaccheus as his superior, and not as a supplicant; and that Christ, moreover, came to the earth in the exercise of a particular lordship — the lordship which pertained to human nature in innocence.¹ It was one thing to receive temporal alms, and another to become petitioners for them.

But the error under the third article is deplored as especially pernicious. This vending of pardons “without condition,” is denounced as in the last degree presumptuous and cruel; and as a course of proceeding in which mendicants do not scruple² to enrich themselves at the cost of deceiving the souls of men, so as to sink them to perdition. But friars do not blush to allege that these spiritual treasures are *to the priesthood*, what worldly treasures are *to secular lords* — they are goods entrusted to them, to be expended at their pleasure, and for their benefit. But the “idiots who argue by way of such likeness, do more harm to men than if they cut their throats.” Do these deceivers not know that men who have the disposal of temporal goods, have their superiors and known laws to which they are responsible, while the dealers in these supposed “merits of men” dispense their wares “according to their own will?” Even the letters of pardon granted by the pope, make some mention of the signs of penitence; “but these friars, in their letters, speak of no contrition.” What is more natural than that the people should be negligent of their own works, “seeing that they may purchase [pardon] in this manner, in lieu of those works?”

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Wycliffe’s conclusions are”

— that by the first of these errors, relating to the eucharist, the friars impeach the wisdom of God, setting him forth as the patron of contradictions and impossibilities;

— that by the second error, they charge God with inconsistency, representing him as an abettor of the kind of indolence and poverty which He has so decidedly condemned throughout the Old and New Testaments;

— and that in the third error, they slander His purity, in describing him as authorising priests to dispense pardons in a manner which could only conduce to their own corrupt aggrandisement, and to the grossest irreligion and depravity among the people.

30. *De Ecclesiæ Dominio*.³ This work consists of about fourteen closely-written folio pages. Its English title is, *Of the Church of Christ, of her Members, and of her Governance*; and it begins, “Christ’s church is his spouse, that has three parts.”⁴

It then it immediately proceeds as follows —

¹ *In innocence*: the state of man prior to the fall. God in Christ is our *eternal* Lord.

² *Scruple*: to hesitate on moral grounds.

³ *The Church of the Lord*.

⁴ MS. British Museum. Bib. Reg. 18. B. ix. Trin. Coll. Dub. Class C. Tab. 5. No. vi. pp. 38-63. My extracts are taken from the MS. in the British Museum, sometimes described by the titles, *De Ecclesiâ Catholicâ*, and *De Ecclesiâ Dominio*. Baber, 42. The marked allusion of this work to the papal schism, and the crusade, fix its date as among the works written by the Reformer during the last year of his life, or, at the furthest, in the year preceding, the year 1383.

“The FIRST PART is in bliss with Christ, head of the church, and it contains angels and blessed men that are now in heaven. The SECOND PART of the church is saints in purgatory, and these do not sin anew, but purge their old sins. Many errors occur in praying for these saints; and since they are all dead in body, Christ’s words may be taken to be about them: we pursue Christ as our life, and let the dead bury the dead.¹ The THIRD PART of the church are true men that live here, who shall afterwards be saved in heaven, and who live here the life of Christian men. The first part is called the *overcoming* part, the middle is called the *sleeping*, and the third is called the *fighting*. All these make one church, and the head of this church is Jesus Christ, both God and man. This church is mother to every man who shall be saved, and contains no other.”

He then derides the folly of regarding the church as the spouse of Christ, and yet supposing that the offspring of Belial can be among its members. In the present world, no man can possibly know himself to be a member of the church of Christ except as he is enabled to live a holy life; few, if any, are so taught by God, as to know their ordination to the bliss of heaven. In allusion to the Urban crusade,² he censures the folly of men who “fight for the pope more than for belief,” and who in doing so, probably “fight for the fiend.”

In the next section, he proposes to trace the rise of secular power in the church, founding his statements partly in “belief,” or Holy Scripture, and partly on “common chronicles,” but proceeding always, as he hopes, under the guidance of charity.

THE CHURCH, HER MEMBERS, AND GOVERNANCE. 75

The *Church Militant* is described as consisting of persons who conform themselves to “the example of Christ, to come to heaven as he came.” Then follows a sketch of the history of the Savior, mention of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, and earnest praise of their labors among Jews and Gentiles.

“And thus the apostles of Christ filled the world with God’s grace. But long after, as chronicles say, the fiend envied this, and by Silvester, priest of Rome,³ he brought in a new guile, and moved the emperor of Rome to endow his church. When the *life* of the priest was thus changed, his *name* was changed. He was not called the apostle, or the disciple of Christ, but he was called the pope, and head of all holy church. Afterwards came other names, by the pretensions of hypocrites, so that some say he even has the manhood of Christ, and is the highest vicar of Christ, to do on earth whatever he likes. And some flourish other names and say that he is most blessed father, because from this father come benefices, which the priest gives to men — for Simon Magus never labored more in simony than these priests do. And so God would no longer allow the fiend to reign in one such priest only — but for the sins which they had done, He made division among two,⁴ so that in Christ’s name, men might more easily overcome both. For just as a virtue is stronger when it is gathered than if it is scattered, so malice is

¹ [Phi 3:14](#) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [Col 3:3](#) For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. [Luk 9:60](#) “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

² Urban VI’s papal bull of 1382, appointed the Bishop of Norwich to lead a “crusade” against the Schismatics, adherents of the antipope Clement VII (see [note on p. 69](#)), which included the King of Castile. John of Gaunt (patron of Wycliffe; see [p. xxvi](#)) therefore claimed the throne of Castile on behalf of his wife, who was the daughter of King Pedro of Castile. Wycliffe doesn’t hesitate to condemn such church-authorized conflicts, even by his patron.

³ Sylvester I (d. 335), pope from 314 to his death. The accounts of his papacy preserved in the *Liber Pontificalis* (which Wycliffe calls here “the chronicles”) contain little more than a record of the gifts said to have been conferred on the Church by Constantine I.

⁴ Alluding to the Western Schism between pope and antipope.

stronger when it is gathered in one person; and it has less strength when it is dispersed among many. And this moves poor priests to now heartily speak in this matter. For when God thus helps his church, and men are slothful and will not work, their sloth is to be condemned for many causes.”

In several of his works, the Reformer speaks in this manner of the schism in the papacy, as having greatly encouraged himself and others in their endeavors to direct the attention of men to the corruptions of the church. In the claim of the pope to be regarded as the successor of St. Peter, two things are to be supposed: that he is the vicar of Christ, and he is a follower of Christ. But in respect to the first,

“Christ bids the Jews that they should trust to his works. And thus ‘Christ’s vicar’ should be ¹ the poorest man of all other men, and the meekest of all others, and labor the most in Christ’s church. But this choosing of cardinals, and procuring of benefices, and taking new names, is far from that state. Thus Peter lived after Christ, and claimed no such names, nor to be head of holy church, but rather studied hard to meekly serve it. Each apostle in his country also worked according to Christ’s law; and none of them needed afterwards to come to Peter to be confirmed.”

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We do not learn, Wycliffe observes, that Christ ever left preaching to sell offices in the church:

— “all these things that popes do, teach that they are Antichrists. If they say that Christ’s church must have a head here on earth, it is true — for Christ is the head which must be here with his church until the day of doom.”

To say there is need of another head, is to impeach the power and the grace of Christ. Some men, however, have invented “a false tale” on this subject, saying that,

“‘When Christ went to heaven, his manhood went on pilgrimage, and he made Peter, with all these popes, his stewards to rule his house, and gave them full power to do so, before all other priests alive.’ Here this dream proceeds amiss, turning the church upside down. For Peter was a true helper, with Paul, and John, and the other apostles. But none of these servants dreamed that he was head of holy church, or that he loved Christ more than any of his brethren did. It seems likely to many men, that, in a way, Peter loved Christ more than any of these other apostles; but he was not taught to strive on that account. For other apostles, in other ways, loved Christ more than Peter did, as John loved Christ more heavenly, and Paul labored more in the church.”

Wycliffe adds,

“We do not affirm as belief, that if a man is chosen as pope, then he is chosen to bliss, though here he is called ‘blessed father.’ Many know by their works, that these popes are deepest damned in hell, for they charge themselves as hypocrites, both in office and in name. And so they sit in the first place here; and at the last day of doom, they shall be in the last place — that is, the deepest place of hell. Here let us hold ourselves in bonds of belief that stand in general and conditional words; let us not judge foolishly. But we may say, by supposal, that we *guess* it to be so. And the part of the one who brings the most evidence, should soonest be supposed.”

The Reformer then proceeds to complain of three heresies which deceive men. The first is involved in the practice of calling the pope “most blessed father.” This is said to be done in flattery, and for gain; and it includes heresy inasmuch as it supposes that where there is the highest office, there is the highest sanctity — all true blessedness being attendant on character

¹ “We should understand...”

and not on office. If the principle on which this practice proceeds were just, then it might be just to give the title “most blessed father” to Judas, and to multitudes resembling him.

Another heresy is that, “If the pope determines anything, truth is so determined, and it is to be believed.” This pretension is denied, and censured as most sinful and pernicious. Appeal is made to the infirmities of Peter, as fatal to the doctrine of infallibility thus assumed by his successors. Some men say that the church rests on such dignities,¹ as on her proper foundation. Wycliffe answers that the church rather traces her greatest *mischiefs* from that source, especially as evinced in the matter of indulgences, and in the manner of administering absolution.

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He proceeds to show still further how these supposed infallible “stewards may err in regard to the ordinance of Christ.” The monks are said to have come in because of the laxity and degeneracy of the regular clergy. Canons and friars came in from the same cause in the place of monks. All these in their turn have so degenerated, that if Christ were to come again to the earth, he would judge them as so many clerics of Antichrist. The laws of these several institutes are dwelt upon as unscriptural; their history is shown to have been unfavorable to the purity of religion; and it is demanded whether the popes, the great patrons of these orders, can be regarded as infallible, in the face of such palpable blunders?

“The apostles of Christ, and other disciples long after them, were not busy about tithes, but held themselves paid in the little that the people readily gave them; and so housing and clothing, as Paul says, should be enough.” ^{1Tim 6.8} But this Roman “steward so trades in appropriating churches, that the people dwell untaught, and unserved in spiritual help. Who should be blind, therefore, if not this steward, that does this without leave of the Lord, and openly against his bidding? If any man should be damned, this steward should be deepest damned, and by all means — for he feigns power, and new laws, which God never made. And yet he gabs falsely about God, that all this is God’s work. But in the time of the Old Testament, such a blasphemer would have been stoned to death.”

In the fifth section, the friars are censured as the advocates of war, and especially as having favored “this last journey that the English made into Flanders,” an enterprise by which the realm was not a little despoiled “of men and money.” In the next section it is argued that the converts made by these men, degenerate as the effect of such conversions; and that the rival popes have in fact no greater enemies than these zealous allies. But the time has come in which all men should apply themselves to the work of purifying the church, some by scriptural learning, some by secular power and influence, some by a Christian example, and all by earnest prayer to God — “for in him lies the help here, against the cunning of the fiend.”

The Reformer then proceeds to counsel his reader in respect to the best method of reasoning with the friars on the doctrine of the eucharist.

“The people trust commonly that this host is God’s body. Friars should begin here, and tell men if this is true. If they say that this host is in no manner God’s body, then flee them as heretics, for Christ and his church say the contrary. If they say that this host is an accident,² such as colour and figure without a subject, and so it is *not* God’s body, we know well that old belief, grounded in the words of Christ, says

¹ *Dignities*: formalities, which here derive from tradition rather than scripture. – WHG

² *Accident*, in logic, refers to an incidental trait, rather than an essential element of something. Bread can be brown and oblong, rather than white and round, and yet remain bread. – WHG

that *it is* God's body. And if they say that this sacrament is God's body as it is in heaven, then these friars speak as idiots."

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They were thus to insist that the accidents of whiteness and roundness pertained to real bread, according to the words of consecration; and they were to maintain equally that the bread is God's body, in a figurative and sacramental sense.

In the remaining part of the treatise, Wycliffe resumes his strictures¹ on the pretensions of the papacy.

"Accordingly, men should know about the pope's power in absolving, granting indulgences, and other vain privileges, with cursing. For just as the popes pretend that they do miracles — when they...² more wonderfully than Christ or his apostles ever did — so in absolving and cursing, they pretend to have an unknown power; and thus they blaspheme and harm the church. Christian men believe that Peter and Paul, and other apostles, took power from Christ, but only that they might edify the church. Thus all priests, who are Christ's knights, have his power to that end; which of them has the *greatest* power, it is vain for us to address. But concerning the deeds of priests, we suppose that he who profits the church most, has the most power from Christ. And thus, by the [kind of] power which Christ gave to Peter, no man may prove that this priest, the bishop of Rome, has more power than other priests."

In fact, where the test of spiritual utility is especially needed, it is found (as shown before) to be especially lacking. It does not follow in a papal election, "that God must sign, when these cardinals have chosen." Nor should the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," be understood as relating exclusively to an order of priesthood, but as relating to the whole church, and as a declaration "that Christ shall thus be with his members that he has ordained to bless." Referring to the Romanist interpretation given to the words of our Lord addressed to Peter — "Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosened in heaven"³ — the Reformer observes that this reasoning is "full of folly from many causes." Truly, Christ said this to Peter; but he also said it to the other apostles. Why should Peter have power by this, more than the other apostles of Christ? Also, men should know that these words which Christ said to Peter, are of no avail to this pope, except as he follows Christ and Peter in life. And suppose that all this is truth, "the power intended by Christ cannot have been such as is now dreamt of, since in that case Peter must have sinned in many ways, inasmuch as he did not use this power." And it is demanded, "Who shall excuse him of this sin?"

THE CHURCH, HER MEMBERS, AND GOVERNANCE. 79

"Men should understand what it means to bind man on earth. And men must see here, that their priest binds man on earth, when he binds man after God, and not for the flesh, nor for covetousness. And so this pope should teach men that he binds thus on the earth, and neither in the earth, nor under the earth, but according to the keys above. But he will never teach this before Gabriel blows his horn.⁴ And if he teaches that the church above binds thus, or absolves thus, at his instance,⁵ he still does not prove this

¹ *Strictures*: Severe criticisms.

² The original text is illegible here.

³ Mat 16.19.

⁴ This may be the earliest known English mention of Gabriel as the trumpeter.

⁵ *Instance*: urging or insistence.

great power. And thus its grounding (or authority) from God's law, shamefully fails here. But if Christ said to Peter, 'Whatever he bound on the earth, is bound in heaven,' then it follows of this pope now living, that whatever thing he pretends to bind, is bound by God. But certainly the most ignorant man in this world might shame such a reason. Furthermore, if we give this pope such power as he pretends, and if we take heed to his deeds, he will be ashamed of such power. For the law of charity would teach that if he had such power, he would absolve all his subjects from pain, and from trespass; for then he would bring all men to heaven, and allow no man to go to hell. And since charity stands in using the gifts of God to this end, he would be too slow in God's service, denying to men the gifts of God; for as he freely took his power, Christ bids that he should freely give."

Christ, alone, it is maintained, could be equal to the just exercise of such authority, as that claimed in this instance by the popes. And the pontiffs, in claiming the power to do such miracles in relation to the soul, are shrewdly challenged to furnish evidence of their claim, by doing similar wonders in relation to the body, such as expelling diseases — "Prove this greater power," says Wycliffe, "by this lesser."

The cupidity¹ and extortions of the popes in other respects are then dwelt upon: as in their encouragement of appeals to their authority; in their practices with respect to provisions and commendams;² and in their demand of the first-fruits from vacant benefices. By some flatterers of the papacy, it was alleged that "the pope could do no simony, because all benefices are his." Wycliffe replies that had the pope ever been in possession of such a title, it has long since been forfeited by abuse; "for it often falls, according to their law, that a tyrant, and a member of the fiend, is put before a member of Christ." Hence it has come to pass, that "a man's doing according to the school of Christ, without any other sin," is sufficient to bring him to ruin.

31. Sermons. The only remaining portion of the writings of Wycliffe still in manuscript, to which I invite the attention of the reader in this section, will be his sermons. We have seen in many of the preceding extracts from his various works, that preaching, in the judgment of Wycliffe, was the great agency by which men were to be brought under the influence of religion, and by which they were to be continually edified when they had become religious.

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The sacraments and the other services of the church might have their value, but not so much as to supersede in the slightest degree the office of preaching — the great office relating to instruction. Wycliffe is never weary of reiterating that men can never be religious, except as they are enlightened; and if they were to make advances in devout feeling and in Christian conduct, it must be as the result of their increasing knowledge of Divine truth. Accordingly, in the esteem of the Reformer, the priest or prelate who did not labor assiduously as a preacher, was a man who was negligent of his great duty, and justly exposed to the severest judgments both from God and man. Holding such doctrine, and laboring with the greatest earnestness to give it the utmost publicity, we of course expect to find in Wycliffe a man who is eminent in the labors of the pulpit. His reputation as a scholar may render it expedient for him to sometimes address himself to the solution of questions which perplexed the less learned intelligence of senators and kings. And his celebrity as a schoolman, and the novelties broached by him in that character, may impose on him the duty of entering the arena of controversy with the most cultivated intellects of his age. But if Wycliffe, in the rector of Lutterworth, is to be judged according to his own

¹ *Cupidity*: extreme greed for material wealth.

² *Commendam*: a vacant benefice commended to a cleric until an incumbent was provided.

doctrine, he must be known within that narrow space as the diligent pastor, and as the laborious preacher. He must not be so occupied with the great and the distant, as to overlook the less, and the more immediate. He may be zealous as a Reformer of the church, but he must be considerate, condescending, and exemplary, as the minister of his particular cure.¹ It is sufficient to say that the Reformer appears to have been, in this respect, all that consistency demanded. We do not know the number of sermons composed by Wycliffe, except that copies of nearly three hundred have been preserved, notwithstanding all the effort made to destroy whatever had proceeded from his pen. This is proof that his labors as a preacher must have been abundant.

Until about the beginning of the thirteenth century, two methods of preaching had prevailed: these were technically called “declaring” and “postillating.”² According to the former, the preacher commenced by announcing the subject on which he meant to discourse, and proceeded to deliver on the topic thus introduced something more like an oration or an essay than a sermon. To *postillate* was to commence with reading a portion of Scripture, and then taking its parts in the order of the writer, to offer such remarks upon them as tended to explain their meaning, and to secure their application.

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To the latter method, which was the same as our own custom of “expounding,” another was added about this time. And it was one by which the ancient practice of *declaring* was soon almost superseded, and the far better practice of *postillating* became much less frequent. The sacred text had been recently divided into its present order of chapters, and the dialectic art, to which the schoolmen were so much devoted, suggested selecting some brief portion of Scripture as the basis of a sermon. And the matters introduced to illustrate and establish the doctrine or duty of the passage, would be divided and subdivided in the manner still so generally retained among preachers. This scholastic method of preaching was much opposed for some time, and its follies and mischiefs appear to have been many and considerable. Anthony Wood introduces Roger Bacon³ as censuring this new custom, and as accounting for its prevalence in the church in a manner which shows that the good friar’s estimate of the mind of the clergy in his time, even of those who rose to the dignity of prelacy, was not much more favorable than that so often expressed by Wycliffe.

“The greater part of our prelates,” he writes, “had but little knowledge in divinity, and had been little used to preaching in their youth. When they become bishops, and are sometimes obliged to preach, they are under a necessity of begging and borrowing the sermons of certain novices, who have invented a new way of preaching. It has endless divisions and quibblings, in which there is neither sublimity of style, nor depth of wisdom, but much childish trifling and folly, unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit. May God banish this conceited and artificial way of preaching out of His church, for it will never do any good, nor elevate the hearts of the hearers to anything that is great or excellent.”⁴

¹ *Cure*: what is committed to the charge and care of a parish priest or curate; a curacy.

² *Postillate*: to preach by expounding Scripture verse by verse, in regular order.

³ Roger Bacon (c.1220-1296) was an English philosopher and Franciscan friar who emphasized the study of nature through empirical methods. He was nicknamed *Doctor Mirabilis*, or Wondrous Doctor. Anthony Wood (1632-95) was an antiquarian; he wrote *Annals of Oxford*, and *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford* (1661-6), which contained accounts of Roger Bacon.

⁴ Wood’s *Hist. Oxon.* 58, 59. Henry’s *History of England*, viii. 182-185.

Wycliffe adhered as a preacher to the postillating or expository method. His “postils” appear to have been produced at different times through the interval from 1376, when he became rector of Lutterworth, to the close of 1384, the time of his decease. In some instances, these discourses consist of little more than a few brief notes, attached to an English translation of the lesson for the day; in others, they approach nearer to the length of modern sermons. But when filling several closely-written folio pages, we do not know how far to regard them as exhibiting anything more than the general manner of the Reformer’s efforts as a preacher. In many instances, they resemble mere outline preparations for the pulpit, topics being briefly indicated rather than fully expounded or discussed. Nor do we have any reason to suppose that their being made public was at all the act of the Reformer. Purvey, his curate at Lutterworth, was a man who would not fail to attach great value to such documents, if we suppose them to have fallen into his hands after the decease of their author.

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But through whatever channel the copies of these discourses now extant have been transmitted, we may safely conclude that they contain the very matters which were delivered to the people of Lutterworth by their rector. And there is hardly a particular opinion promulgated by Wycliffe, the nature or the progress of which might not be illustrated from these discourses. It should be stated, also, that these compositions are strictly popular in their character. References to abstruse and speculative questions frequently arise, either from the import of the text, or from the reasonings suggested by it; but these are soon dismissed, so that the attention of the people might be directed to “things more profiting.” Through the whole, the manifold corruptions of the hierarchy are vigorously assailed, as forming the great barrier to all religious improvement. The duties of men, in all relations, are frequently discussed, and always with a careful, and mostly with a judicious reference to the authority of Scripture. The doctrines of the Gospel are uniformly exhibited, declaring that the guilt and spiritual infirmities of men are such that the atonement of Christ is their only way of pardon, and the grace of the Divine Spirit is their only hope of purity. We sometimes feel the lack of more clearness in Wycliffe’s statement of these truths, and we often wish to see them more fully developed. But no room is left to doubt their being there, and they are there as the full substance of the doctrine taught.

In an exposition on the passage from Isaiah, in which the promised Messiah is said to preach the Gospel to the poor, and which our Lord applied to himself in the synagogue of Galilee, ^{Luk 4.16-21} Wycliffe has the following observations on reading sermons, and on preaching generally.

“From this deed of Christ, men say that it is lawful to write, and afterwards to read a sermon, for thus Christ did, our all-perfect Master. For if men may thus improve the people, what would keep them from having this manner? Certainly the labor of the preacher, or the fame of having a good wit, should not be the end of preaching, but would profit the souls of the people. And however this end comes best, that is most pleasing to God. But the curious ¹ preaching of Latin is far from this end, for many men thus preach themselves, and leave preaching Christ.” ²

On the text, “Let a man so guess of us, as [he would] of the ministers of God and dispensers of his services” ³ — the preacher remarks:

¹ *Curious*: bizarre and ornate – in this case, to appear artful and elegant, but without useful effect.

² Postils, p. 21.

³ 1Cor 4.1, *et seq.* “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” NKJ

“If each Christian man were to be found true in this respect, priests, both high and low, would be more true. And the sin of failure in this respect among priests is most foul. As if the pope and his bishops were ashamed to be Christ’s servants in their manner of living, they show an emperor’s life, and are lordly in the world. Since Christ hated this kind of life, they give no ground to guess they are ministers of Christ.

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And so they fail in the first word of this belief which Paul teaches. Lord, what good does this prating do,¹ that the pope will here be called *most blessed father*, and bishops *most reverend men*, since their life departs from Christ? They show in taking this name, that they are on the fiend’s side, children of the father of lies.² For if he says, as Gregory did, that he is the servant of servants, his life is the reverse of his name. He fails to follow Christ, since he is not the dispenser of services which God has bid; rather, he departs to the lordship which the emperor has given. And so all the services of the church which Christ has limited to his priests, are turned to the contrary side, and thus to the service of the fiend. So that if men take heed to the service of the church as Christ has limited it, it is all turned upside down, and hypocrites have become rulers.”

Thus the signs of a true priestly character are said to be often lacking where the office of priesthood is assumed; and in such cases, the people do not owe the reverence due to priesthood.

The apostle proceeds to say, “To me it is the least thing that I be judged by you, or by man’s judgment, but I do not judge myself.” ^{1Cor 4.3} On this passage, the preacher observes —

“And thus men shall not be harmed because of the blind judgment of man, for God himself will judge all men, either to good or evil. Therefore Paul pays little heed to the judgment that man judges, for he knew well from Scripture, that if God judges thus, then the judgment must stand, and that nothing else will stand but God’s judgment. Thus there are two days — the day of the Lord, and man’s day. The day of the Lord is the day of doom, when he shall judge all manner of men. The day of man is now present, in which man judges according to man’s law; and this judgment will be reversed if it reverses reason at all. But at the last day of doom, all shall stand to God’s judgment. So that will be the day of the Lord, for all shall then be as He wills, and His judgment shall not be contravened, for nothing may reverse it. Therefore Paul says, ‘Judge nothing before the time: until the time of the Lord comes, which shall light the hidden things of darkness, and shall make known the counsels of the hearts.’ ^{1Cor 4.5} This moves many men to think day and night upon God’s law, for that disposes them to know what God’s will is. Without knowing this, a man would do nothing; and this moves many men to flee man’s judgment. Paul does not charge that the judgment of men was enough for him until doomsday, whether of priests or lords, but only the truth of Holy Writ, which is the will of the first Judge. And thus stewards of the church should not judge wickedly by their own will, but only by God’s law, in things of which they are certain. But the laws and judgments which Antichrist has brought in, putting God’s law behind, too greatly mar the church of Christ. For to the stewards of the church, the laws of Antichrist are rules to make officers in the church, and to condemn the laity.

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Antichrist claims here to be fully God’s equal. For he says that if he judges thus, his will should be taken for reason, and this is the highest point that falls to God in respect to his Godhead. Popes and kings, therefore, should seek a reason above their own will; for such blasphemy often brings to men more than the pride of Lucifer. For he said that he would fly up and be like the highest lord — but he

¹ *Prating*: speaking about unimportant matters rapidly and incessantly.

² Originally, “father of leasings.”

did not claim to be God's equal, even with him, or surpassing him.¹ May God bring down this pride, and help so that His word reverses the word of the fiend! Well indeed I know, that this smoke shall disappear when it is at the highest."²

The attentive reader will be sensible that in these passages, the thoughts and language of Wycliffe come strongly before him, and will require no further evidence in respect to the authorship of these discourses.

In the exposition of the gospel for Christmas day, Wycliffe proceeds thus: —

“On Christmas day we may say a little child is born to us, for Jesus is born by our belief. — We take it as our belief, that as our first parents had sinned, satisfaction must be made for sins, to the righteousness of God. For as God is merciful, so He is full of righteousness. But how shall He judge all the world, unless he keeps his righteousness here? For the Lord against whom this sin is done, is the Lord all-mighty, and all-righteous, since no sin may be done except as it is done against God.^{Psa 51.4} And however higher the lord is against whom the sin is done, that much greater is the sin — as it would be a great sin to go against the king's bidding. The sin is even more without measure, to go against God's bidding. But God, according to our belief, bid Adam not to eat the apple. Yet he broke God's commandment, and was not excused for it — not by his own folly, nor by Eve, nor by the serpent. And thus this sin must always be punished according to the righteousness of God.

“And it is a light word to say that God might, of his power, forgive this sin without the satisfaction which was made for it, for God might do so if he would. But his justice would not allow it; it requires that each trespass be punished, either in earth or in hell. And God may not accept a person so as to forgive his sin without satisfaction; for in so doing, He would give free leave to man and angel to sin. And then sin would be no sin, and our God would be no God.

“We conclude also that the man who would make satisfaction for the sin of our first father must be God and man. For as man's nature trespassed, so man's nature must make satisfaction. And therefore it was not possible for an angel to make satisfaction for man, for he does not have the power, nor was it a nature like his own which had sinned in this case.

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But since all men are one person, if any member of this person makes satisfaction, he makes satisfaction for the whole person. By this we may see that if God had made a man out of nothing, and anew, in the manner of Adam, yet he would be accountable to God as much as he might for himself. And so he might not make satisfaction both for himself, and for Adam's sin. And so, since satisfaction must be made for Adam's sin, as it is said, the person making satisfaction must be both God and man. For then the worthiness of the person's deed would be equal to the worthiness of the sin.”

The third point, which must follow from the two before, is said to be that —

“A child is born to man to make atonement for man's sin, and this child must be God and man, given to man. And he must bear his empire on his shoulders, and suffer for man. And this child is Jesus, whom we suppose was born today. And we suppose that this child was born only to those who follow him in his manner of living, for he was born *against* others. The men who are unjust, and proud, and rebel

¹ **Isa 14:12-14** “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! ¹³ For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’”

² **Hos 13:3** Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud And like the early dew that passes away, Like chaff blown off from a threshing floor And like smoke from a chimney.

against God, have this judgment in Christ: that they must be condemned by him, and most certainly if they are grievous towards his Spirit, to their death. Thus, if we covet well that this child is born to us, we have joy by this child, and we follow him in these three virtues: in righteousness, meekness, and patience for our God. For whoever is opposed to Christ and his Spirit in these virtues, must be condemned by this child unto his death, even as all others must be saved. And thus, the joy of this child, who was all meekness and full of virtues, should make men little in malice, and then they should hold well this feast. We study how Christ came in the fulness of time, and when he should come; how he came in meekness at his birth; and how he came in patience from his birth unto his death. And we follow him in these three things, for the joy that we have by him — for this joy, *in this patience*, brings joy that shall ever last.”

The extract following was meant, no doubt, to show to the people of Lutterworth, that the itinerant labors of the Reformer’s “poor priests,” were in imitation of the highest possible example.

“This Gospel tells of the office that should fall to Christ’s disciples; and so it tells how priests should now, both greater and lesser, occupy themselves in the church in serving God. And first, Jesus shows truly the love that he taught. The Gospel says how Jesus went about in the country, both in great places and lesser, such as cities and castles, to teach, and to profit men generally, and not to forbear preaching to a people because they are few and our fame may be little. For we should labor for *God*, and hope for our thanks from Him. By castles, we understand little towns, and no doubt Christ went to small uplandish towns, such as to Bethphage, and Cana in Galilee.

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For Christ went to those places where he wished to do good, and he did not travel for money, for he was not afflicted either with pride, or with covetousness.”¹

It is then deplored, that the jurisdiction set up by the prelates prevented good men from following the example of Christ in this particular. He was freely admitted to synagogues which, Wycliffe remarks, “were then, what churches are among us.” In another of his discourses, he observes on this subject,

“Jesus ever had this manner: to speak God’s words where he knew that they might profit the people who heard them. And so Christ preached often, now at meal, and now at supper, and at whatever time it was convenient for others to hear him.”²

The following passage may be taken as a specimen of the Reformer’s more practical and familiar method of teaching.

“Just as men in fevers do not desire what is best for them, so men in sin do not covet what is best for them in this world. The world said that the apostles were fools, and forsaken by God; and so it would say today of all who live like them. For worldly joy and worldly good pleases them, and they do not savour heavenly things, nor rightly follow after Christ. And this judgment by the world is a manifest witness against men: that they are not holy, but turned aside to worldly things. For just as the palate of a sick man, distasting good food, moves him to covet things that are contrary to his health, so it is true of a man’s soul that does not savour God’s law. And just as the lack of a natural appetite is a deadly sign to man, so this lack in respect to the knowledge of God, is a sign of his second death.”

¹ Postils, p. 134.

² Ibid. p. 169.

Some men, the preacher observes, have learned to interpret the success of their worldly enterprises as a mark of Divine approval; but it is added —

“We should leave these perceptible appearances, and take the examples of holy men, such as Christ and his apostles — how they did not have their bliss here. Rather, here Christ ordained pain, and the hatred of the world, much suffering for the men he most loved, that we might be taught to follow after him. And thus patient suffering on this earth should be taken as the sign of God’s love.”¹

In the following terms Wycliffe speaks concerning the sufferings of Christ —

“Men mark the passion of Christ, and print it in their hearts, to somehow follow it. It was the most willing passion that ever was, and the hardest passion man ever suffered. Being thus willing, it was most meritorious; and therefore Christ foretold to his twelve disciples the form of his passion when he went to Jerusalem. And therefore Christ, who before had concealed himself coming to the city,² now came to suffer — in a way, to show his free will. Therefore he says at the supper, ‘With desire I have coveted to eat this Passover with you.’³ [Luk 22.15](#) The desire of his Godhead, and the desire of his manhood, moved him to eat it, and later to suffer.

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But all this was a sign and figure of his last supper, which he eats in heaven with the men whom he has chosen. And since Christ thus suffered cheerfully for the sin of his brethren, they should suffer thankfully for their own sin, and purpose to forsake it. This is the reason why God would have the passion of Christ recited, for the profit of his brethren, and not for his own. This pain of Christ’s passion surpassed all other. For he was a most tender man, and in middle age, and God by a miracle allowed his mind to suffer; otherwise, because of joy,³ he might not have known sorrow. But all things that could make pain hard were in Christ’s passion, to make it more meritorious. The place was most solemn, and also the day; and the hour was the most solemn to Jews or heathens. And the despite⁴ was most — for men who should most have loved Christ, ordained this most foul death against his surpassing kindness. We should also believe that Christ did not suffer in any manner except for some certain reason. For he is both God and man, who made all things in their number; and so he would shape his passion to correspond to the greatness of man’s sin. So we follow after Christ in his blessed passion, and we gather our devout mind from him.”⁵

Our next extract touches on some points of theological doctrine. It occurs in an exposition of the narrative concerning the healing of the centurion’s servant.

“We should know that faith is the gift of God, and so God may not give it to man except as He gives it graciously. And thus all the goods which men have are gifts of God. And thus when God rewards a good work of man, He crowns His own gift. And this is of grace; for all things which men have from the will of God, are of grace. God’s goodness is the first cause why he gives men these goods. And so it may not be that God does good to men, except as he confers these goods freely by his own grace — and only with this, do we grant that men deserve [anything] from God. We learn from this knight to be meek in heart, and in word, and in deed. For he granted first, that he was under man’s power; and yet by the power of man he might do many things. Much more should we know that we are under God’s power, and that we may do nothing except by the power of God. And if we disuse this power, woe be to

¹ Ibid. p. 78.

² [Joh 7.1-10](#).

³ [Heb 12:2](#) looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

⁴ *Despite*: lack of respect accompanied by a feeling of intense dislike; a contemptuous disregard.

⁵ Postils, p. 61.

us. But this root of meekness shall beget other virtues in us, and also the grace of God to deserve help in heaven, as grace was in this gentle knight.”

It will be seen, that though the expressions employed here by the Reformer are somewhat strange to us, his real doctrine is that the graces which fit men for rising to the enjoyment of rewards, and the rewards themselves, are alike from the grace of God — it is God crowning his own work, according to a principle of moral congruity or fitness.¹

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In another of these discourses, the Reformer refers, with his characteristic force and boldness, to the intolerance of hierarchy.

“Freedom is much coveted, as men know naturally; but Christian men should greatly covet the better freedom of Christ. Yet it is known that Antichrist has now enthralled² the church more than it was under the old law, when men might not bear that service. And Antichrist makes new laws now, and does not ground them on God and man; for more ceremonies are now brought in than were in the old law; and they hinder³ men from coming to heaven more than the scribes and Pharisees did by their traditions. And the root of this thraldom⁴ is the lordship which Antichrist has, for he claims to be full lord, both of spiritual and temporal things. He so prevents Christian men from serving Christ in freedom, that they may say as the frog said to the arrow, in the poet’s proverb: ‘Cursed be so many masters!’ For Christian men are oppressed now with popes, and now with bishops, now with cardinals under popes, and now with prelates under bishops, as one would buffet a football.⁵ But surely if the Baptist were not worthy to loose the strap of Christ’s shoe, Antichrist has no power to thus hinder the freedom which Christ has bought. Christ gave this freedom to man to freely come to the bliss of heaven; but Antichrist wearies man to give him money. These hypocrites ever fear that God’s law would be shown, and they would thus be convicted of their falsehood. For God and his law are stronger than they, and these hypocrites may only hold man for a time in this fiend’s thraldom.”⁶

In a subsequent discourse, Wycliffe speaks thus on the connection between suffering in the cause of God, and the enjoyment of His favor.

“Whoever suffers here for God’s sake, however much, his suffering must have a reward that surpasses all his labor. But since this is certain, who would grudge against God for this labor? And since God

¹ “Paul says that God does all things by his grace, and never withdraws his grace except as man disables himself; and then the righteousness of God requires that this sinner be punished. We suppose from Scripture, that each good thing we have, be it estate, be it knowledge, each such thing is God’s grace. For God gives it graciously that man should serve him by it. And thus the one who takes His grace and leaves His service, takes God’s grace in vain. Therefore Paul begins thus, ‘We admonish you that you do not thus take the grace of God in vain.’ ^{2Cor 6.1} These words might be said to each man in this life. The fault is not in God, but all the fault is in His servants.” — *Ibid.* p. 17. “Since among the works of man, thinking seems most in his power, and yet his thought must come from God, much more each other work of man. It is a known thing to clerics, that no creature may do anything, except as God first does that same thing, and helps his creature to do it. And since we have a better procurator (mediator) in time of grace, to pray to God, than men had under the old law, no wonder if this is a better time. Thus we should put off pride, and wholly trust in Jesus Christ. For he that may *think* nothing by himself, may *do* nothing by himself; but all our sufficiency is of God, through Jesus Christ.”

² *Enthralled*: captivated.

³ Originally, “tarry men to come...”

⁴ *Thraldom*: The state of being under the control of another person; imprisonment or servitude.

⁵ That is, kick a soccer ball back and forth.

⁶ *Postils*, p. 52.

sustains man, and moves him, and helps him to labor so, how would it not be of grace? And thus reward for this labor must all come of grace.

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If a man suffers to the death in a good manner in God's cause, he has everlasting life, which is better. Man was made in a state that he might ever live in, and be translated into the bliss of heaven without death and other mischiefs. But by sin he is required to suffer pain and death. Yet Christ has bought him again to the state he should first have had. And thus these reasonings of the apostle move men gladly to suffer for Christ. And just as God, by grace, rewards man over what he deserves, so the state which man has now in heaven, is better than the state of innocence was. And this fact should move men to become martyrs for the love of Christ.”¹

We give, in conclusion, a few shorter passages, such as abound in these discourses, and such as (compared with the other works of the Reformer), contribute to establish the identity of authorship.

“As no word of God's law has any strength unless Christ speaks it, so no word of man's law should be loved unless Christ speaks it. Christ is truth, and no word should be loved except for its truth — since he is God, his words may not be amended.”²

The third homily speaks of a threefold baptism: by blood, by water, and by the Holy Ghost,³ of which the last is the best, and that must be from God. In the seventh he says, “John is not Elias⁴ personally, as he himself confesses, but he is Elias figuratively — and just so, the sacred host is truly bread in its nature, and a figure of God's body.”

In an early part of this volume, allusion is made to King Richard⁵ as then reigning. This passage, and others containing similar references to contemporary circumstances, help (as observed elsewhere) to determine the date of these productions. Thus, when the Reformer says in a subsequent page that the “two bishops,” Annas and Caiaphas, did not prevent the preaching of John the Baptist, and that from this fact “it seems to many men that prelates who hinder true priests from freely preaching the Gospel are worse than these two bishops,” it is sufficiently plain that the reference is to the labors and difficulties of the “poor priests.”⁶ In the same connection, the preacher speaks of “fleeing the sour dough of the Pharisees;” and, censuring the secular lordship of the clergy, he ascribes it to the evil of ecclesiastical endowments.

“Therefore many prelates say that no man who has a cure⁷ should live except on God's portion — that is, on tithes and offerings. And so they would have goods by clear title of alms; for thus lived Christ, the highest pope. And who are you that you will not live thus? Would you be greater than Christ, who is Lord of all this world?”

¹ *Postils*, p. 93.

² *Ibid.* 2nd.

³ **1Joh 5:5-6** Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶ This is He who came by water and blood-- Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

⁴ *Elias*: that is, Elijah. **Mat 11:14** “And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come.”

⁵ King Richard II of England (6 January 1367 – c. 14 February 1400).

⁶ In pages 141, 142, 146, 176, 182, the papal schism, and in several places the papal crusades, are distinctly mentioned. In page 163 is a further allusion to Richard as reigning.

⁷ *Cure*: the benefice or paid office of a curate, where believers are to be cared for (*cured*).

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But while the people are said to owe such contributions to true priests, as much as they owe any debt to any man, it is asked —

“By what reason should someone have tithes and offerings from the people, if he lives in lust and idleness, and does not profit his people? Certainly this would be a fiend’s law, to give God’s portion to such men.”¹

On the papal supremacy, he did not hesitate² to speak thus: “We suppose that Antichrist, the head of all these evil men, is the pope of Rome.”³

SECTION II. ON THE REMAINING WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE STILL IN MANUSCRIPT, AND INCLUDING THOSE WORKS WHICH ARE KNOWN ONLY BY THEIR TITLES.

32. *Contra Mendicatem Validam*.⁴ In English, and beginning “Most Worshipful and Gentlest Lord Duke of Glocester,” it sets forth the substance of a discussion before the duke on questions at issue between a clergyman and a friar. The former half of it is occupied in giving a summary of the debate as it respected certain theological opinions; the latter presents some of the most plausible things to be said in favor of the begging practices of the friars, with the common arguments opposed to that usage. Wycliffe states in the preliminary discussion, “God is so good, that in each goodness He is before, and in each evil He comes after the effect.” This is one of a collection of MSS. in Trinity College, Dublin. Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12. The volume containing it is thus described in the “*Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Angliæ et Hiberniæ*,” published in Oxford in 1697, as “Jo. Wicliffe’s Works to the Duke of Lancaster in 1368.”

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But this description is by a modern hand, and it is erroneous. Most of the pieces in that volume are manifestly of a much later date. There is no ground to suppose that any of them should be ascribed to a period so early as 1368, except the piece entitled, *De Ultima Ætate Ecclesiæ*,⁵ of which mention will be made in the section relating to works of the Reformer which have been

¹ Postils. In pages 10, 122, 126, 134, 151, 152, 159, are similar passages.

² Originally, “did not scruple...”

³ Postils. p. 176. “True men say, that so long as Christ is in heaven, the church has in Him the best pope, who is head of all saints. And distance, either more or less, does not hinder Christ to do his deeds as he promises; and he says he is with his own always, to the end of the world. It is granted that the church beneath has a head, that is Christ, head of angels and of men (all that are or shall be saved), and we dare not put two heads, lest the church be monstrous. Peter was not head of the church, but captain of the church; surely warriors would scorn the reasoning which says that if a man is captain, he is head. Peter was captain for a time, and afterwards Paul was captain. But these blind buzzards should first know what Christ’s church truly is. There are three churches of Christ: one that has vanquished and is above, and another that sleeps in purgatory; neither of these requires such a pope. But the third is fighting here. This and the others require Christ as their head. And the man who is meekest, poorest, and most serviceable to the church, is its captain by the judgment of the Head above. If men seek well, they shall find that it may not be proved that it is reasonable to have such a pope. For nothing would prove it except one of these three: a right understanding of the words of Christ; evidence of man’s law; or custom, with the opinion of many people. But none of these may prove anything in this case.” — Postils, p. 181. Two pages further on, the preacher states that the only authorised and requisite orders in the church are priests and deacons.

⁴ *Against the Validity of Mendicants (or beggary).*

⁵ *The Last Estate of the Church.*

printed. The mention of the year 1356 in that tract, has probably led to the error in respect to the date of the other pieces. We have no means of fixing the date of this piece addressed to the Duke of Gloucester. It should not, I think, be placed among his earlier or his latest productions.

33. *De Sathanæ astu contra Fidem.* This tract begins, “The fiend seeks many ways to mar men in belief.” It consists of two pages only, and is in the same volume with the preceding piece, in Trin. Coll. Dub.

34. *In Regulam Minoritarum.* In English, in C.C.C. Cambridge. Sometimes described as the *Rule of St. Francis — the Testament of St. Francis.*

35. *Determinationes Eucharistiæ:* — *Ad rationis Kyningham:* — and, *Determinationes Magistri J. Wicklyff contra Carmelitam Kyningham,* appear to be different descriptions of the same treatise, which was an answer to a Carmelite friar concerning a pretended miracle urged in support of the doctrine of transubstantiation. C.C.C. College, Cambridge. Lambeth Library. Knighton de Event. Angliæ, p. 2650.

36. *De Questionibus variis contra Clerum.* In English, in Lambeth Palace Library. Cat. MS. 151. Another copy in the same library, No. 30, called *Questiones XXVI.* It begins, “Almighty God in Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, both in the old law and the new.”

37. *De Modo Orandi.* In English, in the Bodleian Library, Laud, C. 3, and in the British Museum, Cotton MSS. Titus D. xix. It is also entitled, *De Duodecim Impedimentis Precationum,* or, *The Twelve Lettings¹ of Prayer.* In the prologue of the MS. in the British Museum, the twelve hindrances of prayer are enumerated — “sin, doubting, asking things we should not,” etc.

38. *De Anima.* A part of this treatise, under the title, *De Incarnatione Verbi,* is in the British Museum. Bib. Reg. 7, B. iii.

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39. *De Virtutibus et Vitiis.* In the British Museum, is a short tract under this title. Titus, D. xix. It treats the following matters: The seven works of mercy, bodily and spiritual; five bodily wits; five wits spiritual; the cardinal virtues; *septem mortalia peccata.* “In Bib. Reg. 7, A. xxvi. is another copy of this tract which varies considerably from the former: in some instances the chapters are abridged; in others the chapters are considerably altered — a liberty very common with the transcribers of those times. This MS. varies from the preceding in another respect, as it treats the Seven Sacraments; *Six Manners of consenting to Sin; Four Things that are needed for man.*” Baber, 47.

40. *Pauper Rusticus; Confessio derelicti Pauperis; and the Pore Caitif* — different titles of the same treatise. It consists of a series of tracts in English, intended to present the elements of religious instruction in a form adapted to the humblest of the people capable of reading. It is described by its author as “sufficient to teach simple men and women, of good-will, the right way to heaven.” There are copies of this work in the Lambeth Palace Library; in Trinity College, Dublin; and in the British Museum. These collections vary a little from each other. The pieces included in the Dublin MS. are as follows: Of the Creed — *The ground of all goodness is steadfast faith,* etc.; Of the Commandments — *A man asked of Christ what he should do,* etc.; Of the Paternoster — *Christ says, Who loves me shall keep my commandments, etc.;* Of Perfect Life

¹ *Letting*: hindrance; what prevents or obstructs something.

— *Christ, not compelling, but freely counselling each man, etc.*; Of Temptation — *But he that is truly fed with this bread that came down, etc.*; Of the Charter of our Heavenly Heritage — *Every wise man that claims his heritage, etc.*; Of Spiritual Battle — *The Almighty says by holy Job, etc.*; Of the Love of Jesus — *Whoever you are that araiest you¹ to love God, etc.*; Of Man's will — *Every deed punishable, either reproveable of man's will, etc.*; Of Contemplative Life — *Christ greatly loved Mary, and Martha her sister, etc.*; Of Chastity — *I write this treatise in five short chapters, etc.*; The substance of this work has been printed in the *British Reformers*, from the copy in the British Museum.

41. *Expositio Orationis Dominicæ.* This is a different comment on the Lord's Prayer from that which forms part of the "Pore Catif." It enters more on the subject of ecclesiastical abuses. "In Lambeth Library, Cott. MSS. 594, is a transcript of the 'Prologus in Expositionem Orationis Dominicæ.' Herein are condemned the lucrative catholic tenets of works of supererogation, indulgences, and auricular confession, and the Romish hierarchy are reproved for withholding from the people the scriptures in the vernacular tongue." Baber, 48. Lewis, No. 89.

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42. *In Apocalypsin.* This is an exposition of parts of the Apocalypse. It begins thus, "Saint Paul the apostle says that all those who would live meekly in Christ Jesus," etc. It is in the British Museum, Bib. Reg. E. 67.

43. *Sermo in festo Animarum; de Sermone Domini in Monte; and Octe Beatitudines,* appear to be different titles of the same work. It is in English in the British Museum, Cott. MSS. Titus, D. xix. It is in Latin in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 362. S.C. 5. 8. No. 13. The English discourse begins, "Friends, St. John Chrysostom on the homily upon this Gospel says," etc. Wycliffe was charged with having published seventy-four erroneous opinions in this discourse.

44. *In XVII. caput Joannis. Publevatis oculis in cælum Jesus.* This is a homily in English, beginning, "This Gospel of John tells what loves," etc. It is among the Wycliffe MSS. in C.C.C. Cambridge.

45. *De Surdo et Muto apud Marcum. Iterum exiens de finibus Tyri.* This is another homily in English. It begins, "This Gospel tells a miracle..." It is in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 349. Class 4.

46. *De Pharisæo et Publicano.* This is a detached homily also, attributed to Wycliffe. Lewis, No. 97. It begins, "This Gospel tells in a parable," etc.

47. *Speculum Peccatoris. Quoniam in via sumus vitæ labentis.* This tract has the English title — *Visitation of sick men*, and begins thus: "My dear son or daughter, it seems that you light fast," etc. It is attributed to Wycliffe, and is in the British Museum. Bib. Reg. E. 1732.

48. *Augustinus arguam te quando nescis.* It begins, "The holy Doctor St. Austin, speaking in the person of Christ." It is in the collection, C.C.C. Cambridge.

49. *Speculum Secularium Dominorum. Cum veritas fidei eo plus rutilet.* "Archbishop Usher tells us that a copy of this tract is in MS. in the King's Library, in Latin. By what his grace has

¹ It is indeed "araiest you," though perhaps mistranscribed. What Wycliffe intended is unclear, but "Whoever you are that cries to love God" seems reasonable. — WHG

transcribed from it, it appears that Dr. Wiclif had written before, *Prospeculum Secularum Dominorum*, in English.” Lewis, No. 137.

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50. *De Blasphemia*. “Archbishop Usher quotes this tract in his book *De Christianarum Ecclesiarum Successione*, and tells us that in it Wiclif observes that the true doctrine of the sacrament of the eucharist was retained in the church a thousand years, ‘even till the loosing of Satan.’” Lewis, No. 199.

51. *Five Bodily Wits*. There is a tract under this title in Trinity College, Cambridge, B. 8. 37. It begins, “Thus should a man rule his five bodily wits.”¹

52. *Seven Works of Bodily Mercy, and Seven Deeds of Spiritual Mercy*. Works with these titles are in the Public Library of Cambridge, 120. No. 467.

53. *Of Pride*. It begins, “Pride is too much love that a man has for himself...” Bib. Reg. Titus, D. xix.

54. *De Actibus Animæ*. There is a Latin treatise under this title in C.C.C. Cambridge, attributed to Wycliffe. It begins, “Gratia dicendarum restat tractatus de actibus.”²

55. *The Nine Virtues, etc.* There is a tract in the British Museum under this title, attributed to Wycliffe. Bib. Reg. E. 1732. It begins, “All manner of men should hold God’s biddings,” etc.

56. *A Discourse in old English against the Vices of the Clergy, and the Usurpations of the Bishop of Rome in the Affairs of the Church of England*, drawn up in Thirty-seven Articles. Trinity College, Dublin, Class C. Tab. i. No. 14. This work is also in the British Museum, Bib. Reg. Titus, D., and is attributed to Wycliffe by Wanley. It is throughout expressive of Wycliffe’s opinions, and many passages are transcripts from his different works. It may be the work of the Reformer, or it may have been an attempt on the part of some disciple to bring the sum of his doctrines together in the shape of so many distinct articles.

57. *Of Temptation of the Fiend*. There is an imperfect work under this title in Trinity College, Dublin, Class C. Tab. iii. No. 12.

58. *How Men of private Religion should love more the Gospel of God’s Commandments, and his Ordinances, than any new Laws, new Rules, and Customs of sinful Men*. This is a piece which immediately follows the preceding in the same collection, pp. 152–156.

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59. *Tractatus Evangelii de Sermone Domini in Monte, cum Expositorio Orationis Dominicæ*. This is the title given to the first section of a manuscript volume in Trinity College, Dublin, Class C. Tab. i. No. 23. These expositions, with a further exposition of the sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew, extend (if my notes may be trusted on this point) to page 195 of the volume.

Tractatus de Antichristo, cum expositorio in Matthew chapters 23, 24, 25. This work closes with page 313.

¹ *Wits*: senses.

² Roughly, “Grace remains the reply to the tract about works.” – WHG

Tractatus in Sermonem Domini, quem fecerat valedicendo discipulis suis. pp. 313–333.

These three pieces, bearing three distinct titles, have been not unnaturally described separately in the catalogue of the Trinity College MSS., and by Bale, Lewis, and other writers. It is plain, however, from certain passages, that they have a connection with each other, though they appear to have been written as separate treatises, and to have been first known as such to the Reformer's disciples.

60. *Tractatus de statu Innocentiæ.* This work is in the same volume. It extends to about seventeen pages, and begins, “Ut supradicta magis appareant oportet parumper disgrede.”¹ What this “supradicta” [what appears above] refers to, does not appear; and it is not uncommon in the writings of Wycliffe to find parts of treatises thus detached, and known by separate titles — a circumstance which has added much to the difficulty of presenting a complete and accurate account of his productions.

61. *Tractatus de Tempore.* This work is detached from its original connection. It is the treatise described by the same title in Trinity College Library, Cambridge, and numbers thirty-seven pages in the Dublin volume, but not more than ten in the large folio volume in Cambridge.

The remaining part of this volume is occupied with expository pieces of different passages of Scripture, and with one document under the following title: —

62. *De Captivo Hispanensi — filia comitis de Dene incarcerato infra septa Westmonast.* It relates to a question concerning the rights of sanctuary. I am not aware of the ground on which it has been attributed to Wycliffe. Wycliffe's connection with John of Gaunt may have led to his giving publicity to such a paper. Mention is made of the case to which it refers, by several historians; and a number of papers relating to it may be seen in Rymer's *Fædera*.

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63. *De Veritate Scripturæ.* A large work under this title is preserved in the Bodleian Library, and in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. The copy in the Bodleian is imperfect at the beginning, the first page commencing in a part of the first chapter. The copy in Dublin, which is perfect, commences with these words, “Restat parumper discutere errores et concordias circa sensus Scripturæ hodie plus solito seminatos, tum quia in ea consistit salus fidelium.” The treatise ends thus, “Istud itaque dixerim pro nunc in communi de heresi, ut sciatur ex fructu veritatis Scripturæ notare et cavare hereticos, et ut planius intelligatur tractatus de simonia, quem si Deus voluerit diffusius pertractare.”

The close of the Bodleian MS. agrees with that of the MS. in Dublin, but the first page is without any initial letter or heading, and begins in the middle of a sentence.

In both manuscripts, the chapters are thirty-one in number, but chapters six and seven are not duly marked in the Bodleian copy. This copy closes on the middle of the last page, and the scribe has indicated the completeness of the work by placing its title in the space below.

The volume in the Bodleian is a small folio; it numbers 621 pages, and each page consists of about twenty-six lines. The Dublin copy does not exceed 244 pages, but the pages are larger, and double-columned, with nearly a thousand words in each. The volume in the Bodleian includes no other treatise; in the Dublin volume the *De Veritate Scripturæ* [Of the Truth of Scripture] is

¹ “As mentioned above, this must appear a little more discredited.” — WHG

followed by three other treatises, bearing the following titles: — *De Simonia* [Of Simony] — *De Apostasia* [Of Apostasy] — *De Blasphemia* [Of Blasphemy]. The treatise *De Simonia* begins thus, “Post generalem sermonem de heresi, restat de ejus partibus pertractandum.” It consists of eight chapters, and extends to about forty pages. The treatise *De Apostasia* commences, “Restat ulterius ponere aliud principium pro ambitu heresis simoniacæ perscrutando; quamvis enim simonia, blasfemia, et apostasia committuntur ad subsistendi,” etc. It extends to nearly twenty pages, and is divided into two chapters. The remaining part of the volume is occupied with the treatise *De Blasphemia*, which begins, “Restat succincte de blasfemia pertractandum. Est autem blasfemia insipiens detractio honoris domini.”

It has been supposed, partly from the order in which these pieces succeed each other, and partly from the references made in them from one to the other, that they were all portions of a large theological work. This notion derives some support also from the manner in which the names of these pieces occur in a work bearing the title *Summa Theologica*.

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“This title appears in a very ancient manuscript catalogue of Wycliffe’s writings, which is in the imperial library at Vienna. The work is described as consisting of twelve chapters, the titles of which are as follows: —

1. De Mandatis [Of the Mission]. 2. De Statu Innocentiæ [Of the State of Innocence]. 3, 4, 5. De Dominio [Of Dominion]. 6. De Veritate Scripturæ [The Truth of the Scriptures]. 7. De Ecclesia [Of the Church]. 8. De Officio Regis [The Office of the King]. 9. De Potestate Papæ [The Power of the Pope]. 10. De Simonia [Of Simony]. 11. De Apostasia [Of Apostasy]. 12. De Blasphemia [Of Blasphemy].” — Baber, xlvi.

Here it will be seen that three pieces intervene between the *De Veritate Scripturæ*, and the three treatises which immediately succeed it in the Dublin MS. On what authority the title *Summa Theologica* is given to the whole collection, we do not know. That title is possibly of a later date than the works themselves. Indeed, few things were more common among the transcribers of the fourteenth century, than to place a number of treatises together, all having completeness in themselves, and it may be, all published separately — while certain of them contain allusions, and probably have some relation to each other. In the writings of Wycliffe, references in one treatise to the contents of another, are very common, without being meant to indicate more than that it was not necessary to discuss a topic again which had been discussed elsewhere.

It is important to remark, that in the tenth chapter of the Bodleian copy of the *De Veritate Scripturæ*, there is a reference to the vigil of the annunciation in 1378, which determines the date of this production. This work, in both the existing copies, is exceedingly difficult to read, consisting as it does, in great part, of obscure discussions which have been rendered still more unintelligible by the barbarous and technical Latin in which they are clothed — and by the abbreviated and almost illegible character of the writing. Dr. James, the author of the work entitled “An Apology for John Wicliffe,” was the librarian of the Bodleian in the time of James I. In that work, he has given many passages from the *De Veritate Scripturæ*. But in the manuscript volume of extracts from the writings of Wycliffe, preserved in the Bodleian, in the hand-writing of Dr. James, there are characteristic passages transcribed from the *De Veritate Scripturæ*, extending to nearly a hundred pages. These passages, and those parts of the work itself which may be deciphered with an approach to certainty, warrant the description which I have given of his treatise in the “Life and Opinions of Wycliffe.”

