Lollardy and Political Community: Vernacular Literacy, Popular Preaching, and the Transformative Influence of Lay Power

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ABSTRACT

This essay investigates the way Lollardy, a movement of religious dissent founded by the Oxford philosopher John Wyclif, theorized secular authority and conceptualized political community in late medieval England. The extent and influence of Lollardy in English society at large as a heterodox movement that faced brutal persecution and repression, especially after the beginning of the fifteenth century, have always been a matter of debate for scholars. By assessing the movement's contribution to the development of political society and its presence in public discourse and civic life in late medieval England, my essay suggests that Lollardy as a movement was meaningful politically. The movement's discourse of politics and governance brought radical change to English society. In particular, my essay scrutinizes the connection between the Lollard program of vernacular literate practice for the laity and the movement's vision of political community. I suggest that Lollard undertaking in the uses and transmission of texts in the English language, in preaching in English, and in group study and discussion of vernacular writing facilitated the public discussion of ideas that informed, shaped, and expanded the political community.

KEYWORDS: Lollardy, Vernacular Literacy, Popular Preaching, Authority, Political Community, Laity

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羅拉德派和政治社群：
白話文知識、公眾佈道，以及
教徒群眾的改革影響力

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摘　　要

　　本文探討英國中世紀晚期的羅拉德派如何建立政權與政治的理論。因為羅拉德派從十五世紀開始就受到極端的壓迫和迫害，所以現代學者對羅拉德派以異端教派的身份對英國社會到底有多少的改變和影響常有疑問。本文探討羅拉德派對英國政治體與公民社會的貢獻，並指出它在歷史上的政治義意。羅拉德派的政治理論與它帶給英國社會的改革有著密切的關係。特別是，本文詳細探討羅拉德派教徒群眾的白話文知識培養運動以及它對於政治社群的憧憬之間的關聯。我認為羅拉德派因著手推廣組織性的英語學習、以英語講道，並討論白話文書寫而促進了社會大眾普遍的社政教育，更因此促進、塑造、並擴展政治社群的理念。

關鍵字：羅拉德派、白話文知識、公眾佈道、政權、政治
　　　　　社群、教徒群眾

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This essay investigates the way Lollardy, [1] a movement of religious dissent founded by the Oxford philosopher John Wyclif, theorized secular authority and conceptualized political community in late medieval England. For modern scholars, the status of Lollardy as a heterodox movement has always raised questions about the nature of religious nonconformity and its political significance in the later Middle Ages. My study of the movement's contribution to the development of political society and its presence in public discourse and civic life of English society from the late fourteenth through the fifteenth century seeks to understand whether and how Lollardy was politically meaningful.

Modern scholarship on Lollardy ranges from the celebratory to the dismissive, and at the heart of the debate is a question of the extent of the Lollards' presence and influence in late medieval English society. Anne Hudson, arguably the most eminent scholar of Lollardy, leads a major approach that pays tribute to Wycliffism as organized religious dissent that contributed to English thought and society in the later Middle Ages. Such an approach emphasizes the way Wycliffism engaged established tradition and practice and called into question, in its promotion of vernacular writing and lay literate practice, the hierarchical authority that such tradition and practice long maintained.[2] For Fiona Somerset and Kantik Ghosh, where the Lollard movement posed the most forceful challenge was with respect to the clerical establishment (e.g., *Clerical Discourse*, *Wycliffite Heresy*). The widely transformative potential of Lollardy was also visible in the area of English

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[1] I make no distinction between "Wycliffism" and "Lollardy" in this article. As Anne Hudson has pointed out, the popular lay movement that followed Wyclif and his academic disciples was consistent with and reflected coherently the ideology of early Wycliffites (*Selections* 8-9; *Premature Reformation* 2, 60-119). I want to express my sincere appreciation to the anonymous reviewers and the editorial board of *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture* for helping me revise this essay. The erudition and insights in the reviewers' report I received helped me conceptualize the essay more sharply and intelligently.

[2] I call the Lollard social uses and activities of literacy "literate practice" after the work of Rebecca Krug in her study of women and writing in late medieval England to refer to the engagement of textual culture by non-literate or semi-literate people (5). The Lollards' emphasis on the vernacular and intellectual engagement of texts as groups and communities all attest to their commitment to "literate practice." In the sense that they practiced literacy, not as a static engagement of texts by a solitary "literate" individual, but as a "social practice," their uses and activities in vernacular communication can be characterized as "literate practice." For an illustration of how Lollards at once engaged highly intellectual and sophisticated legal and theological traditions of the church and defied them, see Ben Lowe's discussion of Lollard pacifism: ordinary Lollards at once had in-depth knowledge of the issues and laws involved and rejected ecclesiastical authority on the same intellectual grounds (e.g., 406-07, 412, 415-17).

literature, according to Andrew Cole, where major English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer drew upon Lollard ideas in their work.

Scholars who challenge the celebratory approach to Lollardy themselves hold radically different views on the place and meaning of heterodoxy in the later Middle Ages. In his influential *Stripping of the Altars*, Eamon Duffy downplays the historical importance of the Lollards by claiming that "their number and their significance" have been "overestimated" (6). While Duffy trivializes Lollardy as a way to portray late medieval culture as a harmonious and complete one of "traditional religion" where difference and tension just had no popular support or appeal (6), Paul Strohm portrays state formation in fifteenth-century England as taking place at the expense of the hapless Lollards. Following R. I. Moore, who has argued that the centralization of political authority and the elaboration of the state apparatus in the later Middle Ages were constructed on the identification, targeting, and persecution of social difference as the other (e.g., heretic, Jew) (72), Strohm suggests that the state in fifteenth-century England fabricated twisted narratives of conspiracy and subversion against dissenters such as the Lollards as a means of legitimating its own political authority. Where for Duffy the Lollards were unpopular priggish cranks in a strong harmonious culture of "orthodox faith" (6), for Strohm the Lollards were doomed victims of a sinister political state (e.g., *England's Empty Throne* 34-62, 65-86, 120-24, 132-35).[3] While both perspectives underplay the significance of Lollardy in late medieval England, they imply different views on the place and meaning of heterodoxy and present different portrayals of England in the later Middle Ages.

More recently, Shannon McSheffrey also dismisses Lollardy as "less than a coherently organized sect with a fully articulated creed" (49). Instead of understanding heterodoxy as the puny and insignificant challenge to the religious establishment, however, she characterizes it as a "situational" phenomenon that often blended in with orthodoxy. Once the authorities cracked down on Lollardy, people were quick to abandon Lollard beliefs and return to the fold of the orthodox church; and those who remained staunch Lollards often had no idea what fundamental Wycliffite creeds were (e.g., 48-49). Heterodoxy was a form of protest against authority and in this sense a largely socio-political phenomenon, but it lacked an essential religious core or theological commitment (48).

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[3] See also Strohm's more recent comments on Lollardy in *Theory and the Premodern Text*, 20-29.

The precise political meaning of Lollardy, therefore, remains an important question in the study of heterodoxy in the later Middle Ages. In this essay, I extend the work of Anne Hudson and others who celebrate Lollardy by examining Lollardy's political ideas and social practices, in order to affirm the basis of Lollardy's historical and political meaning in a strong and coherent tradition of religious nonconformity. Where scholars who celebrate Lollardy have largely focused on their challenge to the established church and clergy, I scrutinize the movement's theoretical ideas on politics and governance and the political significance of its campaign to empower the laity. Against the characterization of Lollardy as either unpopular, powerless, or empty, I tie the movement's practice of religious nonconformity directly to its vision of political community. In particular, I show that the Lollard program of vernacular literate practice, based in preaching, religious worship and study in the English Bible and vernacular texts, facilitated the public discussion of ideas that informed, shaped, and expanded the political community.

