

Elemér Boreczky

Actor or Author

John Wyclif's Teaching and Fame as Authorship of History¹

Although John Wyclif's documented public appearances are remarkably few, his teaching on justice, law and dominion and transubstantiation reverberated in the schools of the university of Oxford. Summoned to appear before ecclesiastical courts, and snarled at by friars and monks, his fame was promulgated in the discourses of other audiences, among the knights and their ladies in royal courts and the common people of England, before it spread to the continent and inspired

¹ This essay is a reflection on a more substantial study of Wyclif's theology and theory of dominion, which I have conducted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Glamorgan. The title of my dissertation, *More Delightful Love and the Sweet Sense of Dominion: The Disruption of High Medieval Order and the Rational Reconstruction of the Integrity of Man and Nature in John Wyclif's Theology and Theory of Dominion*, shows the main thrust of my work. I engaged myself in the study of John Wyclif's natural philosophy and political theology neither as a philosopher nor as a theologian, but as a student of cultural studies. By this work of *cultural discourse analysis* I have tried to substantiate a proposition that Wyclif's *understanding* of the Scriptures as "script of humanity," his understanding of the essential unity of man and nature in his philosophy and the *communication of his understanding to various audiences* placed the themes of property and rule [i.e. "by what right one can claim to dispose of wealth, natural resources and the services of other people; commonly remembered as his theory of dominion by righteousness and his 'communism'"] at the core of the complexity discourses that were to lie behind several themes of formative public discourses in English-speaking cultures.

In this essay, however, I only want to comment on two rather controversial issues in respect of John Wyclif's reputation: i.e. how an Oxford don could become the instigator of popular revolt and a heretical movement. In other words, how could the Doctor Evangelicus be the *author* of acts performed by political *actors*. This reflection, of course, also contributes to the issue of authorship in cultural discourses as highlighted in Bakhtin's, Barthes's and Foucault's works.

Jan Hus and the rise of the Czech nation against the German nation. He contributed substantially to scholastic, political and lay talk on justice, and in the process he crossed the path of political actors in an unusually calamitous period of English and European history, which Trevelyan called "the meeting point of the medieval and the modern." Yet the picture we get from his public manifestations does not fit into the role of the political activist (actor), "the Reformer," invented by Bale, canonised by Foxe, and even accepted by Robson.² In fact, it is hard to fit Wyclif into any other contemporary or modern "role constructs."

In the following essay I want to show how Wyclif's person, his fame and his teaching operated as separate factors that influenced historical actors, and how creative potential, wisdom and love, i.e. the divine essence found in every being singularly and in the human community universally³, became the author of history by integrating man and nature in the human person and by the gratification of the ethnic community.

Wyclif's person has posed a problem for almost everyone who tried to reconstruct his role as "the morning star of reformation." His fame as the Father of English Prose was originated in the mythical belief that he had translated the Bible into English. His teaching as reflected in his work could not be studied for five hundred years as his works were demolished and the extant copies were stacked away at libraries and archives mostly in Vienna and Prague. When they were finally dug out and they started to appear in print, the editors expressed the hope that

the zealous patriot, preacher, missionary, and Englisher of the Bible [...] being dead, yet speaketh, and once more his voice would go forth, his hand point the way, as over the long tract of his time his skin-books turned into paper and print, would tell them the steps he trod, the spirit in which he prest onward, as he sought the Right and fought the Wrong, during his time of struggle here on earth.⁴

2 J.A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools, the Relation of "Summa de Ente" to Scholastic Debates at Oxford in the Later 14th Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1961). (To this day, Robson's is the most comprehensive reconstruction of Wyclif's metaphysics and philosophy, which reclaimed him as a great scholastic thinker and gave impetus to a revival of interest in his logic, metaphysics and philosophy.)

3 Of course this is meant to paraphrase the debate between Fitzralph and Wyclif, or between nominalists and realists. Whereas nominalists followed Ockham's concept of the singularity of the real, Wyclif's professed aim was to restore the order of love of universals.

4 The Second Report of the Executive Committee of the Wyclif Society, attached as an appendix to John Wyclif, *De civili dominio* (London, 1885). Vol. 1, p. 1. [All parenthesised references are to this edition.]

They were apparently disappointed; Wyclif's scholasticism, communism, and the clumsiness of his style could not fit into any great trends of late nineteenth century thought. With the publication of his Latin works, which took nearly forty years of efforts on the part of the Wyclif Society, and which is still unfinished, his fame curiously dwindled, and he almost vanished in near oblivion.

