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## The mayor and early Lollard dissemination

Angel Gomez  
*University of Central Florida*

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# **THE MAYOR AND EARLY LOLLARD DISSEMINATION**

**by**

**ANGEL GOMEZ**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## **Abstract**

During the fourteenth century in England there began a movement referred to as Lollardy. Throughout history, Lollardy has been viewed as a precursor to the Protestant Reformation. There has been a long ongoing debate among scholars trying to identify the extent of Lollard beliefs among the English. Attempting to identify who was a Lollard has often led historians to look at the trial records of those accused of being Lollards. One aspect overlooked in these studies is the role civic authorities, like the mayor of a town, played in the heresy trials of suspected Lollards. Contrary to existing beliefs that the Lollards were marginalized figures, the mayors' willingness to defend them against Church prosecution implies that either Lollard sympathies were more widespread than previously noted or Lollards were being inaccurately identified in the court records. This contradicts scholars' previous view that English religious views were clearly divided between Lollards and non-Lollards, providing depth and additional support to very recent work emphasizing the complexity of religious identity during the period immediately preceding the Reformation.

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## Introduction

In England during the fourteenth century there began a religious and social movement referred to as Lollardy. The Lollards spoke out against the Roman Catholic Church and the movement is therefore seen by historians in various degrees as a precursor to the Protestant Reformation. This work will serve to clarify the extent to which Lollardy grew and survived as a cohesive movement in its early dissemination during the last two decades of the fourteenth century. One aspect overlooked in studies about Lollardy is the role civic authorities, like the mayor of a town, played in the heresy trials of suspected Lollards. In the towns of Leicester and Northampton the mayors were involved in the religious dissent. John Wycliffe, the Oxford professor traditionally believed to be the founder of the Lollards, will be compared to the suspected Lollards in both cities in order to determine the interconnection between him and the accused. In doing such a comparison, chronicles describing the early spread of Lollardy, trial records of those who were accused, and correspondence between the accusers will be utilized as a means to understand the spread of early Lollardy. In addition to the primary sources, the last six centuries of work recounting the early dissemination of Lollardy will be traced in order to determine trends that may have occurred in the historiography.

Conventional historiography had used the term Lollard and Wycliffite interchangeably. However, as we shall see, there are distinctions between Wycliffe and even the early Lollards that need to be made clear. This is especially in light of recent scholarship that has made any unity among Lollards a virtual myth.<sup>1</sup> Problems with viewing Lollardy as a cohesive movement under the leadership of John Wycliffe have stemmed from a *prima facie* view of the two

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<sup>1</sup> Hornbeck, J. Patrick. *What Is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010)

contemporary chroniclers of early Lollardy. The mayors at Leicester and Northampton, one of whom voluntarily offered testimony in the defense of a suspected Lollard and the other who was accused of importing and maintaining Lollard preachers are examples of how Lollardy crossed the lines from ecclesiastic to civic bodies. As this work crosses the same lines of looking at local administrative officials instead of relying solely on ecclesiastical sources, the partiality coming from those within the Church establishment and fear of persecution coming from the Lollards themselves is muted. Instead, while looking at the early Lollards through the accounts recording how the mayor in a town was involved in the spread of early Lollardy, assumptions made about who the Lollards were can be clearly identified.

## Literature Review

John Wycliffe and the religious dissent in England that occurred during the later portion of the fourteenth century were precursors to the Protestant Reformation. As early as in the 1380's chroniclers such as Henry Knighton and Thomas Walsingham chronicled the events surrounding the lives of those involved in the religious dissent.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, various factors including that both Knighton and Walsingham belonged to religious orders shaped the way they thought and wrote about those who were speaking out against the Church.<sup>3</sup> They like the majority of historians in the twentieth century writing about Wycliffe and the other Lollards used the term Wycliffite as synonymous with the term Lollard. Using the two terms synonymously is a result of presumptions made that originated in a general fear of any dissent from the Church.

John Foxe, who wrote during the English reformation over a hundred years after Knighton and Walsingham lived, continued with portraying Lollardy as a cohesive movement that was started and led by John Wycliffe.<sup>4</sup> Foxe was appealing to the masses when he wrote an account of how from ancient times Christianity had survived amidst persecution and martyrdom. He would in turn use the grouping of Wycliffe with all the other Lollards for the benefit of gathering support for the English Reformation. As the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries passed, historians writing about the reformation whether they were Protestant or Roman Catholic continued with the presumption that all Lollards were also Wycliffites. The involvement the mayors in the cities of Northampton and Leicester had in early Lollard

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<sup>2</sup> Knighton, Henry. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) and Thomas Walsingham. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. trans, David Preest, ed. James G. Clark, (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Chapter on John Wycliffe for background on conflict between Wycliffe and regular orders.

<sup>4</sup> Foxe, John. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives Sufferings and Deaths of the Early Christian and Protestant Martyrs*. ed. Miles J. Stanford, William Byron Forbush, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1967) 138

dissemination will provide further evidence to question whether the two terms should have ever been used interchangeably.

Anne Hudson and K.B. McFarlane are the two foremost experts on Wycliffe and the Lollards during the later portion of the twentieth-century. Their works have survived into the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> Each of them, just as their predecessors before them, shares the view that the terms Wycliffite and Lollard should be synonymous. They both also view Wycliffe as a precursor to the Protestant Reformation. McFarlane through his work, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*, was the first to note apparent doctrinal differences between Wycliffe and his supposed followers but he would not go far enough to make a clear distinction. Hudson believes that making a distinction between the two terms would be “to reduce Wycliffe to a ‘mere schoolman’ with the implication of obscurity and ineffectuality that is attached to the term.”<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, making the distinction will better solidify how much of an influence Wycliffe had on protestant leaders like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Understanding the doctrinal chasm that existed between Wycliffe and other Lollards does not diminish the idea that Wycliffe was a precursor to the Reformation. It is as very recent scholarship has pointed out, that a better understanding of the lack of cohesion among the Lollards gives us a better understanding of the discrepancies among the primary sources.<sup>7</sup>

Hudson has acknowledged but rejects the argument for the separation of Wycliffe from the entirety of Lollardy. She refers to the distinction as fashionable among historians who wish to

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<sup>5</sup> See. Hudson, Anne. *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) McFarlane, K.B. *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972) McFarlane, K.B. *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966)

<sup>6</sup> Anne Hudson. *English Wycliffite Writings*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1978) 1

<sup>7</sup> Hornbeck, J. Patrick. *What Is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010)



attribute Lollardy to “economic and social forces.”<sup>8</sup> In that respect Hudson is correct in stating that Wycliffe should not be severed from Lollardy. However, while acknowledging Wycliffe to be a source of inspiration for the movement, it should be made clear that he was not the leader for the entire movement. Hudson’s denial of the social and economic forces involved in the religious dissent is a denial of one of the most volatile centuries to have ever plagued Western Europe. How could she deny the effect of the Black Death, the Peasants Revolt, the Avignon Papacy, and the Hundred Years War on the people of England? Turmoil and suffering should no longer be muted as a significant factor leading to religious dissent, but seen as necessary to Lollardy.

In the same year Hudson released her magnum opus, *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*, Gloria Cigman, produced an article comparing many of the surviving sermons delivered by the Lollards.<sup>9</sup> In it Cigman concluded that as a whole, Lollardy was more “personal rather than institutional” and “seems to be more unified more by the hostility of orthodoxy than by any coherent ideology.”<sup>10</sup> Cigman’s work in looking exclusively at sermons given by the Lollards and not the heresy trials nor what was written by those belonging to the ecclesiastical establishment provides a picture of what the movement was from within. She goes further to describe how a “misleading appearance of unity was imposed on the phenomenon called Lollardy by the term itself.”<sup>11</sup> The term Lollard itself is derived from the Dutch “*lollen*” which means to mumble and it is unknown who was the first of those speaking out against the dissent to coin the term.<sup>12</sup> Although the term itself has no explicit theological reference in its

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Hudson. *English Wycliffite Writings*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1978) 8

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Cigman. “Lucreat Lux Vestra: The Lollard Preacher as Truth and Light”. *The Review of English Studies New Series*, Vol 40, No. 160 Nov, 1989, 479-496.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 479

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 481

<sup>12</sup> Anne Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1978) 8

etymology, there appears to be an implicit reference to the biblical wilderness tradition wherein the twelve tribes at times grumbled against the deity as they wandered in Sinai for forty years. What Cigman is ultimately leading up to, even though she also fails to make a specific distinction between the terms Wycliffite and Lollard, is that the early ecclesiastical establishment sources have created an interconnected and organized movement that did not exist.