64. Misc. Works I — Trinity College Dublin. In a volume in Trinity College, Dublin, are the following works attributed to Wycliffe. Class C. Tab. 5. No. 6.

1. Three pieces, on the CREED, the PATERNOSTER, and the AVE MARIA, two pages each. The first begins, "It is sooth [truth] that belief is grounded..." The second, "We shall believe that this Paternoster," etc. The third, "Men commonly address our Lady, God's mother," etc.

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2. OF THE SEVEN HERESIES. It begins, "For false men multiply books of the church," etc. The seven heresies are divided into seven chapters. The contents of this piece show it to be from the pen of Wycliffe, the whole being directed in his manner against the friars; and the fourth heresy, which is said to consist in saying, "that the sacred host is in no manner bread, but it is either nothing, or an accident without a subject," shows that this is one of the Reformer's later productions. Fol. 4–9.
3. OF THE DECALOGUE. This begins, "All manner of men should observe God's biddings." The part of the decalogue relating to God is treated in twelve chapters; that relating to man in twenty-eight. Fol. 9–27.
4. ON FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY. It begins, "For it is said in observing our holiday," etc. This is a work in six chapters, but does not exceed six pages. Fol. 27–30.
5. OF THE SEVEN WORKS OF BODILY MERCY. It begins, "If a man were sure that tomorrow he would come before a judge," etc. Fol. 30–35.
6. OPERA CARITATIS. Beginning, "Sixth we should serve our parishioners in spiritual alms." Fol. 35–38. This piece, and the two preceding, are in the library of New College, Oxford.
7. SEPTEM PECCATA CAPITALIA. Beginning, "Since belief teaches us that every evil is either sin or comes of sin." This is the work of which an account is given from the copy in the Bodleian in the preceding pages. See pp. 66–71. It extends, in the MS. from page 38 to 63.
8. DE ECCLESIA ET MEMBRIS EJUS. This work is also in the British Museum; and for an account of it, see pp. 74–79 of this volume. Fol. 63 to 75.
9. DE APOSTASIA ET DOTATIONE ECCLESIAE. It begins, "Since each Christian man is held..." It exhibits, as the title suggests, the doctrine of Wycliffe concerning the evils of ecclesiastical endowments. Fol. 76–80.
10. TRACTATUS DE PSEUDO FRERIS. It begins, "[It is] for many being heavy-borne,¹ that friars are called pseudo [false], or hypocrites." It consists of arguments against the peculiarities of the religious orders. Fol. 81–95.
11. OF THE EIGHT WOES THAT GOD WISHED TO FRIARS. Beginning, "Christ bids us beware with these false prophets." This piece relates to the same subject with the preceding, but consists of a parallel between the Pharisees and the mendicants. Fol. 95–101.
12. EGRESSUS JESUS DE TEMPLO. It begins, "This Gospel tells much wisdom that is hidden to many men." Homily on Mat xxiv. Also, in Trinity College, and C. C. C. Cambridge. This is a detached homily. In the volume of homilies in the British Museum, Bib. Reg. 18 B. ix. p. 175, is the following passage — "All our west land is with one pope or the other; and he that is with the one hates the other and all his. And yet hypocrites pretend that all this is for charity; but *this* hypocrisy is worse than the sin before." The first part of this sentence, it seems, is in the Dublin MS., and comparison would probably show that it is merely a strayed postil. Fol. 101–116.

¹ Originally, "beren heavy" – or being overweight. – WHG

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13. OF ANTICHRIST AND HIS MEYNEE, or train — i.e., followers. This begins, “David says, Lord, set a law-maker upon me.” This is probably the tract mentioned under the title *De Antichristo et Membris*. But the latter piece, according to Bale, begins, “Quemadmodum Dominus Jesus ordinavit.” Fol. 116–124.
14. OF ANTICHRIST’S SONG IN THE CHURCH. It begins, “Also prelates, priests, and friars, put on simple men, that they say that God’s office or service is not to be sung with notes.” Fol. 124–126.
15. OF PRAYER, a Treatise. Beginning, “Also bishops and friars put to poor men that they say,” etc. This piece ends on the next fol., 127.
16. NOTA DE CONFESSIONE. This work extends to eleven pages, and begins, “Two virtues are in man’s soul, by which a man should be ruled.” Fol. 127–138.
17. CHRIST, TRULY, DID ALL THAT HE COULD TO OBEY LORDS. This is the beginning of a tract without a title, ending on the same page.
18. NOTA DE SACRAMENTO ALTARIS. It begins, “Christian men’s belief, taught by Jesus Christ, both God and man.” — Fol. 138–145.
19. CHRYSOSTOM SAYS, THAT FISHERS AND BUYSTOUSE MEN,¹ MAKING NETS EACH DAY. This is the beginning of a piece without a title. It does not exceed two pages. Fol. 146.
20. ST. BERNARD SPEAKS THUS TO THE POPE. This is the beginning of another piece without a title. Fol. 146–152.
21. GOD MOVES HOLY CHURCH BY MANY KINDS OF SPEECHES TO KNOW. This also is the beginning of a piece without a title. It consists of a dialogue between Christ and Satan. Fol. 152–154.
22. NEITHER MAN NOR WOMAN MAY PERFECTLY DO THE SEVEN WORKS OF MERCY — “Clerics know that a man has five outward wits.” These are the beginnings of pieces without a title. They extend to little more than a page each. They appear to be shorter tracts on subjects which the Reformer had discussed more largely in other works, if indeed they are to be regarded as from his pen.
23. HERE ARE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS PUT THAT ARE WRITTEN HEREAFTER. The work which thus begins is without a title. It extends over more than forty leaves — from page 164 to 218 of the volume; and I had taken this note of its extent at the time of examining it. But from some subsequent oversight, I failed to describe it correctly in my former catalogue of the Wycliffe MSS. This is the piece which has been recently published by the Camden Society, under the editorship of Dr. Todd, librarian of Trinity College, Dublin. It is published under the title of “Wycliffe’s Apology,” but I have shown elsewhere that it is not a work of the Reformer’s.²

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¹ *Buystouse men*: neophytes or new converts.

² The reader will find this question discussed, and some other points at issue between Dr. Todd and myself, in the *Eclectic Review* for January, 1843. Soon after that article appeared, a paper was inserted in the *British Magazine*, purporting to show that Mr. Lewis, the biographer of Wycliffe, has left evidence among his private papers of being acquainted with the series of Dublin MSS, which I had ventured to describe as unknown to him. But strange enough, the proof furnished by these papers is that Mr. Lewis did certainly possess some second-hand knowledge of the Dublin MSS. which he *does* mention, but that he possessed no knowledge whatever of those he does *not* mention! This was precisely my impression of the matter, and this led me to describe my catalogue of the writings of Wycliffe as containing mention of nearly forty MSS. unknown to the Reformer’s biographers.

24. The following are the beginnings of three other short pieces, forming the conclusion of this volume.
“It is written in the first book of Holy Writ, that there were three patriarchs. These are the nine points that the Lord Jesus answered a holy man. God will speak of the deeds of mercy at the dreadful day.” Fol. 218, 219.

65. Misc. Works II — Trinity College Cambridge. In the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, is a folio volume with the following works attributed to Wycliffe. MS. 326. c. 5, 8. They consist of scholastic treatises on philosophical and theological topics, and the uninitiated reader will be able to form a sufficient notion of their character from the account of the first three books of the *Triologus* in the present volume.

1. DE ENTE COMMUNI. *In primis supponitur ens esse, hoc enim non probari potest nec ignorari ab aliquo.* Fol. 1–5.
2. DE ENTE PRIMO. *Extenso ente secundum ejus maximam ampliationem, possibile est venari in tanto ambitu ens primum.* Fol. 5–9.
3. DE PURGANDO ERRORES ET VERITATE IN COMMUNI. *Consequens est purgare errores.* Fol. 15–23.
4. DE PURGANDO ERRORES ET UNIVERSALIBUS IN COMMUNI. *Tractatu continentur dicta de universalibus.*
5. DE UNIVERSALIBUS. *Tractatus de universalibus continet xvi. capitula cujus primum.* Fol. 23–37.
6. DE TEMPORE. *In tractando de tempore sunt aliqua ex dictis superius capienda.* Fol. 37–47.
7. DE INTELLECTIONE DEI. *Illorum quæ insunt Deo communiter quædam insunt sibi soli.* Fol. 47–53.
8. DE SCIENTIA DEI. *Ex dictis superius satis liquet quod scientiam quam Deus.* Fol. 53–70.
9. DE VOLITIONE DEI. *Tractando de volitione Dei quam oportet ex dictis supponere.* Fol. 70–91.
10. DE PERSONARUM DISTINCTIONE. *Superest investigare de distinctione et convenientia personarum quas credimus plena fide.* Fol. 91–115.
11. DE YDEIS [or IDEIS, ideas]. *Tractando de ydeis primo oportet quærere si sunt.* Fol. 115–122.
12. DE POTENTIA PRODUCTIVA DEI. *Veritatum quas Deus non potest renovare.* Fol. 122–134.
13. DE SERMONE DOMINI IN III. PART. *Licet totum Evangelium.* Fol. 134–141.

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66. De Universalibus. Eccl. Cathed. Lincoln. A. 9.

67. De ente Universali et Attributis Divinis. Trin. Coll. Dub.

68. De Temporis Quidditate. In the library of the cathedral church at Lincoln (A. 9.) is a part of this treatise under the title *De Tempore* [Of Time].

The manuscripts which follow are in the Imperial Library of Vienna: they are mentioned in Mr. Baber's catalogue of the writings of Wycliffe prefixed to his edition of the *Reformer's New Testament*, and are copied from Denis's *Cat. of the Latin Theol. MSS.* in the Imperial Library.

69. Misc Works III — Imperial Library of Vienna

1. DE MINORIBUS FRATRIBUS SE EXTOLLENTIBUS. This and the piece entitled *De Perfectione Statuum*, are the same tract.

2. DE SECTIS MONACHORUM. It exists in the same collection, entitled *De concordatione Fratrum cum sectâ simplici Christi*.
 3. DE QUATUOR SECTIS NOVELLIS. This tract is also entitled, *De Prævaricatione Præceptorum*.
 4. DE FUNDATIONE SECTARUM.
 5. DE SOLUTIONE SATHANÆ.
 6. RESPONSIONES AD XIV. *Argumenta Radulphi Strodi*.¹
 7. LITERA PARVA AD QUENDAM SOCIUM.
 8. SPECULUM MILITANTIS ECCLESIE.
 9. DE ORATIONE ET ECCLESIE PURGATIONE.
 10. DE GRADIBUS CLERI.
 11. DE GRADUATIONIBUS.
 12. DE DUOBUS GENIRIBUS HERETICORUM. The persons here denominated heretics, are those who have contracted the guilt of either simony or apostasy.
 13. DE QUATUOR INTERPRETATIONIBUS.
 14. SUPER IMPOSITIS ARTICULIS, and SOCHII ARGUMENTUM CONTRA VERITATEM, are different titles given to the same tract.
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15. DE CITATIONIBUS FRIVOLIS ET ALIIS VERSUTIIS ANTICHRISTI.
 16. DE JURAMENTO ARNOLDI (de Grannario) COLLECTORIS PAPÆ.
 17. DE SEX JUGIS. A treatise on the relative duties.
 18. DE EXHORTATIONE NOVI DOCTORIS. This is conjectured to be an exercise performed for the degree of Doctor in Divinity.
 19. DE ORDINE CHRISTIANO. Twelve opinions subversive of the power of the pope were extracted from this book. MSS. Twini, A. 218.
 20. DE VATICINATIONE.
 21. DIALOGUS INTER VERITATEM ET MENDACIUM.
 22. EPISTOLA, DE PECCATO IN SPIRITUM SANCTUM.
 23. LITERA PARVA AD QUENDAM SOCIUM.
 24. EPISTOLA AD ARCHIEPISCOPUM CANTUAR.
 25. LITERA AD EPISCOPUM LINCOLN. DE AMORE, SIVE DE QUINTUPLICI QUÆSTIONE.

¹ Radulphus Strodes, non Anglus sed Scotus, in Monasterio Dryburgh, provinciæ Teviotdale, educatus, Ord. Fratrum Prædicatorum, poeta-laureatus, Oxonii diu studuit, socios collegii Mertonensis, Galliam peragravit et Italiam, Syriam item Terram Sanctam, contra Wiclefi dogmata acriter disputans circa a.c. 1370. Musices quoque fuit studiosus. Scripsit fabulas, panegyricos, consequentiarum formulas, (Ven. 1517. 4to. impressas) summulas logicales, sophismatum strophas, phantasma carmen elegiacum, itinerarium Terræ Sanctæ, positiones et xiv. argumenta contra Wiclefum opuscula. Fabricius. Bib. Med. Lat. lib. xviii. Baber. 41.

26. DE EUCHARISTIÂ ET PËNITENTIA. In this treatise Wycliffe opposes the doctrine of transubstantiation, and questions the use of auricular confession.
27. DE OCTO QUÆSTIONIBUS PROPOSITIS DISCIPULO. It is a letter upon the subject of tithes.
28. DE TRIPLICI VINCULO AMORIS.
29. DE ORIGINE SECTARUM, and DE NOVIS ORDINIBUS, are the same tract under different titles. A part of this tract is in the Imperial Library at Vienna, entitled *De sectarum perfidiâ*.
30. SUMMA THEOLOGICA. This title appears in a very ancient manuscript catalogue of Wycliffe's writings, which is in the Imperial Library at Vienna. The work here called *Summa Theologica*, is described as consisting of twelve chapters, the titles of which are as follows: — i. De Mandatis. ii. De Statu Innocentiæ.¹ iii. iv. v. De Dominio.² vi. De Veritate Scripturæ.³ vii. De Ecclesiâ. viii. De Officio Regis. ix. De Postate Papæ. x. De Simonia.⁴ xi. De Apostasiâ. xii. De Blasphemiâ.

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The following are the titles of extinct works, or they are different names given to some of the preceding treatises. They are found in the lists published by Bale, Tanner, and subsequent writers, with no other description than is given here: and they appear to have been, for the most part, treatises or tracts on grammar, philosophy, and a variety of scholastic questions.

70. Extinct and Alternately Titled Works.

1. QUESTIONES LOGICALES.
2. LOGICA DE SINGULIS.
3. LOGICA DE AGGREGATIS.
4. DE PROPOSITIONIBUS TEMPORALIBUS. *Sequitur jam ultimo de proposit.*
5. DE INSOLUBILIBUS.
6. DE EXCLUSIVIS EXCEPTIVIS. *Secundarie superius est promissum.*
7. DE CAUSALIBUS. *Pertractandum venit de causalibus.*
8. DE COMPARATIVIS. *Consequens est ad dicta superad.*
9. DE CONDITIONALIBUS. *Primo supponitur omnem hypotheti.*
10. DE DISJUNCTIVIS. *Tertio sequitur de disjunctivis.*
11. DE COPULATIVIS ET RELATIVIS. *Sequitur de copulativis pertract.*
12. GRAMMATICÆ TROPI.
13. METAPHYSICA VULGARIS.
14. DE UNIVERSO REALI.

¹ Biographia Wiclefiana, sive elenchus multorum ejus operum cum eorum initiis, unde Catalogi Balei et Tanneri non parum supplevi et perforce possint. Inter alia disco, tractatus varios, qui nunc separatim feruntur, partes esse *Summæ Theologicæ* nostri. — Verum id esse, vel horum librorum initia comprobant Cod. Sæc. XV. Denis, Cat. Lat. Theol. MSS. in Bib. Pal. Vind. 391. xii. In C. C. College, Oxford, is a manuscript entitled — Quædam abstracta ex *Summâ*, doctoris Anglici, Wiclefi. MS. 116. Baber. 46. See XXXII. in this series.

² See No. XXX. of this series. There are two copies of the *De Dominio* in the Imperial Library. Forty-four opinions in the part of this treatise entitled *De Dominio Civili*, were condemned. MS. Twini, A. 220.

³ See No. LXIII. of the preceding series.

⁴ Thirty-four opinions in this tract were censured. MS. Twini, A. 217.

15. METAPHYSICA NOVELLA.
16. DE SUMMÂ INTELLECTUALIUM.
17. DE FORMIS IDEALIBUS.
18. DE SPIRITU QUOLIBET.
19. DE SPECIEBUS HYPOTHETICIS.
20. DE ESSE INTELLIGIBILI CREATURÆ.
21. DE ESSE SUO PROLIXCO.
22. DE ARTE SOPHISTICA.
23. DE UNA COMMUNIS GENERIS ESSENTIA.
24. DE ESSENTIÂ ACCIDENTIUM.
25. DE TEMPORIS AMPLIATIONE.
26. DE PHYSICA NATURALI.
27. DE INTENTIO PHYSICÂ.
28. DE MATERIA ET FORMÂ. *Cum materia et forma sint uni.*
29. DE MATERIÂ CELESTIUM.
30. DE RARITATE ET DENSITATE. *Videtur ex tertio sequi quod nihil.*
31. DE MOTA LOCALI. *Sequitur de localibus pertract.*
32. DE VELOCITATE MOTUS LOCALIS. *Tam ultimo restat videre quid.*
33. DE CENTRO INFINITI.

The pieces thus described appear to have been treatises, or more probably, short tracts or detached parts of treatises, on grammar, logic, and philosophy, embracing, as intimated before, such topics as found in the first and second books of the *Trialogus*.

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The titles which follow denote works more strictly theological, and some of them no doubt exhibited many of the distinctive opinions of the Reformer.

34. DIALOGUS DE FRATRIBUS.
35. JOHANNES A RURE CONTRA FRATRES. *Ego Johannes a rure Deum verum precor.*
36. DE CHARITATE FRATERNÂ. *Premum cum quolibet homine qui.*
37. DÆMONUM ÆSTUS IN SUBVERTENDÂ RELIGIONE. *Ut omnipotens Deus homines disponit.*
38. DE DIABOLO MILLENARIO. *Cum consummati fuerint mille anni.*
39. DE PERVERSO ANTICHRISTI DOGMATE. *Cum puri concionatores doceant Dei verbum.*
40. DEFENSIO CONTRA IMPIOS. *Evangelii predicationem lites suscipere.*
41. CONTRA P. STOKES.¹
42. RESPONSIO AD ARGUMENTA MONACHI DE SALLEY.
43. CONTRA MONACHUM DUNELMENSEM.²
44. DE IMITATE CHRISTI.

¹ Stokes was a Carmelite friar. He was commanded by the Archbishop of Canterbury to publish at Oxford the condemnation which had been pronounced against the opinions of Wycliffe and his disciples by the court assembled in the Preaching Friars.

² This monk was named Ughtred Bolton, and had written several tracts against Wycliffe.

45. DE UNICO SALUTIS AGNO.
46. CHRISTUS ALIUS NON EXPECTANDUS.
47. DE HUMANITATE CHRISTI.
48. DE DEFECTONE A CHRISTO.
49. DE FIDE ET PERFIDIÂ.
50. DE FIDE SACRAMENTORUM.
51. DE FIDE EVANGELII.
52. CONSTITUTIONES ECCLESIE.
53. DE CENSURIS ECCLESIE. *Quantum ad excommunicationem attigit.*
54. DE SACERDOTIO LEVITICO.
55. DE SACERDOTIO CHRISTI.
56. DE STATUENDIS PASTORIBUS AD PLEBEM.
57. SPECULUM CLERI PER DIALOGUM. *Sed adhuc arquitur si querus sic.*
58. DE NON SAGINANDIS SACERDOTIBUS. *Cavete qui sacerdotes ad honestatem.*
59. DE MINISTRORUM CONJUGIO. *Fuit in diebus Herodes sacerdos.*
60. COGENDI SACERDOTES AD HONESTATEM. *Apertam eruditionem in Dei lege.*
61. DE RITIBUS SACRAMENTORUM.
62. DE QUIDDITE HOSTIÆ CONSECRATIÆ.
63. DE QUINTUPLICI EVANGELIO.
64. DETERMINATIONES QUÆDAM.

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65. DE TRINITATE. *Superest investigare de distinctione.*
66. DE EXCOMMUNICATIS ABSOLVENDIS. *Quoniam sub pœna excommunicationis.*
67. DISTINCTIONES RERUM THEOLOGICARUM.
68. DE FONTE ERROREM.
69. DE FALSATORIBUS LEGÆ DIVINÆ. *Postquam interpretes subdoli legem.*
70. DE IMMORTALITATE ANIMÆ.
71. CEREMONIARUM CHRONICON.
72. DE CESSATIONE LEGALIUM. *Redeundo autem ad propositum de.*
73. DE DILECTIONE. *In quelibet homine peccatore.*
74. CONCORDANTIÆ DOCTORUM.
75. DE CONTRARIETATE DUORUM DOMINORUM. *Sicut est unus, verus et summus.*
76. DE LEGE DIVINÂ. *Ut de legibus loquar Christianorum.*
77. DE NECESSITATE FUTURORUM.
78. DE OPERIBUS SPIRITUALIBUS. *Quia paræcianos spiritualibus.*
79. DE OPERIBUS CORPORALIBUS. *Si certus esset homo quod in.*
80. DE ORDINE CHRISTIANO.
81. DE ORDINARIA LAICORUM.
82. DE ORDINE SACERDOTALI. *Quia presbyterorum ordo instituitur.*
83. DE PURGATORIO PIORUM. *Dona eis, Domine requiem semper.*
84. POSITIONES VARIÆ.

85. REPLICATIONES ET POSITIONES.
86. DE PRÆSCITO AD BEATITUDINEM.
87. DE QUATERNARIO DOCTORUM.
88. DE RELIGIOSIS PRIVATIS. *Omnes Christiani in spiritus fervore.*
89. DE STUDIO LECTIONIS. *Malum est in eis perseverare ea.*
90. DE SERVITUTE CIVILI. *Cum secundum philosophos sit relativorum.*
91. THEOLOGIÆ PLACITA.
92. DE VIRTUTE ORANDI. *Ut sabbatizatio nostra sit Deo acceptabilis.*
93. CONTRA MONACHUM DE ST. ALBANO.
94. DE COMPOSITIONE HOMINIS. *Tria enovent me ad tractandum.*
95. DE HOMINE MISERO.
96. SCHOLIA SCRIPTURARUM.
97. GLOSSÆ SCRIPTURARUM.
98. GLOSSÆ VULGARES.
99. GLOSSÆ MANUALES.
100. GLOSSA NOVELLA.
101. COMMENTarii VULGARES.¹ *Stabat Johannes, et ex discipulis.*
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102. LECTIONES IN DANIALEM.
103. DE DOTATIONE ECCLESIAE, and DE DOTATIONE CÆSAREÆ, are different titles of the same work, beginning — *Utrum clerus debuerit dotationem.*
104. DE ANTICHRISTO ET MEMBRIS. *Quemadmodum Dominus Jesus ordinavit.*
105. ITERUM DE ANTICHRISTO. *Nota quod Antichristus 4 com.*
106. SPECULUM MILITANTIS ECCLESIAE. *Cum identitas mater sit fastidii.*
107. DE PERFECTIONE EVANGELICA. *Primo fratres dicunt suam religionem.*
108. DE OFFICIO PASTORALI. *Cum duplex debeat esse officium.*
109. DE SIMONIA SACERDOTUM. *Heu magni sacerdotes in tenebris.*²
110. SUPER PENITENTIUS INJUNGENDIS. *Pro eo quod curatorum officium sit.*
111. DE DIVITE APUD MARCUM. *Cum egressus esset in viam salvator.*
112. DE REMISSIONE FRATERNÆ. *Si autem peccaverit in te frater.*
113. DE TRIBUS SAGITTIS. *Quisquis mente tenere cupit quid.*
114. DE ECCLESIA CATHOLICA. *Sunt sacerdotes qui certis rationibus.*
115. DE MANDATIS DIVINIS. *Præmissa sententia de Domino.*
116. CONCIONES DE MORTE. *Beati qui in Domino moriuntur.*
117. DE PECCATIS FUGIENDIS. *Dum fides nos doceat malum quodlibet.*
118. DE ABLATIS RESTITUENDIS. *Quæritur 1 utrum omnium errum.*
119. DE SEDUCTIONE SIMPLICIUM. *Septem sunt quibus decipiuntur simplices.*

¹ “It is probable that the six preceding titles are various descriptions of the same work.” — Baber. 48.

² These words are the commencement of the piece entitled “The Last Age of the Church,” of which mention will be made elsewhere.

120. DE OCIO ET MENDACITATE. *A manuum labore excusantur fratres.*
121. IN SYMBOLUM FIDEI. *Certum est fidem esse omnium virtutum.*
122. SUPER SALUTATIONE ANGELICA. *Solent homines Christissaram salutare.*
123. AD SIMPLICES SACERDOTES. *Videtur meritorium bonos colore.*
124. AD QUINQUE QUESTIONES. *Quidam fidelis in Domino quærit.*
125. SUPPLEMENTUM TRIALOGI.
126. DE TRINO AMORIS VINCULO.
127. CONTRA CONCILIUM TERRÆ MOTUS.
128. DE SOLUTIONE SATANÆ.
129. DE SPIRITU QUOLIBET.
130. OMNIS PLANTATIO.
131. SI QUIS SITIT.

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132. DE CONFESSIONE LATINORUM.
133. DE CHRISTIANORUM BAPTISMO.
134. DE CLAVIS REGNI Dei.
135. DE CLAVIUM POTESTATE.
136. DE HOMINE MISERO.
137. CONTRA CRUCIATUM PAPÆ.
138. DE LEGIBUS ET VENENO.
139. COLLECTIONES CONTRA DOMINICANOS.
140. RESPONSIONES ARGUMENTORUM.
141. AD RATIONES KYNINGHAM.
142. CONTRA BYNHAMUM MONACHUM.
143. REPLICATIONES ET POSITIONES.
144. DE BULLIS PAPALIBUS.
145. DE VERITATE ET MENDACIO.
146. DE PREVARICATIONE PRECEPTORUM.
147. DIALOGORUM SUORUM.
148. DE VERA INNOCENTIA.
149. DE VII. DONIS SPIRITUS SANCTI.
150. DE VERSATIIS PSEUDO CLERI.
151. OF WEDLOCK.
152. THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

Book II. The Trialogus

SECTION I. BEING SOME ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD BOOKS OF THE TRIALOGUS.

THE work of our Reformer which bears the name of the *Trialogus*, is so called because it consists of a series of colloquies between three speakers. The names of these speakers are *Alithia*, *PSEUDIS*,¹ and *Phronesis* — or Truth, Falsehood, and Wisdom. The opinions and reasonings of Alithia, accordingly, are to be regarded as those of Truth; those of PSEUDIS as being the contrary of truth; while in the person of Phronesis, Wycliffe himself speaks. And in setting forth his judgment on the points at issue, he generally assigns those reasons for his opinions which tend to expose the sophistry of PSEUDIS, and to sustain the views of Alithia.

Many of the opinions discussed are not of a nature to interest a modern reader, and the debates relating to such opinions are valuable chiefly as they serve to illustrate the history of theological speculations. In many instances, also, the method of the argumentation is no more to our taste than the matter of it. It was one of the peculiarities of the scholastic process of reasoning, that in attempting to establish any doctrine, full expression should be given to every conceivable form of objection against it. And it often happened from this, that the disputant raised the spirit of the doubter, without being well able to lay it down again. Thus the practice itself served to whet the faculties, and to bring them to their office² with the greatest degree of circumspection and force. Thus in the *Trialogus*, the language of PSEUDIS gives expression to the captious and sceptical spirit of the Middle Age on the great questions relating to philosophy, morals, and theology — while the speeches of Alithia and Phronesis embody the sounder views of those times on such subjects. And along with the opinions generally received, come those bolder utterances which distinguish the writings of Wycliffe as those of a Reformer.

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But the argument is conducted in the prescribed scholastic form, especially in the earlier part of the treatise. And as relating to its more obscure topics, the method of reasoning, and the technical expressions frequently recurring in it, are the sort that have no place even in the most scientific treatises in our own age.³ In one respect, indeed, the works of the ancient schoolmen bear a

¹ PSEUDIS is formatted in SMALL CAPS throughout, to more easily identify his arguments as false. — WHG

² *Office*: this is used repeatedly to mean *function*: anything typically done by or expected of something.

³ The following passage is the first in the treatise, and may be taken as a specimen of the obscurity which attaches very generally to the metaphysical portion of the work — an obscurity which renders it impossible for a literal translation to convey to a modern reader any intelligible meaning.

“ALITHIA. Licet dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus, tamen videtur supponendum, omnium hominum Deum esse, quia aliter tibi nemo negaret aliquid, vel aliquam veritatem esse, cum negando illud statim concederet ejus oppositum. Quia si aliquid est, illud vel est finitum vel infinitum, sive sic, vel illud, vel causa illius, est Deus, cum supponitur omne quod est prima causa non causatum ab alio, esse Deum. Et extendo hoc nomen aliquid ad omne eus, vel per se, vel aggregatum, vel affirmativam, aut negativam, vel possibilem veritatem.

“PSEUDIS. Præcipui Logici multipliciter sic instarent, non claudit contradictionem formalem, nullem eus esse, cum ex nulla negativa sequatur formaliter affirmativa, non ergo sequitur pro primo loco Deum esse, quia tunc sequeretur formaliter, si nihil est aliquid est. Item stat veritatem esse cum hoc, quod non sit aliquid, cum veritas potest est quod nihil sit, et tunc non est aliquid. Et tertio possibile est esse processum in infinitum in caussalibus, non ergo sequitur, si causa est, tunc prima causa est, cum in ordine causarum homo posset procedere infinite.

strong resemblance to our later literature, inasmuch as there is very little in the speculations of the modern sceptic which may not be found in the writings of those Middle-Age churchmen. In some instances, the polemic may have secretly sympathised with the freedom of thought which he affected to condemn. But in general, the atheist, the infidel, and the heretic, were imaginary foes, conjured up so that the militant ecclesiastic might indulge in such displays of his skill, that they would secure for him the honors of a victory, as in a species of tournament.

That there should have been men during the Middle Age disposed to bestow a laborious attention on such a system of dialectics, is not surprising. But Wycliffe was a man of earnest piety, of an impassioned temperament, and with a mind eminently practical. He was intent through life, on bringing about great practical reforms. Nevertheless, if we may credit the testimony of enemies in his favor, even that of the most bitter among them, we must believe that no man of his age was more deeply learned, or more thoroughly skilled in the science of the schoolmen. According to Knyghton, a contemporary and an adversary, —

“As a theologian, he was the most eminent in his day; as a philosopher, second to none; and as a schoolman, incomparable. He made it his great aim, with learned subtlety, and by the profundity of his own genius, to surpass the genius of other men.”¹

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Instances, indeed, are not lacking, in which the speculative and the practical, the abstract and the impassioned, have been united in strong proportions in the same men. In Pascal, that purely intellectual concentration which is so necessary to success in the exact sciences, was combined with the imagination of the poet, and with the feeling of the saint. But opposites of this nature meet in something like equal apportionments in the weak, much more frequently than in the strong. And among the reformers, it is in the genius of Calvin that we see, in this respect, the nearest reflection of the mind of Wycliffe.

The first and second books of the *Dialogus*, are the least extended, and the least valuable. The third and fourth books embrace more than three-fourths of the whole treatise, and abound in matter that is more or less interesting to every sincere Protestant.

Book I. The Being and Attributes of God

The first book is wholly occupied with arguments to prove the being of a God, and with other speculations relating to the Divine perfections, and to the mysteries of the Divine nature. The *first* chapter is designed to show that “God is the first cause of all things;” the *second* exhibits Him as taking necessary precedence of all things; and in the *third* He is set forth as the great reality, whose nature is such that our thoughts can never rise to the conception of any higher excellence. The *fourth* chapter is intended to demonstrate that “God is whatever it is better to be, than not to be.” And this conclusion being established, all the Divine perfections are deduced from it, inasmuch as it is manifestly better that the Divine nature should be just, wise, omnipotent, and the like, than to be devoid of such perfections. In the *sixth* chapter it is maintained that the reasoning which is thus satisfactory in leading to sound conclusions in regard

Sicut enim divisio lumine in suas partes proportionales causatur a secunda, et sic in infinitum, et sic etiam in infinitis casibus, quibus oportet procedere infinite.”

¹ “Doctor in theologia eminentissimus in diebus illis. In philosophia nulli reputabatur secundus: in scholasticis disciplinis incomparabilis. Hic maxime nitebatur aliorum ingenia subtilitate scientiæ et profunditate ingenii sui transcendere.” — *Knyghton*, p. 2644.

to the Divine perfections, is no less satisfactory in serving to show “the Lord of all to be a Trinity.” And in the remaining chapters of this book, an attempt is made to demonstrate the doctrine of the Trinity from the light of nature, and to exhibit the old philosophical doctrine concerning “ideas,” as in harmony with the prevailing notions of the schoolmen in respect to the manner of the Divine existence.

THE FIRST BOOK. 111

In this preliminary portion of the work, we find none of the opinions peculiar to Wycliffe as a reformer — except that, in two instances, he censures the conduct of some men in making an undue use of the authority of tradition; and the following passage on the sufficiency and excellence of the Scriptures, may be regarded as having the same complexion.

“It is plain, that all error in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, by which weak men so falsify and debase them, proceeds from ignorance of grammar and logic. And unless God assists us in respect to the understanding of these rudiments of faith, the faith of the Scriptures will be too little estimated. The opinion is manifestly just, that if there is any truth, it is in the Scripture — this is often inculcated by Augustine. Nothing, indeed, is to be named as subtle ¹ in grammar, in logic, or in any other science, that the same may not be found in more excellence in Scripture.” ²

The most curious portion of the metaphysical speculation found in this book, consists in the attempt made in some sense to explain, as well as to prove, the doctrine of the Trinity, by natural reason. PSEUDIS accounts it “great presumption” in any man to pretend that such articles of faith may be demonstrated by the light of nature. Phronesis maintains that the different opinion of Alithia on that subject is not liable to such a charge. Having spoken at some length on the subordination of the light of nature to the light of faith, and on the agreement of the one with the other, he reminds PSEUDIS of the doctrine of Plato in respect to a trinity of some kind in the Divine nature. And then he endeavors to show not only that the doctrine of Plato is according to reason, but also to show, on strictly metaphysical grounds, why the Divine Trinity is described as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In pursuance of this argument, it is said that the “*potentia*” of the Divine nature, in the sense in which that term is used by the speaker, is God the Father. The “*notitia*,” or power of self-knowledge in the Divine nature, is God the Son. And the “*quietatio*” — the repose — the calm rest of the Divine essence, is God the Holy Spirit. Care is taken to explain the purely metaphysical sense in which the term *person* is used in relation to such a subject. But that name is applied to the above properties of the Divine existence; and these three persons are described as being co-eternal and co-equal. These refinements are pushed so far, that in the sense of “causation” or procession — but not in the sense of “divinity” — God is said to be “the cause of God.” However, this is not in any such sense that it is not still true that “these three persons are *one* first cause as they are *one* God, and not three causes as they are not three Gods.”

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In another place, the mind of man is viewed as consisting eminently in “memory, reason, and will.” And these are not only regarded as a kind of trinity in man, but as a species of revelation in man concerning the Trinity in the Divine nature. To the modern metaphysician, reasoning of this

¹ *Subtle*: clever, finely woven or skillfully distinguished.

² Chap. viii. 23.

nature will appear singularly open to objection; and many of the objections to which it is exposed were strongly urged against it even in those times. But such is the potency of circumstances and fashion, even in respect to such matters, that this method of treating theological subjects, long retained its hold on the learned, and it is only partially superseded even in our own day.

Book II. The Works of God

The discussions in the first book relate principally to the existence and perfections of the Divine nature. Those in the second book extend our thoughts from the Deity to his works, and they relate both to the origin of the world, and to the constitution of created things generally. In thus passing from the Creator to the created, the following all come under review:

- the elements of nature
- the powers of the human mind
- the relation of the human spirit to the body and to the material world
- the nature, gradations, fall, and wars of the angels
- the foreknowledge and predestination of the Almighty affecting the condition of His works.

In this book, in common with the one preceding, we find none of the distinctive doctrines of the Reformer. But there is a much greater portion of matter in this part of the treatise, which may be translated so as to be intelligible to a modern reader, and which may not be uninteresting to many such readers. This, however, is more than can be said of the contents of the first seven chapters, which consist of observations and reasonings concerning the office of the senses, the powers of the human intellect, and the history and properties of the material universe. But the following is a translation of the eighth chapter, “On the immortality of the soul as deduced from reason.”

“**Alithia.** Pray tell me, brother, whether the immortality of the soul, a doctrine you so often assume, may be deduced from reason.

“**Phronesis.** On this point, neither of us entertain any doubt that the soul of man is truly immortal; and consequently, since that soul is identical with the individual man, it follows that the individual in this case will ever remain immortal.

THE SECOND BOOK. 113

“And this was the reason why the apostles underwent death with such courage and boldness, well knowing, as they did, that the imprisonment and burden of the flesh was an irksome restraint and oppression to them, and rejoicing that they had met their death in a just cause.

“But philosophers assign many reasons by which to establish this opinion. In the first place, we learn on the authority of Aristotle, and in fact from common experience, that a certain energy in the mind of man is immortal. But no energy or operation can be more permanent than that which is its subject — that is, the mind, or soul; and therefore we must grant that the soul is immortal. Aristotle gives weight to his assumption on this point, by adducing in its favor the intellect of man, which, so far from being enfeebled, is rather invigorated by the weakness of the body. For there is an increase of keenness in the speculative intellect of the old, even when every corporeal faculty has failed them. This perceptive faculty must have a foundation of some sort to rest upon, of a nature that does not require such an instrument as the body. And we must therefore rank the human intellect above all the animal faculties aforesaid. For in those faculties, animals surpass man, as the poet says, who shows it from experience: ‘the boar excels us in hearing, the spider in touch, the vulture in scent, the lynx in sight, the ape in the

sense of tasting.’ And thus is it with the five organic interior faculties aforesaid. For since man does not surpass animals in power of body, or in any merely animal sense, we are forced to the conclusion that he excels them in the operation of his intellect. But what advantage would have been given him if in the very point which constituted his felicity, he had been compelled to part with that felicity at death? For in such case, God would seem to cast contempt on his favored offspring. Man therefore has an understanding which he takes away from the body along with himself, and which abides forever. Furthermore, man has a feeling within himself of a natural desire to exist forever; and the wiser men are, the more they bear testimony to this truth. Since, then, nature is not to be frustrated in a purpose of such consequence, it appears that there is in man, according to nature, a certain understanding which exists forever, and so he is immortal.

“In respect to every man we must come to this same conclusion. For if we affirm that immortality belongs to the nature of any one individual, this same property must necessarily be inherent in every individual of a like nature. Otherwise, it would not be inherent by nature, but by chance, or from some other adventitious cause which we cannot describe — because, supposing that soul might have been destroyed in the lapse of time by its contrary, or by any other cause, everyone would have become liable to destruction; otherwise there would have been a liability to destruction in it, without any cause.

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“For things which come to their termination at the end of certain periods of time, do not last forever; because if they did, they would become possessed of an infinite power, beyond that belonging to things of a similar species, which endure only for a limited space. Since, then, man has a longing to exist together with God, as the noblest and most natural limit of his desires, no reason can be assigned, apart from his own demerit, which would hinder the accomplishment of such a purpose — especially when we remember that the destruction of the body does not annihilate that soul, but rather gladdens it.

“Hence, philosophers and natural reason teach us that it is well to die for the public good, and to avoid what is disgraceful and criminal. But this preference cannot be shown to be rational, unless the man who so dies, can be made possessor of a life after this life. Hence our conclusion follows.

“Our point may be elucidated thus: a man belonging to an altogether just community, may justly consent to die for the salvation of that community, inasmuch as greater advantage would then accrue both to the individual who died, and to the community. And inasmuch, moreover, as every man ought to desire as an object of preference, that good which, belonging to the community, is called the public good. For it appears that, in such an emergency, a man should so choose death, that according to the law of nature, the possible advantage of the community may be rather chosen. Nor is it to be doubted that in many cases, it might be advantageous to the community, that a certain individual should die, rather than that same individual live any longer, even virtuously.

“The same reasoning applies to a man who must choose between committing a crime, and following the dictates of virtue, but thereby undergo temporal death. Suppose then it were determined, by a conscience within the man, that it would be virtuous and more expedient for him to so die. It might be asked, when the advantage that is supposed to arise out of death, would accrue to him — whether before death, or after? Now it cannot be before death, for death brings no advantage before it comes; and if it is after death, then it must be the spirit

which will reap that advantage after death. And thus it follows that the spirit will remain, for that is not dependent on the body.

“Of this sort are the many reasons amounting almost to a demonstration, which have induced the wisest and best-informed to die in this way. In such a cause they have not died in vain. For then they would have been the most wretched and senseless of all men,¹ in common with many beside, who persevere in virtue to the end of their days.

THE THIRD BOOK. 115

Another kind of reward must then be assigned to them in the end, by an all-bountiful Deity, not in this life — inasmuch as God has determined they should die in the course of virtue. And we are thus obliged to conclude that it will be in a life to come and, in consequence, that the soul of a man will survive the death of the body. For God justly distributes rewards to the virtuous without respect to persons, as in the case of the two men mentioned before — one of whom lives virtuously, and the other who lives out the full period of his lifetime in vice. It is proper that according to some measurement of time, a reward should, in justice, be allotted to each according to his deserts — not in this life, as it is manifest from the fact of the case. And therefore it is necessarily after death.

“And inasmuch as Scripture is full of testimony to this truth, it is most necessary that man should embrace it. It is just as imperative that the Christian should believe that the soul will exist after this life, as it is that he should believe that God exists, and that he is the rewarder of the good.”²

The next four chapters consist of observations, partly scriptural, and partly conjectural, regarding the nature of angels, their different ranks and offices, and their fall, punishment, and conflicts. The fourteenth chapter treats prescience and predestination, in which an attempt is made to reconcile strong opinions on that subject, with sound doctrine concerning human responsibility. The last chapter in this book consists of some discoursing with respect to the heavens, including observations on the seven planets, the stars, the four elements, and the moon and her influence on the humid properties of the earth. This chapter, while presenting an outline of the defective philosophy of the age, is chiefly remarkable from the intelligent scepticism with which it touches on the dreams of the astrologer and alchemist. He alleges that fancies of that nature had done much to injure the science of medicine, and hardly less to detract from the certainty of the necessary truths proper to the “venerable science of theology.”

Book III. The Moral Virtues of God

The first chapter in this book is “On the Virtues.” Phronesis intimates his intention to state his views on this subject, both practically and speculatively. And accordingly, he commences by enumerating the various classes of virtues. He divides them into the created and uncreated. The former are separated into natural and moral. The natural virtues are described as the divisible and indivisible.

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¹ **1Cor 15:19** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

² p. 58; drawn from Heb 11.6.

The moral virtues consist of those which belong to man naturally, and they consist of those that are termed *theological* — such as faith, hope, and charity. Virtue of the former description is defined by Aristotle as consisting in that disposition or habit of mind, which chooses the medium most suitable to the individual, according to the dictates of reason. There are four cardinal virtues — justice, fortitude, prudence, and temperance. There are five intellectual virtues of which man is capable, each of them regulating according to reason, the moral virtue which corresponds to it. These five virtues, or powers, are wisdom, intellect, science, art, and prudence. In this class of virtues, wisdom holds the highest rank. Intellect is defined as that faculty by which we gain our knowledge of the fundamental principles of science, such as this: that the same thing cannot be, and not be, at the same time, and that the whole must be greater than its parts. By science, we arrive at the results of scientific investigation. Art does not consist so much in the manual dexterity which enables us to create works of art, as it does in a theoretical knowledge of the principles on which all such works should be modelled. Lastly, the office of prudence is direct and practical, and is most closely connected with the moral virtues, each one of which may be said to have its special kind of prudence belonging to it.

Aristotle connects the moral virtues with the irrational part of our nature, and calls them elective, because they lead one to choose and delight in the natural end of their being, making it the great object of pursuit. And because these virtuous dispositions maintain a medium between two extremes, which are alike vicious, he defines this kind of virtue as a disposition which chooses the mean course. Still, we are to guard against considering virtue and vice, and the actions consequent upon them, as things having any independent existence. For the *medium*, as Aristotle reminds us, must not be confounded with an absolute and invariable *mean*, or with an arithmetical mean; but it must be regarded as one that is solely relative to ourselves. The medium, then, must be adapted to the circumstances of the follower of virtue, because various means suit various individuals. Every virtue, accordingly, must be accompanied by an appropriate exercise of prudence, and in consequence, Aristotle completes his definition by saying that the choice of this mean is determined by the dictate of reason.

If the reader does not perceive the meaning of this moral analysis, the fault is not so much with the Reformer, as with the distinguished philosopher whose system he is endeavoring to expound. The rest of the chapter is occupied with observations on the conduct of a man who squanders away his property by profuse generosity. And Phronesis shows that it is not true, as it may at first appear, that a virtuous habit has become a vicious one merely by a change of circumstances.

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Rather, the man continues to give beyond his means, not from a principle of virtue, but from the force of habit; and this habit of profusion, while thus unregulated by prudence, is anything but a virtue.

In the second chapter, Phronesis defends his departure from Aristotle, and shows that the cardinal virtues should be assigned to the will, or to the intellect of man, and should thus occupy a higher place than has been assigned to them by that philosopher.

“Neither these,” he observes, “nor any of the moral virtues, can dwell in man without the assistance of God’s grace. How, I ask, can man merit happiness by living and acting according to the good pleasure of God, unless God, of his abundant grace, accepts such service? So whatever man does or may, as it were, beget in himself by nature, is not called a moral virtue worthy of reward and everlasting praise,

unless it has come to him from another, and consequently from the grace of God himself. And no man can ascertain whether he is virtuous in this sense or not, except by aid of a revelation from God.”

Aristotle, he proceeds to say, maintains that the fact of a man’s finding pleasure in pursuing the dictates of reason, is a sign to him of his having been in the practice of virtue. But this is a sign by no means sufficient to prove the point intended, inasmuch as a man without grace, may feel at times a sincere pleasure in the performance of a virtuous action. And the disbelief of this great fact has been the source of much delusion, disposing many to think “that a man may be absolved from his sins, by the mere form of words, or the laying on of hands in the sacrament.”

Phronesis then discusses the subject of FAITH. He remarks that the term is sometimes used to denote the act of believing, sometimes a believing habit of mind, and sometimes the truth which is believed. According to the schoolmen, there is a faith which is incomplete, such as that of devils who believe and tremble; and there is another kind of faith which becomes perfect, such as being inwrought by charity. This charity belongs necessarily to all who are true believers; and all men who are destitute of it are, in a sense, unbelievers. There are three properties belonging to faith. *First*, it relates wholly to truth, to the exclusion of all error — truth which the believer should defend even to the death. *Secondly*, it is proper to faith that the object of it should not allow for demonstration — it should be obscure to the eye of sense, inasmuch as we cannot be said to believe in what we see. *Thirdly*, faith is the foundation or substance giving rest to the pilgrim, in the objects of his belief — the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.¹ ([Heb 11.1](#))

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The believer is further described as a man upon whom God has bestowed a faith which is unmixed with hesitation.² It is added that every man committing sin must so do as an unbeliever. For if he had been mindful of the punishment to be inflicted on the sinner, of the inspection of God constantly over him, and of the other objects of faith that are always present to a believer, he would not have so done.

The third chapter treats HOPE and CHARITY. Hope is said to be distinguished from faith in three respects. *First*, hope has regard only to realizing some future good; but faith has respect to truth universally, and simply as such. *Secondly*, hope falls short of that evidence and knowledge concerning its object which belongs to faith; but it rests in the medium between doubt and credulity. And so logicians say, concerning the objects of hope, that they do not deny, know, or doubt respecting them, but simply suppose them. *Thirdly*, hope has reference only to a good which is possible to the person hoping. Faith, on the contrary, has respect to things which may be advantageous or disadvantageous to the person who believes, as well as to things with which he has no concern.

¹ “Quamvis autem fidelis noscat confuse omnes articulos fidei, et habeat evidentiam, etiam demonstrationem, ad aliquos articulos fidei cognoscendum, non tamen oportet ipsam ex hinc, a merito suo excidere. Licet viator non ut sic habeat rationem meriti, et crediderit veritatem sensibilem. Et sic intelligi potest Grego. in Omilia de octava paschæ, quod fides non habet meritum et cet. Nec video quomodo viator posset in statu isto peregrinando proficere ad beatitudinem promerendam, nisi primo omnium sit fidelis.” — pp. 84, 85.

² “Fidelis autem est, qui habet fidem a Deo infusam sine aliqua trepidatione fidei contraria, quæ suæ fidei sit commixta.” — Ibid.

But the virtue especially necessary to the Christian pilgrim is CHARITY. Without charity no man can enter heaven. It is the wedding-garment, the lack of which must bring condemnation in the Last Judgment. True charity consists in loving God with all the heart, and soul, and mind — and these three terms refer to the love due to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit respectively. This command, though the first and the greatest, is but poorly observed by our fallen and unhappy race. The second command is like the first: that we love all the works of God, and especially that we love our neighbor as ourselves. We all profess to observe this mutual charity, but our actions proclaim the contrary; and our actions are entitled to more credence than our words. To love God is the same thing as to love His law. This is plain from the Gospel, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” [Joh 14.15](#).

We may test our love for the law of God by three things: by our attention to it, our observance of it, and our readiness to defend it.

“Do not the laws of men,” it is observed, “and other created objects, convict us of ignorance and contempt with regard to the law of God? Do we not love other things more, to which we give more attention?”

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“Who is there, I ask, who does not reckon his own advantage to be of more importance in the pursuit of some branch of knowledge that may bring him money, than his attention to, and sedulous observance of, the law of God? This is a course of conduct that is most manifestly repugnant to the spirit of charity, for the apostle tells us that ‘charity does not seek her own.’ [1Cor 13.5](#) — Chap. i. 7.

“Let us see, then, whether the Christian pilgrim is more anxiously concerned about his own private advantage, than about the observance of this law of Christ. Since the opposite is the fact with the greater portion of mankind, it is plain that they are devoid of charity, lacking in their observance of the first and greatest commandment. But if a man is so rooted in this habit of perversity, who can entertain any doubt about his being a heretic, because of his continued failure in attending to and observing this law? Again, if we look to the way in which this law is defended among individuals of the higher orders, who can hesitate in saying that not only the laity, but still more the prelates, have a greater regard for the protection of their private interests than for the public defence of the law of Christ? If this were not so, they would have destroyed, as far as they possibly could, all that takes away from or is opposed to that law. And yet both prelates and civil dignitaries, exalt and defend the laws and interests of men, placing them before the law of God. For otherwise, I do not see how the civil law should be executed with such scrupulous accuracy, and there be only a trifling amount of evidence in respect to whatever violates such human enactments, or infringes on the good of society. It is plain, therefore, from the far greater pains men take in putting human laws into execution, how great a preponderance they carry with them in general estimation, and how false is the assertion of such men that they love God with all the heart, soul, and mind.

“In fact, all, or the greater number, among our religious orders, will be among the first to be inexcusably condemned in the day of the Son of God, for disobedience of this nature — since they all seek that which is their own, and labor for the interests of their own order, and overlook the defence of the Divine law.

“Thus, then, private sects deprived their members of charity. But Christ, who wished his law to be observed in freedom so that its observance might earn a happier reward, appointed no infliction of sensible punishment on its transgressors, but has abandoned the person neglecting it, to a more severe suffering after the Day of Judgment. Are these three virtues, then — faith, hope, charity — anything less than banished now-a-days? The fear of the sensible penalty to be immediately inflicted on the

violator of human law, encourages him to carefully observe those laws. And accordingly, faith, hope, and charity, in obedience to the law of the Lord, are things that slumber.¹

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No one can convince us by reason, that when two objects of choice are set before a man, and he pursues the one, letting go or taking no notice of the other, that he does so from any other motive than from an utter lack or at least an inferior degree of love, for that which he neglects. And thus we should judge the lovers of the world or the flesh. In this manner, these three theological virtues grow cold.

“Who would not willingly suffer in Scotland in behalf of the law and the privileges of the king of England, if he was certain of returning alive and unhurt to England, to be rewarded by the king in proportion to what he had undergone? Such a man, I say, would willingly undergo trouble in Scotland, in the hope of obtaining a reward in England. Much more then should a man in trouble in this vale of misery, manfully strive in faith, in hope, and in charity, after the reward of blessedness to be obtained on being translated to his own country.”²

The fourth and fifth chapters relate to the nature of sin, viewed generally, and to the distinction commonly made between venial and mortal sins. The terms of this distinction are said to be commonly in the mouth not only of the people, but of prelates also — men “who know better how to extort money for sins than how to cleanse any man from his transgressions, or to distinguish between the mortal and the venial, concerning which they babble so much.” It is further stated that these terms have no express sanction from Scripture, and Phronesis claims a right to limit their signification to the sense of Scripture.³

Phronesis. “A sin may be called mortal when, according to the judgment of God, it is worthy of death; and thus it is the sin of final impenitence only — that is, the sin against the Holy Ghost — which is properly mortal.”^{Mat 12.31} But any other sin, since it is such that it may be pardoned, may reasonably be called venial. But inasmuch as those actual sins which quench Divine grace are not distinguishable by our limited knowledge, and we are thus left in ignorance as to which sin committed in our pilgrimage may be venial, and which mortal, we are bound to fly from all sin whatever, since we are aware in a general way of its danger; but we are ignorant of its real enormity. Whatever sin men commit may be traced to the ingratitude of the sinner viewed in respect to the gratitude due to God, against whom all sin is committed.^{Psa 51.4} For it is not possible to sin against any other being without sinning principally against Him.

“The believer may judge in respect to the grievous nature of sin, from the fact that he owes to God a debt of infinite gratitude; and the greater the gratitude due, the greater must be the evil of a failure in that respect. So that every sin is infinite in its evil. Just as the higher the lord against whom a crime is committed, the heavier the penalty inflicted on the criminal — so sin, committed against God, a Lord infinitely great, is infinitely enormous in its evil. In the same manner, the more detestable an evil may be, the more proportionably it must be an evil.”⁴

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¹ That is, they “slumber” because no penalty is prescribed for failing to observe faith, hope, and charity.

² **Heb 11:16** But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

³ **Jas 2:10** For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

⁴ Hence the adage, “A sin against an infinite God, is an infinite sin, requiring either an infinite punishment (hell), or an infinite payment (Christ).” – WHG

“But sin is infinitely detestable. It is therefore an infinite evil. The measure in which God should be sought, is the measure in which sin should be avoided. But God is infinitely worthy of being sought, and therefore sin is infinitely fit to be avoided, and so it must be infinitely evil.”

The speaker proceeds so far as to assert that,

“for the sake of no good whatever, not even for the sake of God, should any sin, however small, be committed. God can never enjoin sin on any of His creatures. If He were to do so, a man would not be bound to obey God in such a case — for even then, the man would be acting in a praiseworthy manner, in endeavoring to keep his life free from the stain of guilt.”

The metaphysical reader will not be startled by the impossible case thus supposed. Our duties arise out of our relations, and they have their fitness or goodness, not so much from the mere will of the Divine Being, as from His whole nature, of which that will is the result.

The sixth chapter is on “The penalty attendant on the evil of sin.” It having been shown that sin is infinite in its evil, it is maintained that the remission of it must be the work of infinite power; and accordingly, it is God only who can forgive sin. The next chapter is “On Grace;” and Phronesis, speaking of indulgences, says, “It is plain that prelates, in granting indulgences, commonly blaspheme the wisdom of God, pretending in their folly and avarice, that they understand what they do not know.” On the subject of grace, the same speaker observes — “It appears to me, that grace, which is called the grace of predestination, or of final perseverance, cannot fall away from anyone; for if so, it could not be that grace.” He also complains of some “sensual simonists,” who chatter on this subject, “as though grace were to be bought or sold like an ox or an ass, and thus merchandise in buying pardons, and taking away sins, the devil having availed himself of an error in the schools to introduce these heresies in morals.”

In the chapter “On Pride,” the hypocrisy imputed to the mendicant orders is described as the worst form of that evil, particularly as evinced in the value which they attached to their vain traditions, asserting that “their private rule of life is superior to the rule of Christ.” In the following chapter, “On Humility,” this subject is resumed, and the same tone of remark is extended from the religious orders to the regular clergy.

“God chooses no prelate,” says Wycliffe, “except as he is more humble than those set under him. For God calls no one to such a station except as he is more skilled than others in the practice of virtue, and in consequence, more humble. The more humble a man is, the more like Christ he is. Thus humility and the other virtues follow each other, and are praiseworthy not only in their species, but according to their gradation.

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“And this is the reason why, before the endowment of the church by the emperors, the rule of the apostle was observed: ‘no man should take this honor upon himself’. For those who aspire to primacy in the church, or any member of a religious order who is lacking in humility and consequently in virtue, regard themselves as more worthy than those beneath them, or otherwise are absolutely senseless. Now if men covet such offices from desiring honor from man, or for the sake of temporal gain, then beyond doubt they are to be blamed — since in such a case, the love of God and humility are set aside, and worldly good has too much weight. It is plain, accordingly, that the choice made by men is unjust in most cases, since if the man chosen is not more humble, then he is chosen unjustly. And this is not the choice made for the greater part, inasmuch as now-a-days, the more humble are accounted less worthy. Hence in such elections, and in their practice as private religionists, men place themselves in opposition to their Maker. For what he deems fit to be done, is set aside as unworthy and is disposed of by the

judgment of men, which God contemns. This is one reason why these religious orders are in such confusion.

“With regard to the objection that the most sagacious ¹ man must be the best adapted to rule, and that the man of good presence and great resolution must be the most likely to gain possessions for his order from the world, your reasoning is a reproach to such orders. It only shows that the better order of Christ ought to be observed. Moreover, if knowledge — a thing so good in itself — puffs up, then how much more does this fox-like cunning! Such men fall, without doubt, under the prophetic woe uttered by Isaiah — ‘Woe unto them who call evil good, and good evil.’ ^{Isa 5.20} And since the judgment and feeling of the world are opposed to these orders, it would be well for them to no longer exist, and that things should be regulated according to the pure order of Christ.”

The thirteenth chapter is “On Charity,” and contains the following passage concerning the manner in which the law of Christ should be defended:

“To be more particular as to the way in which we ought to do whatever we do, to the honor of God. We should look to the law of God, especially to the decalogue and the Gospel, and be observant of them throughout life, in word and deed. We should defend the Gospel against the disciples of Antichrist, by persuasive exhortations, by words of humility, and by praiseworthy deeds, even to the death. Every Christian is bound to a charity of this nature. But what the Evangelist refers to when he says, ‘The love of many, waxes cold,’ ^{Mat 24.12} has appeared in these last days in which many assail the commandments of the Lord, and few duly defend them. The bulls of the pope, and the pretensions of the religious orders, are deemed of far more weight than these.

