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Discerning Devotional Readers: Readers, Writers, and the
Pursuit of God in Some Late Medieval Texts

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IN SOME LATE MEDIEVAL TEXTS**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with both the way vernacular religious texts were written, and the way they were read, in late medieval England. The context for this discussion is the growth in lay readership and the increasingly ambitious spiritual aspirations of sections of the laity. This dissertation argues that awareness of this wider audience profoundly shaped the way writers presented their texts. Regardless of theological perspective or general intent, medieval writers reveal a common tendency to try and identify “right” readers for their texts, invoking specific interpretive communities, and guiding reader response by establishing parameters for interpretation. The first half of the study draws attention to this engagement with hermeneutics as it is found in Lollard tracts, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Nicholas Love's *Treatise on the Sacrament*, Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*, and the anonymous works, *Book to a Mother* and *The Recluse*. Shifting attention on to the reader in its second half, the dissertation uses the evidence of two early fifteenth-century collections of religious texts to demonstrate how lay readers could and did fit their reading material around their *own* concerns and interests, and that these interests could be extremely diverse. Following Nichols and Wenzel's approach of studying the “whole book,” I argue that by choosing to read certain texts together, readers were able to fundamentally alter the interpretation of those texts. Taken as a whole, this study demonstrates connections between contemporaneous works which have rarely been dealt with together because of the tendency to divide medieval religious literature into discrete generic categories (“devotional,” “mystic,” “pastoral”) or discrete doctrinal categories (“Lollard,” “orthodox”). Its discussion of religious texts and manuscripts exposes the inadequacy of such categories given the depth, complexity, and range of religious opinion in late medieval England.

NOTE ON THE TREATMENT OF TEXTS

Quotations from the Middle English texts featured in this dissertation contain minor alterations for the ease of the modern reader. These include the addition of modernised punctuation, changes in capitalisation, and expansions of abbreviated words. I have also replaced thorn with *th* and yogh with *y*, *g*, *s*, *z*, or *gh* as appropriate. The consonantal *i* has been replaced with *j*. Words which may be unfamiliar to the reader are explained in square brackets.

INTRODUCTION: ADDRESSING YOUR READERS

The phrase that forms the title of this dissertation, “discerning devotional readers,” contains within it three different but connected contentions. The first is that writers of vernacular religious texts, aware of the growing distance between themselves and their readers, and the increasing number of those readers, sought to identify, or discern, the truly devotional readers, those who would grasp the writer’s true intention and preserve the meaning of the text. This desire shaped the way they wrote. The second is that the medieval laity were, in fact, becoming increasingly discerning readers, something which was both cause and consequence of the fact that they were also becoming increasingly discerning in matters related to their religious beliefs. Growing in confidence in their spiritual capabilities and becoming more ambitious in their spiritual aspirations, lay readers could and did fit their reading material around their *own* concerns and interests. The third contention is that a great deal of modern scholarship has been driven by a determination to identify or discern the “devotional” readers, and alongside them, the “heretical” readers, and then, perhaps, the “reformist” or “mystic” readers. In other words, to arrange medieval readers, and medieval reading material, into discrete categories. In fact, the range of opinion expressed within some texts and the variety of material found within some manuscripts resists easy categorisation and shows us that one medieval reader could fall into all of these groupings at once. Consequently, the term “devotional” is used here in its broadest sense reflecting the desire, expressed by both writers and readers, that the written text should foster greater intimacy with God; to this extent, almost all works of vernacular theology - be they meditative, instructional or even

polemical - are essentially devotional.¹

The first three chapters of this dissertation focus on the first contention by considering how writers probe and/or provide hermeneutic guidelines or “glosses” designed to define the “right” readership for their work. Their aim is, to a greater or lesser extent, to actually shape reader response, and pre-determine (or, in the case of the texts in Chapter 3, re-determine) meaning. The variety of texts explored here - Lollard tracts, two mystical texts, an ultra-orthodox text, and two pre-Lollard reformist texts - reveals how this aim manifests itself with surprising consistency across a range of otherwise diverse texts. Shifting to the treatment of specific manuscripts, the last two chapters focus on the second contention and demonstrate how readers, able to commission the production of texts they want to read, create from them specific, unique, and often varied collections of religious material, thereby exerting a power capable of affecting and altering the way texts are read. The study as a whole supports the third contention by revealing the vastly rich and complex range of religious and devotional thinking in late medieval England which blurs artificial generic, and even doctrinal, boundaries.

New Readers

“thorw [through] the heryng of holy bokys and thorw heryng of holy

¹ The term “vernacular theology,” popularised by the work of Nicholas Watson in the mid-1990s, is a particularly helpful one in this regard. Watson originally used the term in order to counter generic boundaries and assert connections with different kinds of theologies and different kinds of vernacular writing (“Mystics” 544). In its broadest definition, the term is “a catchall, which in principle could include any kind of writing, sermon, or play that communicates theological information to an audience” (“Censorship” 822-23).

sermownys, sche evyr encresyd in contemplacyon and holy meditacyon”
(*Book of Margery Kempe* 141).

Just like Margery Kempe, writers and readers of vernacular theology in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century considered “holy bokys” to play a key role in their spiritual growth. The volume and variety of religious literature in English had been increasing since Archbishop Pecham drew up the *Ignorantia Sacerdotum* in 1281, the constitution commonly held to mark the beginning of the medieval flowering of vernacular theology in England.² The increase in lay literacy³ and the demand for religious writing acted as a stimulus to the commercial production of books throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and religious works made up a considerable portion of the material produced by this nascent enterprise.⁴ As Anne Middleton, Ralph Hanna, and Janet Coleman among others have shown, the demand for texts written in English grew with the expansion of the urban merchant classes and the civil service; prosperous, with sophisticated religious interests, but also “practical, active” and “public-spirited,” the middle classes were emerging as the “new readers” (Middleton, “Idea” 112,

² Pecham's syllabus outlined the knowledge, essential to salvation, that must necessarily be conveyed to the laity. It included the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the two commandments of the Gospel, the seven works of mercy, the seven virtues, the seven vices, and the seven sacraments.

³ When considering “literacy” from a medieval point of view it is necessary, as many scholars have pointed out, to define the term as more than just the ability to read and write (see Stock 6-11, Moulton xi-xiv, and Clanchy 7-16). Though the number of those who could read the written word did increase during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see Janet Coleman, Bartlett and Bestul 10), hearing books read aloud remained the dominant means of “reading,” even in the later Middle Ages (see Joyce Coleman). See Curry Woods and Copeland for the relationship between Pecham's syllabus, religious instruction and the growth in schools and literacy.

⁴ Griffiths and Pearsall review the changes in book production (the use of the pecia system, the shift from parchment to paper which made books cheaper) which helped extend the book-trade beyond the universities and which contributed to the beginnings of speculative production (3-10).

96).⁵ We know that London was the site of a developing book trade most likely organised around a group of professionals working in close geographical proximity to one another with common professional and personal associations.⁶ While artisans worked independently in their own shops, they may at times have worked on different parts of the same book (particularly if it was a large one) “farmed out” by a scribe who then supervised the work (Christianson, “Evidence,” 96; Taylor, “Manual” 2). The books being produced were almost certainly “bespoke” although it seems likely that some booksellers were engaging in limited speculative production, most notably the production of “booklets” containing popular texts that could be kept as ready stock to meet the predictable demand. As Carol Meale notes, the existence of these ready-made texts meant that a customer could piece together a book by choosing from an existing selection of available booklets (217). This kind of commercial book production may have been functioning in London as early as the second quarter of the thirteenth century at which time it was producing texts in Anglo-Norman (Taylor, “Manual” 15). Hanna's recent study of London literature demonstrates how, from the mid-1300s, religious texts that had traditionally been part of clerical Latinate culture - Scripture, academic commentaries upon it, and scriptural paraphrase - comprised a “basic stock” of the city's English book-trade. Some decades before the Wycliffite Bible translation, various biblical books often accompanied by authoritative commentaries were being read in

⁵ Paul Strohm considers civil servants to have constituted an important section of Chaucer's audience, and Katherine Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice identify “parliamentarians and high-ranking civil servants” as the audience for *Piers Plowman* (217). The term “new reader” is Susan Schibanoff's and is discussed below.

⁶For discussion (and varying opinions) about how the London book trade might have operated see Loomis, Doyle and Parkes, Shonk, and Christianson “Evidence.”

English by a merchant class with a “precocious” desire for, and sophisticated interest in, God’s Word (Hanna, “English” 148; *London* 9).

The “rise in devotionism” to which the *Ignorantia Sacerdotum* had both responded and contributed eventually made that constitution's limited model seem increasingly inadequate (McGinn, *Flowering* 11; Watson, “Censorship” 837). While Pecham’s instructions dealt with matters pertaining to salvation, readers now desired to read in order to increase their spiritual ardour and to grow in love, obedience, and spiritual experience. Nurturing love and faith through the sharing of truth became the self-proclaimed objective of a wide range of religious texts. *A Talkynge of the Love of God*, a lengthy meditation on, and address to, the crucified Christ, asserts that it is written “to sturen hem that hit redden to loven him the more”; Walter Hilton writes *The Scale of Perfection* to teach how the heart might be “turnyd hool” to Jesus Christ; a Lollard commentary on the Pater noster seeks to stir its readers’ hearts to the service of God; mystic Julian of Norwich shares the message of love she received from God that in the “knowing” of it we might “loven Him and clevyn to Him.” Through books, spiritual methods and practices that were once the exclusive practice of religious groups were disseminated among the laity. For example, affective meditation, an originally monastic practice designed to be only the first stage in a process of spiritual growth which would ultimately lead to mystical union, and perhaps visionary experience, had become progressively divorced from such higher goals and, by the late fourteenth century, was the favoured practice of the devout lay person (Baker 87; Newman 25). Contemplation itself, which was once exclusively the domain of the professional religious, was

increasingly seen as an activity that could at least be tasted, if not fully experienced, by those who were not solitaries. Having written Book I of *The Scale of Perfection* for an anchoress, Walter Hilton seems to have written Book II with a more extensive audience in mind.

This opening up of religious knowledge, reading, and practices to the laity - a process variously described as “secularisation,” “generalisation,” or “laicisation” - fundamentally effected not only *what* people wrote and read but *how* people wrote and read. As Nicholas Watson has pointed out, it was not only disciplines and practices that came to be thought of as “detachable” from their “professional base in the contemplative life” and applicable to the laity, but the whole notion of “spiritual perfection” (“Ancrene” 209). Traditional ideas about who was “holy” or “spiritual,” and who was not, were being transformed. The idea that those who “may noghte be bodyle in religyone” may still be “gostely” (*The Abbey* 321) demonstrates a shift away from a focus on the “external signs of religious status (habits, vows, Latinity)” and on to the condition of the inner man (Watson, “Ancrene” 209). These re-definitions were more readily made because of existing scepticism and cynicism about the capabilities and morals of the clergy and religious orders, as reflected in anticlerical and anti-fraternal literature. It became possible to think of the laity as “ghostly” while the clergy might be the ones described as “fleshly.” As *The Recluse*, a fourteenth-century version of *Ancrene Riwe* revised for the laity puts it, God delights more in the “foulest,” “lewed” man that “kepeth hym out of dedlich synne & loveth god & dredeth hym” than in any man of “ordre & dignite” who pursues his “fleschlich likynges” (Zettersten 89).

In part laicisation was simply the outworking of the evangelical impetus of the Gospel that had been its hallmark since the beginning, an impetus that acknowledges God's sovereign prerogative to call whomever he chooses and Man's inability to circumscribe the ways God chooses to act. It also owed something to an anti-intellectual tradition which idealised the love of the "lewed" and rejected the learning of the wise, asserting that it is the former which God esteems; the first apostles, after all, were fishermen, not schoolmen. The influence of both of these beliefs can be seen in a range of vernacular religious texts.⁷ On the other hand, however, laicisation also re-examined the place of learning and therefore re-worked the fundamental distinction between "clergie" and "lewed.". "Clergie" and "lewed" were words traditionally used to define status - "clergie" vs "laity" - and the assumed characteristics of that status: "clergie" was used to mean "'learning' and even 'body or field of knowledge' as well as to refer to

⁷ An example of the first is found in *The Cloud of Unknowing* which acknowledges that it is sometimes those who have been "orrible & customable synners" who arrive soonest at contemplative union with God; by this "merciful myracle," we are reminded that "on the Domesday...somme that now ben dyspysid & sette at lytil or nought as comon synners" will sit in glory while those who "semen now ful holy & ben worschepid of men...schul siten ful sory amonges helle calves" (*Cloud* 64-65). The anti-intellectual tradition is apparent in Richard Rolle who "offers" his (Latin) *Incendium Amoris* to the "simple and unlearned" who, it seems, are more likely to be moved by love than the "philosophers and sages of the world" bogged down in their "interminable questionings" ("Istum ergo librum offero intuendum, non philosophis, non mundi sapientibus, non magnis theologicis infinitis quescionibus [sic] implicatis, sed rudibus et indoctis, magis Deum diligere quam multa scire conantibus. Non enim disputando sed agendo sciatur, et amando") (Wolters *Fire* 46; Rolle 147). The author of the Lollard tract, *The Lanterne of Light*, also uses the anti-intellectual tradition as a means of expressing his own humility and criticising the clergy: "For the apostlis of Crist & other seintis were not graduat men in scolis but the Holi Goost sodenli enspirid hem & maden hem plenteuous of hevenli lore & thei that traveilid in deedli lettirs mekid hem silf as simple ydiotis...Crist in manhood chase pore simple & ydiotis to his prechyng so ayenwarde anticrist is for to chese sturdy & duble men & having the wisdom of this world for to preche his falshede" (5-6).

persons of clerical status,” and ‘lewed’ meant “‘uneducated’ or ‘illiterate’ or even ‘stupid’ as well as ‘lay’” (Somerset, *Clerical* 13). The increasing “clergie” or learning of the laity, along with the awareness that many members of the church hierarchy were woefully ill-equipped intellectually (a fact pointed out by anticlerical literature) made it clear that “clergie” or “learning” was not necessarily a quality belonging to the clergy. As Fiona Somerset has pointed out, exploiting the ambiguity in these words, and particularly the “conceptual paradox” of “lewed clergie” became a means by which writers could question the role of the clergy as ministers of the truth and guardians of knowledge.

Shifts in the make-up of the vernacular audience led to shifts in what it meant to write vernacular theology. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, as Watson states, religious writing in English had been written for individuals, usually nuns or anchoresses, personally known to the author, with the expectation of supervised use. Consequently, “to write in English was...to write for a smaller imagined audience than was addressed in the language of the universal (clerical) access, Latin” (“Censorship” 837). By the later part of the century the audience was - or had the potential to be - at a physical, but also at a “perceptual,” distance from the author (Baüml 96). With written copies of works circulating in greater numbers and beyond specific environments, the author did not have the same control over determining who did and who did not get to read his book. In the case of devotional works, writings which only a short time before had been reaching a very specific and “closed” environment (perhaps even an audience of only one) were now - through the use of the vernacular - travelling beyond the safety of the cloister or

the university, which provided certain frameworks for learning and understanding, to “*eny man that mygth aftywardre rede the boke*” (*Speculum* 75).

The process of laicisation in fourteenth-century England destabilised the status quo in several significant ways. On the one hand, the vernacular, as the “common tongue” seemed to offer the key to “comun undyrstondyng,” particularly as it seemed to be free of the scholastic “strif in wordis” associated with Latin.⁸ On the other hand, “the vernacular provide[d] the means for consensus to break down [o]r, more accurately - since consensus probably never existed - use of the vernacular expose[d] the gaps in supposedly united communities by demonstrating the crucial nonunitary meaning of texts now opened up to diverse constituencies and therefore capable of divergent readings” (Wogan-Brown et al. 115). Creating the opportunity for individual understanding of religious texts (whether such understanding proves heretical or not) gives rise to “potentially as many readings as readers,” a fact that fundamentally undermines the authority of the church and its authoritative interpretation (Hanna, “Ricardian” 338). This “spectre of multiple interpretation” looks particularly threatening when the text is the Bible (Hanna, “Ricardian” 338). Many of the arguments against vernacular translation of the Bible - a subject debated at Oxford during the first decade of the fifteenth century - had the issue of authority at their crux.⁹ Knowledge of the Scripture, it

⁸The quotations come from a Lollard sermon quoted by Nisse. Nisse cites Rita Copeland’s description of how the “Lollard ideal” of the “open” text “takes on a political inflection of public rights and common accessibility” (Nisse 28). Nisse goes on to state that the “vernacular has more authority than Latin for the very reason that it is a public rather than a ‘privy’ language” (28). The preacher of the sermon quoted here speaks “from and to an imagined position of consensus in ‘common’ English,” a position which he strengthens by “exposing the language of the institutional church...as the source of all conflict” (28).

⁹ Surviving evidence of this debate includes two statements against translation written by

was argued, should be passed down from a “higher order” of Christians to a “lower order,” just as knowledge of God was conveyed to man through angels (Watson, “Censorship” 841). This “higher order” of “privileged Latinate interpreters” was certainly to be identified with the clergy. Exegesis was considered the “professional responsibility” of the clergy and it was to them, and them only, that God chose to reveal the Bible’s secrets and obscurities (Hanna, “Ricardian” 326). The laity had their own, different, “professional responsibilities” - cultivating fields for the commoners and martial affairs for the lords. For some it seemed that nothing less than social anarchy of apocalyptic proportions would be the consequence if the laity were given access to the Bible. Old women would usurp the place of preachers, women would usurp the place of men, and the laity, preferring to teach rather than learn, would reject the clergy as redundant. Interpretive anarchy would give way to social anarchy.

The fear of misinterpretation was intensified because of the increasing gulf between author and reader created by the emergence of silent, private reading. As Paul Saenger's studies on the changing nature of reading and writing from classical antiquity to the fifteenth century show, silent reading - enabled by the adoption of word-separated texts and the use of gothic cursive script, and stimulated by the intellectual rigour of scholasticism - had become common practice in the schools and in the cloister by the thirteenth century. Though the transition to silent reading took longer among the vernacular-reading laity, it was becoming more common by the early part of the

William Butler, a regent master of the Franciscans at Oxford, and Thomas Palmer, another friar, and one statement in favour of translation most likely written by Richard Ullerston, an orthodox colleague of Wyclif’s. Some of the arguments raised by these men (including the arguments against vernacular translation quoted by Ullerston in his defence) are briefly surveyed here.

fourteenth century. Indeed, the “new genres of private books of prayer and devotion” like books of hours and common-place books, sometimes illustrated with scenes of silent reading, are a testimony to the spread of this kind of reading among the laity (“Silent” 402). Silent reading brought a privacy and individualism to the reading process which was necessarily absent when texts were read aloud and Saenger sees a clear link between the activity and the intensification of personal religious experience, arguing that silent reading “gave lay readers the means of pursuing the individual relationship to God that had been the aspiration of erudite Christians since Saint Augustine” (*Space* 275).¹⁰

In an article on early reactions to Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* (herself someone who “dramatizes an extreme act of new reading” [77]), Susan Schibanoff has considered writer's responses to the “new,” “visual” reader. While Schibanoff is concerned with the “narrator-poet” of secular works here, her comments apply equally to the writer of devotional texts. Schibanoff suggests that one of the “initial consequences” of the distance which new reading created between author and reader was “authorial fear of misinterpretation by readers” (96). An author who reads his own work to a reader can use a number of “extratextual” means including “gesture, tone, pace, even impromptu commentary,” to try and determine how it will be interpreted (97). The distance between author and reader opened up by new reading means that such methods of control are no longer possible and the author has no say over where an emphasis is placed, for example,

¹⁰ Neither the extent nor the consequences of silent reading should be exaggerated. It is necessary to supplement Saenger's description of the significance of silent reading in the fourteenth century with the evidence for the continuation of public reading presented by Joyce Coleman. As Andrew Taylor (citing the work of Ivan Illich) has pointed out, Saenger's account of the evolution of silent reading should also be modified to incorporate other changes in reading technology including changes in the visual appearance of books (*Textual* 129).

or whether the work is read as a whole or in bits.¹¹ What guarantee can there be that a reader will glean the intended meaning of the author? Fundamentally, there is nothing particularly stable about the relationship between text and reader, or author and reader, but this intrinsic instability was possibly only exacerbated by the nature of medieval book production, as Anne Bartlett and Thomas Bestul suggest: “all agents in the communication process - message, sender, and audience - participate in a highly contingent negotiation of meaning. A particular message, for example, may be easily distorted by scribal error, readerly inattentiveness or lack of education, or the interference of conflicting discourses and intentions” (7). Schibanoff considers how Chaucer dramatises authorial anxiety in some of his own fictional narrator-poets and she describes its typical symptoms as portrayed through the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*: “as [he] begins to conceive of us as reading rather than listening to his words, his authority diminishes, and his uncertainty about his poetic abilities grows” (100). For writers of religious literature, seeking to write about God himself and dealing with the health of eternal souls, this sense of diminished authority must have felt all the more disturbing, especially when the consequence of misinterpretation may be heresy.

The connection between reading (whether silent or not) and heresy is one that many people, from Chaucer's John the Carpenter to church authorities, seem to have been

¹¹ This situation was only aggravated by the creation of miscellany volumes and commonplace books. In both of these formats, texts were subject to a number of processes including “subdivision, compilation, extraction, and anthologizing,” any of which could render the “intentions of the original author irrelevant.” “Miscellany volumes, by imposing a new order and ordination on material drawn from a range of different sources, could generate within themselves an internal logic to create a new whole to be read in new ways and in new circumstances than those in and for which they had originally been conceived” (Gillespie, “Lukyng” 2).

ready to make.¹² Saenger's studies draw a clear connection between silent reading and the development of "individual critical thinking," scepticism, and "intellectual heresy":

"psychologically, silent reading emboldened the reader because it placed the source of his curiosity completely under personal control...Reading with the eyes alone and silent, written composition removed the individual's thoughts from the sanctions of the group" (*Space* 264). Heresy did not necessarily equal Lollardy, however; after all, for a Lollard, the heretics were to be found in the church itself. Certainly Love wrote his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* against the Lollards, even drawing attention to those specific sections of it that are "contra Lollardos," but, as we will see, it is uncertain how much a writer like the *Cloud* author was responding to Lollardy and how much he was responding to other unorthodox opinions which he considered a danger. As this dissertation has cause to consider, the idea that religious controversy in late medieval England consisted only in a clear distinction between "orthodox" and Lollard is possibly inaccurate and unproductive. Recent work by Andrew Larsen and Katherine Kerby-Fulton has stressed the existence of other heresies and threats prior to and concurrent with Lollardy. The Lollard movement itself is being constantly defined and re-defined. Anne Hudson's work of the last three decades has used the evidence of texts written by Lollards themselves to draw a detailed picture of a far more widespread, influential, and even unified movement than had previously been thought. However, Steven Justice and Somerset (among others) have suggested this depiction may be simplistic because it takes

¹² In Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* John the Carpenter, clearly intimidated by clerk Nicholas' "bookes grete and smale" as well as the accoutrements for his pursuit of astrology, seems to consider it natural that excessive "studyng" alone in his room should have led Nicholas away from the faith and into the clutches of demons (Chaucer 68, 71-72).

too little account of the fact that individual Lollards “thought for themselves” (as opposed to according to some clear “formula” of belief) and that their “beliefs were no more the pure product of their clergy's instruction than the beliefs of any believers have ever been” (“Inquisition” 311, 313). This dissertation does not attempt to determine the nature of the Lollard movement but it works on the assumption that there were significant numbers of men and women who aligned themselves very consciously with a core set of beliefs which we can define as Wycliffite (something very close to the “statement of faith” set out in the “Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards,” for example), and for whom Bible reading and preaching was a key practice.¹³ That these men and women considered themselves to be part of a community is apparent from texts which are directed at the comfort or instruction of the group, evidence of possible communal ownership of books, and the existence of Lollard schools or conventicles (Hudson, *Premature* 205-6, 180-200). The dissertation also recognises that the actual nature of the movement may be less important than the reaction against it; there is no doubt that the authorities perceived Lollardy to be a threat and, as R. I. Moore's study of persecuting societies points out, “heresy” is effectively created by its opponents: “the very process of identifying and rebutting heresy [gives] it a greater coherence, and therefore a more menacing aspect, than it actually possesse[s]...Variety of religious opinion exists at many times and places,

¹³That Lollard numbers were not insignificant is indicated by Shannon McSheffrey's study (and others like it) which locates Lollard communities in Coventry, the Chiltern Hills, Essex, East Anglia, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Kent, and London. Core Wycliffite beliefs expressed in the “Twelve Conclusions” include the rejection of transubstantiation and “superstitious” practices like pilgrimage and worship of images, the belief that the church has become corrupt and degenerate (a state of affairs usually dated to the time of the Donation of Constantine), and the belief that true “priests” are those who are obedient to Christ, not necessarily those who are part of the church hierarchy.

and becomes heresy when authority declares it intolerable” (Moore 72, 68-69).

It is frequently observed that the Lollard movement quickly became identified with the written word and with the ownership of books. Investigations of Lollardy, as Hudson's evidence reveals, were initially concerned with the “detection of books of heresy” but “increasingly ownership of any religious literature in English - sometimes it seems *any* texts in English - might be incriminating” (*Premature* 166). According to Hudson, Watson, James Simpson, and Justice, it was this identification of Lollardy with vernacular literature which was chiefly responsible for Arundel's restrictive *Constitutions* of 1409 which sought to limit the production of any kind of writing that involved vernacular translations of Scripture thereby “drastically widen[ing] the scope of what could be regarded as heretical” (Simpson, *Reform* 335). In his 1995 seminal article on the *Constitutions*, Watson argued that the legislation fostered an atmosphere of “self-censorship” and “silent compliance” among religious writers which explains the abrupt transformation of a period of boldly innovative, exciting, and theologically daring religious writing (1350-1410) into a period marked by cautious and derivative writing (“Censorship” 831). Simpson concurs, arguing that in light of the *Constitutions*, writers chose to avoid controversy by “writing wholly devotional and/or penitential” works, by exercising “self-censorship” when they did engage with ecclesiological issues, and by hiding behind anonymity (*Reform* 340-41).

This account of the causes and consequences of Arundel's *Constitutions* has been questioned by Somerset and, most recently, by Kerby-Fulton. Both scholars suggest that the legislation itself was far from all-embracing: Somerset suggests that the main target

of the legislation was the clergy, not the growing lay audience (although the goals of “attaining greater control” over the clergy and “shoring up clerical hierarchy” would presumably have affected the laity in the long run), and Kerby-Fulton argues that the legislation is full of qualifications which show that the aim was to exert a (realistic) measure of control over teaching and texts, rather than to suppress either one completely (“Professionalising” 152; *Books* 398). This perspective on the *Constitutions* tends to see Lollardy as less of a distinct threat, emphasising its disparate, diluted, and even conservative nature (Kerby-Fulton 14; Hannah, “English” 150-53). Both Somerset and Kerby-Fulton consider the *Constitutions* to have been largely ineffective, having little impact on book production.

It seems clear that while many writers of vernacular theology at the close of the fourteenth century were indeed theologically innovative, and sometimes bold and outspoken in their criticisms, many of these same writers were also deeply anxious. Necessarily setting themselves up as authorities (teachers, guides, instructors, whatever their protestations to the contrary), they were sensitive to the threat to that authority arising from “multiple interpretation.” Arundel and the religious authorities shared this fear, and the urge to assert control - manifested most clearly in the *Constitutions* but also, as this dissertation will argue, apparent in writers' efforts to circumscribe readership and shape reader response - was one response to it. This essential, if surprising, connection between the *Constitutions* and writers of vernacular theology may explain why English religious writing could be so effectively intimidated in the years after 1409. Readers, on the other hand, had grown in confidence throughout the fourteenth century. The very

same factors that were diminishing the authority of writers (and would ultimately, in the shape of the *Constitutions*, come close to silencing them) were empowering readers. The evidence of the books people read is that readers possessed a remarkable tenacity for religious enquiry which was clearly not intimidated by the fear of heresy or, later, by fear of Arundel. This means that, in post-*Constitutions* England, there was a momentum among readers that was absent among writers. As Watson's study of the *Constitutions* points out, large numbers of "laypeople of rank" continued to avidly read the "intellectually challenging" texts of the fourteenth century, which circulated far more widely than the new material being produced in the fifteenth ("Censorship" 835). Speaking of the fate of Lollardy, Justice has made the comment that, after 1410, it was "in the reading rather than the writing that Lollardy remained vital as a textual movement," but I would argue that we can extend the application of this comment beyond Lollardy and say that it was in the reading, rather than the writing, that a variety of dynamic and reformist religious strains of thought (including the very idea of variety itself) remained alive in the fifteenth century ("Lollardy" 687).

Exorcising the "spectre of multiple interpretation": "good entent" and God's Grace.

Just as writers of vernacular theology (across the doctrinal and literary board) faced the same threat of misinterpretation, so they attempted to overcome this threat in the same way: by locating and identifying the "right" reader or reading community for their texts and establishing parameters for interpretation. There was also, in theory, another and more straightforward way of dealing with the problem and that was to invoke the guidance of God and the potent idea of "divine inspiration." As most texts,

somewhere along the line, acknowledge reading as a divine transaction between God and the reader, it is worth touching on the treatment of this issue.

The idea that God can and will lead a reader to the one “true” (and intended) meaning of a text is highlighted in many vernacular religious texts. While God’s role in the writing process is almost always acknowledged (by prayers, refrains, and, occasionally, divine commissions to write), God’s role in the reading process is also frequently emphasised, reminding us that the entire process of learning and spiritual growth depends on God’s grace or “Godes yifte” (*A Talkynge* 2).¹⁴ Acknowledging God’s sovereignty over how a reader reads a text takes the onus off the writer (and even off the text) and gives him or her a subordinate role in the communication process. In a network full of uncertain and undependable transactions, God is a reliable “agent.”

To experience God’s grace, however, the reader must possess the right attitude of heart. What a reader will take from a book is ultimately the result of what he brings to it: most fundamentally, his virtue, his humility, and his devotion to God. More devotional texts include lists of the necessary credentials of their readers (or, alternatively, a list of instructions on how to read the text) than include details of the qualifications of their authors. Such credentials generally amount to an attitude of humility and love demonstrated in the ability to “worche thereafter,” or apply the matter read to life (*Pore Caityf* 240). As the translator of *The Myroure of oure Ladye* points out, a reader must be

¹⁴ In *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, for example, reading is described as God speaking to Man and, in order to “feleth more openly the trouth of the worde” and have “more comfort” thereof, it is necessary for God’s “grace and lyghte of understandynge to enter in to the soule” (66). The *Speculum Devotorum* acknowledges how God’s grace is “necessary in redynge” and *A Talkynge of the Love of God* prays for “grace so for to rede” (*Speculum* 76, *A Talkynge* 2)

able to choose the right reading material and possess what he calls the “discreSSION” necessary to be able to respond appropriately to each text (68).

The issue of reader intention - and its ability to engage or disengage the grace of God - could therefore be used to defend works from erroneous interpretations by deflecting the responsibility for making accurate interpretations away from the text and its author and toward the reader and his/her relationship with God. In other words, an impaired relationship between the reader and God is blamed for errors of interpretation: a bad reader is a bad Christian. Acknowledging the connection between a poor relationship with God and poor interpretation is also, however, to tacitly acknowledge the connection between a good relationship and right interpretation. Looked at from this more positive perspective, divine inspiration, as we have already seen, only further encourages the move towards laicisation as it opens up an alternative path for the “lewed” - a path that leads directly to enlightenment and full comprehension of God’s ways and his Word without recourse to intellectual ability or external spiritual “status.” Somerset has called this alternative path “compensatory biblical authorization” and explains how it was employed by reformist writers:

Of course, no vernacular tract, however step-by-step its didactic exposition, could possibly substitute for several years of clerical education...To justify the necessary supposition that the laity could instantly acquire the learning they would need, and make it possible to admit lay persons to the conversation of clerics without taking upon themselves any direct responsibility for the laity learning anything, necessary or not, writers drew on a compensatory biblical authorization of ‘clergie’ independent of institutional training...Christ’s promise to the apostles at Luke 21: 12-15 guarantees that regardless of their status and education, his followers will receive whatever learning may be necessary to combat trained, established clerics by means of a special grant of grace. (*Clerical* 16)

To Christ's promise that he will give "words and wisdom that...[no] adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" we could also add the words of Christ in Luke 10:21 declaring that it is God's "good pleasure" to reveal his secrets to the "little children" and hide them from the "wise and learned," a favourite verse of the Lollards.¹⁵ Indeed, following Wyclif, the Lollards demonstrate repeated use of this "compensatory biblical authorization," arguing that God can give the simple all they need to understand Scripture: "God bothe can and may, if it lykith hym, speede simple men...as myche to kunne hooly writ, as maistris in the universite" (*Bible* 1:52).¹⁵

There was, of course, nothing new in emphasising the role of divine inspiration in reading. As I. C. Levy points out, even with regard to the reading of Scripture, the idea that a "genuine interpretation" depends upon divine inspiration "is as old as the Christian exegetical tradition itself" (110). However, "locating the parameters within which this inspiration manifests itself, and so produces an acceptably Catholic result, can be a point of great contention" (110). (Moreover, the understanding of what is "acceptably Catholic" would be very different for Lollards than it would be for the church). Wyclif, for example, saw personal sanctity, rather than ecclesiastical interpretation, as the key to receiving divinely inspired knowledge of the Scripture, a position that was taken by his

¹⁵ See also the example of William Thorpe's testimony to Archbishop Arundel at his heresy trial provided by Somerset (*Clerical* 184-85). As Somerset points out, Thorpe demonstrates the reality of the Luke 21 guarantee when he prays for grace to answer a question which he "hadde not bisyed me to stodie aboute the witt therof" and is provided with an answer which satisfies the Archbishop. We could relate Thorpe's action - praying for the grace to answer rightly - to the Lollard teaching (expressed in the General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible) that the Bible reader should pray for the grace to read rightly (*Bible* 1:48).

opponents as a sign of his “supposed willingness to dissent from Holy Mother Church” (Levy 115).

This idea of divine inspiration proves, then, to be something of a double-edged sword. The focus that it inevitably places on the reader may enable writers to escape blame for erroneous interpretations, but it also puts a lot of power back in the hands of the reader. We see a clear example of this in the case of the Prologue to the Middle English translation of the pseudo-Augustinian *Soliloquies*, a collection of prayers and meditations from a variety of medieval and biblical sources. In describing his process of translation from the French, the translator defends his decision to translate the French forms of addressing God - “vous and vostre” - into “ye and yours,” despite the objection that they are plural forms. God, he argues, quoting Genesis, refers to himself in the plural. However, should a reader take strong objection, he is free to use the word he prefers:

be it man or be it woman, as they feelen hem best disposed or most devoutly steride to sey, be it “yowe,” be it “the” or “yee,” let hem sey: for both is good, and plesyth welle God. For oure lorde God, worschipped and praysed be he allewey, he is so mercyfulle and benyngne that he taketh after mannes entent, as I sey befor. For many man and woman seith here Pater noster, Ave, and a Crede full overthowartly [mistakenly], and no worde lyke as it was made; yit God of his grete mercy and goodnesse rescceyve here [their] good wille and here good entent. (*Pseudo-Augustinian* 226)

In other words, the reader’s “good entent” (right state of heart) matters more than even the actual words in the text. Despite the evidently large role played by books in the devotional life of lay men and women, the fact remains that “religion exists in people, not in books” (Hirsch 56). Whether these texts will succeed in furthering knowledge and deepening devotion depends to a large extent on the reader and - arguably - less on their

understanding of the text than on their understanding of themselves. By deferring to God's inspiration and role in and over the text, writers were excusing themselves and shifting blame, but they were not asserting control. For this, they would have to find their own ways of shaping reader response.

Shaping Reader Response: Probing and Providing Hermeneutic Practices.

Concerned with the question of how their readers will read and, more particularly, how they will interpret, writers of religious texts demonstrate a sustained interest in hermeneutics. In this they are far from unique. Dramatic religious writing shows the same interest; as Ruth Nisse's recent study reveals, the "vernacular theatrical language" of the mystery plays can be clearly connected to the "hermeneutic methods of scholastic biblical commentaries and dialectics" (2). Secular vernacular texts are also marked by a self-conscious interest in, and implementation of, a tradition of scholastic hermeneutic theory and practice. Rita Copeland's study on translation and hermeneutics in the Middle Ages describes how both Chaucer and Gower assimilate the "interpretive practice of the medieval schools...into a vernacular hermeneutics," self-consciously applying exegetical techniques to their own writings (*Rhetoric* 221, 186). Through the fourteenth century, thanks largely to Dante and Boccaccio who popularised "self-exegesis," a trend was emerging for authors to provide their own glosses. Schibanoff and Alastair Minnis have considered the influence of this practice on manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, and on Gower respectively (93; *Medieval Theory* 210). According to Minnis, the adoption of the standard "*apparatus criticus*" (including commentary) associated with "ancient" works allowed Gower, as a vernacular writer, to assert his authority as "auctor" (Minnis,

Medieval Theory 20). Providing commentary was certainly the most direct way of replacing those “paratextual” devices - tone, gesture, pace - removed by the new way of reading.¹⁶ Changes in the very nature of writing also made the incorporation of these substitutive techniques easier. Even as silent reading was emerging to empower and embolden the reader, the relationship between a writer and his text was also changing. Saenger describes how thirteenth-century changes in writing methods - the adoption of Gothic cursive script, the use of a separated script fast and easy to write, and the use of parchment and (later) paper instead of wax tablets - made writing much easier physically and made it possible for an author to write without assistance, thereby enhancing “the author's sense of intimacy and privacy in his work” (*Space* 258). While composition had previously (necessarily) been a group activity, now, “in solitude,” an author could “personally...manipulate drafts,” develop “internal relationships” within the text by means of cross-references, and make additions or revisions to the text at any point (*Space* 258). This new intimacy is likely to have made writers less tolerant of scribal or readerly error.¹⁷

As Graham D. Caie comments, methods adopted from scriptural study shaped the “culture” of medieval textuality (16). It was the study of the Bible which supplied many of the structures and much of the vocabulary for exploring the processes of interpretation, and it seems to have provided the main model for religious writers. Biblical exegesis, as was well known, was grounded on St Paul's distinction between the letter and the spirit.

¹⁶ It was not, of course, the only way. Schibanoff suggests that we should see the fictional narrator-poet as a form of “gloss,” reproducing the poet's “former role as reciter of the work and determiner of its meaning” (97).

¹⁷ For a famous expression of impatience with scribal error, see Chaucer's complaint in “Chaucer's Wordes unto Adam, his owne Scriveyn” (Chaucer 650).

The spiritual meaning, though most important, was not always easily gleaned and so was supplied, along with specific explanations of difficult words, in glosses which accompanied the text. The provision of glosses was the established and “orthodox” way to guide readers into the truth and away from error while their very presence reminded the reader of his or her reliance on a mediating interpretive method.

However, as the Middle English Dictionary tells us, by the late fourteenth century, the words “gloss” and “glossing” had become associated with lying, flattering, and obscuring the truth.¹⁸ Like the words “spiritual” and “fleshly,” “lewed” and “clergy,” “gloss” underwent a “transference of meaning” in the later Middle Ages; “instead of signifying a scholarly operation performed on texts,” writes Robert Hanning, “glossing” became “a strategic and usually coercive operation performed on people” (28). This “operation” is vividly brought to life in the shape of the friar in Chaucer’s “The Summoner’s Tale” who expresses the supposed superiority of the gloss over the letter during one of his verbal assaults on the sick Thomas from whom, of course, he seeks some funds:

I have today been at youre chirche at messe,
 And seyde a sermon after my simple wit –
 Nat al after the text of hooly writ,
 For it is hard to yow, as I suppose,
 And therefore wol I teche yow al the glose.
 Glosynge is a glorious thing, certeyn,
 For letter sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn. (Chaucer 130)

“It is hard to yow, as I suppose”: the Friar makes an excuse connected to the supposed difficulty or incomprehensibility of the literal sense in order to promote his own “gloss”

¹⁸The Middle English Dictionary includes the following definitions of “glosen”: “to obscure the truth of (a matter), falsify (a statement), gloze over” and “to use fair words, talk smoothly or courteously; speak with blandishment, flattery, or deceit.”

for purely selfish ends.

Hanning suggests that the changing attitude to the gloss was a reflection of declining respect for the “scholars” (most notably the friars), an attitude which finds expression in anticlerical and anti-fraternal thought and, ultimately, in the Lollard call for the “naked” text. The most “orthodox” and “established” system of interpretation was, then, far from unproblematic, its reliability far from beyond question - something writers seeking ways to keep their readers from mis-reading must have been painfully aware of. This sensitivity to both the problems and strengths of glossing is reflected in the exploration of hermeneutic principles and practices carried out by vernacular religious writers who variously probe them for their problems, expose their dangers, advance their benefits, and use them to create their own “aids-to-reading.”

Copeland has described how the adoption, by English writers, of a Latin tradition of authoritative hermeneutics could run counter to the “access” (to Latin culture, but also to religious knowledge or experience) which the vernacular seemed to promise (228). Describing Chaucer's efforts to conserve a “tradition of authoritative interpretation” associated with Latin academic discourse in the vernacular (in particular, his *Legend of Good Women*), Copeland reveals the potential for that discourse to replicate the “regulatory” and “conservative” role it performs in Latin culture, reproducing “systems of containment and control” (228). As the following chapters reveal, I suggest that the invocation by religious writers of particular, and ideal, reading communities for their texts is a key way they “regulate” their texts and seek to contain and control readers' interpretations. These reading or “interpretive communities” are not only identified as

the only “true” audience for the work, but are also looked to to preserve and protect the meaning of the text. The readers composing these communities are considered to be members of the “true” church, the chosen, a spiritual elite. By addressing themselves to these “true” Christians, writers can invoke a more exclusive reading community designed to guarantee “correct” interpretation and to safeguard the text’s meaning from those outside the community. Writers protect themselves from blame for erroneous readings of the text by directing their work to a clear group of “right” readers (those who interpret correctly) and by identifying, and castigating “wrong” readers (those who misinterpret).¹⁹

The thesis begins with a discussion of the most foundational hermeneutic principle for medieval exegesis: St Paul’s dictum from Second Corinthians that “the letter kills but the spirit gives life.” While this principle was used by writers across the doctrinal board in order to identify “bad” readers (those who read according to the letter) and “good” readers (those who read according to the spirit), there was some dispute over what the terms “letter” and “spirit” actually meant and to what they could apply. This chapter considers two anonymous Lollard tracts, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Love’s *Treatise on the Sacrament* in order to demonstrate how the distinction between the letter and the spirit was variously used to define “right” reading. This range of texts represents three different “categories” of religious literature - polemical (and heretic), mystical, and ultra-orthodox or “devotional” - and has been deliberately chosen to point out the close connections between writers’ perspectives regardless of theological conviction or general intent.

¹⁹It is worth noting that Lollard writers offer one of the best examples of this invocation of a specific and chosen community of readers despite their calls for universal Bible access and their evangelical concern for the Gospel to reach all men.

The revelation received, and written down, by Julian of Norwich is the focus of Chapter 2. I demonstrate how Julian draws her reader's attention to her own interpretive methods and how she uses her belief in her role as representative of all her "even Cristen" to shape reader response to the visions and to "fix" the one "true" meaning of the text (God's meaning). The fact that she herself stands for many people (indeed, is in very "oneness" with them) means that this reading becomes less her own exclusive reading and more the common interpretation of "all those who are to be saved." It becomes, in other words, the interpretive framework of a community. Changes from the earlier version to the later version reflect Julian's creation of a "safe" stable interpretive framework or community (built around her own experience and interpretation) which protects the "text" of the visions from being misread or misunderstood. I also consider how Julian ends up imitating some of the texts of affective meditation (also known as "scripted visions" or "guided meditations"), and their hermeneutic methods, which she was used to reading.

Chapter 3 considers two non-Lollard but reformist works, *Book to a Mother* and *The Recluse*, and argues that both texts are best understood as glosses on Scripture and on established texts or textual traditions that mediate Scripture - the pseudo-Bonaventuran Life of Christ narrative in the case of the Book, and the *Ancrene Riwe* in the case of *The Recluse*. These texts both seek to direct their readers into a new understanding of the terms "order," "religion," and "rule" and establish the importance of the laity in reforming the spiritual model which religious orders should be providing. Both texts are also prime examples of the way both devotional and reformist impulses can be at work in

one writer and in one text.

Chapter 4 considers a Lollard commentary on the Pater noster within the context of the vast number of writings on this most fundamental and popular of the prayers. By demonstrating its connections to other non-Lollard commentaries on the prayer, this chapter reveals the degree of movement and borrowing that took place within this mini-genre - a movement which crossed doctrinal boundaries. The second half of the chapter discusses the commentary's location in one of its manuscripts, British Library Harley 2398, a "mixed" manuscript which contains orthodox and Lollard texts and one which, like the texts in Chapter 3 points to the openness of religious opinion in late medieval England. Following Nichols and Wenzel's lead on considering the way the manuscript contextualises the works it contains in specific ways, I argue that the particular "community" of texts in Harley 2398 determines the way this Pater noster commentary would have been read thereby raising the possibility that codicology may be as important as theology in understanding readers' responses to Lollard writings.

Chapter 5 continues the focus on the role of manuscript context in determining how individual texts within the codex are interpreted. This time, the subject is St John's College Cambridge, MS G.25, another "mixed" collection of religious texts. The manuscript combines texts which contain apocalyptic themes but which represent three very different discourses on apocalypticism. Diverging from other assessments of the compilation of the manuscript, I argue that the textual evidence suggests that the manuscript was put together as a planned collection meaning one reader at least considered that these texts belonged together; this chapter suggests a reason why.

Together, these two last chapters provide evidence that Lollard texts were not read exclusively by Lollards nor do the texts themselves seem to have been marginalised in the way we might have expected given Arundel's restrictive *Constitutions*. The two manuscripts studied in these chapters also direct our attention to the power of the individual reader to alter authorial “entent” by creating unique collections of texts, the very shape of which could have a profound impact on how each individual text was read and interpreted.

CHAPTER ONE. "THE LETTERE SLEETH": IDENTIFYING BAD READERS.

Studies of late medieval religious culture in England testify to the central importance of the humanity (as opposed to the divinity) of Christ and a fixation on the sufferings of his physical body.¹ Early medieval emphasis on Christ as conquering king and all-powerful saviour had slowly given way, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to images and descriptions which centered on the suffering man and the bleeding, broken body. Gail McMurray Gibson describes the period as characterised by an "Incarnational aesthetic" which transformed the "abstract and theological" into the "personal and concrete," just as the Incarnation "had given spirit a concrete form" (7-8). This aesthetic is apparent in painting and sculpture (where representations of the Passion became increasingly pathetic and gruesome), in the devotions of prayer-books, in the popularity of affective meditation - promoting visualisation of the bodily and earthly events in the life of Christ - and in the Mass. This latter, once the doctrine of transubstantiation with its "frankly literal and physical" language had been enshrined as law in 1215, "systematically reproduced, and hence decisively reinforced" the central image of Christ's broken body (Bynum 288; Aers and Staley 24). In his study of the "ideal of the imitation of Christ" through the Middle Ages, Giles Constable has charted the course of the shift in focus on Christ's divinity to his humanity in relation to the biblical injunction

¹ Though scholars like David Aers and Gail McMurray Gibson have been keen to expose our failure to correctly interrogate or understand this culture and have offered a somewhat nuanced view, there is still consensus among scholars that Christ's suffering and broken body was the "dominant model" of Christ, the "chief concern," and source of "fascination" for the age (Aers, "Humanity" 22; Duffy 234; Rubin 306). Studies on the subject include Woolf, Duffy, Aers and Staley, Bynum, Constable, Beckwith, and Rubin.

to “imitate” or “follow” Christ: for some the imitation of Christ is anchored in his divinity as “Christ shows the way to become God with Him”; others “concentrate on Christ’s humanity, both on His sufferings and on His activity and behaviour during his life on earth” (218). By the fourteenth century, the latter position, heavily weighted towards approaching the Divine through “intimate knowledge and empathic experience of...the human ordeal of His passion,” seems to have been in the ascendancy in England (qtd. in Aers, “Humanity” 17). However, alternative perspectives did exist.

Those who practiced and wrote about the contemplative life - figures like Walter Hilton and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* - believed that union with God could only be attained by moving beyond a reliance on bodily practices and physical objects. Seeking to achieve a distinctly spiritual encounter with a distinctly divine God, they can be aligned with that tradition which sought a form of imitation which was essentially “participation” in the Godhead (Constable 152). Using the same example of Christ’s Ascension into heaven, both writers assert that a “goostli felyng” of God is superior to love of Christ’s “manheed” and both use the fact that Christ chose to remove his incarnate bodily presence from us as proof of this. In *The Book of Privy Counselling*, the *Cloud* author explains:

yif...ther had ben none hier perfeccion in this liif bot in beholdyng & in lovyng of his manheed, I trowe that he [Christ] wolde not than have assendid into heven...ne withdrawen his bodely presence from his specyal lovers in erthe. Bot for ther was an hier perfeccion...(that is to sey, a pure goostli felyng in the love of his Godheed) therfore he [Christ] seide to his disciples, the whiche grocheden [were unhappy] to forgo his bodely presence,...that it was speedful to hem that he went bodely fro hem.
(*Cloud* 170-71)

Applying the same reasoning to his discussion of the Ascension, Hilton concludes “it is

spedeful to summe that oure Lord withdrawe a litil the bodili and the fleschli likenesse from the iye of her soule, that the herte myght be set and ficchid more bisili in gosteli desire and felynge of his godhed” (*Scale* f32a). While these writers do not denounce the value of “Redyng, Thinkyng & Preiing” in the life of the young Christian or the aspiring contemplative, their focus on the contemplative or mystical dimension of Christianity requires them to acknowledge the presence of the ineffable and the unknowable (*Cloud* 71). This is particularly obvious in the case of the *Cloud* author whose allegiance to the negative theology of the pseudo-Dionysius - with its focus on what we cannot say, imagine or replicate - is apparent throughout his works.² From this perspective, “sensible bodies,” “understandable substaunces,” and “fantastik ymage[s]” are not only inadequate means of drawing closer to God, they are actually obstacles that need to be forgotten, removed, stripped away (*Deonise* 6). This model of devotion, in which a soul motivated only by love pursues the “nakid being” of God, is all “goostly, not bodely” (*Cloud* 25, 106).

Despite holding a very difficult theological position and very different goals from writers like Hilton and the *Cloud* author, Lollards also challenged the dominant model of devotion. Lollards sought to bring reform to a church which had become sidetracked

² Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is the name given to an anonymous writer of the 5th century whose writings were mistakenly attributed to the Dionysius mentioned in the Book of Acts. Heavily influenced by neoplatonist thinking, the pseudo-Dionysius articulates the need for the soul to strip away all “perceptions of the senses and reasonings of the intellect” in order to enter a place of darkness and “unknowing” in which place, contemplative union with God becomes possible (Spearing xvii). The writings of the pseudo-Dionysius were known in Western Europe in Latin translations of the original Greek. The *Cloud* author’s translation of *De mystica theologia* (*Deonise Hid Divinite*) exists in only two copies: British Library MS Harley 674 and Cambridge University Library MS Kk.6.26.

with material trappings and with appearance and which was ignoring its responsibility to the spiritual Christ in its midst (dwelling among the poor and within his servants). They saw that it was necessary for men to be “more gostly” and “take lesse hede to...sensible signes...newe peyntingis schewid by menis craft,” and “bodies of seyntis” (Hudson, *Selections* 84). Turning, like Hilton and the *Cloud* author, to the Ascension as clear evidence that the time of Christ’s physical presence (and of devotion to the humanity of Christ) was passing, and that a new age of the Spirit was arriving, one Lollard sermon-writer draws out the lesson that physicality and worldliness are obstacles to spiritual revelation:

And we schulden marke this word of Crist, whan he seith to his disciples but yif he goo from hem to hevene, he schal not sende to hem the Hooly Goost... We schal trowe that Cristus disciplus lovedon hym heere to [too] worldly, and thei muston be purged heere of this love by the Hooly Goost; and this thing myhte beste be doon whan manhede of Crist was from hem. And thus for rudnesse of apostles seith Crist that hit spedith that he go from hem...And thus, whan Crist was went to hevene, hise apostles weron cler in love and lefton love of erthly thingus and thowten clenely on heavenly thingus.
(Hudson and Gradon I: 451-52)

The emphasis here is on the disciples’ worldliness; not only have they loved “earthly thingus” but their love for Christ has also been too worldly. It is also on the fact that there is a sense that the bodily is actually restricting the spiritual from arriving.

Unsurprisingly given the element of “practical application” always found in Lollard sermons, the Ascension is taken as a case in point that worldly wealth or concerns (here “worldly lorschepe” is the example) will leave men “undisposede...to take this Goost.”