The same views denying the social and economic factors as well as the false sense of unity surrounding religious dissent in England can be found in the works of K.B. McFarlane. McFarlane along with Hudson and the majority of scholars believe that the origins of “English non-conformity” can be found with John Wycliffe.<sup>13</sup> K.B. McFarlane has been deemed by some to be “the most influential twentieth-century historian of late medieval politics.”<sup>14</sup> He understands the failings of all the primary sources surrounding early Lollardy, calling them “though often abundant... patchy, voluminous on some topics, entirely absent for others.”<sup>15</sup> The generalization made, referring to all Lollards as being Wycliffites is a direct result of the same problems McFarlane believed existed within the sources. Within McFarlane’s own work, a lack of footnotes and specific references to his sources creates a level of confusion that makes tracing his evidence difficult.

McFarlane did not acknowledge the important distinction that while all Wycliffites could be considered Lollards not all Lollards should be considered Wycliffites. Furthermore, McFarlane did not attribute the nonconformity to factors such as the Black Death, Millenarianism, the Avignon Papacy, and the Hundred Years War. Instead, he believed Wycliffe to be the spark that was once created by philosophers like Bradwardine and Ockham who also

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<sup>13</sup> R.H. Britnell, A.J. Pollard. *McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*. (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1995) x

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* xi

<sup>15</sup> K.B. McFarlane, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 11

questioned the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> K.B. McFarlane even cites a possible grudge held by Wycliffe against the papacy originating in a denial of a stipend. He describes the possibilities of an early resolve when he states that “a plum or two as early as the 1370’s might have shut his mouth forever.”<sup>17</sup>

Of those who worked under McFarlane, Margaret Aston has continued to analyze the relationship between Wycliffe and the Lollards. Aston like McFarlane does not make the necessary distinction between the terms Wycliffite and Lollard, however she does point out that the only trait of Wycliffe’s that survived through Lollardy was the inspiration to translate the bible into the vernacular.<sup>18</sup> Aston understood that many of Wycliffe’s beliefs including the one Wycliffe stood for most, his denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation, were not held by the majority of his supposed followers. She refers to James Gardiner’s writings in the early twentieth century that heavily doubted the impact that the Lollards had on the Reformation.<sup>19</sup>

The impact the primary sources had upon how the Lollards were viewed both in the fourteenth century and now have colored our understanding of the movement. K.B. McFarlane acknowledged that Lutterworth, the town where Wycliffe was probably born and where he went after being banished from Oxford did not become a center for Lollardy.<sup>20</sup> Instead, McFarlane pointed towards the city of Leicester as the center of early Lollard dissemination during the 1380s.<sup>21</sup> He heavily relied on *Knighton’s Chronicle* as a source for Wycliffe’s connection to Leicester even though the *Chronicle* itself shared in some of the problems he noted about the

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<sup>16</sup>K.B. McFarlane, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England* (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 17. Bradwardine, an earlier philosopher at Oxford, also did not agree with the doctrine of transubstantiation as set forth by St. Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* 31, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Aston. “Lollardy and the Reformation: Survival or Revival?” *History (Historical Association of Great Britain)* Vol. 49 Issue 166, 1964. 149-170.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 149

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* 11. McFarlane points out the lack of evidence about where and when John Wycliffe was born.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* 111

primary sources. Henry Knighton was an Augustinian canon in Leicester, and he wrote much about the local effects the war against France was having on the area he resided in. However, while *Knighton's Chronicle* has been known to be the earliest recorded history of the spread of Lollardy after the trial of John Wycliffe it is mainly due to the fact that one of earliest heresy trials took place in Leicester and not because he saw any direct relationship between the Hundred Years War and religious dissent. Judging from the facts about where, when, and by whom Knighton's Chronicle was produced it would seem that no other account would serve to recall the dissemination of Lollardy more accurately. However, errors in the account such as a deliberate substitution of a man's name and an apparent relationship with the remorseful Lollard, Philip Repton, resulted in an account that should be approached carefully.<sup>22</sup>

Knighton's own use of the word Wycliffite as synonymous with the word Lollard has been repeated by historians like Hudson up until the present day. The routine of using the terms synonymously throughout the centuries has resulted in conformity to the norm. As early as in the sixteenth-century the chronicle was utilized not for the purposes of recounting religious dissent in England but in a compilation of histories about the reign of Richard II.<sup>23</sup> In 1652 Sir Roger Twysden wrote an introduction to the chronicle before the chronicle itself had been published. Knighton was from then on regarded as the first historian of Lollardy.<sup>24</sup> His chronicle was then utilized in the middle of the nineteenth century by Walter Waddington Shirley when editing a treatise written against "Wycliffite" doctrine.<sup>25</sup> The anonymous treatise, *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, was written during the middle of the fifteenth century as Lollardy still survived in England.<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed, trans, G.H. Martin ( Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) xxxvii

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* xviii

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* xix

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

treatise itself is another example of where the terms Wycliffite and Lollard were used synonymously.

Knighton's wrote his chronicle while living in the city of Leicester. Discrepancies within the chronicle reveal the possibility that Knighton deceptively changed the names of those whom he described as the accused Lollard. When writing about the case of William Swinderby and his heresy trial at Leicester, Knighton does not mention Swinderby in parts of his account of the trial. Instead he substitutes the name of John Aston, a known Wycliffite who studied under John Wycliffe while at Oxford.<sup>27</sup> There are contentions as to why Knighton made the substitution in his account at all. K.B. McFarlane believed that Knighton's account was in "blind or willful error."<sup>28</sup> This is especially when it is compared to Walsingham's Chronicle despite Knighton's greater proximity to Leicester.

The contention becomes even more complex since Hudson believes that Knighton received most of his source material from Philip Repton.<sup>29</sup> Repton was a student at Oxford for more than a decade and is known to have been acquainted with the Lollards, John Aston and Nicholas Hereford.<sup>30</sup> He also served alongside Henry Knighton in the Augustinian abbey of Saint Mary of the Meadows.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Repton along with Aston and Hereford sought after popular support for their defiance against the authorities during their days at Oxford.<sup>32</sup> However, out of loyalty to his confidant, Knighton never records Repton's relationship with either Aston nor Hereford. In fact he never mentions Repton's name at all. Both Hereford and Aston were

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed, trans, G.H. Martin ( Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) xlv

<sup>28</sup> K.B. McFarlane, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England* (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 17

<sup>29</sup> Hudson, Anne. *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) 43

<sup>30</sup> Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. ( Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) xlv

<sup>31</sup> Hudson, Anne. *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) 43

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* xlv

tried for their Lollard beliefs and eventually recanted. In the meantime Repton, after serving alongside Knighton as his fellow canon became abbot of Leicester in 1393 and eventually Bishop of Lincoln in 1404.<sup>33</sup>

While Knighton's Chronicle is taken into account, it must be noted that his own portrayal of the Lollards was certainly conditioned by Repton and could even be twisted to the point of substituting the names of individuals. It appears as if Knighton's error was not blind. So then, why would Knighton substitute Aston's name for Swinderby? Did Repton's experience at Oxford under the tutelage of Wycliffe experience a change or were there always large differences of opinion between the student and teacher? This means that Repton either gave in to the ecclesiastical establishment to further his own status within it or he truly recanted his dissent.

It is likely that both Swinderby and Repton did not hold Wycliffe's view denying the doctrine of transubstantiation. Repton's view on the doctrine of transubstantiation can be confirmed by Foxe's Book of Martyrs. As per the document, Repton would "defend Wycliffe but as touching the sacrament, he would as yet hold his peace."<sup>34</sup> It could be stated that while Repton did not share Wycliffe's view of the denial of transubstantiation that he himself was a Lollard. It is an argument made from silence, however a very loud silence since here we have a man known to be acquainted with Aston and Hereford, a student of Wycliffe, a fellow canon of Knighton, and yet never mentioned by Knighton as involved with the religious dissent or as an informational source of the dissent.