1 WHO WAS WYCLIF?

1.1 *The controversial person*

Whereas Wyclif apparently influenced his contemporaries, as well as future generations for five hundred years, mostly by his fame and the "narration" of his story, and much less by the actual reading of his works, his person has remained controversial.⁵ It was controversial in the few documented public roles as well, which he did not seek for himself. Even as John of Gaunt's "athlete" he gave a sermon on law and justice in London, and a testimony on whether the King had a right to withhold the duties from the Pope, in the preamble of which he first defined the English nation as a natural body before the King's Great Council, i.e. in parliament, yet he preferred to stay in Oxford, and teach the ordered love of universals in order to restore the integrity of the created universe in the mind of his audience, which was what "*re-ligio*," i.e. "re-alignment," meant for him and his disciples.

To some, he was "a great clerk and a perfect liver."⁶ To others, his irreproachable life was a disguise for his collegiality with Satan, by which he confused the soul and the mind of people.⁷ He, himself, thought he did not deserve the gifts he received from God, but it seems that he was able to keep the "fire of charity and the light of the intellect" focused within himself in an unusually intensive manner. Apparently uninterested in material "realities," he ventured into the logical, metaphysical and natural dimensions of truth, with abandonment, and used his understanding in his works and sermons to "create" the "realness" of the community of things in the soul of his audience. He believed

5 Berryl Smalley, *Introduction to Wyclif and His Followers* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984), p. 5.

6 Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978). Thorpe's evidence about Wyclif's university followers, 1407, p.33.

7 *Chronica Monasteri S. Albani, Thomae Walsingham, quadam monachi S. Albai, Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London, 1857). Walsingham discusses Wyclif's role at length in Vol. II, pp. 50-61.

that preaching and teaching were creation, and that by the logical reconstruction of will to rule desire, the creative potential, the divine constant present in every individual, could be ordered by the will for the greater good so that the integrity of man and nature be restored, and the welfare and growth of the republic be sustained. Yet, in the end, he seems to have been *ex-communicated* not only by the church, or by “his inordinate pride in the power of his logic and intellect,”⁸ but also by the inability, or reluctance, of his chosen community to unite in the reciprocal service of one another and the common good. Private interests and fear proved stronger than faith, hope and charity.⁹ He complained in his *Protestatio* about “the lack of perseverance in our race [...] to train our nation in unanimity and constancy.”¹⁰

1.2 Wyclif's influence through his fame

Wyclif's contemporaries and near contemporaries called him John, Son of Augustine, *Doctor Evangelicus*, the Fifth Evangelist, King of Philosophers, or “*mala bestia*,” “*collega Sathanae*,” and others¹¹. Characteristically, none of these names had anything to do with politics. He never seemed to fit easily into any assigned role. The tellers of his story have had a lot of difficulties, when they had to find a line to join the various elements into a coherent tale (narrative), and to create (construct) an “individual” from the scarce evidence about the person, as we have been taught by our modern cultural tradition to expect.

Wyclif's fame was canonised by Foxe,¹² who was the first one to turn an oral tradition into a written story. He established almost all the themes and tropes of later Wyclif biographies, when he presented him as the first martyr of Protestantism. He was probably responsible for setting the date of his birth, too, which was put at 1324 (and took exactly 600 years from his death to correct). Foxe keeps a straight line in his argument, placing Wyclif in the clear-cut role of Reformer, and putting all the blame on the bishops for the failure of his

8 Quoted from a sentence of the Council of Constance, condemning Wyclif as a heretic.

9 Cf. the first and general proposition of the Lollard Manifesto of 1395 (Hudson, p. 24).

10 *Responsio Magistri Johannis Wycliff ad dubium infra scriptum questuum ab eo per dominum regem Angliae Ricardum secundum, et magnum suum consilium: anno regni sui primo*, in: *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico*, ascribed to Thomas Netter of Walden, provincial of the Carmelite Order in England, and confessor to King Henry V, ed. Walter Waddington Shirley (London, 1858), pp. 258–271.

11 Walsingham.

12 Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was first published in 1570.

reformation. This charge was reiterated in the fierce debates of the English Revolution and is echoed in Milton's *Arcopagitica*, too. Foxe even tries to clear the Commons of their implication in the passing of "the first act against religion" in 1382, by his reference to a move next year by the Commons to annul the bill passed against their will, but the proceedings of the parliament of 1383 were never printed.

In Foxe's biography, based on Netter, Walsingham, and records of Parliament, Wyclif's few documented public appearances are turned into a coherent story, a narrative, for the first time. In his description, Wyclif's prosecutors find themselves in the general image of "Romish champions," who "never ceased, by writing, admonishing and counselling, yea, and by quarrelling, to move and stir up princes to mind war and battle, even as though the faith and belief of the gospel were of no power or little effect without that wooden cross."