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“But since charity is patient and benign, let us, according to the apostle (1Cor 13.4), dispose ourselves to patience even unto death, and ever keep inviolate the kindness of charity. Perhaps God would then be found willing ² to pity sinners, and turn them from that madness of which they are so full. Let us also ever call to mind how the prophets under the old law, and how Christ and his beloved disciples under the law of grace, were slain in that very cause.³ And let us ask ourselves whether we are better than they, or whether the good which God has provided for his servants is exhausted. Our faith teaches us the reverse of this. And in short, I do not see how any man could die more happily or triumphantly. Since then we are sure to die, and if negligent, we are sure to suffer the penalty of negligence, let us cultivate faith, hope, and charity, while we have the time.”

The fifteenth chapter is “On Patience and Meekness,” and teaches in the following terms that all Christians should be soldiers:

“All Christians, then, should be the soldiers of Christ. And it is plain how many are chargeable with being insensible to this duty, inasmuch as the fear of losing temporal goods, and worldly friendships, and apprehensions of the insecurity of life and fortune, prevent so great a number from being faithful either in setting forth the cause of God, in standing manfully for its defence, or if need be, suffering death in its behalf. From such a source also, comes that subterfuge of Lucifer urged by our modern hypocrites who say that suffering martyrdom cannot be a duty now, as it was in the primitive church, since in our time all men, or at least the great majority, are believers. Thus the tyrant who may

¹ *Sagacious*: acutely insightful and wise.

² Originally, “if haply God shall be found willing...”

³ **Heb 11:37** “They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented...” Eusebius tells us that except for John, each of the apostles was martyred – Paul was beheaded, and Peter was crucified upside down. John was boiled in oil, but survived and died naturally.

persecute Christ and his members to the death, is no more; and this is the reason why there are not martyrs now as formerly.¹ But it is certain that this excuse has been devised by Satan to shield sin. For the believer, in maintaining the law of Christ, should be prepared, as His soldier, to endure all things at the hands of the proud rulers of this world,² so as to boldly declare to the pope and cardinals, to bishops and prelates, how unjustly, according to the testimony of the Gospel, they serve God in their offices, inflicting perilous injury on those committed to their care. It is such that it must bring upon them a speedy destruction, one way or another. All of this applies to temporal lords, but not in so great a degree as to the clergy. For just as the abomination of desolation begins with a *perverted* clergy,³ so the consolation begins with a *converted* clergy. Hence, we Christians need not visit pagans to convert them by enduring martyrdom in their behalf; but we have only to declare with constancy the law of Christ, even before Cesarean prelates, and straightway the flower of martyrdom will be at hand.”

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In the seventeenth chapter, this subject is touched upon in still stronger terms, the pontiff being described as “the great Antichrist.”

“It is supposed, and with much probability, that the Roman pontiff is the great Antichrist, for he falsely asserts that he is in a direct sense the vicar of Christ, and most conformed to him in his life. And by consequence, he is the most humble of Christians, the poorest of men, and one separated more than any man beside from the thralldom of secular things. But the falsehood and blasphemy of such assertions are manifest in the fact that his life is the reverse of all this — that he is the most powerful and the most wealthy man in the whole world. And what can be more contrary to the poverty of Him who had nowhere to lay his head? How can such an Antichrist be described as a vicar bearing any resemblance to Christ? From the fact of what we see in him, it is clear that so far from being the most humble of men, he is vicar to the king of pride, set up over us all. The great mart⁴ in respect to worldly possessions lies in the hands of the pope. And yet Christ declared that he was not a ruler or divider in a case between two brethren, when the worldly matter in dispute was comparatively small.

“Since the church is so greatly harmed from this cause, Christ has said — ‘Whoever reads, let him understand.’ And without doubt, when a man does see this danger, he should, in charity, labor to make it known even to the death. For otherwise he would be guilty of hiding his Lord’s talent, and God would have given him knowledge in vain.⁵ After this great Antichrist, come the lesser Antichrists — the prelates, who desert the office which Christ has assigned to them, and take up another office according to another law. The injunction of Christ to Peter was, ‘Feed my sheep;’ ^{Joh 21.16} But if you wish to bring this point to a test, look well to the life of Christ and of his apostles, and see how badly they are followed by our spiritual leaders. The duty of preaching is set aside, and the practice of fleecing those committed to their care is introduced in its place. Let a man bestow only slight attention on what is going on in modern times, and on the laws of Antichrist, and he will see that they are contrary in every respect to the laws and the office of Christ.”

¹ Thus the pope is alleged not to be a tyrant who martyrs believers; but he merely disciplines heretics. – WHG

² Satraps.

³ **Mat 24:15** “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)...” **Eze 34:10** “Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I *am* against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; ...”

⁴ *Mart*: marketplace.

⁵ **Mat 25:25** ‘And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.’ ²⁶ “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant...’

The next chapter is on avarice, which Phronesis describes as consisting in an inordinate love of temporal things.

“Learned men teach us that the soul is more pure and sublime in its nature than the heavens we behold above us; and just as the heavens are exalted above the earth by their position, so the soul should be exalted above worldly things in its affections.

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“The avaricious man, accordingly, should beware of doing a thing so monstrous as that of making this heaven within him, fashioned after the likeness of God, in order to adhere unnaturally to the earth — inasmuch as the pure soul is the habitation of God. By doing so, he would wickedly cut himself off from God, and aim to subvert the laws of nature.”

The next chapter relates to the virtue that is opposed to avarice. And Alithia, having asked what that virtue is, Phronesis replies —

“As avarice is the immoderate desire of possessing temporal things, the virtue opposed to it is the subordinate love of such things, consisting in an observance of the rule that everyone should desire that measure of temporal good which is most conducive to his spiritual well-being.”

Phronesis then cites 1Tim 6.7, 8: “For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be content with these.” He proceeds to say —

“Nor can I see why all the clergy should not consider themselves strictly bound by that rule; because whatever is beyond such things must be evil — tainted with avarice; and it exposes the man who covets it to great spiritual peril.”

PSEUDIS replies by describing this doctrine as corrupt and false. Since we bring our mental faculties into the world, and carry them with us when we leave it — and inasmuch as it is ordained that food and clothing should not be our final reward — we should not rest content with them before those final rewards have been realized.

Phronesis answers this by saying that in the passage quoted, the apostle refers to temporal things exclusively. He asks PSEUDIS if he can affirm that he existed as the same wealthy heretic before he was born, as he is known to be now; or if he can say which part of his riches he means to take with him from here. And he adds further, that when the apostle gave this injunction with regard to a moderate apportionment of temporal goods, he was so far from denying it, that in fact he implied that we *should* receive the gifts of grace and virtue with the liveliest gratitude and joy. But the apostles were men who wore one garment apiece, men who built no sumptuous edifices; while the friars have run into every excess of luxury, making no due return for their possessions either in the way of bodily service, or as ministering to the spiritual edification of the people.

This chapter is followed by one entitled “On Gluttony,” in which Alithia expresses surprise that Phronesis would so unhesitatingly declare that the church had been guilty of a fault in accepting an endowment, and yet desert the rule of Christ in this particular — seeing that it is possible for a man to possess dominion of the most extended description, and still live devoutly, using all temporal things with moderation. Phronesis answers that his expressions have been taken a bit

too loosely by Alithia, but that Sylvester,¹ or whoever it was that first accepted the perpetual imperial endowment, was by no means free from blame.

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His sin as an individual might be light, but he gave occasion to his weak successors to sin to a far greater degree. For before the time of that endowment, when apostolic men were humbler, men were regarded as deserving in proportion to how useful they were found to be to the church.²

“But now, because of endowments, while they are bound to be humbler, they are less so — foolishly undertaking to serve the church beyond their powers of service. And in this very way, they incapacitate themselves for being useful to the church, and they become negligent of the counsel and command of Christ in respect to temporal things, and dominion over them.”

In the remaining part of the chapter, the degrading nature of the vice to which it relates is strongly set forth, and the saying of Constantine is cited against it: “Gluttony destroys more men than the sword.” Wycliffe concludes by advising the practice of moderate fasting as beneficial to mind and body alike.

¹ That is, Sylvester I, pope from 314-335. He was the pope during the transition under emperor Constantine, when the church moved from being outlawed, to legitimate, to favored. Part of the “favor” was receiving wealth and lands from the emperor. It was a radical change, and the temptations were many. — WHG

² Dante, who appeared about half a century earlier than Wycliffe, makes repeated mention of this supposed endowment of the church by Constantine, in the time of Sylvester, bishop of Rome.

Ah, Constantine! to how much ill gave birth,
Not your conversion, but that plenteous dower
Which the first wealthy father gained from thee!
Inferno, Canto xix.

The following is a further reference to the same fact: —

As in Soracte, Constantine besought,
To cure his leprosy, Sylvester’s aid.
Ibid. Canto xxvii.

In his treatise *De Monarchiâ*, Dante thus expresses himself. — *Dicunt quidam adhuc, quod Constantinus Imperator, mundatus a leprâ intercessione Sylvestri, tunc summi pontificis, imperii sedem, silicet Romam, donavit ecclesiæ, cum multis aliis, imperii dignitatibus.* “There are those who still say that the Emperor Constantine, having been healed of a leprosy, through the intercession of Sylvester, then supreme pontiff, gave Rome, the seat of the empire, to the church, along with many other imperial dignities.” — Lib. iii. In the same book Dante further touches on this subject. — *Ergo scindere imperium, imperatori non licet. Si ergo aliquæ dignitates per Constantinum essent alienata (ut dicunt) ab imperio*, etc. — “Therefore, to make a rent in the empire, exceeds the lawful power of the emperor himself. If then some dignities were alienated by Constantine (as they say) from the empire,” etc.

Milton’s version of this story is as follows:

Ah, Constantine! of how much ill was cause,
Not your conversion, but those rich domains
That the first wealthy pope received of thee!
Then passed he to a flowery mountain green,
Which once smelt sweet, now stinks as odiously;
This was that gift, if you the truth will have,
That Constantine to good Sylvester gave.
Cary’s Dante, Canto xix. xxvii.

The twenty-fourth chapter, “On the Proneness of Man to Sin,” contains some curious thoughts in respect to the connection which is supposed to subsist between sin, as pertaining to the soul, and mortality, as affecting the body. Alithia, speaking of the condition of man in paradise, says it is a state of mortality as relating to the body; but because the well-being of the body is dependent on the influence of the mind, man is immortal through the innocence of his spiritual nature.

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Hence, of necessity, when the soul drew back from God through sin, and man became lacking in the full influence of God from that cause, so far as the soul was concerned — his body became subject to suffering. And being in the lowest grade of the existences endowed with immortality, man necessarily sunk below that grade, and became subject to death, and corporeal suffering.

In concluding, Phronesis expresses his conviction that through the infinite compassion of God, the fall of man from a state of innocence has been made to subserve the introduction of a greater amount of good than would have resulted from his continuance in that state.

The next chapter is on the question, “Why is the Sin of Satan not to be forgiven?” It contains some speculations still further removed from the range of the comprehensible. It is said,

“In order for the forgiveness of sin, there must be an active virtue in the agent, and some disposition toward penitence. But this is not the case with Satan; and so his sins are not forgiven. Again, the sin of Satan is the sin against the Holy Ghost, the sin of final impenitence. And just as Adam committed sin against the wisdom of God the Father, whose wisdom became incarnate on that account, so for the salvation of Satan, it would be necessary for the third person in the Trinity to become incarnate; and as that cannot be,¹ the sin of Satan cannot be forgiven.”

In this manner, the greatest geniuses of the Middle Age meddle with questions which were “too high” for them.

On “the Incarnation,” the Reformer discourses as follows: —

“We discern the uncreated Trinity, by reasoning *à posteriori* ² from the trinity of the soul. So too, from the union of the soul and body, we become acquainted with the incarnation of our Lord. For as the created spirit united to the animated body makes one human person, it is the same as to the spirit. However, the corporeal nature may vary; and so we must, in great part, form our conception in regard to the person of the Word. This is because he assumed in the unity of his person, a complete humanity, becoming that human person which had an eternal pre-existence — inasmuch as according to his nature as the Word, he had existed from eternity. We are not to understand that the created spirit in man has any perception which it does not communicate to the compound person of man. But whatever the human spirit perceives, that is what the compound person perceives, and *vice versa*. We must consider in the same light, the person of the Word and the manhood he assumed, so that the compound divine person perceives whatever the person of the Word perceives. And whatever the assumed humanity suffers, that compound person suffers. We are not to understand that the *person* of the Word, or the *Deity*, is only part of that man — just as the aforesaid spirit is not an integral *part* of man, but in reality, it is the *whole* man.

¹ It's clear, logically, that the Spirit cannot become flesh (non-Spirit), and remain the Spirit. What's less clear is that Adam's sin was only against the Son, and hence God the Son became flesh. Christ is fully God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — without division or admixture. And so the premise appears flawed. That's why the editor says such argumentation is “removed from the range of the comprehensible.” — WHG

² *A posteriori*: reasoning from facts or particulars, to general principles; or from effects to causes.

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“Hence we see that, as in the matter of the Trinity, three persons are the same divine nature, so in the matter of the incarnation, three natures — namely, body, soul, and the Divine nature — are each the same person of the Word.”

The twenty-eighth chapter is “On the Number of the Saved.” Phronesis thinks that as many of the human race will be finally saved as there were angels that fell, or as many as would have been created, supposing our race had remained in innocence. So that by the grace of God, the fall of angels and the fall of man, have produced good.

The next chapter touches on one of the most conspicuous elements in the false religion of the times — the worship offered to saints. Phronesis states that the Divine perfection of Christ is far beyond the reach of any human attainment, and it is absolutely necessary to the salvation of mankind. He proceeds to observe that in consequence of this acknowledged principle, holy men are to be praised only in so far as they have been followers of Christ.

“This custom is observed by our church, with reason, that whoever entreats a saint, should direct his prayer to Christ as God — not to the saint especially, but to Christ. Nor does the celebration or festival of such a saint avail anything, except so far as it tends to magnify Christ, inciting us to honor *him*, and provoking and inflaming our love to *him*. Accordingly, if there is any celebration of the saints which is not retained within these limits, it is not to be doubted that cupidity,¹ or some other evil, is the cause of such services. Hence, many think it would be profitable to the church if all festivals of that nature were to be abolished, and only those related to Christ were retained — because, they say, the memory of Christ would be more freshly kept in the mind, and the devotion of the common people would not be unduly distributed among the members of Christ. But however this may be, it is certain that the solemn services, and the devotion paid to any such saint, is of no use except in so far as it incites to love of Christ, and it is such that it may tend to procure his advocacy. For our faith assures us that Christ is the mediator between God and man.² Hence many are of the opinion that when prayer was directed only to that middle person of the Trinity for spiritual help, the church was more flourishing and made greater advances than it does now, when many new intercessors have been discovered and introduced.”

The closing chapter of this book is meant to show, “How the Law of Christ is infinitely superior to all other Laws.” Alithia opens the dialogue on this subject by expressing apprehension that Phronesis will obtain small thanks from the “Satraps” of the age, for the opinions broached in the last chapter — adding, that so many assail the authority of Scripture on such subjects, and few seem capable of estimating it at its just value.

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Phronesis. “I have learned from experience, the truth of your observation. And the chief cause of this state of things, I have no doubt, is our unbelief. We do not sincerely believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, or else we would hold the authority of the Scripture, and especially that of the evangelists, as of infinitely greater weight than any other.

He proceeds to say,

¹ Cupidity: extreme greed for material wealth.

² **Heb 7:25** Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. **Heb 9:15** He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

“Inasmuch as it is the desire of the Holy Spirit that our attention should not be dispersed over a large number of objects, but be concentrated on one necessary matter, it is His will that the books of the Old and New law should be read and studied; and that men should not be taken up with other books which, true as they may be, and containing Scripture truth as they may by implication, are not to be confided in explicitly. Hence Augustine (Book II. *De Ordine Rerum*) often enjoins it on his readers, that none should give credit to his writings or his words, except in so far as they have their foundation in Scripture — in which, as he often says, is contained all truth, either explicitly or implicitly. Of course, we should judge in the same manner concerning the writings of other holy doctors; and much more so concerning the writings of the Romish church, and doctors of a later date.

“Accordingly, so that the Holy Scriptures may be more duly estimated, every truth which is not manifest to the Christian from the simple evidence of his senses,¹ should be deduced from Scripture — at least if the faithful are to place credence in it. And then the Scriptures would be held in reverence, and the papal bulls would be superseded, as they ought to be. And the veneration of men for the laws of the papacy, as well as for the doctrines of our modern doctors, that have been promulgated since the loosing of Satan, would be kept within due bounds. How do writings of this sort concern the faithful, except as they are honestly deduced from the fountain of Scripture? By such a course, we should not only reduce the mandates of the popes, and of other prelates, to their just place, but the errors of the new orders would be corrected, and the worship of Christ would be purified and elevated. In this view, those upstart doctors are to be accounted as especially worthy of all detestation — those who endeavor to maintain that Holy Writ is the most false of all writings or sayings, and especially the words of Christ in the Gospel of John. They think they can clearly demonstrate this by their logic. In truth, of all heretical doctrines, I know of none more damnable than this, of none more fit for the purposes of Antichrist, none more hurtful to the faith of Christ. All the sophistries of Antichrist on this subject, lie concealed under this foul covering:

‘I understand Holy Writ in this way; and according to my logic it ought to be so understood; but the sense which I attach to it amounts to an impossibility; therefore Scripture, if logically interpreted, and by consequence, the Author of Scripture, must be accounted false, and most unworthy of credit.’”

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It is by reasoning, which pushed to its results, must lead to the impiety of this attitude,² that the anti-scripturalists have generally endeavored to vindicate their conduct when substituting some other authority in place of the immediate authority of the Divine word. Phronesis meets this argument by saying —

“It is no fault of the Scripture if the heretic is found understanding it in a wrong sense. It is not subject to his judgment. On the contrary, it condemns him. The error of his understanding lies mainly in his pride, in his foolish confidence in his own logic — whereas the logic of Scripture itself is the most correct, the most subtle,³ and the most to be followed.”

It is expedient, he adds, in order to obtain such a complete acquaintance with the Scriptures, that the believer should be instructed in sound logic, and by a philosophy chastened from the Lord. Then follows a reference to the “manifold armour” with which the disciple of truth should be provided when opposed to “the disciples of Antichrist.” The modern reader will probably smile when he finds among the requisites enumerated, such matters as the following —

¹ *Senses*: understanding – getting the sense or meaning of it.

² Originally, “of this complexion...”

³ *Subtle*: clever, finely woven or skillfully distinguished.

- just views in respect to “universals;”
- such an acquaintance with “the metaphysics of the schools” as may include a knowledge of “the quiddity of time, and other accidents, and how it is that accidents are nothing but dispositions formally inherent in their subjects;”¹
- such an acquaintance, moreover, with the nature of the Creator and the created, and the relations between them, so as to see that God is an “everlasting ideal,” an “eternal existence in his own genus, and a necessary antecedent;”
- and to see that “the essence of matter is everlasting, and material forms are only so many arrangements of it, though they are quiddities of *species* and *genera*!”

But we must concede much in this form to the tastes of a man who, “in philosophy was reputed second to none, and in the scholastic discipline, incomparable.”²

¹ *Quiddity*: An evasion of the point of an argument by raising irrelevant distinctions or objections; “accidents” refers to incidentals, non-essentials, which comprise those irrelevant distinctions or distractions from the truth. In magic, this is known as misdirection, or sleight of hand. *Quiddity* also means the essence that makes something the kind of thing it is, and makes it different from any other. Wycliffe is saying that we must learn to distinguish those aspects which make something what it is inherently, from those which are only externals. This came up in his discussion of the bread used in the communion: its color and shape (white and round) are not what make it bread; and changing those incidentals (those accidents of form) does not alter its essence as bread. – WHG

² “In philosophia nulli reputabatur secundus: in scholasticis disciplinis incomparabilis.”

SECTION II. CHAPTERS TRANSLATED FROM THE FOURTH BOOK OF THE TRIALOGUS RELATING TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, THE HIERARCHY, AND THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS.

1. On the Eucharist.

Alithia. I wish, brother Phronesis, you would speak of the EUCHARIST, the last sacrament but one,¹ because it is regarded with greater reverence than the other sacraments, and it appears to have the most foundation in Scripture, especially as in our own day this matter has been the subject of so much intricate discussion. And to prevent our being entangled in equivocal terms, it will be necessary to specify the quiddity [or essence] of this venerable sacrament.²

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Phronesis. We must be aware by the ordinary testimony of our senses, that the priest approaches the altar and makes or consecrates out of the bread and wine, something that remains and is cognisable by the senses. The common people understand these to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, let us speak first of the round white wafer — to all appearance like a host which has *not* been hallowed by a consecrated presbyter — which the priest afterwards breaks and eats, and which undergoes changes, like those to which an unconsecrated host is subject — for instance, it may be eaten by a mouse, or it may grow moldy with time, and undergo similar changes.

Let us speak first of this. Now there are certain modern heretics who declare that this is not a sacrament, so that they may escape the inconsistencies which follow from their errors. These men, opposed as much to the ancient as to the modern divines, must be assailed with caution,

¹ Or “next to last,” where “last” means highest. Catholicism observes seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation (chrismation), the eucharist (communion), penance (confession, reconciliation), anointing the sick (extreme unction, last rites); holy orders (priestly ordination), and matrimony. The order of these seven was affirmed at the Ecumenical Council of Florence, Nov 1439. The order Wycliffe refers to is different. — WHG

² Many ecclesiastics of the time wrote in refutation of the doctrine of Wycliffe, especially as set forth in this treatise. The most distinguished person in this class was the friar William Wodeford, or Woodford. Woodford wrote several pieces opposed to the doctrine of the Reformer, but the piece best known is on the eighteen articles from the *Triialogus* condemned in the Synod of London in 1396. This work was written at the command of Arundal, Archbishop of Canterbury. It was first printed in 1535, and was reprinted in 1690 in the *Fasciculus Rerum* edited by Brown. The work extends to seventy-five closely-printed folio pages.

The articles on the eucharist, condemned in the synod referred to, are the following:

1. That the substance of the bread remains on the altar after the consecration, and that the bread does not cease to be.
2. That as John was Elias figuratively and not personally, so the bread is figuratively and not naturally the body of Christ.
3. That the sacrament of the eucharist is naturally true bread, speaking conformably (as before) concerning material bread, white and round. Which the court of Rome determined in the chapter — *Ego Berengarius*.

The method of Woodford in dealing with these articles is, in the first place, to adduce against them the authority of fathers, doctors, and ecclesiastical writers from the earliest time to his own, and then to reason, in the manner usual on such topics, in favor of the received doctrine. The mental contrast between the Reformer and his antagonist is striking and instructive: on the one side a spirit of bold innovation meets us everywhere; on the other, all is abject submission. In Woodford we see the mind which *had* been; in Wycliffe the mind which *was* to be. *Fasciculus Rerum*, i. 190-204. *Concilium Londinense. Acta Conciliorum, Harduin.* vii. 1723.

by asking at the outset what the ordinary sacrament of the eucharist strictly is. And they will either be driven to equivocate, or be unable to escape, since this consecrated host must be a sacrament of some kind. The same holds true of the other six sacraments; they are plainly of a modal entity and permanence like this.¹ No reason can be adduced to show that this is not a sacrament of the church in the same sense as the other sacraments. This is plain from a cursory examination of the quiddity of baptism, confirmation, and the other four mentioned above. We must adopt the common language here also; but the church in her prayers commonly calls this *thing* a sacrament, while the papal enactments call it a sacrament and *not* a thing, and the doctors generally say it is sacramentally the body of Christ. Since, then, the sacrament of the eucharist is a thing of some kind, and the body of Christ is not visible in it, we are restricted to the conclusion that the sensible sign,² the sacrament, does not remain in it, except what is signified by the *differentia* of the *accidens*.³

There is, however, a threefold distinctive mode in this sacrament in common with the others: namely, that of (1) *the sacrament and the thing*; (2) *the thing and not the sacrament*; (3) *the sacrament and not the thing*. These terms should be clearly understood. The body of the Lord, which is above, is called *the sacrament and the thing*. It is called a sacrament because it is the sensible sign of the soul, the deity, and the grace of Christ; and since it is itself signified by the host which we consecrate, it is called (in this respect) the thing of this same sacrament; and this thing, which is naturally the body of Christ, is called the eucharist, or the host consecrated before the death of our Lord, and a multitude of other names which have supplied matter for many tedious arguments. Again, this sensible *thing*, commonly called the consecrated bread, is called a sacrament and *not* a thing.

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This is not in the sense of its not being anything (since, as we see, it is obvious enough to the senses); but in the sense of its not being that holy thing primarily signified by the sensible sign which we see — because it is not naturally the body of Christ. As to the third member of the devisers, making it a thing and not a sacrament, the term has reference to the union of Christ with the church, which is designated necessarily by this sensible sacrament.

Men have fallen into many errors with regard to the quiddity of this sensible sacrament. Some, for instance, say that it is an accident without a subject; others say that it is nothing, since it is an aggregate of many accidents that are not all of one genus. I have many a time inveighed⁴ against this, both in the language of the schools and of the common people — for of all the heresies that have ever sprung up in the church, I think there is not one that is more artfully introduced by hypocrites, or works a more manifold fraud upon the people. It wrongs the people, and it causes them to commit idolatry. It denies Scripture, and by its unbelief, it often provokes the truth to wrath.⁵

In this place I will briefly set forth the doctrine as supported by the testimony of Scripture. In the first place, this sacrament is the body of Christ in the form of bread. And whereas many

¹ *Modal entity*: something that has a mode, modality (sense), or form, which is subject to change.

² *Sensible*: capable of being perceived, sensed, or touched.

³ *Differentia of the accidens*: the differences in the incidental aspects, the mode or form of it, not the essence.

⁴ *Inveigh*: speak against in an impassioned manner.

⁵ Sic — “ad iracundiam provocat veritatem.”

heretics oppose this statement, and say that this sacrament is an accident, or nothing, and cannot be the body of Christ, even if the body of Christ were in every particle hidden in it, all of them are manifestly wily heretics. I say *wily*, because they are aware that the majority hold the doctrine I have stated, and these men will not believe, do not know how to believe, or else are afraid to make known their belief. Since this article of catholic belief is so broadly expressed in Scripture, the doctrine contrary to it is manifestly heretical. Can any one thing, I ask, be more contrary to another, than the doctrine which affirms that this sacrament is sacramentally the body of Christ, and affirms the self-contradictory doctrine which maintains that this sacrament cannot in any sense be the body of Christ?

Again, in regard to the second part, what can be more opposed than the doctrine which says that this sacrament is naturally real bread, and that doctrine which contradicts itself, and holds that this sacrament cannot be bread, because it is a mere accident — or else nothing? It would be well for the Church Universal to attend to this matter, and to anxiously examine what it is they should believe on the ground of Scripture, because this matter is decided with greater completeness, authority, and moderation, in the Gospel of Christ than in the court of Rome. This very court, before the loosing of Satan, was plainly in agreement with the ancient doctrine mentioned before, as is evident from *Con. Dis. II. c. Ego Berengarius*, and so were all the holy doctors who treated the subject prior to that time.¹

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After that time, however, the Scriptures were neglected, and many heresies were circulated on this subject, especially among the friars and the disciples of that school — as in fact the two errors mentioned above sufficiently show. The friars especially maintain these errors, and defend them with obstinacy, not only blaspheming Christ and the commandments of his holy word, but slandering the pope and the court of Rome in defence of their nest, as well as prelates, secular lords, simple priests, and the whole mass of the common people. Thus says the Scripture, Mat 26.26, “And as they were eating, Jesus took *bread*, etc., and said, ‘Take, eat; *this is My body*,’” and the same in Mar 14.22; Luk 22.19; and 1Cor 11.23. Accordingly, our church uses this form at the consecration of the host, “Who the day before He suffered, ... my body,” etc.² In all these places, the meaning is the same, though there is a slight difference in the terms employed. From a faith so authoritatively promulgated, I would argue as follows with heretics: Christ, who cannot lie, said that the bread he took in his hands was really his body; he did not err in this, he did not assert what was false; accordingly, it was truly so. This reasoning gives every believer full warrant to abominate the aforesaid heresies, and by which to convict the friars and their accomplices of heresy. Hence, prior to the loosing of Satan, Jerome, that distinguished student of Scripture, in treating this subject in a letter to Helvidius,³ concludes in the following terms: “We may hear,” he says, “that the bread he broke and gave to his disciples to eat, is the body of our Lord and Savior by his own words — ‘this is my body.’”

¹ On the doctrine of Berenger, as opposed to the notion of transubstantiation, and on the unfixed state of that doctrine in the church of Rome, until the age to which Wycliffe refers, see Mosheim, ii. 465, 466, 548-569. [The discussions of the Eucharist involving Berenger took place in 1037-1059.](#)

² Qui pridie pateretur, etc. Corpus meum, etc.

³ [This quote is not in Jerome's letter against Helvidius; but it is in letter 120 to Hedibiam.](#) — WHG

2. What Is Denoted By the Pronoun “This” In the Words of Consecration.

Alithia. I am delighted, brother, with your clear statement in regard to the faith of the church, which has been only too long hidden. I do not see how the friars or others can escape your reasoning, without either inventing a sense for this passage of Scripture, or actually refusing to believe it.

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Phronesis. Neither we ourselves, nor anyone besides, can deny the force of this reasoning, and the good catholic should cherish it with care, as very dear to him. But heretics have assigned various significations to this Scripture. In the first place, they say that the pronoun “*this*” in the proposition of the sacrament, “*this is my body*,” denotes simply the body of our Lord, and not the bread. For otherwise, according to them, the proposition would be false. As to what John, “On God,” and other illiterate heretics maintain (that the pronoun denotes nothing), I pass over it as not worthy to be mentioned. And I proceed to bring an argument in full against the first heresy. The former of these pronoun denotes the bread which Christ took in his hands; and the pronoun following it, the same thing which was before denoted by the other. Therefore, the subject of the sacramental proposition refers to this same *bread*. How is the believer to comprehend that Christ took bread in his hands, blessed, broke it, and gave it his disciples to eat, unless he understands that the former pronoun means “*bread*?” For the sacramental words had not yet been uttered so that it would cease to be bread. Our opinion is confirmed by Mat 26.27, where Christ bids all his apostles to drink of that cup, which they did. Also Mark 14.23, “And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it,” and he did the same concerning the bread. Thus, the apostle’s words in 1Cor 11.26 are “For as often as you eat this bread,” etc. From all this it appears *either* that the Author of Scripture gives us a false representation, *or* that the apostles ate the bread offered to them by Christ. From the same source it is also plain that the second pronoun denotes the same bread which is made the subject of the sacramental proposition, “*this is my body*.” Otherwise, the causal would be absurd in every view; and besides, Christ would have been deluding his church.

This reasoning, founded on the object denoted by the pronoun, ought to give the faithful abundant confidence. The words of Christ point out the object of which the apostles took cognisance; but it is inconsistent to make them denote the mere body of Christ in its proper nature. Our Lord’s words, then, must denote something else; and they can denote nothing more pertinently than the bread which Christ held out to them in his hand. If the mere natural body of our Lord is meant, then the signification of these words of Christ would be, “*This my body, is my body*.” But the apostles were acquainted with this before; ^{Joh 6.35} and it would be out of place in connection with the injunction that they should each eat of the bread.

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Again, if the reference of the pronoun to be read is out of place in this connection, how can it consistently be taught that the transubstantiation of the bread — by virtue of the words pronounced at the sacrament — is an accident without a subject, and an innovation of Christ’s body in place of the sacramental bread? This fictitious reference, which they ascribe to these pronouns, does away with the entire meaning of the sacrament.

Again, in the second sacramental clause concerning the wine, that wine in the cup is meant. And therefore, by the connection from a sufficient resemblance between this clause about the wine, and the former one in which the bread is consecrated, it appears plainly that this same bread must be referred to, because no catholic would deny that the *contents* of the cup are meant, by metonymy.¹ For Christ, in Mark 14.24, speaks thus — “This is my blood of the new testament.” There is no catholic in existence who believes that the metal cup is sacramentally the blood of Christ; but he understands that the term is referring to the wine contained in it. Further, to lay bare the wily turnings of this sophistry, the Holy Spirit ordained that it should be written in the masculine gender, *Hic est sanguis meus* (this is my blood). This is why, among the many significations of those scriptural passages which we are certain of, this is one of the most certain: that in this proposition of the sacrament, the bread or wine is meant.

This being admitted, the catholic must pass over to the complex signification of the sacramental proposition, “this is my body,” abandoning as the height of heresy, the opinion that the Gospel, especially the words of Christ, can contain anything impossible or inappropriate. But since every word of Christ’s is true (and “catholic” in the highest sense of the term), and Christ has said that this bread is his body, it manifestly follows that this is true. It is about this point, however, that heretics maintain their struggle. They cannot deny that the pronoun denotes bread; and so they assign an extremely heretical compound, a threefold signification. They say, first, that “this” — namely, the bread — is not the body of Christ, but by virtue of the sacramental words, *in a certain way* it *will* be the body of Christ. The second method appears more heretical still. For the opinion that the bread will afterward become the body of Christ, is as inadmissible as the heretic’s own error. For according to his judgment,² that bread would then be turned into, or identified with, the body of Christ. And consequently, it would end in transubstantiation, and hence be the veritable body of Christ. Thus, in the second interpretation, we correct the first — that this bread will become, in a certain manner, the body of Christ. The third course again (being evident that nothing of that bread will remain in the body of Christ) consists in denying any prior sense at all, saying that the Author of Scripture means that this accident, *per se*, without any subject, is the sacramental sign of the body of Christ.

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And this is the signification of the proposition, “This is my body.” The heretic sees that neither the matter, nor the form of bread, is transmuted into the body of Christ. In fact, the things themselves do not agree in subject. Accordingly, he regards it as evident that the catholic should not admit that out of this bread will be made the body of Christ, as a statue is made out of bronze, or day is made out of night (for they are both incongruous in subject). But he should admit that these accidents are sacramentally the figures of the body of Christ, *per se*, without a subject, Oh, how abominable is that figment which would make it appear that what is denoted by that pronoun is not bread, as shown above!

An impossibility, according to our modern doctors, is incomprehensible. And according to Augustine and other saints, it cannot be included even in the Divine Omnipotence. And so, concerning the whole affair, these men are at a loss to express the genus of the accident to

¹ *Metonymy*: substituting an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself (as in ‘they counted heads’).

² Originally, “his showing.”

which this venerable sacrament should be referred. They speak falsely, therefore, when they say that it might be lowlier than horse-food or anything that may be named. So then, these heretics, subsequent to the time of the loosing of Satan, have had no more understanding of this term than magpies. And they falsely assert that neither Christ nor his apostles understood it; and so, of course, none of the fathers who came after them understood it. Therefore, we need not directly refute this error, for believers well know how constantly the body of Christ is made anew by an idiotic and unworthy priest. And it is not until these sacramental words have been duly uttered, that the accident without a subject is created. Thus the demonstrative pronoun of the sacramental proposition may remain forever, without denoting an accident without a subject, so long as the bread continues to be bread.

It is this doctrine of the saints — that whoever imposes upon Scripture a sense that is foreign to it, such as the Holy Spirit does not require — such a man must be a heretic. Neither Scripture, revelation, nor reason can establish this sense given to the above terms by the persons alluded to. Not one of the saints, prior to the loosing of Satan, was acquainted with it. Jerome, Augustine, and other saints, and a vigorous reason, all totally contradict it. The doctrine, then, must be wholly abandoned as one of special falsehood. These men must amend Holy Writ, and make it say, *not* that the accident without a subject is the body of Christ (which they cannot comprehend), but that it is the sign of the body of Christ. But how then, by virtue of this sentence, does transubstantiation come about, or the accident without a subject? Since this accident without a subject may equally signify the body of Christ, these heretics cannot state at what instant transubstantiation — or the accident without a subject — really takes place.

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Thus then, this three-fold doctrine is annihilated. It is a doctrine that is contemptible and erroneous in the manner of all other heresies which pretend to be the doctrine of Christ. We must abide, then, by the opinion of the learned and acute Jerome, who says that the bread, by virtue of Christ's word, is sacramentally the body of our Savior.¹ Of what sort that bread is, and of what it is in its own nature, the true theologian can see by observing other hosts that are not consecrated.

3. Showing That the Bread Remains Bread After Consecration.

Alithia. I am delighted with your stringent and lucid replies to the heretics in this matter, and more so because so great a multitude of friars and others, who call themselves Christians, exclaim against your doctrine, and plot in various ways against your life. According to your former statements, these men are necessarily manifest heretics, and consequently, they should be expelled from the church, or at least excluded from every grade of ecclesiastical dignity, and so from all holding of temporalities² and receiving of alms. I pray you, now, to explain how it is that the bread remains bread after consecration. For many declare that if they had believed this, they would never have observed the ceremony as they have done.

Phronesis. On a subject of this nature, we must attend to the words of Scripture, and give them absolute credence. And the words of Scripture tell us that this sacrament *is* the body of Christ, not that it *will* be, or that it is sacramentally a *figure* of the body of Christ. Accordingly we

¹ Jerome, *Epist. ad Hedebiam* (Letter 120 to Hedibia), ques. 2.

² *Temporalities*: the worldly possessions of a church.

must, on this authority, admit without reserve that the bread which is this sacrament, is veritably the body of Christ. But the simplest layman will see that it follows, inasmuch as this bread is the body of Christ, that it is therefore bread, and it remains bread, and it is at once both bread and the body of Christ. Again, the point may be illustrated by examples of the most palpable description. It is not necessary that a man, when raised to the dignity of lordship or prelacy, ceases to be the same person — on the contrary, it is repugnant to truth. The man, or the same substance [i.e., his humanity], would remain in all respects, though elevated in a certain degree.

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So we must believe that this bread, by virtue of the sacramental words, by the consecration of the priest, becomes veritably the body of Christ, and that it no more ceases to be bread than humanity ceases, in the instance supposed before. For the nature of the bread is not destroyed by this, but is exalted to a substance that is more honored. Do we believe that John the Baptist, who was made by the word of Christ to be Elias (Mat 11.14), ceased to be John, or ceased to be anything which he was substantially before? In the same manner, accordingly, though the bread becomes the body of Christ by virtue of his words, it need not cease to be bread. For it is bread substantially, after it has begun to be the body of Christ sacramentally. For thus says Christ, “This is my body,” and in consequence of these words, this must be admitted — just like the assertion in the eleventh chapter of the gospel of Matthew, about the Baptist: “And if you will receive it, this is Elias.” And to avoid equivocation, Christ does not contradict the Baptist when he declares, “I am not Elias” — the one meaning that he was Elias *figuratively*; the other, that he was not Elias *personally*. And in the same manner, it is merely a double meaning, and not a contradiction, in those who admit that this sacrament is *not* the body of Christ naturally, but that this same sacrament *is* Christ’s body figuratively.

Concerning the assertion made by some hardened heretics, that they would never have celebrated the ordinance if they had believed this, it would, indeed, have been well for the church. And it would have contributed much to the honor of God if such apostates had never consecrated their *accident*. For in so doing, they blaspheme God in many ways, and make Him the author of falsehood. For the world God that created, they straightway destroy, inasmuch as they destroy what God ordained should be perpetual — primary matter — and they introduce nothing new into the world, save the mendacious ¹ assertion that it pertains to them to perform unheard of miracles, in which God himself certainly may have no share. In fact, according to their representations, they make a new world. What loss would it have been, then, if heretics so foolish, had never celebrated an ordinance, the proper terms of which they so little understand, and who are so ignorant of the quiddity of the sacrament which they observe and worship?

With regard to the points touching the truth of the belief that this sacrament is bread, let heretics be on the watch, and summon up all their powers. For He who is called Truth teaches us to pray that he would give us our daily, or super-substantial bread (Mat 6.11).

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And according to Augustine, [commenting] on this passage in our Lord’s sermon on the mount, by “daily bread” Christ intends (among other happy significations) this venerable

¹ *Mendacious*: intentionally untrue, and often outrageously so.

sacrament. Are we not, then, to believe what would follow, viz. that if the sacrament for which we pray is our daily bread, then there must be bread in the sacrament? In the same manner, the apostles recognised Christ with the breaking of bread, as we are told in Luke 24.35. And Augustine, with the papal enactment, De Con. Dist. III. *non omnes*, tells us that the bread is this venerable sacrament. Or are we to doubt that it follows that the apostles having known Christ in the breaking of this bread, that *seeming* bread must therefore have *been* bread? Our apostle, likewise, who takes his meaning from our Lord, calls this sacrament the bread which we break, as manifest in 1Cor 10.16,¹ and often again in the following chapter. Who then would venture to blaspheme God by maintaining that so chosen a vessel could apply erroneous terms to the chief of the sacraments — especially with the foreknowledge that heresies would take their rise from that very subject? It is impossible to believe that Paul would have been so careless of the church, the spouse of Christ, as so frequently to have called this sacrament bread, and not by its real name, had he known that it was not bread, but an accident without a subject — and besides this, when he was aware by the gift of prophecy, of all the future heresies which men would entertain on the matter. Let these idiot heretics say, and bring sufficient reason to prove their statements, what this sacrament (which their falsehoods desecrate) really is, if not the holy bread. As was said above, Christ, who is the first Truth, says according to the testimonies of the four evangelists, that this bread is his body. What heretic ought not to blush, then, to deny that it is bread?

We are thus bound either to destroy the verity of Scripture, or to go along with the senses and the judgment of mankind, and admit that it is bread. Mice and other creatures are aware of this fact; for according to philosophers, they have the power to discern what is good for them to eat. Oh, if believers in the Lord will look on, and see Antichrist and his accomplices so strong as to have power to condemn and persecute even unto death, those sons of the church who thus yield their belief to the Gospel. Yet I am certain that, though the truth of the Gospel may for a time be cast down in the streets, and be suppressed in a measure by the threats of Antichrist, it cannot be extinguished, since he who is the Truth has said that “heaven and earth shall pass away, but that his words shall not pass away!” [Mat 24.35](#) Let the believer, then, rouse himself and demand strictly from our heretics, what the nature of this venerable sacrament is, if it is not bread — since the language of the Gospel, the evidence of our senses, and arguments that have every probability in their favor, say that it is so.

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For I am certain that even heathens, who make their own gods, are perfectly aware of what they are in their own proper nature, even though they pretend that a portion of divinity is bestowed upon them supernaturally by the highest God of all. The believer, therefore, does not hesitate to affirm that these heretics are more ignorant not only than mice and other animals, but more ignorant than pagans themselves. While on the other hand, our aforementioned conclusion is shown to be the true one: that this venerable sacrament is veritable bread in its own nature, and Christ’s body sacramentally.

4. The Preceding Statements Confirmed By Argument.

¹ [1Cor 10:16](#) The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

Alithia. I am pleased to find that a man must be bound, as it seems, to one of two courses: as an arch-heretic, to deny the evangelist; or to admit what you require concerning this sacrament. Will you now add a few arguments to the authorities you have brought forward? For we all admit that God can do nothing without good reason — that he cannot destroy a guiltless existence, or put confusion on that intelligence which he has implanted in our nature — unless some greater good or better reason induces him.

Phronesis. I am pleased with your manner of expressing confidence in God. For the end now proposed, we must proceed in the way which arguments on this topic require, so that the truth of our faith may more clearly appear. Let us lay down, then, that of all the external senses which God has bestowed on man, touch and taste are least liable to error in the judgments they give. But this heresy would overturn the evidence of those senses without cause; and the sacrament which does that, must be a sacrament of Antichrist. With regard to the evidence of touch in the sacrament, the certainty of experiment (which the heretic will not deny), shows us that this consecrated bread, when it is newly baked, differs in its manner of breaking, from bread that is stale, and bread whose toughness is greatest in damp weather — in the degree of brittleness, and in the sort of sound produced in breaking it.

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Now accidents of this sort — hardness, softness, brittleness, toughness — cannot exist *per se*; nor can they be the subjects of other accidents. It remains, therefore, that there must be some subject, such as bread, or some other thing by which they are made subjects. This sacrament (which is always the same) is found hard at one time, soft at another; brittle at one time, tough at another. Thus the philosopher plainly sees that there must be a subject of some sort, which is the seat of these qualities, and which undergoes these respective changes. For otherwise, all distinction between such accidents must either be denied, or else, in such a transmutation, a new sacrament is continually created. But if the first is granted, then no accident is distinguished from a material substance. And since those accidents remain, they would then become the material substance, as in the first instance.

In the same way, in the sacrament of the cup, the same thing applies to the sense of taste. It may happen that the wine, though at first retaining its taste and sweetness, might lose its taste and become sour by remaining in the vessel a day. Now, according to the judgment of our taste and our reason, we must supply a subject of some sort, whose qualities are thus changed. For quantity — such as length, breadth, and thickness — does not allow for the predication of qualities of this sort concerning them. We must therefore allow for a subject besides quantity, which is changed by qualities of this sort, since the quantity must always exist whenever the substance is rarified or condensed.

But I have argued this point at length elsewhere, and brought against this error the testimony of Augustine in many places. I therefore proceed to remark, in the third place, on the great perplexity consequent from the delusion to which our internal faculties are subject. For when the knowledge obtained by our external senses is insufficient, the inward senses must be subject to delusion. And no heretic of this sort will affirm (in the terms of the schools) that he is acquainted with the *quiddity*, or the *differentia* of sensible substances. On the contrary, he will admit, with ignorant philosophers, that he knows nothing of such sensible existences. Thus, it being admitted that many hosts, both consecrated and unconsecrated, may be mingled together by men who are not aware of it, the heretic cannot then distinguish his accident from

bread — just as we cannot distinguish between consecrated and unconsecrated hosts, because the effect of consecration is not sensible; it is beyond the perception of the senses. Mice, however, have an innate knowledge of the fact that the substance of bread is retained, as it was at first. But these unbelievers have no such knowledge, since they do not know which bread or which wine are consecrated, unless they have *seen* the act of consecration performed. What is consecrated does not allow for a second consecration, because if that were so, then an accident may be consecrated *per se*, without bread or wine as the subject.

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Accordingly, it is plain that they must ever be in doubt as to whether they truly consecrated it. What, I ask, could move our Lord Jesus Christ to thus take away the power of judgment from his worshippers? In no way does it redound to their good, nor can it be established by reason or Scripture, that it is necessary for men to be so deceived. For bread and wine, retaining their old form, would be a fitter representation of the body and blood of Christ, than having an accident without a subject. And that way, the body and blood of Christ could be in whatever part of such a *body*, as well as in any particle of such a marvelous ¹ *accident*. Then Scripture faith would be preserved; the advantage would be more on all sides; and the reverence for God would be greater. In like manner, such blasphemers convict the prelates, beyond escape, of a culpable negligence as regards the duties of the grammarian. For the schoolmaster teaches the translation of the aforesaid Latin words, according to the common understanding of them. But to avoid the danger of heresy, such persons should be enjoined from teaching their boys to translate them in accordance with that blasphemous absurdity. The apostles knew the Lord in the breaking of bread, *i.e.*, in the breaking of an accident without any subject. For otherwise a boy of capacity ² might imagine that the bread had been broken by God in its substance — a most perilous notion according to these heretics. The schoolmaster would be culpable who did not explain an equivocation such as *the dog shines in the sky* — but instead taught, according to the ordinary meaning of the word, that a barking animal and not a star shone there. He would be much more culpable, then, if he were to fail to explain an equivocal expression in a matter involving such an injury to the faith.

But blessed be the Lord of goodness, that he has so confounded the wisdom of these heretics, that to this very day they do not know how to construe the aforesaid words of the Gospel, so as to make them yield the sense they affix to them. For neither in construing, nor in preaching, do they themselves understand their own words, when they say that “the apostles knew Christ in the breaking of bread,” *i.e.*, in the breaking of an accident without a subject. And so Antichrist, in this heresy, overturns grammar, logic, and natural science. And what is more lamentable, he destroys the meaning of the Gospel. But as God always preserves a natural understanding among the laity, so he has always kept the catholic sense among some of the clergy, as in Greece or elsewhere, according to his pleasure. Oh, who can excuse the friars and other apostates, in that they do not know how, or do not dare, or through jealousy do not wish, to instruct the people on these points — the people from whom they receive so great an emolument, to say nothing of the people’s obligation to love the brethren? Truly, the natural

¹ Originally, “most monstrous accident.”

² *Boy of capacity*: of maturity – the age of knowing right from wrong; able to reason like an adult.

understanding of man would condemn false brethren of this sort. For acting like foes at home, they would do more than idolaters abroad, to perplex the simple populace.

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What greater blasphemy is there than to assert that Christ, who is God and the Lord of truth, has given special authority to errors of this sort among his people? Without a doubt, the chief cause is a departure from the commandments of the Gospel. Thus, these false followers of Antichrist show themselves to be more ignorant than brutes or pagans.

5. How and from What Cause the Heresy Concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist has Grown Up.

Alithia. I am pleased to hear you express yourself so boldly in behalf of evangelical truths, and that you have unfolded them so far by argument. But I would gladly know how, and from what cause, this heresy took its rise, even supposing it to have been introduced into the church by Satan and his followers.

Phronesis. I should be worse than an infidel if I were not to defend to the death the law of Christ. And I am certain that all the heretics and disciples of Antichrist can never impugn this evangelical doctrine. On the contrary, I trust that, through our Lord's mercy, I will be superabundantly rewarded by him after this short and miserable life, for this lawful contention which I wage. I know from the Gospel, that Antichrist, with all his devices, can only kill the body; but Christ in whose cause I contend, can cast both soul and body into hell-fire. I am certain that he will not allow his servants to be destitute of what is necessary, since he freely exposed himself to a dreadful death. And he has ordained that all his more beloved disciples shall undergo severe suffering with a view to their profiting by it.

The reason why men fall into this heresy, is that *they disbelieve the Gospel*, and embrace in preference the papal laws and apocryphal sayings. Of all the kinds of infidelity that ever grew up in the church of God, this one draws men down deeper and more imperceptibly into the vortices of error; and it causes more to apostatise from our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Let it be granted that Innocent III ¹ was led away by this madness, though the friars take it upon themselves to say that it is not my place to discuss this point. Yet I am sure from the faith of Christ, that whatever he (Innocent III) has laid down in this matter, should not be received by believers, except as it is founded on the commandments of the Gospel. For the same faith of Christ makes me confident that all truth is contained in it, especially all truth relating to faith, and that is most in harmony with its design. Since these things are not from Christ or his law, but on the contrary, it is contained in [the pope's] law — as is plain from what was said before, that this sacrament is the body of Christ *and* bread — every believer should accordingly obey his Lord in this. But it is manifestly inferred in this, that the sacrament is not an accident without a subject, since it cannot be shown that God has raised an accident to be his body.

¹ Innocent III (1160-1216), became pope in 1198. He summoned the Fourth Lateran Council to extend canon law. Through interdicts and censures, he compelled princes and kings to obey his decisions. He called for crusades against Muslim Spain and the Holy Land, as well as the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in southern France. The Fourth Crusade ended in sacking Constantinople, generating animosity between east and west. The Catholic Encyclopedia calls him, "One of the greatest popes of the Middle Ages." Wycliffe disagreed. – WHG

Accordingly, adhering to the faith, I will deny this as the greatest heresy. And with this view, I have elsewhere sent the satraps ¹ the following conclusions on it, with a protest agreeable to it.

The *first* conclusion is that — If by virtue of these sacramental words, an accident is matter without a subject in the sacrament of the altar, that accident is itself the sacrament. It is plain from this, that the said sacrament, according to the concurrent acknowledgment of these heretics, is *not* a substance; so that the sacramental words leave nothing remaining in the sacrament except this sort of accident.

The *second* conclusion is that — Of all the heresies that have ever grown up in the holy church of God, none is more abominable than that which makes this venerable sacrament an accident without a subject. For it is plain that, by this heresy, the very words of Christ are made heretical, so far as it can do so, and heresy is introduced over the greater part of the church.

The *third* conclusion is that — This sacrament is, on the testimony of the Gospel, true bread naturally, and it is the body of Christ veritably and sacramentally, as the above-mentioned passages from the Gospels show.

With regard to your second question, it appears to me that Christ, who is head over all devils, teaches us figuratively by this, how the kingdom of the evil one is divided against itself, and must finally be made desolate.² This shows that its principal supporters, in their very blessing, are divided against themselves, as in the matter of the sect of the friars — so that each one of them is opposed to all the rest, and no one of them can efficiently maintain its own sentiments. And inasmuch as their prelates presume to bless (for the payment of money) those whom the Lord has cursed, so they often curse those whom the Lord has blessed. Accordingly the Lord signifies to us, in that passage of Malachi, that their benediction, following their own pleasure, should often be called the malediction of God.³ For they say that in the consecration of their host, they bless the bread and wine so that it becomes *nothing*, since according to their doctrine no part of it remains in the body of Christ, or in his sacrament — but taking annihilation in its proper sense, it is annihilated and turned into nothing.

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But Christ, though he was called an austere man by the slothful servant, [Luk 19.21](#) never cursed anything with a severity like this. For when he cursed the fig-tree ([Mark 11.21](#)), the substance of the tree remained — since Christ does not utterly destroy his creatures on account of sin or the appearance of sin, and since no creature can do anything without the previous act of God. Hence it is plain that, though they may bless the bread (as they falsely say) so as to cause it to become nothing, yet Christ, since it is his own workmanship, preserves it. Nor must we pass over what is said by John in his treatise “On God,” that the bread remains bread. But where that is unknown — since believers are well assured that, by virtue of the blessing of Christ, the bread is turned into a something better, because it is turned into the body of our Lord — it

¹ Wycliffe’s sarcastic title for the prelates and theologians of the Romish Church.

² [Mat 12:25-26](#) But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”

³ [Mal 2:2](#) If you will not hear, And if you will not take *it* to heart, To give glory to My name,” Says the LORD of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, Because you do not take *it* to heart.

remains bread, because the body itself remains sacramentally. If they say it is transubstantiated by virtue of the sacramental words, that is enough for me, since that substance cannot pass into another which has no existence in the passage.

Let us praise Jesus Christ, then, in that the author of this lie is not He who spoke, and it was done. Rather, it is that liar who spoke, and it was *not* done — who commanded and it was brought to nothing. If you reply that it follows from this, that the pope and his cardinals have many times erred from the faith, and they often deceive both themselves and their churches, that conclusion is true, though lamentable. However, whether, they died penitent for such heresy, or remained heretics after death, it is not for us to rashly decide. Yet, God who knows secret things, knows the truth in this matter, as do those to whom it is His pleasure to reveal it. For we are not bound to proclaim or believe that any pope, as such, is a father in the greatest blessedness after death, as his greedy flatterers clamorously assert during his lifetime. But the more he departed in life from the pattern of Christ, even to the last, the deeper will be his condemnation in hell. But I believe many have been led into this heresy, who finally repented, as was the case (in my opinion) with the Bishop of Lincoln and others, who have left behind them in their writings the opinion that an accident cannot exist without its subject. And yet the aforesaid Bishop of Lincoln, in his *Glossa de Divinis Nominibus* [[Glossary of Divine Names](#)], writes this: “An accident may perhaps (*forte*) exist without a subject.” I believe this subtle doctor to have meant that such an accident in the sacrament must exist in the act of our mind, since we have sensation to actually admonish us. But the consideration of the quiddity of its substance must be put in abeyance, and our consideration of the created substance must be employed about what is signified by it — just as a man entering a church does not set himself to consider the quiddity of the wood of the image or of the cross, but he worships it in respect to what it is the sign of.

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So it is in the matter of the consecrated host. And because this is sometimes the case and sometimes not, I repeat what the Bishop of Lincoln says: “There may perhaps be an accident without a subject.” It is in this way that those philosophers speak, who hold that time has its existence in the mind, and that it is rendered sensible by the act of attention. For the existence of time is known to us because it is the measure of sensible motion, by the actual consideration of the mind — just as what is perceptible to the senses, has this passive power reduced to act during the time that it is actually being perceived. I think it very probable that great philosophers have secretly been of this opinion on the matter. But it would be useless to inquire into the intention of the author of this error. So I leave the discussion and contention with regard to this gloss, to be carried on by theologians, being certain always of the faith of the Gospel upon which I rest without the smallest fear.

6. In What Way the Bread is the Body of Our Lord, and Not the Identical Body Itself.

Alithia. I am pleased again with the acute and lucid explanation of your sentiments. And in my opinion, the truth of Scripture is of infinitely greater authority than that of any person now living, or of any community that could be named. So that if there had been a hundred popes, and all the friars had been turned into cardinals, no concession ought to have been made to their opinion in a matter of faith, save in so far as they rest upon Scripture. I see further that you do not condemn the pope or anyone on account of this error, because you are ignorant in

what way they died. But it is far more likely in your eyes that doctors have erred from the faith, or been slothfully silent, than that a single word of the Gospel may possibly be false.

But there is one thing I would gladly know, and that is, in what sense the bread is the body of the Lord, and yet not identically his very body?

Phronesis. I see that you discern the truth on many points. And as to the mode in which that bread is the body of our Lord, it is surely such. Believe this firmly, for Christ, who cannot lie, has said so.

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Now you know there are three methods of predication¹ — the formal, the essential, and the figurative. Passing by the two former, let us here attend to the third. It is according to the third mode that Christ, as I observed to you before, calls John the Baptist *Elias*, (Mat 11.14). The apostle says of Christ (1Cor 10.4, when deducing a moral from the acts of the old law), that he was a rock. And in Gen 41.26ff, the Scripture asserts that seven ears of corn, and seven fat kine, are the seven years of fertility. As Augustine observes, the Scripture does not say that they are the *signs* of those years, but that they are the years themselves; and you will meet with such modes of expression constantly in Scripture. In these expressions, without a doubt, the predication is made figuratively — it is not the *essential* predication, or the *formal* predication. Now all such expressions show that the thing (*res*) of the subject, is ordained by God to be the figure of the thing of the predicate. So again it is said that, according to that mode, the sacramental bread is specially the body of the Lord, since Christ has authoritatively declared it so.² I am ready to believe in a subtler meaning, if I were taught it either by Scripture or by reason. But I am confident of *this* meaning. Nor do heretics, who would oppose me, have any means of resistance on this point, since according to appearance, this *accident* without a *subject* (as they teach), which is the sacrament, is the body of Christ; that is, it is sacramentally the sign and figure of the body itself. *Then* there is a greater relation between bread and the body of Christ (as Augustine shows) than between bread and an accident of this sort. Therefore it is no mere colouring³ to say that the bread is *figuratively* the body of Christ. For, as Augustine teaches in what he says on John — corn is collected from a multitude of grain, and then it is ground; secondly, water is poured on it, and it is kneaded; and thirdly, it is taken in as food for the body, for nourishment. In a similar way, believers receive the sacramental bread in fragments; it is afterwards watered by evangelical faith, and kneaded in the heart; and when it is baked by the fire of charity, it is spiritually eaten. Accordingly, Augustine says on John, “Believe with a faith molded by charity, and you have eaten;” and this must be understood of eating *spiritually*.