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<sup>33</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) xliii  
Repton's role in the compilation of Knighton's Chronicle will be further discussed when addressing the case of William Swinderby in Chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup> John Foxe. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives Sufferings and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christian and Protestant Martyrs*. ed. William Byron Forbush. (Canada, Holt Rhinehardt and Winston Inc, 1965) 140

The lack of cohesion found through careful analysis of the primary sources is what has led to a renewed view of the origins of religious dissent in England. Scholars such as J. Patrick Hornbeck in his book; *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England*, has recently pointed out that even “to call them ... particularly Lollards is to attribute to them far more coherence and significance than they deserve.”<sup>35</sup> Hornbeck lies on the other end of the spectrum from Hudson. He is not in favor of using the term at all. However, it appears viable that a more middle of the road approach such as that belonging to Gloria Cigman or Margaret Aston even though they do not make the distinction between the terms “Lollard” and “Wycliffite” should be taken to the issue since the term Lollard itself can be lent to all forms of religious dissent. It is an analogous term that may serve as an umbrella under various factors. The term “Wycliffite,” which can be compared to the significance of the term “Calvinist,” should be viewed as a distinct doctrine. In the other hand, the term Lollard, even from its etymology can be identified as a general resistance to ecclesiastical authority.

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<sup>35</sup> J. Patrick Hornbeck. *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (New York, Clarendon Press, 2010) 2

## 14th Century

No single person or single event of the fourteenth century can be deemed the sole inspiration or cause of the religious dissent in England. However, the volatile religious atmosphere in England, and in all of Western Europe, points to a reasonable setting for a movement such as Lollardy to be disseminated. The mayor's role in the dissemination, as we shall see in later chapters, depicts the complex yet rapid way in which Lollardy spread in light of all the developments of the fourteenth century. In this chapter some of the main developments including the Great Schism, the Peasants Revolt, and the millenarianism that pervaded the thoughts of those within the church shall be introduced in the context of the same primary sources that describe the early dissemination of Lollardy as a unified movement under Wycliffe. Both Knighton's *Chronicle* and Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* shall be referred to repeatedly, taking into account their adverse attitudes towards the movement. How Lollards were perceived by those within the Church and especially the false sense of unity that those outside of the movement believed the Lollards possessed, are revealed by the attitudes of each chronicler.

Apocalyptic references and rhetoric protecting a divine right of the church hierarchy were used by Knighton and Walsingham but were also shared by the ecclesiastical officials before some of the pivotal events of the fourteenth century occurred. Wycliffe's doctrines on the Eucharist, clerical authority, and possessions were condemned by Pope Gregory XI as early as 1377.<sup>36</sup> By April of 1378 Pope Gregory had died and Pope Urban VI had been elected by the College of Cardinals and named the new Pontiff.<sup>37</sup> In the same year a group of the cardinals retracted their support for Urban and raised Pope Clement who would move to the French city of

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<sup>36</sup> Eamon Duffy. *A Social History of England 1200-1500* ed. Rosemary Horrox, W. Mark Ormrod. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) 325

<sup>37</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 203



Avignon.<sup>38</sup> This was the beginning of what Knighton refers to as a “Great Schism” and Knighton would also comment on the division this resulted in; “some kings and kingdoms supporting the one, and others indeed the other.”<sup>39</sup> Knighton does not directly link the “Great Schism” to Lollardy. Therefore, the “Great Schism” should not be regarded as the development that tipped the scales of English religious dissent. However, it should be seen as part of a progression of events that disrupted any source of unity that the established ecclesiastical authority could look to. Since both England and France were in the midst of the Hundred Years War against each other, the schism further divided Western Europe. France supported Clement at Avignon while England supported Urban at Rome. This then begs the question as to what authority did those who would become Lollards place their faith in acknowledging the leader of the Church.

It will never be known just how much of an effect the Great Schism had in the minds of the English who would become Lollards. Chroniclers did record some of the opportunities that appear to have been taken by Wycliffe to use the schism as a polemical tool.<sup>40</sup> However, the way in which Wycliffe referred to the schism further proves that the schism had either no bearing on whether or not someone was going to deny papal authority or that the division between the two Popes already left people wondering about the legitimacy of papal authority on their own.<sup>41</sup> It is likely that no dissenter needed Wycliffe to point out that there was a problem with the papacy. Thomas Walsingham in his *Chronicle* recorded seven propositions given by John Wycliffe to the “lords and nobles who had gathered in London.”<sup>42</sup> The second proposition states that; “No money shall be sent from England to the Roman Curia or to Avignon or anywhere else abroad,

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 207

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* 255

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Walsingham. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. trans, David Preest, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005) 174

unless it is proved from Holy Scripture that this money is owing.”<sup>43</sup> Wycliffe does not mention the schism again in any of the propositions recorded by Walsingham or Knighton. Furthermore, the words “or anywhere else” after referring to “the Roman Curia or to Avignon” places his point above the argument of who should be the Pope.<sup>44</sup> While Wycliffe’s dissent from papal authority existed before the schism it is apparent that such a division caused many to think twice about what they thought about the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Walsingham and Knighton saw a connection between the way in which people viewed the Church hierarchy and the 1381 Peasants Revolt against new taxation. Knighton specifically describes the prison break of John Ball, a priest and a leader in the revolt, as a preacher speaking out against abuses related to taxation.<sup>45</sup> The views expounded by Wycliffe about sending money to a central Roman official may have led to an incorrect assumption by Henry Knighton as to how much of a role the Peasants Revolt played in the Lollard movement. Anne Hudson along with the majority of modern scholars sees that the connection between the Peasants Revolt and Lollardy was made in hindsight and that the connection made between Wycliffe and John Ball was a fabrication.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the Peasant's Revolt cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Social reform, in this case, a turning point in the way would be lollards were treated by the nobility could have resonated with those would be Lollards, and goes hand in hand with dissent from a religious authority.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Walsingham. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. trans, David Preest, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005) 174

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 211

<sup>46</sup> Anne Hudson. *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) 67

The dissent was viewed by Knighton and Walsingham as originating from an increase in taxes and problems with the papacy, but also another factor that should be considered in analyzing the religious and social landscape of England during the Fourteenth Century is the millenarianism that existed within the Church at the time. In Knighton's *Chronicle* there is an example of a specific apocalyptic reference to Wycliffe and his followers. After praising Wycliffe for being "second to none in philosophy, and incomparable in scholastic learning,"<sup>47</sup> Knighton criticized Wycliffe for his translating "the Gospel" from "the language of angels" into the "language of Englishmen."<sup>48</sup> Knighton is in part acknowledging his own inadequacies to compete with Wycliffe in the areas of philosophy and scholastic learning while at the same time portraying Wycliffe to be one who has fallen into error. He went further to describe the translation of scripture as spreading "the evangelist's pearls into swine."<sup>49</sup> After writing all this Knighton abruptly begins a new paragraph where quotes from a tract written by the Parisian Doctor of Theology Guillaume de Saint-Amour. The tract was written in 1255 and describes the present time of its authorship as a "latter age of the world."<sup>50</sup> It further describes the different ages to come. There is a "sixth...age of conflict," a "seventh... age of repose," and an "eighth...age of resurrection" that is all to culminate in "the coming of Antichrist."<sup>51</sup> The eight signs of these "latter ages" are listed and detailed. The first of the eight signs is a "labour to change Christ's Gospel into another which they claim to be more perfect."<sup>52</sup> The passage Knighton directly quotes, which appears to be a large detour in the text, ends with Knighton bringing back the subject and applying it to his own day. He ends the copy of Guillaume's tract

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<sup>47</sup> Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 243

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* 245

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* 247

and then states that “Those things...which some have applied to the mendicant friars, but which better apply to those new people, the Lollards, who have changed the Gospel of Christ into the eternal Gospel, that is into the vulgar and common mother tongue, which laymen believe to be better and more worthy than the Latin tongue... there are many great dangers to come.”<sup>53</sup>

Millenarianism, or the belief that the end of the world was immediately at hand left many to question the spiritual economy of the time. While Knighton theorized that the Lollards brought forth judgment, schisms and social unrest brought forth instability that served as a breeding ground for dissent. Whatever inspiration Wycliffe and his small group of followers at Oxford brought to the religious landscape in England no portion of it could have penetrated the belief systems of people without the effects of such a tumultuous time. This is especially significant for the purposes of looking at how a religious movement could have crossed social divides and included both the poor hermit and the mayor of a locality in such a short period of time as we shall see in one of the following chapters.

