

WYCLIF AND HUS: A DOCTRINAL COMPARISON

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THE relation of Wyclif to Hus is as reformers rather than as thinkers. Despite their common philosophical allegiance to realism, their systems of thought were markedly different. Whereas Wyclif rigidly subordinated all his tenets to a few fundamental notions, Hus cannot strictly be said to have had a system at all. Wyclif's main influence was theoretical—in his teachings; that of Hus was predominantly practical, through his preaching and his martyrdom. They met in their common revulsion against the abuses within the church, above all amongst its hierarchy and the religious orders. In that sense Wyclif's influence upon Hus was a moral and practical one. It helped to inspire Hus in his demand for a radical reformation of the church, culminating in Hus's adoption of Wyclif's doctrine of the church. Extreme though this was, Hus reached it principally through his own experience as an advocate of reform and as the upholder of the native Czech reforming tradition.

Neither Wyclif nor Hus was a voice in the wilderness, even though Wyclif spoke in a language of his own. They were part of a widespread movement, stretching from the later thirteenth century and embracing heterodox and orthodox alike: the Waldensians, the Franciscan dissidents, Dante, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, Dietrich of Niem, Pierre d'Ailly, Henry of Langenstein, Jean Gerson, to mention only some of the more formative influences in the ecclesiology of the later Middle Ages. One stream issued in the extremism of Wyclif and the radicalism of Hus; the other in the Conciliar movement, although they converged at more than one point. Marsilius of Padua was the source for much of Dietrich of Niem's outlook as well as Wyclif's, and yet Dietrich took a leading part in the Council of Constance which declared Wyclif a heretic.¹ Hus was condemned by the

¹ Wycliff's works were never condemned in their entirety. 267 were censured under Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1411 and sent to Rome; in 1413

same Council for saying what his accusers enacted : namely that an unlawful pope should be disobeyed and deposed.¹ Ockham inspired Conciliarists like d'Ailly as much as Wyclif, while the belief in an original apostolic ideal of primitive simplicity, which had been betrayed by the Donation of Constantine, was common to heretics like the Waldensians, extremists like Marsilius of Padua and Wyclif, and radicals like Dante and many of the Hussite reformers. Accordingly, much of what Wyclif and Hus held was part of the currency of the age. They diverged from orthodoxy by converting it into an outright challenge to the church, and from one another by the ways in which they did so.

I

Wyclif was the greatest heresiarch of the later middle ages. Yet, apart from his immediate Lollard followers, his influence was indirect ; the message handed down from his writings was in the main the work of unbeneficed preachers² and artisans from whom it lost most of its original doctrinal nuances. Wyclif himself was never the leader of a sect,³ nor was he condemned as a heretic during his lifetime. To the end he remained convinced of his own orthodoxy, branding the church hierarchy as Antichrist for having betrayed Christ. But unlike Hus he was an extremist building upon neither a native reforming tradition nor an accepted body of teaching. In consequence, he gradually became isolated, until he was finally compelled to leave Oxford in 1381 following the condemnation of his eucharistic doctrine by a commission of twelve appointed by the chancellor of the Univer-

some of Wyclif's works were burned at a Lateran Council in Rome. Previously 45 articles, some of dubious authenticity, said to have been extracted from his works, were condemned at Prague in 1403 and again proscribed at the Council of Constance in 1415. See my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1967), ii. 498.

¹ The Council deposed John XXIII on 29 March 1415, on 72 counts ; a week later, on 6 April, the superiority of a General Council over a pope was proclaimed (H. Finke, *Acta Concilii Constantiensis*, iii (Constance, 1907-28), 156-209).

² See K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1966), ch. 5.

³ There is no foundation for the older belief that Wyclif organized a band of poor preachers.

sity, William Barton.¹ The writings of the three remaining years of his life at his Lutterworth rectory were the most extreme of his entire career. In contrast to Hus's works and sermons during his exile from Prague, between 1312 and 1314, they offered no basis for the kind of movement which arose in Bohemia thirty years later, after Hus's burning. The difference is of fundamental importance. Wyclif, for all his intellectual eminence, was a solitary figure; most of his life was lived in the academic milieu of Oxford, apart from his unsuccessful brief excursion into politics in the service of John of Gaunt in the 1370s. Once his immediate following among his Oxford disciples—Nicholas of Hereford, Philip Repingdon, and John Aston—had been routed in 1381 by William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lollardy became a purely clandestine movement. Any initial support it might have had from influential laymen was irrevocably lost after the abortive rising by Sir John Oldcastle in 1414.² Lollardy became synonymous with subversion and suffered prosecution by the state as well as by the church.