Lollardy as a social and religious movement had a fundamental connection to the career of the English theologian and Oxford professor John Wyclif. It began notably in the final two decades of the fourteenth century, when Wyclif began to preach heterodox ideas that challenged ecclesiastical authority. Early on the movement took on a very intellectual character, as Wyclif's disciples and fellow academics organized to promote his ideas at the university and beyond. It spread outside the university and into towns and villages of England. Through it all, Wyclif's ideas remained the center of the movement, inside and outside Oxford.

Shortly before 1380 Wyclif began preaching ideas that challenged the church hierarchy on several grounds. From the very beginning the Wycliffite expression of dissent and call for reform were controversial, especially with powerful churchmen mindful of possible heterodoxy. Wyclif denied the validity of the orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief that bread and wine at Holy Communion transform, in substance, into the flesh and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration. He engaged in a fiercely anticlerical rhetoric, preaching against the privilege and authority of the clergy. He sought to level ecclesiastical hierarchy and to empower the laity. He asserted the right of all Christians, including the laity, to study and interpret the Bible for themselves, to engage in open discussion of the Bible, and to preach in public. Early in 1395 Wyclif's followers nailed a document,

the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*, on the doors of Westminster. Such a daring gesture alarmed the authorities, and they initiated a purge at Oxford soon after this (Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 89, 92-93). The *Twelve Conclusions* attacked the papacy and abuses of the clergy. The document urged, among other Lollard agenda, the disendowment of ecclesiastical and religious institutions of worldly possessions. As Wendy Scase has remarked, the *Twelve Conclusions* became the basis for orthodox clergy's understanding of Lollardy as a heretical challenge to ecclesiastical authority (283-301).

What were the intellectual bases of and social conditions for the Lollard expression of dissent and undertaking to bring about change in their society? And how did such terms for difference and change work jointly to facilitate an increasingly secularizing and inclusive political discourse of community and authority? Besides ideas about government and political power proper, ideas about the role of the laity in Christian society and the fundamental duty of all Christians to engage in the study of the Bible themselves all informed the core of Lollard political thought. In the next two sections of this paper, I will scrutinize these ideas and the social contexts in which they took place. The third and final section of the paper shall focus on the way such ideas contributed to the changing configuration of political community and authority in late medieval England.

I. Wyclif on Secular Power: Intellectual and Historical Contexts

As one of the foremost English thinkers of his time, John Wyclif at once theorized political society and had practical experience in politics. A powerful popular preacher and an eminent Oxford philosopher, he himself served the king as a diplomat in 1374 (Hanrahan 154-55, 162-63). Along with Giles of Rome, William of Ockham, and Marsiglio of Padua, Wyclif was at the forefront of secularizing trends in political thought in the later Middle Ages that made *constitutional* society rather than divine transcendence the basis of political authority.

Civil society and the power that it constituted, as William McCready has shown, became, in the writings of major political theorists of different stripes and affiliations, a source of conceptualizing political authority and community in the later Middle Ages. Even papal hierocratic theorists like Giles of Rome had to cope with the "increased awareness of this-worldly basis of civil authority," following Aristotle's idea of human beings as natural political

animals and "civil society" as "a product of man's natural social instinct" (McCready 664). With this Aristotelian tenet came an awareness of "the people" as the group to whom rulers of society were accountable (672-74). "The people" and "the community" as referred to in late medieval political treatises such as Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* and the *Defensor pacis* of Marsiglio of Padua, a thinker of a very different temperament, represented (not to be confused with a modern democracy composed of individual citizens of equal rights who express and confer a mandate) a major player or collectively a political force to whom nobles and church leaders were responsible.

In their emphasis on the constitutional nature of society and the interests and roles of people who made up a community, late medieval writers on different ends of the political spectrum, from Giles of Rome to an anti-papal writer like John Wyclif, invariably secularized the discourse of political authority. The English philosopher William of Ockham showed a fascination with the power of the state that could derive from an expanded and laicized political community. As he was writing about kingdoms rather than the smaller city-states for Marsiglio of Padua, another philosopher famous for his promotion of the "people" as the basis of political community, Ockham's discussion of the relation between "the people" and the secular ruler was not as intimate and concrete as that of Marsiglio, but it was, rather, a rhetorical support of secular power at the expense of the religious. In *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico*, he engaged simultaneously in a rhetoric of freedom for the people and a legitimation of all secular power, even despotic power. The church's political jurisdiction over the matter of the soul could be contested and denied, and the people should be liberated from clerical tyranny. But civil society remained the focus, for within it earthly government was inescapable (William of Ockham 126-27). Like Ockham, Wyclif's vision of civil authority was also inescapably bound up with his anticlericalism. Both English philosophers promoted the secular state at the expense of religious authority, and both, despite the suppression and censorship of the church, found powerful royal patrons to support and shelter them from direct persecution (Wilks 117-45).

As the founder of the Lollard movement, Wyclif challenged the established church systematically, but he did not urge the radical leveling of all hierarchy. Rather, he de-naturalized or de-essentialized hierarchy, by

imagining a different social order and a re-configuration of political society, asserting that civil society could do without the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Whereas Ockham understood the tension between the absolute power of the monarch and the rights of the subjects as one between secular authority and the primacy of the individual conscience, Wyclif asserted in *De civili dominio*, at once, the necessary submission to tyrants and the right to resist tyranny (1: 28). Kingship, for Wyclif, was not an entitlement or a human right, but a grant of God's grace (1:30); subjection to kings was, however, inescapable in the fallen world (1:27). Such an apparent contradiction, however, ultimately foregrounded the secular state as the center of political interests and debates.[4]

The theorization of political power and governance in the later Middle Ages, therefore, increasingly focused on the role of secular authority in Christian society. Concomitant with it was the growing political awareness of the laity itself. Major political treatises on governance were specifically designed for lay readers in the nobility and in the gentry, and indeed such writing was very popular with powerful and wealthy lay readers, many of whom were members of the ruling elite. Giles of Rome, tutor to Philip IV of France and a major theorist of ecclesiastical authority, was, for instance, a very popular author for secular readers from royalty to the newly emergent urban elite (Briggs 12-70). His *De regimine principum*, translated into Middle English by John Trevisa, was the preferred text on government and politics for the English nobility. It was composed specifically for a lay audience, and it was indeed popular with the laity. English kings and princes owned and read copies of this treatise on rulership. A manuscript containing the French translation was a gift from Philippa of Hainault to Edward III, her husband, early in the fourteenth century. The manuscript then passed into the possession of the king's friend, Henry of Grosmont, the first duke of Lancaster and father-in-law to John of Gaunt. By the reign of Richard II, lay reception of *De regimine* extended well beyond the royal family to the high nobility, and it remained a greatly favored text of the aristocracy in the country throughout the later Middle Ages (Briggs 55, 60-70).

While the clergy also read the treatise, the reception of *De regimine* notably spread from the very top of the lay elite to the gentry and well-off

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[4] David Aers discusses the contradiction between Wyclif's rhetoric of egalitarianism and freedom and his promotion of absolute secular authority and subjects' submission (119-48). For other discussions of Wyclif's simultaneous desire to defend and uphold absolutism and safeguard the right of the people against tyranny, see also Kenny 47-55 and Workman 2: 20-30.

urban middle classes. Its "form of discourse" was designed for a lay audience, "not just to the prince but to all citizens" (Briggs 12). Trained in the Aristotelian thinking of Thomas Aquinas, Giles conceptualized political society in *De regimine* in fundamentally secular terms, with the exception of the idea that the Christian prince was the best figure to head government and community (11, 13).