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 249

## Wycliffe

The prosecution of the Church against John Wycliffe, the supposed leader of the Lollards, is an enduring theme in identifying Lollards. In particular, looking at the mayor that testified on behalf of a suspected Lollard and another that was accused of being a Lollard in the cities of Leicester and Northampton will help establishing a greater distinction among Wycliffe and the other Lollards. In order to best understand the distinction, one must begin with Wycliffe himself and determine what may have shaped how he was viewed by the chroniclers who wrote about the early dissemination of Lollardy. Little is known of his birth, childhood, and his parentage.<sup>54</sup> No surviving autobiographical material exists and it can only be estimated that he was 55 years of age when he died in 1384<sup>55</sup>. However, there is an enormous amount of his own writings from his tenure at Oxford that date to as early as the 1370s. Through his works and a careful analysis of his contemporaries' writings it is difficult to argue as McFarlane claims that "English non-conformity found its origins in John Wycliffe."<sup>56</sup> Modern historians should distinguish Wycliffe from Lollardy for reasons such as the chasm that still existed between the laity and an intellectual environment such as that of Oxford.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, doctrinal variances between Lollards and Wycliffe, and even the fact that no Lollards came from the area of Lutterworth where Wycliffe retired are evident of little to no furthering of Lollard ideas during the last three years of his life after he was named a heretic.<sup>58</sup> It appears modern historians like

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<sup>54</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England* (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 11

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 12-14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* 13.

<sup>57</sup> Malcolm Lambert. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*. (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977) 220

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid* 232, 222. Wycliffe unlike the Lollards always saw a need for an "established interpreter."

Anne Hudson and K.B. McFarlane are committing the same error the contemporary historians and the Church officials made in making the Lollards out to be followers of John Wycliffe.<sup>59</sup>

At the crux of the issue, the charges against Wycliffe with regards to the Eucharist served as a catalyst that began the series of heresy trials against lay ministers. These ministers were not persecuted for their beliefs that contradicted those of the Church before 1382. Wycliffe should be distinguished from other Lollards at least on the basis of his Eucharistic theology while still recognizing inconsistent doctrinal similarities between Wycliffe and his inner circle of followers at Oxford. As we shall see in the example of a known member of his inner circle at Leicester, even in an area thought of to be a place where Wycliffe's ideas took early root, there were large variances in what the suspected Lollards believed.

The significance Wycliffe's view on the Eucharist had on his own excommunication and how the persecution of heresy was handled in England during the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries is evident in the correspondence between the ecclesiastical prosecutors, the theological statements defending the accused, and the heresy trial records themselves. Wycliffe and his accusers tended to focus primarily on his denial of the essential, corporeal, substantial, and identical presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.<sup>60</sup> The other charges of heresy that were shared by the supposed followers of Wycliffe, such as the denial of papal authority, had been embraced by lay ministers apparently before Wycliffe himself embraced them.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in one sense, Wycliffe was another voice, just an educated and well known voice speaking out against the Church. It was likely that such sentiment derived from the problems

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<sup>59</sup> Anne Hudson. *English Wycliffite Writings* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1978) 8. K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England* (New York, Collier Books, 1966) Knighton's Chronicle, a contemporary history places Wycliffe as the leader of Lollardy.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009)

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous. "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards, 1395" In *English Historical Documents 1327-1485* ed. David C Douglas (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969) 848-849

with the papacy that culminated with the Great Schism in 1378. The distinction between Wycliffe and the Lollards is further exemplified when at one of the heresy trials the charges of heresy had to be amended as testimonies were brought forth freeing the accused from holding Wycliffe's view of the Eucharist. Looking at the charges set forth against Wycliffe in 1382 will serve as the basis for comparisons against the trials of those suspected Lollards cited in forthcoming chapters.<sup>62</sup>

A good record of the charges set before Wycliffe exists within a surviving piece of correspondence between two ecclesiastical officials. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1382, Archbishop of Canterbury Courtenay wrote a letter to Peter Stokes, a friar of the Carmelite Order, outlining the heretical and erroneous conclusions of Wycliffe's views. Stokes at the time was the archbishop's commissary. The letter included the twenty four conclusions condemned at the synod of London seven days earlier. The purpose of the letter was to inform Stokes that the teaching of such beliefs at the University of Oxford was to be forbidden.<sup>63</sup> Until Wycliffe's denial of Transubstantiation had been made known, he had been highly favored by the secular clergy for his stand against the dominant religious orders at Oxford University.<sup>64</sup> After his view on the doctrine of Transubstantiation had been made known he could seek the support of neither the secular clergy nor the regular orders.

Conflicts between the regular and secular clergy persisted in England during the time of the Archbishop's letter to Peter Stokes. The conflicts between seculars and those belonging to religious orders are significant since the lay ministers sided with seculars and both of the

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<sup>62</sup> K.B. McFarlane, *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 134-135. The cases of William Swinderby and John Foxe are discussed in depth in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>63</sup> Archbishop Courtenay "The Suppression of Wyclif's Teaching at Oxford, 1382" In *English Historical Documents 1327-1485*. Edited by David C Douglas. (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969) 844

<sup>64</sup> Eamon Duffy, "Religious Belief" *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormond. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006)

chroniclers of early Lollard dissemination, Knighton and Walsingham, belonged to regular orders. An example of such a conflict between those belonging to a regular order and secular clergymen may be taken from Wycliffe's own life when between 1361 and 1366. During those years Simon Islip, then Archbishop of Canterbury, attempted to integrate a small Oxford college he founded.<sup>65</sup> The eight seculars and four regulars were slated to reside and complete their education together.<sup>66</sup> However, as was commonplace within the ecclesiastical structure of the time, secular clergymen were expected to be subordinate to those belonging to the religious orders.<sup>67</sup> Wycliffe and other seculars believed that the orders were "a living denial of the unity of Christ's church."<sup>68</sup> After Archbishop Islip recognized that the integration would not work, being a secular himself, he decided to segregate the college reserving it only for the secular clergy.<sup>69</sup> He named John Wycliffe the warden of the Canterbury College in 1365.<sup>70</sup>

Islip's untimely death led to the naming of a new Archbishop, who happened to be the first belonging to a religious order since the twelfth century. Archbishop Simon Langham did not follow through with Islip's wishes for the college.<sup>71</sup> What resulted was Wycliffe's removal from the position as warden and a law suit that proved costly for Wycliffe and enlarged the chasm between him and the religious orders.<sup>72</sup> This is a significant development in the life of Wycliffe that should be taken into consideration when looking at Knighton's and Walsingham's chronicles. For each of the chronicles were written by men in religious orders. The same presumption was inherited through the centuries and into modern historiography.

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<sup>65</sup> K. B McFarlane. *The Origins of Religious Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1952) 33

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* 34

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* 35



Wycliffe's views with regards to friars were published in his work; *De Officio Pastoralis*.<sup>73</sup> In it he stated that the friars were harming the local parishes by using "flowery words" to defame the local parish priests.<sup>74</sup> The document does not state whether Stokes himself held resentment over Wycliffe's appointment to high office at Oxford or if he was involved in the conflicts that had arisen due to Wycliffe's housing situation. However, it can at least be concluded that before Stokes became aware of Wycliffe's heresy trial, that there was a certain degree of enmity that existed between him and Wycliffe.

The letter written to Peter Stokes from the Archbishop, from where we get the heretical and erroneous conclusions of Wycliffe's views, divides the conclusions between ten heretical and fourteen erroneous theological charges against Wycliffe.<sup>75</sup> The order of the charges, as well as the interdependency of the charges involving the sacrament, point to it as the primary focus of Wycliffe's prosecution. The first six of the heresy charges ranged from one statement denying priestly possessions, two statements illegitimizing the pope, the ineffective services of priest due to mortal sins, and the superfluous confession of a contrite heart. There is another statement listed seventh stating; "That God ought to obey the devil."<sup>76</sup> This seventh charge does not fit in with Wycliffe's view with predestination. The remaining four charges of heresy directly pertain to transubstantiation in the mass. They included "that the substance of material bread and wine remains after the consecration in the sacrament of the altar, that accidents do not remain without a subject after the consecration in the same sacrament, and that Christ is not in the sacrament of

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<sup>73</sup> John Wycliffe. "Wycliffe's Later Views on the Medieval Church" In *English Historical Documents 1327-1485* ed. David C. Douglas. (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969) 838-839

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid* 838

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid* 838-839

<sup>76</sup> Archbishop Courtenay "The Suppression of Wyclif's Teaching at Oxford, 1382" In *English Historical Documents 1327-1485*, ed. David C Douglas. (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969) 844.

the altar identically, truly and really in his own bodily person.”<sup>77</sup> The three statements referring to the substance of the bread and wine were listed first in the series and are dependent upon each other in identifying what Wycliffe believed.<sup>78</sup>

After Wycliffe was deemed a heretic by a panel of twelve Oxford theologians he was pressured by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and patron of Wycliffe’s, to revise his view of the Eucharist.<sup>79</sup> Between 1382 and the year of his death in 1384, Wycliffe responded with a defense of his Eucharistic theology which is referred to as Wycliffe’s *Confessio*.<sup>80</sup> In light of the thirteenth century definition of heresy, John of Gaunt did not attempt to persuade Wycliffe to abandon his “formation of a sect” or to reaffirm the “authority of the bishops.”<sup>81</sup>

Modern historians have downplayed Wycliffe’s sacramental views in order to name him the leader of Lollardy. Jeffrey Burton Russell, writing of the charges against Wycliffe states that, “more important was Wyclif’s ecclesiology.”<sup>82</sup> He goes further to list an order of heresies attempting to establish a primary “radical view of the priesthood”<sup>83</sup> that “was accompanied by a daring Eucharistic theology.”<sup>84</sup> For both Wycliffe and his chief prosecutor, Archbishop Courtenay, the denial of transubstantiation was what incited the heresy charges.