Despite their very different theological positions, then, in both the negative theology of the *Cloud* corpus and the polemic of the Lollards, emphasis is placed not on

the contemporary obsession with the physical and the bodily, but on discovering the “ghostly.” Indeed, the physical and bodily is seen as something which obscures spiritual realities and acts as an obstacle to attaining them. Both the pseudo-Dionysian *Cloud* corpus and Lollard writings frequently employ the language of stripping, revealing, exposing, “making bare,” and rendering naked, language which, as Sheila Delany has pointed out, carries various (sometimes contradictory) connotations. In her work *The Naked Text*, an exploration of, among other things, what Chaucer may have intended when he described his translation of Ovid’s tales in *The Legend of Good Women* as a “naked text,” Delany considers the various connotations of the word for a medieval audience. “Naked” is the “past participle of a transitive verb: to naken or to nake an object, meaning to make bare, to expose, to strip someone or something of covering or protection. It carries therefore a sense of agency: nakedness is a produced condition, requiring an act of intervention” (118). While “nakedness is not necessarily a usual condition, still less a desirable one,” it also, somewhat contradictorily, denotes the “natural condition: the pristine condition...originary” (118). The ideal of the “original condition” was certainly at the centre of much Lollard teaching. The high value placed on the “original” state - of church, of Bible, of worship - made it essential for Lollards to work towards regaining (producing) this condition through “acts of intervention.” The church had to be returned to the “perfection of the first begynningge” - the original and pristine model of apostolic poverty and purity represented by the first-century church (Hudson, *Selections* 29). Simple transactions between men and God (prayer, intercession, worship, sacraments) had to be stripped of the (largely physical)

accoutrements which covered them. Most importantly, Scripture needed to be translated into English and freed from the corrupt modern glosses which, in too many cases, had become as sacrosanct as the Word itself. Similarly, the pseudo-Dionysius, in a famous image from his *Mystical Theology*, translated by the *Cloud* author as *Deonise Hid Divinite*, hints at this reclamation of the “originary” when he compares the process of contemplation to carving an image of God - his “nakyd, unmaad, and unbigonne kynde” - from a block of wood. As long as we are in these bodies, our sight is limited and we do not see the “nakyd” God “cleerly schewid” but we see him as a “thing that were coverhid and overlapped and overleide with unnoumerable sensible bodies and understandable substaunces, with many a merveilous fantastik ymage, conjelid as it were in a kumbros clog abouten hym.” We must “pare away” this “kumbros clog” in order to reveal the “self fairheed in the self nakid, unmaad, and unbigonne kynde” (*Deonise* 6). Here, the notion of nakedness is applied to both goal (the “nakid” God) and the method (paring away, stripping down, revealing). The “ensaumple” is, however, problematic, using the metaphor of creating an image of God even as it rejects the relevance of such “ymage[s]” and “sensible bodies.” Similarly, in its treatment of language, *Mystical Theology* uses words, “unmaad,” “nakid,” “unbigonne,” while simultaneously exposing their inadequacies: the treatise ends with a comprehensive list of everything we cannot say about God which clearly renders language impotent. This attitude to language is reflected in *The Cloud*. “Nakedness” is therefore used in a positive sense by the pseudo-Dionysius - and by the *Cloud* author after him - even as the limitations of the word itself and the concepts associated with it are themselves “exposed.”

In both writings by Lollards and in the negative theology of the *Cloud* corpus, “nakedness” has positive associations because it infers a move away from the physical nature of “covers” - “sensible signs” and “bodies,” glosses, even language itself - and towards the spiritual or “ghostly” (and therefore superior) nature of the thing they cover - the Word, truth, God himself. Within the writings of Lollards and in *The Cloud*, “fleshly” is a term used to insult enemies. Clearly, likenesses between the two groups should not be exaggerated. While Lollardy established itself in opposition to the church, the *Cloud* author continually asserts his orthodoxy, defers to Holy Church, and defends the place of more “bodily” or physically-orientated practices in the spiritual training of the Christian. While there is no evidence that the church deemed *The Cloud*’s interest in an “unclothed” soul or “unclothed” God to be dangerous or unorthodox, the Lollard call to recover the original condition by “stripping,” “exposing,” “revealing” and “laying bare” met with strong resistance.³ Those who defended the use of images or the doctrine of transubstantiation against Lollard attacks heard in the Lollard call for “nakedness” the threat of “impoverishment,” of things “stripped of what had properly covered or adorned” them (Delany 118). After all, as Bernard of Clairvaux had written, the Incarnation itself - the hiding of God’s divinity in the covering of humanity - demonstrated how God recognises our inability to “love otherwise than carnally,” or to

³ Criticism of *The Cloud* seems to have extended only as far as a small community of religious thinkers who judged the book’s teaching too difficult and obscure. The *Cloud* author describes this criticism in his “sequel,” *The Book of Privy Counselling*. There is some irony in the fact that the very process which the *Cloud* author considered to strip away all knowledge and complication and render connection with God simple and direct was criticised as “curious &...queinte.” In his defence of his work in *The Book*, the *Cloud* author turns these words back against his critics claiming that it is their “coryous kunnyng of clergie & of kynde” that makes them blind to the simplicity of this work (*Cloud* 137).

“not thenke bot bodyes or bodily thinges,” as Nicholas Love put it in his Prologue to the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (McMurray Gibson 14; Love 10). The use of images could therefore be defended on the basis that they not only educated the people but also engaged the emotions of the people - something that had always been God’s intention. As Reginald Pecock argued, it is the “nature of love” to desire the bodily presence of the beloved; images reveal the closeness of Christ’s physical proximity thereby “ferther encrecing...devocioun and good affeccioun to be gendrid upon Crist” (*Repressor* 271, 269). Transubstantiation and the ritual of the Mass were closely tied to emotional engagement with the suffering and death of Christ and its defenders argued that Wycliffite teaching perversely inverted the truth (saying that the eucharist is bread naturally and Christ’s body figuratively), and mis-read the words of Christ and the Church Fathers. On the subject of Bible translation, opponents of the Lollards argued that the vernacular was not a vehicle capable of expressing the spiritual sense of Scripture.⁴ The Lollard call to strip the text of its glosses would, they argued, effectively reduce it to its literal - and most base - sense. Common to all these oppositional responses to Wycliffite teaching is that they are also based on the need to defend the “gostly” nature of these practices and expose the “fleshliness” of enemies. Defenders of the status quo therefore identified the urge to “nakedness” not with the move towards a more spiritual understanding but towards a more fleshly or literal one.

All of these writers, then, from their differing standpoints, characterise their enemies (whether defined as “heretics,” “antecrist’s disciples,” or “proude scholars”) as

⁴ Thomas Palmer who participated in Oxford debates about vernacular translation in the early part of the fifteenth century described English as a deficient language, incapable of conveying scriptural truth.

“fleshly” or “bodily.” This is not surprising given that the opposition, and potential for constant conflict between, the (bad) flesh and the (good) spirit was intrinsic to the medieval Christian’s understanding of his life. There is a specifically hermeneutic edge to the conflict between the two because of the way the “flesh-spirit” opposition was worked out in the reading of Scripture. Scripture was compared to the Incarnate Word, Christ himself. On earth, Christ’s divinity had been covered with a “veil of flesh” and now Scripture imitates Christ by having a “body,” which is the “words of the sacred text,” and a soul which is the “spiritual sense”; letter is therefore “almost interchangeable” with “body” (Smalley 1). The idea that Scripture has both a literal meaning and a spiritual sense was a foundation for medieval exegesis and a fact that had directed biblical exposition from the time of the earliest Church Fathers. If, as according to St Paul’s dictum, the “letter kills” but the “spirit gives life,” discovering the “spiritual meaning” of a passage (essentially by reading allegorically) became a vital necessity and much effort was expended to this end.⁵ According to Augustine, “when that which is said figuratively is taken as though it were literal, it is understood carnally” and nothing causes the “death of the soul” more certainly than subjecting the understanding “to the flesh in the pursuit of the letter” (*Christian* 84). To read only what a text “actually says” rather than its “sentence” or meaning was viewed as a form of illiteracy (Robertson 287).

This distinction between the letter of a text and its real meaning (or “sentence”)

⁵ Following Paul’s own model in Galatians Chapter 4, the Old Testament was read typologically as a foreshadowing of the New. However, the fact that Christ had removed the “veil” from the letter (2 Cor. 3:16) encouraged the idea that there could be layers of meaning to the words and events of the *New* Testament, meanings which applied to the church (the “allegorical” sense), the individual (the “moral” sense), and the afterlife (the “anagogical” sense) (Robertson 292).

ultimately influenced how a variety of texts were read. Across a wide spectrum of doctrinal thought and opinion, it was agreed that what made you a bad reader was a failure to distinguish between the literal and the spiritual meaning, although the definitions of these terms could vary among different groups. In the late medieval works of vernacular theology, writers invoke the flesh-spirit dichotomy in order to identify good and bad readers (who are also good and bad Christians). This chapter explores this process at work in Lollard writings, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Nicholas Love's *Treatise on the Sacrament*, a defence of transubstantiation which concludes the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, his version of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*. The first section considers a group of Lollard tracts which refute the accusation that Lollard preference for the unglossed text means that they read only the literal sense. Lollards turn the tables on their enemies by identifying glossing with a "fleshly" way of reading and with a fleshly way of life. The second section considers the case of *The Cloud*. For a mystic like the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who is trying to go beyond the conventional devotional practices, the failure to differentiate between the physical and the spiritual becomes the worst of errors and one that marks those who are enemies of the contemplative work. Such people are seen as having the potential to misconstrue the work and those books which seek to describe it, including his own. I consider how the *Cloud* author attempts to protect his own text by creating a community of "right" readers who will control the circulation of the text, and how he equips those readers with knowledge designed to help them interpret the text and keep bad readers at bay. The third section considers the example of Love's *Treatise on the*

Sacrament, a tract placed at the end of the *Mirror* and designed to defend the cause of transubstantiation against those who willfully “misread” it. Love’s task is to defend the status quo by demonstrating the (life-giving) spiritual “sentence” found in simple obedience to practices (the use of images), and teachings (transubstantiation) which can seem to be tied to the literal and the physical. All of these texts demonstrate how their writers identify their enemies as bad readers who rely on flawed hermeneutic practices. They scrutinise and expose these bad hermeneutics even as they simultaneously attempt to shape their own readers’ response.

Wyclif’s Literal Sense

For Lollards, Bible translation was an “act of intervention” by which one of the coverings that kept Scripture hidden could be removed. Thus in one Lollard tract written in defence of Bible translation, the anonymous author compares Scripture to a tree that is so thick with leaves that it is impossible to see the good fruit it bears.⁶ When the tree is shaken, however, the fruit falls down and reveals itself; we taste and we realise its sweetness. This “shaking” is described as “studying and good kunnyng” (f51b) but also as translation: “a man understondeth not tyl it be drawen [a]nd shaken in to his owne langage” (f52a). The author follows with a second image of a “derk cloude,” which is what Scripture becomes to the “English man” when it is written in Latin (f52a). Both images emphasise how the benefits or goodness of Scripture are covered up or concealed by a language that most men do not understand; vernacular translation uncovers the

⁶ The tract is the eleventh of twelve tracts all on the subject of Bible translation found in Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26. The collection is discussed at more length below.

Scripture and renders it “naked.”

Language was not the only concern, however. Another “covering” was the lengthy and distracting modern commentaries and glosses, particularly those of the so-called “newe ordris,” especially the friars.⁷ While Wyclif, and most Lollards after him, acknowledged the divine inspiration behind the patristic commentaries of Scripture and their valuable role in the interpretation of the Word, he opposed the imposition of modern glosses which he considered the work of “heretics” twisting the Scripture to “suit their own perverse sense” rather than keeping to the sense of the holy doctors (Wyclif 111).⁸ These glosses needed to be removed because they were both corrupt (more interested in furthering the agenda of the friars than in elucidating the truth) and excessive, at risk of “suffocating” and obscuring the text they were meant to be serving (Ghosh, *Wycliffite* 7; Hudson, *Premature* 274-75). Furthermore, even though the practice of Wyclif and at least the earliest of his followers was to provide aids for Bible reading including brief glosses drawn from the Church Fathers, as Kantik Ghosh, Alastair Minnis, and others have pointed out, Wyclif’s understanding of the literal sense made it possible to reject, at least in theory, the necessity for any glosses at all.

At this juncture it is worth outlining Wyclif’s theory of the literal sense. The traditional four-fold sense of Scripture, the basis of biblical exegesis, distinguished the

⁷ The “newe ordris” was the term commonly used in Lollard writings to describe, disparagingly, the religious orders, most commonly monks, canons, friars, with nuns and hermits or the “emperour clerkis” (the papal curia) variously added (Hudson, *Premature* 347).

⁸ As with so many other of Wyclif’s teachings, there is evidence that his followers took his criticisms further. Hudson provides examples of Lollards who opposed any kind of glossing, rejected the divine inspiration of the Church Fathers and argued for a more *Sola Scriptura* position (Hudson, *Premature* 274-77).

letter from the three spiritual senses - the allegorical, the tropological, and the anagogical.⁹ The superiority granted to the spiritual sense had led to varying degrees of neglect of the literal sense among church leaders and scholars. The literal text had been considered only as something that needed to be looked through, not at, and also as a “cloak or concealment which the commentator must penetrate” if he was perceptive enough (Smalley 2, 24-25). “Full-scale allegorical interpretation” made it possible to argue that correct exegesis required “much learning” and that consulting “tradition” or the ancient “authorities” was the best way to discover spiritual meaning (Minnis, “Authorial” 24). Text-books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other aids were created to help in the pursuit of the spiritual sense and glosses became the accepted repository for the text’s “true meaning.” Reliance on the “authorities” represented by the glosses also ensured that the power of interpretation rested with the theologian, rather than with an independent reader.

Wyclif acknowledged the traditional four-fold sense of Scripture¹⁰ but like other theologians before him, most notably, as far as their influence on Wyclif is concerned, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyre, and Richard Fitzralph, he re-considered the relationship between the four, and the question of authorship (Levy 71). In particular, Wyclif followed in the tradition of these three theologians in their re-consideration and, to some extent, resurrection of, the literal sense. Aquinas, influenced by Aristotelian

⁹ It is worth noting that this is a somewhat simplistic generalisation. As Robertson points out, these terms were not considered “sacrosanct” and other terms, definitions and categories were often used. Beryl Smalley’s survey of the study of the Bible through the Middle Ages reveals some of these variations.

¹⁰ See Wyclif 104. The traditional understanding of the four-fold sense of Scripture is also included in the Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible (*Bible* 1:43).

logic, recognised the unity of body and soul and, correspondingly, of letter and spirit: the “spirit” of Scripture is not something “hidden behind or added on to” the text, but something “expressed by the text” (Smalley 293). The literal sense is therefore seen as “broad enough to encompass the spiritual senses,” meaning that rather than locating the spiritual meanings of the text “hidden beneath the letter, Aquinas place[d] them within the letter itself” (Levy 75, 74). Renewed attention to the letter was also a result of attention on authorship which recognised that, while God is the “first author” of Scripture, “the sacred writers are authors too,” each of whom chose particular words in order to best convey the particular truths they were called to express (Smalley 293). A more scientific, contextual, and etymological study of these words therefore became desirable. Aquinas redefined the literal to incorporate much that had been formerly classified as ‘spiritual,’ something that Lyre also does (Ghosh 13). Lyre is responsible for the phrase *duplex sensus litteralis* which has been described as “the high-water mark of literalistic exegesis” (Minnis, “Authorial” 4). By this phrase, Lyre meant that the literal sense has two meanings: one is the “surface, immediate” meaning of the words and the other is the “figurative or christological” meaning, meanings that would traditionally be described using the four-fold description of literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses (Ghosh 13). Fitzralph, influenced by Aquinas and Lyre, and himself an influence on Wyclif, adopted Lyre’s *duplex sensus litteralis*, which effectively recast “the older distinction between the ‘literal’ and the ‘spiritual’” into a distinction between “two aspects of the literal,” and also asserted that the literal sense is the meaning intended by the author (Ghosh 14). The work of these three theologians re-defined the literal sense

even as it did not “substantially alter the prevailing exegetical situation” (Ghosh 12).

Wyclif, like these predecessor theologians, asserted that the literal sense is that intended by the author, who is God. The literal sense can therefore contain any one of the other senses, depending on what is intended: the literal sense is “that sense of Scripture which the Holy Spirit primarily intends so that the faithful soul would journey upwards into God. In one instance it is the historical, as is clearly the case with the deeds of Christ...At another time it is the moral or tropological...And again it is allegorical... While in another instance it is surely anagogical” (Wyclif 104). Wyclif understood that it is possible to glean four distinct senses from the same text, which creates not just a *duplex sensus litteralis*, but also a *triplex* and *quadruplex* sense (Levy 101). The spiritual meaning of Scripture becomes accessible through the literal sense which means, as Minnis puts it, the “Bible itself provided its best critical apparatus” (“Authorial” 25). The radical implications of this understanding of Scripture provided the basis for Lollard theories of Bible reading and challenged the tradition which located the text’s “true meaning” in an external or additional apparatus made up of glosses and “authorities.” Reducing theology to sacred Scripture and arguing that it contains, within its literal sense, the “apparatus” for understanding the divine meaning leads to the conclusion that “the ancients have no monopoly on inspiration” and that any reader of Scripture has access to the spiritual meaning (Minnis “Authorial” 24). What becomes most necessary, in the process of correct interpretation, is a humble and pious frame of mind and divine illumination - the former making the latter possible; Wyclif wrote that “the meaning of Scripture is comprehended through devotion” (Wyclif 93). With such a state of mind, as

long as the reader is presented with the Word - entire and unadulterated - then the reader can expect to receive the spiritual meaning (which is no less than the mind of God) from the words themselves. By reducing theology to sacred Scripture and conceiving of a world in which “faith is the highest theology” and therefore “every Christian must be a theologian,” Wyclif effectively established an “unglossed” text as a theoretical ideal, even if he did not see a need to create one in reality (Wyclif 300).

Lollard theories of Bible reading privilege the reader by centering on his spiritual condition, showing Lollard allegiance to the devotional tradition which prioritises love.¹¹ The “right” reader for the Lollards is not marked by his learning or clerical status but by his devotion, his “charite.” The possession of “charite” becomes for Lollards, a direct path to the complete understanding of the Scriptures. As *The General Prologue* puts it, “he whos herte is ful of charite conprehendith, withouten eny errour, the manyfoold abundaunce and largest teching of Goddis scripturis, for whi Poul seith, ‘the fulnesse of lawe is charite’” (*Bible* 1:45).¹² While *The General Prologue* does spend time explaining some scholarly directions and guidelines for reading the Scriptures such as the “reulis of Austin” and the “iiii undirstondingis of hooly scripture,” it makes it clear that these are not an alternative to charity: their application will only help “simple men” of “good lyvyng and meeknesse” to understand the text of Holy Writ (49).¹³ One of the main

¹¹ As discussed in the Introduction, a concern with the individual conscience and the necessity of a reader’s right motivation or intention when approaching Scripture was, theoretically, intrinsic to exegetical thought. It was also a characteristic of most vernacular theology.

¹² As Anne Hudson has pointed out, *The General Prologue* to the Wycliffite Bible circulated with only a small number of manuscripts and we cannot therefore regard it as a text of influence at the time. However, as a statement of Lollard convictions about Holy Scripture it is valuable to the modern scholar (*Premature* 238).

¹³ In all, *The General Prologue* refers to the four understandings of Scripture (“literal,

purposes of *The General Prologue* to the Wycliffite Bible is to defend the ability of the “simple” to understand Holy Writ. “Simple,” in this case, essentially means humble, rather than “lewd.” No “simple man of wit [should] be aferd unmesurabli to studie in the text of holy writ” asserts the author and “cristen men and wymmen, olde and yonge, shulden studie fast in the newe testament, for it is ful of autorite, and opyn to undirstonding of simple men, as to the poyntis that be moost nedeful to salvacioun” (2). The consistency of the unified message of Scripture is asserted: “eche place of holy writ...techith mekenes and charite” which means that, though the presence of “derk” places in the Scripture must be acknowledged, their existence is not an obstacle because the “same sentence is in the derkiste placis...whiche sentence is in the opyn placis” (2).¹⁴

Wyclif’s understanding of the nature of the literal sense of Scripture allowed him to argue that the spiritual sense was readily accessible to the well-intentioned reader. In the hands of the right reader, the naked text offers nothing less than the revelation of the mind of God. By emphasising personal piety and an attitude of “charite,” Wyclif shared a traditional and orthodox concern with 1 Corinthians 8:1 (“knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”) and made the motivation of the reader the determinant of correct

allegoric, moral, and anagogic”) (*Bible* 1:43), the seven rules of Tyconius (46-48), and Augustine’s instruction on the seven steps of reading the Scriptures taken from *De Doctrina Christiana* (50).

¹⁴ This successful combination of learning and spiritual humility and devotion is exemplified by the author of *The General Prologue* who discusses his part in the translation process. He identifies himself as a “symple creature” who has needed to live a “clene lif...ful devout in preiers” in order to even attempt the translation. While he acknowledges the technicalities of the work - the difficulties of ensuring accurate translation of equivocal words, for example - he gives equal attention to the need to free his “wit” from preoccupation with “worldly thingis.” The translator sees that both the act of translating and the act of reading (or “understanding”) Holy Writ must come from a combination of “good lyvyng and greet travel [travail]” for only then can the translator be assured of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, keeping him from error (59-60).

interpretation. However, the Lollard defence of the “simple” and the power of “charite” was dangerous because, written in the vernacular, it was potentially reaching the very “lewed” men and women it described.¹⁵ These ideas became all the more explosive when they were attached to a call for vernacular translation of the Bible and for church reform – two goals the Lollards were determined to realise.

“The Letter kills:” Glosses

Aware of themselves as embroiled in a long-term debate in which trials, tracts, and government or church legislation all played a part, Lollards liked to invoke the accusations and arguments of their enemies in their own writings in order that they might set out a clear and full response which was fully grounded in Scripture. Thus, while their opponents’ arguments are prefaced with “thise heretikes seyn cursidli that” or “proude clerkis” and “enemyes...seyn that” (*Holi Prophete* 245, 253, 252), more often than not, Lollards preface their own case with direct reference to Christ or Paul: “[b]ut agens here fals menyngge Crist seith in the gospel,” “[b]ut Poul menyth thus” (452). In short, these “lewd objeccions” are always held up against “Goddis lawe” (455). Lollardy’s emphasis on the naked text and Lollard attacks on glosses (traditionally the repository of the ‘spiritual’ interpretation) opened them up to the accusation that they, like the Jews, were guilty of holding “tenaciously” to the letter while being blind to the sense. Paul’s famous words “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” were – if the number of times they are discussed in Lollard writings is anything to go by – frequently used as a slander against

¹⁵ We could contrast Richard Rolle here who also speaks about the power of the “simple and unlearned” to know God but who wrote in Latin (Wolters, *Fire* 46).

the Lollards and their approach to Bible reading.

Two tracts from a collection of twelve with a common theme of defending Bible translation dating from the late fourteenth century focus on this accusation.¹⁶ The collection is found in a late fourteenth-century manuscript, now Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26. While not all of the tracts may have Lollard origins (some could have been written by orthodox voices who happened to support the translation project and some could have been adapted from earlier work) some clearly contain Lollard polemic and several share common ideas and language. Tract nine begins dramatically by listing the “armes of anticristis disciples agenes trewe men” as three types of slander: the first is that the Lollards are hypocrites, the second is that they are heretics, and the third is the words “the letter sleeth” (f47a). (The order of these three accusations is probably a good indication of the frequency with which they were employed against the Lollards). The writer deals with each accusation in turn, always turning the accusation around and against the enemies. Thus, the writer explains, good men who truly repent and forsake the world are accused of being hypocrites by their enemies, but, in truth, it is these accusers who are the hypocrites, calling themselves Christians and yet being traitors to Christ. Likewise, these enemies will attack a man with the accusation of heresy, and yet all the time they themselves are the heretics for they “don cursed synnes

¹⁶ The manuscript preserving this collection has been dated as c.1382-95. The twelve tracts take up most of the manuscript (158 of 202 manuscript pages). The remainder of the manuscript contains an English adaptation of a part of Honorius D’Autun’s *Elucidarium* which contains interpolations (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation). Individual tracts from this collection have been edited and commented upon (see, for example, Forshall and Madden’s version of the Wycliffite Bible for Tract 2 and extracts of Tract I [I: xiv]; Deansely, *Lollard* 460 for Tract 10, and Hudson, *Selections* 107 for Tract 7). Simon Hunt provides information about the tracts in “An Edition.” My parenthetical references to these tracts give the folio number.

and mentene hem agenes holy writ.” When these two slanders fail to move the good Lollard, Antichrist’s disciples attack him with the words of St Paul: “the letter sleeth but the goostly understandynge schal be taken and not as the letter sowneth,”¹⁷ implying that Lollards listen only to the letter and disregard scriptural injunction to take the spiritual understanding, an accusation Lollards were quick to throw back at their enemies (f48b).

Having cited this accusation, the tract expounds the real meaning of Paul’s words: “And the holy gost understandeth this: that the letter of Moyses lawe understandyn fleischly and not gostly kept nowe sleeth men...And thei that turneth this falsly to cristis gospel ben perilous heretikes...” (f48b). In other words, what Paul is referring to is the fact that now, after the death and resurrection of Christ, we need to understand the Old Testament in spiritual rather than literal terms. To hold on to the rituals and sacrifices of the old law (for example, circumcision) which, having been fulfilled in Christ, should now be understood in a figurative sense (receiving a circumcised heart through conversion or baptism), will “brengeth men to heresie and so sleeth men” (f49a). The writer stresses that this is how the “holy gost understandith” this scripture and that to understand “holy writte other weies than the holy gost wol [does]” makes you a heretic (f48b). To apply this word to “the letter of Cristis gospel” is to interpret the verse “falsly” and this is what “brings men into heresy and sleeth men. And not the letter of the gospel” (f49a).¹⁸ In this way, the Lollard author is able to reverse the argument by

¹⁷ The word “sowneth” or “sownen” when applied to a word or phrase means the literal meaning of that word or phrase, what is revealed in the wording (Middle English Dictionary).

¹⁸ We can note that the corrupt Friar in Chaucer’s *Summoner’s Tale* can be aligned with the Lollard’s enemies here for he too interprets Paul’s verse that the “lettere sleeth” as if it applies to exegesis rather than to the difference between the Old and New Testaments. See Introduction, page 24.

demonstrating that it is his enemies' false interpretations of Scripture that kill the soul, not the "letter of the gospel." From here, the writer turns the tables on his enemies and accuses them of blasphemy against Christ by the way they exalt their own glosses above Scripture: "these disciples of antecrist seyn prively in these wordis that the wordis of Jhesu Crist ben fals and of non autorite but the understondynge that thei han to plesynge of the flesch and colourynge of synne is trewe. And so thei maken Crist a fool and fals, and himself wiser and trewer than Christ" (f49a).

Another anonymous tract, *The Holi Prophete David Seith*, also invokes this accusation and responds to it in a very similar way.¹⁹ It encourages "cristene men" to "be not to moche aferid of objectiouns of enemyes seyyng that *the lettere sleeth*," and states assuredly that "Poul menyth thus: "that ceremonyes either [or] sacrifices of the elde lawe withoutyn goostli undirstondyng of the newe lawe sleeth men bi error of mysbileve... goostli understondyng of ceremonyes and sacrifices of Moises lawe quekenth men of rigt bileve" (*Holi Prophete* 452). To interpret this verse in any other way, continues the writer, is to "mystaken the wordis of hooly writ." Providing many scriptural verses that show how "hooly...mighty, and ful profitable" is the Word of God, the writer condemns those who by "weiward menyng and here wickide lyvyng bringen in deeth of soule that is synne" (452). Thus the writer rounds on his enemies and shows that it is *their*

¹⁹ *The Holi Prophete David Seith* (so-called because these are its opening words) is a tract found in Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.31. It dates from the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Both Ernest W. Talbert (in his survey of Wycliffite writings) and Margaret Deanesly, who edited the text, considered the tract to be a work by Wyclif but this is unlikely. Its existence in this particular manuscript reveals that, whatever its provenance, it circulated among readers within the London merchant class as a "common-profit book" (Scace "Reginald" and Wogan-Browne et al. 149-50. See the Conclusion to this dissertation for more on common-profit books). The quotations here come from Deanesly's edition in *The Lollard Bible* 445-56.

misinterpretation that kills the soul.

By both of these methods - the recourse to an alternative (and well-accepted)²⁰ exposition of the text and the accusations of blasphemy - the Lollards are able to accuse their opponents of failing to interpret Scripture correctly, of misapplying Scripture and taking it out of context, of being, in short, bad readers. In these defences the Lollards effectively turn the tables on their enemies, using the language thrown at them (“sleeth,” “deeth of soule”) to indicate that it is not the “literal” reading of the Lollards that will bring death but rather the blasphemy and bad reading of their enemies. That this bad reading is born, not of ignorance or stupidity, but rather of a malicious desire to manipulate the Word of God in order to advance the agendas of those who oppose Lollardy, confirms the Lollard theory discussed above: those who are fleshly or without good intent will not be able to grasp the true meaning of Scripture. This is stated openly in a Wycliffite sermon which takes 2 Corinthians, Chapter 3 as its theme. Having made reference to the difference between the old and new covenant, and the difference between living by the letter, and by the spirit, the sermon writer pulls no punches in pointing out the ulterior motives of Antichrist’s disciples (who are openly identified as the “four sectis” of the friars):

antecristis trauantis spekyn agen the newe lawe, and seyen that literal witt of it shulde nevere be takun but goostly witt; and they *feynen* this goostli witt aftir *shrewed* wille that thei have. And thus thes four sectis ben aboute to distrye literal witt of Goddis lawe; and this shulde be first and the moste by which the chirche shulde be reulid. And agenus this witt anticrist argueth many weyes: ‘that hooli writt is fals bi this bi many partis of holi writt, and so ther is another witt than this literal witt that thou hast yoven, and this is a *mysti* witt, the whiche Y wole chese to gyve’. And thus faylith autorite of

²⁰ The difference between the two covenants (Old and New, Letter and Spirit) had been the primary interpretation of this verse since the time of Augustine (Alford 200).

hooli writt bi anticrist. (Hudson and Gradon 1: 652-53, my italics)

The sermon writer makes it clear that the religious orders assert the spiritual sense of Scripture over the literal sense in order that they may fabricate an exposition that will promote their own agenda. The writer puts into the mouth of Antichrist the argument that the literal sense is flawed and often false and that the “mysti witt” is to be preferred. Here the private orders (and, by association, the devil) are being associated with a preference for the unclear and mysterious which, of course, gives more power to those who are supposedly “in the know.” Knowledge becomes more exclusive, as is here implied by the words “Y wol chese to give,” with their sense of only some being “chosen.” The words imply that it is necessary to receive something beyond what Scripture provides in order to truly understand the message. In these ways, and others, the sermon writer asserts, Antichrist seeks to “hide and derk the lawe of Crist” while promoting his own agenda (655). These sentiments are also found in *The Holi Prophete David Seith* which accuses the enemies of truth of declaring that Scripture is false in order that they may “clepin her owene errour hooli writ” and declare that their “fleischli undirstondyng is trewe and of auctorite.” In this way they “magnefien hem self and her errour more than God and hooly writ” (451).

The Lollard view takes this perception of glosses to its logical conclusion by inverting the accepted understanding of the “letter kills and the spirit gives life” and showing that it is the letter (literal, “naked” text, as understood by Lollardy) that gives life and the glosses supposedly containing the spiritual sense that will kill you. Glosses, like these arguments of their enemies, are seen to be a product of misinterpretation of the

Word designed to assert selfish agendas. Promoting themselves as “gostly,” the glosses are rather the product of a very fleshly and literalistic frame of mind, utterly disengaged from the purposes of Christ and instead serving the purposes of the world and Antichrist. To remove them is therefore to purge the text, returning it to its originary state and allowing it to be revealed as it is supposed to be. What the Lollards propose, then, is a situation where the reader is faced with the Bible text first and foremost, privileging the significance of the direct relationship between reader and Scripture, a relationship that is absolutely dependent on the inner worth or quality of that reader.

Making the Word Flesh: Reader Response

The eleventh tract of the Cambridge collection is a tract unlike most of the other twelve and is more traditionally “devotional” with an emphasis on moral living and spiritual experience. It describes how an incomprehensible language is a barrier for the man or woman seeking the “sweet” fruit of the Word, but also acknowledges a further barrier, “wicked lyvyng,” which so blinds men that “they wanten the light of gras [grace] truly to undirstonde holy scripture” (f52a). This confirms what we read in so many other tracts on the subject of vernacular Scripture: the truth of Scripture will not enter a soul bound by sin, such a soul may as well try and read the Bible in an unknown language. The writer goes on, applying the familiar words of 2 Corinthians 3:6 to ways of living: “Paul seith the letter sleith, that is fleischly lyvers, breakynge the comaundement of god. But the spirit quickeneth: alle thoo that lyven feithfully after the gostly undirstondynge of holy writte...Wherefore Paul seith be yee ledde...or walke yee

with the holy goost and ye schullen not fulfile the synful desires of youre fleische” (f52b). This verse which, as we have already seen, is commonly interpreted to apply to types of reading or to ways of understanding the Word, is here applied to types of living: “the letter slays” applies to all those who live according to the flesh, breaking the commandments of God; “the spirit gives life” applies to all those who live faithfully according to the commandments of God. By using this verse in this way, this tract makes explicit the strong connection between reading and living. By applying a verse that is usually applied to processes of reading Scripture to ways of living, the writer is drawing on the sense that you are what (or perhaps how) you read and, likewise, you read according to what you are. Just as reading without regard for the spiritual meaning would be wrong, so living without regard for the Spirit is wrong. The Word must be applied and lived out in your own life.

This idea of living out the Word - bringing it to life and making it flesh through the way you live - is upheld as a definitive mark of the truly discerning reader, the reader who has read and received the revelation. In their written manifestos in support of Bible access, including *The General Prologue*, the Lollards use many verbs to describe engaging with the Word including “seeking,” “pursuing,” “studying,” and “keeping.” All ultimately dependent on reading (visually or aurally), these words indicate types of reader response and emphasise the importance of earnest desire, devotion, and obedience in the attitude of the reader. Another equally important word is “living”; to know the Word but fail to put it into practice is more dangerous for the soul than ignorance. Applying the Word to life is the required response to reading a text, and is as necessary

as the right intent. It is understood that “Hooly scripture comaundith no thing...but charite” and “blamith no thing...but covetise” and therefore by reading the Scripture one learns how to live in a way that is pleasing to God (*Bible* 1:44). Indeed, it should be read in order to be lived. The author of *The Holi Prophete* comes near to defining the Scripture as a personal moral guide book, given to us that we may see “therynne our defaultis and amende hem.” The “entent” in reading Scripture, he re-iterates, is “to know here owene freelte and dafautis and eschewe deedli synnes and to kepe wilfulli the comaundements of God, and to do the werkis of merci and gewe hooli ensample to here negebours” (448). The life of the truly discerning reader will itself be both an interpretation of the Scripture and an “open” text which others can “read” to find Scripture declared. In this way “life,” as Wyclif wrote, “is the best interpreter of scripture” (Ghosh 61).²¹

In contrast, bad readers will live lives that are out of joint with the message of the Gospel, proving their bad attitude of heart. Lollards argued that the opposition of the religious orders to biblical translation or the preaching of the biblical text originated in their fear that the unglossed text would expose their own faults (Hudson, *Selections* 190). Thus the seventh tract in the Cambridge collection states that “oure antecristis now, suyng [following] the farisees [Pharisees], tellen not verilich the truthe of the gospel, for thei lyven contrariouly therto; and Crist biddith his children deeme after the werkis” (f43a). The same tract makes an allusion to the glossing of the friars (who are compared to three biblical enemies of God, Cain, Dathan and Abiram) and claims that they “wolden

²¹ We witness another dimension of this process of “bringing the word to life” in Lollard practices of Scripture memorisation, a process that, as Hanna says, made the people “walking books” – another form of incarnating the Word (“Ricardian” 333).

that the gospel slepe safe, for thei ben clepid cristyne of manye: thei prechen sumwhat of the gospel, and glosoun it as hem liketh" (f42b). According to Wyclif, friars do not preach the Gospel for fear that "ther synne shulde be knowun, and hou thei ben not groundid in God to come into the chirche" and thus "they wolden not for drede that Goddis lawe were knowun in Englisch" (qtd. in Besserman 70). The "naked" text thus has the potential to degloss not only the text, but also the very lives of the friars themselves as it exposes them for what they are. This re-iterates the connection between reading and living. The Pharisaic way of life of the friars can be compared to a kind of false glossing on their own lives. Just as a life that is well-lived provides a reflection of the true contents of the Bible, a life lived in hypocrisy and disobedience reflects the false glosses attached to the Word. That life becomes a dissembling text in which outward adornments and flourishes obscure the true contents of the text. Furthermore the "naked" (in the positive sense of "originary," "pristine," and accurate) biblical text would also render the friars naked (in the negative sense of "exposed" and "impoverished"). The naked text is a text that exposes the lives and hearts of others, making it a threat to those who have something to hide; bad living becomes another way to detect bad readers.²²

"Nakid entent:" The Cloud of Unknowing.

The mystical work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, was written at the end of the fourteenth century in order to offer instruction on the process of achieving contemplative

²² Alford comes to a similar conclusion in his discussion about the Friar as glossator in *The Summoner's Tale*. He describes how the Friar glosses both the "true intent" of the Bible and also his own behaviour, putting on the face that "will best serve his own advantage" (Alford 199).

union with God. It was written by a man who was a priest, a spiritual advisor, and, very possibly, a monk, who produced a collection of original works and adaptations of other works all on related subjects.²³ Among these is the *Deonise Hid Divinite*, a translation of the pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*, and the negative theology of the pseudo-Dionysius proves to be a dominant influence on the *Cloud* author.²⁴ It is the process of setting aside all those methods and techniques, words and images, concepts and understandings (including learning, and devotional practices) that we have thus far relied upon in our pursuit of God that is the predominant concern of the *Cloud* author.

Like other devotional and religious writers, the *Cloud* author places special emphasis on the importance of the reader's intention, and of the inspiration and intervention of the Holy Spirit, over and above any natural mental aptitude in the practice of piercing the "cloud of unknowing" between a man and God. Indeed, one of his

²³ Most recent scholarship considers it likely that the *Cloud* author was a Carthusian and certainly the work itself seems to have been most popular with the Carthusian Order (Minnis, "Cloud" 70). The theory that the works were written by the Augustinian mystic Walter Hilton is now largely dismissed (see Glasscoe 166-67 for a review of this debate and Riehle for a defence of Hilton's authorship). The "*Cloud* Corpus" is a collection of seven works believed to have been penned by the same man: *The Cloud*, *The Book of Privy Counselling* (a kind of sequel to *The Cloud*), *An Epistle on Prayer*, *An Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings*, and also three adaptations, *Deonise Hid Divinite*, *A Treatise of the Study of Wisdom* (from Richard of St Victor's *Benjamin Minor*), and *A Treatise of Discerning of Spirits* (derived from St Bernard's *Sermones de Diversis*). See Sutherland 82-95, in particular 91-95, for a review of evidence that *Spirits* and *Study of Wisdom* may not be the work of the *Cloud* author.

²⁴ It is important to acknowledge that this influence has been filtered through the commentaries and translations of others as it is very unlikely the *Cloud* author had access to any of the works of pseudo-Dionysius in their original form (Hodgson, *Cloud* lviii). In particular the *Cloud* author has been influenced by the commentary of Gallus - he claims to have translated by the "nakyd letter" while taking the "sentence" from Gallus' gloss. Considering how the *Cloud* author stresses love over intellect, Turner argues that the *Cloud* version (somewhat ironically given his own concern with avoiding "glossing" in the process of contemplation) is more a product of the gloss than it is a product of the "letter" of the pseudo-Dionysius' text.

earliest warnings to his reader is that he is not to conceive of this work as a work of the intellect. Our two “principal worching mights,” he says, are our ability to know and our ability to love, but we can reach God only through exercising the latter (*Cloud* 19).²⁵ This is a point the author re-iterates in Chapter 8 when he describes the necessity of covering the thoughts of our reason and imagination - however good, holy, or inspiring they may be - “with a thicke cloude of forgetyng” for “love may reche to God in this liif, bot not knowing” (33). The reader must be driven by desire for God alone, God himself and not any of his works or any of his gifts, “for thof al it be good to think upon the kindenes of God, & to love hym & preise him for hem: yit it is fer bettyr to think apon the nakid beyng of him, & to love hime & preise him for him-self” (25).

This desire for the “nakid beyng” of God is said to be the work of the soul that most pleases God (16). This pursuit of God “and noght bot him” means that the reader’s “entent” must be not only free of any other motivations but also uncluttered of any thoughts that are not God (26). Even thoughts of Mary and the saints, the author reverently adds, will be no help in this work which requires a full focus on God himself. Things that were once put in place as means of mediation between the soul and God now get in the way of “direct” experience of God. Deliberate steps - acts of intervention - may be required to bring about this naked state and this is what the *Cloud* author is stressing here: the contemplative must labour to put away and suppress thoughts which act only as a covering of God. The writer describes this as a “naked entent unto God” (17) and a “naked entent directe unto God” (28, 58). With his insistence on a focus on

²⁵Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from *The Cloud* are taken from Hodgson's edition.

God himself, without regard for any other thing - even where these are 'heavenly' or 'spiritual' things, things which inspire or sanctify - the *Cloud* author is advocating what could be described as an "unglossed" meditation on an "unglossed" God. We can make the comparison with the Lollard attitude to the reading of Scripture (direct, unmediated, uncluttered, and without distraction); the *Cloud* author wants to remove the coverings and clothings that "hide" God just as the Lollards do. Indeed, the *Cloud* author's use of the word "naked" here carries positive associations similar to those in the Lollard application of the word to the text. That the *Cloud* author acknowledges the unfamiliarity of these actions (putting aside "good" thoughts about the passion or about Mary) shows that he is aware of the possible strangeness (and seeming unorthodoxy) of this teaching for his reader (see, for example, Chapters 7 and 8). It goes "against the grain" in the same way that the Lollard argument that the removal of glosses will make the Bible more clear inverts standard expectations.

The *Cloud* author suggests that the reward for an "entent" that is focused "nakedly directe unto God" is that God, "pleynly by hym-self" and without any medium, will stir the contemplative's heart and shape his will (70). In other words, the contemplative's "naked entent" will bring him into a direct encounter with God; the lack of "glossing" in either the motivation of the reader or the subject text (God) means that the contemplative himself, individually, will experience God's own revelation of Himself. God, rather than "any menes of redyng or heryng" becomes the teacher, guiding the reader into "sodeyn conseytes &...blynde felynges" that are "sonner lernyd of God then of man" (73). True contemplative experience is for the mystic what reading

the “deglossed” Scripture is for the Lollard: the definitive medium through which any God-fearing Christian can encounter God.

However, the extent of the comparison between this negative theologian and the Lollards is limited. The *Cloud* author is unequivocal in his assertion that objects, actions, devotional thoughts, and physical experiences all have their part to play in laying the foundation for the contemplative life. Without many “swete meditacions” on our own “wrechidnes” or on the Passion, or on the “grete goodness & the worthines of God,” anyone seeking the way of contemplation will “erre & faile of his purpos” (27); the apprentice in contemplations must be trained in reading, thinking, and praying (71). However, the author is also clear that these activities and devotions must be left behind, and their inadequacy for those who would ascend to the higher things of the contemplative life must be recognised: “it behoveth a man or woman that hath longe tyme ben usid in these meditacions, algates leve hem & holde hem fer down under the cloud of forgetyng” for no “mene” or intermediary can lead to contemplative union and any such “mene” will simply prove to be an obstruction (27, 71). The author treads a careful line between warning that traditional practices are a hindrance to the contemplative pursuit, and a refusal to consider them an evil in themselves. Perhaps because of the potential for *The Cloud*’s position, with its “downgrading of...bodily practices and external ceremonies,” to be viewed as unorthodox (Spearing xxvi), the *Cloud* author is very careful to clearly disassociate himself from the position of “heretics” whom he rebukes for their complete disregard for the “comoun doctrine & the counsel of Holy Chirche” and who “brestyn up & blasphemyn alle the seyntes,

sacraments, statutes and ordenaunces of Holy Chirche” (*Cloud* 104). These people, he explains, are reprehensible because their concern for “goostly bemening” leads them to despise the “visible miracle” and “semely bodley observaunces” which convey the spiritual truth; having fed off the fruit, they despise the tree, and having drank from the cup, they throw it against the wall (107).²⁶ Earnest as these comments are, the *Cloud* author expends far more words and energy on a different set of bad readers who demonstrate a more traditional form of “illiteracy”: reading literally what is meant to be taken spiritually.

“The lettere sleeth:” Failures to Discern Sign and Signified

The contemplative work described in *The Cloud* is an entirely spiritual one for it is focused exclusively on the Godhead and not the Manhood of Christ. Though the author is not reluctant to acknowledge the foundational role of literal or “bodely” practices, these do not have a part in the work he is now concentrating on describing. It

²⁶ Opinion varies as to the identity of these heretics attacked by the author in Chapters 53, 56 and 58. In the latest modern translation of *The Cloud*, Spearing considers it “likely” that they are the Lollards “who formed the only English heretical movement in his time” (151). Certainly some of *The Cloud*’s comments on the breaking up and destruction of images could relate to the Lollard rejection of images – evidence of sermons and testimonials (and anecdotal evidence of iconoclastic acts) dates the image debate from the 1380s when *The Cloud* was probably written. Alternatively, Tony Chartrand-Burke argues that the *Cloud* author is referring to groups like the “cathars, beguins and beggars, disciples of Meister Eckhart, and members of the Free Spirit movement” who were all interested in mystical experience but came into conflict with the church. This position has been strengthened by Katherine Kerby-Fulton’s recent study on visionary writing in England which suggests that awareness of the Free Spirit movement in particular was considerably greater than has been previously assumed. Kerby-Fulton provides the example of Hilton’s explicit references to the Free Spirit contemplatives and suggests that the *Cloud* author shows himself to be alert to the “potential difficulties” of “foreign imports” as well as “home-grown...mysticism” (*Books* 268).

is therefore surprising how much the author does end up talking about very “fleshly” practices. The reason for this is the extent to which he chooses to talk about an activity *opposite* to the one he is describing: “feigned contemplation,” a product of misinterpretation. For the writer, the biggest mistake, and the biggest danger, in this work is failing to distinguish between the literal and the spiritual. It is a fault he identifies with immature but ambitious disciples who, significantly, have failed to understand what they have *read* about the contemplative way. Thus, “a yonge disciple in Goddes scole, newe turned fro the worlde...herith men speke or rede about [this work]... or paraventure redith hym-self, &...whan he redith or hereth spoken of goostly worching...[because of] blindness in [his] soule, &...fleschelines & coriouste of kyndely witte, [he] misunderstonde these wordes” (95). In three chapters (45, 51, 52) the *Cloud* author highlights how texts (through reading or hearing) expose these young disciples to knowledge of the contemplative experience which they then misconstrue. It is generally assumed that at least one of the texts that he has in mind is Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris* as he makes a thinly veiled allusion to the title and talks about the physical experiences that Rolle’s mystical work describes.²⁷ While the *Cloud* author may well disagree with Rolle’s depiction of the contemplative experience and consider that its physicality will inevitably lead disciples astray, it is worth pointing out that what he stresses is the role of the young would-be contemplatives in misconstruing the words in the text: “thei conceive

²⁷ In his work *Incendium Amoris*, Richard Rolle describes the feeling of physical heat which he experiences during his devotions. In Chapter 45 of *The Cloud*, in the midst of a discussion of these young disciples who are led astray, the author comments on how they may feel “theire brestes...enflaumid with an unkyndely hete of compleccion.” While this heat is actually caused by the “misrewlyng of their bodies” or even by the devil, these disciples will consider it “the fiir of love” (86).

these wordes not goostly, as thei ben ment, bot fleschly & bodily” (85); “thei reden & heren wel sey that thei schuld leve utward worching...& worche inwards [but]...forthi that thei knowe not whiche is inward worchyng, therefore thei worche wronge” (96). After all, in Chapter 4, the author considers the same possibility of misreading occurring as a response to his own text: “who-so herith this werke outhur [either] be red or spoken, & weneth that it may or schuld be comen to by travayle in theire wittes (...& in this coriousthe thei travayle theire ymaginacion paraventure agens cours of kynde...) trewly this man, what-so-ever he be, is perilously disseyvid” (23). It is therefore not the text which is to blame, but the readers; these “disciples” are nothing less than the devil’s own contemplatives: immature, dangerous, and guilty of bad reading (86).

The *Cloud* author goes to some lengths to describe how these young and deceived disciples turn this spiritual work into a “beestly...worchyng.” Upon hearing instructions such as “lift up [your]...herte unto God” or “unseesingly desire for to fele the love of here God,” these young disciples, “travaylen theire fleschly hertes outrageously in theire brestes” (85). Such “rude streynyges ben ful harde fastnid in fleschlines of bodily felynge, and ful drie fro any wetyng of grace” (87) and will ultimately bring about nothing less than a “woodnes” or madness (96). For some ten chapters (a remarkable amount given that what he is describing is something he is trying to keep his readership from) the *Cloud* author concerns himself with describing the characteristics of outward, physical behaviour which will almost certainly reveal whether or not the disciple is walking in the true way of contemplation. Thus, those who are engaged in counterfeit contemplations manifest many “wonderful contenaunaces” including staring, laughing,

and screwing their eyes up into their heads like “sturfy scheep betyn in the heed” (97).

Some always tip their heads to one side; some cry and whine, and some “gape with thiere mouthes as the schuld here with hem, & not with here eres” and some “rowyn with theire armes in tyme of here spekyng, as hem nedid for to swymme over a grete water” (99).

The implication is that these actions, when they “ben governors of that man that doth hem” are indicators of pride and “coriousty,” of “unstabelnes of herte and unrestfulnes of mynde” (99-100). This “feinid” contemplation is defined as an experience that is “neither bodily worching ne goostly worching” but rather a “worching agens kynde, & the devel is the cheef worcher therof” (96). The failure to discern physical from spiritual, literal from figurative is therefore deemed to have the most dire of consequences.

The reasons that these young disciples are led astray are, it seems, their immaturity, their pride, and their “coriousty” or subtlety of thought or cleverness.²⁸ These three characteristics are repeatedly used to describe those who are misled (three times in Chapter 45 alone) and are amplified through other details: the pride and immaturity of these disciples is revealed in the way they consider themselves good enough to start the work even after only a little prayer and penance and whether or not they have the approval of the Superior (Chapter 51), and their “coriousty” marks all the perverted behaviours the author attributes to them (96). Notably, the Prologue attached to *The Cloud* in which the author “tellith what men & when...schuld worche in this werk,” identifies immaturity, pride and “coriousty” as characteristics of bad readers who

²⁸ The Middle English Dictionary defines the meaning of “curioste” as it is used in *The Cloud* as “subtlety of thought; sophistry.” The word was also used to denote “cleverness,” “ingenuity” and “skill.”

are not to be given access to this book. This Prologue identifies the “right” reader as he who has “purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste” and one who has done all he can for “longe tyme before” to prepare for the contemplative life. Unlike the dangerous “yong” disciples, these readers have been proved. The book should not be read by anyone who is “an opyn preiser...of hem-self” nor by any “corious lettred or lewed men” (2).

In an effort to ensure that his text stays in the hands of the right readers, the Prologue specifically commissions the present reader with the job of determining who to give the book to next. This inevitably involves the reader judging, with discernment, his brothers:

I charge thee and I beseche thee, with as moche power & vertewe as the bonde of charite is sufficient to suffre, what-so-ever thou be that this book schalt have in possession, outhir bi propirte outhir by keping, by bering as messenger or elles bi borrowing, that in as moche as in thee is by wille & avisement, neither thou rede it, ne write it, ne speke it, ne yit suffre it be red, wretyn , or spokyn, of any or to any, bot yif it be of soche one or to soche one that hath (bi thi supposing) in a trewe wille & by an hole entent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste. (1-2)

The author goes on to advise the present reader that a potential reader is recognised by his whole hearted desire to follow Christ not just in the active life but in the contemplative life; a desire that has been expressed “bi thi supposing” in a long-term dedication to “the virtuous menes of active levyng” (2). The repetition of the phrase “bi thi supposing” clearly points to the need for discernment in this task of recognising these characteristics and choosing the audience for this book. The reader is also expected to honestly survey his own intentions in (and therefore suitability for) reading this book despite the fact that, if he himself is only “borrowing” the book, it is most likely that he

has already been held up to scrutiny by the lender and has been judged to be a suitable reader for the book. The author continues and charges the reader with the responsibility of instructing these new readers in how the book should be read (with much thoughtful time taken and with a regard for the whole work rather than particular parts of it).

In both these ways - choosing who should read the book and instructing them how to read it - the reader is to take the place of the author who, absent from the communities of circulation, no longer has that power or control. Of course, in adding the Prologue, the sense of which is also repeated in the closing chapter of the work, the author does write-in his own voice speaking these instructions (in his commission he notes “thou charge hem, as I do thee” - a “thee” that gives the author one-to-one contact with every reader of the book [2]). The suggestion, however, is that he is aware that this written (even if authorial) note will not be enough: that it is necessary to ensure the creation of a “school” or “community” of right readers who will actually speak these instructions to others and thereby protect the text from the “fleschely janglers, opyn preisers & blamers of hem-self...tutilers of tales, & alle maner of pinchers,” for whom it was never the author’s “entent” to write (2). If it worked, it would be the creation of a “safe” reading community, imitating that of the cloister or school, but outside of it.