Like Giles of Rome, Wyclif was an influential intellectual figure for the nobility and gentry. As is well known, John of Gaunt, the powerful duke of Lancaster and son to Edward III, took a serious interest in Wyclif's philosophy. Contemporary chronicler Henry Knighton, Augustinian canon at Leicester, characterized the duke as "an invincible guardian" to Wyclif and his followers (251). Gaunt's patronage protected Wyclif from persecution by the church and enabled the Oxford professor to popularize and preach his ideas as the preeminent theologian of his day (Hanrahan 160-62). As has been well documented in the work of such scholars as K. B. McFarlane (e.g., *Lollard Knights*), the larger popular movement after Wyclif also had close ties to the ruling secular elite. Michael Wilks has characterized Lollardy as the "royal priesthood" as well (101-16).

J. Anthony Tuck's work on courtiers with Lollard sympathies suggests that both ordinary Lollards and their wealthy and powerful supporters shared a hatred of the clerical hierarchy (e.g., "Carthusians Monks and Lollard Knights"). Churchmen themselves were also hostile to the alliance between Lollardy and the secular elite, perceiving it as a political threat. Besides attracting common crowds, for Adam Usk, Wycliffite preachers succeeded in their conspiracy to bring about chaos and disorder to the country, also because they flattered their social betters: "by preaching in favour of things that were pleasing to the rich and powerful" (7). The second monastic writer of the *Westminster Chronicle* asserted that Wyclif had "the aim of pleasing men rather than God" (107).

Thomas Walsingham, the monk at St. Albans, went further to allege that as a popular preacher, Wyclif was a key accomplice in John of Gaunt's personal conspiracy to take over England. Wyclif was a preacher-demagogue who attracted a "mob" made up of both "important men" and the "less important" who followed them (Walsingham 503). Wyclif preached publicly, conspicuously in London, "in order to curry favour there with the duke and others" (77). Besides preaching to common people, Wyclif targeted powerful

laity in his appetite for the popular approval of his heresy: "after he had preached amongst the common people without reproach, he wrote new sophistries to lords and magnates . . . in the hope that he could entice them with those arguments and induce them to accept false doctrine by his assertions" (583-85).

The shared anticlericalism of Lollards and their sympathizers in the secular elite threatened clerical writers, because it was motivated by a powerful desire for reform and change that ultimately challenged social convention, religious practice and established spiritual authority. Characterizing the Lollard knights as the "strongest promoters and most powerful protectors of the sect, and its most active defenders, and invincible champions" (295), Henry Knighton claims that these leading members of the gentry so zealously promoted the Lollard cause that they urged and pressured the local lay population to attend sermons by Lollard preachers, even to the extent of strong-arming them (294-95). Certainly, historical evidence shows that members of the gentry wielded considerable influence and used their social connections to promote the spread of Lollardy (Jurkowski, "Lollard Networks" 268-69). The same members of the lay elite that sympathized with Lollardy and shared strong anticlerical attitudes with the movement also were interested in pursuing a different way of life as Christians, in their practice of spirituality and reform. Like ordinary Lollards, they were interested in social change.

Lollard sympathizers within the secular ruling elite practiced personal devotional piety as laypeople. They promoted worthy social causes such as helping the sick and the needy, and reducing waste, conspicuous consumption, and lavish ritual. Leading members of the royal family, from Joan of Kent, mother of Richard II, to the Lancastrian princes in the fifteenth century, were known to be friendly to the Lollards and interested in the movement's ideas. And their social practices of charity, lay piety, and ceremonial economy reflected Wycliffite influence on the ways of secular power. Members of the royal court led the way in such fashions, John of Gaunt among them. The most famous patron of Lollardy displayed a sense of personal obligation to his society by consistently seeking to improve the conditions of the indigent and sick. Not only did he give to poor people, but he also arranged services for them in a particularly attentive manner (Goodman 253). In this he led the fashion of high society of his time, as he did in the areas of literature, culture,

and piety. As "a leading member of a royal family," Gaunt looked beyond England to Europe for his role in the world and cultivated friendship with members of the French royalty and nobility (176, 188). Just as the duke's patronage of the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer stemmed from his continental, Francophile literary tastes and his preference for the culture of chivalry and courtly love (37-38, 188, 193), his patronage of Wyclif reflected his own excellence at rhetoric and logic and his eclectic tastes in religion, which at one point included a definite strain of anticlericalism. As Anthony Goodman has implied, the challenge to the church that John of Gaunt at times expressed suggests not just the pragmatic antagonism of a political figure to the powerful ecclesiastical establishment, but also a genuine interest in the Christian faith and its learning from groups as varied as the Carmelites, whom he favored as his confessors, and the Lollards (37-38, 241, 243, 252).

Gaunt's retainers also practiced Lollard ideas of economy and poor relief. There were more provisions "for the relief of poverty and disease" in the wills of the duke's retainers than in those of their counterparts of the same class. The duke himself left a will of rhetorical penitence in the devotional style of his time, stipulating against extravagances in funeral expenses and leaving a considerable sum for the needy. Collectively as prominent members of the English elite, the duke of Lancaster and his followers led the way in popularizing and shaping contemporary trends in devotional piety, good causes, and the moderation of worldly consumption. Members of the gentry, notably those attached to the duke's affinity, followed these trends (Walker 99-101). Some of them were the famous Lollard knights who decided at their death to cut down on conspicuous consumption and give up conventional worldly pretensions of funereal display and extravagance. Some stipulated that money saved from funeral expenses should be given to indigent people; others expressed contempt for the world by allowing minimal funereal display. Sir Ralph Hastings wished to have his body conveyed in a cart to the abbey. The influence of Lollard values on the last wishes of such members of the lay elite was evident in Sir Andrew Luttrell's apparently orthodox will, which contained a final Lollard request that in carrying out his will no one should swear any oaths (100-01).

II. Investing in Civil Society: Vernacular Literacy and Popular Preaching

Wycliffite theorization of the secular basis of political authority, expressed as intellectual dissent against ecclesiastical doctrine and clerical authority, underlined a powerful commitment to the laity on the part of the movement. The movement targeted not just the lay elite for patronage and support, but it sought adherents in all sections of the lay hierarchy. As Robert Lutton's recent scholarship has shown, against Duffy's dismissal of Lollards' numbers, the presence of Lollardy in late medieval English society was strong and stable. Moreover, the heterodox movement survived and operated in pluralistic local communities, "fully integrated into the political and social life of the parish, village or town," alongside and respected by non-Lollards (Lutton 171). The blurring of boundaries between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, as reflected in the lived realities of ordinary Lollards in close proximity to non-Lollards in the later Middle Ages, does not reflect, as McSheffrey suggests, the lack of an ideological core or intellectual integrity on the part of heterodoxy, but rather, the plurality of local cultures, interpersonal relations, and complexity of intellectual connections between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, as Anne Hudson has pointed out ("Some Problems of Definition" 79-96). The historical existence of Lollardy well into the later Middle Ages bespeaks the dynamics of the movement and the wide diversity of the local communities in which the movement operated (Hornbeck viii-ix).