The document referred to as Wycliffe’s *Confessio* was originally published in May of 1381.<sup>85</sup> It at least in part can be authoritatively attributed to Wycliffe since portions of Wycliffe’s

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77 Anne Hudson. *English Wycliffite Writings*. (New York, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978) 141-142

78 *Ibid*

79 Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 15, 226

80 *Ibid*

81 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Order in the Middle Ages: The Search for Legitimate Authority*. (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1992) 68

82 *Ibid* 84

83 *Ibid*

84 *Ibid*

85 Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 226

confession appear in three of his earlier works.<sup>86</sup> Throughout the *Confessio*, Wycliffe makes no attempt to address the charges outside the realm of the Eucharist regarding issues such as mortal sins being committed by the priests, superfluous outward confession, and that God ought to obey the Devil.<sup>87</sup> The omission of any such apologetic discourse about these issues could either mean that Wycliffe, like his associate and patron John of Gaunt, knew that all of his charges hinged upon his denial of transubstantiation. Furthermore, the silence about the ecclesiastical issues both from John of Gaunt and Wycliffe himself may reveal an existing approval of such positions outside the religious orders that expands to the lay ministers and the gentry.

The most significant question with regards to a “Wycliffite” following within the *Confessio* is in the plurality of the language within the text. Anne Hudson, in her edited volume of *English Wycliffite Writings*, describes the document as “likely to be a communal expression of belief.”<sup>88</sup> She is alluding to a Wycliffite following when referring to statements within the document such as “... we believe that the way of being of the body of Christ in the consecrated is threefold, namely, virtually, spiritually, and sacramentally”<sup>89</sup> and “So we hold that, by the power of Christ’s words, the bread becomes miraculously the body of Christ, beyond the possibility of a humanly instituted sign.”<sup>90</sup> Hudson is correct in stating that Wycliffe is definitely utilizing a communal expression of belief known throughout Church history as early as the Nicene Creed in 325. However, to say that the “we” being utilized by Wycliffe meant a Lollard movement, capital “L,” that made little to no reference to the *Confessio* in the years to follow leaves one to believe that Wycliffe was instituting a confession for the small group of his

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<sup>86</sup> Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 226

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>88</sup> Anne Hudson. *English Wycliffite Writings*. (New York, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978) 142

<sup>89</sup> Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 227

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid* 229

followers within Oxford.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the idea viewing the *Confessio* as a brief statement of beliefs like a creed and not a rhetorical tool used to gather supporters explains why the document itself was a condensed version of *De Eucharist* which Wycliffe wrote in 1380.<sup>92</sup> A contemporary viewing of a mass following led prosecuting church officials of later Lollards to stereotype all protesters of the Church as holding Wycliffe's view of the Eucharist. The fact that the Lollard movement survived well into the fifteenth century and that the beliefs were so inconsistent, particularly regarding the doctrine of Transubstantiation, is evident of a degree of dissent within the Church in England that may have existed before the prosecution of John Wycliffe.

Another document written by an anonymous author in 1395 appears to be more of an accurate declaration of Lollard beliefs.<sup>93</sup> It was posted on the doors of Saint Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey and is referred to as *The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*.<sup>94</sup> There is a stark contrast to Wycliffe's *Confessio* in this theological declaration, in that more emphasis was placed on proposed ecclesiastical reforms. Issues such as pride resulting from the Great Schism, the illegitimacy of the "usual priest hood," and a call against necromancy were forefront in the mind of the author or authors.<sup>95</sup> Here sacramental doctrine is given a low priority when compared to the other reforms being proposed. The only mention of the Eucharist is the fourth conclusion which states; "... the feigned miracle of the sacrament of bread induces all men but a few to idolatry, for they fancy that God's body, which shall never leave heaven by virtue of the priest's words, is enclosed essentially in a little bread, which they show to the people."<sup>96</sup> Even

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<sup>91</sup> Patrick Hornbeck. *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010) 2

<sup>92</sup> Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 226

<sup>93</sup> Anonymous. "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards" In *English Historical Documents 1327-1485*, ed. David C. Douglas. (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969) 848

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid* 848-850

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid* 849

the one conclusion regarding the sacrament, which Wycliffe makes the center of his whole defense in the *Confessio*, only mentions the issue of the substance of the bread parenthetically. The conclusion instead places the emphasis on the consequential sin of idolatry. The traces of Wycliffite belief within any kind of Lollard theological structure which appears to be more concerned with changing the ecclesiastical social structure of the Church does not make Wycliffe out to be a leader of Lollardy. The remnant of some Wycliffite theology does trigger charges of heresy against him by people like Archbishop Courtenay and his successor Archbishop Arundel.

It would be disadvantageous to trace Lollard principles back to Wycliffe and not note Wycliffe's views on the translation of texts into the vernacular and the dominion of Church authority that affected Wycliffe's own thought and theology. However, questions remain as to when Wycliffe's views began to evolve. Wycliffe's position on doctrines such as lay interpretation of the Bible, dominion, and predestination were influenced by a number of contemporary and long deceased theologians at the time in which he published them. It appears as if his view of lay interpretation of the Bible and translation into the vernacular was influenced by Archbishop John Thoresby's catechism for the instruction of the laity. In 1357, while serving over Wycliffe at Saint Mary's Church, Thoresby wrote the catechism and had it translated in English. In it he laid out the doctrines of belief, sacrament, seven deadly sins, and virtues of the church.<sup>97</sup> This same document was later converted into a Lollard catechism whereby changes were made distinguishing Lollard theology of dominion. One of the changes to the catechism included what seems to be a rebuke of the priesthood in the fourteenth century. The revisionist added on to the original catechism; "priests cannot be excused from teaching; and the Archbishop desires that all men should have the knowledge of God, according to what St. Paul

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<sup>97</sup>Stephen E Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wyclif*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 5

says of our Lord.”<sup>98</sup> Note the final part of the added remark. The editor is citing apostolic authority to validate his revision.

Early on in his career, when he was only a deacon at a local parish, Wycliffe was confronted with the need for translation into the vernacular language. It is possible, that because of his university experience, Wycliffe helped with the original catechism.<sup>99</sup> The likelihood that Wycliffe did work on the original translation stands against why someone would revise a work done by a leader of a movement in which they belong. The argument is made clearer when looking at the text itself; for if Wycliffe did contribute to the writing of the original document why would there be a need to seek the apostolic authority on the addition to something he worked on in the past? This reveals the evolving and sporadic nature of Lollardy and it again also reveals the preeminence of Lollard ideas within England before Wycliffe. It can be therefore concluded that the persecution of Wycliffe’s Eucharistic theology became the promoter of future Lollard persecution.

Historians since the fourteenth century have referred to John Wycliffe as the leader of the Lollard movement. However, primary sources ranging from theological defenses, correspondence amongst the established ecclesiastical authorities, heresy trial records, and vernacular translations predating Lollardy as a movement bring to question the validity of such a generalization. Wycliffe’s views, while some were shared by other known Lollards, do not reflect a leadership role among the majority of Lollards. It appears more likely, as was discussed in the previous chapter, that other influences such as the Avignon papacy, the Black Death, the

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<sup>98</sup> *The Lay Folk’s Catechism*, ed. T.F. Simon and H.E. Nolloth, (London, Early English Text Society, 1901) 5

<sup>99</sup> Stephen E. Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 5

events leading up to the Peasants Revolt created an atmosphere conducive to the religious dissent in England.