The attempt to create this interpretive community of “right readers” may explain why the *Cloud* author goes to such lengths to describe the physical activities and the motivations of the “devil’s own contemplatives.” It is a clear aim of the *Cloud* author to keep such people from reading his book which they would only misconstrue. Confident, as he seems to be, that the relationship between “entent” and deeds is a straightforward

one (the disciple who has been led astray into self-deception, *will* demonstrate particular kinds of perverse behaviour while the good nature of the true contemplative is manifested in “his chere & his wordes...ful of goostly wysdam,...fer fro any feyning” [100-1]), what the *Cloud* author offers us in these vivid and detailed descriptions of the “devil’s contemplatives” are guidelines for identifying counterfeit contemplation and those likely to practice it - guidelines of the sort that would come in handy for those hoping to fulfill the author’s initial commission to assess fellow Christians and their suitability as readers of this text. Steering clear of anyone who manifests these particular behaviours will be one way that the current reader can avoid allowing this book to fall into the hands of the immature, the self-praisers, and the “corious.” Given the apparently extreme nature of these counterfeiters’ characteristics, it is unlikely that any reader would have trouble spotting them but, for good measure, the *Cloud* author adds the assurance that discretion is a qualification of the “trewe” disciple; the gift of “discrecion...of alle kyndes and alle complexions,” in other words, the ability to discern or to “read” the nature of other people, is one of the gifts that comes with true contemplation (100).²⁹ There is, it must be said, something rather disconcerting about this whole formula. Given the work’s insistence that we must rise above the physical in every way, the author’s easy assumption that bodily behaviours reveal the true inner condition of the man, and his assertion that potential readers could be judged by anything from the pitch of their voice

²⁹ This truth is given startling visual potency in Chapter 55 where our guide describes how the fact that the devil has only one nostril (information he has heard from necromancers) is a symbol of the fact that his followers lack all “discrecion goostly” and show no discrimination in either their own “corious conceites” or in their hasty judgements of other mens’ faults. The “staunson” or division in the nose is a symbol of a man’s ability to “dissevre the good fro the ivel,” an ability he exercises before making any kind of judgements (103-4).

to the angle of their head, seem an incongruous exception which points out one way the author, as much as these counterfeiters, may be still tied to a very earthly perspective.³⁰

Shaping the Writing (and Reading) Process

Despite the degree of detail the *Cloud* author employs in what are - essentially - demonstrations of the consequences of misconstruing the nature of the fleshly and the ghostly, he does go to some lengths to try and prevent the error happening to begin with. He liberally sprinkles throughout his work warnings about taking what is meant spiritually, physically: “& thus me thinketh that it nedith greetly to have moche warnes in understanding of wordes that ben spokyn to goostly entent, so that thou conceyve hem not bodily, bot goostly, as thei ben mente” (95); “be wel ware that thou conseyye not bodily that that is seyde goostly” (94); “oure werke schuld be goostly, not bodely, ne on a bodily maner wrought” (106); “bodely schewynges were done by goostly bemenynges”

³⁰ It is worth noting that the reader’s ability to judge is somewhat qualified by *The Cloud*’s orthodox acknowledgement that a man should not judge his brother: “no man schuld be demyd of other here in this liif, for good ne yvel that they do” because only God knows the heart of a man (65). This conclusion sits somewhat uneasily beside the rest of the text which, as has just been noted, seems to acknowledge the necessity of passing judgement in some form or other. It is an internal contradiction between what is being instructed (do not judge) and what is being illustrated (a method to be actively practiced by the reader, to some extent on behalf of the author, in order to identify the good from the bad). It is, however, an inevitable contradiction given the concession that must always be made: that God is sovereign and we should not presume to know his mind. This is also apparent in *The Cloud*’s Prologue in which the commission of the current reader to judge the appropriate qualities of other potential readers exists side by side with the acknowledgement that each man is led into this contemplative work by the inward stirring of the “prive sperit of God, whos domes ben hid” (3). If God’s spirit is “prive” or secret and his judgements unknowable then making assessments of his possible choices and purposes becomes a risky and uncertain business, particularly as those who receive this inner prompting may not be the obvious choices.

(109); “beware that thou conceyve not bodely that that is mente goostly” (114). The crux of the problem, as any mystic would acknowledge, is language:

For thof al that a thing be never so goostly in it-self, nevertheless...yif it schal be spoken of, sithen it so is that speche is a bodely werk wrought with the tonge, the whiche is an instrument of the body, it behoveth alweis be spoken in bodely wordes. Bot what therof? Schal it therefore be taken and conceyvid bodely? Nay, bot goostly. (114)

In other words, no matter how spiritual something is, we are forced to use words if we want to express it, words which are generated from the body and are “bodely” themselves. This does not mean that the meaning need partake of this bodely nature, however, for words are just the necessary tools used to convey something greater. The *Cloud* author touches here on a central paradox of mysticism - one identified by Jeffrey Hamburger as the difference between mystical theory and practice. In theory, mysticism is the “unmediated and intuitive experience of an ineffable God”; in its root sense the Greek word means “to remain silent” or “to close” the lips or eyes” (*Rothschild* 1). In practice, “mediation is inevitable. The mystic uses metaphors and symbols as a matter of religious necessity to express what would otherwise remain inexpressible” (2).

What seems most significant here is how the *Cloud* author shares with his audience his problems and complications with language, making his readers aware of the vagaries of language as well as the power of words. His consciousness of both the weakness of language and the possibility of the reader’s failure to take the language in a spiritual rather than a literal sense, leads him to think carefully about his own choice of words *and* to share that thought process with his readers. In chapters 46 and 47, for example, the author encourages his disciple to try and “hide” from God the desire that is

in his heart when he might be expected to encourage him to show his desire. He gives several reasons for this surprising choice (including that he wants to draw the reader away from “the boistouste [roughness] of bodely felyng into the purete & depnes of goostly felyng” [88]) but in chapter 51, comments “paraventure...[if] I had boden thee schewe thi desire unto God, thou schuldest have conceyvid it more bodily then thou dost now, when I bid thee hele [conceal] it. For thou wost wel that alle that thing that is wilfully helid, it is casten into the depnes of spirit” (95). The instruction “to hide” rather than “to show” has been chosen because it has a better chance of being understood spiritually rather than physically although, by describing his first thought, the author has also succeeded in sharing with the reader the instruction “to show.” Again, the author shares with the reader the ways in which he has been led to carefully edit or even censor his words. Thus in Chapter 68 he explains that while “another man wolde bid thee gader thi mightes & thi wittes holiche withinne thi-self, & worschip God there - though al he sey ful wel & ful trewly... - yit for feerde of disseite & bodley conceyvyng of his wordes, me list not byd thee do so” (121). Even though there is nothing that the author objects to in this command to withdraw all thought and power into oneself, the author suggests he cannot bring himself to use these words, for fear they will be interpreted in a physical or literal way. Simultaneously, however, he has, of course, just used these very words. The result is that the *Cloud* author effectively includes the words he finally omits, as if sharing with his readers more than one draft of his work. The effect of these conscious attempts to elucidate both what he means and what he does not mean is to create a kind of “gloss,” a commentary on how to interpret the text. He also models an attitude to

language and a thoughtful approach to processing the meaning of the words in the text which he hopes will be imitated by his reading community.³¹

The restrictions that the *Cloud* author places on his own vocabulary suggests an urge to silence that is only to be expected in mysticism where the relationship to the word is never an easy one. Indeed, this is a path which *The Cloud* seems to pursue in its final chapters where the influence of the pseudo-Dionysius and apophatic theology is clearly apparent. The *Cloud* author counsels his reader to exchange concepts of “everywhere” and “everything” for “nowhere” and “no-thing,” for what seems “nothing” to our outer man is “All” to our inner man (122). A leaving of the senses and all outward understanding, including physical images as well as words, acknowledges the limitations of the material world. Re-iterating that no man can know God intellectually, the author describes how a man may discover God through accepting the limitations of knowledge

³¹ It is important to note that *The Cloud* does not consider language the only problem. Physical signs such as “revelacions...in bodley licnes” (heavenly visions in physical form) must also be interpreted according to their spiritual significance. That the messages take on this physical shape is a concession to our lack of spiritual insight; if we were spiritual enough to “have conceyvid theire bemenynges goostly,” then they “had never ben schewid bodily” (107). Our guide uses the examples of the visions of St Martin and St Stephen as cases in point. Just because both these saints saw Jesus appear from the sky, does not mean that their examples teach us to look physically up in order to see heaven (107). That St Stephen saw Jesus standing in heaven, does not mean that we should become concerned about Jesus’ physical appearance and what posture he may have assumed at this moment (108). Rather we should understand the spiritual sense of Stephen’s vision which is that Jesus is “standing by” Stephen, supporting him and helping him in his time of trial (109). In the case of St Martin, who saw Christ standing in heaven and wearing Martin’s cloak, the message is not that Christ ever wore Martin’s cloak in any physical way as if “to kepe him fro colde” but the message is rather a physical demonstration of the Christian message that “who-so clotheth a pore man & doth any other good deed for Goddes love, bodily or goostly... thei schul be rewarded as substancyaly therefore as thei had done it to Cristes owne body” (107). The physical vision is meant to convey a spiritual, and a practical, message about finding the true likeness of Christ in the poor and needy. Thus we must “pike of the rough bark, & fede us of the swete kyrnel” (107).

and he quotes the pseudo-Dionysius: “the moste goodly knowyng of God is that, the whiche is knowyn by unknowing” (125). This “unknowing” is a point beyond the senses and beyond language, even a “naked” language (after all, even “naked” is a “polysemous signifier” [Delany 122]). The contemplative path ultimately leads to a spiritual condition where it is no longer necessary to read, or to think on, or to imagine, words or images and this, it seems is the ultimate safeguard against erroneous reading and hypocrisy.

The Case of the Eucharist: Love’s Treatise on the Sacrament.

The Cloud warns us that negotiating the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, the visible and the hidden is a complicated business. The text criticises both those who overvalue the spiritual *and* those who cannot get beyond the physical while it itself promotes the need to strip away all “coverings” in the pursuit of God and simultaneously determines that appearances and physical behaviour should be “read” as trustworthy indicators of a man’s spiritual condition. One thing the text *does* maintain is that exposure - be it of God, the hearts of men, or the limitations of language - is a good thing. In contrast, Nicholas Love, in his defence of orthodox teaching on the eucharist - the sacrament which had long been a locus of debate over the dangers of literalism - questions the benefits of “exposure” and associates the call for “nakedness” with fleshliness.

As a sacrament, the eucharist *is* a negotiation between the physical and the spiritual. What this negotiation should look like had been the subject of earnest debate since the ninth century. Discussion moved between the “visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual, and the external and the internal” as the very nature of the

sacrament was defined (Stock 253). Some placed emphasis on the “spoken, the physically symbolic, and the performative” nature of the sacrament (Stock 259); the sign (*figura*) was substantially converted into the reality (*veritas*) of Christ’s physical presence (Levy 149). For others, “emphasis was placed on interpretation” in that the physical became merely a vehicle by which to understand the spiritual (Stock 254). A clear distinction was made between reality and the material figure or veil which covers it; just as Christ’s language is figurative and needs to be read allegorically, so we must search for meaning beneath the “formalistic surface” of the sacrament (Stock 259-60).³²

Transubstantiation was formally decreed as doctrine by the church at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 when it was stated that Christ’s “body and blood are really contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood by the power of God” (qtd. in Bynum 288-89). At that time, the term was “still open to multiple interpretations” but, one hundred years later, the Lateran decree would be considered the “only legitimate formulation” of the eucharist mystery (Levy 173, 214). The shift from relative freedom of interpretation on this issue before the ninth century to the pursuit of one “correct” interpretation to the exclusion of all others reflects greater changes in the church as a whole, in particular the need to assert uniformity in matters of doctrine (Levy 127). This desire for uniformity was expressed in scholastic formulations which “fixed”

³² The two most famous eucharist debates between the ninth and eleventh centuries were between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus, two monks of the monastery at Corbie (c830) and, two centuries later, between Lanfranc of Bec and Berengar of Tours. The “literal” position can loosely be identified with Radbertus and Lanfranc while the “metaphorical” position largely defines the writings of Ratramnus and Berengar (whose writings were ultimately condemned). See Brian Stock 244-325 and Levy 123-54, for extensive discussion of these debates.

points of doctrine as a matter of law and punished deviation (Levy 218). As R. I. Moore's discussion of persecuting societies demonstrates, it is by establishing set requirements of doctrine and discipline that the church creates a watertight definition of "orthodoxy," and simultaneously makes "heretics" out of all those who refuse to subscribe to those doctrines and disciplines (68).

Once established, transubstantiation, and the teachings associated with it, radically altered the way the sacrament was viewed and administered. The teaching that the moment of transubstantiation took place at consecration (rather than at communion) exalted the role and power of the priest and made the priest's elevation of the Host during the Mass a key devotional moment. Witnessing this moment of elevation was believed to offer some "sacramental efficacy" and "sacramental viewing" became a helpful substitution to actually consuming the Host - an act which the doctrine of transubstantiation had actually made more problematic (Rubin 63).³³ The importance of this moment is apparent in changes in church architecture and liturgy. The Mass, as a daily reminder of Christ's broken body and his shed blood, became an important focus of this devotion to the body. Devotion to the Host was manifested in the setting up of the Corpus Christi festival in the early fourteenth century as well as the placing of Hosts in monstrances on display and in procession.³⁴

Brian Stock has pointed out how in the eucharistic debates of the ninth to the

³³ The fact that "the host was considered such a precious object unto itself, and thereby in danger of defilement" meant that it became rare for the laity to take communion (Levy 211). See also Duffy 95.

³⁴ Indeed, of the encounters with the sacrament that Margery Kempe describes in her book - most of which cause her to weep and experience many "holy thoughts" - most are simply viewing encounters and do not involve the act of communion (*Book of Margery Kempe* 171, 126, 102).

twelfth centuries a “classic rift” opened up between “an intellectualist position, which, of course, both [sides] claimed to represent, and what was as a consequence considered to be erroneous, unreflective, or simply illiterate.” Each group asserted that “the other’s ideas constituted a ‘popular’ debasement of higher culture” (242). The group that would ultimately be associated with transubstantiation was accused of “naïve physicalism” (275) and of pandering to the “uneducated masses” who only trusted “appearances and physical changes” (296-97). Those who advocated a more figurative reading of the sacrament were likewise accused of hoodwinking the weak and easily-swayed laity by “focusing their attention on superficial linguistic questions at the expense of deeper mysteries”; in other words, prioritising the “letter” over the “spirit.” (297). Turning to the late fourteenth century, we find that the debate on transubstantiation between Wyclif and the church follows very similar lines. Wyclif accused the church, and friars in particular, of deliberately allowing the people to misunderstand the true nature of the eucharist in order to wield power over them while his orthodox opponents accused him of craftily manipulating the language of the church in order to confuse the unwary and throw them from their “saving faith” (Levy 314, 312).³⁵

Wyclif never denied the importance of the eucharist, nor did he deny Christ’s presence in the sacrament (which he saw as a virtual, spiritual, and sacramental presence as opposed to a substantial, corporeal, or dimensional presence [Levy 269]). He did,

³⁵ Wyclif’s position is expressed in several of his works where he criticises the churchmen who encourage the idolatrous excesses of the laity for financial gain (see Levy 241-2 for examples). Levy also provides the example of Netter here who aimed to expose the “craft” of Wyclif’s manipulation of language in his *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae*.

however, reject transubstantiation which he saw as contrary to the laws of nature.³⁶ The material and physical associations surrounding the chief sacrament were also a major source of concern to Wyclif and to Lollards. That men and women were behaving “as if Christ appeared, substantially and totally, in the wafer” was nothing less than idolatry as far as the Lollards were concerned (Bynum 291). Wyclif considered the eucharist the most disturbing example of the people’s failure to distinguish sign from signified, the classic error of a “generation seeking after signs” (Levy 241). As Wyclif saw it, the people were encouraged to believe that the Host was identical to Christ’s body rather than realising that Christ is only spiritually present in the sacrament (Levy 242). Wyclif saw the people, and the clergy and friars who fostered their ignorance, as too tied to the fleshly or material, as “lost in their obsession with the transformation of earthly elements, thereby rendering themselves incapable of recognising the greater spiritual reality which await[ed] them should they turn their gaze upwards” (Levy 274).³⁷ Wyclif’s criticism

³⁶ Transubstantiation requires a belief in the annihilation of the substance of the bread and the wine, meaning that these accidents can exist without substance. For Wyclif, such an idea was at odds with natural order and therefore impossible. He “rejects the argument that while this might be impossible in the natural order, it is still possible for God supernaturally. For Wyclif, such an event is simply contrary to the Divine Nature, inasmuch as God does nothing superfluously” (Levy 276).

³⁷ We can make a comparison here with Wyclif’s view of Scripture. In *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, Wyclif identifies five levels of Scripture: the first and most important level is the Book of Life or Christ himself, and the fifth level is “the manuscripts, sounds or other artificial signs designed to bring to mind that first truth” (Wyclif 98). It is the fifth and least important of the levels which, perversely, Wyclif claims, garners the most attention: “this modern generation, intent on seeking after signs devotes its attention chiefly to this aspect of Scripture, despite the fact that what it possesses is no more fittingly considered Scripture than the lines on a hand discerned in palm-reading” (Wyclif 103). Although “the Word permeates all levels of Scripture in a descending fashion,” obsession with the lowest level of Scripture - the mere codex - prevents one ascending to the higher levels. Likewise, obsession with the material elements of the eucharist prevents one from ascending to the “highest realm of existence” where one can see the “glorified body in all the celestial splendour of the beatific vision” (Levy 275).

was echoed (although with less theological sophistication) by his followers. The Lollard Walter Brut, writing his polemical defence at his trial for heresy, describes how the people are “marvelously deceived” for they “beleve that they see the bodye of Christ, nay rather Christ himselfe betwene the hands of the priestes (for so is the common oth they sweare): By hym whom I sawe thys daye betwene the priestes hands” (Foxe 591). Brut, in comparison, asserts that simply to believe is to partake in, and to consume, Christ: “as wee beleue by our fayth that he is true God, so must wee also beleue, that hee is true man. And then do we eate the bread of heauen, and the flesh of Christ. And if we beleue that he did voluntarielye shed hys bloude for our redemption, then doo wee drinke hys blood” (Foxe 590). As believing is therefore to “eat spiritually,” it is clear “that they do greatly erre which beleue that they eate not the bodye of Christ, but when they eate with their teeth the sacrament of the body of Christ” (Foxe 591). To the anxiety over the excessively literalistic understanding of the eucharist, Wyclif joined a sense that the eucharistic ceremony was too often allowed to distract from Scripture, the source of our true communion with Christ who is the Word itself (“whom” and not “which” the Father sent into the world [Wyclif 98]). Wyclif considered preaching God’s word to be a “more solemn act than consecrating the sacrament... because preaching is more effective in blotting out mortal sins” (Wyclif 286).

By the time Nicholas Love produced his version of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, there was clearly a felt need for an orthodox - and popular - defence of church teaching on the eucharist. That Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* sought, among its other aims, to challenge head-on the teachings of the

Lollards is apparent from the addition of material specifically marked as “contra lollardos”; that Archbishop Arundel, at least, considered that the text did this successfully is apparent in his approval of the work for its “confutation of the heretical Lollards.”³⁸ Love concluded the *Mirror* with a treatise “of the heist and moste worthi sacrament of cristes blessed body & the mervueiles therof” which continued the defence of transubstantiation and the miraculous nature of the sacrament begun in Chapter 39, the Last Supper, a passage explicitly marked as “contra lollardos.” Chapter 39 identifies the players in the biblical scene with the different parties caught up in the current controversy: Jesus represents the priesthood and is a model to them; the disciples represent the faithful communicants who receive the sacrament with “drede & reverence,” and Judas, with his “grete obstinacye & malice” represents the Lollards (Love 151, 150). Love manages to retain a focus on the “devout imagining” of the scene - providing prompts for the reader as to how and what to imagine - while simultaneously attacking Lollard beliefs and issuing a statement of orthodox belief on the eucharist:

The sacrament of the autere dewly made by vertue of cristes wordes is verrey goddus body in forme of brede, & his verrey blode in forme of wyne, though that forme of brede & wyne seme as to alle the bodily wittes of man brede & wyne in his kynde as it was before, nevertheless it is not so in sothenesse, bot onely goddus flesh & blode in substance, so that the accidents of brede & wyne wonderfully & myraclesly ageynus mannus reson, & the commune

³⁸ The “standard position” of criticism on Love's *Mirror* is that it was conceived as an “official alternative” to the Lollard Bible, designed to substitute the asking of doctrinal questions with affective meditation on the life and death of Christ, and to substitute the Word of God with “devout ymagynyng.” This position has been analysed and challenged by Michelle Karnes in her recent article on Love's use of the Gospel meditation genre. Karnes argues that by “writing Gospel meditations into religious politics” scholars have rendered the entire genre “institutional and conservative” (403). Such a perspective occludes an accurate assessment of Love's own use of the Bible and the genre (405). For more on the relationship between Scripture and the Gospel meditations tradition see the discussion of *Book to a Mother* in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

ordre of kynde, bene there in that holi sacrament without hir kyndely subiecte, & verrey cristies body that suffrede deth upon the crose is there in that sacrament bodily under the forme & liknes of brede, & his verrey blode undur likenes of wyne, substancially & holely, without any feynyng or deceit & not onely in figure as the fals heretike seith. (153-54)

This is the teaching, asserts Love, that has been “halden stedfastly so many hundred yere, & of so many holi men, Martires, confessours” (153). He applies this teaching to the very first eucharist and encourages his reader to do the same, prompting them to consider what the disciples were thinking when Christ told them that the bread he gave them was his body even though his body was right there before their eyes. “Bot than,” explains Love, “was not that brede as it semede...bot onely the likenes or the forme of brede & wyne contynyng verrey cristes flesh & blode” (153). Such a miracle is beyond man’s reason or understanding and so the disciples (Love tells us twice) “laft alle hir kyndely reson” and “restede onely in trewe beleve” (151,153). Judas, however, tied to “bodily felyng”, failed to believe and was damned - as are the Lollards who, however, are even more guilty than Judas because, unlike him, they do not have Jesus’ physical body before them - the perhaps understandable obstacle to belief that faced Judas.

The *Treatise* continues the attack by emphasising the distinction between “kynde,” “kyndeley witte,” or “kyndely reson” (referring to nature and the natural order) and the ways of God, be it God’s direct intervention or the nature of faith in God and Holy Church. Thus, Christ’s body, conceived by the Holy Spirit, is “above kynde” (Love 225), God works “merveiles abovene the commune course of kynde” (227), and the miracles of the eucharist that God carries out cannot be comprehended “by kindly reson...bot onely by trewe byleve” (229). Love uses “kynde” and “kyndely” as

essentially negative terms throughout the *Treatise*, thereby emphasising his point that the eucharist itself, and the process of receiving the eucharist, have little to do with either the natural order or natural reason (indeed, these are inadequate terms for any discussion of the eucharist). We note this as he turns to the criticism of “heretykes” who “leve not that holi doctors haven taut, & holy chirch determinede of this blessedde sacrament, bot falsly trowene & obstinately seyne that it is brede in his kynde” (referring to the Wycliffite idea that the bread remains after the consecration). Lollards are clearly to be identified with “kynde” and with a “kyndely” perspective. Love accuses them of denying transubstantiation and insisting on the continued presence of the bread simply because “it semeth so to all hir bodily wittes,” thereby accusing them of being too tied to a physical, or literal perspective (227). Furthermore, it is pride in their “kyndely witte” which prevents them from submitting to the teaching of Holy Church. To believe that God may not or will not transcend the “commune course of kynde” (a reference to Wyclif’s assertion that God will not go against the laws of nature) is to believe that he is less than almighty or less than utterly loving (227-28).

In parallel with the Lollard approach to Bible reading, Love asserts that true benefit from the eucharist only comes to those who have an attitude of love and dread (an attitude that should make them submissive to the church whatever the Lollards might say) while “kyndely reson,” “principales of philosophy,” and “gostly pride” only get in the way. Citing Gregory, “feith hath none merite, to the which mannus reson yiveth experience,” Love reminds us we should put our faith and trust in what the holy doctors have taught and what Holy Church has determined even though our “kyndely reson

ageyn sey it” (Love 229). Aware of Lollard accusations that a belief in transubstantiation demonstrates an inability to conceive of spiritual matters in anything but physical terms, Love turns the tables and accuses Lollards of seeing with their “bodily eyene” while Love’s Christians see “goddus body” with their “gostly eyene”: “[w]e...honouren not brede [as the “fals heretyke seith”] bot god & his blessedde body in forme of brede, that is to sey in that likenes of brede that we seene with oure bodily eyene. We honouren goddus body that we seene by trewe byleve in soule with oure gostly eyene” (228).

At the heart of Love’s defence of transubstantiation is a desire to assert the sacrament’s essentially spiritual nature even as it vigorously defends and celebrates the very physical reality of the sacrament. Indeed, there is an extent to which Love blurs the boundary between what is physical and what is spiritual. In Chapter 51, for example, Love describes the possibility of encountering Christ - through the sacrament - in a manner that is at once “in the soul” and also deeply physical. He reports this encounter as being the experience of “one person that I knowe” who felt “sensibly” the “bodily presence” of Christ” and experienced the joy of being “joynede body to body” (154). The experience was both “in his soule” accompanied by an “inward” sight of Jesus on the cross, and in his body which was “enflaumed of so deletable & ioyful a hete that hem thenketh sensibly alle the body as it were meltyng for joy” (154). The experience, Love suggests, is ineffable and can only be understood by those who have experienced it and it is also, Love suggests, superior to the visions of Christ that compose the miracle stories because “the witte of that bodily felyng passeth in certeynte the witte of siht” (155). This convergence of physical and spiritual is reiterated through Love’s concluding words on

this experience where he compares it to the experience of the disciples at Pentecost:

And it semeth that joyful felyng in the body is like to that that holi church singeth of the Apostles & disciples at the feste of Pentecost, when the holi goste was sent to hem sodeynly in the likenes of fire withoutforth, & unspeakable joy in hir bodies withinforth, that is that hir bowels fillede with the holi goste joyede sovereynly in god. (155-56)

Here Love takes the moment that signified the arrival of the Holy Spirit (to be seen in relation to the removal of Christ's physical presence at the Ascension) to emphasise how even this essentially spiritual experience was a bodily one also. This agrees with the teaching at the start of the *Treatise*, that Christ's promise (just prior to his Ascension) to be "with us always" referred not only to the arrival of his spiritual presence through the Holy Spirit but also to his on-going physical presence through the eucharist. The "sensible felyng" of this experience "sheweth & proveth sovereynly, the blessed bodily presence of Jesu in that sacrament" (154).

Love is not afraid to exalt the superiority of the sacrament on the basis of its physical nature: its purpose, he says, is to put us in "mynde" of Christ's life and death but, unlike "alle other thinges passeded that we have mynde of," this remembrance is manifested in "bodily presence" and not only "conceyven in spirite & in herte" (225-26). Yet this emphasis on the physical is softened by the description of "gostly mete" (twice mentioned), a phrase which suggests the union of spiritual and fleshly. Having apparently somewhat slighted the miracles of the eucharist in Chapter 39 by considering them inferior (because based on "siht") to the divine encounter based on "bodily felyng," Love goes on to make the recounting of miracles stories one of the prime concerns in the *Treatise*. Love reminds us of the miracles that take place every time the sacrament is

enacted: bread is turned to flesh, Jesus' body is present both in heaven and in the host, and upon many altars at one time. Of these miracles we "have knowing onely by byleve withinforth" (228). Sometimes, though, these miracles may be revealed "opunly" - through occurrences like visions or instances of divine intervention - and then what has been hidden is "shewede withoutforth" (237). It is these that form the bulk of Love's *Treatise*.

Stories such as those that Love gives in his *Treatise* were a well-established part of eucharist teaching, widely-circulated and often used by friars in their preaching. The tales are an expression of the "sort of piety" that made transubstantiation seem "obviously true," and, as Bynum suggests, these tales enhance the reality of Christ's bodily presence in the sacrament by taking the doctrine to what is surely the logical next level: actually seeing God (289). With their sometimes very gruesome depictions of Christ's flesh and blood, these stories remove the coverings and "reveal," "expose," or "lay bare" the very physical reality of the transformation (a reality that we are usually protected from because it would put us off eating it). The tales were popular and could be more effective than sermons in conveying the meaning of the sacramental claims of the Mass (Rubin 113). They required, however, faith and belief; Love warns us that reason or learning may also get in the way of our receiving any "confortable effecte" from the stories of "merveiles & miracles" associated with the eucharist. As these take up more than half of Love's *Treatise*, this provides a helpful reminder to the reader that they better be enjoying what they are reading. To some extent, then, by devoting the majority of his *Treatise*, not to doctrinal or theological discussion, but to the recounting

of “merveiles,” Love panders to what he expects to be his audience’s fascination for “signs and wonders.” However, Love’s use of these stories also reveals an attempt to uphold the credibility of the doctrine of transubstantiation and to assert its essentially spiritual, as well as supernatural, nature.

The first story Love recounts - describing how King Edward and the Earl of Leverich saw a vision of Jesus at the moment of the elevation during Mass - demonstrates how God may grant miracles for the consolation of believers. Here, Love’s interest seems less with the vision itself and more with the history of the tale and how it has come to now be known. After the vision, Edward determines that they are to keep silent about what they have seen “leste we therebye falle in to veyn glorie & pride, thorch the opinion of the commune peple to oure gostly deth, or leste the envye of misbylevyng men lette & destruye trewe byleve” (Love 231). Love then goes into considerable detail to explain how, given the pact of secrecy, the story is now known to us. It turns out that, inspired by the “holy gost,” Leverich confided in a religious man who then wrote the story down “& putte it in sicke a place that it miht be unknowen to hem that than were lyvyng.” Many years later “thorch the miht of god,” brothers of the house found the written testimony and “puplyshede it opynely in the eres of the peple,” as was the “ordinance of god” (231).

What Love offers in this detailed account of one miracle is an analogy for the miracle of transubstantiation itself and the credibility of this doctrine. Edward’s attitude to the experience reflects church teaching about the mystery of transubstantiation: while Christ’s bodily presence is undeniably real, it is hidden from us so that we remain humble

before God and do not fall into “veyn glorie & pride.” Tangible proof of Christ’s physical presence is also denied because of the danger posed by “misbylevyng men” (just like the Lollards, in fact) who seek to destroy the truth. As the credibility of this one experience is guaranteed by its extensive and well-plotted history which is marked by the intervention of God, so the church’s doctrine of transubstantiation is the reliable outcome of a divinely directed history. The church’s viewpoint is upheld as trustworthy, and the eucharist upheld as a miracle as great as the marvelous vision experienced by Leverich and his king.

The testimony of St Hugh of Lincoln - a story Love offers to demonstrate how God provides miracles to convert unbelievers - is used to emphasise the spiritual nature of the eucharist and defend it from those who misread it. Saint Hugh hears from his clerks the testimony of a parish priest who experienced the transformation of the host into flesh and blood right before his eyes even though he was also in a state of sin and corruption. The sight of the “flesh...alle overe wete with the rede blode” leads the man to repent of his sinful ways and the Host is remains as a “preciose relique” visited by “mikel folke” from “diverse cuntrys” (Love 234). Through this story, Love is able to deal with the issue of the sinful priest consecrating the Mass. He shows that in such a case the Mass is still valid (as, indeed, most Lollards, and certainly Wyclif, believed) and that God is more than capable of convicting a sinner and bringing him back to the right way (suggesting we should not focus on the existence of bad priests but rather on God’s sovereign right to work as he will choose). The story has another potent message also, as Love points out. The parish priest has urged Hugh’s clerks to tell him this story that he

too might “be holpene as anentes [concerning] god thorch hees holy praieres” but Hugh responds (an answer “worthily to be notede touching the feith of this holy sacrament”): “lette hem have to hem self thoo tokens of hir misbyleve. What is that to us of these thinges? Whethere we that every day seene with the trewest innere siht of oure soule alle holy & fully this heavenly sacrifice...Bot let him go see those litel smale porciones therof with his bodily eye that seeth not alle the hole with his innere gostly eye” (234-35). Rebuking his men for their “curiosite” (the fault the *Cloud* author also found in bad readers), Hugh reminds them that “thoo thinges that oure feith techeth us shold be undirstande & halde more certainly of trewe belevyng man then thoo thinges that this erthly liht by reson sheweth to bodily siht” (235). Love seems to level Hugh’s words against the Lollards, who can only accept what they see, while also affirming that the eucharist is a daily miracle of “gostly” sight for all those who believe. If we “see” with the eyes of faith, why do we need to be shown? (which is Hugh’s point).

Love - through St Hugh - reveals a deliberate ambivalence about “openness” and “exposure” that goes beyond the miracle stories themselves. These stories clearly “lay bare” and “reveal” the spiritual (which is also a physical) reality behind the coverings of bread and wine but they also question if such exposure is a good or a necessary thing. After all, in the majority of miracle stories it was, the most unworthy - heretics or Jews - who were witness to visions of the *physical* reality of Christ, beyond the form of the bread, thereby once again identifying literalness with unbelievers. An acceptance of, or more, an embrace of the physical coverings is actually a sign of greater holiness and spirituality pointing as it does to one’s willingness and ability to see with eyes of faith.

To some extent, the desire to expose the spiritual reality by removing the physical coverings only reveals a man's fleshliness and exposes faults like "curiosite" (Edward and Leveriche excepted who, after all, did not put God to the test). Furthermore, as Hugh's reference to "oure feith" infers, the physical coverings are common to and shared by Holy Church; the community of Holy Church should be united by what they see both visibly and by faith. The visions of exposure and uncovering, such as are the subject of the miracle stories, are primarily independent, happening to only one or two individuals. St Hugh's words, and Love's own, emphasise the essentially "ghostly" nature of the sacrament and uphold the vision and interpretation of Holy Church over and above the experience or interpretation of the individual.

Conclusion

The texts discussed here are all interested in the relationship between not only God and the Christian soul, but God and the reader. Because this relationship is seen to be mediated at several levels, including through physical objects or texts, interpretation is a key feature of this relationship. Lollards sought an unmediated encounter with the God who "dwellis...in gode menus soules" and believed this was possible through an encounter with a Bible shorn of the obstacles of a foreign language and manipulative glosses. The language of "nakedness," of exposure and revelation is therefore important in Lollard texts. The *Cloud* author also focuses on an unmediated relationship between God and Man and yet ultimately seeks to eliminate interpretation. He sees his enemies as those who are led astray by erroneous interpretation which can best be prevented by eliminating interpretation altogether through apophatic theology. Love's work defends

the church's position as authoritative interpreter for God and eliminates the need for individual interpretation. We see this in his treatment of the eucharist, a focal point in the debate over the dangers of literalism. The sacrament, asserts Love, simply is and cannot be explained; it is "merveilous" just as the miracle stories demonstrate. In his discussion of miracles of the sacrament, Love indulges the language of openness and exposure only to question the necessity of it and exalt the spiritual nature of hiddenness and coverings. Further, interpretation is depicted as the act of an established and trusted community; by eliminating individual interpretation one eliminates the "spectre of multiple interpretation." In the cases of all three writers, "right" interpretations are contrasted with the "wrong" interpretations of their enemies; even the *Cloud*, while apparently removed from any polemical disputes, is marked by this concern. The "literal," fleshly, and physical have negative connotations for all of these writers and are most often used as terms of insult. All these writers, dwelling in the "controversial cultural space"³⁹ of vernacular theology, an area of debate and struggle, find it becomes imperative to identify, and disassociate themselves from, their enemies who are marked as those who see, and read, according to the letter and not according to the spirit.

³⁹ The term is Watson's, "Censorship" 852.

CHAPTER TWO. "BY ME ALONE IS UNDERSTONDE ALLE": CREATING THE
IDEAL INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY IN JULIAN OF NORWICH'S *REVELATION*
OF LOVE

Julian of Norwich received her "revelation of love" from God in May 1373 and shared it in two written accounts: an earlier and shorter version, and a longer version written some twenty years or more after the experience.¹ The revelation contained sixteen "shewinges," composed of images and words which Julian saw while suffering from a near-fatal illness. Both illness and vision seem to have been given in response to Julian's own requests, made sometime in her youth, for experiences that would bring her into closer intimacy with God.² Julian is careful to stress that the visions occurred while she was awake, that they were spontaneous, prompted by the sight of the crucifix which

¹ The long version refers to two further moments of spiritual insight experienced by Julian, one in 1388 and one in 1393. It therefore seems most likely that the long version was begun after 1393. The popular supposition that the short text was produced swiftly after the event it describes was challenged by Nicholas Watson in 1993 ("Composition"). Watson points to areas in the short text which seem to imply the passing of several years and he also asserts that the text shows evidence of Julian's concern about the orthodoxy of writing vernacular theology, a concern that was particularly acute because of the Lollard controversy (which was not in full swing until the mid 1380s). Watson suggests that both versions of the text took many years to write and that Julian could still have been working on the long text in 1413. Aers and Staley disagree with such a late dating, arguing that "Julian's often radical vernacular theology is most unlikely to have been possible after Arundel's Constitutions of 1407/9" (79). Windeatt suggests that what Watson reads as Julian's nervousness about Lollardy actually reflects her concern with the "cautious and conservative tradition in medieval England concerning claims to visionary experience" ("Julian" 71). It remains that whatever the exact dating of the texts, Julian was writing over two to three decades of religious and literary change and turmoil in England.

² Julian names three requests she had previously made of God: to have "bodely sight" of his Passion, to be "purged" by the experience of a terrible sickness, and to receive three "woundes," namely, true contrition, true compassion and a "wilful longing to God" (*Revelation* 128-29).

the priest set before her eyes, and that they came directly from God himself “without any meane [intermediary]” (*Revelation* 135³). As Barbara Newman states, in the late Middle Ages, “spontaneous waking visions” were the most rare yet perhaps the most desirable kind of visionary experience, emphasising as they did the supernatural role of divine intervention and minimising the role of the percipient (4).⁴ The same sixteen visions are described in both Julian’s accounts but the later version includes some extra details of the visions and considerably more commentary.

The scribal postscript found in the Sloane manuscript version of the longer text of Julian’s *Revelation* is notable for its failure to make any mention of Julian herself.⁵

³ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the *A Revelation of Love*, the long version of Julian’s text, as edited by Watson and Jenkins.

⁴ In her discussion of medieval visionary culture, Newman points out four elements of the visionary experience: the “marvelous” or paranormal origins of the vision, the role of spiritual discipline in nurturing visionary experience, an aesthetic element (manifested in the creation of visionary texts), and an acknowledgement of God’s supernatural agency in creating the experience in the first place. Though religious authorities sometimes preferred to ignore or deny the role of human agency (by ignoring or denying the role of spiritual discipline), these four elements “need not be mutually exclusive” (4). For example, while Julian’s experience was clearly spontaneous, it was prompted by gazing at the crucifix, an action which can be identified with the “attentive and reflective study of a visual object” which was often a first step in “programmatic accounts” of contemplation. “The deliberate training of the gaze” on an object such as the crucifix or the consecrated host - a practice known as *speculatio* - “was sometimes explicitly theorized as conducive to visionary experience (15). It is hard to imagine Julian, so close to death, applying any kind of “trained” gaze to the crucifix, but it does instantly become the focus of everything and Julian, as the night wears on, will refuse to lift her gaze from it. When a seemingly “frendely” thought comes to her mind that she “Loke uppe to heven, to his father,” Julian refuses to shift her gaze from the cross, declaring “inwardly” that Jesus is her heaven (*Revelation* 187).

⁵ This postscript is present in two out of the three extant manuscripts of the complete long version (British Library MS Sloane 2499 and British Library MS Sloane 3705, which is a copy of the former) but not in the other version of the long text (Paris MS Bibliothèque Nationale fonds anglais 40) or in the short text. While it is almost certainly not by Julian, it has been considered to probably originate from “Julian’s circle” (Wogan-Browne et al. 233; Watson & Jenkins 11).

Instead, God is identified as the creator of the book, the vital player in the process of its interpretation, and even as the central force in its dissemination. It was Jesus, says the writer, who “made these shewings and revelations for the [thee], and to the,” and it is Jesus who will enable “all clen soules that with mekenes aske perseverantly” to grasp its “hey wisdam.” By praying “that this booke com not but to the hands of them that will be His faithfull lovers” the writer trusts that those he is now addressing are those so chosen by God (Watson and Jenkins 415). By focusing on God in this way, the writer seems to be fulfilling Julian’s own request as stated in an early chapter of her book:

I pray you alle for Gods sake, and counceyle you for youre awne profite, that ye leve the beholding of a wrech that it was shewde to, and mightely, wisely, and mekely behold God, that of His curteyse love and endlesse goodnesse wold shew it generally in comfort of us alle. For it is Goddes wille that ye take it with as grete joy and liking as Jhesu had shewde it to you. (153)

Julian desires that we shift our attention from her as the visionary, to God as the giver of the vision in order that we can experience the vision as if it had been shown directly to us. Removing Julian from the picture allows both scribe and Julian herself to emphasise exclusive divine agency in the creation of the visions and the possibility of a “first-hand” experience for the reader.

The reality, however, is that removing Julian from this text is a lot more difficult than either the scribe or Julian suggest. Julian has also played her part in the creation of this text; she is the “seer” or witness of the vision and therefore becomes its primary “reader” and the one responsible for re-creating its sights through written words or drawings. Furthermore, Julian, motivated by a desire to help her readers grasp the “hey wisdam” of the visions, fundamentally affects the way the visions will be interpreted.

After more than twenty years of rumination, Julian presents her reader with not only a description of the sixteen showings but an entire book of interpretive commentary. Despite her desire to be removed from the reader's perception, she is self-conscious and analytical about her experience as both reader and writer, even sharing details of her interpretive methods. Finally, Julian also attempts to influence dissemination by identifying the characteristics of her ideal reader (modeled on herself and her own reading), thereby filtering out other readers. All of these factors compromise the ideals of exclusive divine agency and of providing a "first-hand" experience for the reader which would somehow by-pass Julian.

One of the difficulties in dealing with Julian's texts is the need to reconcile her identity as visionary with her identity as writer. That the two do not easily mix is apparent in both contemporary theory about visionary experience and in more recent studies of Julian. The increasing number of autobiographical visionary accounts in the later Middle Ages points to popular interest in the life of the visionary herself even though such curiosity was officially discouraged. As both McGinn and Newman have pointed out, the growing number of these texts also raised the question of how authentic these narratives were (*Flowering* 25; 4, 25). After all, the ability to compose an intelligent and eloquent text suggested a level of learning which threatened the preferred channel of visionary experience: an ignorant and simple recipient who was merely a channel for God, incapable of creating or re-creating any aspect of the vision. Even though many visionaries experienced a divine commission to write their visions down, the best way those written accounts could defend the authenticity of the experience was

by “denying their literariness” (Newman 25).⁶ Beyond the Middle Ages, readers and editors of Julian have been primarily interested in her as visionary and “mystic,” and in her words for their affective or devotional power rather than their theological content or literary style. Along with the works of other Middle English mystics, Julian’s texts have been read “for their witness to experiences, not as objects in their own right” (Watson, “Middle” 543). Only recently has attention shifted on to Julian as writer, a perspective that has incorporated the extent to which she reveals herself to be “systematic theologian,” careful craftswoman of her prose, and - above all - interpreter (Watson and Jenkins 23).⁷

This chapter continues in the vein of much recent scholarship by focusing on Julian as writer. It argues that Julian’s final version of the text is a direct product of her efforts to create a “safe,” stable interpretive community (built around her belief in her role as representative for all her “evencristen”) in order to shape reader response to the visions and to protect the “true” meaning (God’s meaning) of the text from alternatives. Despite the apparently “universal” invitation for Julian to share her vision with all her “evencristen,” Julian actually invokes a more restrictive sense of a community made up of Christians whose common interpretive framework “fixes” and secures the “true”

⁶ Newman provides the example of a prologue written by an anonymous nun for the visionary text of Gertrude the Great, *Legatus divinae pietatis*. Newman demonstrates how the nun plays down Gertrude’s own literary abilities in order to emphasise the divine origins of the text. These texts are not to be considered literary products; the “literariness” of their writers must be denied in order to emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit (24-25).

⁷ See Watson and Jenkins 10-24 for a survey of the “readers” of Julian. The 1978 edition of both short and long versions of the text by Colledge and Walsh signalled the shift towards thinking of Julian as a serious and capable theologian possessed of extensive learning. This attention to Julian as writer and interpreter has since been built on by Windeatt, Watson, Aers and Staley, Riddy, Baker, and others.

meaning of the visions. Julian does desire to give her readers the experience of the revelation but that comes increasingly to mean a “book” and not simply a description of sixteen visions; as Robert E. Wright puts it, she offers them “literary” rather than “mystical” visions (28). This “book” is largely composed of Julian’s own exposition, the origin of which is hard to assess.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Julian as reader of the visions and considers her background in reading works of affective piety, and the interpretive strategies which shape her reading. It goes on to consider Julian as writer: the tensions implicit in writing in the vernacular and writing about visionary experience, and how Julian composes the text of the longer version in order to create an interpretive community. Finally, it considers how, by “guiding” her “simple” reader and discouraging unscripted speculation or interpretation, Julian ends up imitating some of the devotional literature she was used to reading.

Julian as Reader

In her Christocentric devotion, focus on the Passion, and self-expressed desire to share in the sufferings of her Saviour, Julian identifies herself with the affective style of spirituality so dominant in her day. Directing its devotion to the humanity and the body of Christ, medieval Christianity developed the tendency to “transform the abstract and theological to the personal and concrete” (McMurray Gibson 7). In such a religious culture, “seeing” became the preferred mode of experience, as is clearly evident in liturgical art and ritual (the elevation of the Host, for example) and also in the fascination with visions. Mental re-creation of biblical events or holy figures through meditation

was another manifestation of the preeminence of “seeing.” Guides to this kind of affective meditation had been written by key religious figures like Bernard of Clairvaux, Anselm of Canterbury, and Aelred of Rievaulx. The practice was seen as a first step on the path to contemplation and, among some religious, as a spiritual discipline which could help “cultivate” visionary experience (a process that was not supposed to take away from the sacredness of the experience or the divine origins of the vision) (Newman 14).

Despite these early associations between meditation and the “higher” modes of religious experience, by the fourteenth century affective meditation was being encouraged as an activity suitable for the laity. Meditation on the humanity of Christ here became divorced from contemplation of the Godhead so that, rather than being a first step towards something much higher, meditation came to be seen as a sufficient devotional exercise in itself. Focused on the imaginative recreation of events and emotional response to the Passion of Christ, these guided meditations were designed to stir up love rather than profound thought or theological speculation and were considered, therefore, highly suitable for an uneducated audience.

The work most influential in introducing meditation to the laity was the *Meditationes vitae Christi* (c1300), a pseudo-Bonaventuran work now widely considered to be the work of Franciscan Johannes de Caulibus. The *Meditationes* was immensely popular, especially, it seems, in England; more than a third of the surviving manuscripts of this Latin work are found in English libraries and there are seven Middle English adaptations. Six of these, including *The Privy of the Passion*, which exists in four

manuscripts, and *Meditations on the Supper of our Lord* (attributed to Robert Mannyng), which exists in nine manuscripts, are solely focused on the Passion narrative. The only complete translation is the 1409 version *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* by Nicholas Love.⁸

Love's work was produced late in Julian's lifetime and there is no guarantee she would have had access to this particular rendition of the *Meditationes*. It is, however, likely that she was familiar with some of the adaptations of the work, and the text does illustrate the parameters of meditative practice within which Julian worked. The reader of the *Meditationes* is required to immerse himself fully in the events about which he reads. As the translator of *The Privy of the Passion* puts it, "a mane [must]...rayse up all the scharpenes of his mynde & opyne whyde the Inere eghe [eye] of his soule In to beholdynge of this blesside passione, and forget & caste be-hynd hym for the tyme all other Occupacyouns & besynes; and that he make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he sawe fully with hid bodily eghe all the thyngys that be-fell abowte the crosse" (Horstman 1:198). The text contains prompts to help the reader respond to particular moments with the appropriate emotions: "Be-hole hym here meekly and habondandly" (Horstman I: 203) or "Be-holde now tenderly how he stode all aschamede" (204). The inclusion of apostrophes to Christ or other key figures give the reader a model for beginning her own conversations with Christ and the saints. This visualisation of events is understood by the pseudo-Bonaventure to have many moral and spiritual benefits but it

⁸ *The Mirror* is extant in nearly sixty MSS. Michael Sargent has produced an edition of the text based on Cambridge University Library MSS 6578 and 6686. *The Privy of the Passion* exists in one published edition in Horstman I (198-218). Meadows Cowper has edited the version attributed to Mannyng.

also gives considerable power to the imagination. As Love writes in his Prologue, “devoute ymaginacions” are a fully acceptable way to expand on the Gospel narrative, providing, of course, that they “be not ageyns the byleve”:

Seynt John seith that alle thinges that Jesus dide, bene not written in the Gospelle. Wherefore we mowen to stiryng of devotion ymagine & thenk diverse wordes & dedes of him & of other, that we fynde not written...And so what tyme or in what place in this boke is written that thus dide or thus spake oure lorde Jesus or other that bene spoken of, & it mowe not be prevet by holi writ or grondet in expresse seyinges of holy doctours, it sal be taken none otherwyse than as a devote meditacion (Love 10-11).

Love works from a position that asserts the impossibility of ever really “fixing down” the subject of Christ's life. For example, he suggests that Christ's life, “ever blessed & without synne, passing alle the lifes of all other seyntes,” can never be fully or truly described but can be known only “in a maner of liknes,” like a face in the mirror.⁹ Likewise, as far as Love is concerned, Holy Scripture has no one fixed meaning but “may be expownet & understande in diverse maneres, & to diverse purposes” as long as such interpretations are in harmony with belief and “gude maneres” (11). Given such a premise, the meditations of the devout believer/reader, set within the basic parameters of the facts of the sacred text, are a valid contribution to the understanding of “spiritual” meaning. Those who visualise become new “seers” of Gospel events, providing an alternative, more subjective, perspective upon them.

That being said, the episodes described in the *Meditationes*, and in Love's

⁹It is notable that Love's use of the mirror analogy is substantially different from the pseudo-Bonaventure's use of the analogy in his Prologue to the *Meditationes*. The pseudo-Bonaventure invokes the image of the mirror when speaking about the example of St Francis who spent so much time meditating on Christ's life that his own life became a “mirror resemblance of Christ's life,” and who ultimately “was totally transformed” into Christ (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 3). In contrast to Love, the pseudo-Bonaventure uses the mirror to invoke the possibility of perfect realisation of Christ' life.

translation where they are sometimes slightly embellished, offer varying amounts of freedom to the reader's imagination with some more important scenes being described in considerable detail - down to the appearance of a face or the style of furniture - while others are painted with broader strokes. Where scenes are fully detailed, the reader simply visualises what is being described to her, rather than having to decide for herself whether Mary was smiling or serious when Gabriel delivered his message, or whether the table at the Last Supper was square or round. Where a scene is depicted without such regard for detail, as in the case of the rejoicing of heaven at the proclamation of God's plan to save men's souls, there is clearly more room for the reader to colour and embellish as he chooses: "Wherof al the court of heven joyful & glade more than tonge can telle or hert thenk, making a solempne fest & devoutly tonkyng the fadere almighty god, we mowen devoutly thenk & ymagine" (Love 39). In its introduction to the crucial sequence of Passion meditations, the text seeks to ensure the appropriate emotional response in the reader: "thou shalt ymagine & inwardly thenk of him in his passione as of a faire yonge man of the age of xxxiiij yere, that was the fairest, the wisest the moste rihtwise in lyvyng & moste godely & innocent, that ever was or miht be in this worlde so falsly accusede, so enviously pursuede so wrongwisely demede, & so despitesly slayne" (Love 161).

Sometimes readers are offered a choice; an opportunity to modify the image as they please, most famously in the moment of the crucifixion when the reader is offered two alternative methods by which Jesus could have been hung on the cross. Other choices are in the detail: was Mary reading, praying, or meditating on the book of Isaiah

when Gabriel came? Did the baby Jesus show his contempt for the gold that was given him at his birth by spitting at it or, “peraventere,” by turning away? (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 35; Love 45). Sometimes this choice only appears to be given when in fact the text once again determines what the reader will see. In the question of what Jesus ate to break his fast at the end of forty days in the wilderness - a question on which Scripture is silent - we are invited to imagine “this triumphant luncheon as we please” (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 76).¹⁰ Before we have gone too far in visualising Jesus conjuring great banquets from the sky, however, the pseudo-Bonaventure sets some limits on our imagination by reminding us that Jesus never displayed his divine powers to create food for himself or his disciples. Then the text prompts us to remember Jesus’ mother and ultimately tells us exactly what to think: Jesus has the angels fetch him one of his mother’s meals, for he likes her cooking best. Thus we have gone from an invitation to imagine this scene as we “as we please” to being told to “settle on this possibility” and “assume this as the method” (77).¹¹

In the area of moral “meaning” or the lesson to be taken from an episode and applied to life, the *Meditationes* (and its various translations) leaves much less to the reader’s discretion, preferring to articulate the message that each event teaches. Thus we are to learn from Jesus’ patience with dumb beasts in the desert to be patient with the difficult people around us, we learn from Mary’s reticence before the angel Gabriel to prefer silence, we learn from Joseph to show patience with our wives, we learn from Elizabeth to seek the fellowship of other Christians. These, it seems, are the meanings to

¹⁰“Possumus autem hoc uictoriosum prandium sicut uolumus ordinare” (Stallings-Taney 89)

¹¹“Immoremur hic ergo, et hunc modum assumamus” (Stallings-Taney 89).

be gathered from these particular events and there is no room for alternative possibilities. This prescriptive approach is designed to help shape the reader's meditations while leaving them free to focus solely on emotive re-creation of events, without being bothered by working out the theological or moral significance of these issues.

This quality of prescribed detail in the *Meditationes* makes the text appear as an already thought-out and presented "script" that the reader can simply follow in his mind without being required to independently imagine people or events. Indeed, Newman finds "visionary scripts" or "guided meditations" the most suitable terms for texts of this kind which promote the phenomenon of "scripted visions" or visions of a "formulaic character" (25). Newman suggests these texts were written to enable "pious imagination" to "shade into visionary experience" (25). By so doing, these texts were opening an alternative route to visionary experience, one that was more accessible to the laity as it did not rely on a memory well-stocked with scriptural, liturgical, and classical texts and images (27). When we remember that via this text, a reader could see, touch, speak to, and hear from Jesus and the saints it is easy to see how fine a line can be drawn between "visualisation" and "vision" (16).

This fine line is witnessed in Julian's experience. Julian was clearly indebted to this tradition of guided meditation both stylistically and, more fundamentally, personally, as much of her devotional life would have been nurtured by it. Her portrayals of the crucified Christ - the drops of blood that fall from the crown of thorns, his discoloured face, and the blood that pours copiously after the scourging - owe something to Passion meditation as well as to those "paintinges of crucifexes that er made be the grace of god

aftere the techinge of haly kyrke to the liknes of Cristes passion als farfurthe as manes witte maye reche" (*A Vision* 63). Her conversations with Christ may also be inspired by the addresses to Christ in the *Meditationes*, as may some of her emphasis, for example, the attention given to the fact that Christ suffered in his "manhode" and found no "socour of the godhead" even though he was never parted from it (189-91; Love 161-62). In her description of the sights she witnessed, Julian is also notably focused on the appropriate emotional responses to them, describing what they are and the benefits of them for her and other readers, which shows, as Denise Baker remarks, that "the meditative tradition...influences not only what Julian sees, but also how she chooses to report it" (55). Julian addresses Christ and hears Him speak, and witnesses some of the key moments of scenes described in meditative texts; however, her experience goes far beyond "devout ymagynyng" and takes her beyond any "visionary script" that was available to her (although never, she would argue, taking her beyond the limits of "byleve" and "gude maneres"). While the practice of visualisation, learned through her reading, prepared Julian for her experience and even facilitated it, it is not the sum of her experience. Indeed, it seems that Julian actively desired to go beyond the "visionary scripts" with which she was familiar. Even her initially expressed desire (one of three gifts Julian requests from God) for "bodily sight" of Jesus at his Passion reveals this. Though she says that she had "sumdeele feeling in the passion of Christ" (probably through meditation), Julian's request for "bodily sight" suggests a desire for a sensory perception and a "sense of frustration over the limits imposed by mere meditation as a means of communion with Christ" (Watson, "Composition" 649; Baker, *Vision* 22). As

Watson puts it, having “internalised that theology’s call for *sapientia*,” Julian “finds the devotional aids it provides inadequate and so creates one herself in the form, first, of an experience, next, of a text” (“Mystics” 558). Julian not only “sees” new things (some of which do not fit neatly into the scriptural narrative that forms the basic limits of the existing meditations), she also analyses and interprets them, articulating their moral and theological application.