The movement, notably, expanded by seeking converts and supporters beyond the natural local communities or social origins of the first Wycliffites and their followers. The Lollards' social reach upwards in the elite was just part of a larger program of a developing network of connections in all directions of society. Lollards reached for powerful patrons in the nobility and the gentry because these were direct sources of empowerment, but they were also interested specifically in the political authority that the secular elite represented. Other medieval heresies also sought powerful connections to sustain their momentum, but their efforts did not go beyond immediate local communities or regions. Traditional local association and kinship ties, for instance, underpinned the support of powerful people for the Cathars in a tightly knit area known historically to be resistant to outside powers of church and state (Lambert 111-17).

The earliest Lollards, that is, the academics at Oxford, sought connections and relations outside their immediate natural environment: outside the university in lay communities of working people, and at the center of national government. Their example established the general direction of Lollardy to connect with disparate sectors of civil society. The expansion of the Lollard movement took place in local neighborhoods and different social groups, among the ruling elite as well as among the urban working people. The majority of the Lollards were not the poorest people, nor did most of them come from the great peasant masses of rural society. Rather, they came from the middle ranks of society, below the gentry, most of them comfortably off skilled working people in towns and villages: trades people, artisans, and craftspeople (McFarlane, *English Nonconformity* 180; Hudson, "English Language" 86; Rex 71-74, 101-04; Tanner and McSheffrey 23-32). The majority of Lollards were part of the populace that Janet Coleman has characterized as the emergent "middle class" of late medieval society (15-37, 43-57). London served as a major center of Lollard organization and influence. Pamela Nightingale's study of grocers in medieval England has shown that such a "middle class" was one which, by virtue of its economic situation and practices, grew steadily more politically aware and culturally advanced (360, 374-76). And Maureen Jurkowski has noted that the upper echelon of this middle social group, the gentry, was also highly mobile, in the great extent and depth of its social connections and geographical reach ("Lollard Networks" 269). The Lollards' emergent situation as urban, market-oriented, and outside traditional bonds of rural feudal society had a close relation to the way they actually organized and carried out social relations. The basis of Lollardy's development and growth, reflecting the movement's urban and middle-class orientations, was a commitment to building ties across hierarchical social division and beyond local rural and feudal identities.

Wyclif himself may have been concerned with the practical question of how the movement would grow and expand outside Oxford. He took a personal interest in popularizing his own writings (Hudson, *Selections* 9). Certainly, John of Gaunt's patronage of Wyclif was meant to introduce him to audiences outside Oxford. The duke's support of Wyclif initiated the Oxford philosopher's public career. It provided the academician a systematic conduit to the public outside the medieval ivory tower (Hanrahan 166; McNiven 21). Wyclif himself may have begun promoting the vernacular language as a

practical way for him to reach laypeople, but his followers understood the radical use and meaning of the vernacular (e.g., Somerset, *Clerical Discourse* 4).

Innovative uses of the vernacular language were key to the movement's growth and expansion. The vernacular was the language of the laity, and as the mainstay of Lollardy, it popularized the movement and sustained the presence of Lollardy in lay society at large. Vernacular literate practice and lay preaching were vital to the Lollard undertaking for political change. The effort to create an impersonal community of Lollards of diverse backgrounds, classes, and localities were inextricably bound up with radical linguistic and textual practices that challenged social hierarchy and broke down cultural barriers. Unlike the Waldensians, who also promoted preaching and pastoral instruction, Lollards made the laity the basis of authority in these activities. Whereas the Waldensian training of preachers followed the traditional clerical form, lay preaching of the Lollards went beyond the clerical model (Copeland 14-15). Lollards promoted the firsthand reading and group discussion of Bible by laypeople; the Waldensians did not and were not considered pioneers in the development of lay vernacular literacy (Grundemann 191).

In this section of the essay, I want to focus particularly on the way the Lollard campaign of the vernacular, based in preaching and literate practice, informed the political organization and empowerment of the laity. For the Lollards, the vernacular was not intrinsically better than Latin, but a vital means of reaching as wide an audience as possible and, therefore, of enhancing their clout. The vernacular as a medium contributed to the persuasiveness of the Lollards' case (Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books* 144-52; Hudson, "English Language" 88-103). The primary purpose of translating texts into English was to reach as many readers as possible (Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books* 24). The prologue of the Wycliffite Bible asserted the fundamental link between the idea of "the people" and the vernacular:

> Crist seiþ þat þe gospel shal be prechid in al þe world, and Dauiþ seiþ of þe apostlis and here preching, "Þe soun of hem ȝede out into ech lond, and þe wordis of hem ȝeden out into þe endis of þe world"; and eft Dauiþ seiþ "Þe Lord shal telle in þe scriptures in pupils, and of þese princes þat weren in it" (þat is, in holi chirche); and as Ierom seiþ on þat vers "Holi writ is þe

scripture of pupils for it is maad þat alle pupils shulden knowen it." (Hudson, *Selections* 67)

Not only were the people the audience of the English Bible, but as the Bible was made for them, the legitimacy of the Wycliffite project rested on them: "Holi writ is þe scripture of pupils for it is maad þat alle pupils shulden knowe it."

The idea of "the people" and the speech that they all shared underlay the community of the Lollards. In reading Lollard vernacular writings we cannot ignore the currency of terms such as "common" and "community": "comun of þe pepul" (Cigman, *Lollard Sermons* 95); "comoun peple"; "comoun mater" (182). In contrast to the church hierarchy, the community of the laity alone constituted the basis of the church: "þe comoun peple drawn on Sondayes and oþer holy dayes into a comoun chirche for to here þe worde of God, which is comounly fer fett fro her propur dwelling places" (181). The people made up the community, and they were the sole authority for reform and protest. The *Twelve Conclusions* asserted that the Lollard agenda for reform was to lift the burden of the tyrannical prelacy upon the "peple here in Yngeland" (Hudson, *Selections* 24). The doctrine of transubstantiation was most hateful because it "most harmith þe innocent puple" (25).

Preaching, particularly, in the vernacular, was the lifeblood of such a community. For Wyclif and his followers, preaching was the primary religious duty of the Lollards (Knapp 24-31; Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 353-55). Overwhelmingly, Lollards who were suspected of heresy by the authorities indicated that preaching was the most important activity for their movement (Hornbeck 169). Lollard sermons themselves emphasized the primacy of preaching and instruction. References to Christ as preacher and teacher par excellence abounded in these sermons (e.g., Hudson and Gradon 3: 123, 142, 179). In one sermon, Christ's fulfillment of his mission as teacher and preacher was accomplished specifically via a personal mobility that enabled his reaching all parts of the country: "For Matheu telliþ þat *Iesu went about al þe cuntre of Galile, teching in þer synagogis and preching þe gospel of þe* reume of heuene" (Hudson and Gradon 3: 136). Preaching legitimated the public expression and communication of lay working people. The claim of the "priesthood of the laity" or the "universal priesthood" authorized lay

public speech.[5] The practice of lay preaching was popular and influential early on in the movement (Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* 15-16). Such preaching not only sustained separate local communities, but it also cultivated the growing network of Lollard communities all over the country. Leaders of the movement envisioned preaching as vital to such a network, in particular, in the program of poor preachers. Well-touted in contemporary Lollard writings, the poor preachers represented the Lollard vision of itinerant preachers, mostly humble but literate and well-trained laymen, moving from neighborhood to neighborhood, preaching Lollard ideas and mobilizing local people in the movement. While the identity of individual poor preachers and how they actually organized and operated remain mysterious, the peripatetic nature of Lollard preaching and the great circulation of Lollard ideas are evident in the stylistic and literary features of Lollard sermons as well as the numerous pocket-sized manuscripts of Lollard sermons that have survived to this day (Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books* 43-56; Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 184-85; Cigman, *Lollard Sermons* xlvi-xlvii). As Anne Hudson has suggested, the history of Lollard texts provides us a window into Lollard preaching. The large production and extensive transmission of vernacular texts all around the country indicate the tremendous mobility of Lollard activists and the vast network of local societies that they served (*Lollards and Their Books* 13-29).