However remotely Wyclif may have inspired the reformers of the sixteenth century, there can be no doubt that his main influence was upon Hus and the formation of the Hussite movement. The form that it took is the subject of this paper.

It has long been recognized that Hus belonged to an independent native tradition which was doctrinally widely separated from Wyclifism. Loserth's³ attempt to prove, by means of parallel passages, that Hus merely plagiarized all his main tenets from Wyclif has been shown to be untenable.⁴ Not only did they diverge on crucial matters of doctrine, such as the eucharist and sinful priests, as we shall see, but Hus frequently gave a different import to his undeniably verbatim citations from Wyclif. Wyclif's significance for Hus lay above all in being a rallying point against the attacks of his enemies. He defended Wyclif

¹ *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, ed. W. W. Shirley (Rolls Series, London, 1858), pp. 105-14.

² See McFarlane, *op. cit.* ch. 6.

³ J. Loserth, *Wiclif und Hus* (Berlin, 1905), as well as introductions to the various editions of Wyclif's works which he edited for the Wyclif Society.

⁴ Especially by the Czech scholars V. Novotný, J. Sedlák, V. Kybal, V. Flasjšhans, F. M. Bartoš.

according to his own interpretation of him as a reformer rather than a theologian. The modifications in Wyclif's doctrines to which this led will become apparent.

Wyclif's writings fall into two clear divisions.¹ Before 1376 they were mainly philosophical; after that date they became almost exclusively ecclesiological and theological. Moreover, they changed in tone, a change directly related to his political activities. Having gone on a diplomatic mission to Bruges in 1374 to negotiate a financial settlement on payments to the pope, in 1376 Wyclif took a leading part in John of Gaunt's attack on William of Wykeham. His preaching and other activities against him in the London pulpits caused William Courtenay, then Bishop of London, to summon him in February 1377. Although Wyclif escaped punishment through the presence of John of Gaunt, extracts from his writings on lordship and ecclesiastical power in *De civili dominio* were sent to the pope, Gregory XI. This led to papal censure of Wyclif's opinions in eighteen articles, and marked a turning point in Wyclif's thinking. Over the next five years, Wyclif reached the farthest extreme of anti-sacerdotalism, far surpassing anything which he had written in *De civili dominio*. As I have suggested elsewhere² his doctrines of the church, the papacy, royal power, and the eucharist largely superseded and out-weighed in importance his earlier views on lordship, which Gregory XI's condemnation tended to magnify. Similarly, his undoubted biblical fundamentalism only takes on its full significance when set against his subsequent teaching on the church and the eucharist. His formulation of his doctrine of the eucharist in *De apostasia* and *De eucharistia*, both written in 1379, acted as a catalyst. It lost him his remaining support among the friars and led two years later to his withdrawal from Oxford. He was now fighting the entire ecclesiastical and religious hierarchy; his sense of isolation is matched by the increasingly bitter invective of the later works, which are for the most part merely a more violent and unsystematic repetition of his existing views, above all his condemnation of the visible church.

¹ For an account see my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. 496-7.

² *Ibid.* 545 ff.

There is, accordingly, a progression in Wyclif's thought which, although closely connected with his own experience, has its own independent logic. It is here that he differs above all from Hus. Wyclif remained throughout his career wedded to a metaphysics which underlay all his main theological positions. It gives them a continuity and provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for his protest against the church. Together with his dialectical skill and evangelical fervour, it made him the supreme advocate of reform at Oxford and helped to transmit its impulse to Prague.

Philosophically Wyclif was an extreme realist : he believed in the independent existence of all universal concepts like goodness, humanity, and so on. They subsisted as archetypes eternally in God as inseparable from his own being. Some degree of realism was common to the majority of medieval thinkers save the nominalists and terminists of Wyclif's own day, as the recognition of the common nature or essence by which a being or action was what it was—the humanity in a man, or the goodness in a good deed. The problem arose over its status. Wyclif was among the minority who asserted the independence of universals as prior to all individuals. But he went further in endowing them with eternal being in virtue of being part of God. All archetypes had what he called intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*). It not only represented the idea which God had of every creature inhering eternally in him ; it also extended to the being of each creature which came under it, so that each creature had its source in God's being. God in knowing and willing each creature's being was thereby endowing his idea of it with his own being.¹ In consequence, being and intelligibility were identical both in God and among his creatures, although they were not the same being. There was no danger of Wyclif's falling into pantheism, for like all Christians he saw creation as an act of God's will, by which he freely conferred being upon what had been nothing. By the same token, however, Wyclif effectively excluded contingency from creation. As envisaged by Wyclif there was in creation a three-fold order of being: intelligible being as an archetype in God ;