Before Wyclif's story was retold in English by Foxe, who canonised the context, the themes, the interpretation, the protagonists and even the judgements, it could have been known in three, or perhaps four, versions. One, or, perhaps, two of these versions could have constituted an oral tradition both within the establishments of church, university, court, and among the secret sect of Lollards. The two oral traditions must have been diametrically opposed to each other in their judgements as regards Wyclif's role in the calamities that characterised the years between 1376 and 1401, and set the scene for the acts of a historical drama which was performed in the following years. No royal prince could have been educated by his clerical tutor without gaining knowledge of the events which featured prominently in the family story of Lancastrian kings, and marked the beginning of a conflict which raged through England and in Central Europe throughout the whole of the 15th century. Thomas Netter of Walden's *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico* and his *Doctrinale* served as the basis of any other work or discussion on Wyclif.

Netter, who sat at the Council of Constance, which had condemned Wyclif's tenets and their author as heretical before it could find a reason to send Hus to the stake, however, never told the story, and, apparently, neither did members of the persecuted sect of Lollards, who, in their dire situation, were hardly able to keep the few notes which helped them to use the Bible in their secret meetings. Netter hoped to discredit the Lollards by refuting their teacher's tenets. The Lollards, in fact, very seldom made direct references to Wyclif. Either because they did not want to give away themselves, or because Wyclif himself left them with a legacy

that would put the word and work before the person. However, as their living relationship with the university was severed, the free flow of ideas of natural philosophy that was an integral part of Wyclif's design was also cut, and they became increasingly dogmatic and sectarian. Even though they took pride in their education and impeccable life, they gradually corrected Wyclif and shaped him to their own spiritual needs. Then they reverted to the literal reading of the Bible, which even Pecock, the Bishop of Chichester, writing about the general agitation among the people of England even about seventy years after Wyclif's death, thought to be scarce of logic.¹³ This oral tradition has proved to be the most pervasive of all Wyclif-narratives: the Evangelical Doctor is still active as the authority behind the unebbing tide of evangelisation. Though historical criticism has expressed serious doubts about the possibility of Wyclif's translating the Bible into English, his popular fame still cherishes him as the Father of the English Prose for this deed. (Wyclif's Bohemian followers started his cult as a saint. Some of them even took a piece of his tomb to Prague, where it was worshipped as a relic.)

Apart from *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, which does not contain much information about Wyclif's life, there are two contemporary sources: Thomas Walsingham's and Henry Knighton's chronicles.¹⁴ Walsingham's *Historia* was believed to be the most authentic one. Its author, however, regarded Wyclif "an evil beast"; he did not only incriminate him as being the main instigator of the Peasants' Revolt, "*collega Sathanae*," but he was also overjoyed when this "instrument of the devil, enemy of the Church, who confused the minds of the people, this idol of heretics, deceptive mirror, who created schism, this breeder of hatred, maker of lies" died, his tongue "paralyzed as Cain's by God."¹⁵

The mystical entity of Wyclif stalked rulers, knights, clerics and commons. Walsingham, a monk of St Albans, was apparently prejudiced against Wyclif, while Knighton, who was a monk at the same Augustinian Monastery in Leicester as Repington, one of Wyclif's most well known followers, who later recanted, and, presumably, betrayed his master, held more favourable, or at least, more neutral views of him.

13 Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor over much blaming of the Clergy* (1457), ed. C. Babington (London: Rolls Series, 1860).

14 Henry Knighton, *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnifton, Monachi Leycestrensis*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Rolls Series, 1889-95).

15 Walsingham.

Wyclif's name was never forgotten. When in 1521 Pope Leo X asked the University of Oxford to falsify Luther, Edward Powell, a Welsh Fellow of Oriel, answered: "Luther less than Wyclif in terms of knowledge, but greater in evil."¹⁶ How did he know? Less than ten years later Henry VIII sent to Oxford for a copy of the condemnation of Wyclif at the Council of Constance, but the university sent its own condemnation from 1410. In a perverted manner, the king received the script for his reforms. As if a late realisation of Wyclif's his ideas, the Act of Uniformity aimed at "training the nation in unanimity and constancy."