Preaching delivered the vital substance of the spirit, the word of God, to the community: "þe worþi worde of God shal profite to þe peple, be þei neuer so greet in noumbre, þat þei shullen be fed while þei wandren in þis wey, þat þei feile not in her jorne"; "be fed and fulfilled wiþ goostly mete of Goddis wordis" (Cigman, *Lollard Sermons* 182). The optimism about such a community, underpinned by people speaking a common language, is evident in the trope of the ministry of the word as an organic activity, sowing the seed of the movement, that would grow and blossom: "Crist teciþ us of þis seed þat it is Goddis word, but alle we here Goddis word, alȝif it growe not in us. And þerfore we shulden tile oure lond to bringe fruyt of þis seed. Þis seed is treuþe

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[5] For a discussion of lay preaching and its social implications, see Spencer 49-53. Anne Hudson comments that for the Lollards all Christians were required to preach, although the clergy more than the rest (*Premature Reformation* 353-54). David Aers suggests that the breakdown of the distinction between the clergy and the laity was more fully developed by the Lollards than by Wyclif himself. While Wyclif's followers believed in universal priesthood, Wyclif himself maintained that only the truly predestinate could be priests (127-32).

of Goddis laws, þat may not perische for yuel men" (Hudson and Gradon 3: 142).

Beyond the optimism of such a characterization, Lollards conceptualized social speech as the basis, for both them and their opponents, of political debate, dialogue, and struggle. They understood the moral struggle that they engaged in as the growing occupation of public discourse against the forces of evil. The promise of preaching lay, therefore, not in the inherent goodness of speech, but in the empowerment that such a discursive management of the public sphere entailed. The mouth itself was the source of both good and evil, as it enabled one to engage in the fight between good and evil. Speaking up in imitation of Christ and his apostle, as enjoined in many sermons (e.g., Hudson and Gradon 3: 192, 203), was an act of good. Yet the mouth itself also engendered evil. Numerous sermons focused on the actual lips of evil preachers and the sinfulness produced out of them: "wawyng of prestis lippis; for lippis be þe wrst part by whiche men synnen aȝenus God" (Hudson and Gradon 3: 217); "specialy whanne lippis ben pollut; for sich preyours of prestis don harm many gatis. And herfore þey shulden kepe her lippis for bloody seruyss of þe fend. For men seye þat prestis wordis shulden be as þe gospel, but now þer lippis ben fould on seuen maners wiþouten mo" (3: 237).

Their adversaries also understood the connection between speech and power. As Simon Forde has pointed out, in the Norwich heresy trials, in Joanna Clifland's deposition against Margery Baxter, Margery's vivid witness to the attempt of the Lollard preacher William White to preach one last time at his execution centered on the struggle to control the very source of speech, White's mouth:

> Margery saw that at the place where he was burnt when the said William White wanted to preach the word of God to the people one devil then, a disciple of bishop Caiaphas, struck the same William White on the lips and blocked the mouth of the said holy doctor with his hand so that he could not possibly propound the will of God. [6] (119)

The preacher's mouth was a means of spreading the word—a mainstay of the Lollard dissemination of ideas.

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[6] The quotation is Simon Forde's translation of the Latin document in Tanner 47.

Jill Havens has remarked on the impressive number of Lollard texts that have survived, in the face of both external censorship and internal secrecy. The manuscripts are witness to the widespread circulation of Lollard writings and the extent of contemporary audience that they reached (Havens 111-16). The remarkable number of Lollards in the book trade certainly formed the chief support for the "production and circulation of Lollard texts" (Jurkowski, "Lollard Networks" 273). The increasingly literate public in England that had emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries before the era of the printed book was equipped to receive these books (Clanchy 1, 53). Moreover, the predominantly oral character of society at large may, in fact, have made the dissemination of ideas more convenient. Whereas in modern society textual practice is strictly exclusive of illiterate people, in late medieval England, non-literate people could engage in textual practice and in the discussion of intellectual ideas as well (271).

In the Lollard program of communication, texts and their production could be available to more than the technically literate through group reading and dictating, practices Lollards were familiar with in their gatherings. The Lollard promotion of itinerant preaching to different local groups and of communal learning and discussion based on vernacular writings was an instance of what Brian Stock has called the "textual community" in action—a community centered, not on a "written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action" (90). Impressive social change was possible through the inclusion and active participation of non-literate laypeople themselves, who would be responsible for the oral transmission of ideas modeled upon texts. As Stock comments, in such a community, laypeople, "Although remaining unlettered," "could thereby comprehend how one set of moral principles could logically supersede another. In a sense, it was they rather than the spectacular leaders of movements who were the real avatars of change" (91-92).

Within the movement, preaching and the spread of communal study sustained each other. The sphere of influence that preaching exerted extended from the public places of worship and community gatherings into private households, where domestic instruction enhanced lessons preached. In the days before the printing press, Lollards sought to provide as many transcripts of as many sermons actually preached as possible. Such a textual practice

reinforced their learning, at home, in their neighborhood, and at congregated worship. Lollard preacher William Swinderby himself provided a powerful member of his audience a written copy of a sermon that he had preached, as a way of confirming his lessons (Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* 128-29). In one instance, an itinerant preacher offered to leave his text with fellow Lollards in the community before moving on to another: "Now siris þe dai is al ydo, and I mai tarie ȝou no lenger, and I haue no tyme to make now a recapitulacioun of my sermon. Neþeless I purpose to leue it writun among ȝou, and whoso likiþ mai ouerse it" (Hudson, *Selections* 96).

Lollard textual community reflected a conceptualization of community that radically challenged the traditional notion of authority and re-configured the relations of power between people. Authority rested not with the preacher as a clerical superior, but with group reading, interpretation, and critical dialogue over the text. The same preacher indicated that he was quite willing to discuss his sermon both with his local brothers and sisters and with opponents, and he had a sense of how his activism participated in the broader debate of the public sphere:

> I biseche ȝou here þat, if ony aduersarie of my replie aȝens ony conclusioun þat I haue shewid to ȝou at þis tyme, reportiþ redili hise euydencis, and namely if he take ony euydence or colour of hooli scripture, and if almyȝty God wole vouchesaaf to graunte me grace or leiser to declare myself in þese poyntis þat I haue moued in þis sermoun, I shal þoruȝ þe help of him in whom is al help declare me, so þat he shal holde him answered. (96)

Thus the Lollard dissemination of ideas was a political strategy, one that promoted the community of laypeople in debate and dialogue. Such a strategy implicated a changing conceptualization of authority. For the Lollard preacher, one's authority to speak lay not in any prior cultural valorization, such as clerical training, but in the active and responsible engagement with people "out there," friend or foe. Power for one who spoke and disseminated spiritual knowledge, then, derived from intellectual engagement and exchange.

Laypeople high and low in medieval England were drawn to Lollardy precisely because of the vernacular discussion and intellectual debate that the movement offered them. Outside Oxford, Wyclif had a popular reputation as a preacher (Hanrahan 160; Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 64-65, 269).