Presented with sixteen “new” sights, Julian, as the only recipient, attempts to work out their meaning. As reader, her primary concern is to understand the author’s intention: what does God “mean” in the showings? Julian pays considerable attention to her process of “reading” the words and images that make up the sixteen showings, sharing with other readers her process of increasing illumination. There are several methods that make up the reading process including identifying the different qualities of the experience, re-reading (or “re-visioning”), reflection, and divine guidance.

Julian is able to identify three different ways by which the visions were conveyed to her: “bodily sight,...worde formede in my understanding, and...gostely sight” (157). While she does not always specify exactly which parts of the vision fit into which category, Julian seems confident about discerning the difference and - sometimes - the reason for the difference. For example, when Julian prays for a vision of Mary she expects she will see her “in bodely likenes” but, in fact, God grants Julian a “gostly sight” of Mary so that she can see how Mary is “high and noble and glorious and plesing to him above al creatures” (205). Julian also makes reference to what we might call an experience of re-visioning by which she is able to re-read some or all of her visual “text.”

At the end of the last showing and after an attack of the devil, Julian reports how Jesus showed Julian the whole thing “all agene within my soule, with more fullehed, with the blessed light of his precious love” (343). Possibly this was the first of many such replays of the entire experience. Even twenty years after the original showing of the parable of the Lord and the servant described in Chapter 51, Julian describes how she is still able to see “inwardly” “all the pointes and the propertes that were shewed in the same time [first time]” (277). Julian acknowledges that her description of the visions has been “renewde by lighteninges and touchinges...of the same spirite that shewed them alle” (329). This process seems to be reflected textually by Julian’s tendency - especially apparent in the later chapters of the longer text - to re-visit earlier visions and provide additional commentary upon them.¹²

These re-visions are themselves evidence of another of Julian’s methods for reading and understanding: taking time (a lot of time) to reflect and consider. That Julian spends much time in meditative reflection over the “text” of the visions is obvious given the distance of more than fifteen years between the original visions and the two subsequent illuminations upon them.¹³ Clearly, however, Julian considers such time yields dividends in greater clarity and more accurate understanding. Thus, in Chapter 37, God tells Julian that she, and all her fellow Christians, will inevitably sin. However, as Chapter 78 informs us, the fact that this teaching was to be applied to others and not to

¹² See, for example, Chapter 44 when Julian re-visits the first vision, and also Chapter 60 when Julian reviews earlier sights through the lens of the teaching that God is mother.

¹³ It is also likely that Julian took her time over the writing of both texts. See Watson “Composition” for the likelihood that Julian was still writing the first version of the text in the 1380s. Staley also implies that the short text may have been written some time after 1373 (Aers and Staley 112). See n.1.

Julian alone was not understood by her at the time but only later. Julian's original readings are therefore supplemented by meaning that only comes later.

Perhaps the most important of Julian's methods for reading is to listen to, or simply wait for, God. This is based on her conviction that God is the source of the vision and that he is able and willing to expound *his* meaning. Julian looks to God for affirmation of his authorship, guidance as to what constitutes a vision (159), and actual interpretations (or, at least, clarifying analogies or examples¹⁴). In the case of the inscrutable lord and servant analogy, for example, God finally teaches Julian how to unpack the meaning with the instruction that she "take hede to alle the propertes and the condetions that were shewed in the example, though the thinke that it be misty and indefferent to thy sight" (277). Julian applies this and spends the rest of the chapter (the longest in the book) doing exactly that. We can assume that Julian would continue to apply this teaching to her continuing reflections on the vision as a whole.

Behind these processes, Julian has three hermeneutic principles that shape her developing understanding of the individual showings and of the experience as a whole: her loyalty to the teachings of Holy Church and her conviction that the revelation is consistent with those teachings; her conviction that the visions make up a coherent revelation from God and possess a "true" meaning and purpose; and her conviction that what she saw, and what she now writes, was not just for herself but was for all her fellow Christians. When it comes to the writing process, these three principles will enable

¹⁴ For example, God provides Julian with an "open example" of a King treating a servant like a friend to help her understand the nature of God's compassion on Christians (147), and, in Chapter 25, God helps Julian better understand his desire that Mary be exalted by providing her with the "exsample" of a man's desire to "make alle other creatures to love and to like that creature that he loveth so mekille" (205).

Julian to form three unities which she considers to be foundational to the experience: the unity of the revelation and church teaching, the unity of Julian's interpretation and God's meaning, and the unity of all Christians.

Regarding the first of these, Julian describes how her reading is filtered through the "faith of holy church" which, throughout the sixteen revelations, "stode continually in my sighte," like a pair of spectacles. This filter also acts as a kind of censor as Julian determines "never to receive anything that might be contrary" to the teaching of the church, and to this end she studies the revelations with all "diligence" (157). Julian, for her own security as much as her own devotion to the church, places her reading squarely in the framework of the faith, teaching and preaching of Holy Church, a fact that influences both her intention as a reader (she will not "receive" anything contrary to it) and her response as a reader (she will read diligently, seeing how the revelations uphold the teaching of Holy Church). Consequently, having witnessed all the visions, Julian can assert that all "that oure lorde had shewed me" and the "faith of holy church" is "both one" (335). Julian takes opportunities to remind us that the revelation and the teachings of Holy Church are "one in Gods mening" (157). It is, for example, "know[n] in oure faith, and also it was shewde" that Christ is both God and man (219); God "shewd" that Adam's sin was the greatest wrong, just as is "openly knowen in alle holy church" (215); the vision of Christ's marred face concurs with the "teaching and the preching of holy church" on the nature of man's creation and fall into sin (159).

With regard to the unity of the visions, Julian's conviction that the showings form one "text" with one overall meaning is apparent from an experience she describes in the

final chapter of the long version. From the time that the revelation occurred, Julian describes how she often wondered what the meaning of her experience was. She reports that fifteen years later God responded to her thoughts by telling her the meaning was “love.” Both question and answer reveal that both percipient and giver consider the sixteen showings to create one whole revelation, with one overall meaning. This is something Julian has already hinted at; in Chapter 51 she describes how she began to identify three “propertes” of the entire revelation:

The furst is the beginning of teching that I understood therin in the same time [time it happened]. The secunde is the inwarde lerning that I have understonde therein sithen [since]. The third is alle the hole revelation, fro the beginning to the ende, which oure lorde God of his goodnes bringeth oftymes frely to the sight of my understanding. And theyse thre be so oned, as to my understanding, that I can not, nor may deperte them. (277)

Here Julian distinguishes between the original vision, the subsequent enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and the “hole revelation,” the entire experience. The Sloane manuscript adds to the definition of the “hole revelation” with the words “that is to sey, of this boke,” a note that clearly equates Julian’s text (including all the interpretive commentary) with the revelation. The three are clearly distinct and yet they are all equally important; indeed they are unified. All three, says Julian, play a role in helping her to navigate through the “misty example[s]” and “privites” of the visions (277). As we shall see, the fact that Julian came to understand that the interpretive commentary she supplies is as important as the original visions - that her commentary is, in fact, “oned” (united as one) with the visions - has massive implications for how Julian will construct her text. It means the text is no longer only the simple presentation of “sixteen showings” but also an account of the interpretive process and the interpretation.

The third hermeneutic principle that shapes Julian's reading of the showings is her understanding that "alle this sight was shewde in generale"; in other words, that the visions are not meant for Julian alone, but for all her fellow Christians (151). This, she asserts, is what God has led her to understand, but Julian already seems to possess a strong sense of identity with her "evencristen" based on her understanding of the unity of all believers. "For if I looke singulery to myselfe," she comments, "I am right nought. But in general I am, I hope, in onehede of cherite with alle my evencristen. For in this onehede stondeth the life of alle mankind that shalle be saved" (155). Through both divine instruction and her own sympathies, then, Julian understands herself to be a representative of "alle mankinde that shall be savid"; a kind of "everyman" (155). This means that everything she sees and experiences is to be applied to everyone: the "I" becomes a "we." More than this, however, Julian also comes to believe that what she learns from the visions and what she understands to be their meaning and relevance, also applies to everyone. Throughout her book, Julian continues to remind us that it is for everyone: "that I say of me, I mene in the person of alle my evencristen" (153); "by me alone is understonde alle" (235); "and alle this lerning [teaching] and this tru comfort, it is generale to alle mine evencristen, as it is afore saide, and so is Gods will" (339); "I saw that his mening was for the generale man: that is to sey, alle man which is sinfulle and shall be into the last day, of which man I am a membre" (369).

One consequence of this is that Julian understands herself to be part of a Christian body made up of people who feel and think like she does; she takes herself - a conscientious, devout, pious, earnest woman - as an accurate representation of every

Christian. This may be wishful thinking on Julian's part. Nevertheless, Julian becomes the template for reader response ("feel this", "think this", "consider this"), not because she considers herself a suitable role model, but because she knows herself to be one with other believers (who are also readers) and because she believes that she is communicating God's true meaning of the text. Julian "embodies all those predispositions required for a literary work [in this case, the visions] to exercise its effect" and therefore becomes her own ideal reader (Iser 34).¹⁵

Julian as Writer

Despite the fact that Julian receives no specific divine commission to write down her experiences (unlike many of the European female visionaries whose names were just beginning to be known in England), Julian is convinced that it is God's will that she share them. It is, therefore, in obedience to God that Julian enters an arena where two areas of controversy converge. The first is the controversy over visions and visionary writings, the second is the highly-charged issue of writing vernacular theology during the period of the Lollard controversy and, possibly, after the promulgation of Arundel's restrictive *Constitutions*.

Julian had very few role models for the process of turning vision into text; there were no vernacular texts by English female mystics in circulation in England (Barratt 241). The extent to which Julian may have been familiar with traditions of female

¹⁵ I am adopting the language of Wolfgang Iser here whose discussion of what he calls a text's "implied reader" can be applied to Julian's work. The implied reader as a concept, says Iser, can be identified as a "textual structure" which "prestructures the role to be assumed by each recipient" and which therefore "designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text" (34).

mystical experience on the Continent is disputed. Middle English versions of Mechthild of Helfta's *Liber spiritualis*, Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations*, and Bridget of Sweden's *Liber celestis* all exist but the degree to which they circulated before the fifteenth century is uncertain.¹⁶ Julian makes no mention of them. The answer to the question of whether or not Julian's writing was influenced by these women and their experiences probably turns on the dating of Julian's texts. Wolfgang Riehle argues that Julian "fits the pattern of the late medieval female mystic" as this developed on the Continent, something he argues "cannot be due to mere chance"; Watson and Jenkins (who consider it quite possible that Julian continues to write the longer version well into the fifteenth century) assert that Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations* and Bridget's *Liber celestis* "would have been known to members of [Julian's] circle and could have provided models or precedents for *A Vision*" (27, 3). Kerby-Fulton agrees (*Books* 309). On the other hand, Alexandra Barratt, who places the *Revelation* in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, considers any influence unlikely, a view that seems to be shared by Oliver Davies in his study of the mystical tradition of northern Europe, although he concedes that access to news from the Continent would have been easier in a centre like Norwich (253, 159).

The cautious attitude to visionary experience which marks Julian's writing (she states, twice, that she did not actively pursue "sight nor shewing" of God [127, 135]) could be a consequence of being without these models but may equally reflect Julian's

¹⁶ Extant copies of Middle English translations of Continental mystics (including *The Book of Ghostly Grace*, a translation of Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber Specialis Gratiae*, two versions of Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations*, and Bridget's *Liber celestis*) all date from the fifteenth century.

awareness of controversies surrounding them (Kerby-Fulton, *Books* 315). Her caution certainly reflects the conservatism of religious teaching within England, manifested in texts like *Book for a Simple and Devout Woman* and *The Chastising of God's Children* (a book which textual evidence suggests Julian knew [Kerby-Fulton *Books* 309]) which discourage the pursuit of visions and paranormal experience and promote “safer” means of spiritual growth such as affective meditation and ascetic practices. Such conservatism and concern arose in part from the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a divine vision - a problem reflected in scholastic debate and papal legislation, as well as in mystical texts (Camille, “Visionary” 287). As Newman has demonstrated, the “dominant theology” of visionary experience called for exclusive divine agency and preferred visions to follow the biblical model: a “bolt from the blue, unprovoked, and even undesired” (5). “In order to be considered authentic and reliable, a vision must have come directly from heaven” (Newman 5). Questions like the “possibility of human collaboration with grace” and “the role of the imagination” (two questions that are surely raised by Julian’s text) were still the subject of on-going debate but on the whole “convention and prudence alike dictated the suppression of human agency” (Newman 5). Such “agency” included any acknowledgement of prior spiritual preparation on the part of the visionary and the literary ability that might be revealed in a written account of the experience. This is one reason why visionary experience was often connected to women who, lacking the learning or spiritual maturity that might get confused with the vision, would be more likely to be clean vessels for the Word of God.¹⁷ That the reality of

¹⁷ Even an aristocratic and political woman like St Bridget of Sweden was presented as a simple soul by the man who wrote the Prologue to the first collection of her earliest visions. Master Mathias of Linköping describes Bridget as “unlearned” in order to re-

visionary experience was far more complicated than this one ideal model allowed for is apparent from the controversy that often surrounded well-known visionaries,¹⁸ as well as from the evidence that most medieval visions were most likely “cultivated,” the result of spiritual disciplines (including the visualisation techniques associated with affective meditation) which were common practice in the religious houses. By the fourteenth century, increasing lay interest and involvement in visionary affairs added fuel to the fire of the church’s concern over the authenticity, and origin, of visions. The phenomenon of “scripted visions,” with their “ready-made” approach to divine encounters, ran the risk of creating a “routinised mysticism” which posed a “sharp challenge to the theology of spontaneous divine intervention” (Newman 34). Furthermore, actively desiring and seeking visionary experience was deemed to be a sure and certain way of falling victim to the deceptions of the devil, as many cautionary tales bore witness (Newman 34). It became even more necessary to distinguish cultivated visions from spontaneous ones, which were the “real thing.” In such an uncertain and sceptical environment, Julian’s step to not only assert the authenticity of her visionary experience but to also write it down, is neither a small nor a simple one.

By emphasising exclusive divine agency as the necessary quality of an authentic vision, the church sought to minimise the importance of the seer, or even erase her altogether. At the same time, however, the seer was at the heart of the visionary process and proved to be a figure of interest and inspiration for other Christians. We can chart

assure the audience of the vision’s authenticity: “she would not have been able to make it up even had she wanted to” (Searby and Morris 52).

¹⁸ St Bridget’s canonisation was a subject of some controversy and the decision-making process took more than a decade. Marguerite of Porete was burned at the stake as a result of the heresy deemed to be present in her account of her visionary experience.

the growth of this interest in the artistic treatment of the most famous visionary, St John, as demonstrated by the Apocalypse books circulating in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in the evidence of interest in the more recent but more controversial visionary, Bridget of Sweden. In the case of John, artists went to great lengths to incorporate John, the seer, into their scenes where he was present as “the percipient - as witness, not author, of these events” (Camille, “Visionary” 287). He was also present as intermediary “through whom the reader can ‘see’ and experience...visions ‘in the spirit’” (Lewis 267). His visible reactions could affect the reader’s perception and understanding of the vision and the fact that he was sometimes painted outside the frame - physically isolated from the vision but closer to the world of the viewer - emphasised his ability to move between the physical and the spiritual worlds and therefore his role as an intermediary. “For medieval visualisers,” writes Camille, “the Apocalypse had been not so much a text but a series of experiences, all of which were witnessed, felt, and understood by the saint, and all of which thus include his perception of them”; John became a model for seeing and interpreting (“Visionary” 288).¹⁹ Margery Kempe offers the best example of medieval interest in, and exposure to, the life of the visionary Bridget of Sweden. Margery reads Bridget’s book, visits the room where she died, and often compares herself to Bridget, considering the differences and similarities in their experiences of God (a comparison which usually works to Margery’s advantage).²⁰ The

¹⁹ Lesley Smith has performed a similar analysis on the illustrations which accompany Hildegard of Bingen’s visionary texts *Scivias* and the *Book of Divine Works*. Like John, Hildegard sometimes appears outside the frame “observing and recording.” Every illustration, Smith suggests, emphasises the direct line between the Holy Spirit (via Hildegard) and the text in front of the reader (24).

²⁰ While Christ tells Margery that he speaks to her in the same manner he spoke to St Bridget, he also says that Margery has *seen* more than Bridget ever did (57-58). Margery

only surviving Middle English translation of Bridget's *Liber Celestis* circulated with a life of the Saint while versions of the popular devotion *The Fifteen Oes*, erroneously attributed to Bridget, were accompanied with the story of how the "female recluse" (who would have been recognised as Bridget) was given the prayers by Christ. There is, then, an inherent contradiction in ideas about visionary experience. While the church seeks to remove or negate the percipient by emphasising the spontaneous, divinely-inspired nature of the revelation, the prevalence of John's image in art, as well as the extent to which biographical details about Bridget became known among the laity, points to a popular interest in the visionary who has importance as a helpful model and a mediator.

Julian seems to deflect any interest in her own person by keeping autobiographical references to a minimum and reducing them between the shorter and longer versions. She also begs the reader to forget her presence and focus instead on God (Chapter 8). The fact that Julian's visions come spontaneously while she is incapacitated on her deathbed, far from lucid thought, sets them in good stead as far as the eyes of the church are concerned. Julian asserts her credentials as the recipient of a genuine vision by describing herself as a "simple creature unlettered"; female and uneducated, Julian's status (or lack thereof) makes her a likely site for an "authentic" experience with an exclusively divine source. Julian, in a passage that was omitted from the later version, also denies that she, "a woman, lewed, febille, and freylle" seeks to be a teacher. Rather she defers to the "soverayne techare" whose showing she has received and says that she is only writing down her experience because "it is his wille that it be knawen" (*A Vision*

was an avid reader of Bridget's book and visited the Bridgettine house in Rome where she heard about Bridget from those who knew her (*Book of Margery Kempe* 98-99).

75). Furthermore, as we shall see, Julian writes her text in such a way as to assimilate her authorial voice with God's voice.

By drawing attention to her unlettered condition, the proofs she was given of the vision's authenticity, and her certain allegiance to Holy Church, Julian must have hoped she could be excused her use of the "mother" tongue. To write in the vernacular at this time was, whether intentionally or not, to engage with that "vernacular intellectual community" the very existence of which raised questions about the intellectual capacity of the laity, the role of the clergy as ministers of truth and the definition of truths that are "necessary" to know" (Watson "Censorship" 837, 846). As this dissertation has already discussed, this was not an anxiety-free activity for writers as they faced the possibility of not only larger audiences but also unknown audiences. The communication process revealed itself to be more contingent than it had been in the past which increased the risk of misunderstanding. Furthermore, the vernacular was becoming more and more associated with the Lollards; Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions* failed to make a distinction between Lollard and other vernacular texts, thereby potentially suppressing all discussion of theological and ecclesiastical issues (Watson, "Censorship" 829). The *Constitutions* banned the writing, or owning, of the translation of Scripture, even single verses. Only two words of Scripture ever come into Julian's mind (and into her text), "I thirst," and they are written in English, but Julian writes many more words which she asserts to be the words of God (Chapter 17). If Julian feels compelled to write what she has heard, and what she hears is God speaking to her in the vernacular, then she has no choice but to write these words in the vernacular.

Given these complications and controversies, Julian's conviction that God wished her to write down her experiences must have been very strong. We have seen how Julian came to understand that her task was not simply to "read" the visions and share them, but to communicate God's meaning. At one level, God reveals clearly and simply what this meaning is:

I desyerde oftentimes to witte what was our lords mening. And fifteen yere after and mor I was answered in gostly understanding, seyeng thus: "What, woldest thou wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening. Who shewid it the [thee]? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherefore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therein other withouten end. (379)

Here God provides an interpretation strategy for understanding the whole and Julian (still composing the longer text at the time of this disclosure) takes these words to heart. Love is the theme of the entire work from its opening words ("this is a revelation of love") to its end. It remains, however, a very simple statement for explaining such a complex text and in this way can be compared to Augustine's *caritas-cupiditas* framework for interpreting the Bible: "Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity" (*Christian* 88) and thus "whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or to the truth of the faith [both of which pertain to charity]...must...be figurative" (88). This exegetical principle provides guidance for the Christian and alerts him that "all figurative interpretations must promote the love of God and of one's neighbour. If they do not, the interpreter is either deceived or deceiving, and the interpretations are false" (Robertson 295). In a similar vein, God's words to Julian provide guidance for reading the visions - all will point to love - and include the warning that no alternative meaning will ever be found therein (with the

inference that when a word or image seems to suggest something other than this reading, it needs to be re-read). Augustine's method would influence centuries of scriptural exegesis but the fact that the church felt the need to provide explanatory glosses highlighting the "spiritual meaning" hidden in the text suggests that "figurative language" frequently called for justificatory explanations, or glosses. These glosses, providing the "correct" and spiritual meaning (of greater importance than the literal meaning), became as necessary, therefore, as the scriptural text itself. Likewise Julian, in seeking to draw out the message of "love" in each individual showing, must offer glosses on the words of God to reveal this meaning when it is not utterly clear. The "correct" interpretation becomes as important to convey as the literal experience of the visions.

It is the inclusion of these interpretive commentaries which can be likened to explanatory glosses which takes us from "vision" (as the scribe to Julian's earlier version introduces her text) to "booke" (as the later version is described by its scribe). Structural changes Julian made to the longer text (addition of a contents page, cross-references, chapter summaries and recapitulations) reflect this sense of cohesion of the whole. By the time the scribe of the later version is adding his postscript, it is clear that he views the book as a complete and inviolate text.²¹ It is notable, however, that, there is no physical distinction made between the "text" of the sixteen showings and the commentary upon them, but the two are so fully integrated that it can be hard to know where vision ends

²¹ Richard Emmerson has pointed out the importance of the "totality" and "unity" of the book in visionary texts and uses the Apocalypse, with its use of the book as a potent symbol, as an example. He demonstrates how the presence of the curse at the end of John's text, warning any future readers against changing a word of the prophecy, implies that the book is understood as a perfect "totality and unity," and as "inviolable" (Emmerson and McGinn 332). He points out that Hildegard of Bingen imitated John by adding a curse at the end of her book and that this has the same effect.

and commentary begins. This, it seems, would reflect Julian's understanding of the revelation's three "propertes" that "be so oned, as to my understanding, that I can not, nor may deperte them." As none of the surviving manuscripts of the longer version of Julian's work date from earlier than the seventeenth century it is impossible to know whether or not the words that Julian hears, or understands to be spoken by God, were set off from the rest of the text, as they are by rubrication in the Paris manuscript, and by italics in one modern edition of the text. Insofar as the commentary was not separated from the text, as an accompanying gloss would be, no clear distinction was made, a fact which reflects Julian's growing understanding of the importance of the "hole revelation...this boke," and her belief that the interpretations are equally part of the revelation.

A Picture of Christendom: Unity between God, Holy Church, and Christian Souls

The creation of the *Revelation* as a text is shaped by Julian's desire to draw attention to three unities which form it and which are, indeed, foundational to the whole experience. Individually, these are the unity between Julian's interpretation of the vision and God's, the unity between the teaching of Holy Church and the teaching of the vision, and the unity between Julian and her "even Cristen"; taken together they enable Julian to create an ideal picture of Christian concord. Julian establishes the first by fusing her own perspective with God's. As she expounds the meanings of each vision she uses a wide variety of language to express her enlightenment: "I saw," "I was answered in my understanding" (139), "he...formed in my soule" (169), "God brought to my minde" (235), "in this sight I understand" (137), "our lorde shewed...as to my sight" (207). It is

not always clear how these phrases are distinct from one another. Julian also paraphrases God's words in an attempt (possibly inspired, possibly not) to convey God's words even more powerfully and clearly, prefacing such paraphrases with "as if he had said" or sometimes "meneth he thus," "so ment he."²² In these cases it is easy to forget that these are not actually God's spoken words; it takes an edition like the 1994 student text produced by Georgia Ronan Crampton which italicises only God's spoken words, to help us remember the distinction.²³ That even Julian may have become confused about this is suggested by occasions when she glosses her own words in the same manner as she sets about expounding God's words. For example, as part of the eighth vision in which Julian sees Christ's sufferings in the moments before his death, she states that "this long paining semede to me as if he had be sennight deade" and then goes on to supply an explanatory gloss of her own description (179). Finally, the purpose and meanings of individual visions, or aspects of the visions, are also confidently declared by Julian even though the issue of whether these are Julian's own personal conclusions or divine insights is not made clear: "this shewing was geven, as to my understanding, to lerne our soule wisely to cleve to the goodnes of God" (143);²⁴ "this bodely exsample was shewde so high that this mannes hart might be ravished" (147); "this vision was a lerning to my

²² Barbara Newman notes that this "as if" formula is present in other mystic texts and derives from Latin visionary texts (23)

²³ This potential for confusion is apparent elsewhere. In one case, the phrase "and so ment he" which is usually used to introduce an explanation or interpretation, is used to introduce God's spoken words (identified by rubrication in Sloane) (193). In another case (Chapter 24), according to the Paris manuscript the words of God are given and then expounded by Julian; however, the phrase "as if he had saide" which introduces Julian's exposition is omitted in the Sloane manuscript which leads the reader to assume all the words are words spoken by God (203).

²⁴ The Sloane manuscript does not include the qualifying "as to my understanding."

understanding that the continual seking of the soule pleseth God” (161).

Julian, then, not only provides glosses but she integrates them into the text itself making it impossible to know where the original text starts and ends and where the commentary begins. We see here the ambiguity intrinsic in the God-percipient relationship of visionary experience (an ambiguity which, as we have seen, it was preferable to ignore or do away with by insisting on the absolute passivity of the recipient of God’s message). Julian expounds a “text” that is not fixed and immutable but rather “an interaction between a number of profoundly mysterious and (in their way) highly intellectual visionary moments and their actively-engaged recipient, the boundaries of which are by their very nature so fluid as to be impossible to chart” (Watson, “Trinitarian” 74-75). It is this fluidity that causes the “gloss” to merge with the “text” of the sixteen showings, creating the sense that the entire work, rather than the original visions, is the “revelation of love” (Watson, “Trinitarian” 74-75). This merger between God’s Word and human gloss, particularly as applied to the most significant case - Holy Scripture - was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a subject of some controversy. The practice of setting the Scripture apart through the use of underlining or of a different coloured ink was standard medieval practice in the copying of texts but, as texts varied in quality, and in intention, absolute clarity was not guaranteed. The need to distinguish absolutely between the Word of God and any commentary upon those words was a sacrosanct principle of Lollardy and one that informed Lollard treatment of biblical texts.²⁵ The idea of the Bible text “overflowing” to merge with its surrounding apparatus,

²⁵ The so-called *Glossed Gospels* and the revision of Rolle’s Psalter commentary, two of the larger Lollard projects of biblical commentary make clear distinctions, by means of script or rubrication, between Bible text and gloss. In all cases the words of Scripture

or of that apparatus “annexing divinely-inspired status and authority” was exactly what worried Lollards about the kind of glossing they associated most strongly with the friars (Watson “Trinitarian” 74). Failures to make clear distinctions would lead readers into the trap of reading a gloss (a defence of mendicancy based on a Gospel story, for example) as if it were Gospel truth (literally). As far as the Lollards are concerned, the presence of over-abundant and erroneous or manipulative glosses disables the reader’s opportunity to independently engage with and interpret the text.

If we can compare the original sixteen showings given to Julian to the biblical text, at no point does Julian allow the text to be seen in an “unglossed” or “naked” state. The main reason for this is her belief that the showings are incomplete in such a state; the revelation includes the God-given interpretation. The text is indeed glossed but the glosses, Julian would argue, are God’s. From this perspective, the very integration and merging of commentary and revelation is itself a sign of Julian’s attempt to merge her perspective, her interpretation, and her very self with God. She believes that she is communicating God’s meaning and not simply her own interpretation, asserting that she has conveyed “alle his owne mening” (379). Elsewhere, Julian describes how it is “oure savioure that shewed it, and that it is in the faith that he shewde. And therefore I beleve it...and therto I am bounde by alle his owne mening” (343). Again, in the case of the “example” of the vision of the lord and his servant (which provides a microcosmic view of Julian’s interpretive process, even as it provides a microcosmic understanding of the entire revelation) Julian seeks to leave us in no doubt as to the origin of the interpretation,

must be clear and must not be allowed to become confused with the words of men (Hudson, “Book” 134).

stating that it was God who gave her “sight to my understanding of both” and “ghostly understanding” and that God “ledde forth my understanding in sight and in shewing of the revelation to the ende” (273, 277). Julian also describes how God “enforms” her mind, brings to mind particular thoughts and shows her explanatory examples (72,71). Julian often communicates the nature of God’s will, saying it is God’s “wille that we be occupied in knowing and loving til the time cometh that we shal be fulfilledde in heven” (145), or that “it is Goddes wille that we holde us in comfort” (177), or again that God wills that we “beleve that we see him continually” (159). Julian uses all of these terms and phrases as she explains how God rejoices in the Passion and how we too should rejoice in our salvation, as she describes how God is the foundation of our praying and how there is a part of us that never sins, as she reveals how God will make all things well through a final great deed, and as she, in short, expounds the (sometimes surprising) theology behind each scene, each phrase. Yet Julian always keeps within the greater framework of the “meaning” of the whole: love. Rather than compare Julian to the exegete writing a biblical commentary, we are perhaps better off comparing Julian to the inspired writers of the biblical text itself, to a prophet like Jeremiah, for example. Jeremiah’s text is clearly the product of an on-going and inspired relationship between God and prophet in which God’s “voice” is heard not only in the speeches of God but also in the accompanying words of Jeremiah, so that the entire text needs to be understood to have been authored by God and not only those parts that identify themselves as God speaking.

As far as Julian is concerned, then, these glosses are divinely, and not humanly,

authored and this is the source of their authority. It is true that there remains a difference between them and the spoken words of God (best seen in an edition like Crampton's) but it is a difference of experience or means of communication, not of authority. This belief in the unitary relationship between the "experiential" and "theological" aspects of the revelation reflects the synthesis which McGinn has identified as being a key aspect of the mystical tradition: "it is not carelessness when Christian mystics do not want to make a distinction between mystical experience and the meaning or teaching about this experience; it is intentional" (qtd. in McGinn, "Flowering" 26). In the God-percipient relationship, even as she tells her reader, Julian wants to keep the focus fully on God and off herself by eliding her perspective, her understanding, and reason in favour of God's. This elision, as Elizabeth Alvida Petroff observes, is a feature of almost all the female mystics of the Middle Ages who, aware of how the act of writing could be viewed as an attempt to usurp male authority, considered it necessary to assimilate their own voice with the "male voice of God" if they were to have a chance of being heard (27). Taking this into account, even Julian's excision of all references to her gender in the final version of the text can be seen as an effort to not only remove autobiographical distractions but also, as Lynn Staley suggests, to emphasise the essentially male "authority of the exegete" (Aers and Staley 139). If the visions begin, as Watson suggests, as a "fluid" rather than fixed text, the addition of the divinely authored commentary indicates that the text may have an immutable and "fixed" interpretation.

Through this assimilation of her own voice with God's Julian creates a unity between God's meaning and Julian's interpretation. This is not the only sense of unity

Julian seeks to create. As we have already seen, Julian is careful to assert her belief that the revelation was always “one in meneyng” with Holy Church. This interpretive agreement is stressed in her written account and is used to affirm the unity that exists between God and his church. However, Julian does face moments where she honestly admits her perplexity in understanding how the two are in agreement. The most obvious example of this is the issue of man’s sin and God’s anger. The church, and her own experience, teaches Julian that we are sinners, worthy of God’s “blame and wrath,” but the revelation teaches Julian that God shows us “no more blame than if we were as clene and as holy as angelis be in heven” and that it is impossible for Him to be angry (261, 273). The question of how these two judgements or “domes” can be reconciled causes Julian considerable stress as she fears that she will not receive an answer or that she will be forced to believe that “in God...sinne were alle done away,” a teaching that would be at odds with the teaching of the church (273). God does give Julian an answer - in the “wonderful example” of the lord and his servant through which Julian is granted insight into God’s compassion, the redemption achieved through Christ and, consequently, “how he beholde us in oure sinne” (273). While Julian does not explain how the “parable” resolves the apparent contradiction (indeed, in its teaching that God is able to behold us in our sin because of his great love and sympathy towards us, and that God does not consider us blameworthy because “oure good lorde Jhesu taken upon him all oure blame” it seems to fully support the revelation) she seems reasonably satisfied that it does (283).²⁶ Perhaps the full understanding is only to be gained by further reflection or even

²⁶ Others have not been as convinced. Clifford Wolters, in his Introduction to his modern translation of Julian’s text, accuses her of heresy at this point, and of mis-reading the revelation (37-38)

only by death, as Julian implies when she states,

I stond in desyer, and wille into my lives end, that I might by grace know theyse two domes as it longeth to me [how these two judgements pertain to me]...And the more knowing and understanding by the gracious leding of the holy gost that we have of these two domes, the more we shalle see and know oure failinges... [and so] long to be fulfilled of endless joy and blisse. (261)

This is not the only place where Julian uses the idea that in eternity all things will become plain - an expectation based on the conviction that now we only know in part - as a way to affirm the unity between the church and the visions. Another place where Julian seems to anticipate possible conflict (or the appearance of conflict) between church teachings and the revelation is in her discussion of the existence of sin and God's promise that "alle maner of thinge shalle be wel" (209). Julian struggles to imagine how all things can be made well when both Scripture and Holy Church teach that "many creatures shall be dampned...to helle without end" (223). Through God's answer, that what is "impossible to the is not impossible to Me," Julian believes she is taught to "stedfastly holde me in the faith as I had before understond" and "sadly beleve that alle maner thing shall be welle" (223). In other words, God teaches Julian to believe that both can be true. It is by valuing the unknown or the unrevealed that Julian is able to find what she needs to assert the truth of both church and revelation, even when they appear to contradict each other. This may be one reason why Julian issues several gentle warnings to her readers against trying to know too much.

Even when discussing areas of apparent or potential conflict, then, Julian is able to assert that the *Revelation* (including God's instructions and guidance, and Julian's inspired understanding) only ever shores up the faith. While Julian's *Revelation* is often

considered by modern scholars to contain original thought and new theology, Julian is adamant that it does not command anything “new” but rather obedience to the existing truth, to what we knew “afornehand.”²⁷ This is apparent in the extended discussion in Chapters 30-37 of God’s “privetees” or secrets. While God chooses to reveal some of his secrets to us (through Holy Church or through the Holy Spirit [215]), like a king, he is entitled to “his privy conceyles” which means that some secrets he will choose to leave hidden (217). Julian demonstrates a willingness to accept God’s right to keep secrets; even as she provides tantalising details about at least two of these secrets, Julian is more interested in the fact of their existence than in revealing what they are.²⁸ We should be like the saints, she says, who delight in the fact that God has secrets without having to know what they are (217); she herself is willing to “yelde me to my moder holy church, as a simpil childe oweth” (263). In another example of Julian’s submission to church teaching, she acknowledges that even though she did not see the Jews in her vision of the crucifixion, she was still “strengthed and lerned generally to kepe me in the faith in every point and in all, as I had before understonde” (225). This reference to “before” shows how the visions do not really “change” anything or bring any kind of transformation; they maintain the status quo with the result that the revelation and its interpretation are seen to be in unity with the church, not only because of the unity of the message but also because

²⁷ Some of the more original or radical theology believed to be present in Julian’s text includes the promise of universal salvation (Watson “Visions”) and some of the implications of Julian’s depiction of Jesus as our mother (Donohue-White). See also Simon Tugwell’s account of Julian as a speculative theologian.

²⁸ Julian discusses two secrets, both of which are described as glorious and excellent “dedes” [deeds]. The first “grete dede,” known only to God will be performed on the last day and will “make al thyngs wele” (77); the second “dede” is “begonne here” and brings profit and joy to all believers, continuing to be worked out until the last day. Some of us may, indeed, know some part of this second deed this side of eternity.

the revelation asserts the authority of the church.

The third unity Julian seeks to create is a unity between herself and her fellow Christians. As we have also seen, Julian believes herself to be experiencing the revelation as a representative of all her “even Cristen.” By eliminating anything but the barest autobiographical details (which provide context for the vision), Julian does “universalise” her implied reader (herself) and that reader’s responses. Julian describes experiences - and their meanings and moral applications - using the language of community (“we”). If we take Julian at her word and understand that the “I” in this text is a “we” and that Julian is in oneness with her fellow Christians, then Julian’s inspired interpretation of the visions automatically becomes the interpretation of every Christian; the interpretation that is Julian’s within this text is ours even before we have read it. Thus, Julian’s interpretation (which is also God’s) is not exclusive to Julian but becomes the interpretation of, in fact, an entire community. By using the language of community, Julian is also able to eliminate the possibility of alternative interpretations based on different interpretive strategies (readings not based on loyalty to the church, for example, or readings based on fragments, rather than the whole, of the experience). Rather than expose the original text of the visions to different interpretive frameworks, Julian asserts that the text (which, authored by God, has an independent status, existence and authority) has one “right” and truthful interpretation. Given this, we could also read Julian’s warnings against curiosity and her teaching about “secret” knowledge as a means by which she further preserves her “fixed” interpretation.²⁹

²⁹ Julian - in her on-going role as model and template - demonstrates the right attitude to knowledge with a personal example. In Chapter 35 she describes how she was curious to know the eternal destiny of someone close to her. A voice in her “reson” answers her

By incorporating every reader into herself, Julian is able to create an interpretive community around herself (which is, simultaneously, all Christians). Because this interpretation is viewed as being the same as God's and in agreement with the church it also brings a unity between God and reader, and between reader and church. Therefore, what Julian manages to create in her "boke" is an ideal unity of interpretation between God, church, and every Christian soul. This is a unity that revolves around herself as percipient, child of the church, and "member" of the body of the saved. She fuses her interpretation with God's interpretation and, as representative of her "even Cristen," merges her interpretation with that of every other Christian. This interpretation is shown to also be in unity with the church. With her emphasis on unity, Julian creates an ideal Cristendom which is centred around an interpretive community that includes God, church and Christian souls. Towards the end of the work, Julian stresses this three-fold unity as the source of our knowledge.

Be thre thinges man stondeth in this life, by which three God is wurshipped
and we be sped, kepte, and saved. The furst is use of mannes kindly reson.
The seconde is the comen teching of holy church. The third is the inwarde,
gracious werking of the holy gost. And theyse thre be alle of one God. God
is grounde of oure kindly reson, and God is the teching of holy church, and
God is the holy gost...theyse wurke in us continually alle togeder. And these

own thought and tells her she is to "take it [the revelation] generally, and behold the curtesy of thy lorde God as he sheweth to the." Thus, Julian (and so we) learns that "it is more wurshippe to God to know althing in generale than to like in onything in specielle" (229).

It seems that Julian was successful in creating a consensus about the meaning of what she saw given that, for all the amount of modern scholarship written on Julian, few question the actual accuracy of her interpretation: the fact that the hazelnut represents "all that is made" or that the seabed is a picture of the fact that God is ever present with man, or Julian's interpretation of the "parable" for the lord and the servant. We rarely question the route taken in Julian's reading of the "text" of the visions or consider that the text could have taken "a quite different direction" ("Trinitarian" 77). Wolters in his edition is a notable exception (see n. 26).

be gret thinges, of which gretnesse he wille we have knowing here, as it were in an A.B.C. That is to sey, that we may have a litille knowing, whereof we shulde have fulhed in heven. And that is for to spede us. (371)

The Showings as "Visionary Script"

When, in the process of experiencing the first vision, Julian is convinced that she is about to die and be judged, she says aloud to those round about her "'It is todaye domesday with me,'" and then explains: "This I saide for I wolde they loved God the better, for to make them to have minde that this life is short, as they might se in my exsample" (153). The phrasing suggests that Julian's words were designed to have a deliberate effect on her "audience" (to stir up greater devotion to God), an effect that would be strengthened by the *memento mori* of her own dying self. This momentary interaction with these most immediate of her "evencristen" is, I would argue, a telling demonstration of Julian's tendency to seek to direct the responses of her readers throughout the text of the *Revelation* by use of both her words and her example. In this final section of this chapter, I suggest that, having herself expressed an appetite for a deeper spiritual experience than affective meditation could offer, Julian ends up imitating the meditative devotional literature in its "guiding" of the "simple" reader and discouragement of (and lack of incentive to) unscripted speculation, thought, or interpretation.

Devotional works, such as the works of affective meditation described in the first section of this chapter, seek to draw readers closer to God through the stirring of their emotions and the provision of moral instruction on living a life that pleases God. Though Julian's text is, on one hand, a visionary account, it is a text focused on God's love and

designed to stir love. This emphasis is apparent throughout the text: the meaning of the revelation given to Julian and, through her, to us, is love. Specifically, God desires that we “knowen” God’s love and forgiveness better than we have done (379); the right response to this knowledge will be the stirring of our hearts to “love him and cleve to him” (379). Indeed, it is the vision’s power to “gretly stirrande...alle thaye that desires to be Cristes loverse” that the scribe of Julian’s earlier text considered to be the quality most worth highlighting about the work (63). Julian’s own devotion precipitates the showings and her focus on the role of the text in increasing the devotion of her readers is apparent. The vision only matters, says Julian, insofar as it causes our love to increase: “for the shewing I am not good but if I love God the better, and in as much as ye love God the better, it is more to you than to me” (153). “Stiryng simple soules to the love of god & desire of heavenly thinges,” and “steryng specialy to the love of Jesu,” the avowed aims of an affective work like the *Mirror*, could also be taken as the aims of this text (Love 10).

As we have encountered elsewhere in this dissertation, writers of devotional literature show a concern with both the intention or “entent” of their readers as they approach the devotional text, and with the response of those readers to the text. The author of the postscript at the end of Julian’s text expresses concern about the “entent” of the reader when he notes that the revelation will not “dwelle with him that is thrall to synne” and prays that the book will only reach the hands of those “that will submitt them to the feith of holy church” (415). Julian’s concern with the “entent” of her reader is implicit in her efforts to express the qualities that God desires to see in us and the

attitudes of heart and mind that allow God to communicate with us. Intrinsic to this revelation that is meant for *all* is, it seems, instruction on the kind of Christians (and the kind of readers) God *prefers*. It is “full great plesance” to God when we come to him “nakedly, plainly, and homely” (141), realising that by our reason “we may not profite” unless “we have evenly therewith minde [insight] and love” (303). It is God’s desire that “we be occupied in knowing and loving till the time cometh that we shal be fulfilledde in heven” (145). That Julian also acts as representative - and therefore model - for her readers, means that the reader’s “entent” should resemble Julian’s with her zeal for sharing in Christ’s sufferings, her submission to the church, and her humility before God and her love for him.

As well as “entent,” the readers of devotional literature are required to demonstrate the sincerity of their devotion by responding to the text in the right way, usually by a combination of emotional (feelings of pity, sorrow, shame, gratitude) and rational (reformed thinking, acts of contrition, or mercy) responses. Thus, in the case of affective meditation, the reader is expected to respond to the different events in Jesus’ life with, immediately, the appropriate emotions and, subsequently, with an improved life. The importance of making the right response can be seen in the way that texts will often seek to lead their reader into that response. As we have already noted, works of affective meditation gave varying degrees of freedom to the imagination and could be prescriptive when it came to expressing important lessons or drawing out meanings that were meant to be seen as definitive. In the latter case, the moral application or the theological explanation is provided for the reader, relieving them of the responsibility (or

the privilege?) of discovering their own.

Julian is also aware of this need for personal response and she works hard to guide her reader into the right responses in terms of both the right emotions and the right understanding of moral applications. Similarly to the methods employed in works like the *Meditationes* where readers are prompted to consider certain points (“Be-holde hym here meekly & habondandy” [*Privy* 196]; “here...owht we to have compassion, & be stired to the love of vertuouse poverté” [Love 32-3]), Julian sometimes directly exhorts her audience to an action: “Think also wisely of the gretnesse of this worde” “Ever” (201); “Beholde and see” (167). The text also includes direct instruction: “But be we not adred of this [sin]...but meekly make we oure mone” (321); “and therefore us nedith mekille to praye oure lorde of grace, that we may have this reverent drede and meke love” (359); “and than we sorrow and morne discretly, turning us into the beholding of his mercy, cleving to his love and to his goodnesse, seeing that he is oure medicine, witting that we do nought but sinne” (375). In Chapter 77, Julian also provides her readers with words of a petition with which to draw near to God (365). More often, however, Julian’s guidance is implicit in the text through her use of the communal pronouns “we” and “us” and through the model of her own responses and reactions. Julian tells us how particular words or images prompted her to think or act and this serves as a guide to us. We find such examples on almost every page and these tend to leave no alternative about how to act: “and thus I saw him and sought him, and I had him and wanted him. And this is and should be our comen working in this life” (159); “for till I am substantially oned to him I may never have full reste ne very blisse” (141); “saw I

sothly that me behoved nedes to assent [I must necessarily assent] with great reverence, enjoying in God” (165); “Here may we see that we have verely of kind to hate sinne, and we have verely of grace to hate sinne” (319). These statements act as prompts to the readers, encouraging them to think along these same lines and guiding them into a particular kind of response. Julian is, after all, the absolute example, representing in herself the struggles, the questions and the ups and downs of Everyman’s Christian life.

By being able to offer herself as an example, Julian is actually able to go further than the affective texts and their instructional techniques. While affective texts can describe a right way to respond, Julian can actually model it while simultaneously - by her focus on her unity with her readers - implying that it is also our response. For example, at the scene of the Crucifixion, the *Meditationes* gives us prompts and directions leading us to think on Mary or feel Christ’s suffering but in Julian’s revelation we actually see Julian do these things herself and share the experience with us. We watch another reader make all the right emotional responses and experience the most laudable states of mind, as when Julian states, “I felt no paine but for Cristes paines” (183). Indeed, she goes on to describe how she “loved Crist so much above myselfe that ther was no paine that might be suffered like to that sorrow that I had to see him in paine,” a statement that surely identifies Julian with all the disciples and “tru lovers” gathered at the cross who, explains Julian, “suffered paines more than ther awne bodely dying” as they watched Christ die. Julian thus becomes a more immediate model than the possibly distant biblical models invoked in the *Meditationes*. Julian also provides a model for us in her attitude to seeking knowledge – a subject that has been a concern to

her, especially in her discussion of God's "privitees." Julian remains blameless as her original desire for "bodely sight" of Christ's Passion is not motivated by "corioustie" but by a desire to understand it more fully, while her "longing" to fathom God's attitude to sin is prompted by her need to "love goodnesse and hate evil as holy church teacheth" (127, 273). This applies even to those moments which seem - on the surface - to be personal and unique to Julian.³⁰

It is, chiefly, however, in the very presence of Julian's dominating interpretive commentary that the extent of Julian's prescriptive guidance - even greater than that contained in the "visionary scripts" of affective meditation - is apparent. As we have seen, a writer like Love gave license to the imagination by assuming the impossibility of ever really fixing down or fully describing the true nature of Christ's life; even Scripture does not have one true meaning. Julian, however, focuses on fixing down the interpretation of this text. The commentary Julian provides - which, as we have seen, is both exegesis and a guide to response - makes it not only unnecessary but also impossible for the reader to independently survey and interpret the original text of the visions. Thanks to Julian's vivid and detailed descriptions we "see" but the presence of her interpretation means that we do not interpret (indeed, we might be hard pressed to know what to interpret because the lines of distinction between God and Julian are so blurred).

Several examples of changes between the short and the long version of Julian's text point

³⁰ One example is the moment when Julian describes how she chose Christ above anything else despite his, and her own, pain and despite the fleshly, "outward" part of her which resists the suffering (Chapter 19). Though, as she describes the comfort that this choice has brought to her soul and the assurance that she would ever choose Jesus for herself, the experience seems to be a purely subjective one, Julian goes on to extend the meaning of the experience to the idea that our inward nature is capable of overruling our outward nature - a message that is for everyone.

to this tendency towards prescribing responses rather than leaving them to the reader.

The first refers to the famous passage, already quoted above, in which Julian expresses her desire that her reader shift her attention from Julian and on to God, for it is God's will that we each receive it as if God had shown it directly to us. While the longer, later version simply states "it is Goddes will that ye take it with as grete joy and liking as Jhesu had shewde it to you" (153), the earlier version prefaces this statement with an address to "ye that heres and sees this vision and this techinge that is of Jhesu Criste to edification of youre saule" (*A Vision* 73). The short version emphasises the experience of the reader who is, or should realise that she can be, partaker of the vision: hearer and seer. The omission of this statement in the later version places the emphasis on the mediation of Julian and on the reader's reception of the account of the revelation *as if* it had been shown directly, rather than actually experiencing it. In other words, it becomes a quasi-experience rather than a direct experience.

A second example of the tendency towards greater prescription in the long text comes from the eighth vision in which Julian witnesses the final sufferings of Christ on the cross and, in particular, his dehydration. Both short and long version descriptions of this vision include details such as the changing colour of the body, as reflected in Christ's face and his lips, the drying of the skin and the "wringnge" of the nails (*Revelation* 181; *A Vision* 83). Both accounts also include a statement as to the ineffable nature of these sufferings: "swilke paynes I sawe that alle es to litelle that I can telle or saye, for it maye nought be tolde"/ "for whiche paines, I saw that alle is to litille that I can sey, for it may not be told" (*Revelation* 183; *A Vision* 83). Despite this statement, however, the long

version is considerably expanded with many more details about the dying and broken body, as if in an attempt to describe these things rather than concede to ineffability. A significant line is also omitted from the longer version. In admitting the ineffability of the scene in the shorter version, Julian encourages her readers to try and transcend it by following the words of St Paul: “ilke saule [each soul], aftere the sayinge of Sainte Paule, shulde ‘feelee in him that in Criste Jhesu’” (83).³¹ It seems that this encouragement to the reader to try and “feel” Christ’s pains for himself has been replaced in the longer version with further details as remembered or added by Julian.

Two further changes suggest changes in Julian’s understanding of herself and of her experience and suggest that Julian was taking a more authoritative role in the later version even as she continues to emphasise her oneness with others. The first of these has already been mentioned, that is the removal of Julian’s statement that she is not a teacher but only a “lewed, febille, and freylle” woman. It seems possible that Julian omits this statement because of increasing confidence, not in her role as teacher but in her ability to express God’s meaning (to understand the vision) and because of the need to convey this one true meaning with effectiveness and authority. We might speculate the same kind of reasoning lies behind the way Julian changes her account of the tenth vision, the vision of Christ’s heart riven in two. In the first account of this vision, Julian suggests that God shows her his wounded side and cloven heart as an alternative to the “godhead” which she is not able to see (*A Vision* 89). In the later account, Julian describes how she is actually led into the wound and that there she sees “the blisshed

³¹ The scripture reference is probably to Phil.2:5 (cf. also Acts 25:28 and 1 Cors 6:17) according to Beer (89) and Watson and Jenkins (82).

godhede" (*Revelation* 201). Focusing on what Julian is able to see gives her "reading" more authority.

These examples, within the context of the longer work, demonstrate how Julian is keen to guide her reader into greater love for God but not necessarily greater knowledge (the readers are discouraged from their own theological exploration) or independent thinking (the readers are to simply follow Julian's lead rather than think for themselves). In this way, Julian reproduces the texts of affective meditation with which she was nurtured but which she "outgrew" – she, like they, is encouraging her reader to grow in love but not really in thought (because Julian thinks for us and we can simply agree with her). Like a "visionary script," a "sharing" in the experience is promised and "visualisation" is encouraged, but is limited by the degree of detail present in the text. While visualisation promotes greater love which may, in theory, lead to mystical experiences (and, consequently, the creation of new "texts"), the promotion of new or alternative interpretations is not the primary goal of either *The Mirror*, *The Privity of the Passion*, or Julian's "boke."

Thus we see Julian the vernacular reader and the vernacular writer. As devotee (and reader), Julian had wanted something more and had aspired above and beyond visualisation to vision. She is given a "text" (the sixteen visions) authored by God, but also provides an interpretation which she asserts is God's and which is therefore definitive. This interpretation is shared not only with Julian but - through her - with all Christians who, in their unity with her, are as central to the reading process as she is. As writer, however, she uses her belief in her role as representative for all her "evencristen"

to shape reader response to the visions and to protect the “true” meaning of the text (one that represents an ideal unity between God, church and believer) from alternatives. Providing a hermeneutic method and a gloss of the original “text” of the visions, Julian ultimately ends up reproducing the kind of prescriptive literature she herself had read. Though sometimes very different from these in its theological content, Julian’s “boke” promotes devotion, not original thought (even though Julian herself demonstrates both these things), asserts that there are mysteries but does not reveal them, denies the need for any kind of change in doctrinal thought or understanding, warns against curiosity or “particularity” in the way we understand or interpret things, and demands complete allegiance to Holy Church. Furthermore, by tightly restricting independence of experience, Julian’s text actually goes beyond other “guided meditations” and makes the reader a passive observer of her; Julian’s audience experiences not a “mystical showing” but a “literary one.” By being theoretically in union with the vision’s percipient and yet, in reality, removed from the interpretive process, the reader of Julian’s *Revelation* becomes practically redundant, an observer of a text-reader transaction through which the definitive meaning of the text has already been established.