John Bale, who compiled the first catalogue of Wyclif's works in 1548, wrote that "he shone like the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and remained for many years as the faithful witness in the church."¹⁷ He started his fame as "The Morning Star of Reformation." In the Church of England, he became a kind of a pseudo martyr. Thomas James, the first keeper of the Bodleian Library, hung his picture in the main reading room, which remained there for almost four hundred years. In fact, it was only removed a few years ago. For most of these years he was frozen in this rather dusty image. Incidentally, Thomas James also found it essential to point out even in the title of his apology for John Wyclif, that "[he] did not hold all the goods of Christians to be common" – betraying the living tradition of Wyclif's communism.¹⁸

1.3 Wyclif's waning fame

The debate about Wyclif's person and work was revived again in the 1830s, in another period of frenzied change which affected every segment of English society. Shirley in his edition of *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* effectively revived interest in Wyclif, and he was the first to present him as a scholar, too. Shirley edited his sources to the effect to emphasise the "commencement of Wyclif's career as a reformer [...] contemporary [...] with the climax and first decline of feudal chivalry in England."

16 G. Fitch Little, "John Wyclif, Edward Powell, and the Lutheran Revolution," *SCH*, Subsidia 5 (1986).

17 John Bale, *Scriptorium illustrium maioris Brytannie [...] Catalogus. Centuria Sexta* (Basel, 1557), pp.450–455.

18 Thomas James, *An apologie for Ion Wycliffe: shewing his conformitie with the now Church of England; with answeare to such slaunderous obiections, as have been lately urged against him by Father Parsons, the apologists, and others, etc.* (Oxford, 1608). The title of James' apology may serve as a study by itself, underlying at least two aspects of Wyclif's living legacy: a bookish knight and a public library.

The common belief about Wyclif's communism revived interest in his works in the 1880s. An equally important impetus for the study of Wyclif's works came from German scholars who attempted to revise the assessment of Hussitism in their quest for the origins of German nationalism and spirituality. With the publication of more and more of Wyclif's Latin works by the Wyclif Society, the introductions by Pool, Lechler, Dzewiczky tried to summarise their content and even give appraisals of it. But in popular history, it was Trevelyan's *England at the Age of Wyclif* which reformulated his myth. Trevelyan's book, which was published in more than twenty-five editions, is very much biased, but it is revealing in respect to the overt and covert discourses of historians and the educated audience at the end of the 19th century. He brushed aside Wyclif's *De civili dominio*, the work that made him notorious and most controversial, that was taken to Prague, translated into Czech, and burnt there, too, as heretical, so much that it has been looked upon with suspicion ever since. Trevelyan's story is told with such vehemence, heat and pathos, that his retelling of events on the basis of *Chronicon Angliae* and *Historia Anglicana*, and a select reading of Rolls of Parliament, leaves little doubt about his inner motive: to clear Wyclif of any incrimination with the "peculations" of his patron, John of Gaunt, and the Peasants' Revolt, even at the cost of belittling his intellectual capacities and moral judgement. Shakespeare had given a better role to the Duke of Lancaster.¹⁹

Workman's *Wyclif*,²⁰ by constructing the most detailed biography possible from the scant evidence, gives a much more balanced picture than Trevelyan, but its positivistic attitude was hardly influential in 1926; at an age when one of Wyclif's main concern, the integrity of the soul, seems to have been lost for good, and what was left of it was taken care of by analysts and psychologists. His other major concern, social justice became a political issue for liberals, conservatives and socialists to implement through various legitimations for the distribution of goods and resources.²¹ As there has been little hope of discovering more data about his life, interest slowly turned to his political role in lollardy, and his logical-philosophical and theological-pastoral work. As a result, in a hundred years' time, by the end of the 20th century, Trevelyan's judgements have been cautiously

19 G. M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wyclif*, first published in 1899 (25 editions).

20 H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: a Study of the English Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), 2 vols.

21 Wyclif confessed that the theologian was Christ's lawyer in cases of injustice, and that he should always support the oppressed in such "cases of God."

revised, while never returning to the high-toned and fairly superficial appraisal of Wyclif in traditional Anglicanism. Wyclif began to wane into oblivion, without his epoch-making work on justice, law and dominion ever having been seriously considered or even read.