Vernacular preaching, as the sermons of Wyclif's Oxford disciples Nicholas Hereford and Philip Repingdon and the reaction that they provoked indicate, incited laypeople to take matters into their own hands, in the case of fighting church corruption. In the words of Anne Hudson, "they were an evident bid for popular support" ("English Language" 95).

Lollard preachers became popular and influential regardless of their social status, academic credential, or clerical training. William Swinderby, a preacher whose name came to be identified with founding Lollard leadership, along with Nicholas Hereford, John Aston, and John Purvey, was not an Oxford intellectual, but a humble priest whose ordination was even deemed suspect at one point by the authorities (McNiven 44-45). Knighton's account of the special favorable relationship that seemed to have existed between the duke of Lancaster and Swinderby bespeaks the Lollard's prominence and popularity as a preacher. When his preaching got him into trouble with the church, John of Gaunt interceded on his behalf with the bishop of Lincoln to commute his sentence (Hudson, *Premature Reformation* 74; Knighton 310-15). There is also evidence to suggest that Bolingbroke, the duke's son and later Henry IV, began his public career as a Lollard sympathizer, attending bishop of Lincoln's trial of Swinderby with his father (Knighton 313-15n5).

Hostile chroniclers such as Walsingham and Knighton noted that ordinary Lollards and the powerful supporters of the movement shared an interest in literate practice and public communication. Moreover, they observed that the movement's social practices of language and learning challenged the church's authority and in this way they were central to its agenda of empowering laypeople—against the clergy. As members of the clerical establishment they clearly felt threatened. Walsingham described Wyclif's eloquence as a popular preacher, which so mesmerized "certain nobles of the realm—or rather, devils—who would embrace his ravings, give him the strength to blunt the sword of Peter" (77). The heresiarch was criminal in his education of laypeople, violating the orthodox governance of the laity, "For he did not obscure his meaning in a welter of words when he poured those ideas into the ears of the laity, but taught them blatantly and clearly laid down, thus winning the favour of the laity" (211). Walsingham was very threatened by the empowerment of laypeople that such public communication brought. In his account, Lollard preachers are "so successful that lords and magnates of the land, and many of the people commend them

for what they preach, and support their preaching of these erroneous doctrines. They do this, of course, because the Wycliffites attribute great power to the laity in encouraging them to remove temporalities from churchmen and the religious" (983).

Prominent members of the lay elite preached in public and engaged in vernacular literate practice on behalf of Lollardy. A well-connected Lollard lawyer was said to have preached in public as a layman on numerous occasions (Jurkowski, "Lawyers and Lollardy" 159). Sir John Clanvowe, one of the Lollard knights, authored a layman's homiletic treatise in which he identified with the "lollers," despised as "fools and shameful wretches" as Christ was (McFarlane, *Lollard Knights* 205-06).

The Wycliffite promotion of lay literate practice raised the question of the extent of Lollard influence on government and organized public life in the later Middle Ages. The English gentry known to have Lollard sympathies were familiar with the running and maintenance of government. Quite a number of them were lawyers (Jurkowski, "Lawyers and Lollardy" 155-82). On a lower social scale, certain bookmakers and book traders participated in the movement in London. Some of them were named as insurgents in the Lollard rebellion led by Sir John Oldcastle in the fifteenth century and very likely played a crucial role in the transmission of Lollard texts, even after taking part in the uprising (Jurkowski, "Lollard Book Producers" 201-26, esp. 202, 203, 210). Even beyond Oldcastle's rebellion, such a legacy of active participation in the public spheres of society survived late into the fifteenth century, notably in the case of Coventry, where prominent local Lollards ran its civic government and implemented measures to fulfill Lollard ideas (e.g., Goldberg).

III. Civil Obedience and the Authority of the Community

For Lollardy, within the people "out there" lay a source of authorization and empowerment that historically had been excluded from active political participation. But just what did laypeople authorize and what were the political implications of such authorization? Were laypeople simply to be shaped as submissive citizens under an oppressive state, and manipulated into supporting secular power? Or were they undergoing an education of egalitarian liberation that would challenge hierarchy and authority, as Rita Copeland has suggested (e.g., 5-6, 11-12, 14-15, 40-49, 141-42)? On the one

hand, Lollard texts, notably vernacular texts, made frequent expressions of allegiance to secular authority, even tyrannical power. On the other hand, the call to reform and the promotion of the egalitarian community of Christians informed Lollard vernacular writings.

Rather than seeing the emphasis on the absolute nature of secular authority and the fundamental commitment to dissent and egalitarian idealism as irreconcilably disparate, opposed, or united only by the spirit of polemical confrontation, as Gloria Cigman has characterized ("Lollard Preacher" 479-96), I want to suggest that these two apparently opposing views on politics and governance at once reinforced the centrality of the secular basis of political community and opened up the discourse of political authority to scrutiny, debate, and discussion. Wycliffite teaching on submission to monarchical government underscored the secular basis of political power, and such a teaching on obedience to even tyranny promoted the discussion of the meaning of authority and the relations between the prince and his subjects among the laity. While the universal Lollard belief in dissent and the egalitarian community of Christians certainly enhanced the investigation of the basis of power and the conditions of the community, its embrace of the expression of difference and inclusion was also not necessarily antagonistic to the absolute legitimation of secular power, since secular power posed as a different source of power, a viable alternative to the clerical establishment. The logical gap between the promotion of absolute secular power and the conviction in the basic equality of all Christians and their right to express themselves remained, however, and the way Lollards reconciled these two opposing views took place as a dynamic negotiation. The result of such a negotiation was a complex discourse that envisioned the formation of a new political community, one without church power, yet accountable to Lollard ideals of equity and public dialogue.

Wyclif and his Lollard followers preached submission to secular authority, even tyrannical government. While this may seem contradictory for a movement that insisted on the rights of subjects to resist tyranny, Lollards respected secular political authority even as they practiced social dissent. Historically, even when the secular state pursued an apparent policy of persecution against the movement, a policy that began as early as the reign of Richard II, Lollards continued to look to the secular hierarchy for support of their reformist effort, and this in consistency with their commitment to the

primacy of secular authority (Richardson 1-28). As Helen Barr has shown, Lollards, like the rebels in the Great Uprising of 1381, had no interest in attacking the secular lords; their target was the clergy ("Wycliffite Representations" 197-216, esp. 214-15). Oldcastle's rebellion, even while it sought to topple a regime, centered on keeping the king away from corrupt factious advisors and on informing the king of proper Lollard values.

In a sermon in Middle English, the preacher stressed that "Crist was suget to þes tyrauntis, as God obescheþ to mannys voys. Þis subiection is no synne" (Hudson and Gradon 1: E25). Civil obedience in this and other sermons like it was a teaching to be disseminated to common subjects of the realm. In one sermon devoted exclusively to such a teaching, the preacher cited Christ's example:

> Crist shulde paye þis tribute for Goddis lawe, þat is Goddis wille nedide Crist to paye þis. And here may men se by resoun þat Cristis prestis shulden not grucche ȝif men token þer temperaltees; for oure Iesu grucchide not. And ȝit he hadde no temperaltees of kyngis þat dwelten in þis erþe, for he ordeyned in þe olde lawe þat his prestis shulden haue no siche lordschip, and he kepte it in þe newe lawe for hym and hise ful streytly . . . And þus Crist tauȝte þat God wolde þat he obeschide þus to þis kyng, for ellis hadde Crist synned here in doing þat he shulde not do, or þat God wolde not þat he dide. (3: 228)

The agenda of clerical disendowment strengthened the claims of secular rulers. While the sermon discussed the difference between earthly and spiritual authority, it also taught firmly that obedience was to be paid to the secular ruler, the only legitimate wielder of political authority.