CHAPTER THREE. RE-CREATING ORDERS, RULES, AND TEXTUAL
COMMUNITIES: THE CASE OF *BOOK TO A MOTHER* AND *THE RECLUSE*

At the start of her recent book, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*, Katherine Kerby-Fulton provides a detailed chronology of non-Wycliffite cases of heresy and related events from the middle of the twelfth century to the middle of the fifteenth, thereby providing sufficient evidence to challenge the assumption that a discussion of radical thought in late medieval England is always a discussion about Lollardy. Such an assumption is held, Kerby-Fulton suggests, by “modern scholars” convinced that “intellectual radicalism in the period can be subsumed under the heading of Wyclif’s influence *simpliciter* just because it dominates the official records” (*Books* 12). Lollards were not the first people in England to express anti-clerical thought, exalt the spirituality of the laity, or question the efficacy of practices promoted by the church and yet, as Andrew Larsen points out, the idea that there was no heresy in England before John Wyclif and the Lollards has become a pervasive “myth” which has shaped our reading of texts, trials, and lives (62). The effect has been to allow a crude binary distinction between “Lollard” and “orthodox” to shape our perspective of the late medieval world even *before* Lollardy came on the scene. As Larsen shows, scholars have, on occasion, been guilty of overlooking “simple chronology” by linking even pre-Lollard heretics with Lollardy (62).¹ Similarly a large

¹Larsen cites specific examples including the nun Marion Rye (who was accused of rejecting the sacraments), whom the historian T. F. Lirby (in 1899) speculated was a follower of Wyclif even though her heretical activity occurred in 1369, and the connection made by the editors of the *Victoria History of the County of Huntingdon* (1926) between Lollardy and a recluse examined for suspect beliefs in 1346 (61). Larsen’s survey of the perpetuation of the “myth” that heresy was “rare and unimportant”

number of texts have been, at various times, attributed to the Lollards (or, in some cases, to Wyclif himself) because they contain reformist sentiment, anti-clerical themes, or simply because they were written in English, even when the dating of the texts makes the attribution impossible, or at least highly unlikely.² In fact, these pre-Lollard texts have a lot to tell us about the “intellectual interests” of the world into which Lollardy was emerging, interests with which many Wycliffite concerns would later coincide (Hudson, *Premature* 393).

That this binary approach to late medieval religion still continues to exert an influence is apparent from recent criticism on *The Recluse*, a unique fourteenth-century redaction of the *Ancrene Riwe* found in Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 2498. A somewhat disordered, and sometimes confused, text, *The Recluse* omits material from, and alters the structure of, the *Riwe* and inserts several pages worth of additional material. This material has many of the features we now mostly (sometimes entirely) associate with Lollardy including the exalting of the apostolic model (the value of preaching), the condemnation of those who forbid men to preach, criticism of the clergy, defence of the layman’s right to religious instruction, and condemnation of the Donation of Constantine. Consequently, the only two full-length articles written about the text - that of Edmund Colledge in 1939 and of Christina von Nolcken in 2002 - associate the work with the Lollards. The text is problematic, however, because not all of the interpolations are “Lollard” in flavour; one of the additions is an extract from the *Mirror*

in pre-Wycliffite England takes in nineteenth and twentieth-century studies and finds the most recent examples in R. N. Swanson's study of medieval church and society (1989) and Malcolm Lambert's discussion of medieval heresy (1992).

²For one example see the discussion of the Middle English Apocalypse Commentary in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

of St Edmund on observing the canonical hours, another is a fable (never a popular genre among Lollards) from the life of St Augustine, a third seeks to extend the *Riwle's* discussion of confession to the "commune people" but does so by providing instruction on oral confession, a sacrament Wyclif spoke out against. The choice of *Ancrene Riwle* as a base text is also an odd one for a Lollard given the movement's opposition to the solitary life.³ The text can also give the impression of holding apparently contradictory views, particularly on the validity of life in an "order" (as I will argue below, this is in part because of ambiguity in the author's use of this word). Colledge put such inconsistencies down to the work being a first draft that was never revised; von Nolcken, following Hudson's suggestion in a very brief comment on the work, argues for the likelihood of two revisers, an earlier one (presumably responsible for the more "orthodox" of the changes) and a later one "whose career and preoccupations were very much what we might expect of an early Lollard" ("The Recluse" 182).

As I will go on to discuss, the idea that the work is the product of more than one reviser occludes evidence of the text's unity. It also seems to be necessary only because of a need to see the heterodox comments as being separate from the orthodox comments - a refusal to believe they could have come from the same hand. This conclusion seems to work on the assumption that unorthodox ideas have to be Lollard and Lollard only. Thus the treatment of *The Recluse* becomes an excellent example of how the "Lollard" - "orthodox" divide continues to influence the way we read texts.

Actually, the biggest problem with reading *The Recluse* as a Lollard, or Lollard-influenced, text, is its date. The text is almost certainly too early to be a Lollard work.

³ See, for example, the tract "Of Feigned Contemplative Life" (Matthew 187-96).

Arne Zettersten's edition of *The Recluse* dates the Pepys manuscript as the "middle of the second half of the fourteenth century" (xix). Subsequent attempts by Hanna to provide a more specific estimation suggest that the "Pepys scribe's bookhand would make most sense in the decade 1365-75" and that the manuscript "cannot likely represent a late fourteenth-century hand" ("English" 143). This places it as probably at least a decade before Wyclif's ideas were becoming well known outside of Oxford.⁴ It therefore seems possible that Colledge and von Nolcken may be guilty of the tendency described by Larsen for scholars to overlook "simple chronology."

Though the inconsistencies and apparent disorder of *The Recluse* make it a special case, the fact is that there are many texts, and collections of texts, dating from the late medieval period which contain a mixture of orthodox and heterodox ideas. While some of these documents are the result of subsequent manipulation or engineering, others testify to an open-mindedness in the original writers and readers which Hudson has suggested contrasts with the modern critic's narrow-minded demands for "doctrinal consistency" (*Premature* 425). As texts contemporaneous with *The Recluse* show, it was possible for one writer to express doctrinally diverse opinions, or to express both "reformist" and traditionally "devotional" sentiments: one writer can aggressively criticise the failings of the clergy and berate the wealth of the church while in the same breath promise an indulgence to all those who pray the Pater noster three times, to give just one example.⁵

⁴ Wyclif starting lecturing in theology on Oxford in 1371 and most of his surviving sermons date from the mid 1370s. His teachings were first officially condemned in 1377. Most evidence suggests that Wycliffite ideas were spreading beyond Oxford only by the early to mid-1380s.

⁵ The example comes from a sermon included in Ross' collection (58-59).

In this chapter I discuss two texts - the second of which is *The Recluse* - which demonstrate this co-existence of reformist and more traditionally devotional thought. The first text is *Book to a Mother*, a work written by a priest for his mother and, by extension, the lay community and dating from the 1370s. I argue that these works can be understood as attempts to re-create (in the case of the *Book*), and promote renewal in (in the case of *The Recluse*), religious communities by re-working the definition of “order,” “religion” and “rule.” To do this, both texts effectively act as commentaries on existing, authoritative texts or textual traditions. *Book to a Mother* comments on the “book” of Christ’s life which is actualised in a Life of Christ narrative in the tradition of works like the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, but also, somewhat surprisingly, in the presence and explication of vernacular Scripture. *The Recluse* comments on the canonical *Ancrene Riwe* and, through it, the scriptural definition of true religion found in the letter of St James. Both texts express anticlerical opinion and dissatisfaction with the condition of the religious orders and both see true religion as grounded in a biblical model of love and obedience rather than in membership of an order or submission to an external rule. This perspective opens up the possibility of re-arranging the existing spiritual hierarchy. *Book to a Mother* takes this opportunity, and creates a new community of “weigoers” or pilgrims identified with the laity and united by the way they read, interpret, and respond to the “text” of Christ’s life. *The Recluse* is the less radical text, preserving the idea and structure of the religious hierarchy but seeking its purification and reform by re-establishing the centrality of the “inner rule.”

Re-writing the "Rule": The Rule-book for "Cristes Religioun."

Book to a Mother was probably written in the 1370s around the same time as *The Recluse*. It survives in four manuscripts.⁶ It was written by a priest (he makes passing reference to his experience in the "heringe of schrift" [*Book* 64]⁷) and was intended for his mother although also, as he explains at the start of his work, for a wider lay audience: "to knowe the bettere my purpos in this boke, wite ye wel that I desire everych man and womman and child to be my moder, for Christ seyth: he that doth his Fader wille is his brother, suster and moder" (1). Starting with the declaration of central teachings of the faith - the Creed, the Beatitudes, the Seven Virtues - the central passages of the book incorporate pastoral instruction (from spiritual concerns like repentance to more practical issues like marriage and the raising of children) mixed with a narrative of the key events from Christ's life. The last quarter of the text is made up almost entirely of translations of Gospel extracts and epistles from the New Testament.

The author's purpose in writing the *Book* is, essentially, to create a vehicle for another text, a text that he primarily describes as a guide-book: "before alle other bokes oon I chese that techeth every man and womman that wol do after him to be Cristes brother, sister and moder, and eir with him of al heven and erthe" (17). Speaking more "opunliche" a few pages later, the author identifies the book as "Crist, Godis sone of hevene" and, in particular, his "conversacioun" or way of life demonstrated in his thirty-

⁶ The manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 416; British Library MS Additional 30897; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 210; and British Library MS Egerton 826. Evidence for the text's dating to the 1370s is provided by A. J. McCarthy in his edition of the text and is mostly based on reference to the fashions of the day, oblique remarks on contemporary politics, and the lack of reference to Wycliffism or religious controversy (xxx-xxxiv).

⁷All quotations of *Book to a Mother* are taken from McCarthy's edition.

three years on earth. The bulk of the text therefore moves from different scenes and events from Christ's life, beginning with the Annunciation (33) and ending with the crucifixion (148) (although considerable digression sometimes prevents the events following smoothly one from another). What characterises this "book" of Christ at every turn, what is "write withinne and without," the author points out, is humility, willful poverty, and chastity. As these qualities were the central tenets of Christ's life, so they have become the central tenets of "Cristes religioun" and the "rule" which anyone claiming to hold that religion must be practicing (31). In other words, "Cristes religioun" is marked by the imitation of Christ's virtues. The focus of many of the descriptions of particular events or moments from Christ's life is on identifying the presence of the "rule" (all, or at least one of, the three qualities of humility, poverty, chastity) and this is frequently what the mother is encouraged to think upon. Thus, the main participants at the Annunciation are marked by their "meknesse, povert and chastite" (35, 45), the mother is exhorted to pray to the Christ-child for those same three virtues which he also taught his own mother (37), and the Last Supper and the washing of the disciples' feet are presented as lessons of "lownesse" or humility, as is the crucifixion (145, 147). Attending to the "rule" grounded in the deeds of Christ enables us to know God's will ("whanne thou wolt knowe the wil of God, bi his werkes thou maist know his wil" [32-33]) and Christ's actions reveal his commandments, thereby making "opene" what we "schulde don" (114). As living in God's will places us on the "wei to hevene," it is clear that knowing, and responding to, this book of Christ's "conversacioun" is sufficient for salvation (22).

The language of “rule and “religion” is deliberately used to invoke a comparison with the rules and “religion” represented by the religious orders. The author makes it clear that the “text” of Christ’s life is the most important guide or rule-book because Christ’s religion is “most parfit bi herself...and non other mai be good without this. For what abite ther ben of ony religioun; customes, signes, or ony other serimonies; but their acorde with Cristes religioun and helpe therto, thei ben noious, and better hit were to leve suche ordynaunces of men” (122). The external attributes which identify the religious orders are identified as man-made and as possessing value only if the virtues which mark Christ’s rule are also present. Those who pay more heed to “thinges withoute forth” than “virtues withynne” “disseyven mennes soules” and are compared to Herod who pretended to seek the Christ-child when all the time he had murder in his heart (194-95). Nuns in particular are accused of a superficiality which leads them to imagine that their “rule” and “verrey religioun” is to be found in their outfit. This attitude enables the son to assure his mother that obedience to Christ is “bettere than forto have the mantel and the ryng and the wympel and the veil, with propurte” (22).

This idea of Christ’s “religion” and its “rule” is further emphasised by descriptions of Christ as the “Abbot and Priour” of the “cloister” which is made up of virtues and built in the soul (22, 122). Those who dwell in this cloister are faithful in thought, word, and work to the model of Christ; obedience to the “rule” of humility, poverty, and chastity, rather than any uniform or external ceremonies or signs, is what identifies them (121-24). This “cloister” is therefore, in theory, open to all; neither access to the “rule-book”, nor entrance to the “order” is restricted to only those who can

afford it (18, 122). Indeed, as obedience to Christ and his example is identified several times as essential for salvation, it would follow that every man must endeavour to be part of this order. However, as we shall see, the author emphasises how few choose to be obedient to Christ's commands. The author perceives the community of "true" religious to be small and few in number, outnumbered not only by the sinful in the world but by the hypocrites who "semen holy and ben not," a group he comes increasingly to identify with the religious orders (3).

The "Weigoers": Relocating religious community

Book to a Mother is full of virulent criticism of the religious orders, and of nuns in particular; among other things, it accuses them of being hypocrites and flatterers of men (194), of being occupied with worldly wealth and worldly affairs (75, 56, 49), and of confusing the outward accoutrements of their rule with the true nature of their calling (123, 194-95). Such criticism may have had personal grievance as well as principle at its heart and it certainly makes it more likely that the author himself was part of the secular clergy.⁸ Though its criticism seems leveled at the abuses and the corruption within orders rather than their grounding or foundation, *Book to a Mother* succeeds in locating a new, truly religious lay community made up of those who follow Christ's rule and named, towards the end of the text, as "weigoers" or pilgrims. The author shows that humility,

⁸ The author refers to a time in the past when he sought to join a community of canons but was denied entrance because he could not afford it. Placing the comment in the midst of praise for the "moste fre" religion of Christ, the author does little to hide his criticism. As McCarthy points out, the text also gives the impression that the son is concerned that his widowed mother may be susceptible to the idea that it would be desirable or appropriate for her to join a convent (xxviii).

poverty, chastity - the characteristics of Christ's religion - can no longer be found among the religious even though these principles had once provided the basic foundation of the Rules they are supposed to be bound by. Consequently, he re-locates the honour and spiritual supremacy usually granted to religious orders to a lay community obedient to Christ's rule. He does this by applying characteristics once associated with the religious orders, namely their poverty, their existence as a small and marginal group, and their textuality and literacy (or at least their interaction with books) to the lay community.

'Propurte' is a loaded word for the writer of the Book, denoting not only physical possessions but also the individual will itself.⁹ Thus, early on in the text, the writer exhorts his mother to "forsake alle manere of propurte, first forsakyng thin owne propur wille" (21). "Will" - in terms of forsaking our own, knowing God's, and aligning our own with his - is a term repeated throughout the text. By forsaking "propurte," we can "buy" God, becoming united with him and with our fellow Christian (22). The praising of poverty clearly finds its source in the life and teaching of Christ: as we have seen, the rule propounded by the text is the imitation of Christ. Thus, "Crist...clepede riches the develis name, Mammon...and therfor he wolde have non in this world, but conseilede alle men to forsake hem" (74). As Watson has suggested, however, it also seems likely that the personal situation of both author and mother is one of some poverty - we learn that the mother no longer enjoys the "pompe" and "richesse" she once enjoyed and that the family could not afford the twenty pounds required for the author to become a canon -

⁹ The Middle English Dictionary states that "propurte" could mean private or individual ownership, the possessions or property itself, or "a thing belonging to an individual and thus separating him from God." *Book to a Mother* uses the term in all three of these senses.

and this raises her, and others like her, into an exalted position as far as the author is concerned (“Fashioning” 174-75; *Book* 58-59, 122). Indeed, the author’s bias to the poor is apparent in his comments that the Bible has little good to say about rich men: “fewe seintes or none schal men finde of justices, of prentises of doctoures or of lechistres of worldli lawes. Holi Wryt spekith not of hem, but that suche laweres, Mammones servauntis deden Crist to dethe and his apostlis and his holi martires” (74).

Wealth - either possession of it or desire for it - is seen to be the disease which consumes the “moste part of this world” including “lewed and lered, religiouse and seculers, fro the leste degree to the pope, that is the heieste degree” (75). The wealth of the religious is of particular concern to the author as it reveals their failure to live according to the rule of Christ. Nuns are depicted as having many possessions and parading the latest fashions and are identified with Antichrist who comes, as their Abbot, “with pompe and pride and riches” (123).

Whereas those in religious orders were numerically a minority in society, their small numbers representing the selective holiness of their chosen path, the author of *Book to a Mother* shifts this characteristic to create the impression that there exist vast numbers of corrupt religious while the true followers of Christ are the select minority. Thus he writes that the devil has more sons and daughters following his lessons than Christ does (17), and that Eve has more daughters following her ways than Mary does hers (49). He considers that “the more part of men” choose not to learn God’s law (77), that “many ben of... irreligioun and fewe othere” (125), and that “fewe ther ben now that holden Godis hestis” even though we have been told we must know them (123). The

extent to which the author of the *Book* confers minority status on the true followers of Christ becomes apparent in the final pages of the text when he describes this group as “weigoers” or pilgrims. Citing Saint Gregory, the author defines a “weigoer” as he who “holdith this lif to him a wei, and not his contre, and dipiseth to ficche [fix] his herte in love of this world; that coveiteth not to dwelle in thinges that passen, but to come to everlastinge thinges” (196). He exhorts his mother to be a “trewe weigoere” and to seek counsel only from “othere weigoers,” in particular the “sixe justices,” Christ, John, Jude, James, Peter, and Paul, “for thei weren verrai weigoers, havinge no propretees ageyns here Fadur” (198). Implying that both the hypocritical and corrupt religious and the “citesynes” and “burgeysis of this world” (whom he declares to be “liers to God”) are excluded from this group, he then warns that even those who appear to be “weigoers” may be deceivers and that his mother must be careful to use discernment to distinguish the true from the false.

Book to a Mother, then, clearly transfers the characteristics of poverty and a minority status from the religious orders to the lay community. It does the same thing with the association that is normally made between the religious orders and texts. By envisaging the relationship between Christ and the mother (who is also reader) as an essentially textual one, the author suggests that the world of texts and textuality can be adopted by the laity and does not belong exclusively to the religious. This textuality is apparent in the metaphor of Christ’s life as a book but also in the author’s description, using the image of the soul as book, of reader-response as an essentially textual process:

[H]enneforeward stude thou bisiliche in this boke and loke wher thi lyvyng
accordith with Cristes livinge, and thanke him therof; and ther it doth not,

scrape it out with sorew of herte and schrift of mouthe...And that that thee lacketh, that thou most nedis have to holde Godis hestes, writ in thi soule. Thy penne to write with schal be thi love and thi wil ymad scharp with drede of sharp peyne of helle...and yif thou scave thi penne and make hure feir and loveliche, nothing large wilnyng in thought, word and dede than God wol that thou wilne. And it mai not be that God faile of yevynge enke, that is grace, to suche a penne. And thus thou maist lerne after thi samplerie to write a feir trewe bok. (38-39)

Love for God and total submission to his will are the means by which the mother can re-write the book of Christ's life from the exemplar into her own soul, the copying of the text equating with the copying of Christ in her life.

Notably, the "text" of the mother's soul interacts not only with the "text" of Christ's life but also with a biblical community of other writers and readers. For example, when introducing the book of Christ that is at the centre of his narrative, the author refers to the passages from Baruch, Revelation, and Ezekial which all make reference to this book. It is the book which Baruch recognised as "the boke of God hestes and the lawe that is everelastyng"; it is the Book of Life which John saw opened by the Lamb, and it is the book that Ezekial was commanded to eat. As the author - citing Augustine - points out, the mother and the laity she represents must imitate John in weeping with sorrow until the Lamb opens the book and imitate Ezekial by "eating" the book that they might be turned into Christ. In this way, the mother joins the ranks of these scriptural writers and readers. A similar - if more literal effect - is created by the inclusion of the translations of the apostolic writings at the end of the text and the identification of those writers as fellow "weigoers." Rather than distant, lofty, academic figures, the apostles are identified as pilgrims who exist in community with the mother and who are, the son assures her, "more redi to teche the al that the nedith, than thou to

receive” (198).

How to Read the “bok”

As we have already observed, the author writes his book in order to present his mother with a rule-book which will teach her how to please Christ and win heaven; his book is important only insofar as it is a vehicle for this other text which, like a gloss on a page, it effectively frames through its opening (statements of the faith), closing (translations of Scripture), and ongoing comment. The image of Christ as book had strong scriptural foundation and, as Vincent Gillespie has pointed out, had become a “theological commonplace” by the thirteenth century (10). It was an image associated with the tradition of affective meditation and is found in several Passion narratives (10).¹⁰ The image could have invoked two associations in the mind of the contemporary readers: the Life of Christ genre associated with texts like the hugely popular pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, and Scripture itself. Perhaps surprisingly, *Book to a Mother* seems to make room for both, including large portions of translated Scripture while also employing a Life of Christ narrative as the main framework for the book.

That *Book to a Mother* brings together the pseudo-Bonaventuran tradition and Scripture can seem surprising to the modern scholar because of the way the two traditions have come, in the light of the evolution of vernacular theology in the years after the

¹⁰Notably the iconography is also associated with Christ's mother; the inclusion of a book which Mary may be reading or holding in scenes depicting the Annunciation or the Visitation reminds us that Christ, the eternal Word, is already present even before his birth (Lesley Smith 22).

writing of *Book*, to be seen as such opposites of each other. As Michelle Karnes has recently pointed out, in the discussion of late medieval religion in England, the Life of Christ tradition has often been seen in opposition to the vernacular Bible, largely because of the relationship that Nicholas Love's hugely popular translation of the *Meditationes* is seen to have with the Lollards and the Wycliffite Bible. Discussions of Love's text and representations of it as an "intended antagonist" to the Wycliffite Bible have cast the entire genre of Gospel meditations as "both institutional and conservative" (Karnes 405, 403). Gospel meditations have therefore come to be seen as associated with orthodox and conservatively devotional religion, and as opposed to the reformism associated with Bible translation. By combining vernacular Scripture and the Life of Christ narrative, *Book to a Mother* reminds us that it was possible to create, quite unproblematically, a space of co-existence. Such co-existence arises from the author's primary concern with deeds rather than words. Both Scripture and the Life of Christ tradition are valued and used for the way they point to Christ and provide a model for imitation. Indeed, they are seen essentially as guides to this imitation. The author does not seem to consider them to be distinct from one another: the Gospel meditation is, after all, grounded in the Gospel, and he instead works on the assumption that they will be read, interpreted, and responded to in exactly the same ways.

With the exception of its first pages in which the author sets out the articles of the faith and defines his intention, the first three-quarters of *Book to a Mother* are knit together with a narrative of Christ's life clearly influenced by the Life of Christ tradition and, in particular, that tradition's attempts to bring more "local colour" into Gospel

scenes and to encourage the mental involvement and interaction of the reader with the events being described. The author's debt to the *Meditationes* is apparent, as Adrian McCarthy has pointed out, in the presence of descriptive passages, phrases, and ideas drawn from it. The most obvious of these is the account of Christ's nativity through which the mother is encouraged to dwell on the poverty of the stable scene, the harshness of the season in which Christ "ches to be bore," and to consider St Bernard's teaching that by choosing this means of entering the world, God teaches us that that which is more "peinful" is more wise (*Book* 33-34). These same elements make up the description in the *Meditationes*:

On the verge of the birth, the Son of God, within whose control it was to choose whatever season he wished, chose the one which is rather burdensome, especially for an infant and the son of a poor mother...Christ, who is never deceived, chose that which was more mortifying to the flesh. This, therefore is the better choice, the more useful choice. (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 27)¹¹

Later, *Book to a Mother* returns to the nativity scene to comment on the absence of "proude squyers with baudrikes, gurdelis, lakis, colers abouten the neckes" (48). This seems to be drawn from the *Meditationes* which remarks that the nativity scene contains no consolation for "those who strut around in elegant robes; the stable and the manger do not console those who love front seats in the synagogues" (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 26).¹² Still at the nativity scene, *Book's* instruction to the mother to "go to Marie and make covenant with hure to kepe hure childe...And tak to thee the swete childe and

¹¹"Nasciturus Dei Filius, cuius in arbitrio erat quodcumque uellet eligere tempus, eligit quod molestius est, praesertium paruulo et pauperis matris filio...Christus utique, qui non fallitur, elegit quod carni molestius est. Id ergo melius, id utilius" (Stallings-Taney 34).

¹²...non consolantur panni eius ambulantes in stolis: non consolantur stabulum et presepe amantes primas cathedras in synagogis" (Stallings-Taney 33).

swetliche swath hit in his cradil with swete love bondes” seems inspired by a very similar instruction in the *Meditationes*: “ask our Lady to hand him to you and even allow you to hold him. Take him and hold him fast in your arms” (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 28).¹³

On the whole, however, the author seems less concerned than the *Meditationes* with promoting a purely emotional response to the events of Christ’s life and more concerned with drawing out the lessons we are to take from these events. The nativity scene is itself an example of this: whereas the *Meditationes* portrays the imagined act of holding the Christ child as a moment of emotional engagement (focusing on the physical actions of gazing, kissing, and touching), *Book* uses the action as a symbol for repentance: “[p]ut fro thee the cradul of false love, and drawe to thee the cradul of trewe love, for that liketh this child to reste him inne” (50). As I have suggested above, in the description of particular scenes or persons, the author is keen to direct the reader’s attention to the presence of Christ’s “rule” in order that she might learn by these examples. Indeed, the central episodes (events like Christ casting the demons into the herd of pigs, the story of the prodigal son, and the raising of Lazarus) which are already somewhat disrupted by the presence of lengthy digressions on marriage, the raising of

¹³Deinde osculare pedes pueri Iesu iacentis in presepio, et roga Dominam ut eum tibi porrigat uel permittat accipere. Accipias eum, et inter brachia tua retine” (Stallings-Taney 35).

McCarthy connects the metaphor of the “king’s highway” (used in *Book*) and the teaching that St John was the bridegroom at the Wedding in Cana (cited in *Book*) to the *Meditationes*, though both are also found elsewhere (xlili-xliv). McCarthy notes that the author’s exaltation of the book of Christ’s life being the “beste remedie and the beste rule and the beste mirour that mai be to over come synne” (31) captures the essence of the Prologue to the *Meditationes* which also asserts that meditation on the life of Christ is a remedy against “vain and passing enticements, trials and adversities, and the temptations and vices of your enemies” (Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney 1).

children, and criticism of sinners and hypocrites, sound more like homiletic exposition rather than passages of affective meditation.¹⁴ References to the mother's imaginative interaction with the text are fewer in these scenes and the events are interpreted in terms of their relevance for wider (and usually corrupt) groups: "fleshlich men," "sinful men," "mysproude wemmen and men" (97, 100, 128). The mother's imaginative engagement is most strongly encouraged in the traditionally most emotive scenes - Christ's birth and the Passion. Yet, even here, the emphasis is on accruing Christ-like virtues ("and be glad with hure [Mary] of the conceyvyng of hure Sone, and preie hure that sche wol bidde hure Son that thou mowe folewe hure in mekenesse, povert and chastite" [33]; "preie this Child that lai in the stal before the oxe and the asse for his modir love that he teche the spedfulliche to thi loives ende thes thre virtues - meknes, povert and chastity - as he taught his modir" [37]) and on imitating Christ "gostliche." It seems the goal is not emotional engagement but to learn from the pattern of Christ's life the model or rule by which the mother (and all other "weigoers" or followers of Christ) are to live. This is perhaps most apparent in the description of the scene that usually provides the opportunity for the most emotionally intense identification with Christ and his sufferings in the Life of Christ tradition - the crucifixion. Here the brevity of the description is startling (the moment of Jesus' arrest through to his hanging on the cross is all covered in fourteen lines) and it is portrayed as, above all, a "lessoun of lownesse" (148). It seems - in some contrast with the affective tradition - that identification with the living Christ is

¹⁴ The story of the exorcism is interpreted as a warning for sinful men and how they are bound up in their sin (97), the prodigal son is taken as a picture of God's mercy, with allegorical readings of the different players and parts (100), the raising of Lazarus is read in connection with the two other cases of Jesus raising the dead, the three being interpreted, conventionally, as different degrees of sin that God forgives (128).

here considered more highly than identification with the dying Christ.

Incorporated in and around this Life of Christ narrative, we find Scripture. Indeed, the language throughout the text is very much the language of Scripture. The author cites Bible verses directly, paraphrases them, and alludes to the biblical narrative and to biblical teaching always in the vernacular with no reference to the Latin. The author stresses the identification of Christ with Scripture: as well as providing the testimonies of Baruch, Ezekial, and John with their various descriptions of the Book of Life and the Word which is made flesh, the author cites the Gospel in which “Crist clepith himself Holi Writ that his Fadur halewide and sende into this world, that men schulde amende here false bokis bi him. For Crist seith: ‘Example I have yeve to yow: right as I have don, do ye’ (38). The identity of the “false bokis” is uncertain but, given the subsequent discussion of the need to write this book into our souls, it seems likely that the false books the author has in mind are our distorted souls which are amended by the example, and saving work, of Christ.

The last quarter of the text is composed of large extracts of New Testament writings to which very little in terms of gloss or exposition is added.¹⁵ At the end of the section, however, the author provides something by way of commentary by re-presenting the “highlights” of the passages just quoted in order to demonstrate that all this teaching “hongeth on Cristis hestis” (192). Thus, “Seint Jon...seith: yif ony man seith he loveth

¹⁵ These are excerpts from Chapters 8, 12-17 of John, selections from 1 and 2 John, sections from Jude, excerpts from James, passages from 1 and 2 Peter, extracts from 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews. The additional comments include one short explanatory phrase on Jude (167), a short introduction to Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians (180), a definition of idols (165), and one reference to a gloss of Bernard explaining John’s reference to the three witnesses: water, spirit and blood (163-64).

God, and kepith not his hestis, ‘he is a liere’...Seint Jame accordeth with Crist and Jon, techinge that feith withoute Godis hestis holding is ded and dampnable...Seint Poul seith that charite is ende of Cristis hestis, fulfillingge of his lawe” (192). While in reality the sections of Scripture quoted contain a variety of teaching, the author clearly wishes to direct our attention to the way they uphold the core teaching of the Book itself: obedience to Christ’s example.

The author encourages his mother to learn the “dome” (judgement) of the “sixe justices” (Christ and the New Testament writers) for this is why “thei leften hit write with us” (193). The comment suggests that Scripture is a key source for this knowledge which is essential to salvation; however, as a whole *Book to a Mother* conveys the message that Scripture is not the only source from which this teaching can be garnered. *Book* reminds us that Christ *is* Holy Writ and suggests that we can glean from his life and his deeds all that we need for salvation, and perhaps even more than we glean from Scripture. This is apparent in a complicated discussion of the nature of Scripture found early in the book. After describing the process by which the mother will “stude” the book of Christ’s life, amending the text of her own soul in accordance with it, the author describes how she may thus

better konne Holi Writ than ony masiter of divinite that loveth not God so wel as thou; for who loveth best God, can best Holi Writ. For bokis that men wryten ben not Holi Wryt, but as ymages ben holi, for thei bitokeneth holi Seintes; but Christ, Godis Sone, he is verreiliche Holi Writ, and who that loveith him best is best clerk. And of this maner wrytynge spekith Holi Writ and seith: “Here thou, Israel, the hestes of lif”: and “write hem in a boke.” Also bothe tables of Goddis hestes weren “write with Godis finger”: that is, with the Holi Gost as a penne that he writeth with. (39)

This passage is intriguing. “[T]his maner of writing” refers to the preceding description

directing us to write the text of Christ's life into our hearts. This process is here compared to the inscribing of the Ten Commandments on the tablets and to the way God wrote the Scripture (Christ) through the Holy Spirit. The comments on the "bokis men wryten" could simply refer to the books or glosses that men write to understand or explain Scripture, the lack of which need not impede the mother's ability to understand Scripture. However, it is also possible that the description refers to the written word of Scripture, the signs on a page, which - though they contain Christ - are not Christ himself. The author is effectively talking about "levels" of Scripture just as John Wyclif was doing not too far away in either time or space. According to this understanding the most important level is the Book of Life or Christ himself, and the lowest level is the manuscripts, sounds, and signs which convey that truth to the mind. Though the Word permeates all levels of Scripture in a descending fashion, the importance or holiness of the lowest level of Scripture comes from its relation to what it conveys - just as the analogy with images used here suggests. Wyclif, in his teaching on Scripture, invoked a very similar analogy: "[t]hat Scripture which is perceptible through voices and manuscripts is not Holy Scripture, except in an equivocal sense, just as we might say the picture or image of a man is called a man on account of its resemblance to the actual man" (Wyclif 99).¹⁶ It seems then that the passage indicates that the direct writing into our hearts of the Holy Word which is Christ is here prized by the *Book* author above the

¹⁶ Wyclif's theory of the five levels of Scripture is set forth in *On the Truth of Holy Scripture* (c.1377-78). I am not intending here to suggest that the *Book* author knew of Wyclif or his teaching but simply that he had good theological knowledge and may even have been aware of on-going theological debate. Indeed, McCarthy points to evidence suggesting that the author of *Book to a Mother* was aware of, and influenced by, theological debate arising in Oxford on the doctrines of predestination and "dominion of grace" (lii-lvii).

Scripture itself.

For the author of *Book to a Mother*, the “bok” of Christ is not ultimately contained by Scripture or by a Life of Christ narrative and Christ himself is exalted above both these two mediums. This teaching is confirmed in the text’s instruction on how we are to read this “bok” of Christ and how we should respond to it, reading practices which remain the same whether we come to that book via Scripture or a Life of Christ narrative.

A variety of reading practices are implicitly or explicitly suggested through the course of the *Book*, with the foundation of them all being right living. Humility and penance are described as the best way to begin to learn “oure foreside boke”; they are the equivalent of “oure a.b.c.” (24, 23). The author describes the reading process in terms which are reminiscent of the monastic “lectio” with the focus on chewing on and ingesting the book: “modur, lerne this boke, as I seide...that is, know thou the livinge of Crist and ofte chew hit and defie [digest] hit with hot brennyng love, so that alle the virtues of this soule and of thi bodi be turned fro fleschliche livinge into Cristes livinge, as bodily mete that is chewed and defied norschith alle the parties of a mannes bodi” (32). In an image that relates to the idea of copying Christ’s text into the soul, this passage also emphasises how the result of our reading should be a replication of “Cristes livinge.” When we “stude...bisiliche in this bok” it is always with an eye to how our own living accords with it (38). What is perhaps the clearest piece of advice comes in a short digression between the narration of Christ’s attendance at the wedding in Cana and a section of pastoral teaching on marriage and child-rearing:

Modur, to knowe what this schulde mene and undurstonde the bettur al that thou herest of the gospel or of Cristes techinge, wite thou wel that this was

the maner of Cristes techinge. For he wiste wel that we hadde blend
[blinded] us self and destried oure gostliche wittis, that we seie not ne saurede
none hevenliche thinges, bi folewinge of lustis and likinges of oure bodiliche
wittes. Therefore whanne he wolde undurnyme the Jewes of ther sinnes or
teche hem ony gostliche thinges, he wolde telle hem a bodiliche ensample
that thei knewe, for thei schulde therbi have knowe gostliche thinges that he
chargede more. (62)

This explanation of the “maner of Cristes techinge” essentially reflects the “letter-spirit” division which was foundational to scriptural exegesis. As Jesus covered spiritual truths with “bodiliche ensample[s]” that we might better understand them, so now, in interpreting the Word, we need to be careful to uncover those “gostliche thinges.” This hermeneutic principle is also, however, key to the narratives in the affective tradition as they sought to reveal the deeper relevance of events and persons from the Gospel story, providing, as they did so, another kind of gloss on the scriptural story.

Book to a Mother demonstrates this hermeneutic principle at work. For example, the mother is encouraged to make identifications with different characters based on the symbolic significance of their names; she can be “angel Gabriel gostlich...for angel bitokeneth a god messanger, and Gabriel strengthe of God” or, if she has “bittur sorwe” for her sins and lives a good example to those around here, she may be Mary “gostlich” “for Marie is as muche to seie as a bittur se or a sterre of the see” (45). More importantly, however, the “ghostly” interpretations of events often provide a practical way to imitate Christ even in those actions which seem superhuman or beyond the reach or ability of the present reader, thereby extending the scope of the reader’s aspirations to become like Christ. The mother can, for example, imitate “gostliche” Christ’s fast in the wilderness by choosing to “make of alle the world a desert” (and here the author reminds

us of all the ways the world can be understood as a desert [57]). Unable to take a precious ointment and anoint Christ's body as Mary Magdalene did (as much because of her poverty as because she dwells in another age, it seems), the mother is invited to "tak...thre oynementis that Seint Bernard speketh of, more preciose to Christ, better chep and lighter to have than that of Marie, of the thre hundred pans. The firste is of contricioun, the secunde of devocioun, the thridde of pite" (135). Again, when describing the washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, the author instructs his mother to imitate Christ "gostliche":

bifore the feste dai that thou schalt passe into the blisse of hevene, rise up fro the derke soper of synne with sorwe of herte and schrift of mouthe, desiringe to do satisfaccioun; and so put fro the thine olde clothes, and with a whit, strong love-gurdel of rightfulnessse gurde faste to the a semles cote, that is charite, as Cristes was, of the seven vertues of the Holi Gost. (144)

The author also shows his reader how to imitate the physical or literal actions of the main players in the narrative by interpreting the actions in an allegorical or "ghostly" manner thereby drawing us nearer to our goal of imitating Christ. The hermeneutic foundation of the distinction between letter and spirit, which is key to the reading of both Scripture and the Life of Christ genre, is here clearly directed to the end of practical imitation and obedience.

By centering on right living, attitude of heart, and the goal of the imitation of Christ, the author is clearly favouring deeds over words. This dominance of deeds over words (even the words of Scripture) is also apparent in the depiction of preaching and in the son's call to his mother to be a preacher. Here preaching is clearly identified not with the preaching of a physical text but with the example given by a life lived in obedience to

Christ (61). “With gode livinge alle men and women ben holde to preche,” says the author, declaring that “oure Ladi was the beste prechour that ever was, save Crist; and yet sche spac but fewe wordis” (61). In this manner, his own mother should preach, imitating Christ who “first dide and setten he taught” (61). Action, obedience, and living-out the Christ model are the primary means of reading and the primary means of believing as far as this author is concerned. Imitation of Christ and the humility, poverty, and chastity he exemplified becomes the only “orthodoxy.”

Effectively, then, in order to present Christ’s life as a “rule-book” for “weigoers,” *Book to a Mother* glosses the two major sources of that life: Scripture and the Life of Christ narrative tradition. It re-directs the traditional emphasis of the pseudo-Bonaventuran tradition away from emotional response and towards practical imitation of Christ’s example, and it presents obedience to Christ’s commands as the only message of Scripture; in this way both textual tradition and text support the author’s contention that the substance of “Cristes religioun” is imitation. As a last note on this orthodoxy of imitation, it is useful to recognise the extent to which the writer presents himself as imitating Christ. His opening statement shows how he imitates Christ in his desire that “everych man and woman and child” should be his “brother, suster and moder.” The central relationship between son and mother provides a means by which the author can identify himself with Jesus and seek to imitate him. In considering the scene of the nativity, for example, the author bids his mother to “preie this Child that lai in the stal... for his modir love that he teche the spedfulliche to thi lives ende thes thre virtues - meknes, povert and chastite - as he taught his modir” (37). The model of son teaching

mother as Christ taught Mary is therefore being imitated by the author's instruction of his mother, while the passage also suggests the extent to which Christ also considers the author's mother his mother. Obviously seeking to be obedient to Christ's own teaching, the author imitates the content, and some of the expressions of Christ's own teaching; this is particularly evident in his attacks on wealth (74). In his closing words the son excuses himself from having spoken "boistres wordis" to his mother implying that he is only imitating Christ who "spak to his modir boistres wordis" (201). The author's own identification with Christ allows him to also - along with the central text of Christ's life - offer his own life and his own actions as a model. This brings us back to the extent to which his own text (and his own life) acts as a kind of gloss on the central "text" he is presenting which is the text of Christ's life.

Making Sense of The Recluse

As has been mentioned above, *The Recluse* is a text full of apparent inconsistencies and contradictions. Most recent assessments of the text have sought to explain this by suggesting the text has been through more than one stage of revision. Thus, Hudson considers that the text has likely been through "at least two stages of modification, the first by an orthodox reviser who added material reinforcing the intentions of the original author, the second by a perfunctory and unorthodox redactor who endeavoured rather sporadically to convert the text to a secular purpose" (*Premature* 28). Watson, in comments made as part of a survey of fourteenth-century adaptations of the *Ancrene Riwe*, also suggests the possibility that the work is the "product of more than one phase of revision" ("Ancrene" 219). Von Nolcken considers that this theory

makes “excellent sense” in relation to both its context and its content (“The Recluse” 181). Beyond the assumption that anything of an “unorthodox” nature must belong to a Lollard or heterodox redactor, however, no one has provided any details about where or how the differences between the two (or possibly more) revisers can be detected and which elements of text we should ascribe to which reviser. This is not surprising as the task is a very difficult one; individual interpolations sometimes contain both conventional and more reformist comments mixed together without an obvious change of voice while a number of the interpolations, scattered as they are throughout the text, sometimes demonstrate close connections. While it is probably impossible to determine for sure whether the text is the work of one or more revisers, I would suggest that the attempt to explain incoherence by invoking two or more revisers occludes the features of the text which point to its unity. The *Riwle*, as it appears in *The Recluse*, has been altered to, apparently, emphasise Scripture, shifting the biblical verses which are integrated into the text in the *Riwle*, into a position as “headers” for each new paragraph – a job that was almost certainly the work and vision of one person. A large number of the interpolations lead off from the scriptural headings or insert new ones in accordance with the model. While it would be neat to be able to ascribe every interpolation containing radical comment to one “voice,” this does not seem possible because of similarities in wording and phrasing shared across a selection of the interpolations with varying content. Phrases and vocabulary that mark the interpolations include “quemeth [pleases] God,” “understonde wel,” “I rede,” “I ne speke nought,” and “wisdom and quentise.” Thus, for example, language that is used to defend appropriate entering of the “onelich life” is

mirrored in an apparent rejection (or at least rebuttal of) the solitary life (*English Text* 28, 72).¹⁷ The interpolations sometimes cross-reference other points in the text (“as ye schulle heren here after” and “as I seide of before”) which suggests a continuity within the interpolations and a systematic incorporation of material, even though this material expresses a variety of religious opinion (28, 62, 73, 89-90). The text also contains significant repetition of ideas and examples including providing two almost identical explanations of the Parable of the Two Sons and two passages (the second expanding the first) refuting false teachings about judgement and the afterlife (57 and 142-43).

Certainly, aspects of the text point to some surprising and curious choices made on the part of the redactor: the inclusion of an exposition of the Hours as well as the instructions for the worship of the anchoresses (Book I of the *Riwle*), for example. The text is also ambiguous about whom it is seeking to address; while it clearly widens the audience beyond the original, it is not clear that it ever eliminates the original audience - quite often it seems to address two groups of people and, as will be discussed below, it continues to apply some instruction just to anchoresses. At the very end of the text there is also the intrusion of a substantial passage from John’s Apocalypse (with commentary) which would have seemed to have made good ending material but which is followed by Book VIII on the outer rule. Most obviously, perhaps, the text contains some virulent anticlerical and anti-religious comment and apparently criticises the solitary life even as it uses a guide to solitaries as its template.

I want to suggest, nevertheless, that there is an overall unity to *The Recluse* and

¹⁷All quotations from *The Recluse* are taken from Zettersten’s edition, *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe*.

that the text can best be understood as an extended gloss on the opening of the *Ancrene Riwe* and its distinction between the outer and inner rule and its definition of the “right religion and ordre.” These definitions are from the *Riwe* - by now a “canonical” and authoritative text, recognised by many (Watson, “Ancrene” 197-98). These definitions clearly inspired the redactor and also enabled him to ground his comments in this orthodox text (which he does quite literally by imposing them upon it). *Ancrene Riwe* is meant to be perceived as the root of his commentary and the authority for it.

The *Riwe* opens by providing two very clear sets of definitions: one on the difference between the inner and outer rule and one on true religion and order. “Moníe cunne riwlen beoth ah twa beoth bimong alle & ich chulle spoken of...The an riwleth the heorte...Theos riwe is eaver inwith & rihteth the heorte...The other riwe is al withuten & riwleth the licome [body] & licomliche deden [bodily things]” (*Wisse* 5-6). The *Riwe* goes on to assert the superiority of the inner rule; it is the “lady” while the outer rule is but her handmaid. While the inner rule is “I maket [made] nawt of monnes fundles [invention] ah is of godes heaste” and therefore unchanging, the outer rule can be varied according to the needs or weaknesses of the individual anchoress (7). Turning to the question of defining the “order” to which the anchoress should say she belongs, the author asserts that religion is nowhere more clearly defined than in St James’ epistle: “he seith what is Religiun, hwuch is riht ordre:...cleane religiun & withute wem is iseon & helpen wydnes & faderlese children & from the worlde witen him cleane & unwemmet” (9).¹⁸ As the verse neatly falls into two parts, the *Riwe* applies to it the traditional

¹⁸ “religio munda et immaculata apud Deum et Patrem haec est visitare pupillos et viduas in tribulatione eorum immaculatum se custodire ab hoc saeculo”(James 1:27).

division between the active and contemplative lives, stating that it is the job of the “prelaz & treowe preachurs” to take responsibility for the widows and orphans, terms which are interpreted as representing a spiritual (the soul which is “widowed” or “orphaned” by sin) more than a physical condition (10). The second part - withdrawing from the world so as not to be stained by it - is the responsibility of the anchoresses “over othre religiuse” (10). The *Riwle* firmly states that this is the only definition or “order” and of “religion” that matters; “religion” is not a matter of the clothing, the habit (whether black or white), which is only a part of the outer rule. Confirming James' description by a reference to Micah 6:8 - that what God requires of us is to seek mercy, love justice and walk humbly before him - the *Riwle* asserts that where these things are found there is “riht religiun[,] ther is soth ordre”; without them the habit, and the rest of the outer rule, become nothing but “trichunge ant a fals gile” (11).

The Recluse sticks very closely to this description provided by the *Riwle* but makes efforts to extend the relevance of the discussion beyond anchoresses. Thus, when explaining the inner rule, it substitutes “ancren” with “men and wymen,” but also inserts an addition to the definition of the inner rule, interpreting “clennesse of hert” as Christ's commandment to love God and love our neighbour (2). This is accompanied by several lines directing one's interaction with one's neighbour, implying that these comments are very much addressed to those living in the world. At the same time, however, the reviser does not exclude the solitary or “onelich” (though here men, not just women), but maintains the *Riwle's* instruction on the very specific vows (including stability of abode and obedience to the bishop) that apply to them (3). On the subject of the order described

by St James, *The Recluse* omits the distinction made by the *Riwle* between the responsibilities of the “actives” and the contemplatives” and states more simply that the first part applies to “he that can fede thise [the widows and orphans] with holy lore and thorou holy techynge brynge hem agein to her fader and to her spouse.” Significantly, it clearly favours this first part of the scripture over the second, inserting the statement that “this is the heighest Religioun that is” (4). Though it does say that the second half of the scripture applies to “onelich men & wymmen,” it adds “& to all othere that willethe kepen hem clene out of synne & fram the werlde,” defining the world as a “gaderynge of wicked folk” but defending the God-given sustenance to be gained from its goods (4). In so doing, it seems to modify the idea of being removed from the world in the sense of being a recluse to the idea of simply keeping oneself from the sin of the world while still dwelling within it. It also includes Micah’s definition of “right ordre” and the warnings about hypocrisy that feature in the *Riwle* and it follows the *Riwle* in establishing that order is not in a uniform or in outward effects or features; those who have only the outer form receive the same indictment Christ gave the Pharisees: they are white-washed tombs.

These opening lines introduce two important dualities crucial to our reading of *The Recluse*. The first of these is the inclusion of two audiences, those living the “onelich” life (both men and women) and those who are not. Both these audiences continue to be identified throughout the text. Thus while, in the majority of cases, the *Riwle*’s addresses to “ancres” have been changed to the more inclusive “men and wymmen,” some points of instruction for solitaries remain. That these have been

modified to include male as well as female solitaires seems to indicate that they are not simply the result of careless oversight on the part of the redactor. In dealing with the questions of handling the sense of speech in Book II, for example, the redactor makes the conscious step of specifying the rules for a “man oither a womman” who are “enclosed out of the chirche” and goes on to follow the *Riwle*’s recommendation that silence should be held every Friday but applies this to “onelich” men as well as women. The same thing happens when *The Recluse* follows the *Riwle*’s teaching on the necessary attitude to food but again carefully amends the address to “man oither a woman [who is]...bischett” (40).

The identity of the second audience is left somewhat vague by the use of a variety of forms of address throughout the text including “bretheren and sustren” (18), “man and woman that yiven hem to god forto ben his spouse” (18), “Man & woman...that desireth forto serve god” (58), “Man & woman that desiren for to queme god” (59), “Men & wymmen ye that desiren forto ben goddess childer” (112), among others. Most of these terms of address replace “ancre” where it is found in the *Riwle*. The vagueness, as we shall see, seems to be intentional, allowing the redactor to appeal to an ideal group - lay or clergy - who can be identified as keepers of the inner rule and sincere seekers after God.

The second duality raised in these opening pages and important for the text as a whole is in the definition of “order.” By asking the questions “what is Religiun” and “hwuch is riht ordre,” *Ancrene Riwe* deliberately scrutinises attitudes to religious orders, suggesting, by its analogy to the Pharisees who “strain out the gnat and swallow the fly,” that there is an unhealthy obsession with the external credentials of “order” (9). Dealing

with the issue of how the anchoresses should respond when they are asked what order they belong to, the *Riwle* invokes the conventional understanding of “order” as applying to communities marked by an outer rule. However, it then uses St James’ text to provide a wider and greater definition of the word. Similarly, in *The Recluse*, the word “order” is used most often to refer to religious orders or secular hierarchies which represent the spiritual “heighe lyf” or “heighe degree.” In this context, you “bicometh” a man or woman of order, and an order is something you give yourself to (43,33). However, the word is still applied to the idea of true or “right” religion; in this context being a man or woman of order is less something you become or enter into and more something that you simply are. A short passage taken from a longer interpolation provides an excellent example of both uses:

[There are] hij that seien that noman schulde preche of god bot yif he were ordred. Ac hij ne loken nought there what her ordre is. For I saie hem forsothe theigh that he be a Pope oither Bisschope. Monk oither Frere & he be in dedlich synne, he is out of ordre & ferrer fram the grace of god than a lewed Man that non ordre hath taken of holy chirche bot his cristendom is in clene lyf. (89)

Here order clearly applies to both secular (Pope and Bishop) and religious (monk and friar) orders and to the “ordre” of a “clene lyfe.”

I suggest that it is this double-definition of order and religion that is of primary concern to the author of *The Recluse* and that we can read almost all the additions in the text as an extension of the definitions and distinctions established in its first few pages and grounded in the *Riwle*. Indeed, in many ways, the comments are designed to turn the text into a handbook to this order of St James as defined by the *Riwle* with the purpose of establishing the primary importance of the inner rule and reforming the religious orders

upon the foundation of true Christian religion.

Defining the Inner Rule: the Role of the Laity

In their opening pages, both the *Riwle* and *The Recluse* establish the distinction between the inner and outer rules, and the central importance of the inner rule to right religion and to any form of religious order. This distinction, and the superiority of the inner rule, is reflected in the structure of the *Riwle* which is divided into eight parts of which the first and the last deal with “uttre thinges” (the practice of devotions and the outer rule) while the central chapters deal with “ruling the heart” (3). *The Recluse* retains this structure, stating, like the *Riwle*, that it intends to speak “almest al” of the inner rule (3).¹⁹

The definition of the inner rule provided by the *Ancrene Riwe* and upheld by *The Recluse* is “charite of schire hert and clene inwith and trewe byleve”; it is commanded by God and therefore must be kept with more diligence and care than any outer rule based on man’s invention. Both the *Riwle* and *The Recluse*, then, ground any “order” and “religion” not along status lines but along the lines drawn by heart and intention. This is emphasised in one of the additions found in *The Recluse* which reminds its audience that God looks at the heart and “yiveth more after the goode wille than after the dede” (43). As every man is capable of loving and honouring God, every man is equal in the sight of God and the redactor says as much, reminding us that “als dere bough god on as a nother” and that we “[a]lle...ben goddess sones lettred and lewed” (43).

¹⁹ The structure is slightly thrown off by the intrusion of the Hours (and confusion about whether they are part of Book I or after it) and the addition of the Apocalypse just before Book VIII.

This emphasis on the inner rule reveals - something implied by the *Riwle* but extensively discussed by *The Recluse* - that external religious status does not count for anything in and of itself. *The Recluse* virulently criticises those who mistake the outer rule for the inner rule by imagining that, as the *Riwle* puts it, “the ordre sitte ithe kurtel other ithe kuuele” (5). The recluse who thinks her holiness lies in her physical enclosure but has set her heart upon “werldelich thinges” “quemen litel god,” unlike the “lered” or “lewed” man who takes care to “bischett” his soul in his body, shutting the doors and windows which are his five witts “that he take no liking to synne ne to werldelich thynges” (44). Similarly, “god holdeth better by the foulest myster Man that lewed is & kepeth hym out of dedlich synne & loveth god & dredeth hym than of alle Men that have taken ordre & dignite and lyven after her fleshlich likynges” (89). The redactor reminds us that a man does not enter the “parfit lyf” simply because he becomes a “man of ordre” (42), and encourages us to think of “uche man” with the same spiritual respect we offer to “onelich men” or “Ancres” (43). As these examples suggest, the laity - lacking the outer rule but capable of holding the inner - form an important point of contrast with the religious; they come to represent the sufficiency of the inner rule. This is what allows the redactor to open his text up to a much wider audience of lay men and women who can be numbered among those who “desire to be God’s children” and desire to “please God.”