1.4 Modern images: Wyclif as ideologist of dissent, and an analytical philosopher

K. B. McFarlane's *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1952) and his lectures on Lollard Knights have shown how Wyclif influenced Lollardy, and how Lollardy led to the Henrician Reformation, but he presented Wyclif as an inferior thinker and a failure as a political activist. Mary Aston apparently followed this appraisal in her impressive studies of lollardy. Gordon Leff summarised his theology and placed it in the broader context of medieval heresies, yet he apparently undervalued Wyclif's originality as a theologian, and was unimpressed by his political role. Michael Wilks attempted to restore Wyclif's reputation as an ideologist of dissent, and Anne Hudson has done invaluable and abundant work on various aspects of Wycliffism. Her Introduction to her *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, seems to be one of the most balanced and reliable summaries of Wyclif's life and works to this day – even though she fails to mention Wyclif's work *De civili dominio*, which made him what he was to be in the memory of several generations, in the list of important events. Robson's *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* initiated serious interest in his logic and philosophy. The work in this field was followed by Kenny, and Kretzmann, and by the publication of *De universalibus* and *Summa insolubilium*. Anthony Kenny's *Wyclif* (Oxford, 1984), is the latest handbook on Wyclif, and it also tries to reconstruct his intellectual profile on the basis of recent work. An edition of Michael Wilks's studies by Anne Hudson is the latest attempt to keep interest in Wyclif's political ideas alive. Perhaps the most important change in Wyclif's acclaim came with Beryll Smalley's discovery of Wyclif as a Biblical scholar. In this respect, Anne Hudson's work on *Floretum* is an equally fundamental link between his actual teaching and its impact on his audience.

These works reflect the intellectual interests of twentieth century academics and reveal new aspects of Wyclif's person and influence, yet they leave the fundamental problem of the appraisal of Doctor Evangelicus in the dark. At one end, there stands the Oxford scholar with his impressive amount of Latin works on logic, metaphysics, philosophy and theology, and the secular priest, who would do honour to God, and edify; at the other, the instigator of a popular

movement, the arch-heretic, condemned by the English Church, the University of Oxford, and the Council of Constance. Between the two ends, there are about seven years, when Wyclif's path crossed the path of people who were the heroes of chronicled history, and became entangled with them. It is believed that the intensity of intellectual illumination of private and public paths came to being through *De civili dominio*, in which he applied his intellectual vision at political "actualities." His involvement with politics gave a pretext for posteriority to overemphasise his political role, and to leave his evangelising, preaching, and teaching in obscurity.

2 ACTOR OR AUTHOR?

2.1 Wyclif's union with the "universe" of Oxford scholarship

This may be at the bottom of many difficulties as concerns his historical role. One of Wyclif's main scholastic problems was whether nominalism, or rather terminalism, or the science and art of "sign-doctors," was compatible with realism, whether logical truth was compatible with truth as justice; or, in post-modern usage, whether "constructed" reality, with its formalistic rules and the conventional meaning of its symbols was compatible with a more fundamental "narrative," whose *author*, though incessantly and charitably giving his creative potential, intelligence, and charity (all homonyms for the divine essence) to his audience, the "*genus*" called "humanity," by "*ens communissimum*," does not know them as individuals or their individual actions. The implication of this proposition is that the free choices made by individuals either to "liberate themselves from justice, or from sin, or from humanity"²² cannot but receive the creative potential which makes them inevitably real, while the material substance they are made of, informed by the reason of their "creation" at their *conception* by a name which is identical with the concept, will obey the dumb forces in the physical world of cause and effect. Yet, as the promise of salvation is given to "humanity," and was even made real by Christ's life and resurrection in the body, by following the only authoritative "narrative" of his story, we can obtain a mirror by which to see ourselves, and free ourselves from sin. "Narration" is creation; through "narration" words assume their higher meaning in the audience, and create a community. It is through this narrated (or, in fact, created) universe

22 Cf. *De civili dominio*, Vol. I, p. 240.

that the first cause moves men to wisdom. However, the other two aspects of the divine presence, creative potential and charity are constants that are effective even if the will and its interpretation in rational terms are inflected from straight line.

In Wyclif's quest for the good, free and beautiful life, "ordered love of universals" and contemplation of God's law was the supreme good for "*viators*"; "every Christian who flees from meditating on God's eternal love to temporalia by which he satisfies his inordinate appetite fornicates spiritually [...], and becomes a fool."²³ No more a sinner than any human being except in the state of innocence, nor a fool, but "a passing reuli man,"²⁴ Wyclif channelled his creative potential into his work, rejecting his carnal desires, and converting them into the driving force of prayer and work of another kind than Benedictine or Cistercian *regula* would demand. Instead of turning away from the world, and keeping the canonical hours, or embracing mysticism, he turned to the natural world and created a memorable presence by the example of his life and the power of his words in the soul of his audience. He believed that the only rule (*regula*) to live by was natural order. He chose the medium of the university for his good works. Whether or not this was a viable example for young men who went to Oxford to prepare for a life in the service of the church is debatable. He became one with Oxford, and his presence has lurked there ever since he was condemned and forced to leave in 1382.