A partial vernacular rendition of Wyclif's *De officio regis* asserts that Christ favored and preferred the secular hierarchy to the religious, by the various events and actions associated with his life:

> Þe þrid part of þo chirche is muche praysid in Goddis lawe, as kyngis and dukis and nobulemen and knyȝttis . . . God chese to be borne when þo empirer florischid moste; Criste chese to be worschipid and susteyned by thre kyngus; Crist payed taliage to þo emperour; Crist tauȝt to pay to þe emperoure þat was his;

> Crist ches to be biried solemply of knyʒttis, and he commyttid his chirch to gouernaile of knyʒttes . . . And þerfore he þat aʒeynestondus iuste powere of knyʒttus, aʒeynestondis God to his owne dampnacion. (Hudson, *Selections* 128-29)

Yet the text does not stop with the teaching of simple-minded submission. Instead, it uses the topic of secular authority as a way of opening up a whole investigation of various aspects of authority. The worldly power with which Christ identified, after all, was the "*iuste* powere of knyʒttus" (emphasis added). Beyond teaching submission, the treatise also engages its audience in a complex treatment of the meaning and function of political authority, its specific responsibilities, and its jurisdiction and hierarchy. It is an extensive disquisition on kingship and secular hierarchy:

> Þre þingis mouen men to speke of kyngis office: furst, for kyngus may hereby se þat þei schulden nout be ydel but rewle by Gods laws to wynne þo blys of heuen; þo secunde is for kyngus schulden not be tirauntus of her pepul, but rewle hem by reson þat falles to þer state; þo þrid cause is most of alle, for þus Goddis law be better knowen and defended, for þerinne is mannys helþe bothe of body and soule þat euermore schal laste. (128)

The monarch is the ideal ruler for Christian society. The jurisdiction of the secular prince, which is to be subject to God's law, occupies a later chapter of the treatise (129). As a king must have total unified rule over his kingdom, no one is exempt from his jurisdiction: "And hit were al one to say þat þes men bene exempt and not sugett to þeire kynge in dedis of þer office, and to say þat kyngus bene not fulle lordus of her kyngedome; and on þis wyse myʒt anticriste distroye mony rewmes" (130). Consequently, the clergy is to be subject to the secular hierarchy: "þes þat lyuen apostilys lyfe schulden be sugett to lordis and obedient to iche man, as techis Cristis lawe" (130).

The Lollard commitment to the secular establishment, therefore, moves beyond the unquestioning support of the state towards a thorough critique of authority, its rights, and duties. While the vernacular treatise based on *De officio regis* delves into various aspects of the secular state in terms of responsibility and jurisdiction, Lollard sermons emphasize that the obverse of

secular power is lordly duty, in particular, the duty to disenfranchise and discipline the corrupt clergy:

> lordis shulden chastise symonye and oþer synnes þat ben usid in þe chirche. For, siþ clerkis ben lege men to kyngis in whoys londis þey ben ynne, kyngis han power of God to punysche hem in Goddis cause, boþe in body and in catel . . . so lordis shulden wiþdraw mater of þis synne of prestis, for ellis þey mayntenyden þis synne and disusiden aȝen God godis þat þey shulden be lordis off. (Hudson and Gradon 3: 165)

For the Lollard preacher, the lay hierarchy, by neglecting its duty to discipline and punish the church, condones corruption and therefore sins against God. The example of Pontius Pilate serves as a reminder that earthly power is no license to act against God. Pilate "hadde not from aboue power to do þus Crist to deþ. And here men taken wisely ȝif þey han power of erþely lordis, neþeles al þis power must be reulid by Goddis lawe" (3: 179). Lollard emphasis on the centrality of secular authority, therefore, does not simply rest with the unquestioning submission to tyranny, but facilitates and promotes the examination, in the vernacular, of the responsibilities and duties of lordship and the meaning of a just and godly government.

Besides the emphasis on the responsibility of the secular hierarchy, Lollards also promoted an egalitarian community in the same sermons and treatises. Lay preaching itself is a challenge to hierarchy: "And heereinne shulde eche man sue Crist to speke and do þat God biddiþ" (3: 192). The right—and the moral responsibility, following Christ's example—to voice oneself is universal; it belongs to every human being. Nor is Lollard vernacular literature critical only of religious authority, but of secular authority as well. One sermon attacks the hypocrisy of both secular and spiritual lords (3: 130). The Lollards' appeal to secular power to disendow the clergy reflects the irresponsibility of the secular establishment in present reality. One preacher observes: "kyngis and worldly lordis ben in perelis in þis mater, for þei mayntenen religious ofte tymes to spuyle þer tenauntis, and to emprisoun þer oune briþeren aȝenus þe dedis þat Crist dide here" (3: 147). The present permissiveness of the secular hierarchy towards the church has caused much suffering and evil, and for this damnation awaits the secular lords.

The critical attitude towards hierarchy and the inherent faith in every human being to participate actively in intellectual dialogue and exchange, following the example of Christ, finds a well-known and well-circulated expression in William Thorpe's *Testimony*. Unlike the other Lollard autobiographical work that has survived, that of Richard Wyche, Thorpe's *Testimony* was more widely circulated (Von Nolcken 132). The author himself opens his work with a profession that he wrote in response to popular demand: "dyuerse freendis in sunder placis spaken to me ful herteli. And þei diden to me ful freendli, comaundinge to me þat if it bifel þat I schulde be examined before þe Erchebischop, þat I schulde, if I miȝte in ony wise, write to them boþe my aposynge and myn answeringe" (Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts* 24). In making community the basis of his authority, Thorpe reveals an intellectually engaged Lollard community that sustained and reproduced itself on textual practice.

Within the *Testimony*, the community of equals prevails as the only legitimate basis of speech and action. The work provides a rare picture of an individual's view of his community, and how he understands his membership in it. Throughout his work, Thorpe makes no social distinction when characterizing members of his community; he never mentions fellow Christians in terms of social class. In doing so, the author makes a deliberate contrast with Arundel, whom he recalls consistently characterizing Lollards as "þe lewid peple" (83), including him, "Lewed losel" (46). For Thorpe, fellow Lollards are "friends" (24), or simply "men and wymmen" (27). And he seems not too unhappy to see how unsettling his cool articulate confidence must be to Arundel, when he recounts the archbishop exclaiming "Herde ȝe euer losel speke þus?" (72).

When Arundel urges him to return to the church, the author characterizes the church as an institution of bondage incompatible with freedom: "I fynde nouȝwhere in holi writ þat þis office þat ȝe wolden engeggen me now herewiþ acordiþ to ony preest of Cristis sect, neiþir to ony oþer christen man; þerfor to do þus it were to me a ful noyous bonde to be tied wiþ, and ouer greuous charge" (35). To pledge allegiance to the church is, therefore, to commit oneself in bondage. Elsewhere Thorpe challenges and attacks the church's licensing of preaching as a way of compromising preachers:

> We knowen wel, er, þat neiþer ȝe ne ony oþer bischop of þis lond wol graunte to vs only suche letter of licence, but we

> schulden oblischen vs to ȝou and to oþer bischopis bi vnleeful ooþis . . . we dur not obleschen vs to ben þus bounden to ȝou for to kepe þe termes which ȝe wolden lymyte to vs, as ȝe don to freris and to suche oþer ȝoure proctours. (46–47)

The clerical privilege of preaching, for Thorpe, in fact creates lackeys for the establishment.