## William Swinderby and the Mayor at Leicester

The prosecution of William Swinderby is an example of a mayor's involvement in the trial of a suspected Lollard who was misidentified as a disciple of John Wycliffe and therefore reveals a reason why a larger distinction between Wycliffe and the Lollards should be made. In this instance, a mayor came to the defense of the accused. It is traditionally believed that Leicester was the place that "Wyclif's ideas took early root."<sup>100</sup> It is my argument that on the contrary, a continued lack of cohesion among those speaking out against the Catholic Church places a limitation on the degree of Wycliffe's influence. The similarities between the errors charged to Wycliffe and Swinderby, and the different outcomes in each case, reveals a doctrinal difference between Wycliffe and Swinderby and the assumptive error of the prosecuting church officials that grouped both men. A possible but unlikely relationship between Swinderby and one of Wycliffe's students and the way in which the chroniclers presumed Wycliffe to be the origin of religious dissent are the reasons why Swinderby has been deemed a Wycliffite until the present day. However, the implications resulting from the mayor's role and his effectiveness in the trial, newly reveals the complexity and the depth of the Lollard population.

Swinderby is traditionally believed to have been an indirect disciple of Wycliffe because of the fact that one of Wycliffe's students may have had contact with him at Leicester.<sup>101</sup> The proposed connection between Swinderby and the so called proto-Lollard is not valid chronologically and does not make up for a critical difference in the outcomes of each man's prosecution. Philip Repton, the proto-Lollard in question, did not continue to adhere to

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<sup>100</sup> Hudson, Anne. *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) 73

<sup>101</sup> Malcolm Lambert. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*. (New York, Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977) 238



Wycliffe's doctrine and in fact recanted of all Lollard beliefs.<sup>102</sup> The critical doctrine dividing Wycliffe and Swinderby was Wycliffe's denial of the physical presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine. Through the proceedings of the investigation and accounts of the defendants, it can be granted that both Swinderby and Wycliffe were both fomenting dissent against ecclesiastical officials. However, the traditional classification of Swinderby as a Wycliffite is an inherited presumption that was made originally by the prosecutors and the chroniclers who resided in monasteries during the fourteenth century.

Henry Knighton chronicled the different places where Swinderby resided in and around Leicester and alluded to where Swinderby might have been originally indoctrinated. Swinderby lived and preached in and around the city of Leicester where Knighton also revealed that he may have actually lived in the chapel of Saint John while he preached "against the determinations of the holy church."<sup>103</sup> If it was at St. John the Baptist's Chapel where he fell into the "Wycliffite Sect,"<sup>104</sup> Swinderby would become a Wycliffite less than four months prior to being charged as a heretic, as it was not until the winter between 1381 and 1382 that Swinderby moved to St. Johns and was associated with the other Lollards.<sup>105</sup> However, it is possible that his Lollard beliefs predate residence at St. Johns. Contrary to the belief that Swinderby became a Lollard while living in the chamber of St. John's Chapel, there were times when he advocated dissent from the Church before he could have come in contact with any of Wycliffe's students. When he first arrived, Knighton describes him as "mixing amongst other people" and some of his first sermons

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<sup>102</sup>Malcolm Lambert. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*. (New York, Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977) 238

<sup>103</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Clarendon Press, 1988) 74

<sup>104</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 309

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid* 307

at Leicester denounced the enjoyment of “riches in the world.”<sup>106</sup> The sermons partly did agree with some of the doctrines Wycliffe expounded with regards to a commitment to poverty and a denial of worldly riches. However, even the level poverty assumed by Wycliffe was distinctly different for William Swinderby who was also known as William the Hermit.<sup>107</sup> Unlike Wycliffe, who lived and served in various faculties in and around Oxford, Swinderby asked to be isolated. Further evidence of his isolationist tendencies are revealed when Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln, who by March of 1382 ordered that he be silenced, referred to him as “*William Hermita*.”<sup>108</sup>

Bishop John Buckingham of Lincoln ordered that Swinderby’s preaching be silenced due to the fact that he was not licensed to preach by the Catholic authorities. Even more condemning, Swinderby was by this time believed to have been preaching against the authority of the Church.<sup>109</sup> Despite the Bishop’s order to have Swinderby silenced according to Knighton’s Chronicle, he preached to at least two large congregations in Leicester during the Easter season.<sup>110</sup> On May 12<sup>th</sup> of 1382, the bishop called upon three friars to investigate Swinderby and charge him as a heretic.<sup>111</sup> The three friars set forth sixteen charges against Swinderby. The various heresies he was accused of included debtor forgiveness, justification of withholding tithes from a corrupt priest, sacramental invalidation resulting from a minister’s state of sin, and a denial of the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is as if the charges that were pressed against Wycliffe that led to his dismissal from Oxford in 1381 were replicated for

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<sup>106</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 307

<sup>107</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Clarendon Press, 1988) 74

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* Note as discussed in the literature review that Knighton substitutes John Aston’s name as the preacher.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

Swinderby. In the end, the charges of heresy had to be amended as testimonies were brought forth freeing the accused from holding Wycliffe's view of the Eucharist.<sup>112</sup> Unlike Wycliffe, Swinderby recanted of all the charges except those regarding the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. By July 11<sup>th</sup>, a final judgment was made and Swinderby abjured two heresies and eleven erroneous beliefs.<sup>113</sup>

In contrast to Swinderby's admission, Wycliffe in his *Confessio*, made little to no mention of the charges that did not reference the transubstantiation debate.<sup>114</sup> In essence, Wycliffe stood by all of his views but especially those against the doctrine of transubstantiation. Through his banishment from Oxford and probably until the day he died in 1384 the transubstantiation debate was the priority of Wycliffe's theological convictions. Dissimilar to Wycliffe, Swinderby recanted but only after submitting written testimonies from those who were said to have been present during the time he delivered his sermons. The written testimonies were to prove that he never denied the physical presence of Christ in the sacrament of bread and wine. The testimonies did not deny the other charges against Swinderby, which would indicate either that Swinderby did not preach about the other heresies in question or that the mayor affirmed them.

Those testimonies brought by Swinderby to the attention of the prosecuting Church officials included testimony from the mayor of Leicester. The mayor had been one of those who heard Swinderby preach.<sup>115</sup> The mayor's testimony was likely what convinced the prosecution to

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<sup>112</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of English Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 134-135.

<sup>113</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 321

<sup>114</sup> John Wycliffe. "Confessio" *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wycliffe*. ed Stephen Lahey. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 226-245

<sup>115</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of English Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 133.

drop the charge regarding the Eucharist.<sup>116</sup> It can be concluded that at the very least the mayor at Leicester was not at odds with the ecclesiastical officials at Leicester. Furthermore, the mayor must have possessed a level of influence with the prosecutors. Unfortunately, little is known about the mayor as even his name is not mentioned in an account recorded by the Bishop of Hereford seven years later.<sup>117</sup> Even so, such a record that would provide for a plausible reason to believe dissent existed among civic leadership should be respected. In fact, in 1389, John Trefnant was the Bishop of Hereford and he is the most valuable source in recounting the trial of William Swinderby. Before becoming the Bishop of Hereford, Trefnant served as an auditor in the Papal Palace in Rome.<sup>118</sup> Such an auditor was charged with advising the Pope on legal matters. The power that went along with being an auditor in the Papal Palace was such that by the fifteenth century, they were a recognized tribunal that was given power to make legal decisions.<sup>119</sup> Given Trefnant's experience and the lack of a monastic background it appears as if his is the most accurate of contemporary accounts even after a seven year time lapse.

Before Swinderby had to come before Trefnant he preached at other towns. After his initial trial and recantation at Leicester in 1382, Knighton records that Swinderby fled "covertly" to the town of Coventry.<sup>120</sup> He was said by Knighton to have preached in Coventry for a year; "converting many to his execrable beliefs, until news of his fame and his evil seductions came to the notice of the bishop and clergy, and then he was driven forth from the dioceses with ridicule and the greatest shame."<sup>121</sup> Before leaving Leicester Swinderby had been censured from

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<sup>116</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of English Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 133

<sup>117</sup> John Trefnant, *Registrum Johannis Trefnant Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1389-1404*. ed. William W. Capes (Hereford, Wilson and Philips, 1914) 238

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid* Intro

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>120</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. ed. trans. G.H. Martin. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 325.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*

preaching in 1382, he had promised not to preach without an episcopal license. In 1389, when he finally appeared before Bishop Trefnant in another neighboring town, Swinderby defended his actions of going against the censoring by describing himself as; “a true Christian with open confession acknowledging my open defaults and unwise deeds, making openly this protestation ... before our worshipful bishop.”<sup>122</sup> Swinderby then took the opportunity to recount what had happened at his trial in Leicester seven years earlier. It was only in his trial before Bishop Trefnant that he described the role the mayor played in his defense. Swinderby stated that he provided “a letter and twelve seals thereby from the mayor of Leicester and from three burgesses and thirty men to witness with me.”<sup>123</sup> Here we have open testimony about an important development that was not mentioned by either of the two chroniclers that recounted the Swinderby case in depth. The silence coming from both Knighton and Walsingham about not only the mayor’s role as a witness but also the lack of a coherent Eucharistic theology between Swinderby and Wycliffe is evident of the presumption that was made by both chroniclers. It should be noted that outside of Swinderby’s testimony to the Bishop, no other source describes the mayor’s involvement in his defense. However, given the proximity between Hereford and Lincoln, the extensive length of the account, and the experience of Bishop Trefnant, it is unlikely that if the account about the mayor was falsified.