2.2 Wyclif's appearance on the stage of history

In view of this, what is known, or can be known, about the life of Wyclif's "spare, frail, emaciated"²⁵ body is ultimately not very interesting. In fact, not much is known for certain. He made his first appearance on the stage of history on February 19, 1377, in an imposing pageant, as he marched down the aisle of St. Paul's in the company of four friars, escorted by the two most powerful men of England, the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Percy, the Marshall of England, to face an equally magnificent ecclesiastical court sitting in full pomp in the Lady Chapel. A show of force ensued, which did not last long. John of Gaunt threatened to pull the bishops out of their churches by the hair, should they dare to touch "this saintly man," leaving no doubt that Pilate, this time, was not going to wash his

23 John Wyclif, *Tractatus de mandatis divinis accedit Tractatus de statu innocencie*, eds. Johann Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London, 1922), p. 102.

24 In Thorpe's testimony, see fn. 6.

25 In Thorpe's testimony, see fn. 6.

hands. But then a crowd of Londoners, unimpressed by the pageantry of the historical moment, broke the door down, and instead of coming to the rescue of their preacher, their doctor (teacher, and – thus – their creator), whom they apparently did not recognise, they threatened to kill the Duke of Lancaster, and put an end to the whole show. Quickly saved by his rival, Courteney, the Duke fled to the palace of the Princess of Wales, who hid him in her wardrobe. The “small emaciated figure” of the “saintly man” mysteriously vanished. Knight, priests, and the common people were all participating in this rude interlude “at the break of dawn of Reformation.”²⁶ Yet, four years later, on Corpus Christi Day in 1381, the London crowd had Wyclif’s name on their lips, when they rioted.

The timing of the riot could hardly be accidental. Apparently, the event had been related to the attack of Doctor Evangelicus on transubstantiation. The Corpus Christi mass written by Thomas Aquinas and commissioned by Urban IV as a means of gaining popular attention for the Host of the Altar, and the secret of the Catholic faith, especially against *Albigensis*, had been perhaps the most important liturgical change introduced by the Lateran Councils. Liturgically, i.e. culturally and ritually, its celebration overshadowed Ascension Day and Pentecost. When in 1379, Wyclif attacked the dogma of transubstantiation in his famous *De eucharistia*, based on his understanding of Christ’s humanity, and the mystical body of the church that he believed was “one integral rational body [...] always a convocation, never a congregation,” he signalled a change of cultural discourse from the ancient sacrificial worship of divinity administered by a privileged class of clergy to its “real presence” in the community of the faithful communicated by the Spirit, the power of the Word. If the spirit, that was the reflection of humanity in the individual soul, the word, which was verity, and natural body were integrated, free life and dominion were achieved. This could only happen in community through goodwill, mutual exchange and reciprocal service. This was how Wyclif considered Christ nature instituted and free life. This was compatible with the symbolical celebration of the Gift of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of nature at spring. If Wyclif’s philosophical ideas were intended to liberate the soul of men from the “constraints of false logic,” his

26 What followed is not relevant for Wyclif’s life, but it may reveal a further dimension of the symbolism of the age. John of Gaunt identified the action of the mob with London and threatened to withdraw its charter. This must have been motivated by certain controversies over financial issues.

theological views did the same in respect of subservience to a costly regime of rule over the public and individual mind.

The riots came only a few weeks before the more memorable Peasants' Revolt, and signified the beginning of a popular form of heresy in England, which was to characterise Lollardy as its distinguishing feature. At the Lords' Supper, Lollards refused to accept that the bread after consecration by the priest became Christ's body. After Wyclif, they would consider this the most horrible form of heresy. At communion they ate the bread and became one with Christ in the community of his humanity and divinity in their souls. Though Hus did not embrace Wyclif's idea of transubstantiation, the liturgical change was further developed by Hussites. The political consequences of Wyclif's ideas were also acted out by his followers.

2.3 Wyclif's integrity

Whether it was the apparition of a man, or whether it was Wyclif's written and spoken word which was more like himself, whether word and its power over passions of the soul were bigger than natural bodies who would attempt to elevate themselves by brutal force, wealth, rank, ornaments, and loud and rude words, has remained a question to the present day. If it was into his words that the reality of person, his intellect and his soul, was translated, it remained hidden, as his written words were demolished by fire, or scattered around the world, and the spoken ones were distorted by the interpretations of his diverse audiences. All other facts of his life remain obscure and can only be reconstructed from imagined contexts.