The true holy church of God is the community of the faithful, and authority of the church comes, not from the clergy, but from its members. Without clerical hierarchy in such an egalitarian order, submission to authority—the authority of the community—is nevertheless still necessary: "I wolde submitte me only to þe rule and gouernaunce of hem aftir my knowynge whom, bi þe hauynge and vsynge of þe foreseide vertues, I perceyue to be þe membris of holi chirche" (33). Such authority is not static, but realized through the continual dialogue and pragmatic interaction between individual members and the community at large. Not only do individuals derive authority from the community for their actions, but they are accountable to the community as well. Mutual responsibility forges the relation between individual members and the Lollard community. As an activist-preacher, Thorpe is responsive to the demands of his community and nurturing and protective of it as well. On quite a few occasions he tells Arundel that he could not abjure his belief because this would affect the morale of his community (e.g., 38). And he does not think that his abjuration would just damage them passively, but that they would be reproachful of him and want to hold him accountable for his faithlessness. Thorpe brings up the example of Philip Repingdon. After Repingdon's return to the orthodox church, Thorpe explains to Arundel, "ful many men and wymmen also wondren vpon hym, and speken hym myche schame and holden him Cristis enemye" (42). Despite his status as an elite intellectual and trained cleric, Repingdon has as much responsibility to the community as the rest. The community still holds him accountable for his defection. And his departure from the community shows how fundamental an individual's moral action is to the well-being of the entire movement. In contrast to Repingdon, whose action has harmed Lollardy, Wyclif's example has converted many men and women to the true faith. The heresiarch, by his personal behavior, has had a wide impact on society at large.

Within his writing, Thorpe presents a vision of community where equal members engage in intellectual discussion and practice virtuous living. Opposed to such a community is the clerical institution. Thorpe suggests, in line with the Lollard agenda of clerical disendowment, priests should be stripped of their wealth and such wealth given to poor people (70). While the Lollard community embodies the pursuit of the pure life by Christians equal in the eye of God, it is precisely the church hierarchy that has hindered the ideal community's growth and ascendancy.

Thorpe's discourse of community, defined against the church hierarchy, is linked both ideologically and by contemporary circumstances to a text of a different genre, tone, and focus. While William Thorpe builds and represents an ideal community oppressed by the church, William Taylor's sermon is a scathing anticlerical polemic. Preached in 1406, it is an occasional work whose agenda is that of incendiary attack against the church. In his autobiography Thorpe indicates that he finds resonance with the anticlericalism of the sermon, preached a year before the production of his autobiographical work, and he corroborates the controversy that the sermon aroused. It provoked a counter-sermon the next day from the orthodox priest Alkerton, who was in turn insulted publicly by the king's lifelong supporter and loyal friend Robert Waterton (xiv). Thorpe characterizes himself as an eager participant in the contemporary controversy of the sermons, harassing the priest Alkerton (84-85). For Thorpe, the shared anticlericalism of both Taylor's sermon and his own work centers ideologically disparate perspectives on community and on the secular state, on moral ideal and on hierarchical authority.

The fact that Thorpe does not find inconsistency between Taylor's work and his own indicates that for Lollards, the hierarchical authorization of secular power and the commitment to the Christian community of equals are not diametrically opposed ideas, but different agendas that share the common hatred of the church and its persecution. Taylor's sermon opens with an emphatic statement on Christian submission to secular authority: "Ʒeldiþ to Cesar þat bilongiþ to Cesar"; "Crist, nowiþstondynge þat Cesar was not riȝtful man but a mawmetrer, confermyde to him his secular lordship raþere þan he wolde receyue it himsilf" (6). Such a promotion of secular authority is the obverse expression of the sermon's central attack on the church.

The sermon provoked strong responses from both the clergy (Alkerton) and secular elite (Waterton). The controversy even threatened to embroil Henry IV, who took measures to protect his friend Robert Waterton. Where Eamon Duffy characterizes the crackdown on the Catholic church in the age of the Protestant Reformation as Henry VIII's "personal diktat" (448) against his own people, a monarch's own willful war against a traditional religion that had functioned cohesively and organically in medieval England, here we see evident fissures in that traditional religion, as proto-Protestant sympathies against the Catholic church existed within the secular elite well before the sixteenth century. Moreover, in this case, the secular elite's anticlerical sympathies did not reflect the willful autocracy of a single monarch like Henry IV or the programmatic initiative of his government against the church. Rather, they were part of a larger movement of religious dissent against the church. From the identity of these antagonists and protagonists we can see a whole complex of political agendas that radiated from its anticlerical message. As far from Thorpe's ideal of egalitarian community as this historical episode of political rivalry and animus may seem, individuals of disparate agendas, status, and perspectives such as Thorpe, Waterton, and Taylor, in the anticlericalism that they shared, sought a political community without the presence of the church. For Thorpe, "þe viciousenesse of prestis," which harmed "boþe lordis and comouns" spiritually, united them in a common cause (Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts* 72). Waterton acted his part as the loyal servant of the crown and Lollard sympathizer. As a member of the secular elite he saw in the sermon's anticlerical agenda a legitimation of kingship and his identity as a member of the secular elite, its right to unified rule of England without the interference of the clergy. Moreover, as a Lollard sympathizer he saw that the interest of his establishment was inimical to that of the church, and political authority could not belong to both the church and state but the state alone. For humbler Lollards, Taylor's sermon was one in a whole body of Lollard literature that provided a series of civic lessons on the secular state. Such civic lessons reinforced and expanded the social discussion on legitimacy, rights, and duties of the state, and on its operation, structure, and organization. Often carried out in anticlerical terms, these lessons taught Lollards to anticipate a political community where authority was vested in a single ruler, and where they were not parishioners or the laity but were all, equally, subjects under a Christian king. In this way, the Lollard campaign to

transmit ideas in working communities all over the country, with its preference for secular power, also provided an educational program for lay folk on the civil state. The lesson of submission and obedience reinforced the institutional stability of the secular hierarchy. Beyond such a lesson, however, more complex lessons developed that encouraged common working people to think in terms of the duties of their social superiors, the accountability of political power to their community, and the moral justification of lordship.

These more complex civic lessons about the secular state extended to the Lollard community in Thorpe's account, where individuals shared responsibility in moral vigilance and were equally entitled to speak up and hold accountable members of their own. Whereas Arundel distinguished between the lewd and the learned, Thorpe's discourse of community leveled all distinctions of traditional feudal and church hierarchies. While the absolutist state of the early modern period was far from such a community, the legal categorical development of the "subject" paralleled such a conceptualization of community as based on equal membership beyond traditional social division. And in the Lollard elaboration on the various aspects of the civil state, the role of the subject was the primary one for laypeople. Lollard civic lessons thus taught lay folk how they were to behave as members of the state. Lollard empowerment of individuals that we find in Thorpe promoted the political initiative of laypeople and the universal right to dialogue and debate. At the same time, the community of equals, from the perspective of the secular elite, formed an educated and informed base of the state, one that conferred legitimacy on civil power. While such an intellectual movement to educate and inform people outside the traditional classes of privilege was far from the mass education under the modern state, it promoted the expansion of the political community beyond the feudal and clerical elite. In this way, the Lollard theorization of secular authority and political community was a tentative event that anticipated the long series of developments towards the modern state.

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