While the idea of the laity has important symbolic significance in the text, it is apparent that the redactor also sees lay people as being capable of taking on more practical responsibilities: of being spiritually active and responsible, of fulfilling duties (often ones that have not been carried out by those who are in orders), and of being

readers of his text. As has already been pointed out, the opening of *The Recluse*, and the small additions and changes it makes to the *Riwele's* exposition of the inner rule (expanding it to include the "Golden Commandment" and providing some practical instruction on how to deal with the difficult neighbour we "lyve by" or from whom we "erne [our] sustenance") provides a very practical edge to the text's teachings aimed at those who are living in the world. This expansion of the definition of the inner rule - and the sense of practical application - is further developed throughout the text with the author's repeated exaltation of the virtues of "wisdom and queyntise." The most lengthy discussion of these terms, including their definition, is provided fifty pages into the text. Wisdom is defined as "Ihesus crist, hym self" and most particularly "his lawe" which we should study and obey. "Queyntise" which is also described as "prudencia" is the practice of discretion and an attitude of balance or temperance. Without these two - which must always be found together - no man may come to "parfit lyf forto love god" (51). Reference to the two qualities occurs repeatedly throughout the text, describing how we are to be "ruled" by these two, and how they are essential for pleasing God, and how they secure for us God's grace (45, 43, 73, 140). We are told that they are essential "forto overcomen the fende, thi flesche & the werlde" (140). They are also closely tied to the aspiration to join the "high life" of an "order": "Wene ye than that a man schal come to parfit lyf for that he bicometh a man of ordre? Nay, the higher that he clymbeth the ferrer he is therfro bot yif he rele hym by wisdom and by queyntise" (43). By this on-going discussion of what they will provide for us and how necessary it is to possess them, it seems that "wisdom and qeuyntise" can be identified with the inner rule. The choice of

language, however, seems significant; the terms have, I would argue, a particular appeal for a lay, middle-class audience, suggesting as they do a kind of ethic of balance and level-headedness expressed in a practical activity and an active life. I will consider the possible significance of this at the end of this chapter.

Further practical instruction for the laity would seem to be apparent in modifications made to the description of the anchoresses' daily devotions from Book I of the *Riwle* in order to extend its application to a non-enclosed audience. The *Riwle*'s instruction to the anchoress to sprinkle herself with holy water (which, the author reminds her, she should always have) has been altered with the qualification, "yif ye it have" (6). To the *Riwle*'s instruction that the anchoress pray towards the altar (which she would have been able to see from her cell) the redactor adds another qualification: "yif ye have none autere maketh an autere of your hert as god biddeth maketh myn autere of erthe" (7). The addition of the exposition of the canonical hours from the St Edmund's *Mirror* which is inserted directly after the description of the daily devotions taken from the *Riwle*, may also be an effort to provide a parallel form of devotion as an alternative to the model provided chiefly for the solitaries. The Hours are, after all, more universal; as the redactor states, in an expansion of the original text, "uche man that hath taken cristendom owe to have hem in mynde" with the assurance that God himself will teach the man of "goode wille" what is "best for hym bothe to lyf & to soule" (17). These attempts to make connections between the life of the anchoresses and the laity experience their fullest expression in two of the more dramatic statements of the text: the first, briefly mentioned above, uses the image of the enclosed life as a metaphor for holy living

(44); the second suggests that we should understand that text's references to "onelich men or of Ancres" as references to "uche man" [every man] (43). This is a misleading comment because, as we have seen, it simply is not technically true. However, the comment points to the redactor's interest in making connections between the laity and the practices of the traditionally superior religious orders, thereby extending the possibilities for the laity beyond the possession of the inner rule to the practice of right religion.

The point is clearly illustrated by the reviser's exposition of the Parable of the Two Sons, an exposition he gives twice in the space of ten pages. Here, the son who tells the father that he will do the work but then does not keep his word is compared to "everyche Man that goth to ordre and to heige lyf & doth nought as he schulde do" (61) Such men are also thereby related to the "clerkes of Jewrie" or the Pharisees to whom Jesus first directed the tale. The second son who initially said he would not do the work but then went and did it anyway is compared to "the simple Man" who is "adraad to goo to heige lyf and to ordre ac he dothe it in the dede as ferforthe as he may" (61). It is the latter who "quemen god" while the other "quemen hym nought for they ne done nought that they han taken on honed to do" (72). These examples point to the way that the laity is given more than a symbolic or abstract significance in *The Recluse*; the text recognises that lay people may be the only ones effectively serving God. This is important when we turn to consider *The Recluse*'s exposition of the two elements of the "order" described by St James.

"Right Religioun" I: "helpen faderles children and widewen"

As has already been mentioned, the introductory passages of *The Recluse* imply

that it considers the first element of St James' definition of true religion - the care for the (spiritually) orphaned and widowed - to be the most important. Consequently, on reading further into the text we discover that the task of spiritually feeding the spiritual orphans and widows (essentially, preaching) is exalted and also that there seems to be some effort on the part of the redactor to provide some teaching and instruction himself, as if he too is keen to be seen to be fulfilling this part of the commission.

The Recluse consistently defends the preaching life (caring for the spiritual "widows" and "orphans" by teaching them) as the "highest religion," even as it is defined in the opening pages. The text invokes the example of Christ himself, but, more frequently, the example of the apostles, to stress the superiority of a life spent teaching and dwelling among the "commune people": "[the apostles] duelleden amonges men in sorough and in wo in this werlde, and taughtten the folk and lyveden after her techynge that the folk might take ensample of hem forto do wel. And ne schal a man never love god parfitelich" (44). The point is not only that the word was preached but that the preachers' lives were a living example of that teaching ("he preched...and he dude it in dede" [66]). Like all other aspects of "ordre" and the "ordred life," a ministry of preaching is solely dependent on the possession of the inner rule and therefore *The Recluse* does not see preaching as something that is limited to those externally prescribed to do it. As the Parable of the Two Sons suggests, the laity are often those who do the duties neglected by those whose responsibility they are (the "ordred"). Thus, in the passage already quoted above which challenges the idea that only a man in an "order" may preach, the redactor asserts that God prefers that a "lewed Man" rather than any

corrupt priest or friar should speak of him (89). Lack of learning is not deemed to be a problem given that God is able to send “cunnyng ynough” to the man of “goode wille” who seeks to “lerne abouten what thing that he hath forboden the & what he hath bidden the do” (86).

The Recluse also does some teaching of its own, thereby demonstrating the redactor’s own awareness of this duty as something incumbent upon everyone and perhaps also revealing his sensitivity to his audience’s appetite for knowledge. To this end he does provide some general advice about how the “uncunnande” man can become “cunnande” by applying learning techniques associated with the pursuit of “werldliche cunnyng” (i.e., having the “wille and love to lerne it” then “besilich to “stodye therto”) to “goddess lawe” (86). A significant amount of the redactor’s own teaching deals with our understanding (or lack of understanding) of Scripture and is therefore mildly exegetical in nature. Dealing with the verse in John in which Jesus assures his disciples, “what ye aske of my fader in my name ye schullen it have,” the redactor considers how “many understonden this woorde amysse.” “Thou moste taken it on this manere,” he urges, “looke what Jhesus one on englich is. It is als mychel as to saie saveoure” (55). Understanding the meaning of the name in which we pray should direct the content of those prayers. The redactor goes on to comment on two more verses - Christ’s teaching that we are to receive the Kingdom like little children and his statement that “what we yiven the leste of myne ye yiven it me” - in these cases applying his exposition to the practical question of giving alms (another favourite topic of his) (55).

The redactor’s concern with the accurate explication of the Word is also apparent

in the time he takes to refute false teaching. He deals twice, for example, with a debate on the subject of judgement and damnation with which he seems to be very familiar. He rejects the arguments of those who say that “God tooke alle out of helle and att Domesday he schal make alle goode” or “yif it were so as holy wrytt seith noman schulde be saved” (57). The men who speak such things “fordo the lawe that god hath made and his woorde.”²⁰ *The Recluse* is also critical of those who only give half of the Gospel message in their teaching, flattering their rich listeners with the “nesche” or easy message of mercy without the accompanying “hard” part which is righteousness (50-51).²¹

As teaching and preaching to the spiritually bereft is the highest religion, the redactor rebukes those who fail in this duty. Considering a non-specific group of “men now,” *The Recluse* argues that their failure to teach their sinful neighbours how to amend their lives proves that they are “out of love & charite” and therefore incurring God’s anger. Towards the end of the book, in a short addition that deals with the process of oral confession for the “commune people,” the redactor makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the “schrift fader” to teach the basics of church teaching. If “the preest seth that ye ben uncunnand & nyl nought teche you, bothe ye schullen gon o waye,” that way being the “pyne of helle” (150, 149). It is in line with what we have seen of the author’s own sense of his duty that he himself gives some basic teaching on the attitude with which the penitent should attend confession, though he cautions that he describes

²⁰ The arguments are listed on page 57 and then expanded on at pages 142-43. The redactor seems to have very specific heretical teachings in mind here including ideas of universal salvation or universal damnation, and the idea that Hell is not forever. He also rebukes the more “carefree” attitude of some men who don’t fear hell because they expect they will go there in the company of friends!

²¹ It seems quite likely, given other contemporary criticism, that this rebuke is aimed at the friars.

“the schortest schrift” which should be supplemented by guidance on how to withstand sin (150).

It should be noted that, while teaching and preaching take centre stage in *The Recluse's* (and the *Riwle's*) exposition of James' command to help widows and orphans, the text does deal at some length with the issue of giving physical alms to the poor. It asserts that we should practice Christ's commandment to love our neighbour, helping them physically or spiritually, knowing that Christ taught that “what ye given to the leste of myne, ye given it me” (55, 2). Begging is, however, a source of worry for the redactor: in words presumably directed at the mendicants, he claims that begging inevitably leads to lying as the beggars are required to flatter or “glose” their would-be benefactors. Consequently, the redactor counsels a distinctly cautious approach to giving, suggesting our interaction with the world should be essentially careful and discerning. For example, he claims that while it is always right to help “synful Men” for by so doing we “savest” Christ (57, 45), we must not give aid to “wicked Men or commune sinners” for then we only sustain their sin which dishonours God. To aid a wicked man by providing him with “bodilich sustenance” is simply to become a “susteyner of synne” (67, 56). Quite possibly, by strengthening the man's body, we undermine God's attempts to “chastise” the man through “poverté and meseise” (56). And if we consider ourselves not guilty because we did not know the man to be wicked then we only demonstrate a failure to do our research: “Looke here whan thou schalt bugge [buy] any thing here in this werlde, looke that thou wilt avise thee ful wel er thou paie thi silver that thou be nought bigyled...And bot yif thou wilt looke als besilich

aboute gostlich thinges elles holdestou better bodilich thing than gostlich” (56).

“Right Religioun” II: and “kepen clene out of synne & fram the werlde”

That the second part of the scripture from St James, and the second component of “right religion,” is of less interest to the redactor than the first is apparent not only in his description of the first part as “the heighest Religioun that is” but also in his failure to actually provide a translation of the second part of the scripture. After providing the entire verse in Latin, the redactor translates the first part, promptly goes on to explain it, and then refers to the “laste deel” which he only indirectly translates by means of its application to “onelich men & wymmen & to alle othere that willeth kepen hem clene out of synne & fram the werlde” (4). The redactor then gives a definition of “the world” before digressing to his favourite topic of the preaching life of the apostles. Despite this apparent lack of interest in a way of life that was traditionally associated with a decidedly non-lay life of contemplation, however, the redactor’s expansion of its meaning to a more general sense of withdrawing oneself from wickedness and sin turns it into a more pressing concern for him.

Certainly, *The Recluse* can give the impression that it thinks little of the physically enclosed life. The redactor’s exaltation of the apostolic model and his emphasis on the life of preaching, of living among the people, and teaching by example makes it easy to feel that the author is rejecting the solitary life of religious orders especially when he explicitly points out that the apostles were “nought bischett” but “duellede amonges men in sorrough and in wo in this werlde” (44). Furthermore, in the middle of the *Riwle*’s praise of the solitary life in Book III (and in the middle of a long

line of biblical advocates of the solitary life), *The Recluse* resists the *Riwle's* reading of John the Baptist as a model of the solitary life, asserting instead that his hermit-style life never took him entirely away from the people for he “yede aboute and preched the comynge of ihesu crist fro he was chosen therto” (66). This impression does, however, need to be qualified. After all, the whole text remains tied to the framework provided by the rule for anchoresses, and, as we have seen, the redactor chose to include the instructions found in Books I and VIII of the *Riwle* on the outward devotions and actions of the anchoresses as well as direct instructions to the “onelich.” In seeking to make connections between the laity and the model of the solitary life, the text implicitly invokes this model as a standard. It also refers to the possibility of receiving the call to come out of the “commune Poeple forto serve god” and compares it to Mary’s calling in the traditional depiction of the contemplative life (28).

Overall, the redactor’s problem with removing oneself from the world seems to be less with the idea in principle as with a concern that such a physical withdrawal from the world does not correspond to a withdrawal of the affections. And this goes, it seems, for any degree of “order” which is supposed to indicate a withdrawal from sin and worldliness. As the Parable of the Two Sons suggests, the redactor’s criticism is levelled at those who fail to do what they say they will do and whose supposedly religious behaviour only hides corruption.

Thus the redactor accuses members of orders of being too worldly or of being more worldly in the order than they were before they joined it (72). He suggests that men and women join orders for “worldly” motives - such as ease of living - rather than in

response to God's call (72). Indeed, this issue of the process by which one decides to join an order seems to be the crux of the matter for the redactor who, over and over again, expresses a concern that men join orders "reccheleslich," that it is necessary that one is "proved" before joining an order, and that the process is carried through by God's grace. Part of being proved is, it seems, surrendering worldly affections and concerns. The best example of this follows on from the discussion of Mary who represents the call to the contemplative life:

Now who so taketh hym to any degre out of the commune People forto serve god and ne dothe nought as sche dude that is yiveth no keep to erthelich thing bot onelich to have al her blis and al her foode in hym, hym were better ben in the world and done as Martha dude til that god sent hem the grace that they myghtten come to that othere. And biseken fast night and day yif that it were his swete wille to sende hem that grace that they mygtten come to that ilche degree forto quemen hym as the best manere were. And than they schullen have grace forto queme hem wel better than that they yeden to heighe degree by her owen wille, for the devel is ful queynt and putteth a man to heighe degree of heighe lyf forto make hym the faster in his service as ye shullen heren here after. (28)

The passage makes it clear that no man should enter this "heighe lyf" unless he has honestly renounced the things of the world. If he has not then he needs to delay joining an order and pray that God will give him the grace he needs. The emphasis is very much on the working and the call of God and not the spiritual ambition of the individual which, as the writer points out, may often be inspired by the devil. The redactor uses the same language to describe the decision to enter the preaching life: "Ac ever be uche man that he ne bigile nought selven as he may ful lightlich forto desire so holy lyf [the preaching and working life of Peter and Paul]. Ac biseeke he god that he sette hym there that it is best for hym & kepe hym than from Meridiane the devel that wil schewe hym to hym as

a goode Aungel & so bigileth he many” (4-5). That the comments raise the same concerns with the need to seek God’s calling and to beware the deceit of the devil is apparent in this text. Christ himself is the example here as, before entering his preaching ministry, he was tested to “yive us ensample that we ne schulden nought shape us to hastilich to heigh degree of ordre er that we were wel proved in the werlde thorough temptacions more and more and that we were stronge thorough goode werkes to we be worthi to come to higher degree in lyve in goode lyf...and than wolde god putt his honed therto and help us” (70).

An authentic call guarantees an authentic life. Without this call, the orders become filled with those prone to hypocrisy and corruption. The author is so concerned with the idea of receiving, and obeying a calling to the “higher life” because he is concerned with the existing shape of the orders. Corruption within the orders is what the redactor seems to feel marks the current times; his repeated references to what is happening “now” express the immediacy of the problem and stress the concern of the author. It is the fact that men and women are now joining orders “ere they have been proved” which leads to the redactor’s virulent criticism of the clergy and religious orders declaring them to be no less than Antichrist’s prophets. The criticisms of the author, when examined, are therefore essentially criticisms of hypocrisy; they can be read as an expression of his disappointment and his desire for reform and renewal within the orders, rather than a rejection of the orders themselves.

The Audience for The Recluse

The redactor of *The Recluse* does not seek to dismantle existing hierarchies or

undermine the institutions of religious orders; this is apparent in his use of the *Riwle*, its structure and its instructions for solitaires, and his use of the “onelich” life as a worthy spiritual standard and helpful metaphor. He does, however, seek to reform them: his demonstrations of the necessity of the inner rule and the use of the laity as symbol act as warnings to those in orders, encouraging them to return to the purity of their calling. The text does not seek to replace the orders with the laity; on the contrary, it seems likely that *The Recluse's* repeated discussion of what does or does not constitute readiness for joining an order reflects its recognition that the ambition and aspiration for spiritual growth that mark its lay audience could well be manifested in a desire to *join* the orders. It seems quite possible that the author's emphasis on calling reflects his expectation that he may be counselling those who are contemplating taking that step. At least part of the anticipated audience for this text, then, is a spiritually ambitious laity, members of whom, like the addressee of Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life*, might consider the call to orders.

The Recluse also anticipates a lay audience which treats its public, secular duties with all the seriousness and piety of spiritual vocation. This fits well with the profile of the new reading public emerging among the urban middle classes who, says Anne Middleton, show a concerted interest in “the foundations of Christian authority, and right relations as well as faith within the Christian community” (“Audience” 105). Composed in large part of civil servants, this audience's “customary activities involve them in counsel, policy, education, administration, pastoral care - in those offices where spiritual and temporal governance meet” (“Audience” 104). Middleton considers this community as the likely audience for *Piers Plowman* and observes how Will's first two questions to

Holichurche, which deal with the stewardship of earthly “tresour” and the salvation of the soul, capture the “range of practical and speculative activity” of this group (“Audience” 104). This mix of practical and spiritual is evident in *The Recluse* with its emphasis on the qualities of “wisdom and queyntise” and the potential responsibilities of the laity, as well as its discussion of careful almsgiving - a very appropriate subject for a conscientious, and wealthy, laity.

Ralph Hanna also associates *The Recluse* with London's community of readers and book-producers in his recent studies of London literature and the pre-Lollard trade in religious literature. Hanna connects *The Recluse* with a group of texts which, prior to 1400, are known only in copies which can be connected to London (“English” 146). These texts include all those which are in Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 2498 which is also the home of *The Recluse*. These texts, which include an English prose psalter, a Middle English Apocalypse with commentary, and a translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus, reflect the thoroughly biblical interests of their readers: the texts are all types of biblical translation with varying degrees of commentary and exposition. Hanna suggests the audience for these texts would have been one composed of “leading City figures” with a “sophisticated” interest in theological discourse who conceived of themselves as “responsible religious agents” and were therefore interested in reading literature which would confirm such a conception (“English” 148, 146; *London* 212).

Given this context for *The Recluse* it is worth considering the text's biblicism a little further. As we have already ascertained, the text alters the *Riwle's* structure in such a way as to emphasise the scriptural quotes which now feature as “headers” in the text.

The Recluse also inserts two extracts from the Middle English Apocalypse and commentary; the second, covering the very end of John's book and also inserted close to the end of *The Recluse*, describes the new Jerusalem (a place where, incidentally, there is no longer any need for an ecclesiastical hierarchy).²² The entire structure and content of *The Recluse* is also, as I have pointed out, grounded in the scripture from St James and the exposition offered in the *Riwle* which it extensively expands. The *Riwle* grounded its re-definition of "ordre" and "religioun" in St James' text, and in its own gloss of that text, claiming that if we want a definition of "order" it is to "hali writ" that we need to turn

(9). *The Recluse* uses and develops this exposition thereby expanding on this biblical model for "order and "religioun." One way it does this is with its repeated exaltation of the apostolic model which, it seems we are to surmise, is the perfect example of St James' order in practice as the apostles both cared for the spiritually widowed and orphaned through their preaching, and kept themselves from being polluted by the world even as they dwelt within it. The apostles, then, effectively brought the Word to life, something they are repeatedly praised for doing. This grounding in biblical text and its exposition would probably have appealed to Hanna's "sophisticated" lay audience, as also would the exaltation of the position of the laity and the defence of their spiritual capabilities. Not afraid to hear criticism of the clergy or the religious orders where it was deserved and probably themselves interested in promoting reform, the audience would

²² The first extract from the Apocalypse is a short exposition of Chapter 13 (which includes an interpolation made to the original Middle English Apocalypse commentary) which stresses the "leccherie pryvelich" and simony that corrupts men of the church (Zettersten 50). For more on this commentary and its interpolations see Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Neither extract is an exact copy; the translation of the Apocalypse text differs from the one in the original text and the commentary is slightly altered in places.

nevertheless have respected the existing religious hierarchy: a combination of attitudes reflected in *The Recluse*.

Conclusion

Both *Book to a Mother* and *The Recluse* express a democratising impulse which exalts the spiritual capabilities of the laity. *Book to a Mother* is, however, the more radical text. Just as *The Recluse* sticks to the textual skeleton of *Ancrene Riwe*, so it sticks to the existing religious hierarchy, seeing a need for reformation, but not replacement, of that order. *Book to a Mother*, in contrast, is its own text. It uses, but significantly alters the emphasis of, the Life of Christ genre, modifying it to support its contention that the substance of “Cristes religioun” is imitation. Similarly, it invokes the vocabulary and characteristics of the religious orders but only to re-apply them to the laity, creating a new community of “weigoeres” who dwell in the world, who are joined by the “rule” of Christ’s deeds, who read from the book of Christ’s life, and who are marked by what was traditionally a quality of the religious life - poverty. While *The Recluse* uses the example of the laity to underscore the importance of the inner rule to any order or religion, *Book to Mother* demonstrates how the “rule” of humility, poverty, and chastity is not only the only rule that counts but is also a rule that can *only* be identified with the laity.

It is worth considering how much this difference is a result of the texts’ anticipated audiences. *The Recluse* writes to an audience of theologically “sophisticated” gentry who may well have leisure, opportunity (and money) to join an order. The author of *Book to a Mother* writes for an audience he anticipates to be like himself and his

mother, too poor to join religious orders. As this group are unlikely to be absorbed by the existing hierarchy which is rotten with wealth, the author establishes that the foundations of true religion are found among the poor. Despite these differences in the ultimate form of this “right” religion, in the case of both works what is at the heart of their re-definition of “order” and “religion” is the same: the imitation of Christ’s life.

CHAPTER FOUR. “GLOSSING” THE GLOSS: THE LOLLARD PATER NOSTER
COMMENTARY AND BRITISH LIBRARY MS HARLEY 2398.

The mix of reformist and devotional thought expressed in texts like *The Recluse* and *Book to a Mother* can also be found in late medieval religious anthologies where orthodox texts sometimes exist side-by-side with heterodox texts. Investigation into the compilation of such manuscripts, which must necessarily be on a case-by-case basis, would seem to offer a fruitful avenue of exploration into the nature of late medieval religion. Admittedly some mixed manuscripts may simply be the result of confusion, ignorance, or error on the part of the compiler or scribe (Havens 338). Others may have been altered or added to over time so that the integrity of the original collection has been lost. For every collection of mixed texts that was put together deliberately as a book, however, questions are raised not only about the intentions of the compiler and the reader but also about the nature of book production and access to Lollard works both before and after Arundel's *Constitutions* which made the reading or production of any Wycliffite or, indeed, any “book, libel or treatise” containing scriptural translation, illegal (qtd. in Watson, “Censorship” 829). Katherine Kerby-Fulton has recently questioned the impact of the *Constitutions*, describing them as a “failed” attempt at censorship and suggesting that the evidence points to their minimal effect on book production or manuscript circulation (*Books* 16, 397-401).¹ In her article on Lollard book producers in early

¹ Kerby-Fulton points out how very few book prosecutions took place under the *Constitutions* and that even Wycliffite Bibles, with which the *Constitutions* were chiefly concerned, continued to be produced and “seem to have remained widely available, particularly to certain classes of society” (*Books* 397). She considers the impact of the *Constitutions* on non-Wycliffite texts to be negligible, pointing to the apparent freedom with which even the suspicious *Mirror of Simple Souls* was produced and transmitted

fifteenth-century London, Maureen Jurkowski concludes that it is quite possible that known Lollard booksellers worked with the largest workshops in London, a view that confirms A. I. Doyle's suggestion that Wycliffite Bibles may have been produced in London workshops both before and after 1409 (226, 201). As Kerby-Fulton states, "censorship in a manuscript culture is especially difficult to enforce" (*Books* 397); mixed manuscripts may represent a *failure* to "categorise works simply as "orthodox" or "heterodox" or an actual *unwillingness* to do so, an unwillingness which points to that surprising "broad-mindedness" in the medieval reader which Hudson contrasts with the "narrow-minded" vision of modern scholarship (*Premature* 425).

The number of extant mixed manuscripts makes the assessment of these books' "typological identities," and the influence of that identity on how individual texts contained within each collection were read, all the more important. "Typological identity" is the term Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel use to describe the shape or "agenda" of a manuscript that has been organised along "certain principles" (2). This identity, which is itself a product of the choice of texts, "contextualizes the text(s) it contains in specific ways" making it necessary to "analyse the consequences of this relationship on the way these texts may be read and interpreted" (2). Far from being "a transparent or neutral vehicle," then, the codex crucially "affects the way we read and understand the texts it presents" (2). The result is that codicology may be as important as theology when we consider how an individual text was read and understood. In the case

within the "monastic" and "semi-religious contemplative world and its lay outreach" which accounts for "a large amount of English readership" (278). Somerset ("Professionalizing"), and Hanna ("English") have also questioned the impact of the *Constitutions* on vernacular literature.

of mixed manuscripts, establishing the nature of such “agency” or identity should shed light on the shaping of late medieval religious belief and opinion.

Both this chapter and the one following discuss individual texts and what their location in particular (mixed) manuscripts tells us about how they were read. I consider how these particular collections of texts end up creating their own “interpretive communities” which effectively “gloss” the individual texts they contain by determining, or at least influencing, how they are read or interpreted. In this chapter my subject is a Lollard Pater noster commentary and one of the manuscripts in which it is found, namely British Library Harley 2398, a collection of texts which includes conventionally orthodox works alongside works which have been associated with the Lollards. The first half of the chapter discusses the commentary and its relationship to contemporaneous writings on the Pater noster in order to consider how the Lollards chose to gloss existing glosses. The second half of the chapter considers how the context of the “whole book” affected the way that the Pater noster commentary was read. I suggest that, though this manuscript is some years later than either *The Recluse* or *Book to a Mother*, like them, its mix of orthodox and reformist thought can be put down to its focus on the imitation of Christ’s life and service as the only true standard for the Christian. Like the individual texts *Book to a Mother* and *The Recluse*, this collection testifies to the complexity and variety of religious opinion at the close of the fourteenth century and the start of the fifteenth century and moves us away from seeing late medieval England as marked by an easily distinguishable divide between “Lollard” and “orthodox.”

Teaching the Pater noster

Creating a praying community does not seem to have been high on the list of Lollard priorities; relative to the number of tracts written on subjects like the eucharist or vernacular Scripture, Lollard comment on prayer is limited. Prayer is consistently viewed as a second best to (and possibly even a distraction from) preaching.² Most writing on the subject defines holy living rather than the repetition of words “by mouth” as true prayer; perhaps because of this, there is not much evidence to tell us what part prayer had in the communal and devotional lives of Lollards.³ One clear concern, however, was the idea that where prayers are spoken, they should be understood in order that they be spoken with conviction and belief. This was of particular importance in the case of the most important prayer: the Pater noster. Somewhere along the line, any Lollard discussion of prayer will describe the Pater noster as the best and most effective prayer; indeed, perhaps as the only legitimate prayer. This is not surprising given the prayer’s biblical origin: to speak the words of the Pater noster is to speak the words of Scripture.

In their respect for this prayer, the Lollards were not, however, unique. Though

² The tract, *Speculum de Antichristo*, which outlines the arguments used by Antichrist and his servants to try and keep “true priests” from preaching, states that “it is agenst charite for prestos to preie evermore and no tyme to preche; sith crist chargith prestis more for to preche the gospel than to seie masse or matynes” (Matthew 112). Elsewhere prayer is described as something of a non-essential: “As a thing may be withoute odour or savour, but odor may not be withouten sum thing, so a good dede withouten preiere is sumwhat, but preire withouten goode ded is nought” (Arnold 223).

³ Hudson provides a review of the evidence coming out of Lollard writings and Lollard trials (*Premature* 195-96 and 310-13). Notable views held by Lollards include the rejection of praying to saints, the idea that prayer is an essentially private, rather than communal affair, and the view that repetition of vocal prayers is pointless and even dangerous.

not originally a part of Pecham's Syllabus, the Pater noster had quickly been absorbed into the expanding list of things it was necessary for the laity to know. Every layman was expected to be able to recite the Pater noster and the prayer became, to a large extent, an accessible "substitute" for the saying of less familiar prayers, fasting, or comprehension of the liturgy (its use during moments of the liturgy that were incomprehensible to the "lewd" man was encouraged) (Aarts 12; Duffy 219).

Furthermore, as had long been recognised, the "extreme adaptability of its text" and the "attributes of the dominating and symbolic number seven" (there are seven petitions in the prayer) made the prayer a vehicle for "almost the whole religious training that the laity [or priests, for that matter] were given or needed to assimilate" (Aarts 8). A whole variety of sevens, from the deadly sins and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to the planets or the days of the week were incorporated into discussions of the prayer. By the fourteenth century, both the manuals designed for parish priests and those designed for the laity included vernacular versions of the prayer, it being recognised that it was "more spedfull and meritabull" for the laity to say the Pater noster in English than their understanding of it might increase their "lykyng and devocyon forto say hit" (*Mirk's Festial* 282). While some texts stuck to simple translations of the prayer (such as the verse version contained in *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests*) others, including St Edmund Rich's *Speculum Ecclesie*, and the English translations of *Somme le Roi*, *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, and *Ayenbite of Inwyt* incorporated "encyclopaedic" commentaries. The comprehensive *Speculum Vitae*, the most popular of Middle English religious poems, uses the seven petitions of the Pater noster and associated sevens as a means of

structuring its huge volume of material. Sermons which took the prayer as their subject also made use of the schematic approach and thereby provided teaching on subjects like the seven deadly sins and the seven virtues.⁴ Whatever aspects of Christian teaching these expositions choose to include, they all agree on the superiority of the prayer over all others; all praise it for some combination of its “dignite,” “profit,” “auctorite,” “sotelte,” “goodnesse,” and “worthynesse.”

There are three so-called “Lollard” commentaries on the Pater noster; two of these (one shorter, one longer) were edited by Thomas Arnold in his nineteenth-century selection of Wycliffite works and will be identified here as Arnold I and Arnold II. The third appears in F. D. Matthew’s edition of Wycliffite Works (identified here as Matthew). Significantly, only the longest of the commentaries (Arnold II) is recognizably Lollard in content, containing lengthy passages on the need for vernacular Scripture, the guilt of the clergy who fail to preach the Gospel, and the sins of the modern-day “kynreden of the Phariseus” (i.e., the friars). Arnold I and Matthew, both short commentaries promoting a thoughtful and responsive attitude to the prayer and celebrating its unique qualities, have been ascribed to the Lollards purely on the basis of the commentaries’ “inclusion in Wycliffite compilations,” even though Arnold I appears in a copy of *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and in the interpolated version of the *Lay Folk’s Catechism* (Talbert 363).⁵ The idea that a manuscript containing some Lollard

⁴ See for example the sermon “De Oracione Dominica” in Mirk’s *Festial* (282-88).

⁵ The view that the interpolated version of the *Lay Folk’s Catechism* is a Lollard “version” of this text has been disputed by Hudson. Hudson suggests that the interpolated text should be viewed as an “assemblage of diverse materials” some of which contain possibly Lollard remarks but which, by no means, represents a consistent or coherent Lollard “work.” Again, most of the reasoning behind the ascription of the text as Lollard has been the fact that the material appears in other manuscripts containing

material must necessarily contain only Lollard material, and exclude anything else, seems increasingly untenable given the vast number of manuscripts which have been found to contain a mixture of orthodox and Lollard texts. In cases where the manuscript seems to have been Lollard in initiative, the inclusion of either of these Pater noster commentaries - which provide a translation of the Pater noster and an exposition of the basics of the faith, while also exalting it as the best and most effective prayer - may be an example of Lollard willingness to make use of some orthodox material. To see all the “commune thingis” of the faith (the Ten Commandments, Creed, Pater noster, Ave, and the Gospels and Epistles read in the church) “well translated and truly, sentence for sentence, with good declaration” was one Lollard goal.⁶ Where existing texts were already doing this job it seems that Lollards had no problem with making use of these and it is likely that such orthodox commentaries comprised part of most Lollards’ reading. The presence of Arnold I and Matthew alongside Lollard material need not point to the Lollard authorship of these tracts, therefore, but simply to Lollard acceptance of these commentaries for their brevity, clarity, and helpful exposition.

My subject in this chapter is Arnold II. The following section describes the commentary and its possible sources to demonstrate the range of vernacular literature available to a growing community of readers, some, but not all, of whom were Lollards.

The number of vernacular commentaries of the prayer as well as the prestige accorded to

tracts “tinged with unorthodoxy” (“A New Look” 257, 254).

⁶ This is a statement made in the first of the twelve tracts defending scriptural translation in Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26 (f8a-b) (discussed in Chapter 1). While it is likely that not all of the tracts in the collection have Lollard origins, the first is almost certainly a Lollard compilation. This first tract demonstrates Lollard characteristics: strong reliance on Scripture, criticism of the clergy who keep the Word from the people, and repeated assertions that the “lewid” need access to God’s Law.

it makes the exposition of the Pater noster a fruitful place to discover the fluidity that existed between different vernacular texts, from direct borrowings to imitations of structure or schema. Though we are not dealing here with one work but rather a category of works, it is helpful to invoke Paul Zumthor's term "mouvance" in our discussion of these commentaries.⁷ Zumthor's attempt to demonstrate the fundamental "mobility" rather than "fixity" of the medieval text is relevant when we think about this body of work which possesses the features which Zumthor notes as marking the "l'oeuvre... mouvante," namely, authorial anonymity, the influence of an oral tradition (in this case, especially, preaching), collective rewriting, and the existence of different "textual states" perhaps reflecting changing audiences or functions (72-73). As I shall suggest, what is notable about this textual mobility is that it seems to have had little regard for doctrinal boundaries, for the division between "heretic" and "orthodox" text.

The Lollard Pater Noster Commentary

The commentary is found in eight manuscripts dating from the late fourteenth century.⁸ It is structured according to the seven petitions of the Pater noster and follows them in sequence. Though it does not draw attention to its own schema (in contrast to the two other expositions of the prayer which are found in Harley 2398), it does use one. The petitions are divided into the first three which "answereth and perteyneth to the

⁷ In his discussion of "mouvance," Zumthor is essentially talking about an individual work and versions of it.

⁸ The manuscripts are British Library MS Harley 2398, John Rylands Library MS English 90, Oxford, Bodleian, MS Bodley gg938, John Rylands Library MS English 85, Wrester Park MS 32, Trinity College, Cambridge MS B.14.38 (part only), Cambridge University Library Nn. 4.12, Norwich Castle Museum MS 158.926.4g.3.

worschep of the Godhede” and the last four which “perteyneth to profit and helthe of mankynde” (Arnold 99). The first three are then divided again to show how the first addresses the Father, the second addresses the Son, and the third addresses the Holy Spirit, and these petitions are clearly linked to the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. The petitions are also connected to the seven deadly sins and the seven Christian virtues.⁹ This structure, however, is certainly not highlighted and efforts to clarify it for the reader (for example summaries of the first three petitions given early on) fizzle out in the second half of the commentary where the connection between petition, sin, and virtue seems in danger of getting lost in the midst of other commentary. Generally, the schema seems to be of secondary importance to the writer. Furthermore, the easy petitions-sins-virtues relationship is disturbed at the end when both gluttony and lechery and abstinence and chastity are tied into the sixth petition, “lead us not into temptation.” Obviously, this leaves the seventh petition without a sin or virtue. Instead, the commentator uses “deliver us from evil” to discuss the need for deliverance from the unforgiveable sin against the Holy Spirit - a discussion which also enables him to speak at some length about those “kynreden of the Phariseus” he sees as guilty of this sin.

This lack of a strong framework does not, however, imply that the prayer is merely a vehicle for the polemical comments of the writer. Each petition is dealt with in considerable depth and with an overall concern with the application of the prayer to the

⁹ The first petition teaches us “mekenesse and bad ous fle pryde”(101); the second to “destroie envye agens oure evene Cristen with parfite charite” (104); the third “to destroie wrathhe with verray love of herte” (105); the fourth is a “remedye agens cursed covetyse,” for we come to desire the good of others as we desire our own (105); the fifth teaches us to “putte away slouthe and to serve God with verrey busynesse” (107). The fact that the sixth and seventh petitions are an exception to this pattern is discussed above.

attitudes and actions of the individual Christian. The first petition, for example, is broken down into its separate elements in a manner imitating more detailed commentaries as the commentator explains why we say “our,” and not “my” father; why we say “hevenes,” rather than “heaven,” and why we say “halwed be thy name” when the name of God cannot be “appaired nother amended” (Arnold 101).¹⁰ The reference to “heavens” is used as a springboard for a discussion of the definition of the church (always an important subject for Lollards): “We schulle understonde that hevenes in this place beth understonde Cristen mennes soules, the whiche, as holy wryt seyth, beth the seeles of God. And so all thylke that schulleth be in blysse after the dome, rygtwyslyche may be cleped holy Churche” (Arnold 101-2). The church is then divided into the fighting church (here on earth), the resting church (in purgatory) and the overcoming church (after the day of judgement) (102).¹¹ This definition of the church is referred to again in the explanation of the second petition, “come to the thy kingdom.” The commentator offers the “fyghtyng Churche” or “trewe Cristen peple” as his definition of the kingdom which, “in holy writ is understonde on dyvers maners” (103).

¹⁰ These questions have parallels in other commentaries including those found in St Edmund’s *Mirror*, *Speculum Vitae*, and *The Book of Vices and Virtues*. Note here that the translation of “in celis” as “in hevenes” (plural) is shared with *Speculum Vitae* and the prose version of that work, *A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen*, while most other works use the singular “in heaven.” *Speculum Vitae* interprets the plural in a similar way to the Lollard commentary: God is everywhere and in human hearts. The two other, shorter so-called “Lollard” commentaries also use “in hevenes” though they do not discuss the phrase. The translation of the phrase in Matthew’s Gospel (the clause is not included in Luke’s Gospel) in the Wycliffite translation of the Bible gives a plural “hevenes.”

¹¹ These same categories with the same definitions are used in the Lollard tract, *The Lanterne of Light*: “Whilis this liif durith in erthe, this chirche is clepid militaunt & whanne it slepith in purgatory thane is sche clepid the chirche slepand, But whanne sche hath rest of al hir traveile thane is sche clepid the chirche triumphaunt” (35). They are also found in the Lollard tract *Vae Octuplex*.

There is a strong reliance on Scripture throughout the commentary: in expounding the third petition, the commentator paraphrases Pauline verses from Romans and First Corinthians on being led by the Spirit and on fostering charity. A strong “devotional” undertone is also apparent in the work. When describing how God’s name is hallowed when men live lives that give glory to God, for example, the language has an affective or even mystical quality as it describes, three times, the idea of the soul “brennyng” in love or in charity to God and to our fellow Christian. Two images are employed to make the point: a “berille-ston” held up to the sun absorbs the sun’s light and heat and likewise the soul focused on Christ shall “cache hete, and brennyng love to thy God”; Christ does not need us to make him more holy but, thurgh presyng of him,” we become more holy just as “the tender wex maketh no preynthe in the seel, bot the seel maketh a preynt in tender wex” (Arnold 103). Elsewhere, discussion of the fifth petition - the need to forgive and to ask forgiveness from God - prompts the commentator to move from exposition to exhortation, calling on his readers to “lyft up” the eyes of their souls and consider the Passion of Christ. What follows - a fifteen line survey of Christ’s pains and wounds on the cross - acts like a brief meditation linking particular sufferings of Christ with required responses from the Christian: “He was ybounde and ybete with scourges...that thou scholdest kepe thy body clene...he was corouned with scharpe thornes, that thou scholdest thenke on him” (Arnold 107). Prompted by these thoughts, we should put aside laziness, serve God with all busyness, and pray more “mekelyche” that God forgive our sins (107).

The commentary shows a particular concern with Christian living: the practical

outworking of the faith. The exhortation to not only know the Word but to apply it in our lives is repeatedly referred to throughout the commentary. Thus, “sythe it is the gospel of Crist...the peple scholde lerne and kunne it and worche thereafter” (Arnold 98); “it is an heye sacrifice to God to kunne here Pater noster...and other poyntes of holy wryt... and they to do thereafter” (100); “this profitable prayer scholde men lerne, and reule himself thereafter” (101); “[God] lyghte our hertes with understandyng of his lore, and graunte ous grace to worche thereafter” (106); “we beth taught in this...prayere...to know his lore and worche thereafter” (108); “[God] yif ous grace to love his lore in herte and to werche thereafter in dede” (110). By our “kepyng” of Christ’s law (which is also the key to our salvation [100]) we will provide “ensample of geode lyvyng” to our neighbours. This emphasis finds biblical justification in Christ’s instruction, repeated twice in the commentary, that we should judge men by their deeds since their outward example testifies to their inward devotion (99, 110). As has been previously discussed, this concern with responding to the word by letting it shape one’s life, is typical of Lollard tracts.

Perhaps because of this focus on obedience to the Gospel model, the commentary is staunchly anticlerical; within its first few lines it has identified “byschopes and prelatz” as “fals techers” who keep the truth of the Gospel from the people because they know it will expose the wickedness of their own lives (Arnold 99).¹² The same points - how Christ taught the people in their own language and how clerks who do not wish the

¹² These lines are the same as those which begin a treatise in defence of vernacular Scripture found in Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26 (tract number seven, folios 41b-46a). In these footnotes I make reference to the edited version of the tract (Hudson *Selections* 107-9). See the discussion below for further information on this tract.

people to learn stand in the way of all Christ lived and died for - are repeated just a few lines later (100).¹³ “Proude clerkes” are named alongside many others including “grete swerers,” “coveytous glotouns,” or “pursuers of Godes trewe servants,” as those whose failure to live obedient lives nullifies their prayers (103).

The commentary is also aggressively anti-fraternal. Its discussion of the unforgiveable sin in relation to the final petition, “deliver us from evil,” is used as a springboard for criticism of the modern Pharisees, the “religious,” on the basis of their separation from the people, their replacement of God’s law with their own, and their persecution of the “*trewe* tellers” of the Gospel. With the same concern with behaviour which we have already encountered, the commentator advises his readers how they can identify these hypocrites for themselves:

Byholde now wel these condiciouns, and loke where men doth after hem other worse, and so thou schalt knowe the kynreden of the Phariseus. And these fayners of holynesse pursue Crist in his members, as the Phariseus pursuede Crist bodilyche. And yf they seye that God is here fader, and his lawe they kepe and here reule both, understonde that Phariseus breke the lawe that God yaf to hem and to the peple, for here feynede reule that hy himself ordeynede....yf these were trewe Cristene men, they scholde nought pursue Cristes membres for prechyng of the gospel. And so by here dedys thou schalt knowe hem, and therefore Crist byddeth to trowe the workes. (Arnold 110)¹⁴

“Trewe,” used twice in this final discussion and used earlier in the commentary as descriptor of “Cristen people,” “servauntz,” and “men” who are seen to be pitted against,

¹³ These lines correspond to the next large section placed in the CUL MS tract, ll. 37-49. This is preceded by a few short lines (32-35) in praise of the “sotilte” of God’s law which is a paraphrase of the commentary’s praise of the “sotilte” of the Pater noster. On the subject of the sacrament, the commentary makes no mention of controversy or of accidents or subjects but neither does it assert the substantial presence of Christ’s body - merely the fullness of Christ’s presence (as Wyclif believed).

¹⁴ These make up lines 81-96 in the tract from the CUL collection.

and persecuted by, false and wicked men, has been identified as being a part of a possible “Lollard vocabulary” (104, 101).¹⁵

As the above quotations suggest, the criticism is centered on the failure of the clergy to preach, and on the fact that they impede the teaching of the Word, deceiving the people with lives lived in disobedience to God. It is out of this position that the much more controversial appeal for the translation of Scripture arises. The author's initial assertion of the superiority of the Pater noster over all other prayers and the need for it to be taught to the people in their own language leads him to ask: “sythhe it is the gospel of Crist and Crist bad it be preched to the peple, for the peple scholde lerne it and kunne it and worche thereafter why may we nought *wryte* in Englyssche the gospel, and othere thynges declaring the gospel, to edificacion of Cristen mennes soules?” (Arnold 98). God's Word, as the discussion of the fourth petition “give us this day our daily bread” makes clear, feeds the soul, making it “stronge to worche after the lore therof” and is therefore more needful than the bread which only nourishes the body, destined to “lyth stynkyng in the grave” (106). If, therefore, the clergy fail to do their job and teach the people, then the people will have to ask God to call up preachers from among their own

¹⁵ The idea that the Lollards shared a particular vocabulary has been explored by Anne Hudson in her essay “A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?” As Hudson points out, contemporary observers claimed that the movement used a distinctive language. A specific example provided by Knighton is the use of “trewe” and “false” preachers. As Hudson points out the common use of “trewe” as an adjective to describe Lollards and their teachings can be traced back to Wyclif himself who often referred to himself as “quidam fidelis” and his followers as “fideles” (17). Jill C. Havens has recently commented on the controversy over this language, providing examples of scribes amending the use of the word when copying even an apparently orthodox text, the *Visitatio Infirmorum*. As Havens writes, such changes reveal “an orthodox anxiety about the potentially heterodox meaning of this language...and suggests that most orthodox scribes were aware of the implications of this idiom and the beliefs associated with it” (349).

ranks, being confident that God will inspire them with “kunnyng and wisdom” as he inspired the original apostles (106).¹⁶

All this material is sometimes loosely and sometimes closely tied to the material at hand. Early on, the commentator himself seems to be aware of the extent to which he digresses when he feels the need to re-introduce the subject of the Pater noster: “Leve we now this mater, and speke we of the Pater Noster that Jesus Crist made” (Arnold 99). That the more polemical passages of the commentary could, without any difficulty, stand apart from the schema of the prayer is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the comments are found in duplicate in the seventh tract in defence of vernacular translation in Cambridge University Library, MS II.6.26, the collection of twelve tracts in defence of translation referred to in an earlier discussion. This tract is almost entirely composed of passages from the Pater noster commentary. It is probably impossible to say with any certainty which text came first. Hudson, who has edited the tract from the Cambridge manuscript, has argued both ways, pointing out that the way the parallel passages in the translation tract run in order through the Pater noster commentary may suggest that the latter is the earlier text (it would take “some ingenuity” to incorporate the material otherwise) but also accepting that the more radical material may have been added later (Hudson, *Selections* 190).¹⁷ The suggestion that it adds to an existing commentary -

¹⁶ Lines II.52-65 of the CUL tract.

¹⁷ Hudson comments that the phrase noted here, “leve we now this mater and speke we of the Pater noster,” “might suggest the incorporation...of material not originally associated with the prayer” (*Selections* 189-90). In her *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, Hudson concludes that it is “difficult to make a judgement about the priority of either version,” but in *The Premature Reformation*, Hudson seems to unquestioningly assert that the commentary is the antecedent when she writes that the translation tract is a “redaction of a...Lollard commentary of the Pater noster” (424).

extends or glosses an existing gloss - raises the question of sources for the commentary.

Sources for the Commentary

In their discussion of this Lollard Pater noster commentary, Kellogg and Talbert suggest that it is a revised version of Arnold I, the shorter Pater noster commentary referred to above which, despite its lack of controversial material, has been categorised as “Lollard.” With the inclusion of the polemical material, this “second version” of the commentary has clearly been significantly radicalised. Hudson also considers the possibility of Arnold I being the primary source for Arnold II. There are certainly similarities between the two commentaries. Both commentaries translate “in heaven” as in “heavens,” both commentaries cite Augustine in their discussion of the meaning of “daily bread,” both apply “deliver us from evil” to the sin against the Holy Spirit, both describe Christ as a “noble man” who came to earth to establish a kingdom for himself (Arnold 94, 103). Both commentaries praise the prayer in a very similar manner for its “auctorite, sotilte, and profit” and both also apply the first three petitions to the Father, Son, and Spirit respectively, though this is not unique to them.¹⁸ Elsewhere, however, the exposition of each petition varies quite widely in emphasis, if not in spirit.¹⁹

Considering how much vernacular exposition on the Pater noster was available it seems necessary to go beyond an attempt to find clear-cut links between two texts simply

¹⁸ See, for example, the anonymous commentary found in the Simeon manuscript of *The Book of Vices and Virtues* (Appendix II in Nelson Francis).

¹⁹ Arnold I places a noticeable emphasis on unity, for example, stating how addressing God as “our Father” teaches us to be “knyt togidere in charite and meeknesse of herte,” while God made our forgiveness of others a condition of our own forgiveness because he “wole that he loven oure bretheren” (Arnold 95).

because of their supposedly shared “Lollardy” and throw the net wider. The common characteristics between these two commentaries all have parallels in a perhaps surprising source: two Middle English sermons found in a collection of sermons designed to provide preaching material for the clergy. The collection is preserved in British Library MS Royal 18 B. xxiii, and contains thirty-five Latin sermons followed by fifty-five English sermons, the first of which is the well-known sermon preached by Thomas Wimbledon probably in 1388, and three of which come from John Mirk’s *Festial*. It seems that the sermons were designed for preaching, not simply reading, and, indeed, it is evident that some - like Wimbledon’s - had already been preached (they include references to the occasion of delivery). The majority, however, seem to have been written as model sermons for others to use and imitate. Internal and external evidence allows us to date the sermons as originating somewhere between 1378 and 1417 although it is unlikely that the collection itself was put together until after the first quarter of the fifteenth century.²⁰

Two sermons on the Pater noster are found in the collection. The first takes as its theme First Corinthians 1:4, “Gracias ago Deo meo,” and the need we have to always thank God and pray to him. The best way to do this is with the prayer Christ himself taught us for the Pater noster is “cheefe of all preyours” (Ross 9). The theme of the second sermon is “Vigilate et Orate”; it speaks more generally about prayer before

²⁰ Ross provides the following assessment of the history of the collection: “the sermons themselves were written 1378-1417, the MS. was not copied until about 1450, and the sermons were handled by more than one copyist in the meantime” (xl). Ross cites phonological evidence for dating the manuscript to the mid-fifteenth century, although he also points out how it is quite possible that the presence of anticlerical comment in the post-*Constitutions* world made it necessary to delay putting together such a collection until the *Constitutions* had become a “dead letter” (xxxviii).

addressing the Pater noster in order to demonstrate how the seven deadly sins contradict the seven petitions within the prayer, thereby demonstrating the ineffectiveness of saying the prayer unless we have first repented.

It is possible to find close connections between the Lollard Pater noster commentary and both of these sermons. For example, the Corinthians sermon uses the same structure, and some of the same phrasing, to divide up the seven petitions. The sermons runs as follows:

In...the Pater noster ben vii asshyngus, the wiche iii firste perteynen to the three persons in Trynite and oo God. The fyrste longeth to the Fadur of heven, to whom is apropred all the power in heven and in erthe, as the gospel wittenes...The second ashynge longeth to the Sonne, the seconde person in the Trinite, oure Lord Jhesu Criste, to whom all widsom is apropred, as Seynt Poule seth, Romanos 13...The thride askynge perteneth to the third persone of the Trynyte, the Holygoste, to whom is apropred love and charite, as Seynt John seethe: "Deus caritas est"...And the othur foure askynges perteneth to the helthe of mankynde both bodely and goostely. (Ross 10)

The Pater noster commentary is very similar:

This holy prayer...conteyneth vii axynges. The fyrste axynges answereth and perteyneth to the worschep of the Godhede. The first perteyneth to the Fader, to whom power is apropryed, of whom, as seyth holy writ, is alle power in hevene and in erthe. And the secunde answereth to the Sone, to the whiche wisdom is apropryed; as Seynt Poul seyth, In him beth alle tresoures of kunnyng and of wisdomhud. The thrydde answereth to the Holy Gost, to wham is apropryed love; and therefore seyth Seynt Jon, God is charite, and he that dwelleth in charite dwelleth in God, and God in him. And the other foure axynges perteyneth to profyt and helthe of mankynde, bothe gostlyche and bodylyche. (Arnold 99)

The sermon's assertion that the prayer "conteyned more witt than anny erthly man can tell" (10) has a parallel in the commentary's "contenyned so muche wyt that no tonge of man may telle it al here in erthe" (100). On the third petition, the words in the two texts are very close:

Sermon: "Here we prayon God that is will be do here in erthe amonge synfull mene thorow amendinge of her life as itt is done in ryghtwys men, the wiche is heven goostely" (11).

Arnold II: "Therefore praye we God that his wyll be don here in erthe among synful men, thurghe amendement of here lyf, as it is ydo yn hevene among his glorious seyntz" (104-5).

On the subject of the fifth petition, the words follow each other even more closely:

Sermon: "Than by this witty techynge of oure Lorde ihesu Criste, malicious and veniabull wreches may well knowon that thei be in the vewe to-hellwarde as longe as the dwell in here cursed malice. For by these dettys ben undirstond synnes that we don ageyns God, as Seynt Austyne and othure seyntes seyon" (11).

Arnold II: "By these witty wordes of oure Lord Jesus Crist, mowe malicious men and wengeable wrecches knowe that they beth in the weye to helleward, as longe as they dwelleth in here cursed malice. For by these dettes bethe understonde the synnes agens God" (106).

In their exposition of the petitions the Corinthians sermon and the commentary share common features (though admittedly some of these are quite standard interpretations). In praying the sixth petition, for example, we do not pray "that we be nought ytempted" but we pray that God "lede ous nought into temptacioun" meaning to be "overcome" by temptation or to be unable to "suffre" it (Arnold 108; Ross 11). The fourth petition in the sermon refers to the three meanings of "bread" according to Augustine though the order is different here than in the Lollard commentary (food, sacrament and Word as opposed to food, Word, and sacrament).²¹ Structurally, both texts

²¹ The Lollard commentary also refers to the "thre maners" for understanding "bread" as explained by Augustine (in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount). The fact that Scripture is put ahead of the eucharist in the commentary may be a deliberate attempt to demonstrate the inferiority of the sacrament to the Word, but possibly we should not pay it too much attention given that the importance of the body - placed first in both lists - is swiftly denounced in the Lollard commentary: "this breed [Scripture] is more needful than that other firste breed...for whanne the body lyth stynkyng in the grave, thane the soul is parfytlyche yclensed" (106).

seem to have a schema but they fail to stick closely to it. The sermon states that the seven askings “putteth owte” the seven deadly sins and “purchaseth” the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but it does not seem to use this as a structure for its exposition, not explicitly referring to any of the sins or the gifts as it makes its brief comments on each petition.