It seems that Wyclif was not tempted to assert (construct) himself as an individual, but, true to his own teaching, he integrated in himself the "created universe of knowledge" with the natural man. Many Wyclif scholars have wondered why he has left scarcely any trace of himself in his works. Life in its vegetative sense, controlled by blind forces, "the animal" part, may have interested him only in as much as it was the matter which was given form by the creative potential of God through "*ens communissimum*." True, in others, he saw the essence of God as part of their created being, and thus nature was the most fitting object of contemplating on the divine essence.²⁷ In a certain sense, this must have been one of his attractions. His did not triumph over the body by destroying

27 Cf. *De mandatis divinis*, p. 175.

it, or doing sacrilege to it – on the contrary. Together with the beauty of nature, he would find great joy in beautifying it.²⁸ Yet, the body, being of matter, was corruptible, and only the soul made it real. It was made sensible by its creation in time, as part of a universe governed by reason, which was made up of entities with names: genus and species. The soul was the mediator between uncreated nature and the omnipotence and omniscience of God, and a priest was to be its cultivator – in himself as in others.

Whether the intellectual qualities of the soul by which it recognised its own indestructible essence and justified its being, inhered in the individual, or whether they had a reality outside the individuals, i.e. whether they were common, in community, and the individual soul had only the capacity to recognise them, was a decisive issue in scholastic thought. The former assertion found its intellectual being in nominalism; the latter in realism – Aristotle instead of Plato. The former amplified the forces leading to Renaissance individuals, and united the body and the soul by *autonomous actors*, the latter helped to shape the forces which led to periodic outbursts of rebellion under various *common* (collective) names they found for themselves; good men, peasants, nation.²⁹ Renaissance individuals found a reflection of this individual spirituality, in fact the “locomotion” of the soul, in enjoyment and use, manageable rituals and objects of worship, and dynastic families, by which they could hope to be in control of their own justification and fate after life on earth, and civil law in their temporal being. Less self-assertive people found their self-identity in a feeling of being in community with others achieved by the enlightened and communal practice of study and talk of God, i.e. supreme justice, and contemplation of created nature in the refracted light from over the horizon of eternity.³⁰

Whether the cure of the soul consisted of administering the sacraments and keeping the unity of past, present and future by the elaborate liturgy of the Catholic church, and doing the work of God in external ways, or by cultivating

28 Cf. *De mandatis divinis*, pp. 140–150. Here, quoting St. Anselm, Wyclif describes the 14 signs of blessedness (*beatitudines*); seven of the body, and seven of the soul, namely: beauty, swiftness or agility, fortitude, liberty, health, pleasure, duration, and wisdom, friendship, concord, honour, power, security, joy.

29 The connection between Marsiglio of Padua and Wyclif, or FitzRalph and Wyclif, is misleading. They were ‘modern,’ i.e. nominalist, voluntarist and individualist, whereas Wyclif was ‘antique’ and stood for community.

30 Paraphrased from *De mandatis divinis*, p. 175: “Si ergo voluerimus videre naturam divinam in patria, consideremus creaturas suas secundum rationes quibus ab ipso cognoscuntur et ordinantur; et sic convertamur ad *orizonem eternitatis* sub quo latet adhuc lux illa abscondita...”

the soul so that it could receive the seed of truth and nourish it, was a further reflection of the dichotomy, which would point to different directions for the “*cathena* of concord and love.”³¹ For one, it was unbearable to be without a name; he had to find one for himself, by distinction, if they did not have one by inheritance, that was attached to a piece of land, an estate that would make their name fertile for “eternity,” or by other means. Not to be known to God by name, i.e. as an individual, meant fear of damnation. Whether one’s name was written in the Book of Life was to become a painful issue. But for Wyclif, the Book of Life was the Scripture with its veritable sense which even went before its literal sense, and the veritable sense was its “natural” truth.

The question of nominalism *vis* realism was crucial in this respect, too. It also affected Wyclif’s view of predestination, and various desperate efforts by certain people to manipulate the memory of their name by mass, prayer, donation, funds, etc.- or, at the other end, to manipulate the generation of offspring’s. No wonder such practices were most abhorable for Lollards and Hussites, as well. For them, it was all vanity; God promised eternal life for humanity and not for individuals, and Christ redeemed men in body by delivering them from the rule of man-made custom and law. He showed them the way back to the state of innocence, i.e. natural life, and thus to a chance for perpetual justification.

In Wyclif, too, there was a paradox; perhaps, the paradox of every “realism.” For nominalists, there are several truths and a mystical sense of, or faith in, what is beyond their terms. For realists, truth is universal. The first proposition seems to give more freedom of choice to individuals, and an acceptance of conventional forms of the cure of the soul and the rule of law. The second one, on the other hand, has a tint of authoritarianism, self-righteousness, and community control. Yet, it looks like there have been “realists” with community action behind every change of “paradigm.” A nominalist would construct the details in between.