Of the occasions on which Swinderby had been preaching at Leicester, it was a particular Good Friday service which the Mayor who testified in his favor attended.<sup>124</sup> It is difficult to imagine a Good Friday service in which the institution of the Last Supper, the origin of the transubstantiation debate, was not mentioned. Either, the Mayor was not being truthful or

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<sup>122</sup> John Trefnant, *Registrum Johannis Trefnant Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1389-1404*.ed. William W. Capes (Hereford, Wilson and Philips, 1914) 237

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid* 238

<sup>124</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of English Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 134-135.

Swinderby did not share Wycliffe's view denying the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is more than likely that the latter is correct. K. B. McFarlane suggested that the rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation was added to the list of charges by the prosecution in error.<sup>125</sup> The error was a result of a presumption made by the appointed prosecutors. It would be the same false presumption made by the contemporary chroniclers and even modern historians that would label William Swinderby a Wycliffite.

It is difficult to imagine a Good Friday sermon without mentioning the Maundy Thursday institution of the Lord's Supper, since it marks the original supper from which the sacrament originated. The sermons preached on Palm Sunday and Good Friday as referred to by Knighton, Walsingham, and Bishop Buckingham's Registers normally take place during Holy Week. During this week, the passion of Jesus is commemorated beginning with the triumphal entry as recounted in the biblical canon. The Sunday before the Passion Week is denoted as the Palm Sunday when as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem palm branches were placed along his path. The Good Friday service denoted the crucifixion and death of Jesus. In between the two services there existed another Holy Day referred to as Maundy Thursday. It was during Maundy Thursday that the Partaking of Bread and Wine was instituted. The transubstantiation debate has no greater date or occasion to pin its arguments against. Therefore, it is suspicious that if the mayor and others were present at both the Good Friday Sermon and the Palm Sunday Sermon, why would Swinderby not address the transubstantiation issue.

An argument for identifying Swinderby as a Wycliffite is his possible connection to Philip Repton at Leicester. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, it has been traditionally

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<sup>125</sup> K.B. McFarlane. *The Origins of English Dissent in England*. (New York, Collier Books, 1966) 131-135

believed that Lollard ideas had been imported to Leicester by Philip Repton.<sup>126</sup> Repton was a Wycliffite and also a student of Wycliffe's at Oxford.<sup>127</sup> Repton had strong connections at Leicester and it is suspected that he founded a group of Lollards in an area surrounding the chapel of St. John the Baptist outside the walls of Leicester.<sup>128</sup> If Repton was "planting seeds" of Wycliffe's theology in Leicester, why would Swinderby's position on the doctrine of transubstantiation not be similar to that of Wycliffe? The connection between Swinderby and Repton is circumstantial and lacks explicit source material.

John of Gaunt is another notable figure that may circumstantially link Swinderby and Wycliffe. Gaunt's relationship with Wycliffe and the fact that Gaunt was also acquainted with Swinderby has been utilized as evidence that Swinderby was not just an "individual eccentric."<sup>129</sup> What Hudson failed to mention in her dismissal of the individuality of Swinderby is that Gaunt himself attempted to convince Wycliffe to recant his position denying the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>130</sup> Essentially, Gaunt himself can be labeled a Lollard his views denying the authority of the pope.

Walsingham, while writing his Chronicle in the middle of the 1380s, referred to Swinderby as Wycliffe's "disciple."<sup>131</sup> Walsingham's distinction is a broad one, and unfortunately the distinction has caused contemporaries as well as historians today to group the two men. There is a substantial amount of confusion as to who the Good Friday and Palm Sunday sermons were preached by when comparing both Knighton's and Walsingham's

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<sup>126</sup> Malcolm Lambert. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*. (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977) 238

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* 234

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid* 234.

<sup>129</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Clarendon Press, 1988) 74

<sup>130</sup> Stephen Lahey. *Great Medieval Thinkers: John Wyclif*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 131

<sup>131</sup> Walsingham, Thomas. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. trans, David Preest, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005) 177

accounts. This should also cast further doubt onto the classification of Swinderby as a Wycliffite. Walsingham credits the sermons to Swinderby and modern historians such as McFarlane and Hudson would agree. However, Knighton attributed the sermons to John Aston possibly because Knighton was aware of the disunity between Swinderby and Wycliffe or it maybe he wanted to protect Philip Repton. This is all speculation, but unlike Swinderby, it can be confirmed that Aston was one of the Proto-Lollards that was verifiably a disciple of Wycliffe's. At the same time, McFarlane was likely correct in believing that Knighton was in error and Swinderby was the Palm Sunday Preacher. While not conclusive, it is at least plausible that Knighton made his error on purpose. A more blatant error in light of the Eucharistic charges that were dropped and the testimonies given by the mayor and others is Walsingham's record stating that "William Swinderby also made clear ... in his sermon to the mayor of Leicester and several others that God had never ordained the celebration of the mass, and that it would be a good thing for fewer masses to be celebrated at that time than formerly."<sup>132</sup>

Another reason why contemporary chroniclers were so quick to categorize Swinderby as a disciple of Wycliffe was his manner of dress. Swinderby was also described by Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln as having been a hermit. At the earliest recording of Swinderby's name among the primary sources, Bishop Buckingham's order for Swinderby to stop preaching refers to him as "William *Hermita*."<sup>133</sup> There is a generalization that is made about Wycliffe's followers by in the very least the chroniclers of the time, in that they all wore robes as an outward sign of the poverty they required of themselves and all clergy. Knighton recorded

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<sup>132</sup>Walsingham, Thomas. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. trans, David Preest, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005) 177

<sup>133</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (New York, Clarendon Press, 1988) 74



Swinderby as “disregarding bodily ease, rejected the use of a horse, and went about on foot.”<sup>134</sup>

Wycliffe did indeed stress a need for poverty among clerics and there were similarities between the way Wycliffe and Swinderby believed that church officials abused their positions within the church.

It is impossible to deny that both Wycliffe and Swinderby spoke out against abuses within the Church. Each of the men could even be labeled Lollards. However, referring to Swinderby as a Wycliffite would be continuing a presumptive error of generalization made by monks and ecclesiastical officials of the day. Swinderby’s connection to Wycliffe is circumstantial at best and none of the sources explicitly refer to a connection between him and the Wycliffite; Philip Repton. Furthermore, McFarlane’s assumption that Swinderby represented a “watered down” version of Wycliffe’s theology denies the importance Wycliffe and his followers placed on the denial of the transubstantiation doctrine. In this case the Mayor’s role in the dissemination of Lollardy confirms a lack of cohesion among the Lollards in England at its earliest stages. This appears not to be the case in other instances such as in the city of Northampton where the Mayor is said to have played an active role in importing Wycliffite preachers from Oxford.

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<sup>134</sup> Henry Knighton. *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*. trans. ed. Lynn Staley.(New York, W.W. Norton Company, 2001) 285.