The second sermon, “Vigilate et Orate,” opens by discussing the problem of unanswered prayer and makes it clear that our prayers go unanswered when we let our souls sleep in sin. It then asserts the superiority of the Pater noster over all other prayers:

[T]his preyour passeth all othur preyours in thre thinges: in auctorite and in soteltee and in profit to all Cristen men. Itt passeth in auctorite, for Crist, God and man, made it and taughte itt to be used for all Cristen men, as Crist hym-self beres wittenes in the gospel of Seynt Mathewe, in the syxte chapter. It passeyth also in sotelte, for ye shall undirstond that in the Pater noster ben comprehended vii askyns and preyours, and in these vii is conteyned sotelly all the poyntes in the world that anny witt or reson may conprehend. Than thus shortely to comprehend so meche with-in so fewe and pleyn wordes, therefore I may sey it is the witt and wisdom of God, passynge every mans witt. Also it is more profitable to us than anny othur preyere, for an we be well disposed to preye this preyoure, God hym-self will here us and gretly he will reward us there fore in all thinge that us nedeth to body and to sowle.
(Ross 48-49)

I quote this section at length because while it is clearly similar to the words of praise in the Lollard Pater noster commentary,²² it bears a much closer resemblance to the opening of Arnold I:

We schal bileve that his Pater noster, that Crist himself taughte to alle Cristen men, passith othere prayers in these thre thingis; in auctorite, in sotilte, and profit to Cristis Cherche. It passith in auctorite, - for Crist, both God and man, made it for Cristene men to usen it; and he is mosst of auctorite, as oure

²² Arnold II reads: “And so this blessedde prayer passeth alle othere in thre speciale poyntes, in auctorite, in sotylte, and profyt to Cristes Churche. In auctorite it passeth, for Crist, bothe God and man, made it, and taughte it his disciples...In soteltye it passeth, for in so schort a prayer is conteyned so muche wyt that no tonge of man may telle it al here in erthe...It passeth other prayers in prophyt to holy Churche, for al thing that nedeth to a man gostlyche and bodylyche, is conteyned in this prayer” (99-100).

bileve techith. And heerfor the Gospel of Mathew seith that Crist baad us praie thus. It passith also in sotilte, - for we schal understonde that in these seven askingis is sotelli conteyned alle poyntis of the worlde in whiche lieth any witte; and so schortli to comprehende so much witte in pleyne wordis, is a sotilte of God passynge witte of men. The thridde, we schal suppose that no praier in this world be moore profitable to man, sithe Crist himself herith alle.” (93-94)

This sermon's exposition of the petitions has in common with Arnold II the application of “deliver us from evil” to the danger of the sin against the Holy Spirit, an interpretation not common to mainstream expositions. The sermon states “ther is synne ageyns Holygoost that, as Crist seys in the gospel, shall never be for-yeve in this world ne in the othere,” and defines the sin as despair, describing the man [who] “dieth in vanhope [despair] and goth to hell for evermore” (Ross 56-57). Arnold II says similarly, “synne agens the Holy Gost is worst of alle other, for, as Crist seyth, that schal nought be foryive in this worlde ne in that other worlde,” and describes how the man guilty of this sin “dyethe in dispeir, and goth to peyne withouten ende” (Arnold 109).

To be sure, many of the teachings reflected in both the sermons and the Lollard commentary are traditional and well-known. What is significant here is the similarities in phrasing. Such close parallels among these texts suggests a high level of influence, though it could be hard to determine in which direction. Ross, in his edition notes only the similarity between the words of praise in the “Vigilate” sermon and Arnold I and considers the borrowing to have been made by the sermon writer who may well have had easy access to the interpolated Lay Folk’s Catechism or a copy of “that portion” of the Catechism which circulated “as an independent treatise on the P.N.” (346). He does not give any reasoning behind his supposition but, given the innocuous nature of the

commentary and its not inconsiderable circulation, his supposition seems plausible. In the case of the close connections between the Corinthians sermon and the Lollard commentary, however, borrowing in the direction of commentary to sermon seems harder to imagine as this would require the sermon writer to be drawing upon radical, polemical, and clearly identifiable Lollard documents. The alternative is that this is simply another example of Lollard use of orthodox material; these sermons would seem to fit the model of clear translation with “good declaration” approved by the Lollards and accessible to them.

One other possibility - that the sermon writers are themselves Lollards - has no basis in the evidence of the sermons themselves. Indeed, the writer of the “Vigilate” sermon (a sermon which refers to the occasion of its deliverance), offers his audience 300 days pardon if they sincerely repent and pray the Pater noster five times. He also invokes the legend of St Nicholas at the end of the sermon to provide an example of one who was found “awake and praying.” Yet this same preacher also openly criticises the clergy and the current condition of the church. In discussing the sin of “slowgthe in Goddes serves,” the sermon writer expresses his fear that “all thre degrees of holychurche arn gilty in this synne of slowth, as well prelates, prestes and religious as lordes and othur common pepull” (Ross 53). Defining sloth as a man’s choice to give all his energies to the world and leave little or nothing for God, the sermon writer considers the clergy to be the most guilty of it as they fail in their responsibility to “wake wisely over Cristen folke, techyng and prechyng here goostely sugettes principally by ensampull of good lyvyng in dede, and aftur the prechyng of Goddes word” (53). Pointing out how Christ always did in

deed what he spoke in word, the sermon writer notes that the clergy's failure to follow this model means that the lords and commoners "take hede of oure lyvyng, how we be so slowe in Goddes serves and in good bedes biddynge and in almus doyinge and othur goostly dedys" (53). At the end of the sermon, the writer also speaks of the papal schism which leads him to the following comments on the wealth of the church:

wold God that ther longed not so meche riches as ther dose to that office, but that itt were pore as Crist lefte it with Petur, and than ther wold no man make debate ne striff ther-fore, and than shuld all othur clerkes lese meche of here covetise and yeve hem to prechyng and to teche the pepull Goddes lawe aftur the gospel. And than shuld mucche flateryng in sermons be lefte, and men shuld lerne to life aftur the gospel, and wake oute of synne. (58)

The call for clerical poverty, the need to return to the primary task of preaching the Gospel, and the implied criticism of sermons that are full of flattery: none of these statements would be out of place in a Lollard tract. This apparently reformist streak in this sermon writer adds a further dimension to the borrowings taking place among these vernacular texts as such statements may have attracted Lollard writers to his text; alternatively, this preacher's reformist sympathies may have made him unafraid to glean helpful material from texts associated (whether clearly or less clearly) with the Lollards.

The anticlerical comment in this sermon is not the only example of such sentiment to be found in this sermon collection.²³ Indeed, its most famous sermon - both then and now - Thomas Wimbleton's sermon, contains the highest concentration of such comment. The number of extant manuscripts containing copies of the sermon preached by Thomas Wimbleton at St Paul's Cross sometime between 1387 and 1389 suggests that this sermon achieved considerable fame in its day.²⁴ Next to nothing is known for

²³ Ross cites five other examples of anticlerical comment in the collection (xxxviii).

²⁴ The text has been edited by I. K. Knight who provides details of fifteen manuscripts

certain about Thomas Wimbledon himself; he was possibly the chaplain to Sir John Sandes.²⁵ Taking as its theme the scripture “Redde rationem villicacionis tue” or “give an account of your stewardship,” the sermon is in two parts. The first part expands on the duties of the three estates, their mutual interdependence, and the need for each man to fulfill his duty to God because one day he will have to give an account of himself to his Maker. Details on this time of reckoning - interpreted as both an individual moment (the trials of sickness, age, and death) and a universal one (the end of time) - is the subject of the second part of the sermon. In its scrutiny of the clergy, and how they will have to give an account for their lifestyle, Wimbledon pulls no punches, decrying the “abhominacions” now prevalent among priests, like their failure to care for the poor and their accumulation of wealth. He accuses the clergy of dressing like knights and speaking as churls (78) and of “maketh hem houses lich chirches in gretnesse,...with diverse peyntoures colouren her chaumbres, [and] with diverse clothyng of coloures maketh ymagis gaye” while the “pore man for defaute of clothes beggeth and with an empti wombe crieth at the dore.” In truth, says Wimbledon, “ofte tymes pore men ben robbed for to clothen with trees and stones” (78-9).²⁶ The entrenched sinfulness of the clergy should be seen, Wimbledon declares, as a sign that we are in the end times. The imminence of the end forms the focus of the last part of the sermon. Wimbledon takes a

containing the sermon (two in Latin translations). Hanna adds five more manuscripts to this list (*Handlist* 30). Eighteen printed editions also survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²⁵ Knight cites evidence from William of Wykeham’s register which notes that Thomas Wymbeldone, chaplain to Sir John Sandes, was granted a preaching license in 1385 (43).

²⁶ Wimbledon’s wording is of interest here. The reference to making “ymagis gaye” and the idea that poor men are cheated out of what they need by a desire to clothe “trees and stones” echoes Lollard criticism of the making and maintaining of religious images.

very “historical” approach to the last days, going so far as to predict the year of the arrival of the Abmonition that causes Desolation (just over twelve years away, in 1400). The sermon's anticlericalism and this discussion of the end times were probably the main sources of its popularity. Both these subjects would also have made it popular among readers of Lollard texts (the sermon is found in several manuscripts containing Lollard writings), although it should be noted that Lollard interest in the Apocalypse diverged from the popular “historical” interest with its fascination for dates and times (see Chapter 5).²⁷ Certainly the inclusion of Wimbledon's sermon in MS Royal B 18 xxiii need not take away from the thoroughly orthodox nature of the collection's many legends of the virgin, fables, and exemplum. However, the inclusion of a text well known for its more radical assertions may suggest that even this vernacular collection of model sermons reflects a greater range of religious opinion than placing it in either “orthodox” or “heretic” categories will allow for.

The exchange of material between sermons and Lollard tracts reflects the mobility of vernacular texts across doctrinal boundaries. As a variety of Lollard writing makes clear, as well as the testimony of Lollard conventicles and evidence of ad hoc teaching, Lollards were clearly interested in the provision of basic instruction on the key elements of the faith. It seems more than likely that, when it came to a prayer so essential, popular, and respected as the Pater noster, Lollards did not see a need to create such commentary for themselves but rather tried to utilise and draw from existing

²⁷ Manuscripts containing Wimbledon's sermon and Lollard tracts include British Library MS Additional 37677 which contains some Wycliffite Sermons along with some miscellaneous religious texts; British Library MS Additional 24202 which contains short polemical Lollard tracts; Cambridge, Sidney Sussex MS 74 contains Wycliffite tracts; Oxford, University College MS 97 contains texts often associated with the Lollards.

instruction. Outside of its radical passages (which, as we have seen, could exist separately from the commentary), the Lollard Pater noster commentary under discussion here was clearly happy to build on existing traditions of commentary. It would be wrong, however, to consider Arnold II as simply a crude attempt by Lollards to use the “cover” of “an ostensibly unimpeachable” title to “infiltrate” their ideas into the “hands of unsuspecting readers,” a practice Aston suggests must explain Lollard use of orthodox texts (211). If this were the case, there would be no need to include the more devotional passages which seem to be unique to this version of the commentary nor the repeated teaching on the need for obedience. Key to this commentary is the idea of “living out” or “working out” the Word by applying the prayer in our lives, obeying Christ, and remembering Christ, something the commentary logically connects to the need for access to that Word (especially necessary when all those who should be living lives which follow the Gospel pattern are failing miserably to set the right example). The call for vernacular Scripture, which above all else marks this commentary as radical and dangerous, is a natural extension of the call for obedience to Christ’s model; it is the Word which makes a man “stronge to worche after the lore therof” (106). Similarly, the commentary can be seen as an extension of existing glosses designed, like them, to direct readers’ understanding and enlarge their faith. As the next section of this chapter will suggest, this concern with personal response to the Gospel had an appeal for more than just Lollards.

Text in Context: MS Harley 2398

As mentioned at the start of the chapter, two of the three Pater noster commentaries usually ascribed to the Lollards (Matthew and Arnold I) are simply clear and concise expositions of the prayer, likely to have been useful to people with a variety of religious opinion. We may expect that Arnold II, with its more radical defence of vernacular Scripture and its anticlericalism, would have had a more limited audience. That this audience was not exclusively made up of Lollards, however, is suggested by its inclusion in MS Harley 2398, a compilation of religious texts, many of which are entirely orthodox. The inclusion of *The Fifteen Oes* - the only Latin text - with a legend and indulgence attached to it, as well as the presence of orthodox teaching on subjects like the eucharist and oral confession means that the manuscript is not a Lollard production. Yet, besides the Pater noster commentary, the manuscript contains other examples of Lollard thought in the midst of devotional teaching.

Harley 2398 was probably produced in the first decade of the fifteenth century.²⁸ It contains fifteen items, fourteen of which are texts on a religious subject. The full contents are as follows:

1) *Memoriale Credencium* (ff1a-69a).²⁹

2) *The Fifteen Oes* (in Latin) preceded by a story of a female recluse³⁰ (ff.69b-

²⁸ This date is given by Bremmer in his edition of *The Fyve Witts*. Rolf Bremmer follows A. L. Kellogg and E. W. Talbert who date the manuscript as 1400-10 and Raymo who suggests the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

²⁹ Extant in eight manuscripts, the *Memoriale* is a manual of the faith providing teaching on the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins (more than half the work) as well as other key elements of the faith. It opens with the statement that it is meant for all those “lewede men that conneth nought understonde Latyn ne Frensch.” It has been edited by J. H. L. Kengen.

³⁰ *The Fifteen Oes*, originally ascribed to Bridget of Sweden but now thought to have

72b).

3) Tract on the Ten Commandments (“bonus tractatus de decem mandates”)

(ff.73a-106a).³¹

4) *The Fyve Wyttes* (ff106b-127a).³²

5) Five things which it is necessary for Christian men to know (ff128a-140a).³³

6) Thomas Wimbledon’s Sermon (ff 140a-153a).

7) Pater noster taken from *The Mirror of St Edmund* (ff153a-156a).³⁴

8) *Visitatio Infirmorium* (ff156a-160b).³⁵

9) *Of Wedded Men and Wyves and here Childrene also* (ff160b-166b).³⁶

10) Pater noster commentary (Arnold II) (ff166b-174a).

originated in England perhaps from the hand of a Brigittine, circulated in Latin as well as in several Middle English versions. The text is composed of fifteen devotional prayers focused on the suffering of Christ at his Passion. The text was often accompanied, as it is here, by a legend describing the miraculous origin of the devotions and listing the extensive benefits of regular utterance of the prayers.

³¹ Discussed below. Exists in eight manuscripts. Its connections to other tracts on the Ten Commandments have been discussed by Kellogg and Talbert (“Wycliffite Pater noster”) and C. A. Martin. This longer version has not been edited but excerpts of the image debate contained within it have been published by G. R. Owst and Margaret Aston.

³² Discussed below. The text is unique to this manuscript. It has been edited by Rolf H. Bremmer.

³³ Also known as *The Nature of Man*, this treatise is found in three manuscripts. Part of it has been edited by John V. Fleming and published in *Notes and Queries*. It considers the nature of man (body and soul), the origin of Man, and his relationship with his Maker.

³⁴ The exposition of the Pater noster from *The Mirror of St Edmund* exists as an independent tract in seven manuscripts. An edition of the *Mirror* has been published in C. Horstman (Volume I). The beginning of the commentary, including the translation of the prayer itself, has been altered in Harley 2398.

³⁵ A prose treatise based on St Augustine’s treatise of the same name, its popularity is attested to by the fact that it exists in five Middle English versions. It is extant in 28 manuscripts (some of which contain a mixture of both heterodox and orthodox texts) and has been edited by Horstman (Volume II). Of interest is the fact that, in a few cases, the apparently orthodox use of “trewe” in this text was amended by scribes, suggesting a desire to clear the text of any heterodox associations (see n.15).

³⁶ Discussed below.

- 11) Treatise against sin (ff174a-175b).³⁷
- 12) Easter sermon (ff175b-185a).³⁸
- 13) Memorial note to the death of Thomas Sarvant written in 1559 (f185a).
- 14) Short instruction on prayer (ff186a-188b).³⁹
- 15) *A Schort Reule of Lyf* (ff188b-190b).⁴⁰

As is clear from the list, the manuscript contains a second Pater noster commentary, beside the Lollard text, and it actually includes a third if we count the short exposition contained in the survey of Christian doctrine found in the manual *Memoriale Credencium*. The manuscript is largely uniform in appearance throughout except at item two (*The Fifteen Oes*) which is written in Latin rather than English and where the decorated initials have not been supplied. Its mix of texts - elements of instruction and devotion, practical advice and guidance, and examples of theological teaching and biblical exposition - suggests a desire to provide a thorough and quite practical basis for Christian living, suitable for “(secular) priests or the interested, educated layman” (Bremmer xxi). What has been most often observed about the manuscript, however, is that it is “mixed,” containing orthodox texts alongside four texts which are, for slightly varying reasons, identified with Lollard thought.⁴¹ One of these is the Pater noster

³⁷ Also known as *Two Weyes Contrarious* from its opening words, this short tract is extant in one other manuscript besides Harley 2398. It considers the different nature - and the different end - of the path of virtue and the path of vice.

³⁸ Unpublished text which is found in one other manuscript. The sermon includes large extracts from the Gospels detailing the resurrection and draws moral teachings from them.

³⁹ Identified by P. S. Joliffe as a popular instruction on prayer. Edited by Horstman (Volume II) as part of the *Fervor Amoris*.

⁴⁰ Discussed below.

⁴¹ Four of the items have been traditionally identified as Lollard works: they are included in Arnold, and in Talbert's bibliography of Lollard writings.

commentary; the other three are the tract on the Ten Commandments called “bonus tractatus de decem mandates,” *Of Wedded Men and Wyves*, and *A Schorte Reule of Lyf*.

“Bonus tractatus de decem mandates” is an expanded version of a commentary found elsewhere which itself has been identified as a Lollard version of an originally orthodox commentary (Kellogg and Talbert). It is a tract which emphasises the need for everyone to know and obey the commandments and which provides guidance on the responsibilities of each of the three estates. Its protracted discussion of the first commandment, and its connection to the making of images, is the chief source of its suspected Lollardy (as Hudson, points out, this was an easy way to detect Lollardy in these commentaries [*Premature* 4]). Admittedly, this discussion expresses a fairly muted Lollard perspective on the question of images - one which is, in fact, more in line with Wyclif’s own. It does not encourage iconoclasm or forbid the making of images but rather considers it “lausom to ous to have the ymage of Crist in the cros” (f81a). It is, however, very clear that images are not to be given the “worschep that is onlyche y-propred to god”; the man who worships them in this way “erreth fro the sothenysse of feyth” (f81b). This, of course, could reflect the position of an “orthodox reformer” rather than a committed Lollard.⁴² What is significant is the inclusion of a paraphrase of Wyclif’s own comments on this subject taken from *De Mandatis divinis*, Wyclif’s

⁴² Indeed, Owst, who edited a section of the text in his discussion of medieval preaching, considered the tract to show “very clearly the official attitude to images as set forth by the orthodox pulpit” (143). Given the reference to Wyclif, this seems unlikely and Aston considers Owst’s judgement a mistake. Aston suggests that the comments represent a “mildly iconomach position” which seeks to correct “would-be iconoclasts” and proposes that the text can be read as evidence of the “infighting of the [Lollard] sect” on the image question, a view that implies that Lollards composed a part if not all of the audience for this text (156).

commentary on the Ten Commandments. The comment focuses on the good and ill use of images. The tract paraphrases Wyclif's comment, stating that "ymages mowe be maked wel and eke ylle": well, if they stir men's hearts to devotion, and ill if the "ymage be worsched as god" (f81b). The passage is cited as the teachings of a "great clerk." Marginalia draws attention to these comments.⁴³ Further on, an exhortation to worship the "trewe ymage" of God not in wooden statuary but by caring for the "meke trewe poure man that ys the trewe ymage of god" echoes Lollard writings on this issue (f83b). No further references to Wyclif are found in the treatise.

Further Lollard references are found in *Of Wedded Men and Wyves and Here Childrene Also* and *A Schort Reule of Lyf*.⁴⁴ *Of Wedded Men* is a short book of guidance and instruction in five chapters designed to promote successful marriage and parenting. It relies heavily on Scripture, inserting large passages from the epistles of Paul and Peter (with no reference to the Vulgate). The majority of its teaching is orthodox and conventional, referring to Paul's regulations for the ordering of the household and for the marriage bed, for example. While it opens with a definition of the two types of marriage ("gostlyche" marriage between Christ and the church and "bodilyche" marriage between a man and a woman) and provides some discussion of marriage as a sacrament, the text is more concerned with practice than with theory. Spelling out the requirements for a good marriage (mutual consent, an equal match), discouraging marriages made for money not love, and providing dos and don'ts of parenting, the tract is above all practical. In the first chapter it takes advantage of its subject to make some points that are close to the

⁴³ For example, "nota de ymaginibus" (f80b) and "nota bene" (f82a).

⁴⁴ *Of Wedded Men* is extant in seven manuscripts including Lollard compilations. *A Schort Reule* is also extant in seven manuscripts.

heart of a Lollard. For example, the author asserts that the “ordre of matrimoyne” is “betre and more to preyse than the newe ordris” for God instituted marriage but he did not institute “thes newe religions” (f161a). Neither, in either the Old or New Testaments, did God forbid priests to marry and yet “now, bi ypocrisie of fendis and fals men, manye bynden hem to presthod and chastite, and forsaken wifis bi Goddis lawe.” Consequently priests - many of whom, the writer argues, have the easy life of idleness and good food that drew them to the vocation in the first place - end up falling into lechery (f161b).

Also in this first chapter the author takes the opportunity to define the church (“Cristene soulis ordeyned to blisse”) - a characteristic of Lollard texts - and makes reference to the conflict between hypocrites and “trewe men” that marks the last days: “the Holy Gost warneth Cristen men, hou in the laste daies summe heretikis schullen departe fro feith of Goddis lawe, yevinge entente to spiritis of error, and to techynge of develis, spekyng lesyngis in ypocrisie, forbedynge men and wymmen to be weddid, and techynge men to abstene hem fro metis, the whiche God hath maad to be eten of trewe men” (f161a).

Another anti-fraternal comment which seems to draw on particularly Lollard vocabulary is found in the final chapter which discusses the problem of wives giving money away to beggars but also to friars: “wifis many tymes don a litil almes opynly, and fynden ypocritis to seyn massis, and maken the sely husbondis to meyntene sicke ypocritis in here falsnesse, to robbe the pore peple, and to lette trewe men to teche Goddis lawe, and to favoure false sclaunderis of here brethren” (f165b). Though the criticism of wives giving money to pandering friars is nothing new, the language seems particularly loaded.

As has been mentioned, the use of “trewe men” is a characteristic of Lollard texts

and, possibly, of a distinctive Lollard vocabulary and the word appears in the Pater noster commentary. *A Schort Reule of Lyf*, which provides instructions of godly living for each man in general and for priests, lords, and labourers in particular, also raises the question of Lollardy because of its repetition of the word “trewe.” Like *Of Wedded Men*, this tract is also eminently practical, identifying the behaviours (keeping busy, not giving unnecessary consideration to food or drink, seeking to do right by all men, desiring heaven, remembering judgement) by which a man can keep himself from sin. When considering priests in particular, the text asserts that a priest should teach by example, his “opyn dedis” making him a “trewe book to alle sogettis and lewid men”; such an example “sterrith rude men” even more than “trewe prechyng bi nakid word” (f189b). The “trewe prest” is identified as he who lives in poverty and gives “treuli to pore men that have nought of ther owne” (f189b). Lords, in the meantime, are exhorted to “mayntene trewli...Goddis lawe and trewe prechours ther-of” while they themselves should be living exemplary lives, guarding the “trewthe” (f190a). In their use of the adjective “trewe,” both texts imply the existence of a “community” of “trewe” men in conflict with the “false.”

All three of these texts demonstrate the inclusion of radical statement in the midst of otherwise conventional and accepted theological and pastoral commentary. This mix, however, is not restricted to these “Lollard” texts but is found in two other of the longer texts in the manuscript: Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon and *The Fyve Wytis*.

Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon was discussed above. As stated there, the sermon is a mixture of practical instruction on the duties of the individual Christian (for all three

estates) and eschatological speculation. It is notable that the version of the text found in Harley 2398, excludes the section in which Wimbledon speculates on the date of the end times. This concentrates the focus of the text on the matter of Christian living. Its anticlericalism is a result, in part, of the practicality of its matter: the subject of how we should be living our lives. Wimbledon chastises the clergy because of their failure to fulfill their responsibilities: “Here thou art ocupienge the place of Petir, other of Poul, other of Thomas, other of Martyn. But how? As Judas was among the apostelis, as Symound Magus was amonge disciples, as a candel newe queynt that stynketh al the hous in stede of a light lanterne, and as a smoke that blendeth mennys eighen in place of clier fier, yif thou contrarie thus the forme of lyvyng that Crist and his apostelis leften to prestos” (f144b).

The Fyve Wittis, item four in the collection, is unique to this manuscript. It offers an earnest, detailed, and practical account (almost a “rule”) of how to keep the senses pure, at times addressing each estate in particular. At the heart of this rule is, it seems, the assertion that the condition of the heart and obedience to God’s law is more important than rules, rituals, or the empty recitations of prayers. In seeking role models for the Christian life we should look, counsels the text, to the apostles and their “forme of lyvyng” rather than to he who lives a “soleyn” (strange or unusual) life marked by its “singulerte” (f111b). These last comments seem to be directed at the friars and their “nywe lawe and nywe manere of lyvyng” (f111b). This word, “singulerte” has a decidedly negative connotation here, referring to the effort to render oneself conspicuous or different from others by attracting attention to oneself (Bremmer 43). The author also

makes the rather biting remark that priests are good at rebuking sin because they are so familiar with it themselves, where as they are unable to teach virtues because of their own ignorance of them.

As well as the fact they are all “mixed,” these five texts all share a concern with exhorting and instructing their readers into obedience to the Gospel pattern of life, with knowing the Word and living it out, and with applying this teaching to all Christians (and, in some cases, specifically to all three estates). We can also add the Lollard Pater noster commentary here which, as we have seen, shares this emphasis but directs it towards the call for vernacular Scripture, recognising that being obedient to the Gospel model requires you to know what that model is. Looking at the rest of the manuscript, other texts seem to share this concern. Item eight, *Visitatio Infirmorum* can be likened to *Of Wedded Men* in its provision of very immediate and prescriptive advice. The tract provides instruction on how to counsel the sick and dying and prepare them for death. Notably, it does not specify that it is written for priests but addresses “men that been in hele [health]” and implies it is their duty to visit the sick (f156a). It takes the reader through the words he should speak to the sick man, even providing short scripted dialogues. The short instruction on prayer (item fourteen) is just that, recommending how and where to pray and what thoughts should fill our minds in order to “gete to the [thee] compunccon” (f186a). It provides a brief Passion meditation designed to stir the devotion which will better focus our prayers (rather like the Lollard Pater noster commentary) and provides a model prayer which draws a connection between Christ’s suffering and our behaviour (again, like the Pater noster commentary):

Jesu cryst goddess sone whiche stode styll before the Juge nothyng to hym
answerynge withdrawe my tongue tyll I thynke what & how I shall speke that
may be to thy worship. Jhesu goddess sone whose hondes were bounde full
sore for my love, governe and wysshe myn hondes & al myn other lymmes
that all my werkes begynne & graciously ende to thy most pleasure. (f188a)

The Pater noster commentary taken from St Edmund's *Mirror* somewhat
supplements this guidance with its own instruction on how to pray the Pater noster:
saying the "naked lettre by mouthe" while thinking in our heart on the meaning (as
explained in the commentary) (f155b). The commentary also discourages the repetition
of many Pater nosters stating that it is "beter to seye onys the pater noster with
understandyng in good entent and devocion than a thousand othes withouten
understandyng and devocion for this seyth Seynt Poul, I wolde rather seye in myn herte
five wordes devoutely than to brynge for the ten thousand by mouthe and understonde
nought" (f155b) - an application of Paul's comments on the gift of tongues which the
Lollards used in exactly the same way to make the same point some 150 years after St
Edmund.⁴⁵ Finally, theological and expository tracts like *Memoriale Credencium* and
"The Five things Man needs to know" (a short study on man's spiritual make-up) provide
some theological foundations on which to build this Christ-like life.

The emphasis of many of these texts on the practical outworking of the faith
stresses the centrality of the theme of Christian living to the manuscript as a whole. At
the heart of this theme is the example of Christ himself. It is perhaps this thematic focus
on Christ's life as the standard for the believer which breeds the mixture of the

⁴⁵ The comment comes from *De Precationibus Sacris*: "Therefore seith Poul, I have
levere five wordis in my witt than ten thousand in tonge. Poulis witt is in devocion and
trewe undirstondyng; the tonge is that a man undirstondith not, and hath no devocioun.
O Pater Noster seyng with devocion and goode understandyng, is beter than many
thousand withouten devocion and undirstondyng" (Arnold 228).

devotional and reformist comments common to many of the works and therefore characterising the codex. Christ's example is both a source of inspiration to the devoted and a rebuke to the sinful, particularly those who themselves are in a position to be an example to others, and few of these texts are afraid to criticise corruption where they see it. Reading and studying the manuscript as a whole, we could describe this focus on the imitation of Christ as the "typological identity" of the manuscript which influences the way *all* the individual texts within the codex are read. I noted in my introductory comments to Harley 2398 that what is most commonly observed about the manuscript is not its thematic consistency but the fact that it mixes texts which we are used to considering as doctrinally set apart from one another. Our estimates of each individual text are, in turn, often a result of reading them shorn of context and in association with other "Lollard" or "orthodox" texts - in edited collections of Lollard works, for example. By thinking of Harley 2398 in terms of "Lollard" and "orthodox," we occlude the connections between the texts, connections which ultimately contextualise the radical nature of the Pater noster commentary. While, standing alone, the Pater noster commentary looks radical and, some would consider, subversive, the context of the manuscript - Wimbledon's comments, a rejection of the orders, a defence of any man who lives true to the Gospel, the need to obey the Scripture - softens the edge of this radicalism with its own mixture of devotional and reformist comment. The manuscript acts as its own "interpretive community" which effectively shapes our reading of the Pater noster commentary, contextualises the Pater noster text's own combination of devotional and anticlerical comments, and emphasises the tract's concern with the life of

obedience to the Word.

To further clarify the attitude the manuscript seems to represent, I want to return to *The Fyve Wyttyis* which provides helpful insight into contemporary opinion on the ongoing religious controversy. In his discussion of the sense of hearing and how to guard it, the anonymous author of this tract arrives at the subject of blasphemy “whiche I calle errour and heresy contrarie agenst Cristes lore” (f117b). We must shut our ears to any “nywe adinvencioun” or “nywe and sotel conceytes which are contrary to the teaching of the saints or Doctors of the church or contrary to the Gospel of Christ” (f117b). We need to take especial care in these days, the author suggests, when “opynyouns faste encreceth...blasfemyng God and his seintz, usynge, meynthyng and defendyng liberte of synne, so that no man dar cheyrlly do, as he scholde, reprove synne” (f117b). We must be careful not to consent to such error, whether those who preach it be called “heretykes or lollardes” (f117b). However, before we assume that the author identifies all Lollards as blasphemers, it is important to note how he cautions his readers about the danger of failing to distinguish between who a man is and what he may be labeled. No man who preaches “trewely Crist and his gospel” should be called heretic or Lollard regardless of “commune sclaundre,” the “clamour of fooles,” or the lies of men (f118a). Many of those who are accused of Lollardy are those who act most like Christ: “they preche povert, [and] so dyde Crist and was pore himself...they reprove pride and precheth mekenesse, so dyde Crist and was meke himself...they reprove swerynge [and] Crist forbedeth it ne swor he nought himself...they reprove gret array [and] Crist reprevede it and seyde that the riche man, yclothed in purpur and bysse, was beryd in

helle" (f118a). Furthermore, it is often left to those that "ben called heretykes" to reprove the sins of other men (and he gives the specific example of the blasphemy of swearing oaths in God's name [f118b]). Though the author concedes that it may well be that some of them are "fooles and precheth presumptuously and fantasies of here owenehed," the comparison he makes with the time of the early church - when deceivers sometimes preached alongside the true apostles - implies a positive correlation between the earliest followers of Christ and these modern men who preach from motives of "sadnesse and devocioun." The safest course, the author suggests, is to refuse to "presumptuously" judge such men but rather "lete God alone with hem" for "yf it be of God, it schal stande...yf it be nought goed, it wol be destroyed" (words which again echo the Bible, this time Gamaliel's verdict of the first Christian disciples in the Book of Acts) (f118a). He ends with the sombre warning that we must be careful not to reprove the good lest we fall into the "pereles iepurdye" which is the unforgiveable sin against the Holy Spirit.

What the author of *The Fyve Wyttes* is suggesting here is his willingness to go beyond semantics and to make judgements on the basis of how men live. For this writer, at least, qualifications for acceptance (by God or by the Christian community) are based solely on faithfulness to the Gospel. Such an attitude goes a long way in explaining the inclusion of these Lollard works described above. While the author of *The Fyve Wyttes* is clearly not a Lollard, as we have already seen, he does share some of their feelings about the professionally religious and the true model of religious perfection.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The author's orthodox attitude to the eucharist suggests he is not Lollard (f109a). Furthermore, despite his comments about the motivation for reading Scripture (the reading of Scripture should be prompted by pure motives and not from a desire to "babel

The comments of the author of *The Fyve Wittis* help us understand the sentiment responsible for putting a compilation like Harley 2398 together. The combination of items in the manuscript certainly points to a similar concern with an “orthodoxy” which is essentially defined, not by legislation, but by fidelity to the Christian model of living and fidelity to Christ and the Gospel and, simultaneously, an impatience with those who are not getting the job done. This model - as the author of *The Fyve Wyttyis* makes perfectly clear - crosses certain other doctrinal boundaries and therefore makes an openness to a wide variety of religious opinion possible. Harley 2398 shows us the extent to which readers were prepared to incorporate radical material into their reading. It also demonstrates a commitment to the devotional life of the laity and, indeed, to their spiritual status and importance, a status most radically suggested by the comment of the Lollard Pater noster commentary that God could call preachers from among the laity, but a status and role that is also surely meant to be nurtured by this very compilation.

it to other to be holde [held] wys and connyng”; we should read the word in order to “lyve [it] thereafter,” keeping God’s commandments “withoute glose or cautele [deceit]”), he does not seem to envisage Scripture reading as being necessary for everyone but sees it as an activity for those who are “lettred” (f111a).

CHAPTER FIVE. SEEKING ANSWERS AT THE END: RECONCILING
APOCALYPTIC VISIONS IN ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE MS G.25

St John's College Cambridge MS G.25 is a collection of vernacular religious texts which has been described as mainly orthodox by Anne Hudson and as an aggressively Lollard project by Ralph Hanna ("Book Production" 135; "English" 150). That these two scholars can come to such different conclusions is a good reflection of the kind of difference of opinion a "mixed" manuscript of this type gives rise to. Dating from the early fifteenth century, the manuscript contains six texts. Among its contents we find a series of questions and answers about the identity of the Antichrist (an interpolation into a Middle English translation of Honorius d'Autun's *Elucidarium*), a translation of John's Apocalypse (with Commentary), and an exposition of the eschatological prophecies of Christ from Matthew 24 (known as *Of Mynystris in the Chirche*). The codex seems to make the end times its central concern. However, these three texts simultaneously reflect three very different discourses on apocalypticism: the question and answer exchange assumes the existence of a historical, identifiable, individual Antichrist which reflects a largely extra-scriptural tradition responsible for composing a biography of the final enemy; the Apocalypse Commentary is almost certainly Franciscan in origin and the history of its use indicates a mediated approach to Scripture; the exposition of Matthew is a vehicle for virulent anti-papal Lollard polemic which simultaneously (and somewhat schizophrenically) exposes the uncertain status of its exegesis even as it asserts its conclusions as authoritative. As I will go on to explain, the evidence from the manuscript itself is that these units were deliberately put together in order to create a

book. In the following discussion I will make some suggestions as to why, for one reader at least, these texts belonged together and consider the larger implications for our study of late medieval apocalypticism and Lollardy. I will begin by discussing in turn the three texts and their traditions. Then, in the last section of the chapter, I will turn to the manuscript and the question of its compilation.

Eschatological anxiety and expectation influenced both life and literature in late medieval England. The most widely held and taught position on eschatological matters continued to be a conservative one based on the writings of Augustine which very consciously discouraged speculation about dates and the historicisation of events, preferring moral or ecclesiological readings of scriptural prophecies which directed the Christian's concern to the "eschatology of the individual soul" (Cohn 29). Augustine's perspective was, as Bernard McGinn has pointed out, "eschatological" rather than "apocalyptic," the important distinction in the two terms being described as the difference between "a general consciousness of living in the last age of history and a conviction that the last age itself is about to end, between a belief in the reality of the Antichrist and the certainty of his proximity (or at least the date of his coming), between viewing the events of one's own time in the light of the end of history and seeing them as the last events themselves" (*Visions* 4). As Curtis Bostick writes, a sense of "crisis" is key to the apocalyptic perspective (7).

Alternative eschatological perspectives did, however, exist, the most prevalent being the historicist and largely extra-scriptural tradition of a human, identifiable, and individual Antichrist whose life and times were the subject of legends, prophecies, and

religious writings.¹ In the tenth century, much of this material was compiled into a coherent survey, modelled on the form of the saint's life, by Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der; the treatise was hugely popular and hugely influential, shaping many of the vernacular portrayals of the final enemy. In late medieval England, for example, the Adsonian narrative is apparent in the *Cursor Mundi* and *The Pricke of Conscience* as well as in the play of the Antichrist from the Chester cycle. Both the *Cursor Mundi* and the *Pricke* include details of Antichrist's origin (from the tribe of Dan), and birth: "He sal be gotten.../Bytween a sinful man and a woman/And aftir that he consayved be/ The fende sal entre.../With-in his moder wambe" (*Pricke* 113). The legend goes on to describe the Antichrist's education among necromancers, the "wonders" he performs as "tokens" of his power, his success in deceiving the rulers of the world (given dramatic potency in the Chester play), and his persecution of Christians. The accounts are detailed and invoke the authority of various biblical prophecies but they remain non-specific about when the events will take place, the *Pricke* in particular reminding us that "na man suld aske, ne say/How mykel we hafe til domes day/Ne we suld nought yherne it to lere" (127). There is no sense that the events are already coming to pass - a sign of the essentially eschatological rather than apocalyptic nature of the Adsonian vision and something which would have made this depiction of the end rather less threatening than some.² Indeed, Curtis Bostick suggests that the Adsonian tradition, dark as it is, still

¹ The most well-known expressions of this tradition are the Tiburtine Sibyl and the *Revelationes* of pseudo-Methodius, both revived in the Middle Ages and both sources used by Abbot Adso in his biography of Antichrist.

² The eschatological perspective marks Adso's original text but it should be noted that elements of the Adsonian narrative could be, and were, adapted to more apocalyptic ends (as they are, to some extent, in the *Lucidarie* interpolations). Bostick provides examples of how later adaptations of Adso incorporate a sense of apocalyptic crisis and urgency

creates a sense of safety or distance between the Christian and the terrors of the end because it upholds the presence of the church as a defence and a stronghold against the enemy. Adso's Antichrist comes "via Jewish channels" and is most certainly "outside the church" which remains "intact" and under God's protection (Bostick 47).

Fascination with the end times is also apparent in the popularity of illuminated Apocalypse books which circulated throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries among wealthy, lay, often female readers.³ In the pursuit of knowledge of the "Final Enemy" and of the signs that tell of his coming, John's Apocalypse was a key text. The text itself is a paradox: at once, an "unveiling"; a revelatory script, it is also a book of divine secrets with its own figurative language to be de-coded by those who have "insight." The illuminated Apocalypses provide "insight" into this difficult text both by way of the illustrations they contain and through the commentaries - either a French prose gloss or a Latin commentary derived from the twelfth-century Benedictine Berengaudus - which accompanied the Scripture. The creation of picture cycles for each of these commentaries would have made them useful for private devotion, but given the connections between the Apocalypse and romance, particularly Arthurian romance of the thirteenth century, more secular interests may also have driven the production of these texts.⁴ The illustrations - which vary in their portrayal of John and his role in the scene -

(43).

³ Lewis, and Szittyá both identify twenty-two such illuminated Apocalypses of English origin from the thirteenth century and Szittyá notes the existence of a further twenty-eight from the fourteenth century ("Domesday" 381).

⁴ See Szittyá, 385-90 for a survey of scholarly commentary on the connections between the Apocalypse and Romance. Szittyá also provides a list of aristocratic women who owned illustrated Apocalypses and who also composed the audience for Arthurian romances ("Domesday" 385-86).

also reflect changing attitudes to visionary experience and the role of the seer.⁵

Concurrent with these more established and popular expressions of eschatological curiosity, “alternative apocalypticisms” were also known in England, including, as Katherine Kerby-Fulton has recently demonstrated, versions of the endtime visions of Hildegard of Bingen and Joachim of Fiore (*Books* 38-70, 188-204). Indeed, the influence of both visionaries is apparent in a text we have already come across: Thomas Wimbledon’s hugely popular vernacular sermon of 1388. Marshalling evidence for the imminence of the end, Wimbledon cites Joachim and Hildegard: “Abot Joachym in exposition of Jeremy seyth: fro the yeer of oure Lord a thousand and two hundred, alle tymes beth suspecte to me, and we be passed on this suspect tyme neith two hundrid yeer” while according to the calculations of “mayde Hildegare” “this last day is more than half agoo” (Knight 113-14). A testament to interest in, and access to, the ideas of these visionaries, Wimbledon’s sermon (and its extensive and varied dissemination) also points to popular fascination with interpreting the “signs of the times.” While consistently denying that he is attempting to predict the exact date of the end but only wishing to show that it is “at the hond,” Wimbledon is still able to announce, by calling on the argument of another “doctour,” that the Antichrist will emerge in 1400 - just twelve and a half years away.

Seeking to make correlations between “spiritual and historical data” provides, as Bostick suggests, the “underpinning” for the apocalypticist’s perspective, as does the attempt to announce “details of the future course of history...in a manner that goes

⁵ Lewis, and Camille (“Visionary”) have written on the various portrayals of John in image of the Apocalypse. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a brief summary of their comments.

beyond the mere attempt to interpret the Scriptures” (9, 7). As Kerby-Fulton has shown, where this concern with “current affairs” and their relationship with end times history was combined with a call for church reform and spiritual renewal, apocalypticism became an important discourse for radical reform (“Closet” 320). This, she suggests, is what we find in the apocalyptic perspectives of Joachim and Hildegard, and some of those who used and adapted their works; she describes their apocalypticism as “reformist” in that it was primarily concerned with “clerical reform” and “spiritual renewal” (*Reformist* 3). Notably, Kerby-Fulton considers that for such writers, apocalypticism, rather than an end in itself, was the “handmaiden of religious reform politics” (6).

An Addition on the Antichrist: the Lucidarie

The Adsonian tradition seems to have influenced the dialogic exchange that has been added to a Middle English translation of Honorius d’Autun’s *Elucidarium*. The original *Elucidarium* is a Latin work in three books which provides an overview of Christian theology and practice in the form of a dialogue between a master and his disciple. Written in the twelfth century, it proved hugely popular throughout the Middle Ages and was translated into every language in western Europe.⁶ The form and subject matter rendered the text useful to the laity, as is apparent from the title of one of the Anglo-Norman translations: *Lumere as Lais* (light for the laity), itself one of the most popular Anglo-Norman works of the thirteenth century. Only one Middle English translation of the *Elucidarium* exists; it is found here and in one other manuscript,

⁶For a review of the *Elucidarium* and its derivatives see Lefevre.

Cambridge University Library Ii.6.26 which contains twelve tracts in defence of vernacular translation (for more on this manuscript, see Chapter 1). This version, called “Lucidarie,” translates Book One - which includes questions on the nature of God, on creation, on angels and demons, on Christ, and on priests and the eucharist - and the very beginning of Book Two.

In this extract of the *Elucidarium*, eleven new questions have been interpolated at the very end of Book One. They follow from a discussion of bad priests who are defined by their failure to follow the example of Christ. Priests who “lyveth in unclennesse” or “leven the labour that crist hem bad, that is for to preche” or fail to “schewe...good ensaumple of trewe lyvyng in keypyng of goddis hestes” are identified as “traytorus to crist,” his “crucifiers,” and “verry disciples of antecrist” (f12b). The Master also instructs the Disciple that men should do what they can to keep themselves from priests whom they know to be evil (f13a). It is at this point that the additional questions are inserted with the first five extending the anticlerical discussion and the next five giving this discussion a decidedly eschatological bent. The questions are as follows: 1) Why are men who are false to God and to their neighbour (e.g. false lawyers, adulterers, liars) not punished? (f13a); 2) Why is it that the priests do not do their job and chastise these men? (f13b); 3) Who can amend the state of the church (in which corrupt priests do not chastise evildoers)? (f13b); 4) What prevents the heads and officers of Holy Church from performing their due roles? (f13b); 5) Who can amend the church’s devotion to wealth? (f13b); 6) Will Antichrist have many disciples before he is born? (f13b-14a); 7) Where will they rise first? (f14a); 8) What shall Antichrist do when he first arrives? (f14a); 9)

Will clerics be taken in by him? (f14a); 10) What is that abomination of desolation of which Daniel speaks? (f14a); 11) What is the best religion? (f15a). The Master's responses to the first five questions emphasise the corruption in the church; the "hedes" and "officeres" of the church are unable to chastise sinful men because they too are guilty of "viciouse lyvyng" and the Pope, who has the power to cleanse the church if he chose to, is so bound up by the great wealth of the church that he, and the Christian kings around him "knownen not...the lore of poverté that crist hem taught" (f13b). This leads the Master to imply that the end of the world may be near and to introduce the subject of Antichrist: "for the neer the eende of the world, schal antecrist have gretter & gretter clerkes & richer & richer clerkes, lordes, peeres to his disciples" (f13b). The Master claims that Antichrist will have "manye hundrid thousand" disciples and that the "grettest clerkes" will be among the first; he argues that these disciples who presage the arrival of Antichrist himself will arise "whanne prelates of hooly chirche ben so weel dowid with possessioun that thei ben lordes, peeres of the world. Thanne schulen thei wratthe with alle hem that prechen of crist poverté & namely with hem that moost dispisen this world" (f14a). Similarly to Adso, the Master anticipates that Antichrist will perform miracles in order to confirm the teaching of his disciples, teaching that is contrary to Christ's teaching.

The Master cites Jesus' prophecy of the end times from Matthew 24 in which Daniel's prediction of the abomination of desolation is invoked. On the Disciple's request he explains that the "abhomyacioun of discomforte" standing in the holy place corresponds to the "hedes of the chirche...stondyng in grete pompe & pride agens the

lore of jehu crist, that is to seie agen the meekenes, agen the povert, & agen the chastitee, that jehu crist & his aposteles taughten” (f14b). Concluding the discussion, and the first book, the Master asserts that the best religion is to obey the two New Testament commandments which Christ himself taught for these lead to “trewe folewing of crist” (f15a).

To some extent, we see the influence of the Adsonian tradition here. Both Master and Disciple assume that Antichrist will be “born,” that he will gather followers to himself, and that he will perform miracles in perverse imitation of Christ. On the other hand, the text clearly connects this person of Antichrist with the corruption in the church – it is the wealth and disobedience of the prelates which signals the coming of Antichrist. Furthermore, the abomination of desolation, a figure usually interchangeable with the Antichrist, is here identified as “prelates and maistris of dyvynete” standing in opposition to Christ (f14b). Here the portrayal clearly diverges from the Adsonian picture and suggests a more apocalyptic vision which is more in keeping with, as we shall see, Franciscan and Lollard perspectives. The picture the Master paints is one of crisis in the church and the criticism implies the need for reform.

The interpolations have, in fact, been attributed to the Lollards.⁷ Certainly, some examples of vocabulary and phraseology show connections with Lollard writing. The additions imply that the church lacks “trewe” officers, and “trewe” obedience to Christ’s model is exalted at the end of the book (ff13a, 15a). The best religion is described as that

⁷ See Margaret Deanesly who describes the *Lucidarie* as a “Lollard translation” (*Lollard Bible* 270). Utley, in his survey of Middle English dialogues, debates, and catechisms considers the questions to exhibit a “Wycliffite cast” (741) and Carmela Giordano comes to this conclusion in her article.

which is “grounded” in the Gospel and any other “ordir of religioun” is valid only insofar as it has this grounding. Religions “that ben late made of mennes wittes & not the hooly goost” are, it is implied, found wanting, although the Master leaves any final judgement on the matter to God (f15a). Prelates are accused of attacking those who preach Christ’s word and imitate his poverty. The current situation in which corrupt clergy are supposed to be leading the people is decried as one in which “the blynde ledith the blynde,” a verse which frequently comes up in Lollard writing (f14b).

However, as Anne Hudson warns in her discussion of the possible existence of a distinct Lollard vocabulary, the vocabulary in itself can never be used as a “test of a text’s Wycliffism”; other factors also need to be taken into account (“Lollard Sect” 20). Looking at the content of the text, it seems there may be good reason not to connect the additions or even the translation with the Lollards. At least in part, as we shall see, the vision of Antichrist is quite distinct from the Lollard view which rejected the Adsonian myths and fables and was not afraid to denounce the Pope as Antichrist. Although the discussion of the eucharist is significantly reduced, the translation retains the original text’s teaching on the eucharist which is orthodox in its assumption of transubstantiation (f11b).⁸ The Master’s comments on religious orders seem far from hostile. Furthermore, when it comes to the language of the interpolations, it is notable how in tune it seems with the preceding passages from the original *Elucidarium*, passages that contain equally virulent anticlerical language and another reference to the “blind leading the blind,” again

⁸ The Middle English translation omits a considerable degree of detail from the *Elucidarium*’s discussion of the eucharist including questions about whether it is more holy to take the sacrament often and what benefits might arise from touching the host. It is worth noting that throughout the translation questions from the original are omitted, although apparently more for brevity’s sake than anything else.

in connection to clerical corruption (f12b).

Little light is shed on the situation by taking into consideration the second existing copy of the translation found in Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26. This version contains eight of the interpolated questions but omits the first three describing corruption among the clergy. This version also omits the six questions from the original text which immediately precede the interpolations, also on the subject of “uncleene preestis” and their powers, responsibilities, and impact on the church. These omissions seem peculiar: if the adapter was seeking to avoid criticism of priests he would also have removed the remainder of the interpolated questions. There may in fact be little reason for the changes other than the limitations of the exemplar or the rough and rushed work of the scribe: Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.26 is not a particularly well-written or careful manuscript. On the whole, the best we can do is perhaps to describe the *Lucidarie* as a “mixed” text, attractive for its provision of some foundational teaching (the history of creation, the theology of salvation, the nature of sin) but also containing sufficient criticism of clerical and religious orders to provide seams that could be opened up by more reformist writers and readers.

Mediated Scripture: The Middle English Apocalypse and Commentary

The Apocalypse Commentary found in St John’s MS G.25 is a translation of the French prose gloss which accompanied the thirteenth and fourteenth-century illustrated Apocalypses described above. By the fourteenth century the French gloss had become more popular than the Berengaudus commentary at which time it also began to circulate in an unillustrated and cheaper format. We can date the English translation to some time

between 1340-70 after which time the text underwent various revisions at the hands of different scribes.⁹ The commentary is a largely faithful translation of the French original. In these unillustrated versions, the chapters of the Apocalypse are subdivided into sections of biblical text (with a varying number of verses) and followed by the corresponding commentary. In every case, Scripture is distinguished from commentary, in some cases by underlining or rubrication. The text circulated independently, without other biblical books and seems to have been reproduced in many copies.¹⁰

Despite early speculation that the commentary was a Lollard production, the French commentary almost certainly had Franciscan origins.¹¹ In their detailed study *L'Apocalypse en français au 13 siècle*, Paul Meyer and Léopold Delisle argue that it is a compilation of possibly two originally Latin Franciscan writings perhaps dating from the

⁹ The French commentary has been edited by Paul Meyer and Léopold Delisle. According to Elis Fridner's study of the manuscripts, the French commentary exists in two English translations, represented by British Library MS Harley 874 (and ten other extant manuscripts including St John's MS G.25 and MS Pepys 2498) and British Library MS Harley 1203 (and two other extant manuscripts), and in many copies and revisions. The tradition represented by Harley 874 has been edited by Fridner. The two versions "agree in substance, but differ widely in manner of expression and vocabulary" (Fridner xvii). In his survey of commentaries on the Bible, Laurence Muir (who does not seem to have been aware of Fridner's work) lists seventeen extant manuscripts and includes all those manuscripts listed by Fridner with the exception of one, Cambridge, Caius College MS 231/117 (547). Muir also identifies a third translation, represented by only one text, in which the entire Wycliffite version has been used. This is British Library MS Harley 3913 and is considered by Fridner to be simply a revision of the translation represented by Harley 874. We can conclude that there are at least eighteen extant manuscripts containing one of the Middle English translations.

¹⁰ This is Fridner's conclusion given the extent of the variance in the manuscripts which points to the loss of many links.

¹¹ The date of 1340-70 for the English translation means that, even at the very latest possible dating, it predates the existence of Lollardy as a major movement. Forshall and Madden, nineteenth-century editors of the Wycliffite Bible, ascribed the commentary to Wyclif himself, describing it as his "first attempt at the interpretation of Scripture" and a response to the "general gloom" of the times (*Bible* 1:vii-viii).

first half of the thirteenth century (ccviii-ccxix). The confusion about its origin says something about the likenesses between the reformist bent of the Franciscan writers and Lollardy's programme of reform, something that may have made the text attractive to Lollard as well as reformist readers. Five of the extant manuscripts containing the commentary also contain works of so-called "Lollard colouring," suggesting that the text was popular in heterodox circles (Hudson, *Premature* 267).¹² There is also evidence of the use of the later version of the Wycliffite Bible in the revised versions of the work and, in one case, the complete substitution of the original scriptural translation with the Wycliffite version.