Furthermore, those heretics are not to be listened to, who endeavor to do away with the meaning thus assigned, by the false objection that such a figurative mode of expression is not used on any other occasion in the Gospel. For in Luke 22.19 it is immediately subjoined, “Do this in remembrance of me;” as if it had been said, “This sacramental bread should be taken as

¹ *Predication*: in logic, a declaration of something that is self-evident; something that can be assumed as the basis for argument. “Socrates is a man” predicates the quality or condition of manhood; it’s a given.

² **Mat 26:26** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

³ *Colouring*: to give a deceptive explanation or excuse for something.

an efficient memorial of me.” Paul (1Cor 11.25) speaks in a similar manner — “this cup,” etc. where there can be no doubt of its being a figurative expression, since in Mark 14.24 Christ says, “This is my blood,” etc. where the words show the same thing.

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For the mind of the Catholic cannot comprehend that the bread is the body of Christ, except by a figurative understanding of these words, since identifying these two things is impossible. Beyond all doubt, then, the expression “this is my body,” is figurative, as are those in the Gospel of John (6.53): “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man,” with many like them, which Christ spoke in another sense. Nevertheless, there are some expressions in Scripture which must be understood plainly and without figure, as we grant in the matter of the incarnation — our Jesus is God and man. This is plain from collated passages, such as John 1, Eph. 1, and Heb 1. From this it is thought that the cunning of the fiend has long been busy about this fallacy, to lead the church into that heresy. And the cause of it is that the church prelates are not preferred according to Christ’s ordaining, nor does the law of Antichrist allow them to be zealous for the law of the Lord.

It is as if the devil had been devising to this effect, saying, “By my vicar Antichrist, if I can so far seduce the believers of the church, as to bring them to deny that this sacrament is bread, and to believe that it is a most abominable accident, I may in the same manner, after that, lead them to believe whatever I have a mind — inasmuch as Scripture language and the senses of men plainly teach the opposite of that dogma. And doubtless, after a time, these simple-hearted believers may be brought by the same means, to say that however a prelate lives — whether he is effeminate, a murderer, a simonist, or stained with any other vice — this must never be believed about him by such obedient people.”

Nevertheless, from motives of gain, such an exemption must not be allowed to extend to the inferior clergy. As for the pope, it must be believed — as though it were a matter of faith — that he falls into no error, especially in regard to the faith of the church; rather, he is a “most blessed father,” because he does not sin.

And thus it would appear that the passage explained above, in Mat 24.15, “When you see the abomination of desolation,” refers to this heresy about the host.

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7. On the Identification of the Bread with the Body of Christ.

Alithia. I must request you, brother, to show still further, from reason or Scripture, that there is no identification of the bread with the body of Christ, and no impanation.¹ For I am by no means pleased with the spurious writings which the moderns use to prove an accident without a subject, because the church so teaches. Such evidence should satisfy no one.

Phronesis. As to identification, we must, in the first place, agree on what you mean by the term. It signifies God’s making two natures, which are distinct in species or number, one and the same — for instance, as if he were to make the person of Peter be one with Paul. I recollect

¹ *Impanation* (or CONSUBSTANTIATION): the actual, substantial *presence* of the body of Christ *with* the bread and wine of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; as opposed to TRANSUBSTANTIATION, where the bread and wine are said to be *transformed* into the body and blood of Jesus.

having adduced many reasons to show the impossibility of such identity. For according to this speculative theory, every quantitative part of a permanent quantity, such as a quantity of time, could be identified with any other. This is immediately shown to be impossible. For if this were true of A, where A represents a line that is a foot in length, then every quantitative part of that line is a foot in length; even the very smallest must be so. This is a manifest contradiction. So this opinion is shown to be identical with an impossible and heretical one; and the same reasoning is applicable to time, or to anything else that may be named.

For if A is *identical* with B, then both of them must remain — since a thing which is destroyed is not made identical, but is annihilated, or ceases to be. And if both of them remain, then they differ as much as they did at first; and consequently they differ in number, and so they are not the same in the sense given. For it is plain, by the mere force of the language, that “if both of them remain,” the pronoun “them” being in the plural, points to them as numerically distinct. In like manner, supposing there were any identification in the sense meant here, then all their differences would be made identical also. Every difference is repugnant to such identification. By the same consequence, they would be identical in their differences; and a thing of one species being identical with a thing of another species, is an assertion which we know involves a contradiction in terms.

Alithia. This threefold reason satisfies me that the identification you mention cannot exist. But let me request you to destroy the doctrine of *impanation* held by some false brethren.

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Phronesis. I am certain that this doctrine of impanation is impossible and heretical. In the first place, I oppose it by saying that in that case, the body of Christ (and so Christ made glorious in the body) would undergo all the transmutations which bread could undergo. And so the body of Christ would not only be made by the presbyter who celebrates the service, but by the baker. And before now, it would be so multiplied, that Christ would have many bodies at once. All that could be predicated about bread, would be applicable to the body of Christ. Thus a mouse would eat the body of Christ, and that very body would putrefy, and turn into worms. And a priest, in celebrating this ordinance, would commonly break the neck and all the limbs of Christ! But what could be more hateful, more savouring of the infidel, more disastrous to the catholic pilgrim? The consequence is plain, because when two natures are identified in the same person, as is plain in the case of the INCARNATION, all that is predicated about either nature, is applicable to the one person. In this sense, we truly grant not only that Christ, but that God Himself, was crucified, dead, and buried, just as before he had been temporally begotten and made of a woman. But if in the same way that bread is made to be the identical body of Christ, and that body is really Christ himself, then that bread is in reality made Christ *as God*. But what idolatry could be more odious? For every church would then have its own God, to whom would be applicable all the degrading predications we mentioned — and thus the Deity would become the basest thing in the universe! On the same ground, adopting the doctrine of impanation as set forth above, the festival of the impanation should be solemnly celebrated like that of the incarnation. In that same sense, Christ would be made Peter, a lamb, a sheep, a kid, a ram, a serpent, etc. But what is more absurd? This is why it is certain that the expression, “This is my body,” and others like it, should be understood as predicated *figuratively*.

We must notice one difference between *identical* predication, and *figurative* predication. For when two natures are identified in the same person, as in the case of the incarnation, each of

them is numerically the same. But in the case of the sacrament of the altar, it is otherwise. For although the bread is broken in three, or any number of parts, each one of them is not really, but only figuratively, the body of the Lord — as in looking into different mirrors, you see the same face as regards the *likeness* in every one of them. This is why there is no necessity that a thing made by God to be symbolic, should stand in need of the presence of the thing of which it is a figure; or that the thing itself of which it is the figure, should be locally proximate to it, or be really changed on this account.

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So it is not to be understood that the body of Christ descends to the host, in any church where it is being consecrated. Rather, it remains above in the skies, stable and unmoved. Thus it has a spiritual existence in the host, but not of the dimensions, nor according to the other accidents pertaining to it in heaven. Hence it seems to me that the body of Christ (and so Christ in his humanity) may extend spiritually to every part of the world. But according to Augustine and the other doctors, he is king spiritually, potentially, and virtually, even unto every part of his kingdom. The body of Christ therefore extends to every part of this world, since by virtue of that body, every part of the world is pervaded beyond any power that an earthly king has of pervading the parts of his kingdom. Nevertheless, we must believe that the body of Christ is far otherwise present in the consecrated host, since it is the host itself only *figuratively*. And according to the nature of spiritual and virtual existence, it is different in every part of it.

8. *Showing That the Body of Christ Does Not Corrupt.*

PSEUDIS. The follies to which you have been giving vent, have sent me into a long nap. But now I must awake a little, and confute them. In the first place, you cannot escape from this expository syllogism: — *First*, this bread becomes corrupt, or is eaten by a mouse. *Second*, the same bread is the body of Christ. *Third*, therefore the body of Christ thus becomes corrupt, and is thus eaten; — and thus you are involved in inconsistency.

Phronesis. It has been a false sleep in which you have indulged, I think, with too much of the sophist and the fox in it. Think of what has been said before, concerning the Trinity and the incarnation, and concerning universals, and then you will blush in the midst of your subtleties. I deny, then, the argument which you call an “expository syllogism.”¹ [Yours] is a deceptive paralogism.² For, if in the matter of the Trinity it does not follow that this essence is the Father, and this same essence is the Son, then does it not follow much more clearly in the syllogising resorted to in your obscure reasoning? In the same manner, it does not follow in the matter of the incarnation, that because this person is this humanity, and this same person is this Divinity, that therefore this humanity is this Divinity.

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And in the matter of universals, there is no need for quarrelling about examples, for though a human species may include Peter, and the same species may include Paul, it does not follow from this that Peter is Paul, but only that they are the same in species. And so, by means of your proposition, you can only prove that if this bread is eaten by a mouse, and this bread is the

¹ *Syllogism*: a trick, artifice; an extremely subtle, sophisticated, or deceptive argument.

² *Paralogism*: a fallacious argument or illogical conclusion, especially one committed by mistake, or believed by the speaker to be logical.

body of Christ, then that which is the body of Christ is eaten by a mouse, etc.¹ And thus the conclusion must be adapted to all other paralogisms. An example of this is found in Scripture. It does not follow that because the Baptist is Elias, and this Baptist was at that time born of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that Elias was therefore so born. Accordingly, we must not, by reason of this word of Christ, true as it is, apply to the Baptist all that may be formally predicated about Elias, or the contrary. This becomes obvious whenever we resolve propositions into their general signification. How can it be shown that if the bread is sacramentally the figure of the body of Christ, and that bread has been baked, that the body of Christ was baked at that time?

PSEUDIS. Still your heretical evasions will be manifest; for according to your meaning, it must be granted that writing, utterance, and anything that might be laid down as a sign of the body of Christ, would be laid down figuratively, and so it is really the very body of Christ. But who could ever enumerate all the incongruities that would follow from such a doctrine? For, as regards the principle of symbolic predication, reason is in as much agreement with the one side as with the other.

Phronesis. The believer will yet escape many such arguments, because unless you can prove that the being imposing the sign or term that is to be a sign of the body of Christ, or to be a sign of anything else, is He who spoke and it was done, and cannot lie, your seeming argument must be defective. Accordingly, there is nothing you can identify with any other thing, until this paramount authority has been communicated to your ally who imposes it, whoever he is. And since you cannot avail yourself of this power, you may blush at the baseness of your sophistry. Accordingly, I admit the authority of these words of Scripture, not because they are of human imposition, but because in the first place the Scripture speaks this way. Thus, in consequence of maintaining this special reverence for Scripture, I humbly admit the aforesaid conclusion without reserve, being certain that no part of the Holy Writings can be false. Therefore, what is it to me, that signs or terms have been imposed with such a designation? I will not change my reply, on that account, as to the doctrine on those subjects which I have learned from Scripture.

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9. Whether Two Bodies May At Once Be in the Same Place.

PSEUDIS. I see that you do not blush to oppose both philosophers and theologians, by propositions which carry their own refutation along with them. For all men of sound mind suppose that it is impossible for two bodies to be in the same place — which you, nevertheless, intimate as possible, in what you say about the body of the bread and the body of Christ.

Phronesis. The body of Christ is not co-extensive with the body of the bread, as shown to you before in the distinction between formal, essential, and figurative predication. With regard to your second instance, it has been stated already that the body of Christ is there *spiritually*, in the same manner in which it is distinguished *essentially* from the body of the bread. Accordingly, when you say that we do not know whether to say that the body of Christ is there essentially, corporeally, or dimensionally, it seems to me that we can say with probability that the body of Christ is indeed *a body* there, because the same body is extended in heaven. But is it there corporeally or dimensionally? It seems to me that many labor vainly and equivocally

¹ That is, the bread so eaten is, *in a sense*, or *figuratively*, the body of Christ.

on this subject.¹ For by understanding this adverb in a double ² sense, it appears to me that the body of Christ is in that same place *as a body*, but not corporeally. With the analogous adverbs, it should be granted that the body of Christ is there, beautifully and really. Yet I dare not say that it is there dimensionally or in extent, though the body which *is* there dimensionally and in extent, may be bread.

But the second equivocation of the adverbs is of this sort: that they are sometimes understood *simply*, as a thing is said to be corporeally elsewhere when it is there in the manner of the body. And so some understand that the body of Christ is in the host corporeally, substantially, and essentially. This mode of expression can be confirmed by the apostle (Col. 2.9), who says that “in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” — not that the Godhead *could* exist bodily. But because many heretics shrink from the idea that Christ should himself be the Godhead, since he is body, the apostle tells us that in Christ, existing bodily (that is, in the manner of the body), dwells the Godhead himself identically. And so the Godhead, though not in its nature a bodily existence, is yet a body, existing bodily in Christ.

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Let no one suppose that by taking this doubly, Christ is corporeally the Godhead, since he is body — because then, in as far as he was body, by consequence, the whole of his body would be the Godhead itself.

PSEUDIS. It seems to me that you depart alike from the church and Scripture, since according to your statements, a layman might officiate in this sacrament as well as a priest, and the church would then be in doubt as to which host to worship.

Phronesis. I see that you do not apprehend the ulterior arguments in this matter, and thus you introduce difficulties foreign to the subject. For the church, owing to the great subtlety of the subject, and her zeal for temporal things, has given too little attention to this point — the pope and all his cardinals having but a very imperfect notion concerning it. But by the grace of Christ, I will maintain the sense of Scripture, and keep clear of the heresy which teaches that “if the pope and cardinals assert them to be the sense of Scripture, therefore so it is,” because then they would be set above the apostles. But further, in regard to your logic, it seems probable, for many reasons, that for a layman to have the power of celebrating, and for a layman to have the power of *rightly* celebrating, are much the same thing. In the first place, this admission must be conceded according to your logic. And again, many men consecrated as presbyters are imbecile — and so, at the pleasure of some, even the laity themselves often celebrate it. And, again, in the equivocation about consecrating, it seems that it must be granted that the laity can officiate, and even consecrate, as the blessed Cecilia consecrated a house for her church.³ Indeed, I believe you cannot show that when the Christians broke bread from house to house, as we read in Acts 2.46, that the bread broken was not the body of Christ, and that the apostles or elders were the only persons who did so. But leaving this uncertain, it appears to me that this office suits consecrated priests, since Christ specially enjoined them to do so, when he said, “As often as you eat this bread,” etc. So then, wherever Christ operates

¹ *Equivocal*: Open to more than one interpretation or meaning; intentionally ambiguous so as to mislead.

² Originally. “reduplicative.”

³ Cecilia was martyred by first being scalded in the baths, A.D. 222, and then beheaded (Foxes’ *Book of Martyrs*). Legend says that she asked the pope to consecrate her home as a church; Wycliffe refers to that here.

with a man, then and only then does he consummate the sacrament — and this should ever be admitted and remembered by our priests. Nevertheless, because this is not an article of faith, there is no necessity for its being believed by the church. Rather, it may be left as a probable supposition. And therefore, there is no need for quarrelling, inasmuch as there are a number of things which may be proposed to the Christian which he should neither admit, deny, nor doubt. For example, if I were asked whether I am destined to be saved; or if I were asked about someone who has sinned grievously, whether he will be damned as being finally obstinate — about such things, I neither admit, deny, nor doubt.

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And so, on seeing the host, I worship it *conditionally*, and I adore the body of the Lord above *fully*. And so my answer to the six preceding arguments may be used as a means of doing away with similar ones.

10. On Baptism.

Alithia. Let us indulge no more in these vexatious disputes with PSEUDIS, but pass at once to the other six sacraments. And as you do not discuss them according to the order mentioned before, but according to their comparative authority in Scripture, following the eucharist you must treat baptism.

Phronesis. I agree with you. In the first place, let us observe where the institution of baptism is established in Scripture. In the last chapter of Matthew, Christ commands his disciples saying, “Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” And accordingly, when he was about to baptize the eunuch, Acts 8.30-38, Philip first instructed him in the faith; as did the apostles when they baptized the people, Acts 2. John the Baptist, however, had no need to instruct Christ, Luke 3.21. On the contrary, he was instructed in humility and other virtues by our Lord. On account of the words in the last chapter of Matthew, our church introduces believers, who answer for the infant which has not yet arrived at the years of discretion. Those who have attained the years of discretion, while still under instruction and before baptism, are called *catechumens*.

How necessary this sacrament is to the believer, may be seen by the words of Christ to Nicodemus, John 3.3, “Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Accordingly, such is the authority from Scripture, on which believers are customarily baptized. The church requires pure water for baptism — no other liquid. Nor does it matter whether the baptized is immersed once or thrice; or whether the water is poured on the head. But the ceremony must be performed according to the usage of the place; and it is as legitimate one way as another. For it is certain that bodily baptism or washing is of little avail, unless the washing of the mind by the Holy Spirit, from original or actual sin, goes with it.

ON BAPTISM. 157

For in this it is a fundamental article of belief, that whenever a man is duly baptized, baptism destroys whatever sin was found in the man.¹ Now, because satisfaction is required before sin can be taken away, and satisfaction for sin cannot be made except by the death of Christ, so

¹ This language points to a kind of baptismal regeneration, but the reader will find that this doctrine is considerably modified and guarded by the language of the Reformer when taken largely.

therefore the apostle says, (Rom 6.3) “We who are baptized into Christ Jesus, are baptized into his death.”

Alithia. What you say of the outward appearance pleases me. But tell me clearly, I pray you, how is it that Christ, who was so greatly opposed to sensible signs, has made a washing of this nature necessary to salvation? For it seems to derogate from the Divine munificence and power, that with all his merit and passion, God should not be able to save an infant or an adult believer unless an old woman or someone else performs the ceremony of baptism, just as for an unbeliever.¹ In the same manner, the child of a believer is carried into the church to be baptized according to the rule of Christ; and in the absence of water, or some other requisite, the child is not baptized, even though the whole people retain their pious intent to do so. Meanwhile, the child dies by the visitation of God. It seems hard, in this case, to assert that this infant will be lost — especially since neither the child nor the people sinned, so as to be the cause of its condemnation. Where is the compassionate bounty of the Divine Christ, if such an offspring of believers is to be lost from this cause, when God, according to the common principles of theology, is more ready to reward than condemn men, both through the obedience and passion of Christ, and His own long-suffering?

Phronesis. You have urged this point with much subtlety and acuteness. But you must attend to the distinction of terms on this subject. Some things I state as *absolute assertions*, others as *suppositions*. And I regard the holy doctors of the church to have spoken in this last sense, even the greatest of them, who came after the writers of Scripture. But I state as absolute assertions, those things which are either testified by my own senses, or are plain from faith in Scripture. Others that I feel persuaded are probable, though lacking an argument, I suppose to be true. And it is in this way of supposition that I speak on this subject of baptism.

With regard to your first instance, in respect to signs, it appears to me that Christ approves of the use of signs, though he condemns their abuse. This is how I understand Mat 12.39, “An adulterous generation seeks after a sign,” etc. For Christ, in his own person, is a sensible sign. And it seems to me that he is the sacrament of sacraments, since the definition of a sacrament applies to him in the highest degree.

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Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and all who had been stung by the serpents were healed upon looking up to that serpent, as it is said in Num. 21.9. So too, Jesus — our living serpent, having the likeness of sin upon him, though he could not possibly sin — was suspended on the cross, that those who are stung by the poison of the old serpent, sin, may become spiritually whole. Christ therefore approves of signs, both under the new law and in the old, but he is opposed to their abuse. You must mark, then, that the mystical body of Christ, during the time of the old law, was like a child, to be instructed in many ways by such sensible signs.² But as the church grew in age under the law of grace, signs of this nature are not to be regarded so much. Accordingly I think there is in the present day a threefold abuse of these signs.

¹ Logic: all are washed (baptized); if only the elect are saved, then baptism is not the cause or means of it.

² Gal 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

In the *first* place, because the signs of the old law are observed; according to the decision of the apostles, these should now cease, as it appears from Acts 15, and the epistle to the Galatians.¹ And this is the case especially with regard to signs denoting objects which have passed away. For consistency would require that those who observe the signs, should look to the objects which they signify.

The *second* abuse with regard to signs consists in the undue importance attached to them. Many attend so much to the observance of such signs, which are not according to the law of God, but have been improvidently ordained from human fancy, that they would sooner transgress the decalogue than neglect such observances.

The *third* abuse is the burdening of the church with those signs which Christ has declared it should be free from; so that the yoke is even greater than was endured by the church under the old dispensation.

Our religious generally are guilty of these two abuses. It is plain that signs, especially those instituted by Christ, may be lawfully used with moderation, if these three abuses are guarded against. Since, then, Christ himself instituted the sign of baptism, why should we not observe it in a prudent manner, especially as we are still only pilgrims, and have not yet attained clear knowledge — and seeing that it is necessary that we should be led in this way by some signs of this nature?

ON BAPTISM. 159

11. On the Threefold Baptism.

Alithia. I am pleased that you have touched on the subject of signs, for I think you have treated the matter with acuteness, though your statements imply that it would be better for our religious to abandon those superfluous signs which they have invented. But I pray you, reply to my two other objections.

Phronesis. The task you impose is a pleasure. You must mark afresh the distinction between the two kinds of statements which I referred to before, [*absolute assertions*, and *suppositions*]. With regard to your first objection, I think it probable that Christ might spiritually baptize without any such washing, and by consequence, save infants. Accordingly, it is commonly said that the church has a THREEFOLD BAPTISM — the baptism of **water**, of **blood**, and of **fire**. The baptism of water is the baptism with that material element of which mention is most frequently made. The baptism of blood is the washing with which the souls of the martyrs are cleansed. Nor do I dare assert that the infants slain for Christ are lost (Mat 2.16). Not having reached the eighth day, they had not been circumcised. I believe the Bishop of Armagh² spoke on supposition only, not positively, when he said that this was the case. The baptism of fire is the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which is absolutely necessary to every man if he is to be saved. Accordingly, the two former baptisms are *antecedent* signs, and may be supposed necessary to this third baptism. So then, without doubt, if this unseen baptism of fire is performed, the man

¹ Especially Gal 4.22-30 – Ishmael is the son of Hagar, who represents Mt. Sinai and bondage; Israel is the son of Sarah, who represents Mt. Zion, the Jerusalem above, and freedom. “Cast out the bondwoman and her son...”

² Richard FitzRalph c. 1300–1360) Irish Archbishop of Armagh. He was an ex-fellow and teacher of Balliol College, at the University of Oxford in 1325. By 1331, he was a Regent master in Theology, and soon after was made Vice-Chancellor of the University.

so baptized is cleansed from guilt. And if this baptism is lacking, though the others may be present, the baptism does not avail to save the soul. And since this third baptism is not perceptible by the senses, and is so far unknown to us, it appears presumptuous and unwise to me, to decide on the salvation or damnation of men simply from the circumstance of their baptism. Our conclusion, then, without a doubt, is that infants duly baptized with water, are baptized with the third kind of baptism, inasmuch as they are made partakers of baptismal grace. The above argument also holds concerning the martyrs who were slain for Christ, as it manifestly was with the Theban Legion,¹ many of whom were not baptized with water.²

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With regard to the language of Scripture, (John 3.3) “Unless a man is born again of water and of the Spirit,” etc. it is probable that Christ speaks there of the water which flowed from his side, and of the third kind of baptism. This is because it appears indubitable that a man who suffers martyrdom for Christ will be saved, even though he may not have been baptized with water. So it seems probable that the words of Christ have this negative meaning — *viz.* that no man can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is baptized with the baptism of the water that flowed from the side of Christ (*i.e.* being cleansed from guilt by Christ’s passion), and with the baptism of fire (*i.e.* from the influence of the Holy Spirit).^{Mat 3.11} The Trinity could not save the fallen by receiving them into happiness, unless the second and the third persons remove their sins. Accordingly, Christ taught that the first baptism should be celebrated in the above words of the Gospel. Yet must it not be imagined by believers that the baptism of the Spirit altogether supersedes the baptism of water, but that it is necessary to become recipients of it wherever circumstances permit. When an infidel baptizes a child, not supposing that baptism is of any avail for his salvation, we are not to regard such a baptism as serviceable to the baptized.

Yet we believe that when any old woman or despised person duly baptizes with water, that God completes the baptism of the Spirit along with the words of the sacrament. For our signs are of small avail unless God graciously accepts them. Thus I reply to your objection by admitting that God, if He will, may condemn such an infant, without wrong done to Himself; and if He will, He can save it. Nor dare I determine on the other side, or strive for the sake of mere opinion, or for gaining evidence in this matter; but I hold my peace as one who is dumb, and humbly confess my ignorance. I make use of conditional expressions, because it does not seem clear to me whether such an infant would be saved or lost. But I know that whatever God does in the matter will be just, and a work of compassion to be praised by all the faithful. But

¹ The Theban Legion (or Martyrs of Agaunum) was a Roman legion of 6,666 men who had converted en masse to Christianity, and were martyred together in 286. The Legion was the garrison of the city of Thebes in Egypt. They were ordered by the emperor Maximian to march to Gaul, to assist him against the rebels of Burgundy. At Saint-Maurice, Switzerland, then called *Agaunum*, the converted Legion refused to sacrifice to the Emperor. Orders were given to “decimate” it by putting to death a tenth of its men at a time, until none were left.

² The reader will observe the mixture of light and obscurity in these statements and allusions, and will form his own conclusion from them. The story of the Theban Legion belongs to the close of the third century. It is for the most part an uncertain tradition. The authorities relating to it may be seen in Gieseler’s *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 117.

those who come to any decision on this, relying on their own authority or learning, cannot establish what they are so foolish and presumptuous as to assume.¹

ON CONFIRMATION. 161

12. On Confirmation.

Alithia. Pray inform me in the next place about the third sacrament, which is generally named CONFIRMATION; and first concerning the authority which may be adduced for it from Scripture. It has not, I conceive, a sufficient warrant from Acts 8.14-17:

“Now, when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost (for as yet He had fallen upon none of them: they had only

¹ The following translated passage may be taken as a specimen of the manner in which Woodford [see note on [page 131](#)] replies to Wycliffe, and will show that, obscure as the views of the Reformer may have been in some respects on this subject, they were greatly in advance of the views which characterised his times: —

“The fourth article condemned as erroneous is in the twelfth chapter of the fourth book of the *Trialogus*; and teaches that those who decide that the infants of believers who die without the sacrament of baptism will not be saved, are presumptuous and foolish in this.

“That this article is justly condemned appears in the first place from the blessed Augustine [commenting] on Peter, concerning faith, where he assigns to such the punishment of everlasting fire: and the words are found in the fourth division of the canon respecting consecration. But here our opponent replies in the twelfth chapter of the fourth book of the *Trialogus*, that Augustine gives this as a hypothesis, and not as an assertion. But it is plain that this is false from Augustine’s mode of expressing himself, who in this article, as well as in that on the Trinity, says — ‘Maintain such firmly, and in no respect doubt’ — which are not the words used by one advancing a mere hypothesis, but the words of one asserting what is truly believed. And at the conclusion of that work, Augustine writes thus in the fourth book —

‘Adhere firmly to the rule of the true faith — and if you see any one uttering dogmas against it, flee him as a pest, and reject him as a heretic. For those things which we assigned to the catholic faith are in such harmony that if anyone contradicts, not all of them, but any one of them, in the very fact of his contumaciously rejecting these separate doctrines, he shows himself a heretic and an enemy of the Christian faith at large, and consequently is to be anathematised by all Christians.’

“Now, in these words, Augustine asserts particular articles of the catholic faith, and that the obstinate opponent of these particular articles thereby becomes a heretic, and an enemy of the whole Christian faith. Since, therefore, this makes the fourth article in this book, it is manifest that Augustine positively asserts this article is heretical.

“It is plain, in the second place, that this article is condemned with reason, by the definition of the church, which is found in the canon respecting consecration, Dist. 4, cap. Nulla, where it is said — ‘No salvation has been promised to infants except by the baptism of Christ’ — because if infants do not pass into the number of believers through the sacrament which was divinely instituted for this purpose, they remain in darkness. The church, therefore, decides that infants dying without the sacrament of baptism will not be saved. It must, therefore, be an error to say that those who thus decide are presumptuous and foolish.

“It appears in the third place, that this article is justly condemned, from the fact that in the primitive church they were not accustomed to hold a solemn baptism more frequently than twice a year, at the time of the passover and the pentecost, except in case of necessity, as at the point of death — as it appears from the canon, Dist. 4, and as it appears in authors who have treated the Divine offices. But this would not have been the practice of the primitive church, had it not been believed that those who died without the sacrament of baptism would perish everlastingly.

“It appears in the fourth place, that this article is justly condemned from the fact that according to the ancient ordinance of the church, children who die without baptism after birth, are not to be buried in holy burial, any more than pagans — but should be interred without the cemetery. The church would never have ordained this custom if it had not believed that such are not of the number who will be saved.” — *Fasciculus Rerum*, 204, 205.

been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

This is the text from which it is generally concluded that, beside the baptism with which men are baptized, apostolic confirmation should be added, since such was the practice of the apostles.

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Yet this passage is not adequate to sustain the doctrine. For it might be urged with probability that, though baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was valid for the time — since up to that time this institution had not been sufficiently promulgated — yet such promulgation having taken place, a return should accordingly be made to the evangelical formula. Thus, those who were baptized in Samaria only in the name of the Lord Jesus, might be lawfully re-baptized — just as those who had been baptized with the baptism of John, or any other illegitimate baptism, may be baptized again without danger. This text fails to establish such a doctrine. This is manifest from the fact that we constantly say that the baptized have received the Holy Spirit by virtue of being duly baptized. Much more, then, must this have been the case in the primitive church. But in this passage it is said that, “Peter and John laid hands on them,” etc. Now, if they had not received the Holy Ghost before, how could they have been legitimately baptized? It is not incongruous for the baptizer to lay hands on the baptized. In the same way, the passage in Acts 8 shows that Peter and John had laid their hands on them.

If, then, it is justly proved from this text that confirmation should be appropriated to the bishops, they themselves must lay their own hands on the confirmed so that they may receive the Holy Spirit. But such a mode of receiving the Holy Spirit is neither taught us by any sensible sign, nor by the dictates of our reason. How then can it be shown that bishops administer this sacrament to the youth whom they confirm? As regards the oil with which they anoint them, and the linen peplus¹ with which they bind their head, it seems a dangerous rite, quite unsanctioned by Scripture.

Still further, it appears that this confirmation, thus unauthorised by the apostles, is a blasphemy against God, since it stoutly asserts that the bishops confer the Holy Ghost anew, or that they strengthen and confirm that gift. But this is to do more than give the Holy Spirit. The apostles dared not teach this, but prayed for themselves that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Has the Cæsarean endowment² exalted our bishops to such a pitch of dignity, that they are thus endowed with the singular power of conferring the Holy Ghost?

Phronesis. Your replies are, in my judgment, acute and satisfactory. Nor do I at present perceive any obvious method of replying to them, either from reason or Scripture. But suppose the bishops were to pray for the baptized, that they may be confirmed in the gift of that Holy Spirit which they received before, and for this reason they add to this service the sensible signs which it is their practice to observe. I do not see what there is to prevent their duly celebrating this third sacrament, supposing that the same result ensues which followed the action of the apostles. But if they fail in attaining the end of the apostles, I see not how they can show from this text that they really confirm.

¹ *Peplus*: A cloth worn by women in ancient Greece, caught at the shoulders and draped in folds to the waist.

² Roman Emperor Constantine’s bestowal of property and money on the Church (see [p. xlvii](#)).

So long as they fail in regard to this end, it would seem useless to further discuss the subject. This sacrament does not appear to me necessary to the believer's salvation, nor do I believe that those who pretend to confirm youths, rightly confirm them, nor that this sacrament should be restricted exclusively to the Cæsarean bishops. Further, I think it would be more devout, and more in accordance with Scripture language, to say that our bishops do *not* confer the Holy Ghost, or confirm the previous bestowment of the Holy Ghost. For such expressions, however glossed by our doctors, are still liable to misconstruction once admitted, while at the same time they lack authority to sanction them.

Hence, some are of the opinion that this slight and brief confirmation performed by the bishop, with the rites which are attached to it with so much solemnity, was introduced at the suggestion of the devil, with a view to delude the people concerning the faith of the church, and to give more credence to the solemnity, or as to the necessity, of bishops. For according to common opinion, while our bishops administer this sacrament of confirmation, retaining it in common with many other things exclusively in their own hands, and while there is no salvation for believers apart from receiving these solemn sacraments, how could the church preserve her station uninjured without such bishops? But one thing appears to hold in the greater part: that according to God's covenant, for any bishop whatever, baptizing in such a way as to bestow the Holy Spirit, implies a blasphemy. But I leave to others the subtler discussion of this topic.

13. On the Sacrament of Orders.

Alithia. I do not see that anything can be done by treating this matter further, or that any great advantage attends it, even though the custom of the court of Rome, or the ancient custom of the church, may hold it to be proper. But this is no more a sufficient evidence in favor of this sacrament, than would be the antiquity of the abuses of the prelates, if they were adduced to justify their faults. But I pray you, discuss simply the SACRAMENT OF ORDERS, and the manner in which it should be defined; and in the first place, what "Order" is.

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Phronesis. In my opinion, this sacrament of order is sufficiently analogous, and accordingly its sign is very equivocal.¹ For since order is the state or position of a creature, according to the Divine ordinance, it appears that, just as there are many orders among angels, so there are among every created sublunary² multitude. Moreover, it is said without end that those who break Christ's order are to be punished. *Secondarily*, the term "order" is used to express, by a kind of antonomasia,³ the state or possession of a new religion — as if Antichrist were above the ordinance and rule of Jesus Christ. *Thirdly*, with greater strictness, and more to the purpose, that power which is given to the priest by God, through the ministry of the bishop, in order for his due ministering in the church, is called "order." This ordination is commonly conferred at a holy time, with a solemn fast, and accompanied by masses and other ceremonies. This is why it is commonly said that ordination is not conferred on a priest, except when the bishop imparts to him the Holy Ghost, and impresses on his mind the priestly character. And so indelible is

¹ Significant in more than one sense.

² *Sublunary*: earthly (under the moon).

³ *Antonomasia*: (linguistics) the substitution of an epithet or title in place of a proper noun.

this last act, that if the priest is degraded, or whatever may happen to him, this character is inseparably attached to him. The opinion is similar concerning the character that is impressed in baptism.¹

One thing I confidently assert, that in the primitive church, or the time of Paul, two orders were held sufficient — those of priests and deacons. I am no less certain that in the time of Paul, presbyter and bishop were the same, as shown in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. That profound theologian Jerome attests to the same fact (see lxxxvii. *Dis. ca. Olim*). For there were not then the distinctions of pope and cardinals, patriarchs and archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, officials, and deacons, with other officers and religious bodies, without number or rule. As to all the disputes which have arisen about these functionaries, I will say nothing; it is enough for me that, according to Scripture, the presbyters and the deacons retain that office and standing which Christ appointed them, because I am convinced that Cæsarean pride² has introduced these other orders and gradations.

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If they had been necessary to the church, Christ and his apostles would not have held their peace about them. So that those who extol the rights of the pope above Christ, blaspheme. But the catholic may best learn about the office of the clergy from Scripture, in the epistles to Timothy and Peter. Nor must he, on pain of incurring serious guilt, allow Cæsarean innovations to be admitted. But here I have no doubt that vast numbers are guilty.

The root of this blasphemy, which has turned the church upside down, is found in this: that the clergy, shrinking from the poverty of Christ, thus entangle themselves with the world. Hence it is plainly seen of what sort their order is, inasmuch as when they should beget sons like Christ and the apostles, they adulterously beget sons of Antichrist. And by this means, the kingdom of Antichrist is fenced about, and the kingdom of their master the devil is set above that of Christ. I have brought forward many proofs elsewhere to make plain the duty of the king and of the military order in such case. As Augustine says, “As the pope is the vicar of Christ, so the king is the vicar of God;” which I understand as follows: As the pope ought to follow the humanity of Christ, living like him and his apostles, in poverty and reproach, and enduring contempt with a patience surpassing other men; so the king ought to be the vicar of the Deity, restraining with severity, by his coercive power, the rebellious and the violators of God’s commandments. So speaks the apostle in Romans 13.¹⁻⁷.

Elsewhere I have brought forward many reasons to show that the clergy ought to live a life of poverty in the manner of Christ. In the first place, this appears from the old law:

¹ To the above paragraph, succeeds the following passage, on the “quiddity” of the sacrament of orders, which I must be allowed to give as it stands. “Sed de quidditate characteres illius est dissentio apud multos, cum quidam dicunt quod est qualitas, et de facto gratia licet steterit cum motali, sed concedet nobis Deus aliam gratiam, cum ista in multis pominibus damnandis et salvandibus viantibus nihil valet. Aliis autem videtur, quod character sit signum insensibile, quo fidelis ab alio convivente discernitur, et ad speciale officium in ecclesia limitatur, et satis est ad esse talis characteris, constantia subjecti et preteritio officii præaccepti, quæ cum sint perpetua et indelibilia, character manet indelibiliter impressus in anima. Baptismi enim character fidelis ab infideli distinguitur, ac si ad Christi militiam sit signatus, et character ordinis clericus separatur a laico, ac si ex ordinatione Christi ad officium singulare supra laicum in ecclesia sit signatus. Et sic multiplicant quidam in ordinibus et sacramentis multis characteres. Sed istorum foundationem vel fructum nec in scriptura considero.”

² Wycliffe implies that the pope considers himself Caesar, an earthly emperor in the line of Constantine.

Num 18.20-21: “And the Lord spoke to Aaron, you shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any part among them: I am your part and your inheritance among the children of Israel. And behold I have given the children of Levi all the tenth for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.”¹

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If then a prelate, and those who live on tithes, strengthen themselves by means of the second part of this Divine authority — greedily seizing tithes for their own gain — why do they not as eagerly embrace the first out of love for Christ, who was poor? To the same effect, Deu 18.1-2 reads thus:

“The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren: the Lord is their inheritance, as he has said to them.”

If these commandments of the Lord under the old law are so strict in forbidding the clergy to hold possessions; and if Christ and his apostles in the time of the law of grace observed this same command more strictly still; then who can be a greater heretic or Antichrist than that cleric who contradicts these lessons more than the men who lived under the old law? To the same effect, Eze 44.28-30 —

“I am their inheritance: and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession, and they shall eat the meat-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering; and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs, and the first of all the first-fruits of all things, and every oblation of all, of every sort of your oblations, shall be the priests: you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest on your house.”

In the time of the old law, the people were more earthly in every respect, being young and not yet wise in heavenly things. If the clergy were so restricted then in temporal things by the command of the Lord, how much more should it be observed since Christ has followed, both God and man, living a life of the greatest poverty, and since the lives of apostles have repeated the same lesson in work and example? It is plain, then, that if any men have become heretical apostates or blasphemers by violation of the law of the Lord, these clergy are such — even the bishops who so notably offend in this. Two other laws are proclaimed in Gen 2.16-17, and Eze 16.8. If therefore the bishop is horned with a mitre, to denote that he knows and observes both testaments, who can be said to belie Christ more in blasphemy than the prelate who is endowed and enriched with worldly possessions, even above kings?

¹ Wodeford [Woodford] opposes to the argument deduced from this passage, the following language: —

“And the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they give to the Levites, from the inheritance of their possession, cities to dwell in; and you shall also give to the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities they shall have to dwell in; and their suburbs shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. And the suburbs of the cities which you give to the Levites shall reach from the wall of the city and outward, a thousand cubits round about. And you shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits; and the city shall be in the midst; this shall be to them the suburbs of their cities.” — Num. 35.1-5. *Fasciculus Rerum*, i. 218. It is plain that the inference of Wycliffe — from the fact that the Levites did not have a share in the manner of the other tribes in the land of promise — is of greater extent than the facts of the case would warrant. But within certain limits, the fact appealed to was justly available for the purposes of his argument.

Alithia. Brother, you have shrewdly fed our bishops with five barley loaves, the Pentateuch of Moses, as figured in John 6.9-13. But inasmuch as our prelates pretend that these commandments of the old law were ceremonial, and should be terminated by the law of grace, I pray you confirm your opinion, if you can, by a reference to the law of grace.

Phronesis. It appears to me, that bishops instructed in the faith need no further confirmation in regard to this doctrine, since it follows by position from the major — if the bishops did so under the old law, then the bishops under the law of grace should observe the same rule.

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And especially since Christ and his apostles have observed it in deed (which teaches more forcibly) as well as in word, which is sufficiently binding. Christ on the second occasion of feeding the multitude, fed four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fishes, as it appears from Mat 15.32-38 and Mark 8.1-9. So too, out of my abundance I will adduce a sevenfold testimony from the law of grace in favor of this same doctrine. In Luke 14.33, after the Lord's parable, he adds, "So every one of you that does not forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple."

What Christ meant by "forsaking," he and his apostles have sufficiently shown by the poverty of their lives. For the actions of Christ and his disciples are the best interpreters of his law. To the same effect is the passage, "The servant is not greater than his Lord," Mat 10.24. Since Christ is the best Master, and the Lord of lords, and all prelates should be servants and disciples of this Lord, it is clear that they should not be raised above Christ in secular dominion. But Christ says (Mat 8.20) that "the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head;" that is, in his humanity he did not have any such place — in a worldly sense, in his own proper right of possession. How, then, do our Cæsarean bishops have the boldness to extol themselves above Christ in civil dominion? On a dispute arising between his disciples as to which of them should be the greatest (Luke 22.24), our Lord said (manifestly referring to the sensible ¹ superiority of the world), "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them," etc. He distinguishes clear as noonday, between the superiority of the world, and superiority in regard to God — denoting the former by the lordship of the kings of the Gentiles. They are especially called "benefactors," because they confer temporal favors on their subjects, and abate the wrongs to which they are exposed, even though they are themselves too often tyrants. Our Lord explains the second, or apostolic superiority, when he absolutely forbids the followers of the Gospel to seek after the [way of the Gentiles], adding, "But you shall not be so." Accordingly, [Bernard] often directed the attention of Pope Eugenius to this prohibition.² Christ afterwards sets forth the attributes of the apostolic superiority, which is a superiority simply in regard to God. He shows that whoever among them is the most humble in Spirit, possessed of the greatest charity, and the most diligent in his ministry, is the greatest.

But after the clergy were given to the world, and learned to despise the commandments of the Lord, and gave little heed to Christ's decision on this, the disciples of Antichrist said in their hearts, "Christ is contrary to our practice. He taught nothing of that refinement so necessary for the world, but lived in misery and dishonor, like a beggar. Who, then, would follow in His

¹ *Sensible*: what can be physically perceived by the senses; tangible.

² *Berenger* was misnamed here originally. On p. 296 it is clearly *Bernard of Clairveaux* (1090-1153). Bernard was a friend of Pope Eugenius III (1145-1153), who nicknamed himself Benardo as an honorific. — WHG

footsteps, unless he were a fool?" The aforesaid doctrine is educed from this threefold testimony in the Gospel, and it is confirmed by the Old Testament.

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Passages from the writings of the apostles attest to the same truth, for the apostle who was snatched up into the third heaven ^{2Cor 12.2} delivered to prelates this rule, — "Having food and raiment, be content with these." — 1Tim 6.8. And he says simple food, not delicacies; and for covering, he does not speak of scarlet, nor of dwelling in sumptuous apartments. And by teaching us to be content with such things, he prohibits superfluity in this, which tends toward burdening the church, and abandoning our office. To the same effect, Peter, the chief of the apostles, enjoins us that we not be as "lords over God's heritage," ^{1Pet 5.3} but that we should be willingly abased for the service of the flock, not studying how we may play the lord over those put under us. Now I ask whether the prelates, in grasping at castles and estates, lord it over God's heritage or not? And are they not doing so when they are contriving how they may adorn themselves in the most splendid and imposing manner, without ever thinking of the burdens they lay on the church? But the life of Christ and his apostles shows in what sense *they* understood that language.

The apostle speaks to the same effect in 2Cor 8.9, saying, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that through his poverty you might be rich." Since, then, all believers are undeniably to follow Christ in their character, the clergy must of necessity follow him in their own order, especially in his humble poverty. This is why our religious orders in their confession (if only it were not a false one!) unite in regarding as the substance of their religion — as the obedience paid to Christ — the poverty and chastity which they maintain for his cause.

In the sixth chapter of the Acts, we find that seven deacons were ordained because, according to the decree of the apostles sent forth after the descent of the Holy Spirit, it was not fit for them to leave the service of the living God, to serve tables. But who can doubt that the prelate who abandons Christ's office, and entangles himself in the sort of life required by the world, gives himself too much to worldly affairs? Yet the apostle says that, "no man who wars, entangles himself with the affairs of this life" (2Tim 2.4). Accordingly, since no one takes this honor to himself, but he who is called of God, ^{Heb 5.4} it is plain that the worldly prelate has this honor from the devil, to whom he has approved himself. Then, at the commencement of Luke 14,¹ we are taught that such a man cannot be the disciple of Christ, but is the disciple of Antichrist. And so, since he presumes to be greater than his Lord Jesus Christ, it is plain that he is not his disciple or his servant, but rather the disciple of Antichrist.

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And now, with these seven loaves — not indeed barley ones, but unpalatable enough — the people may have their fill of prelates, and the aforesaid doctrine may be confirmed. We need not collect other fragments from the doctors, and arguments which some multiply on this subject. For these complete testimonies, adduced from the old and new law, are sufficient to confirm this doctrine in the eyes of believers.

¹ **Luk 14:11** "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." **Luk 14:33** "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

14. On the Avarice of the Clergy.

PSEUDIS. Though you have often taught in this manner, at the peril of your life, yet it is evident that both reason, and the grounds on which the saints have been canonised, contradict your doctrine. For who can entertain any doubt that the law of Christ not only permits, but requires that the man who is especially His servant, should be duly ministered to in temporal things? For God, who is not lacking to his servants in greater things, as in the blessings of grace and of nature, does not withhold from them wealth, or the goods of fortune in any form. In like manner, though your argument would deny the prelate the right to require these things, by reason of his clergy, and declares that he should be content with little temporal possession, yet you dare not assert that it is unlawful for temporal lords to make such offerings to their clergy, under the title of alms — since you would, by doing so, put an end to temporal alms of every kind. On this ground, the clergy may possess these temporal things and yet live sparingly, as the apostle did. Such, we believe, was the case with Sylvester,¹ and many others whom the church has canonised. Since, then, temporal things are from God, and by consequence, they are eminently good, what harm can there be in our possessing the things themselves, along with the higher blessings mentioned before, since the gifts of nature and grace may incidentally derive much good from the gifts of fortune?

Phronesis. In my view, it is plain from the Scriptures alleged before, which we believe the mouth of the Lord has spoken, that our clergy, especially under the law of grace, are bound to live in the manner which I have set forth.

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And since this is an injunction laid on us by the God-man Christ, it is clear that he who manifestly despises it, cannot love Christ; and therefore, he must fall under the sentence of a most fearful excommunication. For the apostle says, “If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.” [1Cor 16.22](#) And this excommunication, inflicted by the Holy Spirit, does not allow being evaded by the precautions of men, but is sure to be inflicted where guilt is incurred. And it is a matter greatly more to be feared than any damnation or condemnation for heresy, which Cæsarean prelates usually send forth. And since loving Christ and keeping his commandments, are the same thing, [Joh 14.15](#) it is plain that those prelates especially, who are so disobedient to the law of the Lord, incur a heavier anathema.

In reply to your first objection, I admit that I have often hazarded my life and worldly prosperity by the promulgation of this doctrine. But since Christ and his apostles did so, and we believe that they are now glorified in heaven for doing so, what believer would hesitate to promulgate and defend the words of Christ? — especially when He himself says, “Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him before the angels of God.” [Mar 8.38](#)

With regard to the canonisation of Sylvester, Gregory, and others, who received the church endowment, I must say, without any wish to scandalise those saints, that I do not make it a matter of faith to believe that by God’s grace, they passed through life unstained in any way by the pollution of temporal things. But who would be so senseless as to disregard the admonitions and counsel of Christ upon this, because one transgressor was saved by the grace

¹ Sylvester I: pope from 314 to 335, who received an endowment of lands and wealth from Constantine.

of God? For if one offender has been rescued from so dangerous a precipice, by some cause unknown to us, who would be so audacious on that account, as to expose himself to a greater danger? For numbers of prelates now grasp these temporalities in a way that is far more illegal and infamous than their predecessors named above. And therefore I grant you that both reason and the law of God require that one who is a chief servant of God, should be duly ministered to in temporal things. But both reason and the real good of God's servant, require that he not be overladen with these temporalities, since they serve their possessor only in so far as they facilitate his duty towards God.

It is plain that the man imbibing the spirit of the Gospel, pleases Christ the more (other things being equal), the greater the poverty in which he fulfils his office. Just as it is of no use for travellers to carry their ship after they have crossed the sea in it, so it does not advantage us to carry temporal things in our hearts more than is requisite for our voyage.

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During our infancy and decrepitude, we must perform our journey aboard ship; while in middle age, to signify that we should aspire after celestial things, we must travel by dry land. In the early part of our voyage we are sustained by our parents; and in the last part, by the goods we have accumulated, or by the charity of our brethren. But in middle age, we should live by our own efforts or on those temporal things which we have virtuously made our own. And we regard this mode of life as an approach to the state of innocence, to which the apostles conformed themselves. Thus some understand the words of Christ, "And you shall carry nothing on your journey, neither scrip," etc. ¹ for apostolic men should not be delayed by anything temporal that may impede their affections or their efforts in the discharge of duty.

But the scanty and moderate nature of their possession is indicated by the staff carried in the hand. Just as one who is overburdened with a multiplicity of clothing is thereby oftentimes rendered unfit for travel, so the man who is burdened with temporal things, is often made less capable of serving the church. In this sense, Christ said, "Neither have two coats;" ² and this law of Christ is founded on the law of nature, which no man can dispense with.

As to your second objection, your assumption is plainly false, since temporal lords should so moderate the alms they bestow, that the ordinance of Christ shall in no respect be destroyed; for they would then not be alms, but a traitorous and accursed presumption. For in Luke 14,³ Christ shows us how we should bestow temporal relief on the poor — those who are blind, lame, and infirm; and accordingly, how to compel sturdy mendicants to labor.⁴

In the rule of Christ, poverty must be understood in the following threefold manner, because Christ teaches us not to bestow alms on the *rich* in the world, though they are blind, lame, or infirm, but he teaches us to bestow alms on these three classes of the *poor*. But how does the perpetual and universal endowment of the church agree with this rule of Christ? This doctrine,

¹ Luk 9.3; also Mat 10.9, Mar 6.8.

² Loc cit.

³ Luk 14:13-14 "But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*. ¹⁴ "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

⁴ Luk 14:27-28, 33 "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish it..." ³³ "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

therefore, implies and teaches how such alms may be given with profit and foresight, and how a wrong done to these three classes of the needy should be amended.

As to your third objection, it has often been said that man holds temporal things under a twofold title: namely, that of *original* justice, and that of *mundane* [or civil] justice. Now, Christ possessed all the goods in the universe under the title of original justice,. As Augustine often declares, all things belong to the just under that title, or under the title of *grace*. But civil possession differs widely from such a title. Accordingly, Christ and his apostles, despising civil dominion, were content with possession according to grace. And hence it is the rule of Christ that none of his disciples presume to contend for his temporal goods, as it appears in Mat 5.40, “If any man takes your coat,” etc. But the laws of the state, and the custom of secular rulers, are far removed from this. And this is the reason why these mundane laws, and the eager execution of them, have been so wrongfully introduced, even among the clergy.

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The conclusion you draw must be admitted, but the mode of possession should be distinguished. For possession in a civil sense, since it necessitates a carefulness about temporal things and the observance of human laws, ought to be strictly forbidden to the clergy. With regard to Sylvester and others, it appears probable to me that they sinned grievously in accepting such an endowment. We may entertain the supposition, however, that they afterwards repented of this to some purpose. So I grant you, then, that the clergy may possess temporal things, but only according to that title and mode of possession which God instituted, and not in that covetous fashion which the institution of Cain has invented.

15. On the Culpability of the Laity In Respect To Endowments.

Alithia. I am pleased with your doctrine, brother, because it appears to me, that you inveigh with clearness and force against the avarice of the priests. And according to the apostle, as covetousness is the root of all evil (1Tim 6.10), and priests should be the root of all goodness — conveying the laity to heaven — you appear to direct your censures against the source of all sin in the church. But tell me, I pray you, whether secular men are also justly liable to rebuke on account of such endowments.

Phronesis. I am pleased to find that you thus introduce this subject. I have often been hindered from rebuking the sins of temporal lords; and to make amends for such omission, I will state to you the belief I entertain in this matter. If God wills, it shall come to the ears of such men.

Believe firmly, and in no way doubt, that temporal lords have also grievously sinned in this. And for this cause, I do not doubt that many, in the righteous judgment of God, have been suitably punished by the loss of their worldly wealth. For this endowment has given rise to wars and strife, and it has brought many secular lords to poverty. And it is only just that they should be made to pay a penalty with respect to that very thing which was the means by which they committed their crime.

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My reason for so thinking is this: that those who are an accessory to a crime are as guilty as those who commit it. The temporal powers have not only united to confer this endowment, but they have consented to it in very many ways. And since such an endowment is contrary to the ordinance of Christ, they are guilty in it.

For if there are six methods of consenting, as enumerated by the poet —

The person who acts, defends, gives counsel, and authorizes;
the one who does not help, and does not reprehend; all give consent.¹

— then it is clear as light, that temporal lords are manifestly guilty in respect to these six modes. And this is especially in regard to the last two, inasmuch as they indolently withhold the assistance and rebuke, by means of which this injury done to Christ and his church might be rectified. Nevertheless, it devolves on them, for many reasons, to amend this injury done to Christ. In the first place, because they are those who have sinned by the commission of this injury; therefore it is for them to make satisfaction for the sin.

In the second place, because God gave the power they possess, that they might regulate the affairs of his church, as it appears in Romans 13. Therefore, so that they are not negligent in respect to the use of this power, nor guilty of an abuse of it, they should exercise it in the instance of so great an injury done to Christ, following his own example. For Christ, in rebuking the priests of the temple, often made use of this kingly power, ejecting in person the buyers and sellers. And on many occasions, by his sufferings and his reproofs, Christ condemned the conduct of the priests, as may be seen at the time of his seizure and passion. And afterwards, he awfully chastised that priesthood by the hand of Titus and Vespasian his servants, as prophesied in Luke.²

Isidorus³ also admirably declares this doctrine, as may be seen in the twenty-third decree, *q. v. c. Principes Seculi*. For if they hold their temporal possessions on condition of service rendered, then what service, I ask, could better befit them, than that of vindicating the wrongs done to Christ, and defending so reasonable an ordinance? Forasmuch as it is the same thing to love Christ, and to keep his law and commandments (as shown in John 14.15), it is manifest that if the temporal lords love Christ above all things, then it is their duty to exert their power in defending his chief ordinance. What temporal lord, I ask, would not be offended beyond measure on seeing his own decree reversed? Still more would this be the case if that reversing were to dishonor his betrothed, and to break up his kingdom. But all this is much truer in respect to the primitive justice of Jesus Christ. Let temporal lords remember, then, how distinguished the favor was which our Lord showed them in his lifetime, without doubt intending that they should return to him their service.

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Now I have collected from the Scripture account, six instances of kindness shown by Christ to temporal lords. *First*, because Christ, who is the Lord of time, and who might have been born at whatever period he chose, selected that interval in which secular dominion was most flourishing; for in Luke 2.1 it is said that a decree went forth that the whole world should be taxed. *Second*, because if Christ had been so disposed, he might have had dominion over all the

¹ "Consentit, cooperans, defendens, concilium dans, Ac auctorisans, non juvans, nec reprehendens,"

² **Luk 21:6** "These things which you see – the days will come in which not *one* stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." *Vespasian leading the 7th legion of Rome, destroyed the temple in 70 AD. Wycliffe apparently saw that event as Christ coming in temporal judgment against them.* **Luk 21:27** "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." **Luk 9:27** "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."

³ That is, Isidore of Seville (560-636).

kingdoms of the world. But he was unwilling to detract in the smallest degree from the secular power of the earth — as in Mat 8.20 it is written, “The Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” In the *third* place, because Christ caused the old priesthood to be despoiled of their possessions, so that he might restore the secular authority to secular lords, undiminished, as was foretold in Luke when predicting the destruction of the temple, chap. 19.43-44.

Fourth, because Christ paid tribute to Cæsar for himself and his little flock, as may be seen in Mat 17.27. *Fifth*, because Christ pronounced a most decisive judgment when he said that the goods of Cæsar should be rendered to Cæsar, Mat 22.21. And in the *sixth* place, because Christ fed the poor tenants of secular lords, and healed them, and taught them obedience in many ways, so that the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, show how servants ought to obey their lords. And what is infinitely more than any of these considerations, though the men of the world place such things first, Christ is the Creator, Redeemer, and finally, the Rewarder of temporal lords.

What then could he do that he has not done? On all these accounts, temporal lords should remember the counsel of the apostle in Col 3.15 — “Be thankful.” But I pray, let the believer mark with what manifest ingratitude they have repaid the Lord. For soon after his ascension, within the four hundredth year, they reversed his chief ordinance by endowing the church; and by consequence, they begat Antichrist, to the dishonor of Christ’s spouse. Hence, chronicles relate that at the time of the endowment of the church, an angelic voice was heard in the air saying, “Today poison is poured into the holy church of God.” This is why, from the time of Constantine — who so endowed the church — the Roman empire decreased, and secular dominion with it.

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Nor is it of any avail to allege in defence of this sin, that the emperor and others who endowed the church, thought that by a devotion of this nature, they would secure for themselves a manifold merit. This is because the apostle [Paul], from a less culpable blindness, and under the same persuasion, persecuted the church. And when this ignorance was no longer in his way, and he had drawn evidence from the Old Testament, he sincerely confessed that he was guilty of blasphemy in this, and had sinned grievously against Christ. How then should it be that the emperor and other lords, in their grosser ignorance, could be anything but sinners against Christ, after such a showing of goodness on his part? Therefore I warn them that it is too hard for them to kick against the pricks.¹

Accordingly, if they would have their dominion kept entire, and not fiendishly torn piecemeal, and have the peace of the church restored, and their tenants be powerful but not rebellious, according to the law of the Lord, then let them have a proper zeal for the ordinance of Christ. Do it to the end that they may reform the church as much as it may be, seeing that our faith gives us reason to believe that it would be ruled most prosperously under that ordinance. For then, what would be done away with are the simoniacal entanglement of the clergy in temporal

¹ **Act 9:5** And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” An ox goad was a stick with a pointed piece of iron on its tip used to prod the oxen when plowing. The farmer would prick the animal to steer it in the right direction. Sometimes the animal would rebel by kicking at the goad, and this would result in the goad being driven even further into its flesh. The more an ox rebelled, the more it suffered.

things, the most scandalous ignorance, and the sloth and heresy which now disgrace the heritage of Christ. And also because of this, wars would come to an end, and the changing of kingdoms by conquests, and the iniquitous spoiling of the poor dwellers in them, since the lordship of the world would then be wholly in the power of the secular arm. And what is best of all, as Christ's word would run to and fro freely everywhere, many more would wing their way to heaven. For then too, what would come to an end are those blasphemies about the spiritual power of popes in respect to absolution from sin and punishment, and the unwarranted granting of indulgences — things which Christ and his apostles never granted — along with an infinite number of other blasphemies. Nor can PSEUDIS, or any other disciple of Antichrist, adduce perfunctory evidence to show that temporal lords have no license to correct these abuses, inasmuch as that would be the same as saying that, seeing they have no power to repair the mischief they have done, they must of necessity perish under the guilt of it. However, we tell them that not only do they have the power to deprive a church habitually delinquent of its temporalities, but they are bound to do so on pain of the condemnation of hell — since they ought to repent of their folly, and make satisfaction for their sin in having thus defiled the church of Christ.