## The Mayor at Northampton

In 1393 Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln compiled a list of seven Lollards and wrote a report to the King describing to him the dissemination of Lollardy in Northampton. The list included two priests, a chaplain, and an anchorite who is described by Buckingham as being the “chief *receptrix lollardorum*.”<sup>135</sup> Hudson brings up a problem with Buckingham’s report in light of a piece of correspondence also written to the King a year earlier by a local Northampton *woolsman* by the name of Eichard Stormesworthe.<sup>136</sup> In a letter written by the merchant to King Richard II, a series of accusations and specific connections to other known Lollards provides information that contradicts that which had been collected by Bishop John Buckingham.<sup>137</sup>

Stormesworthe places the responsibility for Lollard dissemination with the mayor of the town. The letter stated that the mayor had “made the whole town Lollard.”<sup>138</sup> Mayor John Fox was accused of not only being a Lollard sympathizer but one who actively participated in its dissemination. His role according to Stormesworthe included harboring known Lollards, importing Lollard preachers from Oxford, and taking the liberty of personally confronting a priest while performing a mass ritual. A comparison between the record of the mayor’s testimony at Leicester and the accusations made towards John Fox at Northampton further shows the lack of cohesion among the Lollards. However, it is not to say that the Northampton document should be taken at face value. The case against Mayor John Fox at Northampton ended with the accusations of Stormesworthe and no further action was taken by the King or any

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<sup>135</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988) 79

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>137</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. “The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councell Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northampton” *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899)

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid* 46

of the ecclesiastical officials. Hudson makes it a point to mention that while Fox never denied nor admitted to being a Lollard, Stormesworthe “was evidently motivated ...by his own political ambitions.”<sup>139</sup> In Northampton it would be none other than Stormesworthe who succeeded Fox as Mayor of the town.<sup>140</sup>

Whether or not Fox was the Lollard Stormesworthe claims him to be is ultimately unknown. However, even if Stormesworthe was propagating false accusations for the sake of his own political career, the accusations themselves point towards the thesis regarding generalizations made about those who were dissenting from the Church. If Stormesworthe’s letter did in fact consist of lies it would actually further prove how Lollards were presumed to be Wycliffites. If the accusations were false, the presumptions regarding the physical location where all Lollards were thought to have migrated from, their presumed views regarding transubstantiation, and just how those who were not dissenting from the ecclesiastical establishment feared the Lollards would be revealed.

In the letter composed by Stormesworthe, five supposed Wycliffites were named as those whom the mayor harbored. Thomas Compworth was said by the merchant to have come from the “county of Oxford” where he had been “convicted before the chancellor and university there of many errors and heresies.”<sup>141</sup> Compworth is the one of two men that can be verified as a Lollard and yet ties to Wycliffe are difficult to verify. He had been once condemned by Bishop

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<sup>139</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. ( Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988) 79

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>141</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. “The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councell Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northampton” *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York, Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 46

Buckingham in 1385 for refusing tithes to the abbot of Osney.<sup>142</sup> His condemnation by the Bishop gained him notoriety and he was commonly referred to as the “Lollard Squire.”<sup>143</sup> However, the charges against him did not include a denial of the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is likely that Stormesworthe included Compworth’s name in his accusatory list because of his reputation. This is mainly due to the fact that in the same year that Compworth was condemned by Bishop Buckingham he recanted and had been pardoned for his action of withholding his tithe.<sup>144</sup> Outside of Stormesworthe’s letter, no connection to Mayor John Fox can be verified.

The only person named by both Buckingham and Stormesworthe was Richard Bullok.<sup>145</sup> All that is known about specific Lollard activity through the writings of Buckingham and Stormesworthe is that Bullok was at one time a chaplain “who hath been convicted of many errors before the Archdeacon of Northampton.”<sup>146</sup> No references are provided as to specific errors are presented by neither Buckingham nor Stormesworthe. Judging from the charge of a meager withholding of a tithe, and the severity of such a heresy charge such as preaching against the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist, it is likely that Bullok never denied the doctrine of transubstantiation.

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<sup>142</sup> Anne Hudson. *A Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. ( Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988) 80

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid* 80-81

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>146</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. “The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councill Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northhampton” *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 45

The other three supposed Lollards named by Stormesworthe were Nicholas Weston, William Northwold, and James Colllyn.<sup>147</sup> Neither of these men was named in Buckingham's record of Lollardy in Northampton and neither of them, according to Stormesworthe's description appears to have anything in common with each other. Colllyn is described as being an "apprentice at the trade of mersery in London refusing his art to become a Lollard."<sup>148</sup> Weston was named a "friar Carmelite apostate."<sup>149</sup> William Northwold according to Stormesworthe held the highest office of all the supposed Northampton Lollards. He was said to have been an unlicensed "instructor and confessor" who "occupied the archdeaconry of Sudbury for about seven years."<sup>150</sup> Given the amount of time and the position held by Northwold, the fact that Buckingham did not mention him at all in his report to the king and no apparent action was taken with regards to his unlicensed preaching makes Stormeworthe's account even the more suspect.

Nonetheless, through the description of the accused group of Lollards within Northampton we are provided a glimpse as to how Lollards were viewed. In the entirety of Stormesworthe's letter the doctrine of transubstantiation is alluded to only once as he describes an altercation between the mayor and an unnamed cleric. It was during an unspecified year on the feast day of Saint Hillary that ironically a preacher brought to the town "through the maintenance of the mayor and force of all the Lollards of said town," was physically assaulted by the mayor himself.<sup>151</sup> The preacher had just completed preaching a sermon and as he

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<sup>147</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. "The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councell Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northhampton" *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 45-46

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid* 45

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid* 46

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>151</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. "The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councell Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northhampton" *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 47

“returned to the altar to sing his mass, where upon the said mayor going to the said vicar at the altar with great indignation took him by the back of his vestment to cause him to return from his mass.”<sup>152</sup> Such a show of force by the mayor is itself unlikely and is another reason to question the document’s validity. However, beneath the surface Stormesworthe is providing us an image of who Lollards were perceived to be. A lack of specific references to particular doctrines or even the omission of anything said by either of the suspected Lollards is a testament to generalizations within such false accusations. The accusations themselves could only be described by Stormesworthe as “errors depraving the people’s devotion done to holy church, of pilgrimage to images, painted tables, the framings of high and costly works of holy church and of chalices made of gold and silver for divine service, and depraving of statutes.”<sup>153</sup>

The association between local administrative officials, like the mayor and the “holy church” as described by Stormesworthe further reveals problems with the document and disturbs the cohesion that is believed to have existed among the suspected Lollards in Northampton. It was at the local level in fourteenth century England that the execution of policies took place and the “central organs of the government” worked.<sup>154</sup> The distribution of power at the local level meant that in addition to there being a mayor, there also was a bailiff, and a larger body of town councilors.<sup>155</sup> The town council served in almost an oligarchic fashion.<sup>156</sup> Where were the bailiff and the town council during such a time of Lollard infiltration? Was the entire local

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<sup>152</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. “The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the Kinge and His Councell Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northhampton” *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 47

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>154</sup> Jewel, Helen M. *English Local Administration in the Middle Ages*. (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1972) 36

<sup>155</sup> Jewel, Helen M. *English Local Administration in the Middle Ages*. (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1972) 58

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*

administration taking part in religious dissent? It is likely that if the mayor had assumed such a role as religious reformer either he would have experienced an enormous amount of cooperation or resistance coming from the other administrative officials at Northampton.

Apparently, John Fox was not the propagator of Lollard doctrine Stormesworthe accused him of being. Or else he would have to name those that served alongside him either brothers fighting for a common cause or “members of the devil and disciples of antichrist.”<sup>157</sup> In light of both Stormesworthe’s royal writ and the list of names submitted to the King one year later by Bishop Buckingham, there are indications that there existed a broad view as to what Lollardy was. Wycliffe’s name was never mentioned in neither account yet assumptions such as Oxford as a location origin and a denial of the physical presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine point to the same assumptions that classify all those participating in religious dissent as Wycliffites.

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<sup>157</sup> Stormesworthe, Eichard. “The Tenor of the Complaint Made to the King and His Councill Original Against John Fox, Maior of Northampton” *The Peasants Rising and the Lollards: A Collection of Unpublished Documents Forming an Appendix to England in the Age of Wycliffe*. ed., Edgar Powell and G.M. Trevelyan. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co. , 1899) 51

## **Conclusion**

Whether by the direct testimony of an accused Lollard or by assumptions and false accusations made by a political foe, looking at the mayor of a locality in fourteenth century England grants a different perspective on the early dissemination of Lollardy. It provides a window not of opaque stained glass, as seen by the sources that were written for the sake of Roman Catholic unity. Instead, it can be seen that either by being the accused or defending the accused the mayor of a locality like Northampton and Leicester was involved in the spread and prosecution of a movement with no definitive leader and no coherent set of beliefs. The movement's lack of a definitive leader in no way diminishes how much of an influence John Wycliffe had upon those men who would in the sixteenth century turn dissent into the Protestant Reformation. In fact, making the distinction between Wycliffe and Lollardy as a whole shall serve to solidify Wycliffe's own theology and reasons for his dissent. Thereby, clearing the smoke created in the fourteenth century by the Great Schism, the Hundred Years War, and rampant millenarianism. Let it be that Wycliffe is in the future referred to through his own writings, his tenure at Oxford, and even his own heresy trial. Furthermore, let it be that the Lollard movement is referred to by its varying sets of beliefs and the social unrest that propelled it into becoming in and of itself another precursor to the Reformation.



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