According to Hanna, the earliest copies of the Middle English translation originated in London. Indeed, Hanna considers the Apocalypse to be part of that specifically London "canon" to which *The Recluse* can also be connected (see Chapter 3).¹³ By the late fourteenth century, it was, therefore, one of a group of vernacular,

¹² The manuscripts are British Library MS Harley 3913; St John's College, Cambridge MS G.25; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc.33; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc.235; British Library MS Harley 1203. Harley 3913 (in which the Apocalypse text has been completely substituted with that of the Wycliffite Bible) is in two parts, the second containing the Apocalypse commentary. Hudson describes the first part (f1-111) as a Lollard "informal notebook" containing notes and references to "various theological and moral topics" ("Book production" 135). While various authors are cited, Wyclif is "once quoted and other Wycliffite topics and authors figure largely." Hudson considers it a "private collection...of little use to anyone save its compiler" (*Premature* 204). St John's College, Cambridge MS G.25 contains the virulently Lollard tracts, "*Vae Octuplex*" and "*Of Mynystris of the Chirche*" as well as orthodox texts (see below). Bodleian, MS Laud Misc. 33 contains the Pauline and Catholic epistles of the Wycliffite Bible, later version (LV), as well as the Apocalypse, and Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 235 contains the Lollard gloss on the Gospel of Matthew. The Apocalypse translation in these three texts shows the influence of the LV with "some verses...left practically intact by revisers while others were corrected or copied in extenso from a Lollard Bible" (Fridner xxi). Harley 1203 also contains Lollard material (an exposition on Matthew 7:15 and *Of Mynystris in the Chirche*).

¹³ Hanna points out that with a single exception from the end of the century, all copies of

scripturally-based texts that formed a staple of book production in London. Now circulating in English and in a more modest, unillustrated, and consequently cheaper format, the text was reaching an even wider audience, presumably one largely composed of that spiritually “sophisticated” and ambitious merchant class fuelling the London production of religious books. The text seems an appropriate one for an audience which, it seems, preferred their Scripture to be mediated by the presence of “aids to reading” (*London* 9). Notably, the Prologue makes no reference to the distinction between the Apocalypse text and the gloss accompanying it, an omission which has the effect of incorporating the commentary into the message sent to John by the angels and designed to tell the world of its ending and the “tyme of Antecrist” (f17a). “[T]his book” becomes the commentary and the Scripture combined and not only the Scripture. Describing how John’s vision fits with the third manner of visionary sight, the intellectual, the Prologue explains how this means that John not only saw the “figures” but he “understood what it was to menen” (f17b); as the commentary is largely responsible for explaining the meaning of the text, this again asserts the commentary’s integral role. Such explication is, in fact, already taking place in the Prologue itself which tells us what John’s “entent” in writing the book was “to amonesten to be pacient...thorough...tribulaciouns,” a teaching which then recurs throughout the commentary (f18a).

Turning to the Middle English Apocalypse Commentary, distinction is made throughout the text between the “good prelates” who imitate Christ and the “fals” prelates whose wickedness is rooted in opposition to that model. The “good prelate” is

the Apocalypse Commentary from before 1400 are known only from copies written in Type II English. He considers that the exception also has obvious ties to London. (“English” 146).

identified with John and is the one who obeys God. A two-fold requirement of preaching the message and living it out in daily life is consistently commended; the good prelate is he who not only understands the message of the Gospel but who “done in werk al that thai seen in holy writt and techen the othere thorough gode ensaumples to done wel” (ff18a-b, 19a, 24a, 36b, 37a). Preaching is exalted as the first and most significant duty of the prelate for it reveals God’s will to the people. Thus, the opening of the temple in heaven (Chapter 15) is understood to represent how the “pryvetes of holy chirche” are “shewed” by the “prechours” (f47b). Preachers are also given a key role in warning the world of the tribulations that will come with the emergence of Antichrist, and in preparing people for the end (ff33a, 36b).

In contrast, the text virulently criticises hypocrites and heretics (“antecrist’s disciples” and “prophetes”) who, significantly, it identifies as coming from within, rather than outside of, the church ranks. Heretics are (probably scholastic) “maistres” who “techen agein the godspell” and who claim to have “discrecioun” in the Word of God so that they may manipulate the Word and other people (f28b). Hypocrites, in Chapter 3, are defined as those “that han werkes of holynesse, and [yet] the entent yvel” (f22a) while Christ’s message to the Laodiceans is interpreted as meaning that “fals cristen men ben wers than thai that ben out of the lawe that ben jewes and Sarzines” (f23b). These terms are used side-by-side with criticism of “fals” “clerks” or “prelates” and the four groups are seen as being guilty of loving worldly glory and wealth (f56a). References to tribulation imply that suffering becomes a means to distinguish the faithful from the false for, while some will fall away (f45b), other “Cristen men” will “yelden...graces” to God

when they are tormented for they know “it is for gode” (f48b).

Heretics and hypocrites are clearly identified as supporters of Antichrist (ff33b, 34a) and it is implied that Antichrist’s emergence will only reveal more of his followers among “fals cristen Men” and those who “semeden religious.” In his perverted imitation of Christ, the Antichrist shows himself to be the contrary to Christ, the “falslich light” instead of the “soothfast light” (f43b). The commentary does not attempt to identify the Antichrist with any existing person or institution. What is clear, however, is that the devil plans to use Antichrist’s disciples, namely “fals prelates” and “fals clerkes” and even “fals Religioun,” right alongside Antichrist himself in order to acquire power. Thus, the role of the demons that issue forth from the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet in Chapter 16 is compared to the role of the false prelates and clerks in the church:

Right as the devel thorough antecrist & his deciples shal make her conjuraciouns that shullen semen as it were miracles & shullen stiren the princes ageins cristen men right so it fareth in holy chirche that the fende thorough fals prelates & fals clerkes in holy chirche dooth wonders & miracles...[T]hai maken hym keeper of many thousande soules & corruppen the princes thorough yvel ensamples. (f49b)

The role of these disciples in preaching a message that is contrary to Christ’s and that encourages love of “erthelich godes” is particularly noted, as is the effect of their bad example (causing the “lewed to live in “delices” like wine-drinking, for example) (ff43a, 49b, 52a, 53b).

Just as the commentary does not seek to identify Antichrist with any one contemporary agency, so it does not attempt to locate itself or its readers in an apocalyptic timeframe. The commentary considers the opening of the seven seals to

correspond to successive periods of church history in an interpretation which follows Richard of St Victor.¹⁴ Thus the first seal and the white horse signifies the early church cleansed of sin (also identified with the persecution of the Jews), the second seal and the red horse mark the time of the Roman Tyrants and the martyrs, the third seal and the black horse mark the time when the church was assaulted with great heresies, the fourth seal and the pale horse correspond to the subversion of the church by hypocrites. The opening of the fifth seal which reveals the souls of the martyrs, corresponds to the longing of the righteous for judgement, the sixth seal marks the time of tribulation and persecution under Antichrist, and the seventh is the peace after Antichrist has been defeated. The commentary does not identify which period we are now in. It is clear, however, that the writer(s) of the commentary consider ecclesiastical corruption to play a key role in ushering in apocalyptic events: the sins of the prelacy are identified as ways in which they serve Antichrist and prepare for his arrival.

The gloss presents itself as an authoritative explanation of Scripture; it does not mention alternative readings nor does it make reference to any of its sources, something which only adds to the sense, promoted by the Prologue, that this explanatory voice shares in the reliability and accuracy of Scripture. Presumably seeing itself as part of the “unveiling” process, the commentary draws attention to the openness of the Scripture, and the openness of the Apocalypse, rather than its “derk” or “mysti” nature. For example, Christ’s repeated refrain of “who that hath eren, hereth what the spirit seith to the chirche” is interpreted as meaning “that I seie to on I seie to alle” (f20a).

¹⁴ This is also the system used by Wimbeldon in his sermon and Knight locates it in *In Apocalypsim Libri System, Liber II* (134).

“Derknesse” is associated with the undesirable state of lay ignorance or “unconnyng” - a state that prelates are responsible for delivering their congregation from (f19a). It is also connected to the Old Testament which teaches “derklich with figures” while the New Testament “techith openlich” (ff26a-26b). The conviction that God can give people the ability to understand Holy Writ is also asserted: the image of the door opening in heaven in Chapter 3 is taken to represent the way God opens both heaven and holy writt “to hem that han litel cunnyng and kepen his commaundement” (f22b). The same sentiment is expressed in Chapter 10 where the open book carried by the angel is taken to represent Christ who “opened holy wrytt thorough his connyng & yaf understandyng to his chosen” (f35b). On the whole, the commentary places a high premium on the power of Holy Writ, and its place in the life of the believer. The writer of the Prologue addresses his audience and says that he gives them Holy Writ “for to teche yow that thorough suffraunce and confort of holy writt we shullen have hope in hym” (f17a). Scripture is asserted as the chief tool for living a moral life (f24a).

At some point during the translation of the French gloss into English, several anticlerical interpolations were added which considerably intensify the degree of invective against the church. Some four out of eight of the major interpolations add to the description of the sins of bad priests. In Chapter 14, for example, the French gloss is content to identify anticrist’s disciples as “fals prelates and ...fals clerkes” while the English (anxious for us to get the point) adds that they “ben proude & coveitouse & leccherouse” (f45a). The commentary for Chapter 13 adds to the French account of the mark of the Beast by ascribing the mark on the right hand specifically to prelates who

commit lechery (f43b). It also claims that the mark of the beast is on those who practice simony and those who “goo to the ordre forto have bodilich delices” (f43b). Chapter 20 features the longest addition - fifteen lines. While the French gloss, following the biblical text, moves swiftly on from the bounding of Satan for a thousand years to the thrones of the judges, the English gloss gets ahead of itself in order to comment on the end of the thousand years. It states:

Ac after the thousande yer ben gon, Antecristes prophetes shullen regnen & comen more & more & corruppen goddes laws & tournen it after her libyng ffor than shal the fendes power arise more & more in holichirche. Hise prophetes ben coveitous men of holy chirche, proude Men, leccherouse Men, loseniours. (f60a)

Such men “disceyven goddes childer & bynynen god his eritage” (f60a). These sentiments reflect a conviction that Scripture is being corrupted and by those rich and greedy men *within* holy church.

The interpolations stress the extent to which the church is implicated in the emergence of Antichrist and the tribulations of the end. Their inclusion reflects both strong anticlerical thought and perhaps also a desire to stress a particular perspective on apocalyptic events. It is worth noting the similarities between the vocabulary and style of the anticlerical interpolations in *The Recluse* and the Apocalypse Commentary which, according to Hanna’s evidence, were products of the same reading and book-producing community and which appear in the same manuscript, Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 2498. As was mentioned in the discussion of *The Recluse* in Chapter 3, *The Recluse* imports two sections of the Apocalypse Commentary into its redaction of the *Riwe*. Similarities in the anticlerical language of sections of *The Recluse* and the

interpolations in the Apocalypse Commentary (notably “Antecristes prophetes,” “ypocrites,” “heretikes,” “losenioures” to describe wicked clergy and “proude,” “coveitouse,” “leccherouse,” and “losenieur” as descriptors for them) have led to conjecture that the interpolations in both works are the product of the same hand.¹⁵ Whether they are or not, it seems likely that we can connect the interpolations to the London community responsible for the production of both texts.

Unsurprisingly, these interpolations have been connected to the Lollards, even though the date of the translation would seem to make this impossible. We see here once again the extent of the sympathy between Lollardy and other reformist causes. In fact, these comments, inserted as they are into a Franciscan commentary, actually bring the commentary closer to more recent Franciscan exegesis written as a result of late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century conflict between the Franciscan Conventuals and Franciscan Spirituals over the issue of the observance of poverty within the order. Like other persecuted groups before and since, Franciscan Spirituals like Olivi, Rupescissa, Ubertino of Casale, Angelo of Clareno and, in England, Henry of Costesy used apocalyptic rhetoric and ideology to defend their cause and castigate their enemies.¹⁶ Consequently their apocalyptic writings shift the focus from the enemies outside of the church to those “within” it (27). Instead of the Jews or the Pagans, the enemy had become the “praelati, the corrupt church leaders of their time” (Burr 26). Such men were considered to be nothing less than Antichrist’s servants, preparing the way for his arrival.

¹⁵ See Fridner xxxix and Colledge 8-9.

¹⁶ Rupescissa was a disciple of Olivi’s and spent most of the years between 1340 and 1365 in prison; Angelo of Clareno and Ubertino of Casale were both leaders of the Spiritual movement. Henry of Costesy was a lector at Cambridge and was arrested in 1330 for preaching openly against Pope John XXII.

Olivi in particular, interpreted his age as the fifth period described in the Apocalypse in which the “carnal Church, the body of evildoers within Cristendom, and the spiritual Church, the true followers of poverty” are in conflict (McGinn, *Visions* 204). By claiming that the carnal church could be identified by the presence of ecclesiastical abuses especially avarice and simony, these writers clearly pointed the finger at the institutional church and were even prepared to go so far as to implicate the Pope by conceiving of a “mystical Antichrist” who would be a false pope attacking the Franciscan rule (205). McGinn points out how Olivi’s *Lecture on the Apocalypse* was translated into French and was read widely, even by the laity, despite its condemnation in 1326 (*Apocalyptic* 157). While it is hard to know the true impact of the apocalyptic writings of the Franciscan Spirituals in England, Kerby-Fulton has suggested that the very fact of their repression points to their influence (*Books* 95). It is therefore not inconceivable that these writings influenced the re-shaping of this Apocalypse commentary.

Exegesis of the End: Of Mynystris in the Chirche.

Not unlike the Franciscan Spirituals, Lollards, who also considered themselves to be members of a “true” church which was being persecuted by the corrupt and polluted institutional church, used apocalyptic prophecies to make sense of the current time, and couched their polemic in eschatological language. Considering the events and abuses of his own day in the light of the prophecies of Scripture, Wyclif determined that the church’s wealth, the corruption of its clergy, and its preference for its own laws above Christ’s were signs of the emergence of Antichrist. His eschatological thought developed throughout the 1370s as he found more and more reason to make comparisons between

the Papacy and the Antichrist. Ultimately, in 1382, he penned *De Cristo et suo adversario Anticristo* in which he stated categorically that if the pope “‘in doctrine or lifestyle’ contradicts Christ, ‘he is without doubt, the chief Antichrist’” (qtd. in Bostick 69). This was really only the logical extension of the criticism expressed by Wimbledon (who accused the clergy of being “contrarie” to Christ), the author of *Book to a Mother* (who includes the pope in his list of those who have been blinded by the love of wealth [75]), and others, and yet it was of course a radical and heretical departure. For Wyclif, to be contrary to or in opposition to Christ is to be anti-Christ, meaning that you become exactly that.

Despite the objections of Kerby-Fulton who argues that Wyclif’s perspective was essentially pessimistic, even conservative, and over all eschatological, the apocalyptic imperative - the sense of crisis and the correlation of historical event and biblical prophecy - is clearly apparent in Wyclif’s thought.¹⁷ His approach and his belief that the Pope is Antichrist became a key characteristic of Lollard doctrine and found expression in a large number of texts. Thus, the *Thirty-Seven Conclusions of the Lollards*, a late fourteenth-century exposition of Lollard beliefs, invokes biblical prophecies from Matthew 24, John’s Apocalypse, and Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians in order to make sense of the current crisis in the church and to identify the Pope with Antichrist:

¹⁷ Kerby-Fulton seems to ground her description of Wyclif’s position on the fact that he was hostile to extra-scriptural revelatory theology, a perspective that takes him to the “conservative side of orthodox” (*Books* 49). However, her judgement seems too sweeping given her own definition of apocalypticism. Wyclif’s sense of urgency and his efforts to locate current events and leaders in an apocalyptic timeframe is more than apparent. McGinn cites the following examples from Wyclif’s exegesis: the loosing of Satan represents Innocent III’s papacy, Gog and Magog signify the papacy and its followers, the papal schism is a sign of the end (*Antichrist* 182).

...sithen these prophecies shulen nedis be filled and the tyme sett in
 Apocalips is now passed, and the werkis of the bishope of Rome in many
 thingis ben openly contrarie to the werkis of Jhesu Crist, whi perseyven not
 cristen men that the comynge of antecrist is neigheth now. (Hudson,
Selections 126)

Elsewhere the author warns that the Pope is “acurside antecrist” if he gains his position through wealth and simony (123). The tract entitled *De Papa* lists the ways in which the Pope is at odds with Christ - the Pope’s wealth opposes Christ’s poverty, the Pope’s pride opposes Christ’s meekness, and the Pope’s law-making opposes Christ’s preaching - and declares that “the pope is anticrist here in erthe for he is agenus crist bothe in lif & in lore” (Matthew 462). *The Lanterne of Light* spends its opening chapter describing Antichrist both “in general” (any one who lives contrary to Christ) and “in special.” The latter clearly corresponds to the Pope but the author chooses to describe Antichrist as a “conglomeration” (a viewpoint Wyclif also countenanced) in order to implicate the entire structure of papal governanace: “in the court of Rome is the heed of anticrist. And in archebischopis & bischopis is the bodi of anticrist. But in thise clouted sectis as mounkis canouns & freris is the venymous taile of anticrist” (16). In his written set of answers to the charges on which he was brought to trial, the Lollard Walter Brut used eschatological scriptures to defend his conviction that the end is imminent and that the Antichrist has been revealed as the “high Bishop of Rome” (Foxe 569).

These texts reveal that Lollards considered the end times to be unveiling themselves “nowe,” at this very time, making the times themselves key to the interpretation of scriptural texts - something, as we shall see, made very clear in *Of Mynystris in the Chirche*, the last text in St John’s MS G.25. This essentially apocalyptic

emphasis on revelation, on the “unhyd” as opposed to the “hyd,” permeates key aspects of Lollard doctrine: it can be seen in the defence of the “naked” scriptural text (that is, a text free of glosses) and in the rejection of transubstantiation. Unsurprisingly, for Lollards the place to go for information on the end times was the Bible and not extra-scriptural prophecies or myths; Adso’s biography of Antichrist was, for example, rejected by Wyclif who also denounced Joachim of Fiore’s attempts to predict the date of the end and rejected Hildegard of Bingen’s visions because they were “outside” Scripture.¹⁸ As we have already seen the Bible was, according to the Lollards, “open” even in its darkest places (and passages from Daniel, or Apocalypse would presumably be such dark places). As we have also seen, this conviction did not stop exegesis being written and provided, whether in sermons or in writings. No English Lollard commentary on John’s Apocalypse survives, although there is considerable anecdotal evidence of Lollard interest in the book.¹⁹ There is, however, an English commentary on Jesus’ prophetic statements about the end times in Matthew 24 which is likely to have been well known in Lollard circles. The commentary, known as *Of Mynystris in the Chirche*, appears in many manuscripts containing the sermon cycle, suggesting it was read with some consistency and perhaps also in Lollard schools, but it also circulated independently as a tract.²⁰ Its first half seems to have been modelled on Wyclif’s own exegesis of the same

¹⁸ For Wyclif’s responses to Hildegard and Joachim see Kerby-Fulton, *Books* 192-201, 63-70.

¹⁹ One Lollard commentary on the Apocalypse, the *Opus Arduum* does, in fact, exist but it is written in Latin. Written by an academic follower of Wyclif from a place of imprisonment sometime around the end of 1389, it is highly unlikely that the text was widely known in England; there are no quotations of the text or credible allusions to it in English Lollard writing (*Premature* 265). The thirteen extant copies are all found in Continental libraries. The text is discussed by Hudson (“Neglected” 257-79).

²⁰ The Wycliffite sermon cycle is evidence of Lollardy’s focus on preaching. Intended

chapter, but the second half is entirely independent.²¹ Its extreme length is in considerable contrast to the brevity of most sermons in the cycle but it is still possible that it was intended to be read as a sermon. The entire scriptural text is written out in sections but the lines of commentary far exceed the lines of text, sometimes incorporating digressions lasting for several pages. *Of Mynystris* contains many of the common Lollard concerns including complaints about the friars and the way that canon law has replaced Scripture. Its main purpose, however, is the assembly of arguments to reject the papacy, arguments that are grounded in the identification of the Pope with Antichrist and the conviction that the end prophesied by Christ is now coming to pass.

Of Mynystris begins by stating that Matthew 24 is a passage that is not often read in church and later implies this is because “prelatis” consider it “dredful” or threatening to them (f116b). The passage should be expounded in the “modyr language,” the tract declares, because it contains “hud sentence of God that were profiitable to the chyrche” (f105a). The tract asserts the Lollard conviction that Scripture is the source of all

for public reading and grouped in accordance with the liturgical year, there are 294 sermons in the complete collection. For a list of the sermon cycle manuscripts containing *Of Mynystris* see Hudson and Gradon 1:49. Hudson has suggested that the sermon cycle could have been used in Lollard “schools” or conventicles and may have been designed to provide alternative instructional material in existing churches (*Premature* 199).

Of Mynystris circulated independently of the sermon cycle in Trinity College Dublin MS 245, British Library MS Harley 1203, and St John’s College Cambridge MS G.25. Trinity 245 is a collection of Lollard writings including lists of authorities providing support for Lollard opinions (*Premature* 202). Harley 1203 is one of the manuscripts containing a later version of the Apocalypse. It is followed by an exposition of Matthew 7:15 (unprinted) which, according to the Harley catalogue and Hudson, is certainly Lollard.

²¹ That Latin tract entitled *Exposicio textus Matthei XXIV* has been edited by Loserth. *Of Mynystris* contains most of the commentary found in the *Exposicio* although the order has been changed in places and passages of more detailed allegorical exegesis have been omitted.

necessary and truthful knowledge when it describes this Gospel passage as the only source of Christ's words on end times matters: "no man can telle, I gesse, what wordis of Crist wente nerre this mater then wordis that ben in this chapitle whuche semeth beste thus to ben applied" (f106a). This sufficiency of Scripture seems to also be expressed by the fact that the gloss makes almost no reference to any other authority, including the Fathers or Doctors of the church.²²

The tract itself desires to prove two points above all: firstly, that the Antichrist is he who lives in greatest opposition to Christ and, secondly, that the end times are already upon us. The tract provides a definition of Antichrist within its opening pages, claiming that "Antichrist is that ilke man that contrarieth Crist in lyvyng" (f106b). It uses this definition to prove that the Pope (understood to be "on greet persone...whiche...hath monye wickude lymes, as cardynalis and newe ordris" [f105b]) is the Antichrist by demonstrating how he is most contrary to Christ in all the ways that he should be most like him, namely in poverty, meekness, and in benefiting and blessing the church. Providing details of the Pope's wealth and pride, the writer uses language which emphasises the opposition between the Pope and Christ: "how is he Cristes viker that reversith Crist in this?" (f106b); the Pope does "contrariely" to Christ (f107a); "Crist, in al this, dide the contrarie [to the Pope]" (f106b); "Cristus lawe is al reversed" (f127a). This emphasis continues as the discussion goes on to explain the meaning of Christ's invocation of Daniel's prophecy of the "abhominioun of discomfort...standing in the holi place" which is again taken to refer to the Pope. Again here the hypocrite is defined

²² Only three authorities are invoked in the text, once each: Augustine, Bernard, and Robert Grosseteste (ff99b, 100a, 124a).

as he who lives “contrariouly to the dedis that Crist dude” (f107b). By applying verse 16 (“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains”) to the clergy, the tract maintains its focus on the foundational importance of obedience to Christ’s example, calling priests to take “ensample of hoolye preestus that weron byfore, and lyvedon porely of almys, and specially to the high hul [hill] that is Jesus Crist, how he lyvede thus pore life” (f108b). Verse 24, with its promise of false-Christes and false-prophets, is applied to the “newe ordres” who, like their patron, “reversion” Christ’s law and “reversion Crist” (f112a).

In order to prove that the events prophesied by Christ are taking place now, and so strengthen the claim that the Pope is Antichrist, *Of Mynystres* points to the papal schism which it considers to be the fulfillment of Christ’s prophecy of “greet tribulacion” of a kind never before experienced. The tract points out how the schism perfectly corresponds to Christ’s prediction in both its degree of strife (“al oure west lond is with the to pope or the tothur. And he that ys with the ton hatuth the tothur” [110b]) and in the way it makes sense of Christ’s advice in verse 23, “[a]t that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.” This advice, it claims, is Christ’s “medicine” for dealing with the schism (f111a). So certain is the tract of the accuracy of its exegesis in this matter that it claims that “no man of byleve that troweth that Crist is al-witty schulde untrowe that ne Crist tellith here of thes divisiouns and that the pope, that feyneth hym viker of Crist, is a greet cause of alle thes divisions” (f111b).

This conviction that the end times are even now unfolding draws attention to the

the necessity of “reading” and interpreting the times and events in the world which also have their part to play in revealing the truth contained in Scripture. Just as Christ’s words had suggested the “reader” should “understand” when he sees the abomination that causes desolation, so the tract argues that when men see “this pope reigned thus” then they may “rede...this gospel and understonde hyt” (f107a). The tract argues that things that were once hidden in the Scriptures, even to the Doctors of the church, can now be better understood because the events they predict are now coming to pass: “monye wyttis whuche ben hude in Godus lawe weron unknowen to these doctoures. Why mygte not God huyde this wyt, til that the malice of these popis mevede men to undurstonde it?” (f108a). It is contemporary events - “the malice of these popis,” the reigning of this pope - which bring about a true understanding of God’s Word.

What the tract suggests, then, is that the openness of Scripture so often asserted by Lollards is not only conditional on a man’s state of heart, but also on the times in which he lives. The argument attempts to navigate a somewhat tricky course between asserting the openness of Scripture on the one hand and accepting its secrets on the other. It seems to assert, for example, that understanding should and will come from reading; indeed, it is almost our “duty” to understand: “sith byleve techeth men that thes wordis may not be fals, and Crist himself biddith men that redden hem undirstonde hem, what men of right bileve shulde not undirstonde this gospel?” (f111a). We must also be ready to act on what we do know. The writer is quick to assert the well-known fact that Christ described the “perelis byfore” the end of the world and therefore “trewe men in Crist schulden be... wel payed of knowyng” them (f105b). On the other hand, the tract

preserves the conviction that dates and times are known only to God: “And it semeth that Crist wolde seye that this day schal be hud to the comune of men unto the tyme that it falle” (ff114a-114b). The “unconnyng” that such secrets represent is hailed as a good thing, as much for our profit as “cunnyng” for Christ “ordeyned hem...[both] for oure good” (f105b). Such a comment is clearly designed to discourage attempts to gain access to this forbidden knowledge. The reader is also discouraged from being overly curious about the nature of judgement and the afterlife. “Muse we not,” it commands, “wher [whether] alle men schal be of o stature thane or wher yche schal have that body that he hadde here in erthe,” and “muse we not whether al the fulthe that now is in this world schal be thane gederud in helle and medelud with fyr” (f113b).

This balance between openness and hiddenness may account for the tract’s somewhat perplexing attitude to its own exegesis, an attitude which emphasises both its irrefutable authority and its uncertain status. The gloss is defined as the opinion of “somme men,” a descriptor used elsewhere in the gloss and sometimes reduced simply to “men.” A plural pronoun is used in the sections of text which defend the tract’s exposition against the arguments of the opposition: “we seyn, “we askon.” This invocation of some kind of interpretive community has been identified by Hudson, von Nolcken, and Ghosh as characteristic of Lollard writing. Ghosh points out how this gesture towards some kind of extra-textual “tradition” carries with it an implied hermeneutic authority. This proves useful in a tract like *Of Mynystres* which occasionally interrupts its progress through Matthew 24 to deal directly with the oppositional arguments raised by Lollard enemies. Characteristically, the tract makes it clear what it

thinks of such opponents by introducing their arguments as those of fools or as coming from “antichrist.” Thus “many foolis arguen” that if Christ had truly been prophesying about the future events of the church, he would have spoken more “openly” (f108a). The Lollard responds to this by invoking Augustine and the reasons why Christ sometimes speaks “derkli.” Again *Of Mynystres* notes, “Anticrist grutchith here and seith this witt is not conformed bi holi doctours of Goddis lawe,” a complaint that is refuted by referring to the significance of the times in revealing things “unknowun to thes doctors” (f108a). Also, “Anticristis clerkis” dispute that Daniel, a prophet of the Old Testament, could be prophesying about Popes. This argument is particularly thin, as the writer suggests, because Christ himself applied Daniel’s prophecy to the “newe lawe” and Daniel’s prophecies of Christ prove that he spoke of more than just the time of the old covenant (f108a). Asserting the authority of Christ and Augustine, against the “folie” of the opposition, the tract goes as far as to challenge “Anticrist” to “putte he his witt by ouris, and disprove ouris if he can, and prove he his contrarie witt by resoun or autorite” (f108a). The gloss gives the impression of being confident in its authority and in the accuracy of this interpretation against the opposition that makes up part of its audience.

Considering the authority that comes from the invocation of an interpretive community, the confidence which with the text asserts the certainty of its own interpretation, and the challenge to its enemies to come up with something better, the strong note of humility and reservation that the writer also applies to his own exegesis seems somewhat incongruous. The tract begins by making the careful distinction between the Scripture which is “of byleve” and the “expounyng” which is “supposud”

and “bynethe byleve” (f105a). This is taken from Wyclif’s original Latin commentary and is followed by an assertion that is also Wyclif’s which states that the “men” responsible for the exposition are “redy to take meekly betur wyt yif it be tawght hem, and to forsake her owne wyt yif any teche that it is fals” (f105a).²³ Unlike Wyclif’s original exposition, however, *Of Mynystres* continues to insert these disclaimers throughout the length of the tract, apparently seeking to clarify the status of the gloss and assert the author’s willingness to stand corrected on it. Thus: “This wit undurstonduth Crist by these wordis as we supposon; and, by oure protestacioun byfore, we wolon mekely amende this, or ayeyn calle this, yef we ben tawte that it is false” (f107b); “...we undeurstonde this, stonding oure protestacion...” (f108b); “With the protestacion seyde byfore unduirstonden men this tixt thus...” (f109a); “But evermore we ben redy to ayeyncalle this gloos whoso proveth that it is fals or ellis techeth a bettore” (f112a). Even more remarkably, the writer issues a warning on the perils of expounding Christ’s Word “for it is opon heresy to graunton or denye that that Crist himself reversuth,” and apparently seeks to defend this gloss not by drawing attention to its certain authority but by describing it as a mixture of “supposing or gessyng,” formulated “by byleve and somewhat by qwic resoun” (f114b). And, looking at the language of the gloss, we see that the interpretations are put forward as what the gloss “semeth” to mean, what seems “licly” [likely], and what “men” “thenkon” or “undurstonden.”

These two very different attitudes to the gloss seem to come together in the final paragraph of the text, a passage that also emphasises the close and potentially dangerous

²³ Wyclif’s exegesis states “omnia autem hic exposita sunt tanquam dicta probabiliter capienda, protestando quod si aliqua persona ecclesie docuerit sensum magis probabilem, illi volumus humiliter consentire” (Loserth 354).

connection between interpreting the Scripture and interpreting the events of the day. Commenting on how men who “interpretith the popis deede[s] to yvel entent” are punished as heretics, the text returns to the idea that the Scripture, in Matthew 24, provides a direct comment on the current papal schism. In order to know this truth, however, it is necessary for men to provide an exposition of it (such as this one) which is here once again described as “wordis bynethe byleve.” For this “desyr to knowe this gospel,” men should not, the tract argues, be condemned (f127a). The writer goes on to offer a now customary disclaimer, “we wolden fayn knowe the right wyt, and leve this wyt yif it were fals,” followed by an equally familiar challenge to opposition voices to “telle...beture wit of Cristus wordis, grounde[d]...by som resoun,” helpfully reminding them that “that man is cursud of God that wole dampen men in this wille, sithen Cristus lawe bidduth men to seke this wyt and defende it” (f127a). Finally, the text concludes with the logical assertion that “sith men that expoun falsly Godus word ben suffrud of the pope, more men that expounen with drede on this maner schulden be suffrede” (f127a).

This difference between “falsly” expounding and “expounen with drede” seems to be the key distinction to be made here. The qualifiers and disclaimers certainly create the sense that this exposition was written “with drede,” sensitive that “it is perele for to adde, or to bregghe from Cristus wordis” (f114b). The same effect is created by an apparent reliance on prayer: “These wordus of Crist ben mysty but thei ben ful goode and ful of wyt and counseyl whoso cowde understonden hem. But preye we to Crist, wisdom of the Fadur, that he gyve us wyt of hem, yif hym lyke, to oure profyt” (f108b). The

conclusion's understated accusation that there also exist a slew of false glosses, tolerated (if not positively encouraged) by the papacy, provides a category for the arguments and oppositions that *Of Mynysttris* accredits to "anticrist." Against such false glosses, the writer of *Of Mynysttris* can assert the unchallengeable authority of his own exegesis. However, a balance must be struck as too much confidence would take away from the humility that is integral to biblical exposition. The tract's "cautious" and even "conservative" attitude to its own claims reflects this humility and speaks to the readers who are already on its side (Hudson, "Eschatology" 110). This attitude suggests a desire to prevent readers from absolutely confusing the gloss with the Word (something other glosses made it too easy to do) and to show that the commentator's words are always subject to correction based on the Word. The humility also makes room for the involvement of the reader whose ability to interpret and expound was theoretically maintained by Lollardy: with equal access to the Word and to the times, the individual has just as much claim to God-given insight as the expositor.

The fact that *Of Mynysttris* expresses a profound awareness of the process of biblical exegesis and a profound self-consciousness about itself as a gloss suggests that the tract wishes to present itself as, first and foremost, biblical commentary. If we oblige and view it in this way, it is clear that its "apocalyptic vision," as far as it has one, is incidental to its purpose which is to provide access to a passage little read in church but "profytable" to the people, and to expound the meaning of that passage in "model" fashion. On the other hand, we may choose to read the text as pure polemic: like so many other Lollard works, *Of Mynysttris* clearly uses the discourse of apocalypse for

polemical purposes. In either case, it is apparent that the text's apocalypticism plays second fiddle to the greater objectives of the text. Not unlike other religious, and reformist movements, Lollardy's apocalypticism was the "handmaiden" of its crusade against the corruption within the church.

Reading St John's MS G.25

St John's MS G.25 is made up of six items. In order, these are: the *Lucidarie* (f1a-16a); the Middle English Apocalypse Commentary (f17a-67a); a Passion narrative taken from the English translation of the Gospel harmony, *Unum ex Quattuor* (known in English as *Oon of Foure*) written by Clement, a prior of Llanthony Abbey in the twelfth century (f68a-85a);²⁴ a meditation on "how the sacrament of the auter cristis be resceevyd worthily and devoutly" (f85a-93a); *Vae Octuplex*, the Lollard text based on 'the woes of the Pharisees' of Matthew 23 (f97a-104b) and, finally, *Of Mynystris in the Chirche*, (f105a-127a). It is worth saying a bit more about the three texts not yet discussed.

Clement of Llanthony's Gospel harmony is a faithful rendering of scriptural passages, arranged chronologically with citations provided. As in the case of the Apocalypse translation and commentary, earlier scholarship considered this translation of the popular twelfth-century work to be a Lollard initiative. Again, this is because of similarities between the translation and the Wycliffite Bible (this time the earlier version) and the apparent association of the text with Lollard material including two prologues.²⁵

²⁴ According to Hudson, there are fifteen extant manuscripts. Muir has dated the translation as 1375-1400 (394). P. M. Smith produced an edition of the work in 1984.

²⁵ One of these prologues is the same as that which acts as prologue to the Lollard version of Matthew's Gospel (and is consequently found in Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 235, one of the Apocalypse manuscripts). It contains instructions for reading

However, as Anne Hudson points out, “a gospel harmony might seem an unlikely product for a movement that set such a high value on the precise words of scripture” while it is easy to see the appeal of this already hugely popular work among orthodox authorities (who, after all, responded to Lollardy in part by approving Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which can be considered a kind of Gospel harmony) (*Premature* 267). Here, the extract begins with Judas’ betrayal and ends, rather suddenly and somewhat prematurely, with Pilate assigning soldiers to guard the tomb containing Christ’s body. A failure to include the imminent resurrection seems peculiar and may point to the lack of a complete or accessible exemplar.

The Passion narrative is followed by a meditation on the sacrament, one of many similar texts designed to sing the praises of the eucharist and help prepare the hearts of those both receiving and ministering it.²⁶ On the actual nature of the eucharist, the text is unclear, preferring to emphasise a devotional and, at moments, mystical attitude to the sacrament rather than a theological one. It clearly asserts that “Crist god and man is

Scripture which closely resemble those given in The General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible. The second prologue appears as the second tract in the collection of tracts in favour of Bible translation found in Cambridge University Library MS II.6.26. It lists scriptural proofs supporting the necessity of knowing the Bible, criticises the clergy who keep it from “lewid men,” and asserts the priesthood of every believer. Both prologues have been included by Forshall and Madden in their edition of the Wycliffite Bible (44-49, xiv-xv). Hudson also names a third prologue which she says is found in three manuscripts of the Harmony and appears separately in one more (*Premature* 268).

Hudson names five texts in which parts of the Wycliffite Bible are found alongside Clement’s Gospel Harmony. These are Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 978, British Library MS Royal 17 C.xxxiii, British Library MS Harley 6333, Arundel MS 254 and Huntington MS HM 501. In two cases the Harmony is found in manuscripts containing other Lollard writings. The first case is that being discussed. The second is Glasgow University Gen. 223 which contains short Lollard treatises (Hudson, *Premature* 268).

²⁶ I have not located the source for this meditation on the sacrament.

conteyned verily in this sacrament,” but so did Wyclif (f85b). No mention is made as to whether or not the elements remain after consecration (whether or not, in other words, transubstantiation takes place) and the focus is rather, as the title suggests, on how one should receive the sacrament. The text is the only one in the manuscript to follow immediately on from the preceding text without at least half a page of blank text. This, combined with the fact that the Passion narrative could not be finished, may mean that this text on the sacrament was “filler” material. However, as Hanna notes, “it was important filler, since the scribe did not scruple to add an additional full quire to accommodate the end of the text” (Hanna, *London* 308).

Finally, the third text, *Vae Octuplex* is most commonly found alongside *Of Mynystris in the Chirche* in manuscripts of the sermon cycle but its presence here, and in one other manuscript (again with *Of Mynystris*) points to a limited circulation independent of the sermons.²⁷ Though not as long as *Of Mynystris*, *Vae Octuplex* is still considerably longer than the sermons in the Lollard cycle though it follows the sermon format by expounding on a biblical text which is translated. Through its use of the comparison of Pharisee with Friar from Matthew 23, *Vae Octuplex* denounces the friars, applying to them the eight woes Jesus had spoken over the Pharisees. The language of *Vae Octuplex* suggests that it shares in the vision of *Of Mynystris* by attacking the friars (who are part of Antichrist’s body) for the way they “reverse” Christ’s law and live lives “contrary” to Christ.

That St John’s MS G.25 is composed of several codicological units was partially

²⁷ See Hudson and Gradon 1:49 for a list of the sermon cycle manuscripts containing the two tracts. Both *Vae Octuplex* and *Of Mynystris* are also found in Trinity College Dublin 245.

noted by M. R. James in his catalogue description, where he identifies the first division between the *Lucidarie* and the Apocalypse Commentary, and more fully by Hanna who notes the subsequent divisions between the meditation on the sacrament and *Vae Octuplex*, and between *Vae Octuplex* and *Of Mynystris*. Hanna has described these units as booklets but the term requires some clarification. “Booklet” can describe a codicological unit designed as a discrete entity, possibly already in circulation as one, which then ends up being bound alongside other booklets to form a “composite manuscript” (Robinson 46-47, 52-54). The term can also refer to a commercially produced fascicle “intended to be joined with other booklets in the same or a similar format”; in other words, there is a strong possibility that the booklet is explicitly related to the book of which it is a part (Hanna, *Pursuing* 22). The codicological unity of this manuscript, which has not been explicitly considered by either James or Hanna, makes it clear that the “booklets” that make up St John’s MS G.25 are most certainly of the second kind. The John’s manuscript demonstrates consistent presentation throughout, with light ruling and twenty seven to twenty nine lines per page. James’ description of the manuscript as being the work of several hands need to be modified to two, the first for the *Lucidarie* and the second for the remainder of the manuscript. Both hands are relatively informal textura book hands but distinctive letter forms shared by the last five texts prove that they have a common scribe. These same texts - from the Apocalypse to *Of Mynystris* - also have running headings. A further indication that these different items all emanated from the same workshop and were originally conceived as belonging together is that all six texts have a common decorator. The opening initials which share

features including the infilling of the letter with a simple leaf or vine design, a fern-frond in the margin of each text, and a frame for the letter with invected lines are clearly the work of the same person. This strongly suggests that the booklets must have been bound shortly after they were copied in order to create a book.

From this information we can draw some tentative conclusions. The use of two scribes, the independent units within the text, and the use of a common decorator are all highly suggestive of commercial production - the kind of "scrivener's alley" professional book trade described by Hanna, Christianson, and Taylor. The two scribes worked individually on separate units but with the view of bringing the units together. The work is therefore of the same level of quality - formal enough to sell but not overly fancy - a description that can also be extended to the decoration. The originally separate fascicles were then brought together and made to appear as homogeneous as possible through the use of one artist for the decorated initials.²⁸

As speculative production, where it existed at all, occurred on a very limited scale, this book was almost certainly created at the request of the purchaser. That this manuscript was deliberately designed and put together as a book means that, for one reader at least, these texts belonged together despite the fact that two of them are virulently Lollard. To some extent, the material in the codex can be connected to that same interest in the "squarely biblical" and "authoritatively expounded" material which

²⁸ Shonk describes a similar process when defending his claim that the Auchinleck manuscript, though formed by the bringing together of twelve booklets, was a planned production. Scribes wrote their texts leaving space for the planned decoration. The manuscript was then "decorated as a unit after the completion of the writing." Consistent in colour and design, the decorations may have been the work of "several craftsmen working in a single atelier" (77-78).

was already a popular staple of early vernacular theology (Hanna, “English” 149). The Apocalypse is biblical exposition; so, as polemical as they are, are *Of Mynystreis* and *Vae Octuplex*, something that is emphasised by the headers to the texts which identify them simply as “Matthew XXIII” and “Matthew XXIV.” The Passion narrative, though a harmony of the Gospel texts, diverges hardly at all from Scripture. *Lucidarie* and the treatise on the sacrament offer academic-style discussion of the basics of the faith. The placement of these two texts also places Christ, his actions during his Passion and the sacrament which memorialises him - at the centre of the collection.

Within this context, we find our three texts which discuss end times events and the emergence of the Antichrist. All three, as we have seen, reflect very different traditions of apocalyptic thinking; however, they all deal with the role played by church corruption in ushering in the Apocalypse. We start with the *Lucidarie* which associates church wealth with the imminent arrival of Antichrist and anticipates that clerks will be among the first of his disciples. The discussion continues with the Apocalypse Commentary which, especially with the English interpolations, sees false prelates and hypocritical clergyman as the disciples and prophets of Antichrist. The last word goes to *Of Mynystreis* which takes the other two to what would seem be their logical conclusion, identifying the head of the church with Antichrist himself.

My suggestion, then, is that we can view this manuscript as generically bound, as an anthology of, essentially, biblical exposition which has the subject of the end times, and the church's role in them, as a key focus. In the case of all three texts, it is their anticlericalism which is the cause of their apocalypticism (this is particularly obvious in

the interpolations which have been added to the Apocalypse Commentary) and the manuscript therefore also reflects the anticlerical feeling common to many “reformers” which simply finds its most “radical” but also “logical” expression in Lollard attacks on the Pope. The codex, in many ways authoritative, scriptural-based, academic, and Christ-centred, is able to unite three different apocalyptic traditions because of its primary interest in implicating the clergy in the rise of Antichrist: on this point, on which they are all agreed, it can create from the three texts a relatively coherent picture of the end.

St John's MS G.25, like British Library MS Harley 2398, shows us that Lollard texts need not have been read exclusively by Lollards. Rather they could be read and interpreted by different people, in different ways, for different reasons. When we accept the, seemingly obvious but often ignored, reality that in the late Middle Ages, as Justice puts it, “different people not only thought differently, but were concerned to see their belief in different ways and different contexts” (“Lollardy” 685), it becomes easier to see how a Lollard text could be read alongside a Franciscan commentary and an Adsonian-styled exposition simply because of what they have to say about the end times. The manuscripts also suggest that Lollard texts need not have been marginalised texts but that they could have been produced in workshops which also produced non-Lollard material. Finally, these manuscripts direct our attention to the discernment of the individual readers who commissioned these “books” and who could choose which texts to read, and in which combinations - combinations which could ultimately modify the very meaning of those different works. These “interpretive communities” of texts, and the readers who put them together, were capable of disempowering attempts made by authors to preserve

the “entent” of their works. Manuscript collections, with their ability to “affect the way we read and understand the texts [they] present” were often the creation of individual readers, a fact that suggests that readers of vernacular theology would inevitably win the day over writers of vernacular theology in terms of discerning and determining meaning.

CONCLUSION: DISCERNING DEVOTIONAL WRITERS

At the end of his study of the changes in reading culture through the Middle Ages, Paul Saenger hints at the connection between silent reading and the Protestant Reformation (*Space* 276). Key to this connection is the development of individual spirituality, and of a Christian's sense of a personal relationship with God, that private, silent, vernacular reading made possible. Burt Kimmelman, in his discussion of the trope of reading in the fourteenth century has also stressed the connection between reading and the emergence of the individual, stating that in later medieval times reading “came to be a vehicle for self-realization and self-enunciation as well. To read was not only to be empowered, but also to be distinguished as a singular person possessing a unique point of view” (26).

This picture of increasingly individualised responses to religious texts seems to be upheld by my discussion of the anthologies in the last two chapters. British Library MS Harley 2398, which draws a coherent “orthodoxy” of the imitation of Christ from a variety of texts, and St John's College MS G.25, which reconciles different eschatological perspectives to form its own commentary on the end times, both seem to be the product of independent, if not literally individual, thought. The readiness with which a variety of texts have been collected together suggests that readers were exercising a freedom to choose (or discern) the truly “devotional” writers according to their own personal definition of “devotion.” The way that these collections fundamentally affect how individual texts in the manuscript are read, also points to a freedom of interpretation on the part of the individual reader which would suggest that the fear of the “spectre of

multiple interpretation” experienced by church authorities, and vernacular religious writers, was not unwarranted.

There is, however, a necessary corrective to this narrative that depicts late medieval reading as an “anticipation” of the “modern world's prizing of individualism” (Kimmelman 26). Reading could not be an individual activity for everyone - many people lacked the means to possess their own books. Some, like Margery Kempe, were not “eye” readers and depended on others to read to them. Communal reading was often necessary and, in some cases (as in Lollard communities) almost certainly desirable. Even among the London lay people who formed a key readership for several of the texts discussed in this dissertation, evidence of fifteenth-century book ownership and circulation reveals the central importance of community, or the group, in facilitating access to texts through schemes like the creation of books for “common profit.” These books, funded by testamentary charity and designed to be passed from person to person, made religious texts accessible to the poorer laity while simultaneously securing grateful prayers to benefit the soul of the testator.

Writers of vernacular theology had looked to reading communities - whether real or imagined - to counter the threat of deviant reading and protect the meaning and intention of texts. Saenger's and Kimmelman's emphasis on the inevitable triumph of private reading and individualism, as well as the codicological evidence which suggests that readers could and did fit their reading material around their *own* concerns and interests, can make these writers' emphasis on the group look naïve, and irrelevant. The fact is, however, that the continuing prevalence of communal reading and collective use

of books assured the existence, and the power, of reading communities. Furthermore, pious, conscientious, and public-spirited individuals, such as those who composed the audience for many of the texts discussed in this dissertation, desired to use their new-found spiritual confidence and authority to shape the world around them. Controlling what people read became a way of doing this. By way of conclusion, I want to consider the case of a group of readers in London who initiated and managed a scheme designed to connect particular texts with particular people. I offer their case as an example of how readers became responsible for the creation of types of reading communities not entirely dissimilar from those invoked by religious writers.

This reading community, described in some detail in an article by Wendy Scase, revolves around a group of prosperous London merchants and tradesmen associated with Richard Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and the “common-profit” book scheme that they “sponsored” (through testamentary charity) and administered. Five manuscripts have been identified with this particular group; they all bear the same inscription (with the exception of the name of the donor which changes):

This booke was made of the goodis of John Collopp for a comyn profite, that that persooone that hath this booke committid to him off the persooone that hath power to committe it have the use therof the teerme of his liif praying for the soule of the seid John. And that he that hath forseid use of commyssioun, whanne he occupieth it not leene it for a tyme to sum other persooone. Also that persooone to whom it was committid for the terme of liif under the forseid condiciouns delyvere it to another persooone the teerme of his liif, and so be it delyvered and committed fro persooone to persooone man or womman as longe as the booke endureth. (qtd. in Scase, “Reginald” 261)¹

Other named testators are Robert Holland (shearman), John Gamalin, and John Killum

¹The manuscripts are Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.31; British Library, MS Harley 993; British Library, MS Harley 2336; London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 472; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 25.

(grocer). John Colop seems to have been the prime mover here: his bequest was not his only participation in the scheme; an executor of Killum's will and responsible for the administration of the goods of Holland, it is likely that Colop decided on the creation of common-profit books as a suitable method for their "post-mortem" charity (Scase, "Reginald" 264, 262). Colop possibly had familial links with the London book-trade, something that would have facilitated the production of the books, and he was employed by John Carpenter, Common Clerk of London and chief executor of Whittington's estate, to help in the task of administering the Lord Mayor's bequests. Colop was therefore exposed to Whittington's own projects of "book charity" (including the establishment of libraries at the London Greyfriars and the Guildhall) designed to increase access to religious texts (Sutton; Scase, "Reginald" 267). As Scase points out, the common-profit scheme may have been inspired by similar arrangements in place within the church for making books available to the poorer clergy, or even by anti-heresy projects proposed by Bishop Reginald Pecock (the rector of Colop's church) which called on prelates and "mighty men of...greet zeale and devocioun" to provide orthodox books for the poorer laity (qtd. in Scase, "Reginald" 266).² If it was inspired by church programmes, the scheme remained notably distinct from them because it was lay-initiated and lay-managed. The scheme gave its lay participants "control over the circulation and use of...books" and avoided the ecclesiastical supervision that other forms of testamentary

²Pecock considered the dearth of books among the laity to be a cause of error. In a series of sermons preached at St Paul's Cross some time around 1447-9, Pecock argued that prelates should take responsibility for producing books for distribution among the laity. In the *Book of Faith*, Pecock suggested that wealthy and powerful laymen should finance the production and distribution of books as a form of "spiritual almsgiving" (Scase, "Reginald" 265-66).

charity would have involved (Scase, “Reginald” 267).

At the heart of this common-profit scheme are books whose contents have been specifically chosen as material worthy of greater dissemination. Scase suggests that the executors (one of whom was Colop in the cases of Gamalin and Killum), rather than the testators, were the ones responsible for planning the books and choosing their content, although Doyle speculates that Colop may have designed his own, collecting materials for it during his lifetime (Scase, “Reginald” 264). Either way, the choice of texts for the common-profit books reflect one reader's - or a small group of readers' - opinions on what qualifies as “discerning devotional writing” appropriate for meeting the spiritual needs of the London layfolk around them. That the readers responsible for the contents of the books had similar taste and a similar religious outlook is suggested by the degree of homogeneity across the texts, notably the particular emphasis on contemplative texts (writings by Walter Hilton appear in three of the manuscripts and one contains *The Book of Privy Counselling*). That one book (Colop's) contains Lollard tracts should, given the evidence presented in this dissertation, neither surprise us nor cause us to label him a Lollard (though it certainly makes the possible influence of Pecock on the origin of the scheme somewhat ironic). Like St John's MS G.25 and Harley MS 2398, the creation of these books represents a very particular, and even “personal,” perspective on religious writing and the context in which it should be read. Within the common-profit scheme, that perspective is used (as if it were an authority) to determine what other people will read.

Just as particular texts were specifically chosen for the scheme, so we can assume

that these devout and serious-minded laymen would think carefully before determining who should benefit from it. Selection of new users would have been at the discretion of the lay executors, possessors of the books, and possibly members of the book-trade (Scase, "Reginald" 265). The inscription does not lay out any required credentials for the reader, stating only that the book should pass from "persoone to persoone man or womman." A second inscription found in one of the five manuscripts is a little more specific: it states that the book should be given to "som devowte persone to have it under the forme and condicioun wretyn in the ende of this booke" (qtd. in Scase, "Reginald" 262). What might qualify someone for the title of "devowte persone" is, presumably, left up to the discretion of the executor. At the very least, potential readers would have to have shown themselves willing and able to fulfill the requirements of participation in the programme. For, while this common-profit scheme would seem to promise greater access to vernacular reading material, it is worth noting that this access still comes with conditions. The most obvious of these is the obligation to pray for the soul of the testator, but there are also conditions of use: the person who has the current "use of the commyssioun" must lend it out to others when he is not using it, and, at the end of his life, he must "delyvere it to another persoone" "under the forseid condiciouns."

Matching specifically chosen texts with carefully chosen people, the activity of the common-profit scheme seems to be a practical counterpart to the literary manoeuvres of vernacular religious writers attempting to connect their texts with "right" readers. In the dissemination of the Colop-group texts, readers take responsibility for discerning other truly devotional readers in a way not dissimilar to the model for controlling access

to texts proposed by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Each common-profit book creates around itself a community not only in space but also in time (as the book gets passed through generations “as longe as the booke endureth”). Participants are linked by their commitment to pray for the testator but also by their common obligations, common experience of texts, and, presumably, by their common understanding of those texts, nurtured by a common culture. Taking reading seriously, desiring to encourage the growth of lay spirituality, but doing so within the limits of good stewardship, readers like Colop and his associates use their sense of their own spiritual authority to attempt to safeguard - through texts and their controlled circulation - their own religious culture.

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