Alithia. You have said enough, brother, on this doctrine concerning the clergy, a doctrine especially hateful to our superiors. And it is all the more, inasmuch as you do not show how your doctrine may be acted on, without making too great a *disturbance in the church*. I pray you, pass on to the subject of the SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY, observing the same order.

Phronesis. I have never had any scholastic matter more at heart, than that on which I have now dwelt.¹ For it appears to me that it would tend above all things to the honor of God, and the advantages of the universal church. Therefore, it seems to me that the one who neglects this duty, from fear of losing temporal things and the friendship of great men, indeed, even to save his life, is notably deficient in respect to perfect charity, and the love of his king and kingdom.

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I do not doubt that the apostles and other discreet disciples of Christ, would have defended this doctrine, even to the death. But the king and kingdom are worthy of condemnation on account of this sin to which they have given their consent. What faithful servant of the king, therefore, may remain silent with regard to this great crime? For the sovereign authorises by such conduct, the greatest transgression on the part of his clergy, and he gives his sanction to the root of that evil by which the kingdom under him is cut to pieces. And since it is necessary for true secular dominion, that the holder of it should rule justly, and so be opposed to this crime, it appears that, in this case, the king and the nobles of his kingdom govern without the care that is proper to their office. For according to the law of England, if a tenant withholds his service from his chief lord for two years, the chief lord, by the authority of the king of England, may seize, in his own behalf, the land which his subject had unworthily occupied for his own purposes. How much more then should the King of kings confiscate the property of kingdoms, if the service they owe has been neglected for many times two years. It is plain that they ought to serve Christ by refusing all treacherous consent to the claims of Antichrist, and by opposing his works as contrary to Christ, to the extent of their power! We see clearly how long the time has been through which the service so due to God has been neglected. And as it seems to me

¹ Phronesis declines to speak of matrimony here, but continues with his current topic. See note [next page](#).

that any liege man of the king, who fails to expose such misdoing, would be a slothful traitor to his king, his country, and his God.

And with regard to your objection touching the fear of the *disturbance to the kingdom* that would ensue upon carrying out this doctrine, consider well how Antichrist has blinded our military men in this by his chief agents. For they are bold to invade other kingdoms, either on just grounds, or on those that are doubtful, but they are slothful in respect to the discharge of a small duty, and in charitably assisting the inhabitants of their own country, whom they ought to love in a high degree for the sake of their Lord. Nor do we hesitate to say that Antichrist, with his principal agents, has introduced this slothfulness. It may thus be shown that there is a facility for performing this duty. It is well known that upon the death of a bishop or abbot, the king of England, by virtue of his regalia ¹ — or anyone possessing large endowments — takes possession of those endowments as the sovereign; and a new election is not entered upon without royal assent. Nor will the temporalities in such a case pass from their last occupant to his successor, without that assent. Let the king, therefore, refuse to continue the innovation which has been the great delinquency of his predecessors, and in a short time the whole kingdom will be freed from the mischiefs which have flowed from this source.

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Who, I ask, would dare to seize on such temporalities, without obtaining license from the king? Nor need the king or his kingdom, to do themselves justice in this matter, strike with the sword, kill any man, or exercise their authority presumptuously. Nature abhors sudden changes, and this great transgression made progress little by little. So if it were made to decrease by successive steps, as the death of the occupants succeed each other, then with a small amount of prudence, the result would be anything but hurtful either to king or people. But those who among the clergy or elsewhere oppose this doctrine, are falsifiers of the law of Scripture, and thus they are traitors in the worst sense, to God and the king.

From all that has been said, we conclude that the king and his kingdom ought to protect poor priests who promulgate this doctrine, against their own brethren and all enemies whomever. For otherwise they are born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, and not of God. ^{Joh 1.13} And so they are not by birth sons of God, or of the kingdom of heaven, but are children of the king of hell, for they are lovers of the sons of the father of lies. ^{Joh 8.44} It may be that false brethren and other potentates among the clergy of the kingdom, will conspire against those who spread this opinion, contriving their death by the most unfounded falsehoods. But where is the believer who would apprehend the destruction of this veritable doctrine? Where did the daring to proclaim these Gospel truths come from, if not from the hope in Christ's defending, and God's protecting? For whoever opposes these views of things, must without a doubt be ranked as Antichrist — as one contrary to the words of Christ. Woe, then, to those who impugn this catholic doctrine, so salutary to the whole body of true believers.²

¹ *Regalia*: royal rights, prerogatives and privileges.

² Chapters xx. xxi. xxiii. contain some remarks on the subject of matrimony. Phronesis adduces the authority for this "venerable sacrament" from Mat 19. He inveighs against the encouragement given by the clergy to frequent divorces. "I am anything but pleased," he says, "with such a multitude of causes for divorce, founded as they are on merely human ordinances, as is especially the case with that of consanguinity." He objects to the present form, "I take you as my wife" (*cipio te in uxorem*), because it is not true that the rite of matrimony is performed by, or consists in these words. The consent of the parties, and the approval of God, would be sufficient to make this

16. On Penance.

Alithia. You would oblige me now by stating your views of the SACRAMENT OF PENANCE. To define it seems difficult, for it is said that penitence has three parts, like a harp: namely, contrition of heart, confession with the mouth, and satisfaction by deeds. And its genus, accordingly, is not easily specified, these three things being diverse in genus.

Phronesis. It appears to me that penitence consists in the condition of the mind; and these other things which are called the parts of penitence, are its accidents, which go together to form its completeness. Contrition belongs to the mind alone; it is not an object of sense, inasmuch as the contrite confess to the Lord. And this department of penitence, though little esteemed, is yet of the greatest virtue; so that without it, the rest avail nothing. Confession is made up of this feeling, and of an oral utterance made to God alone. And thus the fathers under the old law, in common with those of the New Testament, were accustomed to confess. Penitence, in the sense of satisfaction by works, is made up of the two former, [i.e., the feeling and the oral utterance to God], together with a confession made to the priest in private.

Now from a regard to gain by it, it is to this last view of penitence, [a private confession made to the priest], that we give most attention. But whether this third kind is necessary to salvation, or on what authority it was introduced, is a matter of dispute with many. But we must confide on this point in John,¹ who in his gloss on the decrees says (after stating many opinions which he censures) that Innocent III invented it. And to confirm it, Innocent established the law “*Omnis utrusque sexus*,” which is set forth in the fifth decretal. But in my opinion, as I have explained more at length, it would be better for the church if she contented herself with the first and second kinds of penitence as mentioned above. But though the third form (confession to a priest) is injurious to many, and is the cause of many evils to both parties (the priest and the one confessing), nevertheless it brings many good results to the church. And since it might possibly be well-conducted, it appears to me by supposition that it may be necessary, and so really necessary, to the extent that many are deterred from repeating their sin, through the shame of being obliged to confess the sin, and of submitting to the penance enjoined, and of being obliged to confess what they have done elsewhere.

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No one can believe that a man may not be saved without confession of this kind. Otherwise, all the dead from Christ’s ascension to the time of Innocent III are lost — a horrible thing to believe. We rather think that a much greater number are lost under the law of that pope on this subject, than would ever have been lost for the lack of it. Besides, it generally happens that he who absolves, is not acquainted with the magnitude of the sin confessed; just as he does not know if the man who is confessing is contrite; though he is well aware that unless he *is* so, his sin is not removed. How, then, can he utter falsehoods in the name of Christ, and so

contract regular in the absence of all sensible signs whatsoever. He then passes on to the mystic union of Christ with the church, in its three parts, — “militant, sleeping, and triumphant: — the militant, is the believers on their way to heaven; the sleeping, those destined to salvation, but suffering for a while in purgatory [suffering, *patientes*, seems to be used in this connexion more in a negative than a positive sense.]; the triumphant, the blessed at rest in heaven. Of these, one vast church will be made in the Day of Judgment.”

¹ That is, John Duns Scotus.

impudently absolve sin, and enjoin a penance which he cannot know is proportional to the transgression? Neither is it lawful to burden the church with new traditions, especially those which have a suspicious character, for what we have is already sufficient. And the laws about confession in the Scripture, have served us well enough for more than a thousand years. On what ground is it, then, that without a law, a third kind of penitence has been introduced in so unlikely a manner? It appears to me that this papal law is to be admitted as far as the discretion of the person who confesses may deem profitable.

Alithia. I see, brother, that you allow but little weight to this papal law. And it seems to me that for the same reason, you would make light of the absolution from penalty and guilt, and the full remission of sin granted by the pope, and of that burden of sin which the prelate often aggravates by fulminating his horrible excommunications — and so the decision of the court of Rome on such matters would fall to the ground.

Phronesis. The observations you make seem to involve much truth, inasmuch as in the Scriptures, without any additions on the part of the Roman court, it is sufficiently set forth how every man should regulate his life. And if the injunctions of Scripture are attended to, it follows that the man who lives to the end, the life so prescribed, will be saved. [Mat 24.13](#) Hence, all these fictitious dogmas are generally promulgated to keep the people in subjection, to detain them in a fallacious obedience. And a blasphemous covetousness is the damnable root of the whole of them.

Let us look, then, and see what is enjoined and commanded by the Lord in the law of perfect liberty, and observe it. Let us abstain from what is forbidden, and from giving attention to newly ordained laws, and this will be enough. Accordingly, what is over and above this is not only evil in its origin, but is evil in itself, and it blinds numbers [of believers]. Concerning all vows, promises, and other private observances, let the believer look up to the almighty power of Jesus Christ; let him bend all the strength of his soul to living, from then on, in more perfectness, so as to be serviceable to the church.

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Let him repent of his past evil life, strengthen within him the purpose of sinning thus no more. And this, in my opinion, suffices to destroy his guilt, and to save him, whatever our superiors may say to the contrary. But in all this, let the believer beware of any insincerity toward God. With regard to the words in Mat 16.19, “Whatever you bind,” etc. let the believer demand from the false bishop when he alleges this saying of our Lord’s, if his own life of holiness, by its resemblance to the life of Peter, is such as to make him a true vicar of Peter. If the presumptuous hypocrite impudently affirms that it is so, ask him to show the similarity of his life to that of Peter, especially in the grace given him to work miracles, and in the lowliness of his poverty. Peter did not presume on the possession such power; how then can this hypocrite claim it? And since he cannot prove himself to be a true vicar of Christ, or a member of the church of Christ, what is it to him that Christ promised this power to the blessed Peter, seeing that he is neither Peter, nor by the lowness and holiness of his life is he the vicar of Peter?

17. On the Signs of Contrition.

Alithia. Tell me, I pray you, brother Phronesis, what the signs are which denote true contrition, inasmuch as you have exposed the craft of Antichrist, acutely though obscurely. And say whether the Cæsarean sects, and new orders, which set aside the rules of Christ and observe

and value the new regulations they have devised, sin in this. Or is there true penitence in their earnest and bold observance of such rules?

Phronesis. Not only the true believers among us, but the disciples of Antichrist, unite in confessing that to remove sin, men must experience true contrition of heart. Accordingly, the first tendency to sorrow, which is not sufficient to remove sin, they call attrition; and the grief which follows, and is adequate, they call contrition. But still they are not able to distinguish between them, nor to say where contrition really exists. But I have spoken of contrition in the third part of my sixty-four sermons.¹

ON THE SIGNS OF CONTRITION. 181

I have said there, that sorrow is sufficient to take away sin, but that it must be more on account of the loss of grace than on account of any temporal good whatsoever. And so long as sorrow of this nature is lacking to the sinner, he does not grieve in contrition for the loss of the husband of the church. Nor is the quantity of grief to be looked to as regards its intensity, or merely its duration, but as regards both taken together. Therefore it appears that so long as we are in this life, we ought to be the subjects of grief for sin, in act or habits, since we protract our grief for temporal calamities to a great length. From all this, it further appears that the true penitent does not return to his past sin. Thus the doctors say, with truth, that to be penitent is to mourn over past sins, and not to commit again the sins so regarded. Hence it further appears that it is only the man who is contrite, that will be saved from his sin — the reprobate, by the sudden termination of his sorrow, shows that there is no contrition in him. Hence it follows further that, just as the pope and others who administer confession do not know who will be saved and who is reprobate, so they do not know who is contrite. Hence it is a satanic presumption for men to falsely pretend that they will absolutely absolve this man or that from sin by laying their hands on his head. I ask, what does this sensible sign avail — the leaden seal, or the giving of money — to awaken contrition in the heart of the sinner? Truly nothing; and such administrators of confession deceive with their falsehoods, both themselves and those whom they confess.

But it is manifest that the Christian, by his trust in the compassion of Jesus Christ, and in his pain and holy purpose, may know from within himself that his sin is removed, and that he is contrite in spirit. Again, as to further conclusions, be firmly convinced that these new sects sin grievously against Christ, in thus contemning his ordinance, and delighting rather in their own frivolous observances.

Our possessioners ought to know, both from the life of Christ and his apostles, and from the commandments of Scripture, that those endowments which they thus obtain, are repugnant to that state which they profess, in name at least — though falsely and with a fraudulent intention. Yet along with these deceitful professions, they are ever plotting to increase their possessions, to defend them, and to destroy those who would impair them. It is repugnant to the Divine justice that such men should go unpunished. The same is also true of the friars, who blaspheme God, and defend most anxiously what is in their possession, and bitterly prosecute those who, in the name of the Lord, expose their fraud. The same is also true concerning their love of state, or of the Cæsarean or papal law, neglecting the state or law of the land.

¹ This reference shows that the above number of the Reformer's sermons were published at this time.

This weightiest of sins is not to be taken away by flourishing pompous words, or displaying sensible signs, or by absolutions, or by the invention of indulgences — more especially when the power and opportunity of making satisfaction are within reach, and the sinner remains obstinate in his sin. God discerns the hearts and intents of men, the condition and circumstances of their passions. It is evil, then, for a man to blaspheme God, and say that by a sensible sign that the man has invented, he can absolutely blot out the pollutions of those who are reprobate. Could there be a more presumptuous blasphemy than for God's enemy to falsely profess that he can so reconcile God, even though God's everlasting law and clear justice contradict him? Satan has suggested to these possessioners, that if they were to have such lordship in worldly things, then it would be good for establishing their false dominion, to invest themselves by means of such blasphemies, with an imaginary spiritual power — a power which cannot be assailed because it is not palpable to the senses. And thus they procure for themselves authority from kings to burn all their opponents as heretics. Thus the pretended power of Antichrist was artfully introduced.

18. Of Extreme Unction.

Alithia. You have said quite enough on this subject, brother Phronesis. But I pray, inform me a bit concerning the last sacrament, which is called EXTREME UNCTION. It has its foundation in the passage, James 5.14-15, “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

Phronesis. This foundation for that sacrament does not appear to be adequate. For the faithful might urge with sufficient reason, that this holy apostle does not specify the *last* sickness, but merely says that consolation should be administered by the presbyter when anyone is sick. And as in those parts of the world, it is in the nature of oil to promote the health of the body, so he mentions this anointing — not that the oil affects the soul, but that the prayer of a devout priest poured forth, has a healing effect, so that God helps the sickness of the soul.

ON EXTREME UNCTION. 183

If that bodily anointing had been a *sacrament* in the sense in which it is now represented, Christ and his apostles would not have been silent respecting its promulgation and due administration. Nevertheless, I grant you that to some, this corporal anointing is a sacrament, other things being equal; but then it is necessary that the presbyters would heal the sick with their own devout prayers. Still, beware lest through too light a temper, you understand the words of the apostle imperfectly.

You may possibly err so far as to believe that the mere fact that a priest has prayed for a sick man, is sufficient to remit any guilt that may attach to that man. But many have been sick, and been anointed, who have nevertheless been doomed to everlasting condemnation. It is not to be believed that if a priest does so, his prayer of faith will save the sick. For then it would be a part of the faith of the church to believe that whoever, in his last moments, receives this sacrament, would be saved by faith in Christ. This sacrament would then be the most necessary of all sacraments, for the recipient of the other sacraments may be finally impenitent, and be lost — but without a doubt, so may the one who receives *this* sacrament.

Thus in the sacrament of baptism, and confirmation, and all the rest, Antichrist has invented unauthorised ceremonies; and to the burden of the church, without warrant from Scripture, he has heaped them on subjected believers. But he has overlooked other necessary sacraments, as is seen in respect to the seven works of spiritual mercy ¹ — which ought to be a sacrament esteemed by believers, and especially by priests. But this sacrament, though very necessary, has no temporal gain going along with it, and thus it is irksome to those in high places, and it is faithlessly neglected.

From this it appears to me that those who institute such private orders and publish such general rules — to cause sacraments of this nature to be universally received by those who are subject to them — blaspheme God, especially when God is pleased to save many without receiving this sacrament. How like Antichrist this presumption is: for a prelate to assert and maintain, without foundation, that no one will be saved without partaking a sacrament of this sort!

But whether a rich man, who is thus anointed, is permitted to subsequently recover, and whether the priest ought to have certain knowledge that the man so anointed will not survive, and whether this sacrament of extreme unction can be repeated, is a matter of doubt with many. But I leave it to the weak, to uselessly protract difficult questions of this nature. I merely state one thing as probable: that a man who is thus sick, and thus anointed, and is afterwards convalescent, cannot again receive the sacrament of extreme unction.

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19. Of the Various Kinds of Ministers.

Alithia. Pray inform me, brother, concerning the various kinds of ministers in the church, for you consume our time needlessly in deriding the doctrine of extreme unction.

Phronesis. Derision, I am satisfied, is a lawful weapon, and may be laudably employed on occasion — for Christ, Elias, and the apostles, have all availed themselves of it. And why should we not bring it into use against heretics? Nevertheless, as the excellence of ridicule lies in its moderate use, and is rarely and difficultly attained, I will abstain from it, and speak of the kinds of ministers in the church. Now Christ was the highest minister in the church since, according to the apostle [Paul], he was the minister of the circumcision. ^{Rom 15.8} And in my opinion, no one of the ministers of our mother is worthy of praise, except as he is a follower of Christ in his conversation.² Hence I think it a matter of great difficulty to establish, on sufficient authority, the institution of our new orders.³

There are three kinds of ministers acknowledged in the church, each kind including many subordinate gradations. Of these the first and lowest are simple laborers. The second and intermediate class is composed of potentates, the defenders of the ordinances of Christ in the church. But the last and highest are the priests of Christ, who rightly preach his Gospel. This portion should be as the soul is to the body of our mother the church. Among these, however, there is most deception. For Antichrist has, in the guise of clergy, twelve agents who machinate against Christ's church. They are commonly called popes, cardinals, patriarchs, archpræsuls,

¹ From Thomas Aquinas, as contained in the *Catholic Catechism*. In order, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, bury the dead, shelter the traveler, comfort the sick, and free the imprisoned.

² *Conversation*: the way one conducts his life.

³ That is, the super-biblical offices of pope, cardinal, patriarch, archbishop, prelate, archdeacon, etc.

bishops, archdeacons, officials, deacons, monks, canons, false brethren lately introduced, and questors. Now all these twelve, especially the Cæsarean prelates and the friars, thus unwarrantably admitted, are plainly the disciples of Antichrist, because they do away with the liberty of Christ, burden holy church, and hinder the Gospel from having free course, as of old.

As the last and greatest danger among those enumerated by Paul, is that incurred from false brethren,¹ something should be said concerning these. And as they falsely assert that they were introduced before the incarnation of our Lord, we must see in what way they should be generally defined.

ON THE VARIOUS KINDS OF MINISTERS. 185

The Bishop of Lincoln, in one of his sermons, says of the private orders of monks in general (but of the friar in particular), that he is a dead body that has come out of the tomb wrapped in funeral weeds,² and set in motion among men by the fiend. He is a dead body, he continues, because as vigorous as his bodily life may be, yet his soul is dead — a death far more truly such than the death of our earthly man, as in 1Tim 5.6, “But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” He is a putrid and stinking corpse, because the natural life of the body should be derived from the spiritual life of the soul, by God’s law. Secondly, he comes out of the grave because, as he says, his four walls shut him in as one dead to the world, and shut up and buried in it. But inasmuch as shutting up the soul is far more excellent than shutting up the man bodily, let us mark the four cardinal virtues — justice, fortitude, prudence, and temperance³ — and also mark how the friars tear away, almost asunder, these four walls. And so they break out from the confinement of the soul, and treacherously pollute believers in the church. Christ and his apostles accordingly denounced them as hypocrites.^{Mat 23} And hence, to deceive the church, they dress themselves in funeral vestments, which the religion of Christ does not require.

Some wear russet above,⁴ as a sign of their labors, and a white garment under, to signify the purity of their mind. Others wear black funeral vestments over all, as a sign, they say, of their continual sorrow and pain on account of sin; and they wear white clothes underneath, as the sign of their purity of mind. A third class are clad in white, both without and within, wearing russet to denote the labor they undergo for the church. The fourth order dresses like the second, in black and white, but in the fashion of their dress, and their form of burial, they differ from the two following, as does the first. The deformity of their appearance, they say, shows the utility of their body, and the girdle they tie around them in a knot, shows that they endure a constant and distressing bodily penance. But we do not see the reality of what is thus signified, since they are not prophets, but *hypocrites* who seduce the people, and give their attention more to shutting up the body than the soul. They pretend that by thus shutting up the body, they have put heaven and heavenly things in view. The plants that grow in the cloister signify the vigor of those virtues in which they surpass all; and the tree in the midst of it denotes a

¹ **2Cor 11:26** *in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; Gal 2:4* And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage).

² *Weed*: a black garment (dress) worn by a widow as a sign of mourning.

³ These virtues derive from Plato’s Republic, Book IV. Ambrose, Augustine, and Aquinas adapted them.

⁴ Russet is a coarse cloth made of wool that is dyed a shade of grey or brown. By the statute of 1363, poor English people were required to wear russet or cheap blanket. Franciscans wore russet as a sign of humility.

ladder along which they mount by the steps of virtue, to heavenly things. But was there ever a more hypocritical lie? For they eat of the forbidden fruit in the midst of their paradise, and they make all men who follow after them, utterly drunk. As to the Bishop of Lincoln's fourth particular, that every such corpse has been set in motion among men by the devil, the believer cannot doubt that men of this sort, who break out from the cloister of the soul, are set in motion by fiends — since the fiends (who most love hypocrisy, and such deceiving of the human race) run of course to the support of such heretical fallacies.

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For the sin of hypocrisy, as it is most contrary to the first principles of truth, and as it most seduces the people, is carefully promoted by the fiend. Thus this description of the fourfold member, set forth by that holy bishop, is made good; and the blessed Hildegard makes the same statement more expressly in her prophecy,¹ before these friars were introduced.²

20. *On the Begging Friars.*

Alithia. I could wish that you would make some statement of your opinion concerning the begging of the friars. For many are of the opinion that Christ begged in this way; and it is certain that the friars founded their system on this assumption. This opinion has more colour from the fact that in the Psalms it is said that Iscariot persecuted a man who was poor and a beggar. And because the blessed Peter says, Acts 1.16-20, that this prophecy was spoken by David concerning Christ and Iscariot, it is not a sufficient reply to say that Christ begged only in the person of his members; for certainly the psalm refers to the person of Christ, whom Iscariot persecuted.³

Phronesis. I have affirmed elsewhere in many ways, that the term *mendicancy*, like the term *prayer*, is to be understood in different senses. For one kind of mendicancy is *innuitive*,⁴ another *insinulative*,⁵ and a third *declamatory*.⁶ One kind of begging comes of God alone, another of man; accordingly I have elsewhere defined begging as the petition of a needy man for bodily alms, for the relief of his need, purely on the ground of compassion. In this sense, Christ in his humanity begged of the Trinity, and consequently of himself, when saying the Lord's prayer which he had established. And as Augustine often asserts, everyone in repeating that prayer, must necessarily beg from the Lord. Now we may say that Christ begged in his humanity, but only *innuitively* of his brethren, since he tells them, in fact, how for his love of them he became so poor and needy, as the apostle says in 2Cor 8.9.

ON THE MENDICANCY OF THE FRIARS. 187

Now such real begging, without *insinulative* petition, offered in words, is a faultless and most noble begging, for it became Christ to beg thus, for the interests of his church. But if the friars make a sophistical use of such begging, and beg stoutly from the people with clamour and

¹ Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), also known as Sibyl of the Rhine. She was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, Christian mystic, and scholar.

² For some account of this pretended prophetess see Mosheim, iii. 83.

³ **Psa 109:8** Let his days be few, *And* let another take his office.

⁴ *Innuitive*: here it means *voluntary* – asked according to custom (as in *inured*), and not as required by law.

⁵ *Insinulative*: introducing or inserting oneself in a subtle manner – inserting oneself into a situation uninvited.

⁶ *Declamatory*: openly demanding or claiming a right – haranguing someone to obtain it.

annoyance, who can doubt that this begging is a diabolical and sophistical ¹ perversion of this act of Christ's, that was so full of goodness, and so serviceable to his church? Beyond this, the friars defend their falsehood by adding that it is not only proper, but absolutely meritorious to thus embrace a life of voluntary poverty. I have assailed this position by many arguments in the vulgar tongue. In the first place, from Mat 5.17, that Christ, who came "not to destroy the law and the prophets," says in Deu 15.4, "There shall be no needy man nor beggar among you." Why then should Christ violate this law by thus begging from his own people? In the same manner, Pro 30.8, Solomon says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Christ, therefore, was not compelled to do away with the virtue that is thus said to exist in a medium between the two, since the believers supplied him with all such necessities.

Job says (29.3), "Oh that it were with me as in the months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth." Here it is clear as noon-day, that this pious man piously prays that he might possess the prosperity he had in times past, which according to their doctrine, would be a blame-worthy petition. Paul speaks to the same effect (Acts 20.33), "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel: indeed, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities." From this it appears that bodily labor is indirectly enjoined, and mendicity is forbidden. Also 2Thes 3.10, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you that if any would not work neither should he eat; for we hear that there are some who walk disorderly among you, not working at all, but are busybodies." From this it is shown, as clearly as before, that the apostle forbids begging of this sort. Again, 1Thes 4.11, "But we beseech you, brethren, that you increase more and more; and that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." This likewise shows that in begging, the friars violate the injunction of the apostle, and thus of our Lord. Also Eph. 4.28, "Let him that stole steal no more." But we may see how directly this command is disobeyed by the friars — for oftentimes by their knavery, contrary to the will of our Lord, they delude men, and seize the property of others by the foulest means, and neglect to labor with their own hands. Yet the apostle (as it appears from Acts 18.3) labored as a tentmaker, that the church might not be burdened. God enjoined corporeal labor on the first sinner, Gen 3.19: "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread."

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Are we to regard the sect of the friars as more excellent than the first man, or as a better example than the apostle Paul? Likewise, 2Cor 6.1, the apostle lays down the following injunction: "We beseech you also that you do not receive the grace of God in vain." Do not those friars receive the grace of God in vain, who are endowed by God with bodily strength, and have the opportunity, and yet will not work — to the great burden of the church? Again, when Christ prohibits such public begging, inasmuch as he who thus begs is burdensome to the community, a course of life which Christ through Paul repeatedly forbids, how can the new orders have the effrontery to proclaim such open mendicancy in the case of able-bodied men, and found a new form of devotion on-such an ordinance? Do not Francis, and other idiot traffickers, depart from the faith of the church, and from the Lord Jesus Christ? Furthermore, when paupers, the blind, the sick, and the infirm, ought to receive such alms, according to God's commandment (Luke 14.13), the robust mendicant taking the relief away from them,

¹ *Sophistical*: plausible but misleading.

wrongs this class of men; and what robbery can be more infamous? Such beggary is contrary to the law of nature. What blasphemous necessity, then, could impose it upon our Lord Jesus Christ, especially when it neither became him to so beg, nor have the Gospel commandments (in which all truth is involved) expressed anything of the sort. How dare the friars, then, thus blaspheme the Lord Christ Jesus? For in abstaining from such mendicancy, Christ and his disciples obeyed the tenth commandment in the decalogue, the law of nature, and the bidding of the Old Testament.

21. Further Showing That the Mendicancy of the Friars Is Not Consistent with Scripture.

Phronesis. I see clearly from the reasons adduced, and from many others that might be brought forward if needed, that this mendicancy of the friars is not only without scriptural authority, but a manifest blasphemy. Yet it may be well to go briefly over the poor evidence adduced by the friars in its support. In John 4.7, it is written that Christ asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. Who can refuse to attribute such mendicancy to Christ, they argue, when he was thus poor? But in weighing this argument we should define clearly what is meant by one man begging from another.

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For FIRST, when a creditor or his agent seeks a debt, he does not beg in doing so; and much less does a lord, when he claims to be served with what is his own. Accordingly, though Christ, as Lord, received gifts from his people, it does not follow from this that he begged of them, but rather that he required a ministering of goods that were his own, for the common benefit of those so ministering to him. Thus some students of the Gospel are of the opinion that Christ asked for the drink, out of the faith and devotion from the woman; for it is not likely that Christ when hungry would have asked for water to drink, especially as it was the sixth hour of the day, and the disciples had gone into the village to buy food. Moreover, if Christ had asked for material water, he would probably have drunk it at once, without delay. But when the woman was ready to give him water, he deferred drinking; and some time after, when his disciples exhorted him to eat, he said to them, “I have food of which you do not know.” [Joh 4.32](#) The friars are therefore more foolish in this, than this woman. She mistook the meaning of Christ through an excusable ignorance; while they equivocate damnably by nefarious falsehoods concerning the Holy Spirit. I wish they were doomed to beg nothing of the people but water, until they have made satisfaction for the error of so heretical a lie against God.

In the SECOND place, the friars endeavor to establish their falsehood by that passage in Luke 19.5 where Christ says, “Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house.” From those words these ignorant men conclude that Christ begged food and lodging of Zaccheus. Let these untaught grammarians acquire some knowledge of the use of terms, before they utter such blasphemies, and neither lie nor avail themselves of lies, to defend their begging. For, perceiving the piety of Zaccheus, Christ spoke these words on account of the charity that was in him, and not from being in misery or destitution himself. So let friars mark these terms, and blush to thus falsely ascribe beggary to Christ. They should rather regard him in the light of a supreme and most generous Physician who, from his surpassing charity, is pleased to abide with men.

In the THIRD place, these blasphemers argue from Mat 21.2, where Christ sent two disciples to Jerusalem for an ass and her colt, on which he might go up there. Did he not then beg from the

city of Jerusalem? Now let these heretics blush to say that it is after the example of the Lord that they beg from men without leave that is sought or obtained. For Christ, the Lord of all, did not need to thus mount a colt and an ass, except to fulfill the Scripture (Zec 9.9); and to prefigure how he would ride over the Gentiles as colts, and the Jews as asses (stupidly continuing under the burdens of the law); and still more when his disciples laid their garments on those beasts; that is to say, while the apostles taught the virtues (and principally the virtue of humility) by the efficacy of their example.

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No indeed, I repeat: Christ mounted these animals to condemn the riding of the pope and cardinals, and of the inferior bishops too, who are wont to ride in superfluous pomp on war-horses decked out with gold and silk.

In the *FOURTH* place, these blind heretics argue that Christ begged lodging and bread for his last supper in Jerusalem, which they rest on Mat 26.18. But let these shameless heretics know that the words of the Gospel plainly condemn their heresy. For the words of Christ are, “Go into the city to such a man, and say to him, The Master says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.” It appears clearer than light that Christ speaks there as Lord, and not as a mendicant. For as in Mat 21.3, this Lord taught his disciples, saying, “If any man says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them; and straightway he will send them,” so he speaks in this instance as Lord and Master. Let the heretic mark this consequence — “The Lord has need of them” — and it follows, “straightway they will let them go.” Therefore the Truth, uttering those words, begged for the animals referred to — for in both these cases, they attribute to Christ robbery of the poor. Christ, therefore, in addressing these words to his disciples, “Go into the city...” — and especially in fulfilling those words in a manner consistent with justice — shows the extent of his dominion. Because John, in the thirteenth¹ chapter, says, “You call me Master and Lord,” etc. [Joh 13.13](#) Hence, according to the evangelical doctrine, Christ’s disciples dare not call themselves masters and lords, but servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.²

Let heretics, then, compare these three sayings of Christ. In the *first* place, how he enjoined his disciples, in general terms, that they were to go into a certain city, as if he had said, “Because of my universal dominion, whatever I ask of anyone in my name is provided by him.” In the *second* place, they should mark the expression, “The Master says;” for Christ who speaks is greater in station than any other man that can be named. Thus, to denote the certainty of what he says, and to denote that teachers are worthy of their maintenance, he distinctly subjoins these words, “The Master says...” But let the same men mark the *third* expression also, “My time is at hand;” for other men whom Christ does not illuminate in so high a degree, withdraw their help even when they suppose their dearest friends are near death. So when Christ speaks with such certainty and authority, he shows that he makes it imperative on the part of that citizen to do as required.

¹ Originally, “twelfth.”

² [Mat 23:10-11](#) “And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.”

Therefore, to conclude, it is manifest to believers, that the Gospel, so far from teaching that Christ practised such mendicancy, condemns the custom as the height of heresy.

ON THE LETTERS OF THE FRATERNITIES. 191

*22. On the Letters of the Fraternities.*¹

Alithia. You have argued with sufficient shrewdness in regard to this second blasphemy of the friars. But I pray you, touch a little on a third — on that relating to their Letters of Fraternity. For the church is too commonly deceived by that means.

Phronesis. I am willing to say of them in Latin, what I have formerly expressed in English. But I am apprehensive that PSEUDIS will charge me with wasting my labor in doing so, both because I often repeat the same doctrine, and also (since the malevolence of the friars increases) I am imprudent enough to speak of their last doings as worse than the former. Nevertheless, God willing, this is not the end at which I aim. I suppose, on the contrary, that some friars whom God shall see fit to teach, will be converted and devoutly embrace the religion of Christ in its primitive purity — and abandoning their perfidy,² they will seek or obtain freedom from Antichrist, and return of their own accord to the primeval religion of our Lord. And then, like Paul, they will build up the church.

But in proceeding to deal with these false letters of the friars, it is important to know something of their history; and this being understood, their simoniacal heresy will be immediately manifest. For they do not issue such rules except with the expectation of realizing gain, and of giving strength to their unlawful confederacy. How then, I ask, can they be other in character than simoniacal heretics? In confirmation of this showing, when help is denied them as regards temporal things, or the defence of them, they straightway murmur. Beyond doubt, there is implied in this practice a fraudulent buying and selling; and it is equally certain that God must hate this hypocritical traffic.

The friars must also beware not to give occasion to the faithful to discover their fallacies, or to introduce unauthorised novelties, since they ought to know that Christ meant his church to be free from such things; and inasmuch as the friars do not act thus, they fraudulently diminish the liberty of the church of Christ. On many grounds, it appears that the friars have fallen into a radical heresy. For they expressly pretend in these letters, that the individuals to whom they grant them, will be made partakers of merits from themselves after death.

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But where can you find a more presumptuous blasphemy? For neither they themselves, nor the men with whom they carry on this traffic, can know whether they may not be condemned in hell. How blind is their folly, then, in making assertions on a subject of which they know so little! But it seems they have such an innate tendency to falsehood, that they do not hesitate to assert, contrary to eternal judgment, that they can do the things they cannot do.

¹ These are not Letters of Indulgence, which Wycliffe addresses in 24 below. Rather, these are dispensations of saving merit, based on the merit of the friars. These letters (for a price) impute to the recipient the righteousness and presumed salvation of the friar. — WHG

² *Perfidy*: betrayal of a trust.

Again, by withdrawing his help, no man should be the means of another man's damnation. But as the friars give us to understand in this matter, it is in their power to save both themselves and others from condemnation. So that, supposing any man to be lost, they are to be blamed for withholding their assistance from him. For if they promise to another that he will be a partaker of *their* merits after death, then they manifestly imply next, both that the man himself will be worthy of such participation after death, and that they themselves at present merit future happiness — because if each party were a foredoomed member of Satan, then such a granting must be beyond the power of these friars.

Moreover, the friars, by following the manner of the hypocrites, flatly condemn themselves in this. For according to the evangelical doctrine in Mat 6.3, such alms should be given secretly, so that their right hand should not know what the left hand does. But the friars, by the letters which they so assiduously display to the people, give plain indication that they say to my people, that they themselves are holy and grave men in the church. And what is more than sounding a trumpet before them,^{Mat 6.2} they send out letters to confirm the impression of their sanctity — letters which men are to constantly preserve in their chests.

Also, inasmuch as it is among the provisions of all law, that no man should deceive his neighbor in any worldly matter, much more should he not do so in respect to spiritual things concerning a man's everlasting heritage. Since, therefore, those who trade in temporal goods require some security for their merchandise, this is much more requisite in so precious a commerce as that relating to the salvation of souls. But since the friars have no certainty in regard to themselves, of the blessings hoped for, they have spread churlish¹ fraud on all sides. Are we to believe that God will turn from his own course of justice, because such maniac concessions have been made by friars? Indeed, I have heard some madmen rave about temporal good, and secular dominion, but I never heard any who so horribly blaspheme as these men do, in thus presuming themselves to be as God. Doctors have demonstrated, from the faith of Scripture, that no one can properly grant anything to another, except as God has first granted it. And it would follow, therefore, that whatever the friars grant men, God has first granted it. But since grants from God do not depend on friars, nor on their seals and parchment, it appears a more than devilish presumption to affect to grant a share in the merits of men, who themselves are hypocrites.

FRIARS SELL THEIR PRAYERS AND MERITS. 193

Many simple people, however, confide as much in these frivolous letters as in an article of faith, like that of the communion of saints, or salvation by Jesus Christ. How then can such a heresy fail to place in the way of the believer, an occasion for falling? Will a man shrink from acts of licentiousness and fraud if he believes that soon after, by the aid of a little money bestowed on friars, he may obtain an entire absolution from the crime he has committed? Accordingly, this heresy is supposed to be the cause why the faith of the laity is found to be so wavering.

23. How the Friars Falsely Sell Their Prayers and Merits.

Alithia. Since the subtle evasions of the friars are so many, I pray you strike at their root, that this evil may be altogether rooted out from the church; because I see clearly that the

¹ Originally, "childish;" the context makes it clear that this practice is not innocent or immature, but ungracious.

mendicants affect to dispense more merit from their communion than they have the power to bestow, or than they really possess.

Phronesis. I am pleased to find that you have formed such conceptions in regard to the errors of the false brethren; and you will see yet more to this effect in their crafty excuses and fraudulent replies. For they say, *in the first place*, though falsely, that it is true they cannot grant any one of these things to anyone, unless it is supposed that he makes himself worthy of it in the eyes of God. And accordingly, they grant such things subject to the good pleasure of God. But let these heretics blush, and know that they cannot grant to anyone that he should be as God, and that God should cease to be, in order that the creature may take the place of God. What can be more foolish?

In the second place, they say that the men to whom they make such grants are in many respects meritorious, because of the assistance they render to the friars. But on the contrary, it appears probable to me that the men thus described are in many respects worthy of punishment more than of reward.

FIRST, because they have become unstable in the faith, casting off the catholic belief for the sake of the frivolous falsehoods of these friars.

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SECONDLY, because men who are thus blind, nourish friars — the disciples of Antichrist — and reject the poor, the blind, the lame, and the sick, to whom, by the law of the Gospel, they should be bountiful.

And THIRDLY, because the hypocritical fraud of the friars destroys alike the one and the other. And accordingly, since the supposition should be on the side of the more certain and better part, we ought to suppose that the faith, religion, and ancient usage inculcated by Christ, is far preferable to the usage or religion lately brought in by the friars. Thus we should arrive at the supposition that if all the friars had been destroyed, or consigned to perdition, it would have been better for the church than it is now. And had no such letters ever been dispensed, and if men had depended simply on the graciousness of Christ, it would have been better than at present. Accordingly, may these absurdities which the friars chatter about, return on their own head.

In the third place, the friars falsely argue that, as it is lawful for temporal lords to make free grants of the possessions which they hold, so it is allowable for them — possessing as they do quite as absolute a dominion over the stock of their merits — to make free grants from that source to whomever they will; and thus to render such persons participants of their merits. This absurd analogy appears to have led Simonists to trafficking with those possessions of the church which pass under the name of ecclesiastical *benefices*, but which are in fact *malefices*. But there is no just similarity between the two cases, so as to afford a plea to the friars in thus dispensing their merits, since merit of no kind may be possessed except by the special grace of God. In the case of a just man, accordingly, it is ridiculous to be told that the friars can communicate to others, as they please, the nature of those works which they call merits. In truth, the prayers, fastings, preachings, and the six works which friars commonly set forth in their letters, are not within their power, such that they can observe them, and then communicate them. And the merit remaining after these works (in the formal acceptance of the

term *merit*) has no existence, except in the man to whom the works themselves properly belong. And so every man has his own merit or demerit.

Therefore, if it is unlawful for a man to commute any temporal possession without leave obtained from his chief lord, then much more is it unlawful for friars to communicate their merits without special license from the Lord of lords. But it is certain that God never grants license of this nature unless there is worthiness in the person claiming such merit. In this view, those who heap temporalities on the friars, commonly make themselves unworthy, inasmuch as they often nourish and protect the enemies of Christ. Therefore, if God alone can impart virtues so as not to abuse them by communicating them on wrong principles, God will distribute the principle of merit only according to what the person meriting has deserved from his own life. It is therefore a manifest blasphemy to presume that any power which is not Divine, can distribute merits according to pleasure.

ON INDULGENCES. 195

But, *in the fourth place*, the friars argue from an analogy, as before, that the saints in heaven bestow good measures, pressed down, shaken together and running over (Luke 6.38) on those who had formerly rendered them service in this life. And therefore, it should be lawful for friars to give to their benefactors in an inferior degree. But the saints bestow such good *objectively*, not subjectively or efficiently like God, who (as it were) enters into the saints. And that is good measure, because it is a supernatural good.

In the fifth place, the friars argue by analogy, as before, and say that the popes distribute the merits of the saints in heaven, as it appears in the matter of indulgences. And since the friars are the equals of the pope in respect to priesthood, it follows that they may distribute their own merits at their pleasure. But mark here, in the **FIRST** place, how the friars accuse the popes; **SECONDLY**, how they usurp equality with them; and **THIRDLY**, how they contend for superiority over them. For the popes do not grant such indulgences, except on the express condition that the men to whom they grant them have, in truth, confessed and are contrite. But the friars make no mention of penitence as a condition. Yet we know that God cannot remove the guilt of the sinner unless he is truly contrite.¹ What sect is this, then, which raises itself so greatly above God, and above every vicar of God?

24. On Indulgences.

Alithia. We have here touched on the subject of indulgences; and because granting these appears to me quite in accordance with this blasphemous presumption of the friars, I wish that you would say something on this topic.

Phronesis. As the pride of those who hate God ever tends upward, so although the fountain head of heresy and sin takes its rise in the very beginning of darkness, the rivulet of the friars strives unnaturally to raise itself above its source.

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I confess that the indulgences of the pope, if they are what they are said to be, are a manifest blasphemy, inasmuch as he claims a power to save men almost without limit. And he claims

¹ **Psa 34:18** The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. See also Psa 51.7; Isa 57.15; 66.2.

not only to mitigate the penalties of those who have sinned, by granting them the aid of absolutions and indulgences so that they may never come to purgatory, but to command the holy angels, that when the soul is separated from the body, they may carry it without delay to its everlasting rest.

The friars give a colour to this blasphemy by saying that Christ is omnipotent, and excels all His good angels, and the pope is his plenary vicar on earth. And so he possesses in everything the same power as Christ in his humanity. It is here that lawyers, in common with friars, cry as wolves. Contradicting themselves, they say that when they consider the power of this God on earth, they cannot lift up their face to heaven. From this — in order to declare the power of the pope and the false brethren, according to the secrets of their faith — we proceed as follows:

They suppose, in the *first* place, that there is an infinite number of supererogatory merits belonging to the saints, which are laid up in heaven. And above all these is the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, which would be sufficient to save an infinite number of other worlds. And they suppose that Christ has set the pope over all this treasure.

In the second place, they suppose that it is his pleasure to distribute it; and accordingly, that he may distribute from there to an infinite extent, since the remainder will still be infinite. I have elsewhere inveighed against this rude blasphemy. Neither the pope, nor the Lord Jesus Christ, can grant dispensations, or give indulgences to any man, except as the Deity has eternally determined by his just counsel. But we are not taught to believe that the pope, or any other man, can have any colour of justice to adduce ¹ for doing so. Therefore, we are not taught that the pope has any such power.

Again, I inquire concerning these supererogatory eternal merits, what member of the church is their subject? If in Christ and his members, then it appears a wonder on many accounts, that the pope should be able to subtract them from their proper subjects. *First*, because an accident cannot exist without a subject; *secondly*, because no one of them is in any need of it, because their hour of probation has passed.

In the third place, because he is fully rewarded according to his own merit. How, therefore, can the pope, by such imaginary rapine,² do both God and them an injury? Also, by a *reductio ad impossibile*,³ it is made plain that if any mortal is finally condemned during the time of any pope, the pope himself will be guilty of his destruction. This is because he has neglected to save him, and the pope [claims to have] power enough to accomplish the salvation of such a man. Nor is there any obstacle in the way of his doing so, except perhaps his own sloth — and accordingly, the pope is to be blamed for such sloth.

ON INDULGENCES. 197

Who can be equal to such a dispensation, except God alone? But since God may not recall the office, by reason of the absolute agreement which he has made with it, it appears to unbelievers that as long as that office remains, the pope cannot err, or be condemned — inasmuch as his mind, like that of Christ, is not liable to sin. But where is there a greater blasphemy than by

¹ *Adduce*: advance evidence for something. That is, the pope cannot waive God's requirement for justice.

² *Rapine*: the seizure of someone's property by force; pillage, or plunder.

³ *Reductio ad impossibile*: proof of a proposition which involves demonstrating that its negation entails a contradiction. Since a contradiction cannot be true, whatever entails it cannot be true.

reason of the mere Cæsarean power, which is contrary to the law of Christ, Antichrist should be possessed of such authority? This is why it appears to many, that of all the sufferings endured by Christ from the hand of man, this is one of the greatest: the suffering arising from the permission given to Antichrist to reign so long, and to so widely deceive the people!

Moreover, it appears that this doctrine is a manifold blasphemy against Christ, inasmuch as the pope is extolled above Christ's humanity and deity, and so he is above all that is called God. Such pretensions, according to the declarations of the apostle, agree with the character of Antichrist. For he possesses Cæsarean power above Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head. In regard to spiritual power, so far as the humanity of Christ is concerned, it would seem that the pope is superior to our Lord Jesus Christ. For it behooved Christ to suffer the most bitter passion for the salvation of man. And we believe that, on the ground of Divine justice, men attain to whatever happiness may be theirs, by virtue of Christ's passion. But this renegade says that it is allowable for him to live as luxuriously as he may choose; and that by the bare writing of one of his scribes, he can introduce wonders, without limit, into the Church Militant! Who, then, can deny that the pope is being extolled above the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose life we do not read that He or any of his apostles granted such absolutions or indulgences? Yet if such power had been at their command, on many grounds it is probable that they would not have been absolutely idle in the use of it. This is especially so when Christ condemns the slothful servant for not trading with the talent entrusted to him; and he requires at the hand of the prelate, the souls committed to his care and lost through his negligence, as it appears from the third chapter of Ezekiel.¹ Which alternative, then, should we maintain? That Christ and his apostles possessed no such power? Or that they were culpable in hoarding such treasure instead of bringing it forth for the good of the church? But what greater insanity is there, than to adopt such a conclusion!

Similar in its folly is the doctrine which teaches that the pope dispenses these same merits of the saints for the service of men, to any extent and according to his pleasure. For it behooves Christ to do more, both on his own part to fulfill the claims of justice, and on the part of the sinner whom it becomes him to affect. Christ imparts *grace* to him so that he may prove *worthy* of Divine assistance!

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The same may be said concerning the fiction of the keys of Antichrist. For it is not necessary for the believer to insist on the foundation of this pretension, since the argument will be found to be one without sequence.² They say that Christ granted to Peter the apostle, in the nearest degree following His own example, such power over the keys. And therefore, in the same manner, we should concede to Antichrist — who in word and deed is still more pre-eminently Christ's opposite — as great or even greater power in the church! Christ gave to Peter and to

¹ **Eze 3:18-20** “When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; **but his blood I will require at your hand.** ¹⁹ “Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. ²⁰ “Again, when a righteous *man* turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; **but his blood I will require at your hand.**

² That is, that does not follow logically.

others possessing a knowledge of the law of God, the power to judge according to the law of that knowledge, both in binding and loosing, agreeable to the Church Triumphant. But now, this renegade [pope] will not be regulated by the mind of the church above, nor by *any* authority. But as might be expected from Antichrist, he sets forth new laws; and he insists, under pain of the heaviest censure, that the whole Church Militant should believe in them; so that anything determined in it, will stand as though it were a part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The infatuated ¹ church is involved in such infinite blasphemies, especially by means of the tail of this dragon — that is, by the sects of the friars, who labor in the cause of this illusion, and of other Luciferian seductions of the church. But arise, O soldiers of Christ! Be wise to fling away these things, along with the other fictions of the Prince of Darkness, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Confide without doubt in your own weapons; sever from the church such frauds of Antichrist; and teach the people that they should trust in Christ alone, and in his law, and in his members — that in doing so, they may be saved through His goodness, and learn above all things, to frankly ² detect the devices of Antichrist!

HOW THE ORDERS OF FRIARS WERE INTRODUCED. 199

25. How the Orders of Friars Were Introduced.

Alithia. Inform me, brother, how these orders were introduced, which according to your account, so greatly disturb the church. For it appears to many of the people that they are the safety of the church, since in a special degree, the life and poverty of Christ are retained in them — while the pope, the bishops, and other prelates, have notoriously declined from that life. It is thought that four orders, which are so numerous and of such a character, must therefore have a stable foundation.

Phronesis. The matter you touch upon is in part historical. Since it has no authority from the law of Christ, some among the many who have written on it, have without a doubt stated what is false. To me, however, it seems probable that subsequent to the loosing of Satan, which took place after the first thousand years since the ascension of Christ, the church notoriously departed from the pattern of her Lord. Hence, holy and devout men, not lacking in prudence, endeavored to revive in themselves the model which was thus lost. So Dominic, and Francis, and the other friars, began to do some things that were good in their nature. But through the art of the devil, they were made to rest on many hypocritical falsehoods.³ According to the common opinion, Dominic, seeing the corruption of the regular clergy, and being too intent upon the world, had departed unreasonably from the discipline of the canons, and founded the order of preaching friars. He was succeeded by Francis who, though at first a cunning and covetous merchant, founded his order in a blind spirit of devotion, utterly devoid of prudence. And then other sects, seeing that antiquity carried great weight with it, laid false claim to an antiquity superior to that of these orders. They declared that Augustine was their founder, pretending that they lived four hundred years or more unknown in a desert place, before the introduction of the preaching friars. But the fourth sect (the Carmelites) go still further, and

¹ *Infatuated*: marked by foolish or unreasoning fondness.

² Originally, “honestly to detect.”

³ *Hypocritical*: when someone’s actions are not consistent with their claimed beliefs.

assert that they were founded by Elias ¹ before the incarnation of our Lord, on Mount Carmel, in honor of the blessed Virgin Mary.

These fictions, false as the shape and colour of their habit and every thread carrying a falsehood, show with what care and labor they follow the father of lies. These appear to be the apostates described by Solomon in the sixth chapter of Proverbs: “A wicked man walks with a froward mouth. He winks with his eyes, he speaks with his feet, he teaches with his fingers; frowardness is in his heart, he devises mischief continually; he sows discord.” ² I have set this forth elsewhere, in detail.

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Some men, seeing the reins of falsehood thus thrown loose, pretend that these four saints had their beginning in Caym.³ And thus the voice of his brethren,⁴ representing the malice of these friars, cries from the earth to the Lord. And in fact, the four letters of this word *Caym*, are the initials of these four orders, in the succession in which the friars pretend they rose — thus C denotes the Carmelites; A, the Augustines; I, the Jacobites (Dominicans); and M, the Minors.

But passing by these fictions, there are many things we must observe respecting these men, as affecting the interests of the Church Militant. In the first place, the order of the truly catholic religion which Christ instituted, infinitely transcends all these private orders. For as one patron is to another patron, so is one order to another; but Christ our patron infinitely exceeds the patrons of these orders, and therefore our order infinitely exceeds theirs. For this reason, the holy apostle dared not introduce such sects, as it appears from 1Cor 1, and 3.⁵ Accordingly, although the friars may little relish the conclusion that our religion thus exceeds theirs (because then their own, in reason, ought to be destroyed), they stoutly maintain the confirmation of their order by the Roman court. And they prove by such means, that a man may pass from a secular religion to the possessionate religious orders in their various gradations, and from these to the orders of the friars. From this it follows that the orders of these sects are of the highest authority in the church, and thus they are spiritually elevated above all other orders whatsoever. If the man who favors, or mainly supports these orders, were to be called their peculiar patron or founder, these four sects of mendicants should be called “papal friars,” rather than Dominican or Franciscan. For Dominic is said to have apostatised from his own altar, or he holds the rule of Augustine unchanged. Francis, again, is said to have compiled sermons so incongruous, that his disciples are ashamed to exhibit his rules. But it is particularly by collecting the rules of their sect from the popes, as jesters obtain their mantle, that these men give disposition to their order, which has been so often changed.

Concerning the two other sects, it appears still more plainly that by often changing their customs, they have made but unsteady progress, like boats driven to and fro in a shoreless sea.

¹ That is, the prophet Elijah.

² Pro 6.12-14.

³ An obsolete manner of writing *Cain*.

⁴ Like Abel, the blood of the martyrs cries out from the earth (Gen 4.10; Rev 6.9-11).

⁵ **1Co 1:10** Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. **1Co 3:4** For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I *am* of Apollos,” are you not carnal?

This feeble attempt then, to establish their orders, is a failure; and accordingly we need not be surprised to find them deceiving the church.

HOW THE ORDERS OF FRIARS WERE INTRODUCED. 201

Hence, these friars, seeing the defective grounds of their institution, declare that they hold no other than the religion and ordinance of Christ, but hold that religion in far more perfection than we seculars; and so they observe the law of Christ more perfectly.

But it is natural to ask them how it is that there should be four distinct orders of mendicants; or how it is that they ask the pope to confirm their orders and corrections? And since the novel institution, which they are so singular in observing, is not a special ordinance or religion, they are asked why they retain it so pertinaciously,¹ and what its advantage consists in, or what is still their special authority for it, since according to Scripture, men may not introduce such unfounded novelties beyond the religion instituted by Christ.² And they are bound to consider such orders as far inferior to that of Christ. Inasmuch as Christ our Abbot is more worthy than their patron, our Gospel rule is far more perfect, and its company of Saints Militant is far more noble — indeed, if the excellence of an order is estimated by these marks, the military order far surpasses that of the friars.

Who, I ask, will find in this order of mendicants, such a collection of men as were in Greece in the holy Theban legion? ³ The same is true of Mauritius and his comrades; and of the two hundred soldiers who, in the time of Saint Catherine,⁴ followed Pophorius; and so many bodies of soldiers in the world who, in antiquity, authority, and sanctity, far exceed these orders of the mendicants.

The sort of reply proper to the argument with which we began on this subject, is now manifest, for what is assumed in this case is not valid — even though hypocrites, by their false pretences, deceive and blind many men, giving attention to the surface of life, and not to the foundation of their order. They do not follow the poverty of Christ and his mode of life, since that best of masters would not be the holder of such sumptuous dwelling-places as belong to them, nor lay such a tax on the poor, nor collect together such thieves and plunderers as are the accomplices of Antichrist. But the patron of these men seems to influence them in this opposite direction. Nor is it any argument in their favor, that this patron himself has appointed them the law, and given them the privilege to beg, since the blessed Clement forbade his people so to do.

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¹ *Pertinaciously*: stubbornly persisting, refusing to give up.

² **1Co 10:3-4** all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. **1Co 10:16-17** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? ¹⁷ For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread... ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

³ See [note on p. 159](#).

⁴ Catherine of Alexandria, also known as Saint Catherine of the Wheel. According to tradition, she was a Christian saint and virgin, who was martyred in the early 4th century at the hands of the pagan emperor Maxentius. She was a princess and a noted scholar, who became a Christian around the age of fourteen. She converted hundreds of people to Christianity, and was martyred at age 18.

26. In What Respect the Friars Are Contrary to Christ.

Alithia. The majority of men think that the friars, as they say mass, and preach and pray so much, are necessary to the holy mother church. Therefore, pray tell me in what they are *contrary* to the law of Christ; because then doubtless they are heretics, and should especially be stoned by the clergy.¹

Phronesis. It is evident that they do all these works merely for outward show. And because of the hidden malice within their hearts, they not only hurt themselves to a considerable extent, but also other people. Yet I do not deny (on the contrary I suppose) that there are some good men among them. As for the mass, it is evident that if they are heretics in regard to first principles, in denying that the bread is the real body of Christ and that it is only an accident² (which is above their comprehension), then they sacrifice to idols. It is further certain that their saying mass is a sin for them, even more than the sacrifices of the priests of Baal, and those of the worst kind among the idolatrous nations. And with regard to their preaching, the result shows its tendency to deteriorate the church — for they give all their attention to ritual, flattery, detraction, and falsehood, rejecting Scripture, and neglecting to rebuke sin.

Who can doubt that their frivolous mode of preaching is pernicious to the church, or that the same remark applies to their hypocritical prayers? For according to Gregory, when the man who is sent forth to intercede, is a person who is unacceptable on his own account, the anger of the offended party is only more provoked. But I shall now proceed to speak of the TWELVE ABUSES among the friars.³

The *first*, is that blasphemous heresy among them, whereby they deceive the church in the sacrament of the altar — so that, as they have deviated from the faith of the Scriptures, there are now more than four heretical schisms among the four orders. The fact that they hold such diverse opinions, is manifest proof that their doctrines are erroneous. If, therefore, the Knight-Templars were dissolved on account of some erroneousness in their belief which is unknown to us,⁴ how much more should it thus be with these orders on the ground of their well-known heresy! For annually they send many living souls into hell, to their master and patron the devil.