3 NATURAL INTEGRITY

For Wyclif, the world was what the righteous ones made it to be by their “merituous copulation, rational integration, and enjoyment.” He also based his whole mission of restoring justice by the restoration of the rational order of the

31 “[C]athena concordie vel amoris,” *De mandatis divinis*, p. 325.

universe on his assumption that the human person was the natural integrity of the spirit and the soul. While the soul was the instrument of the survival of the body in the natural and physical environment of cause and effect through the principle of *bonitas*, the spirit became part of this same soul at copulation, similarly to the gift of language, and both the spirit and the language were the reflection and the real presence of the community in the singular, i.e. individual being. The community was an entity that existed in communication: in reciprocal service. This linguistic and emotional exchange, which corresponded with the wisdom and love of the divine trinity was superimposed on the natural constant of creative potential. Creative potential moved man to want things in the material world, but the goods of nature and man made goods could only be truly enjoyed if they were in concord with wisdom and love which were the reality of common humanity. The creative potential was a constant, and will was absolutely free; consequently it was possible for powerful persons to force their will on others, but abuse of one's own potential and of the goods of the community could ever lead to true dominion which was God's ordination and legacy for man in the world.

When he responded to the question of the King's Council as regards the lawfulness of withholding dues from *dominus papa*, his answer was based on his understanding of the "natural body" and its integrity, which was separated from its divine essence by "lust": dominion, possession, fornication, and murder, i.e. Cain's and Lucifer's party. There were two ways for reintegrating body and soul for the "free and good life," i.e. for religion as "realignment." To cut across roles which had created such powerful "composite" characters as William of Wykeham or John of Gaunt, who, in their many "habits," were guided by different principles, reasons, and customs. One was to control one's desire by assuming an individual identity, name, and power, i.e. dominion, to channel all of one's potential into the service of private goals in multiple roles, each governed and regulated by "charter, custom and law," and creating a segment of a complex pattern of culture. The other way was to become part of a greater natural entity, and give oneself over to "natural" desires and work. They were, as they had been in popular heresy, "good" or "true" men and women: the

“righteous” ones, Wyclif’s “*fideli*,” who believed that the “person of the Word” was “*esse deitatem*.”³²

Wyclif agreed that uncreated nature had the potential to procreate, but there was no blessing and grace, no creation and thus no meaning in such procreation. Through this procreation and lust, Satan divides body and soul.³³ This would mean that we cannot create(construct) habits(culture) as second nature, unless in alignment with the first of nature, which is the dominion of God, where the principle of our being is demonstrated; otherwise we become perverted by “Satan’s deceits.” By equivocation, this would mean that since truth is God, and truth is predication (i.e. saying something of a thing which is identical with the thing in essence) all else is falsity – a lie. Wyclif was not a liar, he tried to be identical with his word, which he derived from the Scriptures, and found its incarnation in Christ, as a natural man.³⁴

Apparently it has generally been difficult to conceive of individuals simply as natural indivisible beings. At the threshold of modernity, faced with the disruption of the archaic patterns of lordship and servitude, Wyclif seems to have had a clear choice between *individuality*, with its extrapolation of spiritual needs into constructed artefacts of beauty, thrill, enchantment, rapture, in brief, surrendering the soul to the forces of lust, greed, pride, and conquest, as if deliberately bringing about a division in the soul between Aristotle’s law abiding animal in a world of objects prone to manipulation, by which the qualities of the soul could be projected into, and cultivated by, “private religions,” and an unconscious psyche, burying the burden of sin, i.e. falsity, in private confessions; and *community* of “natural” men and women who open their soul to the creative power of the Word, and go about their business in the spirit of mutual and reciprocal exchange. Wyclif’s philosophy, theology and life seem to have represented the second path, as did Piers Plowman. This was recognised by the rebels in the Peasants’ Revolt.

* * *

32 That is, “the mode of being of God” – “Assumptum patet de persona Verbi, quam fidelis credit esse deitatem [...] patet quod predicatum sit communius quam subiectum” (*De dominio divino, Liber secundus, cap. ix*, p. 190).

33 *De mandatis divinis*, p. 236.

34 Cf. *De dominio divino*, p. 178.

But it seems that it was the impact of the spirit and the intellect, his fame and his teaching, and not his corporeal body and individual self which assumed this historical role. He was not an actor, yet he was seen by his contemporaries as an author. As Archbishop Arundel said at the Lollard William Thorpe's trial in 1407: "Wyclif your master and *author* was a great clerk."³⁵ Wyclif, though, believed that authorship was the divine will, which worked through creative potential, wisdom and love in the human person: the integrity of nature and spirit in the individual soul.

35 "Wiclef ȝoure mistir and auctour was a greet clerk" ("Thorpe's evidence about Wyclif's university followers, 1407," in: Hudson, p. 33).