¹ Wycliffe, who speaks in the person of *Phronesis*, when urging his severest measures against the mendicants, always speaks of “sparing their persons.”

² *Accident*: A quality or attribute of something as distinct from its substance. In communion, bread is the substance; whiteness and roundness are its qualities. But spiritually, the substance is the “real body” of Christ, says Wycliffe, and the bread is only its representative quality – an “accident”, incidental; otherwise it would be idolatry.

³ These twelve abuses are presented in two groups of six; the second group is presented in [chapter 27](#) below.

⁴ *Knights Templar*. In 1139, Pope Innocent II issued a papal bull, stating that the Knights Templar, to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land, could pass freely through any border, owed no taxes, and were subject to no one’s authority except that of the Pope. The Order’s patron, Bernard of Clairvaux, had helped Pope Innocent in his own rise to power. Donations to the Order were considerable. New members to the Order were required to swear religious vows of obedience, chastity, poverty and piety, and hand over all of their goods to the monastic brotherhood. This could include land, horses and any other items of material wealth, including labor from serfs, and any interest in any businesses. The Order grew rapidly throughout Western Europe, with chapters appearing in France, England, and Scotland, and then spreading to Spain and Portugal. The Knights Templar were the elite fighting force of their day, highly trained, well-equipped and highly motivated. By 1150, the Order’s original mission of guarding pilgrims, had changed into a mission of guarding their valuables through an innovative way of issuing letters of credit, an early precursor of modern banking. They became a powerful state within a state.

I pass by the fact that they actually kill many of their brethren. Therefore, if we take their whole occupation into consideration, it is evident that they are useless persons in the church. For the introduction of their heresy, lacking in the authority of Scripture, can be of no value unless we ironically concede importance to it, made up of subtle conclusions, by means of which they disturb the peace of the church. For they imagine that they devour daily the entire body of Christ in its very substance, and that they swallow it through their mouth in the same quantity in which it exists in heaven — because, as they say, the body of Christ is naturally entire as regards every particle of the accident which they so consecrate. Thus the friars, disseminating their falsehood, walk with a froward mouth; for they lie not only against those whom they hate, or those who do them a service, but concerning themselves and the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth of this is manifest in the history of many believers who suffer with much humility under the friars' falsehood, when they so blaspheme the Lord of lords. Therefore, if the retainer of a secular lord would be offended by the promulgation of a falsehood respecting that lord, much more should every believer testify of His displeasure, when a blasphemy is circulated concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such a friar, then, beyond doubt, winks with covetous eyes, full of many vices, and tramples down many seeds of virtues which would otherwise grow up in the Church Militant. Such an apostate has a mind stored to the full with lies, and contrives evil in his depraved heart, to the damage of the church. And since nothing can more occasion strife in the church than the dissemination of such falsehood, it is plain that they constantly sow strife in the church, since they are thus wrapped up in lies, body and soul.

A *second* abuse of the friars is the crime of blasphemy, because they impute to Christ that he publicly begged from men, as the friars beg from the poor.

The *third* abuse consists in the blasphemy of the Letters of Fraternity.¹

The *fourth* abuse consists in their damnable assumptions of superiority over Christ, since Christ, who is the best and most powerful Master, had only twelve apostles whom he sent into the world to preach the Gospel, after he had perfectly instructed them in the faith; while these gather themselves together, and steal many thousands of our youth into their convents, and preach a doctrine which is the sign of their father, by which, as above stated, they are bound forever to the cloister.

The *fifth* abuse is, the false pretence of the friars to be most like Christ in his poverty, and in the possession of temporalities, houses, incomes, and whatever such things belong to them.

In 1306, the Templars forced King Henry II of Cyprus to abdicate his throne in favor of his brother, Amalric of Tyre. This probably made Philip of France uneasy, since just a few years earlier he had inherited land in the region of Champagne, France, which was the Templars' headquarters. At dawn on Friday, October 13, 1307, scores of French Templars were simultaneously arrested by agents of King Philip, later to be tortured in locations such as the tower at Chinon, into admitting heresy and other sacrilegious offenses (e.g. devil worship). Then they were put to death. This caused a scandal in Paris, with mobs calling for action against the blaspheming Order. Pope Clement issued a bull which instructed all Christian monarchs in Europe to arrest all Templars and seize their assets. In 1312, after the Council of Vienne, under extreme pressure from King Philip IV, Pope Clement V issued an edict officially dissolving the Order. — *from Wikipedia*.

¹ See [section 22](#) above.

But it is certain that they are guilty in this of a blasphemous falsehood against Christ. For Christ in his humanity never built any such a mansion — no indeed, it was repugnant to his state of innocence to thus heap together books, and money, and such things.

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The *sixth* abuse is their simoniacal accumulation of temporal things by virtue of their office as false preachers. For Christ taught his disciples, in the tenth of Matthew,¹ since they had freely received from above the teaching which enabled them to preach the Gospel, and also the power to work miracles, they should freely extend the benefit of such endowments to all who might benefit by them, just as God and good angels bestow their gifts most freely. Thus these sealed commodities of the friars involve them in many ways in the guilt of simony and heresy.

27. *Of the Other Six Abuses of the Friars.*

Alithia. Pray, brother Phronesis, inform me of the other six abuses of the friars, as you have promised.. For I do not clearly see how they can avoid the guilt you impute to them, without returning to the free law of Jesus Christ,² inasmuch as their rule and religion, it appears to me, compel them to commit the evils you condemn.

Phronesis. I am pleased to see that you discern so clearly the root of the malice which is in these men. But if you will advance a little further, you will behold the chains of Satan, and see in what numbers they are linked together.

The *first* of these six abuses is the burdensomeness with which they oppress believers, contrary to the teaching of Christ and of his apostles. It is certain that many thousands of friars, scattered throughout one small province, are covertly more burdensome to that province, than a thousand freebooters³ would be, who publicly plundered it. For let it be granted that there are four thousand such friars in England, and that every one of them annually consumes in his own person a hundred solidi⁴ of the goods of the realm, and the same amount in buildings, repairs, and decorations for their cloisters, and it is evident that this sect expends sixty thousand marks of the goods of the realm every year!⁵ What English lord could afford to spend so much as is spent by these friars who creep into the houses or chambers of the rich, and feast on delicacies?

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Those who thus obtain their food by robbery, consume too much of the goods of the realm. For since their expenses do not fall upon themselves, it is plain that whatever temporal goods they have *consumed* in our realm, *belong* to the realm. Therefore, how might the retainers of secular lords be other than so poor, and unable to pay them their dues so readily as before, while the friars receive so much from them every year?

¹ **Mat 10:7-8** “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸ “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

² That is, unless they repent and flee to Christ. **Jam 1:25** But he who looks into the perfect **law of liberty** and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

³ *Freebooter*: someone who takes spoils or plunder (as in war).

⁴ A solidus was equal to forty denarii, and in value about five and twenty shillings. — Du Cange.

⁵ Forty thousand pounds. See note on [page 15](#).

In fact, the whole nation would have murmured loudly if it had been taxed by the kingly power to such an amount, even for a large levy, or for the defence of the kingdom. And it appears a wonderment to many, that so great a number of the disciples of Antichrist could thus cunningly subtract the goods of the realm, and obtain, with the consent of the people, a larger sum than the king could obtain in the same time for the defence of the kingdom. Let then the observant, concerning the state of the people, first consider how it is that the common people, who should give themselves to labor, are more feeble in complexion, more infirm in health, and more short-lived than formerly. Heaven looks down more sadly on this condition of earthly things, disturbing the seasons, retarding and destroying in every direction the fruits of the earth. Beyond all this, those who serve, demand a higher price, are more luxurious, and are less trustworthy, than they once were. Is this scourge, inflicted by God, not then a punishment sufficiently great for kingdoms, without the addition of a new infliction from the secret fraud of Antichrist? How then can it be said that they follow Christ and his apostles in life and doctrine, by making the church sparing?

The *second* abuse of the friars is that they shut themselves up, and despising the labor enjoined by Paul, as we have shown above, live at ease. This appears to be the reason why there are so many more sterile tracts of country in England than in times past.

The *third* abuse of the friars is their preference for the frivolous inventions belonging to their order, to the law and ordinance of Christ. This is a great crime, to the hurt of the church, since it is really no less than blasphemy to give their own follies, which the devil has invented, more weight than the revealed will of Christ. For since the friars are limited in their powers of action and observation, as were the apostles also, it is plain that in fulfilling in its purity the law and ordinance of Christ, they would be far better occupied than they are at present. Therefore, this is an inexcusable fault in them: that in letting go of the evangelical ordinance, they blasphemously prefer the inventions which have proceeded from their own stupidity — as if they felt disgraced, and would blush to be found following Christ as their patron. And deserting the rule of Christ's order, they have set up some liar or notorious delinquent in his place. But Christ says, "He who is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him before the angels of God." [Luk 9.26](#)

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The *fourth* abuse consists in their abandoning the law of the Gospel concerning brotherly reproof, and faithlessly favoring the devil and the world. For Christ says, "Whoever loves father, or mother, or brother, or sister, or even his own life, more than me, he is not worthy of me." [Luk 14.26](#) The friars nevertheless, on account of their love of themselves, of a corrupt order, or from a regard for individuals, dare not rebuke their brethren, however manifestly they may have sinned against the Gospel — nor do they, upon finding a man obstinate in sin, forsake him as a publican, as Christ enjoins, [Mat 18.17](#). Yet they set up a rule expressly for themselves, that when the interests of their diabolical society are concerned, the Gospel commands them to correct or (in the language of the church) to "chastise their brethren," often imprisoning them in a foul dungeon, and even secretly killing them, contrary to the law of Christ. Since it is the same thing to love a person, and to love the commandment or law approved by that person, it is plain that in setting their beggarly and leprous custom above the law of the Lord, the friars prefer loving these wretched patrons, to loving Christ. Where then, I ask, is the rule of charity among the friars?

The *fifth* abuse is seen in their entire subversion of the order of charity; in their desiring honors and worldly wealth more than men themselves; striving after worldly distinctions by such means; and mingling with the world contrary to the law of Christ: “No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life.” 2Tim 2.4. For if they flatter men for the sake of honors and worldly gains; if they are sparing in the inculcation of catholic truth, not setting forth the verity of the Gospel without deceit; and if this is both in prosperity and adversity; then who can doubt that they are secretly and imperceptibly descending to the infernal lake,¹ as the consequence of looking for exaltation in the world? For the Gospel teaches us not to covet such mastery and preeminence, and that a man should not entangle himself with the affairs of this life. But if the friars act in direct opposition to these commands, and allow no worldly business to be transacted without taking part in it on some pretence or other, then who can doubt that the devil works in them, and by their instrumentality involves the whole world in his evil deeds?

The *sixth* and the worst abuse of the friars consists in their pretended confessions. By means of these, they pretend with numberless artifices of blasphemy, that they can purify those whom they confess, and make them clean from all pollution in the eyes of God, through this assumed power of Antichrist — setting aside the commandments and satisfaction of our Lord. Thus, in their eagerness to participate in the gain of their master the devil, they drag all too many down to hell.

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For if by the uprightness of their rule of life, the conversation of the just is seen to be in heaven, then beyond a doubt, the contrary shows that the conversation of these friars is in hell. Thus they may be said not so much to *send* men to hell, as to *drag* them there. What is worst of all, they seduce to their ruin in spiritual things, those people who rashly put faith in them.

28. Showing How the Friars Seduce the Kingdoms They Inhabit.

Alithia. In my opinion you have exposed the artifices of the false brethren satisfactorily, and without undue harshness. But describe more particularly the way in which they seduce the countries they inhabit. For it appears to me that, since they do not have leave from their own sovereign to bring ruin upon the place in which they dwell, and they do not recognise the king as liege lord of their temporal possessions, they have another lord: namely, Antichrist.

Phronesis. I think, in overlooking the pith of the matter — the good of the soul — you may exert yourself unfaithfully about a merely temporal offscouring.² Yet I am certain that these sects of the friars carry on their machinations to the hurt and prejudice of kingdoms, as though it were their intent to destroy them. For it would amount to the same thing for the friars, if they were to set up Antichrist as lord over all the property they possess, both houses and moveables, without asking for or obtaining leave from their respective sovereigns, and were to make him sovereign of the kingdoms they inhabit. Because, if some iniquitous Antichrist should chance to have under him more friars than a good pope, what is there — except the grace of God and the strength of the kingdom — to hinder his seizing the realm of England as his own? For it is said that he has in England treasure ample enough for that purpose. And as the friars pretend, it

¹ **Rev 19:20** Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

² *Peripsema temporale.*

would be altogether contrary to reason to put a check upon the power of such a one, so as to prevent his turning to his own purposes those possessions which are made his own by the occupation of the friars. Now, this is only an artful introduction to prepare the way for a claim on all the residue of the kingdom.

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The believer, therefore, should prudently counsel our sovereign to resist these insidious beginnings. This acting of Satan is seen more plainly in the fact that the friars are aware that it is against the logic of Scripture to thus utter their falsehoods. For in order to make an appearance of sanctity, they pretend that they can hold nothing, either as their own individually, or as common property. This is a ground they cannot effectively defend, unless at the same time, they admit that they are heretics and members of the devil. For it is certain that just as they have a natural existence, and the goods of nature, so they possess many of the goods of fortune. Therefore, if in truth they are possessed of nothing themselves, and yet they abuse the possessions of others to so large an extent, then plainly they must be members of Satan — on the ground of their possessing, by the pretended grace of Christ, what belongs to others. But if they say that they possess nothing in particular or in common in a civil sense, but only in a gospel sense, then it is certain, other things being equal,¹ that they imply the civil dominion of the pope, the vicar of Peter — and so the dominion of Christ. And since (as they say) it is allowable for them to exercise dominion in whatever way Christ in his humanity exercised dominion, it is allowable for them to exercise civil dominion. But why do they impose such dominion on the vicar of Peter, and so on Peter himself, when neither Peter nor Christ could exercise such dominion in such circumstances? Are we to believe that these friars excel Christ, that they thus set Antichrist over kingdoms, and make *him* lord of lords? If these friars exclude themselves from this dominion in words only, and confer the thing itself on their father, who they say is next to Christ, then of necessity they must either blaspheme Christ, or they assert that in doing so, they subject their father to a spiritual stain and poison.

But leaving this ancient archery,² which we bypass because of its folly, it appears that the friars have in general intoxicated the kingdom, particularly since the year of our Lord 1072,³ and especially in their own recent council, held in the time of the earthquake in London.⁴ For it is credibly reported — and the friars maintain and defend their conduct in this particular — that the more artful among them, and the heads of these orders by common council, so successfully drew over many bishops, as to induce them to agree to what implied that our Lord Jesus Christ, and many of his saints now in the highest blessedness, died heretics. These heretics could not have precipitated themselves into a greater blasphemy. Previously our bishops are said to have hated the false brethren as they hated Satan, when in the time of the Lord Bishop of Armagh,

¹ Originally, *cæteris paribus*.

² *Antiquam toxicam* — ancient poison.

³ Perhaps referring to *The Accord of Winchester*, signed by William the Conqueror, that established the primacy of Lanfranc, the new Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, over Thomas, the Archbishop of York.

⁴ May 17, 1382. William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury, convened a synod on this date, in the Blackfriars area of London. It addressed the Lollards, who were challenging the church. In particular, the synod condemned John Wycliffe's twenty-four theses, although many had already been condemned by a synod held in February 1377. The synod also issued teachings on transubstantiation and friars. An earthquake shook London during its meetings, so it became known as "The Earthquake Synod" (also, "Synod at the Grey Friars").

we are told they defended that prelate in his controversy with these false orders.¹ But now Herod and Pilate, who were at variance before, are made friends.

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From this I predict two consequences. *First*, that inasmuch as this alliance is not founded on the law of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will not stand, but come to an end — to the hurt of one party or the other, since the Christian can have no profitable fellowship with Belial.^{2Cor 6.15} *Secondly*, I predict that our bishops and nobles must either desert the doctrines of these false brethren in this, or be involved with them in heresy.

For in their first article, the friars have determined (in opposition to heresy) that no part of the substance of the material bread or wine remains after consecration in the sacrament of the altar. Opposed to this (they say) is the manifest heresy — for heresy it is — that the accidents do not remain without the subject, after consecration in this same sacrament. Although I have determined that outside of the schools, I will not use these terms — the substance of the material bread or wine — yet my faith compels me to admit the convertibility² of the terms in this proposition. For as St. Jerome says, the bread which Christ took in his hands and broke, is the body of the Lord our Savior. But I ask, what was that bread? Was it the substance of material bread, or something else unknown? Therefore, when Christ said that this bread was his body, and these friars deny this as the height of heresy, it is plain that, as far as it lies in them to do so, they condemn Christ as the worst of heretics.

Now, since the conditions of such condemnation make it necessary that the condemning party be the heretical one, it plainly follows— since Christ could not possibly be a heretic — that this sect of the friars is utterly heretical, either in express terms, or by tacit consent. Again, the substance of the body of Christ remains after consecration in the sacrament of the altar, as it behooves the friars to believe. And wherever the substance of the body of Christ is, there is the most general genus of substance; and therefore the thing itself remains after consecration in the sacrament of the altar. And since the thing itself is the substance and quiddity of every special substance whatsoever, it follows that it is the substance of any material bread or wine whatever — and thus the folly of the condemnation they pronounce is manifest. For it is not inconsistent with this sacrament, that a crumb of material bread, or a drop of wine, should be received within the pores of this venerable sacrament. Again, as we have often observed, if according to the definition of these blasphemers, there is an accident without a subject in this sacrament, then they should admit that this accident is the sacrament itself. And since an accident cannot be the body of the Lord, they are forced to the conclusion that the sacrament itself cannot be the body of the Lord. Since Christ says, “This is my body,” and displays the bread, as shown above, it follows that these heretics, in being so expressly contrary to Christ, are blasphemers.

¹ “The first important attack on the friars in the fourteenth century was that led by Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh. He had been Fellow of Balliol College before 1325 and Chancellor of the University in 1333. While assailing the whole principle of mendicancy, his main charge against the friars, especially the friars at Oxford, was that of ‘stealing’ children, i.e., of secretly inducing them to join the Mendicant Orders. In 1357 the Archbishop was cited to appear and defend himself before the Papal Court at Avignon; on the 8th of November, in a solemn assembly of Pope and Cardinals, he made a great speech in defence of the parish priests against the Mendicants.” — Andrew G. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford, Part I*, (Wipf & Stock, Eugene OR, 2013), p.79.

² That is, interchangeability.

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As it was in that other condemnation of Christ by the priests of the old law (which was less to be reprobated), so it is in *this* condemnation of Him. Hence many of the faithful devoutly believe that there was an unusual shaking of the earth, to expose the deficiency of human testimony against such guilt. For when the members of Christ fail to exclaim against such idiot heretics, the very earth cries out.¹ My advice, then, to our bishops and our seculars, without exception, is that they expel such men, since these devils would gladly seduce by their heresy others who stand firm in the faith.

29. Of the Fraud and Malice of the Friars

Alithia. You have said enough on this subject; you would oblige me, therefore, by proceeding to handle another topic.

Phronesis. The whole body of the faithful should be earnest, both in word and work, for the exposure of this evil. And faithful catholics should destroy it, even to the death, considering according to the ancient doctrine, that there are three laws to be attended to in this: namely, the law of Christ and his members, the law of the world and of worldly men, and the law of the devil and his sons. The law and practice of the first principle is to return good for evil; the law and practice of the second is to return good for good, and evil for evil; but the law of the third principle, *contrary* to the law of God, is to systematically return evil for good. Accordingly, these sons of Belial, inasmuch as they so injuriously instruct the bishops and other believers, as a return for the benefits conferred upon them, manifestly show themselves to be devils. Thus it would have been better for them, before they fell into such idiotic heresies, to have carefully considered what that sacrament is, and what is referred to by the pronoun in the sacramental proposition. But in this, their father has bound up his intimations on this subject.

Since, therefore, in this council held on the occasion of the earthquake, they condemned Christ as a heretic, together with the principal doctors of the church — who for a thousand years and more were approved by the church — it is manifest that they include individual Christians under their sentence of heresy. In the second place, in this same council, they labor specially to condemn the king of England, his nobles and realm, as heretics. And by consequence, they labor to dispossess all these lords, and bring into England, Robert Gilbonensis,² with his knot of heretical friars.

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As a means to this end, they artfully assume that it is a most perilous *error* to assert that temporal lords may at their discretion deprive a delinquent church of temporal possessions; and that subjects may, at their discretion, correct delinquent lords. Although this second particular is an invention of the friars, they labor assiduously to establish it by sophistry. God, I say, can teach the people to do so. His power is not so weak, that he could not move the people to such a course of conduct. Therefore it is possible for subjects to do so. The very persons who are now subjects may, by the event of war and a thousand other chances, become the most powerful of conquerors — while on the other side, temporal lords may become the most

¹ Referring to the Synod at the Grey Friars, May 17, 1382. — that is, “The Earthquake Synod.”

² In 1378, when Urban VI was enthroned by the Italians, the French Cardinals chose another pope, Robert Gilbonensis, who became Clement VII, seated at Avignon. See note on [page 69](#).

wretched of beggars. How then can it be denied that subjects may inflict correction on guilty lords? Since the commonalty are the creatures of God, as well as friars, and possess in common more efficient words of exhortation, why may they not themselves, with the help of God's grace, rebuke and correct temporal lords? Are the friars desirous of so hardening the lords, that since they themselves are prevented by their father from correcting these lords, and rather make them worse, therefore all their subjects should be compelled to give the poison of the devil to these lords, just as the friars do? Accordingly, I have said elsewhere, as to the first part of this doctrine, that the temporal lords have power granted to them by God (as it appears from Rom 13) to chastise ecclesiastics. It would be a strange thing if temporal lords had power to change the life of ecclesiastics, by depriving that life of its conformity to the poverty of Christ, and not have power to chastise the folly of their delinquency against God?

But supposing the *truth* of the first part of the conclusion, which is condemned by the friars, and leaving them the solution of that threefold argument with which (in their folly) they have encumbered the former truth, let us ascertain further in what way they determine that this error is so dangerous. They appear to decide thus without pertinency¹ concerning the whole copulative proposition² — unless they have detected error and danger in *both* parts, and consequently have ascertained that both are *false*. And since temporal lords commonly have to deal with the first part as a matter affecting the safety of their soul, and inasmuch as the supposition of the friars makes such dealings an error, they teach by implication that their lords are commonly guilty of ill-doing in this respect. Such an exercise of power is at the hazard of their soul, and to the hurt of the commonwealth, and specific to the sovereignty of the king. Thus it is manifest that the friars impute this error to the king, and to all who assist him in such dealings. And since all truth is contained in Holy Writ, this supposed error, which they describe as a falsehood, must of necessity be contrary to some part of Holy Scripture, at least by implication.

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And since it is so obstinately defended, it is manifest that the friars ought to declare this error a heretical one, and thus pronounce the king and his nobles to be heretics in defending it. In this manner, the folly of these friars (which they account as great prudence) breaks forth. This is because in a matter of faith, they stigmatise one kind of falsity as erroneous, and another as heretical, while the one is as obstinately defended as the other. Let these foolish disciples of Antichrist know that every dangerous error in a matter of faith, is so much clear heresy. Let them know in the second place, that they cannot refute (and by consequence they cannot condemn) the first part of this conclusion, which pertains to the regalia³ of the sovereign. Indeed, a careful study of their own principles would have taught them not to deny that temporal lords should be allowed to inflict punishment in such cases. But it is supposed that the friars conceive that there is much danger in conceding such corrective power to temporal lords — because in that case, they would be loosened from their relation to Satan, and cut off from that brotherhood in which the friars are united with the sons of Belial. *This* is the result

¹ *Pertinency*: relevance by virtue of being applicable to the matter at hand.

² In logic, a *copulative* proposition includes many subjects and many attributes, joined by an affirmative or negative conjunction, *and* or *nor*. This proposition is true as a whole, only if each of its parts are true.

³ *Regalia*: royal rights, prerogatives, and privileges.

which the friars apprehend as dangerous. It plainly appears, then, in what manner the friars treacherously aim to destroy secular dominion, the king's prerogative, and the whole kingdom.

These men labor without ceasing in what relates to gain, though it may savour of manifest heresy. But by the grace of God, the counsel of Ahithophel is brought to nothing;¹ for as members of Satan, the thing which they thought would serve them, they have turned to their own injury both in body and soul — since their diabolical fraud is made more manifest in every direction by their malice. And especially in this: that they have labored assiduously, both in London and in Lincoln,² to effect the destruction of true priests and poor men, mainly in revenge for these poor men having charitably exposed the friars' artifices to the people. In my opinion, God will not rest until he has inflicted a full penalty on this iniquity. For they say that they follow Christ, especially in his manner of life. But how can Christ, who loved and prayed for his enemies, endeavor to effect the destruction of those faithful men, just because they labor in charity of spirit to be of service to His members? In such conduct, therefore, the friars manifestly show their parentage, and how they endeavor to fulfill the commands of their father, by returning evil for good. Of a truth, of all the sins I ever marked in the friars, this appears to me, on many grounds, to be the most iniquitous. For it has proceeded entirely from the unanimous consent and counsel of the friars. With regard to a man seizing the wife of another, and other such sins which men commit, they are of moderate guilt compared with this conduct.

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30. Whether Temporal Lords May and Should Assist and Defend Their People Against the Friars.

Alithia. It appears to me that you have exposed the malicious proceedings of the mendicants with sufficient clearness. But tell me, I pray you, whether temporal lords have the power, and are bound to assist and defend against the friars, the humbler members of the church — consisting of their tenants and the common people. To me it appears certain that the friars are heretics. For I do not see in what way they can more openly condemn Christ and individual Christians as heretics, than by condemning as heretical, this article in their council: namely, that special prayers offered for an individual by prelates or the religious, are of no more benefit to that individual than general prayers, other things being equal. For we believe, on the faith and authority of Christ, that the Lord's prayer in the sixth of Matthew, is far superior to any special prayer. And so we consequently believe that this prayer, devoutly poured forth for the people, does them more service than any prayer which friars or prelates can utter or have invented in later times. Is not a supplication, made through Christ, better than the blasphemous supplication which the friars pretend to offer in behalf of those who are willing to give them money? And since the blessed, as the litany leads us to believe, pray for the Church Militant, it is to be supposed that the prayers of those blessed spirits are far more to be desired by us than the prayers of these friars or prelates. And inasmuch as the blessed, after the manner of Christ, love the people more than any private person, and cannot be turned aside by any such impure influence, it appears sufficiently plain to me that their general prayers avail the Church Militant more than the special prayers of the friars. For the friars cannot presume to extol themselves above the saints. In their unbelief, therefore, it appears to me (as much as it lies in them to do

¹ 2Sam 17.

² Perhaps a reference to the Peasants' Revolt under Wat Tyler, c. 1381.

so) that the friars have condemned both Christ and all the citizens of heaven, and consequently the whole Church Militant, which sets more value on the Lord's prayer than on these special prayers and frivolous inventions of the mendicants.

Phronesis. I am pleased to find that you expose this undoubted heresy by so shrewd a scrutiny of the conduct of the friars. Nor do I doubt that the decision to which you refer, savours of manifest heresy. And the reason why this heresy has thus shot up is obvious.

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For the friars, by means of such prayers, delude the people as regards God, and despoil them as regards the world. This is why the friars so greatly magnify these prayers. And that their doctrine may possess greater weight, and be less open to suspicion of selfish views, they unite themselves with the other religious orders and the bishops. But these fraudulent personages have forgotten Christ and the saints in heaven.

On giving further attention to the question you propose, I do not hesitate to affirm that the temporal lords are bound to assist the humbler members of the church against these false brethren, just as they are bound to defend themselves against the clerks possessioners,¹ as I said before. For God could not receive from his subject, or confer anything upon him, without the return of a greater blessing. How then is it allowable for prelates or lords to receive anything from their subjects, without affording them, in their assistance, an equivalent recompense? For they ought to follow Christ, as far as possible. But in this respect, the false prophets and all the vicars of Antichrist diabolically boast that they are freer, as regards those subject to them, than Christ himself. In fact, I do not see in what way anyone could be a secular tyrant, except by exercising tyranny in withdrawing or withholding such assistance, for it is not possible that Christ would withdraw assistance and defence for his people. How then can these men be said to follow God if they refuse to assist and defend their dependants against their greatest enemy? I do not hesitate to affirm that a just defence of these men would conduce to the worldly prosperity, the merit, and the everlasting glory of such temporal lords.

But if temporal lords are bound to protect their dependants against thieves, robbers, and marauders, yes, and against public enemies invading the realm in which they dwell, they are much more bound against false brethren — inasmuch as the evils to be feared in the latter case are greater. The friars should be especially opposed in that respect, in which they more directly oppose themselves to Christ, and in which temporal lords might with most ease moderate the abuse. For there is no necessity, and I do not advise, that they should fight with or kill the friars. But I certainly do advise this: that men should not foster the friars in their temporal possessions, under the false pretence of alms — because without doubt, they would thus occasion the condemnation of both the offenders and themselves. Lords, then, would do well to call to mind how weighty their own share of guilt is, even though they do not make themselves partakers with these hypocrites in their crimes, inasmuch as according to the Gospel, it is most dangerous to thus have their lot with these deceivers.²

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¹ See [note on p. 24](#).

² Pro 1.11-19.

If it is urged that the temporal lords ought to put faith in them, as the more holy members of the Church Militant, I reply with the apostle, that they should not too readily believe every spirit, but should try them, whether they are of God.^{1Joh 4.1} A secular man may easily do this, since he might easily demand from a friar, on the testimony of his whole sect under their common seal, what the sacred host is. Upon doing so, when the friar utters a falsehood, as he is compelled to do in such a case, it follows that having convicted the friar of falsehood in a matter of faith, the man should wholly reject the friar as a man not to be trusted. For they have decreed in their general council, as have their doctors ever since the time when they first stole their way into Christianity, that this consecrated host is an accident without a subject — in fact, without anything. But if this is the thing they consecrate, then they make their heresy obvious at once to the aforesaid lord, since they not only assert in consequence, that this host cannot be bread, but that it cannot even be the body of Christ.

I am confident that all the friars in the world cannot show any man, nor even themselves, what this accident without a subject is, which they thus consecrate and worship. Therefore let these lords consider that Psalm¹ in which the Holy Spirit, through the sainted David, declares that they shall dwell as members in the tabernacle of the Church Militant, and shall rest after awhile in the Church Triumphant, on the hill of the Church Triumphant. [Let them show that] the following conditions are fulfilled in them by reason of their order. *First*, that they would enter without spot on their allotted state of warfare;² in this, the friars and all simonists are manifestly found wanting. In the *second* place, that the pilgrim, after his entrance upon the state, should carefully execute justice. And among other acts of justice, that of rendering his neighbor spiritual aid is one of the principal act, since it is the one work of mercy obligatory on all men. *Thirdly*, that he is true not only in word, but in thought, as one who speaks truth in his heart. And *fourthly*, that his tongue is not deceitful in outward conversation. In the *fifth* place, that he does no wrong to his neighbor by withholding bodily, or more importantly, spiritual aid. *Sixthly*, that he does not receive or believe calumnies uttered against others, whatever the nature of the accusation may be. In this, those who do not receive calumnies against their neighbors, are those who do not foster those who are in the habit of detraction. And since this is a sin of which the friars are generally guilty, all believers should beware lest they become partakers with them in such guilt. In the *seventh* place, this lord, or faithful Christian, whoever he may be, is acquainted with the times, and aware that he should, as far as requisite, bring to nothing every malignant man in his convent;³ for in doing the things he does, that malignant man is a traitor to God. In the *eighth* place, he should duly extol and honor his brother who works justice fearlessly and constantly, and who has a filial fear of God.

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¹ **Psa 15:1** LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? ² He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; ³ He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; ⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵ He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

² That is, the war against sin, death, and Satan's lies, wearing the full armor of God (2Cor 10.4-6; Eph 6.10-18).

³ Quantum sufficit ut malignum quemcunque in conventu suo deducat ad nihilum.

Now, do not let the friars any longer declare we are lacking in charity, because we take up such language against these sects. For Christ, I am certain, was not lacking in charity; and yet he himself, as it appears in Mat 23, rebuked the sect of the Pharisees with the utmost sharpness. He not only imprecated upon them an eightfold woe or prophecy, but brought about its effectual fulfilment against them. For Christ, to magnify his own sect which he purposed to make sufficient in himself, resolved to destroy all those sects of a private religion — the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. And hence Christ, through his apostle, in Titus 1.10-11, thus teaches us to love ourselves: “There are,” he says, “many unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they should not, for filthy lucre’s sake.”

For this reason it follows, then, that as many as are sound in the faith, should severely rebuke them. I have no doubt that our private religious, in their unbelief, put as high a value on their own adulterous signs, as on the fruit of the faith set forth in the Gospel commandments. Nor do I have any doubt that systematically, they are vain talkers and seducers of simple people. These men are as wedded to their signs as the unbelievers were wedded to their circumcision at the time of the introduction of the law of grace. I am sure, too, that these friars subvert both the temporal and spiritual houses of the temporal lords, teaching things that are apocryphal and ridiculous, for the sake of gain. Therefore, since their mouths must be stopped, according to the apostolic command, they ought to be sternly refuted. And since they fluctuate so greatly in their faith, we ought to endeavor by our rebukes, to establish them in it. If we slothfully refrain from doing these things, then we fail to exercise Christian charity towards the church — indeed, towards these sects themselves — which in my view, is a damnable neglect, and an open betrayal of the ordinance of Christ.

PART III.

A TREATISE OF JOHN WYCLIFFE AGAINST THE ORDERS OF FRIARS.

The following Treatise “Against the Orders of Begging Friars,” and the next, entitled “A Complaint to the King and Parliament,” were printed in Oxford in 1608, edited by Dr. James; and they are now reprinted from that volume.

Chapter 1.

Friars’ Orders Are More Perfect Than Christ’s.

First, *friars* say that their religion, founded by sinful men, is more perfect than that religion or order which Christ himself made, who is both God and man. For they say that each bishop and priest may lawfully leave their first dignity,¹ and afterward be a *friar*. But once he is a *friar*, he may in no manner leave that and live as a bishop, or a priest, by the form of the Gospel. But this heresy is saying that Christ lacked wit, might, or charity, to teach apostles and his disciples the best religion. But what man may allow this foul heresy to be put on Jesus Christ? Christian men say that the religion and order that Christ made for his disciples and priests is most perfect, most easy, and most true. It is most perfect for this reason: for its patron or founder is most perfect, for he is truly God and truly man; and he that is of most wit, and most charity, gave this religion to

¹ *Dignity*: a high office, rank, or station.

his precious ¹ friends. Also, its rule is most perfect since ² the Gospel in His freedom, without error of man, is the rule of this religion. Also knights ³ of this religion are most holy, and most perfect. For Jesus Christ and his apostles are its chief knights, and after them, holy martyrs and confessors. It is most easy and light; for Christ himself says that “*his yoke is soft, and his charge is light,*” since it stands entirely in love and freedom of heart, and it bids nothing but reasonable things, and profitable for the one who keeps it.

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It is most true; for it is confirmed by God, and not by sinful men, and no man may destroy or dispense against it. But if the pope or any man would be saved, he must be confirmed by it, or else he shall be damned. But men say that other new orders and rules are worth nothing unless they are confirmed by the pope and other sinful men. But then they have no worth unless they are confirmed by the devil; and in that case, the pope shall be damned, for then he is a devil, as the Gospel says of *Judas*.^{Joh 6.70} And thus men say that Christ’s religion, in his own cleanness and freedom, is more perfect than any sinful man’s religion, by as much as Christ is more perfect than any sinful man. And if the new religious say that they keep all that Christ’s religion bids, then they spare the truth. For they lack the freedom and measure of Christ’s religion, and are bound to the errors of sinful men, and thereby hindered from profiting Christian men’s souls, and not suffered to teach freely God’s law, nor keep it in themselves.

For by the first and greatest commandment of God, they are held *to love God with all their heart, and all their life, of all their mind, and all their strength, and their neighbors as themselves*; but who may do more than this? Then no man may keep more than what Christ’s religion bids. And so, if this new religion of *friars* is more perfect than Christ’s religion, and if *friars* keep well this religion, they are more perfect than Christ’s apostles, or else they are apostates. And if men are apostates, they leave the better order, and take another that is less perfect. The order of Christ in his cleanness and freedom is most perfect; and so it seems that all these *friars* are apostates.

Chapter 2.

Friars Hinder the Free Preaching of the Gospel.

Also, *friars* say plainly that it is apostasy and heresy for a priest to live as Christ ordained a priest to live, by form of the Gospel. For if there is any *friar* that is a priest, skilled in God’s law and able to travel to sow God’s word among the people; and if he does this office freely, going from country to country where he may most profit; and if he does not cease for *prior* nor any other satrap;⁴ and if he does not charge singular habit;⁵ and if he does not beg, but is paid with common food and drink, as Christ and his apostles were; then they will pursue him as apostate, and drag him to prison and say that he is cursed for this deed.

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¹ Originally, *dearworth*.

² The word “sith” for since, and the word “ne” for nor, which are of very frequent occurrence, are not retained; all the remaining obsolete words are retained. [Reminder: Vaughn’s original footnotes containing the meaning of those obsolete words, have been substituted in the text for easier reading. – WHG]

³ *Knights*: disciples or followers.

⁴ In an abbey, the prior is next below the abbot. Satrap: a great man, either of the laity or clergy.

⁵ *Charge singular habit*: if he does not continually wear the identifying habit (robe) of his order. See [chap. 7](#).

For if freely going about and freely preaching is lawful for such a *friar* — since it is exemplified and commanded by Christ, and is not to be closed in a cloister as if it were Caym's castle¹ — *friars* would need to leave this living of cloister and feigned obedience by singular profession, and dwell among the people to whom they may most profit spiritually. For charity should drive *friars* to come out among the people, and to leave Caym's castle that is so needless and costly to the people, since they cannot occupy themselves so well in such solitary life and contemplation, as Christ and John the Baptist could. And this same Christ ordained all his apostles and disciples to live an openly good life, in meekness and wilful poverty, and discreet penance, to busily teach his Gospel to the people, and not be enclosed in great cloisters, and costly Caym's castles.

It seems an open act of Antichrist not to allow priests to freely do this office of Christ, but to require them to be ruled in this, on pain of imprisoning, following the will of a simple idiot — and in this case, a damned devil of hell. And so no means are left to hold these sects together, unless it is this blasphemy of imprisoning a man for what he does in following the will of God. And thus this new profession is harmful for many reasons. For it is not exemplified by Christ, nor by any of his apostles, who taught us all that was necessary and profitable. Also, this profession serves nothing, unless it is to make fools do more after the errors of sinful men, than after the commandment of God. For by virtue of Christ's teaching, each man is held to follow another, inasmuch as he teaches Christ's commandment or counsel;² and no man may bind another more. Also, Christ gave his disciples power by each work that turns to the profit of their souls, and to the help of other men. And this freedom is hindered by this profession made to sinful men, and in this case, to fiends of hell. But here men should not destroy *friars*, nor flee them, nor curse them — but destroy their *errors*, and save their *persons*, and bring them to that living which Christ ordained priests to live in. For that is always the best, to the most worship of God, to the most profit of holy church, and to *friars* also. And what man would not help do this with all his power, wit, and will?

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Chapter 3.

A Man Once Professed to their Religion May Never Leave It.

Also, *friars* say that once a man is professed to their religion, he may never leave it and be saved, even if he is unable to do it for his entire life. And they will require him to live in such a state evermore, to which God makes him evermore unable — and so they require him to be damned. Alas! Out of such heresy, man's ordinance is held to be stronger than the ordinance of God. For if a man enters into the new religion against *man's* ordinance, he may lawfully forsake it. But if he enters it against *God's* ordinance (i.e., when God makes him unable for it), he will not be allowed to leave it, by Antichrist's power. And since no one knows which man is, and is not, enabled for this new religion by God's judgment, if this reason were well-declared, then no man should be constrained to hold onto this new sect. And thus this new religion would not last, unless it is by this blasphemy which constrains a man who is unable by God's judgment to hold onto this new sect, and does not allow him to come to freedom by Christ's order.

¹ Cain's castle, see [p. 200](#).

² [1Cor 11:1](#) Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

Chapter 4.
No Preaching Without License of their Sovereign, However Bad.

Also, *friars* say that if a man is professed to their holy order, he shall not freely and generally preach the Gospel of Christian men without license from his sovereign, for virtue of obedience. [This holds,] however cursed his sovereign may be in his life, and ignorant of God's law, and an enemy to Christian men's souls, and in this case, a foul devil of hell — though this man professed having received from God ever so much skill in God's law, and power, and the will to work according to this skill. And so this man will necessarily be damned for misspending God's treasure.

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God's law says that a man is without charity if he does not help his brother with bodily alms if he is in need. Then much more is a man without charity if he does not help his brother's soul by teaching him God's law when he sees him running toward hell, indeed, by ignorance. And thus to magnify and maintain these rotten sects, they force a man by hypocrisy, false teaching, and strong pains, to break God's commandments, and to falsify charity. Out of this false heresy and tyranny of Antichrist, men are strongly forced to keep *his* laws more, and obey *them* more, than Christ's ever rightful commandments!

Chapter 5.
The Lawfulness of Begging Maintained By Friars.

Also, *friars* say and maintain that begging is lawful, which is damned both in the Old Testament and in the New. For in the fifth book of Holy Writ, God says to his people, *Always a needy man and beggar shall not be among you.*¹ Also, the Holy Ghost taught Solomon to pray these two things of God:

God make vanity and lying words far from me, and do not give me begging or beggingness: but give only things that are necessary for my livelihood, lest by chance I be drawn to fully renounce, and say, Who is the Lord? as those who say, I know no Lord: and lest I be compelled, and made by force of neediness, to steal and to forswear the name of my God. [Pro 30.8, 9.](#)

Also the wise man says,

It is a wicked or wayward life, to seek these livings from house to house; and he shall not do trustily, there he shall be harbored, and he shall not open his mouth. [\[unknown passage\]](#)

Also, Christ bids his apostles and disciples that they should, "not bear a satchel, nor scrip, but look for what house is able to hear the Gospel, and eat and drink there, and do not pass from there, and do not pass from house to house. [Luke 10.4, 7.](#)

Also, *St. Paul* labored or toiled with his hands for himself, and for the men that were with him, ([Acts 20.33-35](#)); he coveted neither gold, nor silver, nor clothes from the men that he taught, to give other teachers an example to do the same in time of need; and *St. Peter* fished after Christ's resurrection. ([John 21.3](#)) Also *St. Paul* bids that men who live in idleness and curiosity, and do not labor, should not eat. ([2Thes 3.10](#)) Also *St. Clement* ordained that Christians should not beg

¹ [Deu 15:11](#) "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

openly. And to put away this begging, St. *Austin* made two books on how *monks* ought to labor with their hands for their livelihood.

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And *Benet* teaches the same to his *monks*, and St. *Bernard* to his *friars*. And *Jerome* says that *monks* should labor with their hands, not only for their need, but rather to exclude idleness and vanity. For in the state of innocency, God ordained man to labor; and afterward in the state of sin, God gave this labor to man for his penance. Since, then, open begging is thus sharply damned in Holy Writ, it is a foul error to maintain it; but it is a greater error to say that Christ was such a beggar — for then he would have contradicted his own law. But it is the greatest error to continue in this damned begging, and thus rob the poor people, against charity, and make them believe that Christ was such a beggar, and that this begging is well done.

Chapter 6.

Friars Draw All Alms from Poor and Needy Men, to Maintain their Sinful and Superfluous Order.

Also, *friars* say that it is necessary to leave the commandment of Christ — which is to give alms to poor feeble men, poor crooked men, poor blind men, and bed-ridden men — and give alms to hypocrites who pretend to be holy and needy, when in fact they are strong in body and have excessive riches: in great superfluous houses, precious clothes, great feasts, and many jewels and treasure. And thus they slay poor men with their false begging, since they take falsely from their worldly goods by which the poor would sustain their bodily life. And they deceive rich men in their alms, and maintain or encourage them to live in falseness against Jesus Christ. For since there were enough poor men to take men's alms before *friars* came in, and the earth is now more barren than it was, either our *friars* or else poor men must want from these alms. But *friars*, by subtle hypocrisy, get these alms for themselves, and hinder poor men from having them.

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Chapter 7.

Traditions of Friars Preferred Before Christ's Commandments.

Also, *friars* value ¹ more the breaking of their own traditions, than the breaking of the commandments of God. For a *friar* is punished more for breaking one of their commandments, than for breaking God's. For breaking God's commandments is not counted against them, and in this they show how they love their own worship more than God's. And thus they take to themselves the worship that is appropriate to God — and so they are blasphemers and heretics; and so they value more their bodily habit, than charity and other virtues. For if a *friar* discards his bodily habit, to which he is not bound by God's law, he is held apostate, and sharply pursued — sometimes to prison, and sometimes to death, even though he better serves God without his habit than in it. But though he trespasses against charity by impatience, false leasings, pride, or covetousness, it is accounted little or nothing; rather it is praised if it brings worldly muck.

Chapter 8.

Friars are Great Hypocrites, As Poor As Christ In Show, As Sumptuous As Lords and Prelates In Deed.

¹ Originally, "charge." — meaning they assign more value or importance to it.

Also, *friars* feign themselves as hypocrites, to straitly keep the Gospel and poverty of Christ and his apostles — and yet they are most contrary to Christ and his apostles, in hypocrisy, pride, and covetousness. For they show more holiness in a bodily habit, and other signs, than Christ and his apostles did. And for their singular habit or holiness, they presume to be equal with prelates and lords, and more worthy than other clerics.

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And they can never make an end to covetousness; but by begging, bequeathing, burying, salaries, and thirty masses,¹ and by confessing, absolutions, and other false means, they ever cry after worldly goods, where Christ used none of these. And thus, for this stinking covetousness, they worship the fiend as their God.

Chapter 9.

Their Stealing of Children and Enticing Them to Their Order.

Also, *friars* draw children from Christ's religion into their private order by hypocrisy, lies, and stealing. For they tell them that their order is holier than any other, and that they will have a higher degree in bliss than other men that are not in it. And they say that men of their order will never come to hell, but will judge other men with Christ at dooms-day. And so they steal children from father and mother, sometimes those who are unfit for the order, and sometimes those who should sustain their father and mother by commandment of God. And thus they are blasphemers, taking upon themselves full counsel in doubtful things that are not expressly commanded nor forbidden in Holy Writ, since such counsel belongs to the Holy Ghost.

And they are therefore cursed by God, as the Pharisees were cursed by Christ, to whom he says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees," [Luk 11.44](#) you who are writers of law, and men of singular religion, *that compass about the water and the land to make a man of your religion; and when he is made of your religion, you make him doubly a child of hell.* And since he that steals an ox or a cow is damnable by God's law and man's also, much more is he damned that steals a man's child — which is better than all earthly goods — and draws him to the *less* perfect order. And even if this singular order were more perfect than Christ's, he never wrote whether it is to the damnation of the child, for he does not know to which state God has ordained him, and they did so blindly against Christ's ordinance.

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Chapter 10.

Curates Defrauded of Their Duties by Means of Friars.

Also, for pride and covetousness, *friars* draw from curates their office and sacraments, in which lie profit or worship; and so they create dissension between curates and their spiritual children. By many subtle means, *friars* draw to themselves confession, and burying rich men, and masspence, and thirty masses. But they will not come to poor men's dirges, nor receive them to be buried among themselves. And they cry fast that they have more power in confession than other curates; for they may confess all who come to them. But curates may confess² no farther

¹ Triginta or Gregorian Masses: these are thirty Masses said at any altar for thirty consecutive days for the deliverance of a certain soul from Purgatory. A **fee** is charged for each thing in this list. — WHG

² *Confess*: to hear the confession of a believer. In this "auricular confession," the one who takes the confession, forgives the penitent, or assigns penance to atone for the sin. A donation or fee was expected for hearing the

than their own parishes. And curates say that since they will answer before God for the souls of their subjects, they would know their life; *friars* say there is no need, for they have more power than the curate. And thus dissension and hate is created between curates and their children; and the pride and covetousness of *friars* is the cause of all this and many other sins. And thus they are hated and cursed by God Almighty, for they create discord among Christian men.

Chapter 11.

Friars Come Under the Name of Saints, and Forsake the Rule.

Also, *friars* come under the name of *saints*; and yet they forsake the saints' rule, and live and put their own errors on the saints; and so they slander both them and God. For if men speak of *Francis*, he used and taught great meekness, poverty, and penance: and Minors¹ now use the contrary. For they make statutes of their own will, and keep them fast, and make men think that *Francis* made them. But preachers say that *Dominic* founded them, and then he kept *Austin's* rule, since he was a canon before — for otherwise he was apostate, if *Austin's* rule were good.

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But *Austin* would always follow the apostles' living, and preachers do the contrary. And *friar Austin's* rule was founded then on *Austin* the great doctor; but his rule does not speak of *friars*, and so they are grounded on lies, for they have no patron saint. And the Carmes² know neither founder nor rule; and so the *friars* that have founders, act against their founders' teaching, and Christ's also. And they colour their own wicked laws under the name of these saints; and so they are grounded on leasings, and they slander their patrons and Christ also. And other *friars* that have no patrons, live after themselves, and their errors reflect on saints; and so they slander them and Christ. And thus hypocrisy reigns, and sin is maintained, by colour of holiness.

Chapter 12.

Persecution of True Priests By False Friars.

Also, *friars* pursue true priests, and forbid them to preach the Gospel, notwithstanding that Christ enjoined priesthood, and the preaching of the Gospel. And so they part the thing that God joined together, and (as much as it is in them) they break God's ordinance. Thus they harm Christian men more cruelly than the sultan of Saracens, for they are nearer and more malicious. For since Christ charges all his priests to preach truly the Gospel, and friars pursue them for this deed, even to the fire, they slay priests for doing God's bidding. And therefore friars are man-slayers, and irregular,³ and cursed by God. For they keep His people from being saved, and so they require them to be damned. Since the principal point and end of Christ's dying and his passion,

confession, and it was considered charity to the church. "Having one day reflected that the impious and sinners who neglect to redeem their sins, are condemned to eternal pains with demons, suddenly God inspired us with His divine mercy; our heart was touched; and it was with fear, eagerness, and anxiety that we sought the counsel of priests and religious men, in order to know how we could escape the wrath of the eternal judge. The counsel that has been given us is that, among the virtues, there is none greater than charity, and that the act we ought to prefer above all others, is to give to the monastery a portion of our wealth." — Charles Lasteyrie, *History of Auricular Confession*, vol II (London, 1848), p. 130.

¹ In Roman Catholicism, the **Major Holy Orders** are priest (including bishop and presbyter), deacon and even subdeacon; and the four **Minor Orders** are acolyte, exorcist, lector (reader) and porter (doorkeeper).

² Carmelite friars.

³ *Irregular*: acting contrary to rule, or here, acting contrary to biblical order and commandment.

was to save man's soul, and the principal work of Satan is to deceive man's soul, they are traitors to Christ, and angels of Satan transformed into angels of light, and cruel traitors to all men.

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Chapter 13.

Capped Friars Served As Lords Or Kings At Table.

Also, capped *friars*, that are called “masters of divinity,” have their chamber and service like lords or kings, and send out idiots full of covetousness, to preach *not* the Gospel, but chronicles, fables, and lies, to please the people and to rob them. Alas! What cursedness this is — to a dead man, as to the world and its pride and vanity — to get himself a cap of masterdom by request of lords, and to get great gifts, and huge feasts of a hundred and many hundreds of pounds. And then to be idle from teaching God's law, just to seldom come before lords and ladies, or great gatherings, for the name of the world. And then to leave the poverty and simpleness that he is bound to, devouring poor men's alms in waste, and in the feasting of lords and great men. And thus he slanders his brother and other men, in order to live in pride and covetousness, gluttony and idleness, and leaves the service of God as though exempt from all gods. And yet, preceding¹ these covetous fools, who become limiters,² go much simony, envy, and foul merchandising. Whoever can best rob the poor people by false begging and other deceits, will have this *Judas'* office. And so a nest of Antichrist's clerics is maintained by subtle provisions of the fiend.

Chapter 14.

Great Flatterers of the People, neither Reproving nor Removing Their Sins From Among Them.

Also, *friars* do not uniformly show to the people their great sins, as God bids, and particularly to mighty men of the world: they only flatter them, and butter them up, and nourish them in sin. And since it is the office of a preacher to show men their foul sins and the pains for it, and *friars* assume this office but do not do it, they are cause for the damnation of the people.

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For in this they are foul traitors to God and also to the people, and they are nurses of the fiend of hell. For by flattering and false commandments, they let men live in their lusts, and comfort them in it. And sometimes they pursue other *true* preachers, for those will not butter up mighty men, and comfort them in their sins, but will sharply tell them the truth — and thus mighty men hire a false traitor, at great cost, to lead them to hell. Men may note the example of how *friars* allow mighty men, from year to year, to live in adultery, and covetousness, and extortious doings, and many other sins. When men are hardened in such great sins, and will not amend them, *friars*

¹ Originally, *forfending*: fending off beforehand; preventing something from happening; i.e., disqualifying.

² *Limiters*: “In the Dominican order, each priory's territory was called its *praedicatio*, and there it carried out its preaching, administered penances, sought alms, and recruited new members. As in other mendicant orders, these territories were further divided into smaller districts for the easier organization of these activities. Each district was entrusted by the conventual prior to the charge of a particular friar... ‘Limiters,’ as these friars were called, were to be of good reputation and good preachers, and required that they work their districts personally with their assistants. Limiters were not allowed to undertake parochial ministries or hold chantry incumbencies without permission. When they did this with permission, half of the stipend went to their priory.” Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning, and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society* (York Medieval Press, 2001), p. 84.

should flee their close company. But they do not, lest they lose worldly friendship, favor, or winning. And thus, for the money, they will sell men's souls to Satan.

Chapter 15.

How Much and How Often They Deceive and Cheat the Lay People by Their Letters of Fraternity.

Also, *friars*, by letters of fraternity, deceive the people in faith, rob them of temporal goods, and make the people trust more in dead parchment sealed with lies, and in the vain prayers of hypocrites (that in this case are damned devils), than in the help of God, and in their own good living. Commonly these letters are powdered with hypocrisy, covetousness, simony, blasphemy, and other lies. With *hypocrisy*, for in these are told without end many good deeds; and sometimes they are false, and more to show themselves holy in order to get worldly goods, than to save men's souls. With *covetousness*, for they do this to win the penny — for if a poor man does not give the penny, however true he is to God, he shall not have them; but a rich man, however cursed he is, shall have such letters, and think he is well enough by them, however much wrong he does to poor men. With *simony*, for they sell this supernal good for temporal goods, and that is done unskilfully; for such haggling ¹ and granting of letters was never exemplified by Christ, nor his apostles, and yet they loved men's souls best.

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With *blasphemy*, for these sinful wretches take upon themselves the dealing of good deeds, but this belongs to God. And so they are blasphemers, for they surpass bishops, popes, and also God himself. For *they* grant no pardon unless men are contrite and confessed for absolution,² and the merit of Christ's passion, and of other saints — but *friars* mention neither contrition, nor confession, nor the merit of Christ's passion, but only their own good deeds. And so Christ grants to no sinful man who continues in his sin, such a part; but *friars* grant it to cursed men for worship or winning, rather than grant it to good poor men. And thus they falsely surpass Christ. For Christ would not grant his cousins part of his kingdom, unless they suffered passion as he did.³ But *friars* would make men heirs in the bliss of heaven, since they grant other men part of their good deeds after this life. And yet they may not have their own part, unless they are saved. But Christian belief teaches that all men in charity should be procurers of all helpful deeds, by grant of God. Why then grant *friars* this part? For they would have property of spiritual goods where no property may exist, and leave property of worldly goods where Christian men may have property. And thus they teach the people that it is more helpful to give such hypocrites bodily alms, than to give it to poor needy men according to the Gospel. And thus they deceive the people in belief, and rob them of temporal goods, and make them too reckless with their own good living, out of trust in these false letters.

¹ Originally, "chaffering" – to wrangle over a price, terms of an agreement, etc.

² Originally, "contrite and shriven."

³ **Mat 20:22-23** "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." ²³ So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father."

Chapter 16.
***Friars Pervert the Right Faith of the Sacrament of the Altar,
by Making It to be an Accident Without Subject.***

Also, *friars* pervert the right faith of the sacrament of the altar, and bring in a new heresy. For when Christ says that the bread that he broke and blessed is his body, they say it is an accident without a subject, or nothing. And when Holy Writ says openly that this sacrament is bread that we break, and God's body; they say that it is neither bread, nor God's body, but an accident without subject, and nothing. And thus they depart from Holy Writ, and put new heresy on Christ and his apostles, and on *Austin*, *Jerome*, *Ambrose*, *Isidore*, and other saints, and on the court of Rome, and all true Christ-men who hold to the faith of the Gospel.

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For Christ says that, "This bread is my body." ^{Mat 26.26} And *St. Paul* says, "The bread that we break is the communication of the Lord's body"; ^{1Cor 10.16} and *St. Austin* says that the thing we see is bread; but as to faith fully taught, the bread is Christ's body.¹ *Ambrose* says that what is bread, shall be Christ's body.² *Jerome* says that the bread which Christ broke and gave to his disciples, is the body of our Savior; for Christ says, "This is my body."³ *Berengary*,⁴ by approving of the court of Rome, says thus: "I acknowledge with heart and with mouth, that the bread that is laid on the altar is not only the sacrament, but very Christ's body." Ah, Lord! What hardy devil dares teach these *friars* to thus openly deny Holy Writ, and all these saints, and the court of Rome, and all true Christian men, and to find this heresy: that this sacred host is an accident without subject, or nothing? This is not taught openly in Holy Writ; and reason and wit are against it; and *Austin* in three or four great books expressly says that no accident may be without a subject; and all wise philosophers accord here with *Austin*. Lord, what would move Christ all-mighty, all-knowing, and well-willing, to hide this belief of *friars* for a thousand years, and never teach his apostles and so many saints the right belief — but to teach first these hypocrites, who never came into the church till the foul fiend Satan was unbound? Hereby all Christian men should know the *friars'* heresy, and not receive them into their houses,^{2Joh 1.10} until they confess under their general seal, the right belief of Christian men, and forsake their old heresy.

Chapter 17.
Their Excess in Building of Great Churches and Costly Houses and Cloisters.

Also, *friars* build many great churches, and costly waste houses and cloisters — castles, as it were — and do that without need, where thorough parish churches and common ways are paired, and in many places undone. And so they teach in deed that men should have a heritage and a city to dwell in on earth, and forget heaven, against *St. Paul*. For by this new housing of *friars*, though it rains on the altar of the parish church, the blind people are so deceived that they would rather give to the waste houses of *friars* than to parish churches, or to common ways — even

¹ Augustine (354-430), *Sermon* 272.

² *Ambrose*, *On the Mysteries* (c. 387-390); *Ambrose* was Augustine's mentor.

³ *Jerome* (347-420), *Letter of Jerome to Heliodorus*.

⁴ Berengarius, Berengar of Tours, or simply Berenger (999-1088); he rejected transubstantiation, but believed Christ is present in the bread *ideally* – not literally and not figuratively. Calvin later adopted this middle road, saying that the bread is *imbued* with the presence of Christ. See [note on p. 133](#).

though men, cattle, and beasts, perish in them. Before *friars* came in, there were more people, and the earth was more plenteous, and there were churches enough.

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What reason is there now to create so much cost in new building, and let old parish churches fall down? And if men say that in these great churches, God is served fairly, certainly great houses do not make men holy, and only by holiness is God well-served. For in heaven, that was so fair, *Lucifer* served God untruly, and so did *Adam* in paradise. And *Jesus* says that the great temple of Jerusalem, that was a house of prayer and sometimes God's house, was made a den of thieves, for covetous preachers dwelt in it. But *Job* served God full well on the dunghill, and so did Adam outside of paradise, and Christ when he prayed in hills and deserts; and he also baptized there. And therefore Christ and his apostles made no great churches nor cloisters; but they went from country to country, preaching the Gospel, and teaching men to give their alms to poor men, and not give them to waste houses. For Christ taught men to pray in spirit and truth — that is, in good-will, and devotion, and holy living. And to destroy this hypocrisy, he ordained that the temple of Jerusalem should be destroyed for the sin done in it.

Chapter 18.

Friars Teaching the Vow of Obedience, Contrary to God's Law.

Friars also destroy obedience to God's law, and magnify singular obedience to sinful men, and in some cases to devils. Christ never exemplified this obedience, either in himself or in his apostles. For by the teaching of *St. Paul*, each man ought to be subject to others in the dread of Christ — that is, inasmuch as he teaches them God's will — and no man should obey any man more. And the more a man is, the more he should thus humble himself as Christ did, to all his apostles. But *friars* tell nothing by this obedience, except that they make singular profession to sinful fools, who many times teach and command them against God's will; and who say that in those things which are not expressly commanded nor forbidden in God's law, they should always obey their sovereigns — yes, even if it is unwittingly against God's will. And since it belongs to the Holy Ghost to give full counsel in such points, they make their sinful *priars* ¹ even with the Holy Ghost. And where they should be governed in such deep points by the Holy Ghost, they leave His counsel and ruling many times, and submit themselves to the ruling of a sinful fool, and in some cases a damned fiend in hell.

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And thus they leave the obedience that Christ taught and exemplified, as imperfect and not sufficient. And they praise more this feigned obedience to sinful fools, that they take from their own presumption, as if such fools had found more perfect obedience than Christ ever did, who is God and man.

Chapter 19.

How They Forsake the Perfection of their Order for Worldly Respects.

Also, *friars* forsake perfection of their order for worship of the world, and covetousness; and they are not allowed to take the freedom of the Gospel to preach God's word to the people. For

¹ *Priars*: what Wycliffe meant by this word is unclear. It may have been a witty spelling of *prayers*, as if to say that a "friar's prayer", or *priar*, is anything but prayer. Then again, a *prier* is one who inquires narrowly; and thus he may imply that what a friar asks of the Holy Spirit is limited, not really submitting to His guidance. – WHG

friars are made bishops — indeed, many times by simony. And they swear strongly to go and preach and convert heathen men, and leave this spiritual office, and be suffragans¹ in *England*, and rob men by extortions, as in punishing sin for money, and allowing men to lie in sin from year to year for an annual rent; and likewise in hallowing churches and churchyards and altars — and commonly all other sacraments — for money. And thus these *friars* bishops commonly live ever after in simony, pride, and robbery. And thus they are exempt by *Caiaphas*' bishopric from all good observances of God's law, and by their own order, and are free to live in sin, and to rob our land and envenom it with many cursings. And so they first convey the gold of our land to aliens, and sometimes to our enemies, to get this false exemption from Antichrist. And ever after they live by robbing poor men, and maintaining much sin, cursing, and simony, which is passing heresy. And others of their bishops who have dioceses in this land, forsake poverty, and penance, and obedience. For they look to be masters of all *friars* of that order in this land, and to live in pride, in the lusts of their flesh, in idleness, and despoiling the people more subtly than others. And thus a *friar* dwells in the courts of lords and ladies to be their confessor, and not displease them for anything, even though they live in ever so cursed sins. This is done in order to live in Antichrist's lusts, and to falsely get money into his convent, and to hinder poor men from their alms; and for this, he has leave and commandment by virtue of his "obedience."

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But he shall have no leave to go generally about in the world, and to preach truly the Gospel without begging, and to live an open, poor, and just life as Christ and his apostles did. For this would be the destroying of their feigned order. And therefore they love pride, covetousness, and the lusts of their own flesh, more than the worship of God, and the health of man's soul. And thus they sacrifice to *Lucifer*, to mammon, and to their own stinking belly.

Chapter 20.

Their Rotten Habit is Esteemed above Christ's Body.

Also, *friars* praise their rotten habit, more than the worshipful body of our *Lord Jesus Christ*. For they teach lords, and namely ladies, that if they die in *Francis*' habit, they will never go to hell for the virtue of it. Certainly this is an open heresy, damning all who trust in this to their lives' end. But a man may have the sacrament of the altar (and that is God's very body) in his mouth, and flee straight to hell without end; and be more damned for the evil taking of this sacrament. Such heretics are unable to be among Christian men.

Chapter 21.

Friars Beg Without Need, When The Poor Want, Without Remorse.

Also, *friars* beg without having any need for their own rich sect, and do not beg for their poor bed-ridden men who may not go themselves, and have no man to send for their livelihood. Rather, they draw rich men's alms from such poor men. Therefore charity is outlawed among them, and so is God. And lies, covetousness, and fiends are among them: for they deceive men in their alms, in order to make costly houses — not to harbor poor men, but lords and mighty men. And they teach men to support God's temple, who are poor men, or perish for defaulting.

¹ *Suffragan*: an assistant or subordinate bishop of a diocese.

And thus they are traitors to God, and to His rich people whom they deceive in their alms. And they are murderers of poor men, whose livelihood they take away from them by false lies. And therefore they are irregular before God, and despise Him, and harm the people when they say mass or matins in this cursed life — as Holy Writ teaches, and *Austin* and *Gregory* fully declare.

Chapter 22.

***Friars do not Reprove Their Brethren as the Gospel Wills,
but as They Themselves Will.***

Friars also do not keep the reproof of the Gospel against their brethren who trespass, but cruelly doom them to painful prison. This is not the meek following of Jesus Christ. For he and his apostles did not imprison sinful men in this life, but sharply reproved their sin. And at the last, when sinful men would not amend themselves, they taught good men not to commune with them. But these *friars* show their tyranny to the full, who knew so well their pains and torments. It seems no wisdom, nor profit, to give *friars* the power to imprison men. For when the king by his officers imprisons a man, that is commonly done for great and open trespass; and that is a good warning to other misdoers, and some profit comes from the king's ministers. But when *friars* imprison their brethren, the pain is not known to men, even though the sin was ever so open and slanderous. That does harm to other liege men, and the profit of the king's ministers is absent. And when the potentates of *friars* are proud, covetous, and sinful, and hate the truth, they will soon imprison true men who reprove their sins, and spare other perverse persons, so that they may flatter and maintain them in their sin. And so, beside the king's leave, they torment true men, for these men would do God's commandments. Since the king grants occasion for this, the king is obligated to revoke and hinder *friars* imprisoning of men, lest he be guilty of the sin that comes by it, and since he may destroy it, but does not. And thus beggar *friars* leapt up to a king's power, and did many times more than the kings dare to do; and they make the king the fiend's tormentor to imprison true men for saying the truth. And so the king stops God's law from being known in his land, and he nourishes evil men, and imprisons good men. For this dread and many more, the king should revoke this imprisoning, and make clerics be ruled according to the Gospel, by simpleness and holy living.

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Chapter 23.

***Friars Lawless, Begging the King and the Mighty Ones of the Land
to Maintain Their Sect, Begging Their Alms, and Beggaring the Whole Land.***

Also, *friars* make our land lawless: for they lead clerics, and namely rule prelates, and lords, and ladies, and commoners also; and they are *not* ruled by God's law, nor by the laws of the church, nor by the laws of the king. For they gloss God's law as they like, and are exempt from bishops and other ordinaries, and lead the bishops of Rome as they like. And men say they are not liege men to the king, nor subject to his laws. For though they steal men's children, it is said that no law governs them, and that seems well; for they rob the king's liege men by falsely begging sixty thousand marks per year, as men doubt reasonably, and yet they are not punished for that. And by their false ruling, the lawless *friars* make our land lawless; for they hinder clerics, lords, and commoners, from knowing the truth of Holy Writ. And they make them pursue true men to the death for teaching the commandments of God, and crying to the people about the foul sins of false *friars*. And thus falseness is maintained, and false men are raised to great estates, and truth

is pushed back. And true men are pursued — yes, to imprisoning, to loss of all their goods, and to sharp judgment — because they would destroy the sin that was openly and cursedly done, in point, to undo our land. And *friars* are most guilty of this ruling, for they lead prelates, lords and ladies, justices, and other men, by confession; and they do not speedily tell them their sins. For if they told them their sins, and they would not amend them, the *friars* who are their confessors, should lead them to it, as *Christ* and *Paul* teach. But they do not do this, for then they would lose the winning and favor of the world. And thus for love of money and the welfare of their body, they lead our land out of the law of God and all righteousness.

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Chapter 24.

Friars are Not Peace-Makers, but are Themselves Quarrel-Makers and Strivers, who Stir Others up to Wars and Dissensions.

Also, *friars* are irregular procurators¹ of the fiend, to make and maintain wars on Christian men; they are enemies of peace and charity. For *friars* counsel and openly preach that men may flee to heaven without pain, if they go and personally slay Christian men, or maintain and find someone to do so, at their cost.² And the end was to make Christ's vicar most rich to the world, when this vicar should be most poor, following Christ and his apostles in this most highly; for Christ died to make peace and charity. If men were thus to freely grant pardon, they should grant pardon to make peace, yes even to lose their own life. Yet they do not preach pardon, nor help to make peace and charity, despite being bound by God to make men truly have the bliss of heaven, if they would truly procure peace and charity. But the pardon that men used to gain from the court of *Rome*, has no certainty from Holy Writ, nor reason, nor the example of Christ or his apostles. And so friars might hinder other wars and debates if they would — but since they do not, and rather counsel to conduct them, and comfort men in this, and do not tell of their perils — they are the cause and procurators of all wars, and specially this war in Flanders.³ For they preached it, and held it against the king, the duke, and other lords and clerics, and sharply pursued priests who stood by charity and the profit of the realm. And so they were then above the king, lords, and true priests; and they robbed the king's liege men of many thousands of pounds by false pretences, that even if the king were now taken, and our land were now conquered or destroyed,

¹ *Procurator*: a person authorized to act for another; an agent.

² At the close of the 12th century in Southern France, papal legates were sent by Pope Innocent III into heretical districts to suppress the Waldenses. The pope's inquisitors tried, condemned, and punished offenders, up to and including the death penalty, done with the concurrence of the civil powers. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), with Pope Innocent III presiding, took the initial steps to make the Inquisition a permanent institution. Synods were held in each province annually, and violations of the Lateran canons were rigorously punished. The condemned were left in the hands of the secular power, and their goods were confiscated. The secular powers were admonished, and if necessary, *compelled* to exterminate all who were pointed out as heretics by the church. Any prince who declined to do this, was excommunicated. If he persisted, the pope absolved the prince's vassals from allegiance to him, which allowed the country to be seized by those who would then exterminate the heretics. The Council of Toulouse in 1229 adopted a number of canons to make the Inquisition permanent. Heretics were excluded from medicine; the houses in which they were found, were razed to the ground; they were delivered to the archbishop or local authorities. Men from age 14, and women from age 12, made an oath and renewed it every two years, that they would inform on heretics. In 1231, Pope Gregory IX put the Inquisition under the control of the Dominicans, an order specially created to defend the Church against heresy. — *The Christian Enterprise* — also http://www.franciscanfriarstor.com/archive/resources/stf_practice_of_mendicacy.htm

³ See [note on p. 69](#).

the king might not raise what was needed to help himself and his land. Certainly this was treason against God and the king, and a false deceit against all men, of both cattle and fowl, and the hindering and destroying of peace and of charity.

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Chapter 25.

Judas' Children Selling Christ, and All for Money.

Friars also are *Iscairiot's* children, betraying true men of the Gospel, as *Christ* was betrayed for money. For money, they send souls to Satan — by the example of their evil living, by their counsel to conduct wars, and by nourishing and comforting men in their sin, for the lusts of their flesh. For in pleasing bishops and other men, they preach against the poverty of Christ, and they say that preachers of the Gospel and Christ's life, are heretics worthy to be burned. And so, for the gifts of bishops and other men, for worldly favor, they sell the truth of the Gospel, just as *Judas* sold Christ. For *St. Bede* and *St. Ambrose* say that, since Christ is truth, anyone who says what is false, and departs from the truth for money, commits the sort of sin *Judas* did. And so they counsel men to wars, for they win much thereby. For default of charity, they send souls to hell — when by their counsel, men take false wars, and end in them, supposing that they do well; and therefore they die without sorrow for them. To hearten men in this cursed warring, they go with them into war, and they are their confessors, and sometimes they slay men personally. And thus they are Antichrist's martyrs, and flee to hell to draw other men there after them:

Chapter 26.

They Slander True Priests, and Flatter Wicked Men.

Also, *friars*, of all cursed men, most destroy this world; for they backbite good clerics, saying that they disturb the world; and *friars* flatter evil clerics in their sin. And so they praise lords who are tyrants, extortioners, and evil livers, and ladies also; and they despise lords and ladies who are given to leave the pride and vanity of the world. They say it has not been merry since lords and ladies took their reward to the Gospel, and left behind their ancestors' manners that were worshipful to the world.

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And so concerning rich men and others, they praise those who bring them much money, with wrong and many deceits, and say that they are holy. But they say other men who do not give *friars* far more than enough, lack the full amount, even though they do their alms much better to their poor neighbors. And since God says that evil teachers are the cause of the destruction of the people,¹ and *Grosted*² exemplifies it well, and *friars* are the principal evil teachers — they are the principal cause of destroying this world. For they are confessors, preachers, and rulers of all men in common. They do not teach them about their foul sins and their perils; but enable them in

¹ **Isa 9:16** For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err, And *those who are* led by them are destroyed.

² Or *Robert Grosseteste* (Died 1253). Bishop of Lincoln in the reign of Henry III (1216-72). Grosseteste trained the Franciscans in university theology; Roger Bacon was his most famous disciple. In 1251 he protested against a papal mandate enjoining the English clergy to pay Henry III one-tenth of their revenues for a crusade. He noted that, under this system of provisions, a sum of 70,000 marks was annually withdrawn from England by the alien nominees of Rome. After his death, the Pope wrote to Henry, asking him to disinter the bones of the bishop and burn them to powder. — WHG

their sins, in order to win stinking muck and the lusts of their own belly, which is foul worms' meat, and a sack of dirt [i.e., “filthy lucre”, or ill-gotten gains].

Chapter 27.

Friars Most Impatient of All Men Living in Bearing Reproof.

Also, *friars* most rebel against the teaching of Christ's Gospel, and are most out of patience and pity; for they are most impatient against reproving sin and destroying it. For a lord will more meekly suffer the sharp despising of his little sin, than friars will suffer the meek and soft reproving of their great heresies. For they are mad that men's alms should be rightly distributed among poor needy men — feeble, crooked, and blind; for then they say *they* are undone. But their religion is useless.^{Jas 1.26} As *St. James* says:

“For this is a clean religion, without spot towards God the Father: to visit the fatherless and motherless children, and widows in their tribulation, and to keep a man unfouled from this world.”^{Jas 1.27}

That is, to keep them from pride, covetousness, and vanities. But *friars* do all the contrary; for they visit rich men, and by hypocrisy they falsely get their alms, and withdraw it from poor men. They visit rich widows for their muck, and have them buried at the friars' [monastery]; but poor men do not come in there. And they forsake wilful poverty, and are the most covetous of all men; they boast more of their holiness, and are the most lavish in their vain speech, and are worldly, as true men tell. *Friars* say openly that if the king, and lords, and other men, stand thus against their false begging, and will not allow *friars* to rob their tenants, and give their alms to their poor neighbors [instead of to the friars], then *friars* will depart the land, and come again with bright heads.¹ See whether this is treason or not.

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Chapter 28.

The Holy Scriptures are Accused by These Unholy Men, of Falsehood.

Also, *friars* teach and maintain that Holy Writ is false; and so they put falseness upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and on the Holy Ghost, and on all the blessed Trinity. For since God Almighty taught, confirms, and maintains Holy Writ,² if this writing is false, then God is false, and He is a maintainer of error and falseness; but certainly then he is no God. Yet we know that no sect would ever say that the laws of their God were false, and with that say we believe in the same God. But nonetheless, these blasphemers do this to the Holy Trinity. Alas! Who may suffer this blasphemy: that Christ — in whom there is all the treasure of wit, wisdom, and truth — could not, or would not, say true words and sentence, and yet these sinful fools have a true manner of speaking, which is contrary to the speech of our Lord Jesus Christ? For if this is so, then sinful fools, indeed devils from hell, are wiser and truer than Jesus Christ. And when this cursed ground is sought, it stands in this error: “For I who am master of vanity and of heresy, misunderstand the words of God, and therefore these words are false.” But these heretics should know that it follows from their cursed ground, that God is the most false thing in earth, heaven, or hell! Why? For men falsely understand His greatest falseness. And thus each pagan or Saracen might make our God false, as he liked. But why do they say that Holy Writ is false? They are so used to lies and falseness, that they mistake falseness for truth. As men say, a man may be

¹ “Bright heads” may mean helmeted knights; that is, an army. – WHG

² Psa 12.6-7 (KJV); Isa 55.11.

nourished by venom for so long, little by little, that he supposes it is wholesome, fit, and good. Also, Holy Writ damns their foul hypocrisy, as inviting covetousness and other sins;¹ and therefore they say that it is false to colour by its falseness.² Also Holy Writ greatly praises Christ's religion, and tells how new sects, full of hypocrisy and covetousness, will come and deceive Christian men,³ and bids Christians to know them by their covetousness and hypocrisy; and therefore *they* say, as Satan's clerics, that Holy Writ is false.

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Chapter 29.
How Strongly Wedded to Their Rotten Habit.

Friars also are stronger wedded with their rotten habit against the freedom of the Gospel, than the husband is wedded with his wife by ordinance of God. For the husband may lawfully be absent from his wife for a month, a half-year, and sometimes seven years, and by common consent of them both, all their life. But if a *friar* is out of his rotten habit even an hour, he is apostate, even though he loves God more, and serves him better, and is more profitable to Christian men. And they put more holiness in their rotten habit than Christ or his apostles ever did in their clothes. For Christ was out of his clothes thrice in a day,⁴ and yet he was not apostate. But they value this rotten habit so much, for thereby the people suppose that they are holy, and give them more dirt than is necessary or profitable. And therefore each party draws another to hell. So *friars*, for falsely taking alms when there is no need, and for not having leave from God's law to do it, blind the people. For they extract their alms from their poor and needy neighbors, where they should do it by the behest of God;⁵ and so they maintain *friars* in their false begging, hypocrisy, and many other sins.

Chapter 30.
***The Pope's Dispensation, or Commandment of the Superior,
is More Regarded Than Christ's Commandment.***

Also, *friars* teach that it is not lawful for a priest or any other man to keep the Gospel in his bounds and cleanness, without the error of sinful men, unless he has leave from Antichrist. And thus they say it is not lawful for a Christian man to do God's commandment, unless a fiend gives them leave for it — as if the leave and commandment of God is not enough. For they say that a priest that has bound himself to the errors of sinful men by new profession, may not enter the

¹ **Psa 119:36** Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness.

² Originally "their falseness" — but they say Holy Writ (the Scriptures, pl.), is false; and so they say that it must not "colour" — that is, influence or affect — our understanding or conduct, for only these friars have the truth.

³ **1Tim 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron; **2Pet 2:1** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

⁴ **Joh 13:4** rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. **Joh 13:12** So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"

⁵ That is, the poor should give as prompted by God, voluntarily — not out of compulsion, **2Cor 9.7.**

freedom of the Gospel, and live thereafter as Christ taught priests to do, unless they have the dispensation of the pope.

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And I suppose that if he is Judas, and shall be damned, then he is a devil, as Christ says.^{Joh 6.70} And then it is plain, since this priest may not keep the Gospel in his freedom without the pope's leave (and he is in this case a devil), then a priest may not keep the commandments of God without leave from a fiend. But to get this leave, our gold is given to aliens, and sometimes to our enemies. And yet the priest is bound in common to the rotten habit, and is exempt from goodness, and is bold in sin.

Chapter 31.

Their Usury, Simony, Covetousness, Extortion, Rapine, and Theft.

Also, *friars* are a receptacle and swallower of simony, of usury, of extortions, of spoils, and of theft, and a nest or hoard of mammon's treasure. For even though men live in simony, *friars* will not counsel them, and charge them in confession to resign their benefice; but instead *friars* comfort them to hold it still, and to bring them much dirt from it, and in return they will undertake for their sin.¹ And so they charge usurers not to make restitution speedily, but rather they colour this sin² in order to become a partner of this winning. And this is so of other robberies too: they receive it privily, and so they maintain and colour thefts in their own theft, where other liege men would be punished for it. And so they are more covetous than the wicked Jews that bought Christ. For they would not take the money from Judas and put it into their money or treasury, for it was the price of Christ's blood; for Christ was sold and betrayed to death for that money.^{Mat 27.6} But *friars* receive money gotten by sins as great or more, to make great houses and great feasts for lords, and not just to buy a field to bury pilgrims in, as the Jews did. Rather they lay it up in their treasury, to maintain wrongs against their curates and other poor men, by false plea at *Rome*, and merchandise in *England*.

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Chapter 32.

Friars Cannot Endure to Hear of Christ's Poverty Preached.

Friars also loudly cry that poor priests are heretics; for they teach by God's law how clerics should keep wilful poverty and Christ's Gospel, and that the kings and lords ought to compel them to do so. And thus *friars* damn Holy Writ, and the king's crown. For since poor priests have taught both in English and in Latin, how many open laws both in the Old Testament and in the New, forbid all priests and deacons from having secular lordship, and these laws are confirmed by Christ's life and his apostles', and since *friars* say that this is heresy, they openly damn Holy Writ. And since the king's regalia asks by old statute, that the king may in many cases take temporalities from clerics, and *friars* say that this taking is error against God's law, they damn this rightful regalia of our king. And they also damn our kings and lords as heretics, if they maintain this rightful law to the stable peace of our realm. And since by God's law, the office of the king and lords is to praise, reward, and maintain good and rightful men, and to chastise sharply wicked men, and to constrain clerics to hold the state that Christ put them in,

¹ That is, they will intercede for them with God, which is the exclusive office of Christ (1Tim 2.5; Heb 7.25).

² *Colour*: to give a deceptive explanation or excuse for something.

and always wilful poverty — *friars* say that if the king and lords do their office of God's law, they are foul heretics. But why should the king maintain in his land such traitors both to God and him, and cruel enemies of all Christian men?

Chapter 33.

Friars like Thieves coming into the Church by the Window, Not by the Door.

Also, *friars* are thieves, both night thieves and day thieves, entering into the church, not by the door, who is Christ.^{Joh 10.1} For without authority from God, they make new religions of the errors of sinful men; and they make worse rules the longer they last; and they do not meekly seek the worship of God, and the profit of Christian men's souls.

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And they must do this if they come in by Christ. But they choose and find a new order that is less perfect and profitable than what Christ himself made. And so they create divisions in the priesthood, against the commandment of God. And since they are not grounded on Christ and his law, they must be straightened up, and the ordinance of Christ must stand in His cleanness and perfection.

Chapter 34.

Bind Their Novices to Impossible Things.

Also, by hypocrisy *friars* bind novices to impossible things that they may not do; for they bind them above the commandments of God, as they themselves say. But they may do no more than the commandment of God: for God bids, in his foremost commandment, that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength and might — and who may do more than this? No man. So then, they bind them to more than they may do. And since it is not the counsel of Christ to make singular profession to a sinful idiot, and in this case a devil (and they call them to such a one), they go above the counsel of Christ. But all that is above the counsel of Christ is always evil, since Christ counsels good things for each. And thus blind fools that cannot keep the least commandment, may blind these novices to the high counsels of Christ. But see their hypocrisy: since each counsel of Christ is a commandment for some time, and some circumstances, how can they bind them to more than the commandments? Not by the counsels, for they are commandments; but they feign this to draw young children into their rotten habit, and other fools who do not know the perfection of Christ's order.

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Chapter 35.

The Necessity and Multitude of Their Vain and Changeable Ceremonies.

Friars also are worse heretics than the Jews were, who would keep the ceremonies of the old law along with the freedom of Christ's Gospel.¹ For the Jews kept reasonable laws made by God, and helpful for the time that God ordained. But friars keep new laws, feigned from the errors of men, which are more than God ordained in the old law, and more uncertain. For today this law is held among them, and tomorrow it is destroyed; but God's law was not this uncertain, and these laws

¹ This is the substance of the Book of Hebrews: that to continue in the shadows of the ceremonial law, is to reject Christ, who is their fulfillment, and the surety of a better covenant (Heb 7.22; 8.4-6; 9.24). **Gal 5:1** Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

of *friars* are more against the Gospel. For the laws of the Old Testament were a figure of Christ's coming and passion, and they led men to the Gospel. But the new laws of *friars* are not such a figure, and they hinder men from holding the freedom of the Gospel. Ah, Lord, since good laws, ordained by God, must cease for the freedom of the Gospel, much more must evil laws, that are ordained by the error of sinful and worldly men, cease and not hinder men from keeping the Gospel in His freedom.

Chapter 36.
Friars Return Evil for Good.

Also, *friars* are adversaries of Christ, and disciples of Satan; not returning good for evil, as God's law teaches; nor good for good, as kindness and man's law teaches; but they return evil for good, as the fiend's law teaches. For they cast and plot the death of true men who desire and toil to deliver men from the fiend's mouth, and from everlasting death, and bring them to that state in which Christ ordained priests to live. And they proffer *friars* this condition: that if they teach by Holy Writ or reason, that the *friars'* order and living is best for priests, then they will gladly be professed to the *friars'* order.

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And if priests may teach, both by Holy Writ and reason, that their order is better than the friars' — since Christ himself made their order, and not *friars* — they pray that *friars*, for the love of God, would take that order, and leave their singular order, inasmuch as it draws them away from the freedom of the Gospel. And thus *friars* pursue priests who reprove friars' sins as God bids, to burn both them and the Gospel of Christ, written in English, for the best learning of our nation. And thus for the great alms that men give to *friars*, they hinder men from knowing God's law, and hinder them from being saved — for they may not be saved without learning and keeping God's law. And so *friars* force our land to be damned with fiends in hell.

Chapter 37.
Friars, Under the Habit of Holiness, Lead Men into Sin.

Friars also are worse enemies and slayers of men's souls, than the cruel fiend of hell by himself. For under the habit of holiness, they lead men and nourish them in sin, and are special helpers of the fiend to strangle men's souls. For the name of holiness and of great clerics (in the reputation of the people), the people will not trust themselves to a few true men who preach against their covetousness, hypocrisy, and false deceit. But the *friars*, for love of a little stinking muck and the welfare of their foul belly, will spare reproving the cursed sin of the people. For commonly, if there is any cursed juror, extortioner, or adulterer, he will not be confessed at his own curate. Rather, he will go to a flattering *friar* who will absolve him falsely, for a little money per year, even though he will not make restitution and leave his cursed sin. And thus, if the foul fiend might be shown in his true shape to the people, as men say he was shown in the time of *St. Bartholomew*,¹ the people would be afraid to dwell in his service, that is, in sin. But the cursedness of sin is hidden, and the people are made well by false pardons, and letters of fraternity, even though they all break the commandments of God, and do not keep charity. Certainly, then, the devil is better off by both parties.

¹ A reference to the extra-biblical *Gospel of Bartholomew*, in which he asks to see Satan. Angels drag Satan from the depths of hell in chains. He then asks Satan how he came to be the enemy, and other questions.

Chapter 38.***They Persuade Men to Think More of their Anathemas, Than of God's Curse.***

Also, *friars* lead and nourish our prelates, lords, and commoners, in great blasphemy against God. For they teach all this people to think less of the most rightful curse of God, than the wrongful curse of sinful man, though he is a damned devil. For they call the curse of God, the lesser curse; and the curse of sinful man, the greater curse. For however cursed by God a man is for his pride, envy, covetousness, or adultery, or any other sin, this is not charged or pursued, either of prelate, lord, or commoners. But if a man once withstands the citation of a sinful prelate, even by the commandment of God, he is cursed, and imprisoned for forty days. And all men attack him, though he may be persecuted for the truth of the Gospel, and be blessed by God. And thus sinful men's judgment, because of the fiends, is more dreaded and magnified than the rightful judgment of God Almighty.

Chapter 39.***Friars' Heresy in Affirming that the Wicked are Members of Christ's Church.***

Friars also destroy this article of Christian men's faith: I believe in one common or general church.¹ For they teach that those men who shall be damned, are members of holy church, and thus they wed Christ and the devil together. For Christ is spiritually wedded with each member of holy church, and some of these, they say, shall be damned. But then, as Christ says, they are *friends*.^{Joh 15.13-14} Therefore, Christ and the devil are wedded together by them. But God says, by *Paul*, that there is no uniting, nor consent, to Christ and to Belial.^{2Cor 6.15} So then, there may be no wedding between them. Rather, this general holy church is the congregation of Christ, who is Head, and [it includes] all good angels in heaven, and all men and women in earth or in purgatory that shall be saved, and no more.

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For Christ says that none of his members shall perish;^{Joh 6.39} for no man shall take them out of his hands.^{Joh 10.28} And John the Evangelist says of false teachers, "They went out from us, but they were not of us."^{1Joh 2.19} And therefore Chrysostom says that those who do not keep God's law, but die outside charity, were never Christ's body, and shall not reign with him.² And since each part of Christ's spiritual body (of which *Austin* speaks, as Holy Writ does) shall reign with him in bliss, no man who shall be damned is part of Christ's spiritual body, and so he is neither part nor member of holy church. But friars said this, so that men would give them much money to pray for all, both good and evil; and also to please bishops and possessioners.

Chapter 40.***Arrogating to Themselves Glory Due to Other Men, and Sometimes to God Himself.***

Also, *friars* busily seek their own worldly worship, and put the worship of God behind, which is against the teaching of Jesus Christ and *St. Paul*. Indeed, what is worse, they take upon themselves the glory that belongs to God, and so they make themselves equal with God. For they

¹ From the *Nicene Creed*: "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church."

² Perhaps alluding to *Homily 5* on 2Tim 2.11-14; see Philip Schaff, *Early Church Fathers*, vol. 1-13, p. 1010.

seek fast, by great gifts and vain costs, to be called masters of divinity, and to speak before lords, and sit at meal with them, and not teach the Gospel truly to all manner of men by a meek life, and do so freely as Christ bids. Also, they always seek to be confessors of lords and ladies, to be told much by them, and to fare well, and not to seek poor men, even though they have greater need. And this is so of other business of the *friars*, whoever would take a good look at them. For if a *friar* does little well, it is always praised: but if another man does it much better, it will be minimized or despised. Also, they swear by the one they call the patron of their order, and leave God behind. And yet they do so to worship their own patron, and their own sect. Nevertheless, God teaches us to swear by Him in our need, and not by his creatures — but for their proud and idle swearing, *friars* despise God and their patron also.

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Chapter 41.

Exalting Themselves Above Christ Himself.

Friars yet falsely heighten themselves above Christ. For where Christ bids that men not esteem him unless he does the works of the Father of heaven, ^{Joh 10.37} *friars* charge that men trust and obey them as necessary to their souls' health, even when friars do not do the works of God. For otherwise they may not ask men to obey them when they do not know whether the thing they command is against God's judgment, or their own wit. And thus no man should obey them, except when *friars* certainly teach the commandments of God or his counsels, lest men obeying their teaching in this, act against the will of God. Farewell then this new feigned obedience, along with this new profession.

Chapter 42.

Christ's Rule is Not Sufficient Warrant For Them to be Ruled By.

Also, *friars* falsely enhance themselves above Christ and his apostles. For they will not be contented with Christ's rule in the Gospel to teach truly the Gospel, and have food and drink freely from a good man who is devout to God, nor be satisfied with food and apparel as Christ and his apostles were. But they rob curates of their office and spiritual worship, and hinder them from knowing God's law by withholding books from them, and withdrawing their advantages by which they would have books and learn. And also they rob lords of their rents; and by more hypocrisy, some take free annual rents from lords' coffers, and they rob the commoners of their living by hypocrisy and false begging, which are damned by God's law. And thus, in the beginning, they feign themselves to be the poorest of all clerics; but in the end, they surpass all other clerics in great houses, and costly libraries, and great feasts, and many other prides and covetousnesses, and they ever run afoul of Christ and his apostles.

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For where Christ had nowhere to rest his head, ^{Mat 8.20} *friars* who feign being beggars, have lordly places in which, almost throughout *England*, they may lie on their own each night.

Chapter 43.

Friars' Policy in Binding Their Novices to Unknown Things.

Also, from great cunning, *friars* bind novices to unknown things. For they will not allow them to know the privations of their rule and of their life till they have been professed; and then they are not allowed to leave their rule, even though they know well that they may not keep it. This is openly against Christ's teaching and John's Gospel. For Christ says that he spoke openly to the

world, and did nothing in secret; ^{Joh 18.20} and *friars* here do fully the contrary. For first they show great devotion and sweetness of holy life to young children, till they are professed; and then they master them by tyranny to do many things against their conscience. And so they require them to go to hell or to prison, or sometimes to cruel death.

Chapter 44.
Misspenders of the Treasure of This Land.

Also, *friars* are wasters of the treasure of our land by many blind and unskilful manners. For first they blind them blindly from the freedom of the Gospel, and then they spend much gold to get them a dispensation. And many times they bring vain pardons, privileges of the convent, and other vain privileges. And in all this, the gold of our land goes out; and simony, and a curse, and boldness in sin, come back. And God knows where the privations of our land are thus shown to our enemies. And God knows where matrimony is thus abandoned for money by those *friars* making false suggestions, in false pursuit after that money.

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Also, it seems that in this they magnify a sinful caitiff,¹ and in this case a damned fiend, more than God Almighty. For they dare not, by free grant of God, do a good thing with which to please Him, unless they have leave from such a sinful caitiff. And if they have leave of such an unwitty caitiff, they then dare to do an unreasonable thing *against* God's pleasing, and which is sinful and slanderous to all Christian men.

Chapter 45.
Friars Holier Than Other Men.

Also, by Lucifer's pride, *friars* heighten themselves and hold themselves holier than all others outside their sect. For they bind them to new traditions of sinful men, which are full of error, above the most sufficient rule of Jesus Christ, which left no profitable or necessary thing out of this rule. For though a priest or bishop ever so truly performs the office that God bid priests to do, yet they say someone is more holy if he comes to their new feigned religion and obedience. But since boasting and rejoicing about sin is one of the greatest sins of all, and these *friars* boast so much about their sinful error — how they have found a better religion than Christ made for his apostles and priests — it seems they are most sinful and cursedly proud over all other wicked men. For it seems that they make themselves wiser than Christ, wittier and more full of charity, since they teach a better way to heaven than Christ did, as they feign.

Chapter 46.
Friars Altogether Set Upon Covetousness.

Friars also set more by the stinking dirt of worldly goods, than they do by the virtues and goods of bliss. For if a Caym's castle of *friars* has much dirt of worldly goods, though the *friars* in it are full of pride, covetousness, simony, and false robbery by false begging and flattering, yet they say that such a rich house is better than a poor house of *friars*, though they live in meekness, poverty, and penance, and much holiness.

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¹ *Caitliff*: a wretch or contemptible person.

And they toil more to get the dirt of this world than to get the bliss of heaven. And they commend more a *friar* that can subtly and thickly get this worldly dirt, than another that can do and teach much virtuous life. And thus these *friars* sacrifice to false gods for their covetousness. And they forsake God Almighty, since they love worldly muck more than the virtues and love of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 47.

***Friars are Dead to the World, But Raised By Antichrist To Pride,
Covetousness, and Maintenance of Sin.***

Friars also show and witness in themselves Antichrist's miracles, just as Lazarus and others raised by Christ showed and witnessed Christ's miracles. For as Lazarus and others were truly dead and truly raised by Christ to live by kindness and grace, so these *friars* feign themselves dead to the pride of the world and other sins; but they are raised by Antichrist's doing, to pride of states, covetousness, and subtle maintaining or colouring of sin. For though men are cursed adulterers, extortioners, and wrongful maintainers of falseness and debates, yet *friars* will colour these sins, and intercede for these sinful men — if they will give them much dirt, and maintain their vain sect, and commend it more than Christ's own religion. And they are quick to strive, plead, and fight bodily for worships and states of this world; and so they are dead to meekness, charity, and good religion, and are raised to a cursed life of sin. *This* is Antichrist's miracle.

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Chapter 48.

Spiritual Impurity of Friars.

Friars are also foully envenomed with the spiritual sin of Sodom; and so they are more cursed than the bodily Sodomites who were suddenly struck dead by the hard vengeance of God. For they conduct spiritual lechery by God's word, when for worldly muck they preach their own findings more than Christ's Gospel for saving men's souls; and when they leave preaching the seed of God's word, and lose it, by which men would have been made God's sons by spiritual generation. They commit greater sin in this, than if they lost man's seed by which the body of a man would be generated. For misusing the better virtue is greater sin; and the seed of God's word is better than the seed of man. Therefore it is worse to mispend that seed, than to miswaste man's seed. *Robert Grosted* declares this reason well against cruel curates.

Chapter 49.

Friars are Notable Factors for the Pope Herein In England.

Friars also are most privy¹ and subtle procurators of simony, and foul winning, and of begging benefices, and of indulgences, and labors, pardons, and vain privileges. For men say they will get a great thing from the pope, or from cardinals in England, better and cheaper than other procurators. And they are more wily, and can more pleasantly flatter the pope and his court. And they most privily make lords maintain the pope and his court, in robbing our land of treasure by his pardons and privileges; and robbing the first fruits of benefices in our land; and using tithes and subsidies to make war on Christian men; and for stinking worldly lordship that God has

¹ *Privy*: [hidden from general view](#).

forbidden to the pope and all priests. And in false confession, they greatly stir lords to do this, requiring them to destroy the land when they maintain the pope and this false robbing.

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Chapter 50.

Friars are Most Perilous Enemies to Holy Church and to All Our Land.

Friars are yet most perilous enemies to holy church and all our land. For they keep curates from their office, and commonly and needlessly spend sixty thousand marks per year, that they rob falsely from the poor people. For if curates did their office in godly life and true preaching, as they are held to upon pain of damning in hell, there would be clerics enough of bishops, parsons, and other priests; and in that case, there would be excess money for the people. Not two hundred years ago, there was no *friar*; and then our land had plenty of cattle and men; and then they had a stronger constitution to labor than now; and then there were clerics enough. And now there are many thousands of *friars* in England, and the old curates still stand, unamended, and sin has increased among all, and the people are charged sixty thousand marks per year; and therefore it must fail. And so *friars* allow curates to live in sin, so that they may rob the people and live in their lusts. For if curates did their office well, *friars* would be superfluous, and our land would have many thousands of marks discharged. And then the people would better pay their rents to lords, and their tithes and offerings to curates. Much of the flattering and nourishing of sin would be destroyed; and godly life and peace and charity would reign among Christian men.

And so, when all the ground is sought, *friars* say this indeed: "Let old curates wax rotten in sin, and let them not do their office by God's law, and we will live in lusts for long, and we will vainly and needlessly waste sixty thousand marks per year of the poor commoners of the land. And so, in the end, we will make dissension between them and their children for tithes, and for offerings that we get privily by hypocrisy; and we will make dissension between lords and their commoners. For we will maintain lords, to live in their lusts, extortions, and other sins. And we will maintain the commoners in their covetousness, lechery, and other deceits, with false swearing and many guiles. And we will also maintain the curates in their damnation for leaving their spiritual office, and thus becoming procurators of the fiend, to draw all men to hell. This is what they do indeed, however they may feign in their hypocrisy of pleasing words.

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Of these fifty heresies and errors, and many more if men seek them out well, they may know that *friars* are the cause, the beginning, the well, and the maintainers of perturbation in Christendom, and of all the evils of this world. And these errors will never be amended till *friars* are brought to the freedom of the Gospel, and to the clean religion of Jesus Christ.

God for his endless mercy and charity make true peace and charity among Christian men, and bring all priests to Christ's clean religion, without error of wrong by-laws. Amen.

A COMPLAINT OF JOHN WYCLIFFE, EXHIBITED TO THE KING AND PARLIAMENT.

Please it to our most noble, and most worthy King *Richard*, king both of England and of France, and to the noble Duke of Lancaster, and to other great men of the realm; both to seculars and men of holy church, that are gathered in the parliament to hear, assent to, and maintain the few articles or points that are set within this writing, and are proved both by authority and reason, so that Christian faith and Christian religion are increased, maintained, and made stable — since our Lord Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, is Head and Prelate of this religion, and he shed his precious heart-blood, and water out of his side on the cross, to make this religion perfect and stable, and entirely without error.

The First Article.

The first article is this: — That all persons, of whatever kin, private sects, or singular religion, made of sinful men, may freely, without any hindrance or bodily pain, leave that private rule, or new religion, founded by sinful men, and stably hold the rule of Jesus Christ, taken and given by Christ to his apostles, and for more profit than any such new religion founded by sinful men.

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The reason for this demand is shown thus: The rule of Jesus Christ — given to his apostles and kept by them after Christ's ascension — is most perfect, to be kept for the state of living in this world. And each rule, of whatever kin, private sect, or singular religion, made of sinful men, is less perfect than the rule given by Christ to mankind, from his endless wisdom and his endless charity. Therefore, it is lawful to each man or person of this singular religion and profession, to let it cling fast to the rule of Jesus Christ, as more perfect. This rule is plain to each man of wit and discretion, and namely, to clerics — since men of the pope's law witness plainly that a man may lawfully, indeed, *against* his sovereign's will, go from the less perfect religion, to the more perfect. Why, then, may not a man of private religion forsake that less perfect religion, and take Christ's clean religion, without error from any sinful fool, as most perfect?

And Christ's rule, in His own cleanness and freedom, is most perfect, as shown by this reasoning: a patron or founder is more perfect, mightier, wittier,¹ holier, and more charitable than another patron or founder, in so far as the first patron's rule is better and more perfect than the second patron's rule. And Jesus Christ, patron of Christian religion, given to the apostles, surpasses without measure the perfection of every patron, and of any private or singular sect — in might, wit, good will, or charity. Therefore, his rule is more perfect.

Also, that Christ's clean religion (without patching over sinful men's errors) is most perfect of all, is shown by this reason: For otherwise Christ might give such a rule to be kept most perfect for this life, and *would* not keep it; and then he would be mischievous ² (as *Austin* proves in other matters). Or else Christ would ordain such a rule and have no *might*; and then Christ would be unmighty; but it is heresy to affirm that about Christ. Or else Christ might give it, and *could* keep

¹ *Wittier*: wiser.

² Originally, "envious" in a now obsolete sense.

it but would not; and then he would be unwise; but that is heresy, and no man should allow himself to hear it.

Therefore, Christ might, and could, and would, ordain such a rule that is most perfect, which ought to be kept for the state of this life. And so Christ, from his endless wisdom and charity, ordained such a rule. And so, on each side, men are required — on pain of heresy, blasphemy, and damning in hell — to believe and acknowledge that their religion from Jesus Christ to his apostles, kept by them in His own freedom, without patching over sinful men's error, is most perfect of all. And so, let no man forsake private religion, but keep Christ's clean religion, without new wrongful traditions of sinful men, who often erred in their own life and teaching.

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Also, in making the rule and order of apostles, Christ was at this time and ever before, Almighty, all-wise, all full of good-will and charity, to make a perfect rule. Therefore, not only did he make a perfect rule for all, but each patron of *private* rule was unmighty and hindered, both in gifts of kind and of grace, and was not all-wise. Rather, in comparison to Christ, he was an idiot or fool, and not so well-willing as to make so good and perfect a rule as Christ. Therefore, each patron made a rule that was less good, and less perfect. And from this, it plainly follows that Christ's clean religion is most perfect of all.

Also apostles and their followers, keeping the rule given to them by Christ, won most merit and thanks from God in keeping this rule, before all other times. Therefore, if all Christian men, both in old times and new, had kept the same rule of Christ in His own cleanness and freedom, they would have deserved the most thanks from God possible for them, in degree. Therefore, no new sect of religion, striding from Christ's sect, should have begun. But His sect being first, it should have been kept in His cleanness by that new founder, with less of novelties and patrons. Also, it would now be as good, and of as much merit, to keep the rule of Jesus Christ, as it was at the beginning — since Christ's rule is enough, and all men are able to live by it, of whatever complexion or age they may be. This rule was kept by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and their best followers, for five hundred years after his ascension, without finding any such new planting, or religion — during which time holy church increased and profited most. For then, almost all men relegated them to martyrdom, by Christ's example. Therefore, it would now be not only meritorious or helpful, but *most* helpful to the church, to live so *in* all things, and *by* all things.

Also, both monks and canons forsake the rules of *Benet* [[Benedict](#)] and *Austin* [[Augustine](#)], and without any dispensation, accept the rule of friars as most perfect; but the rule of apostles is utterly and always most perfect. Therefore, men may forsake private rules in religion, made by sinful men, and accept the clean religion of apostles that is preached with the freedom of the Gospel, and without dispensation from worldly clerics who, in this case, cry "Devils!" as Christ called Judas Iscariot.

Also, the pope may dispense with the rule of each private sect or religion, and has dispensed, and still dispenses. But he may not dispense with Christ's rule, given to the apostles. Therefore, the rule of Christ, ordained to apostles, is more perfect than any rule of private religion, and it is most perfect of all. From this, it follows openly that men may lawfully forsake private religion, and keep Christ's religion in his cleanness, since it is most perfect, and most easy and light to keep, ^{[Mat 11.30](#)} and most secure to bring men to heaven, and to the highest degree of bliss.

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And if our adversaries of this private religion always strive that the rules be more perfect than the rule of apostles, then why have so many persons been made (some say without number) of each such private sect by license of the Pope? Some are chaplains of households, some chaplains of honor, some bishops endowed with secular lordships, some bishops among heathen men, and they dare not come to their children.

But whatever profession to which a friar shortly belongs if he is chosen to it, he accepts the office — of *Pope* or *Cardinal*, of *Patriarch*, of Archbishop, of Bishop — and he forsakes his own state, because Christ says in the Gospel that no man who puts his hand to the plough, and looking backward, is worthy to have the kingdom of God.^{Luk 9.62} That is, no man taking a perfect state of poverty, meekness, and penance, is able to be saved if he returns to worldly life, pomp, pride, covetousness, ease of body, sloth, riot, and costly festive clothing. Therefore, they do not exchange the more perfect for the less perfect, for then they would be *apostates*; rather, they *purchase* the more perfect for the less perfect. Therefore the clean religion and rule of priesthood under the form of the Gospel, is more perfect than any rule or religion made by sinful men. Also, nothing that is abominable and reprov'd by saints, should be brought in by another, or by any colour or cunning; but those new sects are such that they are of the flesh, as St. Paul says in his Epistles.¹ Therefore such sects should not be brought into the charge of the church. Rather, all Christian men should throw them away, and hold fast the unity, freedom, and cleanness of the rule of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps these hypocrites say (to exclude all these reasons and many more) that the rule to which they make profession, is not strange or diverse from the rule of apostles that Christ ordained, but it is utterly the same and none other. But the contrary of this excuse is openly shown by four of the last reasons said before. For if these new rules were one with Christ's rule given to the apostles, Christ would have taught them both, and exemplified them both in his life and speaking and writing, with their ceremonies, rites, and customs. But he never did this in his death, nor after his resurrection, nor in his ascension. And if this excusing were truth, the sects of friars would not have been created about twelve hundred years after Christ; rather, the contrary is clear in the Chronicles.² It would also have followed from the same, that Christ's apostles had both monks, canons, and friars — if men take monks, canons, and friars, for men who profess such private sects — but this is openly false. Also Christ's rule that was given to the apostles is alike and of one form for all men who make profession of it, to speak of the substance of the rule. But the rules of these private sects are fully diverse and contrary to one another, as to the substance of these rules. Some of them receive tithes and donations, as do these *possessioners*; but some forsake all such tithes and possessions, such as *mendicant* friars.

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¹ **Rom 8:5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. **1Cor 10:18** Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? **Gal 2:16** "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. **Gal 4:29** But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. **Gal 6:8** For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. **Col 2:23** These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

² *Chronicles*: the record or narrative description of past events; history.

But to descend down in speciality, a great many articles of the rules of such sects are openly contrary to the apostles' rule. It is lawful for each true man of the Christian religion, to convert a man of the wrong faith to Christianity. But this is forbidden in the rule of Minors friars, since license is granted only to ministers and to none other, to restrain friars from hearing private sects, notwithstanding that friars ever do the contrary. And Christ received pennies;¹ but by their own rule they would not receive pennies, neither by themselves, nor by lowly persons. Also Christ, in preaching the Gospel, entered into places of both women and men, as the Gospel of Luke tells us. [Luk 8.1-4](#) But it is forbidden to friars to enter into the abbeys of women; so friars interpret these rules to the contrary. But Francis, their founder, commanded them in the article of his death, that they should not receive additions to his rule.²

- Also, if Christ's rule given to apostles, and the rule of private sects, were all one without reason, men would not leave the first, and profess the other, unless it were to show their hypocrisy.
- Also, if this feigning is truth, it seems that it is as perfect and necessary to keep Christ's rule, as it is to keep that of Francis, or Dominic, or any other such man.
- Also, if these rules are all one, and are diverse in nothing, then such a rule should not be called the "rule of Francis," or "Dominic," or any other such person, but the "rule of Christ." For then it would have more authority, and be more commended.

And so the Gospel ought to be kept, without any fouling of all Christian men, and without such novelties, with nothing put to it and nothing drawn from it. If this were done, such private sects should be superfluous and a waste, like flies living in the air. And it was no requirement of Francis, Dominic, or any other such new man, about making this rule of apostles which friars feign to be theirs. For that rule was made by Christ — God and man — and kept by his apostles, and confirmed by the Holy Ghost, and fully declared twelve hundred years before Francis, Dominic, or any such friar of a private sect, was in this world.

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The Second Article.

The second point or article is this: that though men who had unreasonably and wrongfully damned, and that all this counsel be amended of so great an error; and that their error may be published to men dwelling in the realm, the reason for this demand is thus shown. Nothing ought to be damned as error and falsehood, unless it savours of errors or unrighteousness against God's law. But neither the king nor his counsel did anything unrightfully; for he took away the possessions of some prelates who trespassed, whose contrary friars had determined openly. Therefore men should reasonably assent to this demand. For some friars in Coventry write that,

¹ Small amounts of money; donations. [Luk 8:1](#) Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, ² and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities-- Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, ³ and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance. [Joh 13:29](#) For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy *those things* we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor.

² *Franciscans*: "This is the rule and life of the Minor Brothers, namely, to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, in poverty, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to Pope Honorius and to his successors who shall be canonically elected, and to the Roman Church." (1233 AD)

among articles that they damned as heresy and error, are those saying that secular lords may lawfully and meritoriously take away temporal goods given to men of the church. But since our king has done so, and other kings (his predecessors) have done so many times, for lawful cause pertaining to the king's regalia, and by common law, and by counsel of the peers of the realm, it follows not only that our king now present has erred, but also his predecessors, and generally all his counsellors, such as lords, and prelates, and all the men of parliament who counselled it.

- Also, if this is error touching the health of a man's soul, then it is against Holy Writ; thus if a man sustains or maintains this error, he is a heretic. But a great many kings, lords, and prelates, and other wise men, have sustained and maintained this, and yet have done so as pertaining to the king's regalia and common law. If these friars are right, then, all kings, lords, and prelates, and all wise men of our realm, are heretics.
- Also, since this is an old custom, which our kings, lords, and prelates are sworn to sustain and maintain, if this is error (as friars openly say) it follows by these friars, that all these men be forsworn,¹ and are heretics.
- Also, if this is error, as friars feign, even though an abbot and all his convent are open traitors conspiring to the death of the king and queen and other lords, and to force them to destroy all the realm, the king may not take from them a half-penny, nor a farthing's worth, since all these are "temporal goods."
- Also, though other clerics send to our enemies all the rents that they have in our land, and whatever they may rob or steal from the king's liege men, yet our king may not punish them by one farthing nor farthing's worth.

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- Also, on this ground of the friars, even though monks, or friars, or other clerics, whatever they are, slay lords' tenants, the king's liege men, and defile lords' wives, indeed the queen (may God forbid) or the empress — yet the king may not punish them by one farthing.
- Also, it follows plainly that men called "men of holy church," may dwell in this land at their liking, and do whatever kind of sin, whatever kind of treason they like, and nevertheless the king may not punish them, not in temporal goods, not in their body — since if he may not punish them less, he may not punish them more.
- Also, they make one of themselves king; and so no secular lord may hinder him from conquering all secular lordship in this earth. And so, they may slay all lords and ladies, and their blood and affinity; and inflict any pain in this life, or in body, or in cattle. You lords see and understand with what punishing they deserve to be chastised, those who have thus unwarily and wrongfully damned you as heretics for executions and righteousness by God's law and man's — namely, of the king's regalia. For the chief lordship in this land of all temporalities, both of secular men and religious, pertain to the king's general governing; for otherwise he would not be king of England, but of a little part of it. Therefore, the men that busy themselves taking away this lordship from the king, as friars and their favorers do, are sharper enemies and traitors in this point than Frenchmen and all other nations.
- Also, while any bishop or abbot's see is void, it pertains to the king to have all temporalities in his hand, and at his own will, to give them to prelates. Therefore the king may take away these temporalities from prelates when lawful cause excites it.

¹ *Forsworn*: formally rejected or disavowed.

- Also, the king should grant no man freedom to sin or trespass, but should take away that freedom. But men of the church would have free license to trespass if the king may not take away their temporalities when they sin grievously.

And so Saint Paul teaches that each man be subject to their potentates, for there is no power but of God;¹ and as things that are of God are ordained, so those who withstand power, withstand God's ordinance. Why? Princes are not a dread for good works, but for evil works. But will you not dread power? Do good, and you shall have praising from him, that is, from the one ordained in a high estate, for he is God's minister or servant to you in good; but if you have done evil, then dread, for he does not bear the sword without cause, for he is God's servant avenger in wrath on him that does evil. And therefore, by need, or of need, be subject or submissive not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. [Rom 13.3-5](#) St. Paul says all this, of which authority it is, to inform all men that clerics ought to be subject to the king's power, of necessity.

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For St. Paul, that puts *all men* in subjection to kings, never taking one out of it. And so secular power owes, and is bound to punish by just pain of his sword (that is, by worldly power), tyrants rebelling against God, and trespassing against man, by whatever kind of trespass. And that is more to chastise his subjects by pain and torment of their body, and not dread. Thus much more may he may punish them by taking away their temporalities, which is less than bodily pain. Therefore secular lords do this rightfully, since this is done by commandment of the apostle, and by ordinance of God. And therefore, by these reasons and authorities, it is plain that in many cases secular lords may lawfully and meritoriously take away temporal goods given to men of the church.

The Third Article.

The third article is this: that both tithes and offerings be given and paid, and received, with that intent which both God's law and the pope's law ordained them to be paid and received; and that they be taken away with the same intent and reason which both God's law and the pope's law ordain they should be withdrawn. This demand is reasonable for many reasons. For the intent of the maker in every law should be kept, and most, that the intent of God that may not err. Truly God's law says in the first book of Kings,² that the sin of Eli's children was very great before God, for they withdrew men from sacrificing to God, taking by strength or violence that part of the sacrifice that pertained to the priest. And God says afterwards, "I speaking have spoken, that your house and your father's house should minister and serve in my sight evermore. But now," God says, "be that far from me, for whoever worships me, I shall glorify them; but those who despise me," God says, "shall be unable, or without honor:" [1Sam 2.30](#) From this authority, it is plain and open that the things that are due to priests, should not be demanded by strength, by violence, or by cursing, but be given freely, without exaction or constraining. And if the priest is reprov'd by God for his sins, he should be put out of his office, and the sacrifices should not be given to him, but taken from him, as God commands from the high-priest Eli. And another true man, walking in God's ways, as Samuel did, should be ordained to receive such sacrifices.

¹ [Rom 13:1](#) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

² [1Sam 2.12-17](#). At the time, first and second Samuel were called first and second Kings.

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- Also, in the beginning of Tobit,¹ men will find that when priests of the temple went to calves of gold to honor them as gods, which Jeroboam king of Israel had made, Tobit offered truly all his first-fruits and tithes. So that in the third year, Tobit ministered all his tithes to proselytizers, and to visitors or guests, and withdrew them entirely from the wicked priests. The book says that the little child kept these things and others, according to the law of God. Therefore, if our prelates or other priests, whatever they are, openly defile by a sacrifice of idolatry,² as with covetousness — that is, if they openly sacrifice to false gods and commit other great sins, such as pride, simony, and man-killing, gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery — then for the same reason, tithes and offerings should be withdrawn from them by God's law, and be given to poor needy men, according to the example of righteous Tobit.
- Also, St. Paul speaking to bishop Timothy, says this: But we are content with these things, if we have sustenance, and are clothed.^{1Tim 6.8} And St. Bernard speaks thus in this matter: Whatever you take of your tithes and offerings besides a simple living and limited clothing, it is not yours; it is theft, ravine, and sacrilege. It follows plainly from this, that not only simple priests and curates, but also sovereign curates, such as bishops, should not constrain their subjects by asking more than sustenance and clothing, while they themselves make all manner of waste, both of money and worldly array.
- Also, Christ and his apostles lived a most poor life, as it is known by all the process of the Gospel — nothing that made claims by exactions or constraining. Rather, they lived simply and scarcely enough from alms freely and willfully given. Therefore, those who pretend to be principal followers of Christ's steps, should walk as Christ did, and so lead a full poor life, taking of things freely given as much as their need is for their spiritual office and no more, and be contented with that.
- Also, the pope's law commands in the best part of it, that priests who are open lechers take no part of the portion of goods of the church. Therefore, it is lawful for parishioners to withhold their tithes for open fornication of their curates, and turn them to better use. And much more may and should they withdraw their tithes for great and open sins: such as for simony, which is heresy as the pope's law says; and for covetousness, which is worshipping gods, as Holy Writ says; and for pride, envy, gluttony, and drunkenness, since both by God's law and man's law, God curses such men's blessings and prayings — just as *St. Austin* and *St. Gregory* teach in many books, by Holy Writ and reason.

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- Also, commonly when parish churches are appropriated to men of singular religion, that appropriation is made by the false suggestion that such religious men do not have enough for sustenance and clothing; but in truth they have too much.
- Also, commonly such churches are appropriated by simony, as they themselves know better, paying a great sum of money for such appropriation if the benefice is fat. But what man led by reason and good conscience would pay to such religious men tithes and offerings gotten by falseness, lies, and simony? But suppose that such parish churches were lawfully gotten.

¹ Tobit 1.5-8 – The Book of Tobit is one of the Apocrypha. It is part of the Catholic and Orthodox biblical canon, per the Council of Carthage in 397; it was confirmed for Roman Catholics by the Council of Trent (1546), but rejected by the Protestants.

² Originally, “sacrifice of maumetry” — which is Mahometry or idolatry.

Yet since they are superfluous to such men, the tithes and offerings should be given to poor needy men, as *St. Jerome* and the pope's law teach. And therefore the true great cleric, *Robert Grosted, bishop of Lincoln*, writes to the pope that when appropriation of parish churches is made to men of religion, the fourteen great sins and defects that come of evil curates is perpetuated, which is endless confirmation.

- Also, by God and his laws, curates are bound to charitably teach their subjects the Gospel and God's commandments, both by open preaching and by being an example of good life to save their souls, much more than their subjects are held to pay them tithes and offerings. And from these follow two things: *First*, if curates do not perform their office in word and in example, God commands that their subjects are not bound to pay them tithes and offerings. Since the principal cause is absent for which tithes and offerings should be paid, paying tithes should cease. *Secondly*, curates are more cursed in withdrawing this teaching in word and example, than parishioners are cursed in withdrawing tithes and offerings, even if curates did their office well.

Oh! Lord God, where is this a reason to constrain the poor people, to find that a worldly priest is sometimes unable both in life and skill; but is able in pomp and pride, covetousness and envy, gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery, in simony and heresy, with fat horse, and jolly and gay saddles, and bridles ringing by the way, and the priest in costly clothes and furs — and to suffer the poor men's wives and children, and their poor neighbors, to perish for hunger, thirst, and cold, and other mischiefs of the world. Oh! Lord Jesus Christ, just a few years ago, men paid their tithes and offerings at their own free will to good men, enabled to great worship of God to the profit and fairness of holy church fighting on earth. Where was it lawful and necessary for a worldly priest to destroy this holy and approved custom, constraining men to leave this freedom, turning tithes and offerings into wicked uses, or uses not so good as they were in previous times?

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The Fourth Article.

The fourth article is this: that Christ's teaching and belief about the sacrament of his own body, that is plainly taught by Christ and his apostles in the Gospels and Epistles, may be taught openly in churches of Christian people; and the contrary teaching, and false belief, is brought up by cursed hypocrites, and heretics, and worldly priests, who are unskilled in God's law — they seem like they are apostles of Christ, but they are fools. Also Christ would not take the kingdom when the people would have made him king, as John's Gospel tells us.¹ But if it had been a priest's office to deal thus with bodily alms, Christ — who could best have performed this office — would have taken these temporal goods to distribute them among poor men. But he would not do this; rather he fled, hastening so fast that he took none of the apostles with him. Lord, where then are worldly priests better skilled to do this distribution of worldly goods than Jesus Christ? And if they say that Christ fed many thousands of the people in the desert with bodily alms, as the Gospel says, Christ did that by a miracle, to show his Godhead and to teach priests how they are to feed spiritual Christian men by God's word. For so Christ's apostles did, and they had nothing with which to give bodily alms when they might have had treasure and meals enough from kings and lords.

¹ [Joh 6.15, after the feeding of the five thousand.](#)

Also Peter says to a poor man, in the Deeds of the Apostles, that he had neither gold nor silver, and yet he performs well the office of a true priest.^{Act 3.6} But our priests are so busy about worldly occupation, that they seem better bailiffs, or husbands, than spiritual priests of Jesus Christ. For what man is so busy about merchandise and other worldly doings, as priests are, who should be the light of heavenly life to all men about them? Certainly they should be as busy about studying God's law and holy prayer — not out of servitude,¹ but from a holy desire and clean meditation about God, and the true teaching of the Gospel, as laborers are about worldly labor for their sustenance. Priests could be much busier if they might. For they are more held to live well and to be an example of holy life to the people, and to hold to the true teaching of Holy Writ, than the people are held to give tithes, or offerings, or any bodily alms. And therefore, priests should not leave being examples of good life, and studying Holy Writ, and the true teaching of it — not for bodily alms, nor for worldly goods, nor for saving their bodily life.

270 A COMPLAINT OF JOHN WYCLIFFE.

As Christ saved the world by the writing and teaching of four evangelists, so the fiend casts about to damn the world and priests — hindering the preaching of the Gospel by these four things: by feigned contemplation, by songs,² by Salisbury use,³ and by the worldly business of priests!

God, for his mercy, stir these priests to preach the Gospel in word, in life, and to beware of Satan's deceits. Amen.

¹ Originally, “famulorum.”

² That is, by letting the music and pomp supersede the meaning of the words, sung in Latin. See [p. 50](#).

³ Or *Sarum Use* – a liturgy for ordering Christian public worship. It was established by Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury in the 11th century.

WYCKLIFFE'S WYCKETT,¹ WHICH HE MADE IN THE DAYS OF KING RICHARD II.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: whoever eats of this bread shall live for ever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Joh 6.51

A VERY BRIEF DEFINITION OF THESE WORDS: *HOC EST CORPUS MEUM.*²

"I beseech you, brethren, in the Lord Christ Jesus, and for the love of his Spirit, to pray with me, that we may be vessels to his laud and praise, whatever time it pleases him to call upon us."

Rom 15.31

[1.] When Our Savior Jesus Christ walked here on earth with the prophets who were presently before him, and the apostles who were presently with him, whom he also left after him, whose hearts were comforted ³ with the Holy Ghost, he warned us, and gave us knowledge that there are two manner of ways: the one [leading] to life, the other to death. As Christ says (Mat 7.14; Luk 13.24), "How strait and narrow is the way that leads to life, and there are few that find it. But how large and broad is the way that leads to damnation, and there are many who go into it." Therefore we pray heartily to God, that of his mere mercy he will so strengthen us with the grace and steadfastness of his Holy Spirit, as to make us strong in spiritual living according to the evangelical Gospel. This is so that the world — no, not the very infidels, papists, and apostates — can have no occasion to speak evil of us, whereby we may enter into that strait gate, as Christ our Savior and all who follow him have done. This is not in idle living, but in diligent laboring, yes in great sufferance of persecution even to the death.^{Rev 2.10} And we pray that we find the way of everlasting life as he has promised, where he says, "He that seeks finds, and he that asks receives, and to him that knocks it shall be opened." (Mat 7.8)

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[2.] Also Christ says, "If your son asks you for bread, will you give him a stone? Or if he asks you for fish, will you give him a serpent? If you who are evil can give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give a good Spirit to them that ask it of him?" (Luk 11.13) Saint James says, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask it of God, who gives to all men if they ask it in faith, and upbraids none; for he that doubts is like the waves of the sea, that is borne about with every blast of wind. Do not think that such a man shall receive anything from the Lord. For a man that is double in soul is unstable in all his ways," as it is written (Jas 1.5-8). Therefore let us pray to God that he "keeps us in the hour of temptation that is coming in all the world." (Rev. 3.10) For as our Savior Christ says, "When you see that abomination of desolation that is spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place," as Christ says, "he that reads let him understand." (Dan. 12.11; Mat 24.15) But because every man cannot have the book of Daniel to know what his prophecy is, Daniel said, "Towards the last days, the king of the north shall come, and his forces shall stand, and shall defile the sanctuary, and he shall take away the continual sacrifice, and he shall give abomination into desolation, and wicked men shall find

¹ "Wyckett" or wicket. A wicket is a small gate or door. Here it refers to "the narrow gate" (Mat 7.13).

² Hoc est corpus meum (Latin Vulgate): "This is my body."

³ Originally, "mollified."

a testament guilefully. But you that know your God shall hold and do, and untaught men in the people shall teach full many men, and they shall fall on the sword and in the flame, and go into captivity many days.” (Dan 11.31-33)

[3.] “And when they fall down, they shall be raised by a little help, and many shall be joined to them guilefully, and some learned men shall fall to them, so that they build together. And the chosen shall be together, and shall be made white till a determined time. For yet another time shall be, and the king shall do his will, and then he shall be raised, and magnified above each god; and shall speak great things against the God of gods, and he shall be raised up till the wrathfulness determined before is perfectly made. And he shall not inherit the God of his fathers, and he shall be in the company of women, and he shall not change anything of God’s, for he shall raise again all things. — Truly he shall honor the god of mason [stone fortresses] in his place, and he shall worship a god whom his fathers did not know — not with gold, silver, precious stones, or precious things — but he shall make strong the god of mason with thalyent,¹ or a strange god which he did not know, and he shall multiply glory, and he shall give him power in many things, and he shall divide the land at his will.” (Dan. 11.34-39.)

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Up to here are the words of Daniel. Who may see a greater abomination than to see the people be led away from God, and taught to worship in place of God, that thing that is not God nor Savior of the world? For though it is their god, as it is written by a prophet, saying, “The Lord’s going shall make low the god of the earth, for it is their gods that they believe in — which may make them safe,” as it is written, Zeph. 2.11.²

[4.] Whereas Saint Paul says, “You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things I see you as vain worshippers of idols, for I passed by and saw your idolatries, and found an altar in which was written, ‘To the unknown god.’ Therefore, the thing you do not know, you worship as God. This thing I show to you: God which made the world and all the things that are in it. This truly: He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he does not dwell in the temple made with hands, nor does he need anything: for he gives life to all men, and breath everywhere. And he made from one, all kinds of men to inhabit the face of the whole earth, determining the ordained times, and the terms of their dwelling, to seek out God, if perchance they find Him, although he is not far from each of you.” And again he says, “You should not think that the living God is like gold, silver, or any graven thing, or painted by craft, or devised by man; for God despises the time of unknown things. And he shows everywhere that all men should do penance.” (Acts 17.23-30) And the clerics of the law have great need of this. They have ever been against God the Lord, both in the old law and in the new, to slay the prophets who spoke the Word of God to them (Mat 23.31). You see that they did not spare the Son of God when the temporal judge would have delivered him (Mat 27.22-24); and so too with the apostles and martyrs who have spoken truly the word of God to them. And these clerics say it is heresy to speak of the holy Scripture in English. And so they would condemn the Holy Ghost who gave it in tongues to the apostles of Christ, as it is

¹ The word “thalyent” exists only in this treatise. The Douay-Rheims (DRA) verse 39: “He shall do this to fortify Maozim with a strange god.” The KJV has, “Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god.”

² DRA Zep 2:11 The Lord shall be terrible upon them, and shall consume all the gods of the earth: and they shall adore him every man from his own place, all the islands of the Gentiles.

written, to speak the Word of God in all the languages that were ordained by God under heaven, as it is written. ([Act 2.4-8](#)).

[5.] And the Holy Ghost descended upon the heathen, as he did upon the apostles in Jerusalem, as it is written (Joel 2.28). And Christ was so merciful to send the Holy Ghost to heathen men ([Acts 8.5, 27; 10.45](#)), and He made them partakers of his blessed word. Why then should it be taken from us in this land of Christian men? Consider whether it is not all one to deny Christ's words as heresy, and to take Christ for a heretic?

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For if my word is a lie, then I am a liar who speaks the word. Therefore, if my words are heresy, then am I a heretic who speaks the word. Therefore it is all one to condemn the word of God in any language as heresy, and to take God for a heretic who spoke that word. For he and his word are all one, and they may not be separated. God's word is the life of the world, as it is written ([Mat 4.4](#)), "Man lives not only by bread, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." And every word of God is the life of the soul of man, as St. John says, (1John2.27), "you have the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and you have no need of any man to teach you in all things." This is His blessed Word, in whom is all wisdom and understanding, and yet you are always to learn as well as we. For dread of God, how may we let any antichrist take it away from us who are Christian men, and thus allow the people to die for hunger, in heresy and in blasphemy of man's law that corrupts and slays the soul, as pestilence slays the body? — as David bears witness, where he speaks of the chain of pestilence.^{[Psa 91.3](#)} And most of all, they make us believe a false law that they have made about the secret host,¹ for the falsest belief is taught in it.

[6.] For where do you find that Christ or any of his disciples or apostles ever taught any man to worship it? For in the mass creed it is said, "I believe in one God only, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten and born of the Father, before all the world: he is God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten and not made, and of one substance, even with the Father, by whom all things are made." And in the Psalm, "Quicunque vult,"² it is said, "God is the Father, God is the Son, and God is the Holy Ghost; unmade is the Father, unmade is the Son, and unmade is the Holy Ghost." And you then, who are an earthly man, by what reason may you say that you make your Maker? May the thing made, say to the maker, "Why have you made me thus?"^{[Rom 9.20](#)} Or may it turn again, and make the one that made it? God forbid! Now answer, you who say every day that you make from bread the body of the Lord, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, both God and man. Truly, you answer greatly against reason by these words that Christ spoke at his supper on Sheer Thursday,³ at night ([Mat 26.20-28](#)), that Christ "took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples and apostles, and said, ([Mar 14.22](#)), "Take, and eat, this is my body which shall be given for you. And also taking the cup, he gave thanks and gave to them, and said, Drink you all of it; this is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many for the remission of sins." As it says ([Luke 22.19](#)), "When Jesus had taken bread, he gave thanks, and broke it to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body that shall be given for you: do this in remembrance of me."

¹ *Host*: the bread of the communion table.

² Psalm, or song, titled *Quicunque vult*: meaning "Whoever Wants."

³ Thursday before Easter; also Maundy Thursday — Last Supper.

[7.] Now understand the words of our Savior Christ, as he spoke them one after another — as *Christ* spoke them. For he took bread and blessed; and yet what did he bless? The Scripture does not say that Christ took bread and blessed it, or that he blessed the bread which he had taken. Therefore it seems more that he blessed his disciples and apostles, whom he had ordained as witnesses of his passion, and he left his blessed word in them, which is the bread of life. As it is written, “Man does not live only in bread, but in every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” (Mat 4.4). Also Christ says, “I am the bread of life, that came down from heaven.” (Joh 6.51) And Christ often says in [John],¹ “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (Joh 6.63) Therefore it seems more that he blessed his disciples, and also his apostles, in whom the bread of life was left, more than in material bread; for the material bread has an end, as it is written in the Gospel of Matthew. Christ said, “All things that a man eats goes down into the draught away,”² (Mat 15.17) and it has an end of rooting.³ But the blessing of Christ kept his disciples and apostles both bodily and spiritually. As it is written, “none of them perished, except the son of perdition, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.” (John 17.12) Often the Scripture says that “Jesus took bread, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body that shall be given for you.” But he did not say, “This *bread* is my body,” nor that “the *bread* should be given for the life of the world.” For Christ says, “What if you see the Son of man ascend up to where he was before? It is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing.” (John 6.62-63)

[8.] Also Christ says in the Gospel, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the wheat corn falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.” (John 12.24) Here men may see by the words of Christ, that it behooved us that he died in the flesh, and that in his death the fruit of everlasting life was made for all those who believe on him. As it is written, “For as by Adam all die, even so by Christ all shall live, and every man in his own order... For as one brightness is in the sun, another in the moon, and a star is nothing in comparison to the brightness of the sun, even so is the rising again of the dead men. For we are sown in corruption, and shall rise again incorruptible; we are sown in infirmity, and shall rise again in virtue; we are sown in natural bodies, and shall rise again spiritual bodies.” (1Cor 15.22, 41-44) Then, if Christ thus changes our dead bodies by death, and God the Father did not spare his own Son,^{Rom 8.32} as it is written: that death should reign in him as in us,⁴ and that he should be translated into a spiritual body (Rom 5.14-21), the first rising again of dead men.^{Col 1.18}

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How then do hypocrites say, who take it on themselves to make our Lord's body too, that they make the *glorified* body? Either they make again the spiritual body, which has risen from death to life, or else they make again the fleshly body, as it was before he suffered death. And if they also say that they make the *spiritual* body of Christ, it may not be so: for what Christ said and did, he did it as he was at supper, *before* he suffered his passion. And it is written that the spiritual body of Christ rose again from death to life. (Mat 28.6)

¹ Originally, “Matthew.”

² “Draught away” – an obsolete term for an outhouse; a toilet.

³ “End of rooting” – it ceases to exist; it has fulfilled its function, and so it ends.

⁴ Originally, the Gospels are cited here: (Matt, Mark, Luke)

[9.] Also he ascended up to heaven, and he will abide there till he comes to judge the quick and the dead. And if they say that they make Christ's body as it was *before* he suffered his passion, then they must grant that Christ is yet to die: for by all the Scriptures, he was promised to die, and he was given lordship of everlasting life.

Furthermore, if they say that Christ made his body of bread, with what words did he make it? Not with these words, *Hoc est corpus meum*, that is to say in English, "This is my body." For they are words of giving and not of making, which he said after he broke the bread, and then divided it among the disciples and apostles. Therefore, if Christ had made his body of that bread, he would have made it during his blessing, or else in giving thanks, and not in the words of giving. For if Christ had spoken of the material bread that he had in his hand, as when he said, *Hoc est corpus meum*, "This is my body," the bread was made *before*, or else the word would have been a lie. For if I say, "This is my hand," and if it is not a hand, then I am a liar. Therefore, busily seek to find two words of blessing or of giving of thanks, which Christ did, and that all the clerics of the earth do not know — for if you might find or know those words, then you would advance great masters above Christ, and you might be givers of his substance, and be as his father and maker, and *he* should honor *you*.¹ As it is written, "You shall honor your father and mother." (Exo 20.12) Concerning those who desire such worship against God's law, St. Paul speaks of the "man of sin that enhances himself as if he were God. And he is worshipped over all things as God, and shows himself as if he were God." (2Thes 2.3-4)

[10.] Where our charge is upheld in this, let you or those who know most, judge. For they say that when you have said, *Hoc est corpus meum*, that is to say, "This is my body," which you call "the words of consecration" (or else words of making), and when they are said over the bread, you say that no bread is left, but that it is the body of the Lord. But truly there is nothing there but a heap of accidents, such as whiteness, ruggedness, roundness, savour, touch, and taste, and other such accidents.

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Then if you say that the flesh and blood of Christ — that is to say, his manhood — is made more or increased, by so much as the ministration of bread and wine is, then you must consent that that thing that is not God today, shall be God tomorrow. Yes, and that thing which is without spirit or life, but grows in the field by kind, shall be God another time. And we all ought to believe that He was without beginning, and without ending, and begotten in his manhood and not made (Mat 1.23; Luke 1.34-35; Psa 16.10). For if the manhood of Christ were increased every day by so much as the bread and wine draws that you minister, then he would grow more in one day by cart-loads, than he did in 32 years when he was here on earth. And if you make the body of the Lord in those words, *Hoc est corpus meum*, that is to say, "This is my body," and if you *may* make the body of the Lord in those words, "This is my body," then you must be the person of Christ yourself, or else there is a false God.

[11.] For if it is *your* body, as you say, then it is the body of a false knave, or of a drunken man, or of a lecherer, or full of other sins; and then it is an unclean body for any man to worship as God. For if Christ had there made his body of material bread in the said words, as I know they are not the words of making, what *earthly* man had power to do as he did? For in all Holy Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Apocalypse, there are no words

¹ Originally, "worship you." The Hebrew for honor in Exo 20.12 is *kabad*; worship is *shachah*.

written of the making of Christ's body. But there are words written that Christ was the Son of the Father, and that he was conceived of the Holy Ghost; and that he took the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, and that he was dead on the third day; and that he ascended to heaven truly God and man, and that we should believe in all Scripture, which is written of him; and that he is to come to judge the quick and the dead; and the same Christ Jesus, King and Savior, was at the beginning with the Father and the Holy Ghost, making all things of nothing, both heaven and earth, and all things that are in it (Heb 1.8-10), working by virtue of his word;¹ for he said, "Let it be done," and it was done (Gen 1) — whose works earthly man might never comprehend, nor make. And yet the words of making these things are written in the beginning of Genesis, even as God spoke them. And if you cannot make the work that He made, and do not have the words by which He made them, how will you make *Him* that made the works? And you have no words of authority, nor was power left to you on earth, by which you should do this, except as you have feigned this craft, of your false errors, which some of you do not understand.

[12.] For it is prophesied,² "You shall have eyes and not see, and ears and not hear, and you shall see prophecies and you shall not understand, lest they be converted; for I hide them from the hearts of those people. Their hearts are greatly dull,³ and this thing is done to you for the wickedness of your errors in unbelief; therefore, be converted from your worst sin."

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As it is written, when Moses was in the hill with God (Exo 20), the people made a calf and worshipped it as God, "And God spoke to Moses, Go, for the people have done the worst sin, to make and worship alien gods." (Exo 32.7) But now I shall ask you a question, and you answer me, whether the body of the Lord is made once, or twice? Are both the flesh and the blood in the host of the bread? Or else, is the flesh made at one time, and the blood made at other time — that is to say, is the wine in the chalice? If you say, "It is fully and wholly the manhood of Christ in the host of bread, both flesh and blood, skin, hair, and bones;" then you make a false god to worship in the chalice, which is unconjured⁴ when you worship the bread. And if you say, "The flesh is in the bread, and the blood is in the wine," then you must grant — if your craft is true, as indeed it is not — that the manhood of Christ has been divided, and he is made two times. For first you take the host of bread, recently a piece of bread, and make it [his body], as you say, and the innocent people worship it.

[13.] And then you take the chalice, and likewise mar (I would have said "make") the blood in it; and then you worship it also. And if, as I am assured, the flesh and blood of Christ ascended, then you are false harlots⁵ to God, and to us. For when we are assembled for worship, you bring to us the dry flesh, and let the blood be apart. For you give us after the bread, wine and water, and sometimes clean water that is unblessed (or rather, unconjured) by virtue of your craft. And yet you say, "Under the host of bread is the full manhood of Christ." So then, by your own confession, it must be that we worship a false god in the chalice, which is unconjured when we

¹ Originally, "by word of his virtue."

² Isa 6.10, and 42.7, 18; Mat 13.15; Luk 8.8; and Mar 4.12.

³ Originally, "fatted."

⁴ *Conjure*: to summon into action or bring into existence, often as if by magic.

⁵ *Harlots*: cheats, vile persons — anyone who would sell himself and his principles for gain.

worship the bread; and we worship the one as the other. But where do you find that Christ or any of his disciples ever taught any man to worship this bread or wine?

Therefore what shall we say of the apostles who were so often with Christ, and were called by the Holy Ghost? Had they forgotten to set it in the creed when they made it — that is, Christian men's belief? Or else we might say that they knew no such God. For they believe in no other gods, but believe in Him that was at the beginning, and made all things from nothing, visible and invisible;¹ this Lord took on flesh and blood, being in the virgin, the same God. But you have many false ways to beguile the innocent people, and many sleights ² of the fiend.

For you say that in every host or piece is the whole manhood of Christ, or the full substance of him. For you say, "As a man may take a glass, and break the glass into many pieces, and in every piece properly you may see your face, and your face is not parted; so," you say, "the Lord's body is in each host or piece, and his body is not parted." This is a foul and subtle question with which to beguile an innocent fool.

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[14.] But will you take heed of this subtle question, how a man may take a mirror and behold the very likeness of his own face, and yet it is not his face, but the likeness of his face? For if it were his very face, then he must have two faces, one on his body, and another in the mirror. And if the mirror were broken in many places, there would thus be many faces — more by the mirror than by the body — and each man could make as many faces as he wishes. But just as you may see the mind or likeness of your face, and it is not the very face, but the figure of it, so the bread is the figure or mind of Christ's body on earth. And therefore Christ said, "As often as you do this thing, do it in mind of me." (Luke 22.19) Also you say, "As a man may light many candles from one candle, and the light of that candle is never more and never less, so," you say, "the manhood of Christ descends into each part of every host, and the manhood of Christ is never more nor less." What then becomes of your ministrations? For if a man lights many candles from one candle, as long as they burn, there will be many candles lighted — the last candle as well as the first. And so, by this reasoning, if you fetch your word from God, make god of god, there must be many gods, and that is forbidden in the first commandment (Exo 20.3). As for making more or making less of Christ's manhood, it does not lie in your power to come near it, or touch it. For it has ascended into heaven in a spiritual body (Mat 28.6-7), which he did not allow Magdalene to touch when her sins were forgiven her. (John 20.17.)

[15.] Therefore all the sacraments that are left here on earth are but reminders of the body of Christ; for a sacrament is no more than a sign or reminder of a thing that has passed, or a thing to come. For when Jesus spoke of the bread, and said to his disciples, Luke 22.19, "As you do this thing, do it in mind of me," it was set for a reminder of the good things of Christ's body. But when the angel showed to John (Rev 17.3) the sacraments of the woman, and of the beast that bore her, it was set for a reminder of evil things to come on the face of the earth, and a great destroying of the people of God. And in the old law there were many figures or reminders of things to come. For the body of Christ and circumcision was commanded for a law, (Gen 17.12) and anyone that did not keep the law was slain.

¹ Col 1.16, Heb 1.10, Psa 102.25.

² *Sleight*: cunning; craft; artful practice.

And yet St. Paul says (Rom 2.29), "And neither is it circumcision that is openly done in the flesh, but he that is circumcised of heart in spirit, not in the letter, whose praising is not of men, but of God." Peter says, third chapter (1Pet 3.21), "And so baptism, of like form, does not make us safe, but rather it is putting away filthiness of the flesh, and asking God in good conscience, by the rising again of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, that we should be made heirs of everlasting life; he headed into heaven; and angels, and powers, and virtues are being made subject to him." Also the Scriptures say of John the Baptist (Mat 3.3, 11), that he "preached in the wilderness and said: He who is stronger than I, shall come after me, and I am not worthy to kneel down and unlace his shoe." And yet Christ said that John was more than a prophet, Isa 40.3,¹ Mat 11.9;

[16.] How many you say are worthy to make his body; and yet your works bear witness that you are no less the prophets [than John]. For if you did [make the body], you would not teach the people to worship the sacraments, or reminders of Christ, for Christ himself. These sacraments or figures are lawful, for God taught them and left them to us, as the sacrifices remind us that the old law was full good. As it is written, "Those who keep them shall live in them," Paul, Rom 10.5. And so the bread that Christ broke was left to us for a reminder of things passed for the body of Christ, that we should believe he was very man in kind, as we are, as God is in our virtue; and that his manhood was sustained by food as ours are. For Saint Paul says, "He was very man, and in form he was found as a man." (Phil. 2.8.) And so we must believe that he was truly God and man together, and that he ascended truly God and man up to heaven, and that he shall be there till he comes to judge the world. And we may not see him as a bodily being in this life, as it is written, 1Peter 1.8: for he says, "Whom you have not seen you love, in whom not seeing, you now believe." And John says in the first Gospel, "No man saw God, but the only begotten Son that is in the Father, he has declared [Him]." (John 1.18.) And John says in his Epistle, 14.17, "Every man that sins does not see him, or know him." By what reason then, do you who are sinners, say that you make God? Truly this must be the worst sin, to say that you make God. It is the "abomination of discomfort," written in Daniel the prophet, "standing in the holy place; he that reads, let him understand." (Dan. 11.31; Mat 24.15) Also Luke says, 22.20, that Christ "took the cup after he had supped, and gave thanks and said, This cup is the new testament in my blood that shall be shed for the remission of sins for man."

[17.] Now what do you say about the cup which he said is the "new testament in my blood"? Was it a material cup in which the wine was [contained], that he gave his disciples wine from, or was it his most blessed body in which the blessed blood was kept till it were shed out for the sins of those who would be made safe by his passion?

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We must say either that he spoke of his holy body, as he did when he called his passion (suffering in his body) a "cup" when he prayed to his Father; or else he went to his passion, Mat 26.57f, and said, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; but if you will that I drink it, your will be done." He did *not* speak here of the material cup in which he had given his disciples drink, for it did not trouble him; rather, he prayed for his great sufferance and bitterness, which he suffered for our sins, and not for his own. And if he spoke of his holy body and passion when

¹ Isa 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

he said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” then so he spoke of his holy body when he said, “This is my body that shall be given for you,” and *not* of the material bread which he had in his hand. Also, in another place, he calls his passion a cup, Mat 20.20f, where the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to him, and requested of him that her two sons, when he came to his kingdom, might sit one at his right side and one at his left side. And he answered and said, “Woman, you do not know what you ask.” Then he said to them: Would you drink the cup that I shall drink? And they said, Yes, Lord. And he said, “You shall drink of my cup; but to sit on my right hand, it is not mine to give, but it is proper to the Father.” But in saying, “You shall drink of my cup,” he promised they would suffer tribulation of this world, as he did, by which they would enter into life everlasting, and would both be on his right hand.

[18.] And thus you may see that Christ did not speak of the material cup, nor of himself, nor of his apostles, nor of material bread, nor of material wine. Therefore let every man wisely, with meek prayers and great study, and also charity, read the words of God and Holy Scripture. But many of you are like the mother of Zebedee’s sons, to whom Christ said, “You do not know what you ask.” So many of you do not know what you ask or what you do; for if you did, you would not blaspheme God as you do, to set up an alien god instead of the living God. Also Christ says, John 15.1, “I am a true vine!” Therefore do you not worship the vine for God, as you do the bread? In what was Christ a true vine? Or in what was the bread Christ’s body? *In figurative speech*, which is hidden from the understanding of sinners. So then, if Christ did not become a material or earthly vine, then neither did a material vine become the body of Christ; and neither was the bread, material bread, changed from its substance into the flesh and blood of Christ.

Have you not read John 2.18-19, when Christ came into the temple, they asked him what token he would show, that they might believe him? And he answered them, “Tear down this temple, and in three days I shall raise it again.”

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These words were fulfilled in his rising again from death. But when he said, “Undo this temple,” they were deceived, in that they understood it in a fleshly sense, and imagined that he had spoken of the temple of Jerusalem, because he stood in it. And for this they accused him full falsely at his passion, Mat 26.61; for he spoke of the temple of his blessed body, which rose again on the third day. And just so, Christ spoke of his holy body when he said, “This is my body, which shall be given for you,” Luke 22.19 — which was given to death, and to rising again, to bliss for all who shall be saved by him. But just as they accused Christ falsely about the temple of Jerusalem, so now-a-days they accuse him falsely, and say that he spoke of the bread that he broke among his apostles. For in Christ saying this, they are deceived, taking it in a fleshly sense, and turning it to mean the material bread, just as the Jews did with the temple. On this false understanding, they make the abomination of discomfort, written of in Daniel the prophet 11.31, and Mat 24.15, standing in the holy place, “He that reads, let him understand.” Now, therefore, we pray heartily to God, that this evil time may be made short for the chosen men, as he has promised in his blessed Gospel, Mat 24.22. And that the large and broad way that leads to perdition, may be shut; and the strait and narrow way that leads to bliss, may be opened by Holy Scriptures, so that we may know which is the will of God, to serve him in truth and holiness, and in the dread of God, that we may find by Him a way of everlasting bliss. So be it.

[Note.] The bracketed numerals show the commencement of the several pages in the edition of 1546; the Scripture references were added in the edition of 1845.

WHY POOR PRIESTS HAVE NO BENEFICES.

The First Chapter.

Some causes lead some poor priests not to receive benefices. The *first* is for dread of simony; the *second* is for dread of misspending poor men's goods; the *third* is for dread of hindering a better occupation, one that is lighter or easier, more certain and more profitable on every side. For if men were to come to benefices by the gift of prelates, there is dread of simony — for commonly they take the first-fruits or other pensions. Or else they hold curates in office in their courts or chapels, or in other vain offices, far from priests who are taught and exampled by Christ and his apostles. So that, commonly, such benefices do not come freely as Christ commands, but rather they come for worldly profit, flattery, or praising, and for thanks to mighty men and lords — and not for ability or the knowledge of God's law, nor for the true preaching of the Gospel, and an example of holy life. And therefore these prelates and receivers are commonly fouled with simony, which is cursed heresy, as God's law and man's law openly teach, and many saints. And it is so great a marvel now, that as St. Gregory says in the plain law of the church and other books, that those men who desire benefices should not have them, but those men who flee them for dread of an inability in themselves, and the great charge — as did Moses, Jerome, Austin, Gregory, and holy saints. And now anyone who can run fast to Rome, and bear gold out of the land, and pay it for dead lead and a little writing, and strive and plead and curse for tithes and other temporal profits — that are called by Antichrist's clerics the "rights of holy church" — shall have great benefices, a cure ¹ of many thousands of souls, though he is unable in the knowledge of Holy Writ, and in the will to teach and preach to his subjects, except of a cursed life, and a wicked example of pride, covetousness, gluttony, lechery, and other great sins.

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But if there is any simple man who desires to live well, and teach truly God's law, and who despises pride and other sins, both of prelates and other men, he is held to be a hypocrite, a *novel* teacher, a heretic, and is not allowed to come to any benefice. But if in any little poor place, he lives a poor life, he is so pursued and slandered that he is put out by wiles, contrivances, frauds and worldly violence; and he is imprisoned, disgraced, or burnt, if Antichrist's clerics may get any gold for their cursed lies. And if lords present clerics to benefices, they commonly have gold in great quantity, and hold these curates in their worldly office, and allow the wolves of hell to strangle men's souls, so that they have much gold, and their office is done for nothing, and their chapels are held up for vainglory or hypocrisy. And yet they will not present a cleric that is able in the learning of God's law, and a good life, and a holy example to the people. But instead they present a kitchen clerk, or a penny clerk, or someone wise in building castles, or worldly doing, though he cannot read his psalter well, and does not know the commandments of God, nor the sacraments of holy church. And yet some lords, to colour their simony, will not take for themselves anything but kerchiefs for the lady, or a riding-horse, or a tun ² of wine. And when some lords would present a good man, able for love of God and Christian souls, then some ladies are the means to have him be a dancer, a tripper on tapestry,³ or a hunter or hawker, or a wild

¹ *Cure*: what is committed to the charge and care of a parish priest or curate; a curacy.

² *Tun*: a large cask especially one holding a volume equivalent to 2 butts or 252 gals.

³ It was called "cutting the rug" in the slang of the 1940s, for dancing. – WHG

player of summer's games, for flattering and gifts going between — and if it is for dancing in bed, so much the worse. And thus it seems that both prelates and lords commonly make a cursed Antichrist, and a lively fiend, to be master of Christ's people, to lead them to hell, to Satan their master. And they will not allow Christ's disciples to teach Christ's Gospel to his children, to save their souls. And so they labor to exile Christ and his law from his heritage — that is, Christian souls, that he bought not with rotten gold or silver,^{1Pet 1.18} but with his precious heart-blood that he shed on the cross by the most burning charity. In this presenting of evil curates, and holding curates in worldly office, hindering them from their spiritual cure, are THREE DEGREES of treachery against God and his people.

The *first* degree is in prelates and lords who thus hold curates in their worldly office. For these men have their high estates in the church, and lordships, in order to provide *true* curates to the people, and to maintain them in God's law, and punish them if they fail in their spiritual cure; and by this they hold their lordships from God.

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So then, if they make *evil* curates, and hold them in their worldly office, and hinder them from leading God's people in the rightful way to heaven, but help them and constrain them to lead the people hell-ward by withdrawing of God's word, and by giving an evil example. They are wayward traitors to God and his people, and are vicars and procurators of Satan.

Yet more treachery¹ is in *false* curates, who reward or hire,² in order to come into such worldly offices, to spare their muck and lay it up in treasure, and to get lordship and maintenance against ordinances; who dare not call them to residence and save their souls, but live in lords' courts, and in lusts, and in the ease of their flesh, to get more fat benefices; who do not purpose speedily to perform their spiritual office.

More treachery is to the lords who are led by such cursed heretics, Antichrists, traitors to God and his people — namely, traitors to lords themselves — where lords might not find in all their lordship, true worldly men to rule their household and worldly offices, unless they resort to curates who are openly false traitors to God and his people — where lords are so blinded, that they do not perceive that such traitors are so openly false to God, that they will much more be false to them.

But the most treachery is in *false confessors* who should, by their office, warn prelates and lords of this great peril; and in clerics also, that they hold no such curates in their worldly offices, for they do not do this lest they lessen lordship, and friendship, and gifts, and the welfare of their stinking belly. And so they sell Christian souls to Satan, to [satisfy] their stinking belly, and make prelates and lords and curates live in sin and treachery against God and his people. And so, against the hire³ that lords give their confessors, these confessors deceive them in their souls' health, and maintain them in cursed treachery against God and his people.

And thus almost all the world goes to hell because of this cursed simony and false confessors. For commonly prelates, lords, and curates, are envenomed with this heresy of simony, and never give true repentance and satisfaction for it. For when they have a fat benefice, gotten by simony,

¹ Wycliffe used the word "traitery" which Vaughn footnoted as "treachery." – WHG

² That is, these church offices are bought and sold for private profit.

³ *Against the hire*: in return for the fees paid.

they do not forsake it as they are bound to do by their own law. Rather they knowingly make use of that simony, and live in riot,¹ covetousness, and pride — and they do not perform their office, either in good example, or in true teaching. And thus Antichrist's clerics, enemies of Christ and his people, gather eminence for themselves from the people,² by money and flattery and fleshly love, and they withhold true priests from teaching them God's law. And therefore the blind lead the blind, and both parts run into sin, and a great many to hell. It is a huge wonder that God, of his righteousness, does not destroy the houses of prelates and lords and curates, as He did Sodom and Gomorrah, for this heresy, extortion, and other cursedness that they frequent.

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The Second Chapter.

Yet, though poor priests might freely get a presentation from lords,³ to have benefices with cure of souls, they dread mispending poor men's goods. This is more dreaded than the first, concerning their own persons. For priests ought to hold them to being paid with food and clothing, as St. Paul teaches. ^{1Tim 6.8} And if they have more, then it is from poor men's good, as their own law, and Jerome and God's law say — and they are keepers of it, and procurators of poor men. But for institution and induction, he will give much of this good that is poor men's, to bishops' offices, to archdeacons, and to officials, who are too rich and did not come of it freely. And when bishops and their officers come and feign to visit — though they nourish men in open sin for annual rent, and do not perform their office, but sell souls to Satan for money — wretched curates are needed to feast them richly, and give them procuracy and synage.⁴ Indeed, this is against God's law, and man's, and reason, and against their conscience. And also they are not permitted to teach truly God's law to their own subjects, and warn them of false prophets who deceive them in belief, and teaching, and good life, and earthly goods, as Christ teaches and warns in the Gospel. He commands curates to do the same upon pain of their damnation. ^{Eze 33.7-8} For then they must decry to the people the great sins of prelates, and other new-feigned religious, as God bids. But they deem that such sad reproving of sin is envy, the slandering of prelates, and the destroying of holy church.

And curates are not permitted to sharply execute God's law against their subjects, however openly cursed by God and slanderous of Christian religion — not if the high clerics of Antichrist have annual gifts and pensions to suffer cursed men in open adultery and other sins. For when they are falsely amended by officials and deans, no man is hardy enough to waken them out of their lusts of sin, for that would destroy the jurisdiction and profit of the prelates. Their cursed extortion is called 'the great alms of Antichrist.' But hereby they make large kitchens, hold fat horse and hounds, and hawks; and strumpets are gaily arrayed; and poor men are allowed to starve, out of mischief; and yet they allow and constrain them to go the broad way to hell.

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¹ *Riot*: a wild gathering involving excessive drinking and promiscuity.

² Originally, "gather to them leading of the people."

³ *Presentation*: The act or right of offering a clergyman to the bishop or ordinary for institution in a benefice.

⁴ *Synage*: synodal rent paid to the bishop.

Also, many times their patrons — getters of country,¹ and idle flatterers — will look to be feasted by such curates, or else make them lose that little thing that they and poor men live by. So that they do not spend the tithes and offerings for good conscience and God's law, but waste them on such mighty and rich men, and idle — or else for labor, cost and enmity, and the despising they suffer. And on the other side, for dread of conscience in this, it is better to forsake all than to hold it out. Also each good day these small curates commonly have letters from their ordinaries² to summon and to curse poor men for nothing, except for the covetousness of Antichrist's clerics. And if the curates do not summon and curse them — though they know no cause for it under God's law — the curates would be hurled and summoned from day to day, from far place to farther, or cursed, or lose their benefice its profits. Or else, as prelates feign³ by their revelry, the curates would soon destroy prelates' jurisdiction, power, and profit.

Also, when poor priests at first are holy of life, and devout in their prayers, they are beneficed. But if they are not worldly and busy about the world — to make great feasts for rich parsons, and vicars, and rich men, and to be costly and gaily arrayed as their estate requires by the false judgment of the world — they will be hated and baited, as hounds. And each man, to injure them in name and worldly goods, and by so many cursed deceits, Antichrist has brought up by his worldly clerics, to make curates misspend poor men's goods, and not truly do their office. Or else these curates must forsake all, and leave Antichrist's clerics as lords of this world. Indeed, more cruelly than other tyrants, these clerics rob the poor people by feigned⁴ censures, and they teach the fiend's lore, both by open preaching and by the example of their cursed life.

Also, if such curates are stirred to go learn God's law, and teach their parishioners the Gospel, they commonly get no leave from their bishops, except for gold. And when they most profit in their learning, they are called home at the bishop's will. And if [the bishops] have any high sacraments, or points of the high prelates,⁵ they commonly buy them with poor men's goods, both against high prelates, concerning rich men of country (such as patrons, parsons, and other getters of country), and their own kin. This is for the fame of the world, and for shame, and the evil judging of men. And certainly it is a great wonder that God allows this sin to go unpunished openly for so long — namely, the sin of prelates' courts that are dens of thieves, and larders of hell. And this is true of their officers, who are subtle in malice and covetousness; and of lords and mighty men who should destroy this wrong and others, and maintain truth and God's servants, but who now maintain Antichrist's falseness and his clerics, for part of the profit.

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And how could simple priests dare take such benefices, unless they were mighty in knowing a good life, and hearty to withstand these wrongs. And there is more that we might now touch for the multiplicity and subtle colouring of hypocrisy. But certainly God allows such hypocrites and tyrants to have the name of prelates for the great sins of the people and their unworthiness, that

¹ "Getters of country" The context suggests these are landed gentry who enjoy receiving favors, and expect these benefices to act as wayside inns for their private benefit. "Country" here means real estate, land. – WHG

² *Ordinary*: person with immediate jurisdiction in a case of ecclesiastical law, e.g., the bishop within a diocese.

³ *Feign*: to put on airs to impress others; to make oneself appear more important than is warranted.

⁴ *Feigned*: here it means invented – made up without any foundation.

⁵ That is, if a bishop is granted any of a prelate's functions or privileges. A prelate is a church governor over some geographical area or group of people called a *prelature*. Most bishops are given a *diocese* to govern, which includes a particular church. Generally, all prelates are bishops, but not all bishops are prelates.

each part leads the other to hell by the blindness of the fiend. And this would be a thousand-fold more vengeance if God were to destroy both parts and all their goods, and the earth with it, as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah. For the longer they thus live in sin, the greater pains they will have in hell, unless they amend themselves. This dread and many more, would make some poor priests receive more benefices.

The Third Chapter.

Poor priests might have presentation freely given by lords, and be helped by kings maintaining them, and the help of good commoners from the extortions of prelates and other misspending of these goods, that is full hard in this reign of Antichrist's clerics. And yet they sorely dread that by a *singular cure*,¹ ordained by sinful men, they should be hindered from better occupation, and the greater profit of holy church. And this is the most dread of all, concerning their persons: for they have a cure and charge entirely of God, to help their brethren heavenward by teaching, praying, and giving an example. And it seems that they shall most easily fulfill this charge by the *general cure* of charity, as Christ and his apostles did, though they do not bind these priests to our singular place like a tied dog. And by this general cure, they most securely save themselves, and help their brethren: for they would then be free to flee from one city to another when they are pursued by Antichrist's clerics, as Christ bids in the Gospel. [Mat 10.23](#)

- Also then they might best, without men challenging them, go and dwell among the people where they will most profit, and conveniently come and go according to the stirring of the Holy Ghost, and not be bound by sinful men's jurisdiction from doing better.
- Also then they would follow Christ and his apostles closely, in thus taking alms willingly and freely given by the people they teach, rather than taking tithes and offerings by the custom that sinful men ordain, now in use in the time of grace.

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- Also this is more meritorious on both sides, as they understand by Christ's life and his apostles: for thus the people would give them alms more willingly and devoutly, and they would take it more meekly, and be busier to have, keep, and teach God's law; and so it is better for both sides.
- Also by this manner, the people might and should give their alms freely to true priests who truly keep their order, and who freely and openly teach the Gospel; and withdraw alms from wicked priests, and not be constrained to pay their tithes and offerings to openly cursed men, nor maintain them in their open cursedness.
- And thus the simony, covetousness, and idleness of worldly clerics would be laid down, and holiness and true teaching and knowing God's law, would be brought about in both clerics and laymen.
- Also thus the striving, pleading, and cursing for tithes and offerings, and the hate and discord among priests and lewd men, would be ended, and unity, peace, and charity would be maintained and kept.
- Also these benefices by this course that men now use, brings in worldliness and needless business about worldly offices that Christ and his apostles would never take upon themselves

¹ *Cure*: what is committed to the charge and care of a parish priest or curate; a curacy.

— and the apostles were mightier, wittier, and more burning in charity to God and to the people, both to live in the best manner themselves, and to teach other men.

- Also the covetousness and worldly security of clerics, and the occasion for covetousness and worldliness of the people, would be done away with; and Christ's poverty and his apostles' would reign in Christian people, by the example of the poor life of clerics, and by their trust in God, and desiring heavenly bliss.
- Also then priests would study Holy Writ, and be devout in their prayers — not tarried with new offices like new songs, having more sacraments than Christ and his apostles used, who taught us all truth — and speedily saving Christian people.
- Also much of the blasphemy of the prelates and other men of feigned obedience, and the needless swearings made to worldly prelates, would then cease; and sovereign obedience to God and his law, and the eschewing of needless oaths, would reign among Christian men.
- Also then men would commonly eschew all the perils listed before in the first and second chapters, and many thousands more, and live in cleanness and security of conscience.
- Also then priests would be busy to seek God's worship, and save men's souls, and not seek their own worldly glory, and the profit of worldly dirt.
- Also then priests would live like angels, as they are angels of their office — where now they live like swine in their fleshly lusts, returning to their former sins as hounds to their spewings, [2Pet 2.21](#) for the abundance of worldly goods, and idleness in their spiritual office, and excessively busy about this wretched life.

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For these dreads and many thousands more, and to be more like Christ's life and his apostles', and to better profit their own souls and other men's, some poor priests think to labor with God where they would most profit, by the evidence that God gives them, while they still have time and a little bodily strength and youth. Nevertheless, they do not condemn curates who do their office well, so that they keep the liberty of the Gospel, and dwell where they most profit, and teach God's law truly and stably against false prophets and cursed fiends' deceits.

Christ for his endless mercy help his priests and common people to beware of Antichrist's deceits, and truly go the right way to heaven. Amen, Jesus, for your endless charity!

ANSWER OF WYCLIFFE TO RICHARD THE SECOND, AS TOUCHING THE RIGHT AND TITLE OF THE KING AND THE POPE.

In relation to the following document, Fox, the martyrologist,¹ writes: —

“It was demanded, whether the kingdom of England may lawfully, in case of necessity, for its own defence, detain and keep back the treasure of the kingdom, that it be not carried away to foreign and strange nations, the pope himself demanding and requiring it, under pain of censure, and by virtue of obedience.”

Wycliffe thus answers [the pope’s demand]: —

Setting apart the minds of learned men, and what might be said in the matter, either by the canon law, or by the law of England, or the civil law, it remains now only to persuade and prove the affirmative part of this doubt, by the principles of Christ’s law.

And *first* I prove it thus: —

Every natural body has power given by God to resist its contrary, and to preserve itself in due estate, as philosophers know very well. It is evident that bodies without life, to which hardness is given, are endued with power to resist those things that would break them; and those with coldness, have power to withstand the heat that dissolves them. To the extent, then, that the kingdom of England (in the manner and phrase of the Scriptures) ought to be one body, and the clergy ought to be one with the commonalty of its members, it seems that this kingdom has such power given to it by God to remain one; and so much more apparently — by how much this body is precious to God — He has adorned it with virtue and knowledge.

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For as much then as there is no power given by God to any creature, for any end or purpose, that he may not lawfully use it to that end and purpose, it follows that our kingdom may lawfully keep back and detain their treasure for its defence, in whatever case necessity requires it.

Secondly, the same is proved by the law of the Gospel. For the pope cannot claim the treasure of this kingdom, except under the title of alms, and consequently, under the pretence of the works of mercy according to the rule of charity.

But in that case, the title of alms ought to utterly cease: *ergo*, the right and title of challenging the treasure of our realm also ceases in the presupposed necessity. For as much as all charity begins with oneself,² it would not be a work of charity, but of mere madness, to send away the treasures of the realm into foreign nations, whereby the realm itself may fall into ruin under the pretence of such charity.

It also appears by this, that Christ the Head of the church, whom all Christian priests ought to follow, lived by the alms of devout women, Luke 8.3. He hungered and thirsted, he was a stranger, and he sustained many other miseries, not only in his members, but also in his own

¹ Fox’s *Acts and Monuments* (1641), i. 584. [Sometimes titled *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.]

² Originally, “has his beginning of himself.” Today we say, “Charity begins at home.”

body, as the apostle witnesses, 2Cor 8.9, “He was made poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich.” Whereby in the first endowing of the church, whichever of the clergy had any temporal possessions, he had it by way of perpetual alms, as both writings and chronicles witness.

Thus, in his second book to Eugenius, St. Bernard declares that he could not claim any secular dominion by right of succession, as being the vicar of St. Peter. He writes thus:

“If Saint [Peter] ¹ were to speak to the pope himself, as Bernard does to Eugenius, would it be thought that he would take it patiently? But let it be so, that you claim it for yourself by some other ways or means; yet truly, by any right or apostolic title, you cannot do so. For how could he give to you what he did not have himself? That which he had, he gave you — that is to say, care over the church; but did he give you any lordship or rule? Harken to what he says: ‘Not bearing rule (he says) as lords over the clergy, but behaving yourselves as examples to the flock.’ ^{1Pet 5.3} And because you should not think it was spoken only in humility, and not in verity, mark the word of the Lord himself in the Gospel: ‘The kings of the people rule over them, but you shall not do so.’” ^{Mat 20.25-26}

Here lordship and dominion is plainly forbidden to the apostles, and dare you then usurp the same? If you would be a lord, you will lose your apostleship: or if you would be an apostle, you will lose your lordship.

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For truly you shall depart from one of them. If you would have both, you will lose both, or else think yourself to be one of those whom God so greatly complains, saying, “They have reigned, but not through me; they have become princes, and I have not known it.” ^{Hos 8.4} Now if it suffices for you to rule with the Lord, then you have your glory, but not with God. But if we keep that which is forbidden to us, then let us hear what is said: “He that is the greatest among you (says Christ) shall be made as the least; and he which is the highest, shall be as the minister;” and for an example, he set a child in the midst of them. ^{Luk 9.48}

So this, then, is the true form and institution of the apostles’ trade: lordship and rule are forbidden; ministration and service are commanded.²

LETTER OF WYCLIFFE IN EXCUSE TO POPE URBAN VI.³

I have to joyfully tell all true men the belief that I hold, and always to the pope. For I suppose that if any faith is rightful and given by God, the pope will gladly conserve it; and if my faith is error, the pope will wisely amend it. I suppose over this, that the Gospel of Christ is part of the body of God’s law. For I believe that Jesus Christ, who gave this Gospel in his own person, is truly God and truly man; and by this, it surpasses all other laws. I suppose above this, that the pope is most obliged to keep the Gospel among all men who live here. For the pope is the highest vicar that Christ has here on earth. For the greatness of Christ’s vicars is not measured by worldly excess, but by this: that this vicar follows Christ more by virtuous living, for this teaches the Gospel. This sentence of Christ and of his Gospel, I take as belief: that Christ, for the time

¹ Originally, St. John.

² The reply of Wycliffe extends thus far, and does not end with the preceding paragraph, as the use of a different type in Fox might lead one to suppose. Nor does the MS. end here. It is much more extended. Bodleran MSS. *Fasciculus Zizaniorum*.

³ Lewis, Ap. No. 23. Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, i. 581.

that he walked here, was the poorest man of all, both in spirit and in possessions. For Christ says that he had nothing on which to rest his head.^{Mat 8.20} And above this I take as belief, that no man should follow the pope, nor any saint now in heaven, except insofar as he followed Christ: for James and John erred, and Peter and Paul sinned. From this I take as wholesome counsel, that the pope should leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ gave him, and more speedily than all his clerics do so. For thus Christ did, and thus he taught his disciples, till the fiend had blinded this world.

If I err in this sentence, I will meekly be amended — if that is by the death, then let it be skilful, for I hope that would be good to me. And if I might travel in my own person, I would with God's will go to the pope. But Christ has needed me for the contrary, and taught me more obedience to God than to man.¹ And I assume of our pope, that he will not be Antichrist, and reverse Christ in this working, contrary to Christ's will. For if he summons me against reason, whether himself or any of his men, and he pursues this unskilful summoning, he is an open Antichrist. Just as merciful intent did not excuse Peter from Christ calling him Satan, so blind intent and wicked counsel do not excuse the pope here. If he asks true priests to travel more than they may, 'tis not excused by reason of God, nor that he is Antichrist. For if our belief teaches us that our blessed God does not allow us to be tempted more than we may,^{1Cor 10.13} why should a man ask such service? And therefore we pray to God for our pope Urban the Sixth, that his holy intent not be quenched by his enemies. And Christ, who may not lie, says that the enemies of a man are especially his close family,^{Mar 6.4} and that this is true of men and fiends.

CONFESSION OF WYCLIFFE CONCERNING THE EUCHARIST.

I acknowledge that the sacrament of the altar is truly God's body in the form of bread; but it is God's body in another manner than it is in heaven. For in heaven it is sevenfold, in the form and figure of flesh and blood. But in the sacrament, God's body is the miracle of God in the form of bread. And he is neither seven feet high,² nor in a man's figure. Rather, just as a man ceases to think about the *kind* of an image (whether it is made of oak or of ash) and sets his thoughts on the one in whom the image is made, so much more a man should cease to think about the kind of bread, but think upon Christ. For his body is the same bread as the sacrament of the altar, and with all the cleanness, all the devotion, and all the charity that God would give him, he worships *Christ*. And then he receives God spiritually more profitably than the priest, who sings the mass with less charity. For the bodily eating does not profit the soul, except inasmuch as the soul is fed with charity. This sentence is proved by Christ, who may not lie. For as the Gospel says that the night that he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, Christ took bread in his hands, and blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples to eat. For he says, and he may not lie, — "This is my body."

¹ This sentence points to the impaired health of the Reformer. He died two years later.

² Originally, "sene fote" – seven feet.

CONFESSION ON THE EUCHARIST, Delivered to the Delegates at Oxford, in 1382.¹

We believe, as Christ and his apostles have taught us, that the sacrament of the altar, white and round like our unsacred bread or host, is truly God's body in the form of bread. And if it is broken in three parts, as the church uses it, or in a thousand parts, every one of these parts is the same God's body. And just so, the person of Christ is truly God and truly man, truly Godhead, and truly manhead. And just as the holy church has believed many hundreds of winters, the same sacrament is truly God's body, and truly bread — as it is a form of God's body, and a form of bread, as Christ and his apostles teach. And therefore Saint Paul never names it, except when he calls it "bread;" and by our belief, he took his understanding from God in this. The argument of heretics against this sentence is easy for a Christian man to resolve. Just as it is heresy to believe that Christ is a spirit and not a body, so it is heresy to trust that this sacrament is God's body, and not bread; for it is both together. But the greatest heresy that God allowed to come to his church is to trust that this sacrament is an accident without a substance,² and that it may in no way be God's body: for Christ said by the witness of John, that "This bread is my body." And if they say this is the sense,³ then holy church has been in heresy many hundreds of winters — and so it has, especially since the fiend was loosed a thousand winters after Christ was ascended to heaven, as witnessed by the angel to John the Evangelist.^{Rev 20.3} But it is to be supposed that many saints who died in the meantime, were purified of this error before their death. Oh how great is the diversity between us who trust that this sacrament is truly bread in its kind, and heretics who tell us that this is an accident without a subject!

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For before the fiend was loosed (the father of lies), this mockery⁴ was never contrived. How great a diversity exists between us who trust that this sacrament is truly bread in its kind and God's body sacramentally, and heretics who trust and say that this sacrament may in no way be God's body! For I dare say that surely if this were truth, Christ and his saints died heretics, and the greater part of holy church now believes a heresy. And therefore devout men supposed this is why the council of friars in London suffered the earthquake⁵ — for they put a heresy upon Christ and the saints in heaven, which is why the earth trembled. In truth, landman's voice⁶ answered for God, as it did in the time of His passion, when he was dampened to bodily death.⁷ May Christ and his mother, that in ground had destroyed all heresies, keep his church in the right belief of this sacrament, and move the king and his realm to ask sharply of his clerics this action: that all his possessioners,⁸ on pain of losing all their temporalities, tell the king and his realm

¹ Knighton de Event. Angl. apud X. Scriptores, Coll. 2649, 2650.

² That is, a quality (like round or white), without a substance to which the quality applies (like bread).

³ Originally, "be this skylle." In Middle English, *skylle* is a verb meaning to understand or make sense of.

⁴ Originally, "gabbing."

⁵ The "Earthquake Synod" of 1382, in Blackfriar London.

⁶ Anthropomorphically, the earthquake was the voice of the land itself, crying out against them.

⁷ **Mat 26:38** Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." **Luk 22:44** And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

⁸ *Possessioner*: a member of the religious community endowed with property in lands, buildings, etc., as contrasted with mendicant friars.

with sufficient grounding, what this sacrament is. And may all the orders of friars, on pain of losing their allegiance, tell the king and his realm with good grounding what the sacrament is. For I am certain of the third of the clergy that defends these doubts listed here, that they will defend it on pain of their life.

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