¹ *Miscellanea philosophica* (Wyclif Society, 1901-2, 2 vols.), i. 231.

potential being among secondary causes ; and actual being, in the individual creature.¹ Of these only the first was eternal being ; the other two occurred in time and place. Hence an individual's being belonged to creation not God's being.²

The far-reaching implications of this doctrine are to be seen in every major aspect of Wyclif's thought. To begin with, since a creature's being was merely the temporal realization of its eternal archetype, it was itself antecedentially eternal and necessary. It could not therefore be destroyed without destroying the archetype which made its being possible.³ Hence a creature's being was part of an eternal chain of being which resided in God. Wyclif took this as the basis of his metaphysics : it remains the thread uniting his disputes with John Kenningham at Oxford between 1372 and 1374, on God's foreknowledge, to his later teachings on the eucharist. It underlies his notions of both the Bible and the church. As he said in reply to Kenningham, it would be contradictory for God to know what was not ; therefore all that God knew must be.⁴ Such being as deriving from God was eternal, necessary and indestructible.

This, in turn, meant that time lost any independent role in the actions of creatures. If being, however it originated, was necessary in deriving from God, so was the individual's existence, once it had come about. So soon as it passed from the second stage, of being merely possible to having become actual, it could no longer not be. In Wyclif's words, what previously need not have been now had to be.⁵ Time thus became the medium for the realization of the possible into the actual and the necessary ; its duration marked the passage from one to the other.⁶ Once realized, its necessity and indestructibility were proof against temporal vagaries. Accordingly the necessity, eternity and indestructibility of being were the media through which Wyclif conceived existence. They formed the terms of reference for all

¹ *De ente* (Wyclif Society, 1909), pp. 101-2.

² *De dominio divino* (Wyclif Society, 1890), p. 179.

³ *Miscellanea philosophica*, ii. 170-4 ; *De ente*, pp. 43, 62-63, 287-308.

⁴ *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 463-4.

⁵ *Miscellanea philosophica*, i. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 75, 77 ; *De ente*, p. 63.

the major theological and ecclesiological issues of his subsequent career.

Wyclif's ecclesiology and theology centre upon the relation of the Bible to the church. This was not, as used to be believed, through upholding a doctrine of *scriptura sola*,¹ but through the essentially metaphysical and historical definition which he gave to each. It is undeniable that Wyclif revered the Bible with an especial veneration as the repository of all truth eternally given. But that alone would hardly have led him to his revolutionary attacks upon the church, had he not at the same time denied its authority in some aspect. The way in which he did so was in line with much contemporary ecclesiology. During the later thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, there had been a growing emphasis upon the apostolic age of the church and its contrast to its present state. Dante, Marsilius of Padua, Ockham, Dietrich of Niem, among many others, had each in different ways invoked the example of the primitive church against the existing hierarchical and spiritual condition. Their remedy had been a return to the purity of the past, diverse though their means of achieving it were. Certainly Marsilius and Dietrich said most of what Wyclif said against the Pope's primacy, while both the Waldensians and Franciscans had long preached possessionlessness as the true state for Christ's apostles. Even in his literal interpretation of the Bible, Wyclif had many forerunners, especially the school of St. Victor in the twelfth century. Nor could Wyclif, any more than other exegetes, confine himself to an exclusively literal interpretation. His novelty lay in the combination of an historical and metaphysical treatment of the Bible to discount the authority of the contemporary hierarchy. But many of his arguments as well as his solutions were drawn from a well-stocked armoury which was not of his making.

It is at first sight paradoxical that Wyclif's metaphysical presuppositions led him at once to fundamentalism and anti-sacerdotalism. On the one hand the Bible as God's word was

¹ For recent arguments on this question see M. Hurley, " ' Scriptura sola ' : Wyclif and his critics ", *Traditio*, xvi (1960), 175-352, and the reply by Dom P. de Vooght, " Wyclif et la ' Scriptura sola ' ", *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, xxxix (1963), 50-86.

true in itself and for all time ; on the other hand the church in its archetypal being was to be sought not in its temporal form but in the essence in which God eternally conceived it—away from this world. The true nature of the Bible and the church were not therefore contradictory : rather, Wyclif sought to employ the Bible to point to the true nature of the church. The truth of the Bible was ever-present in its every word, although Wyclif was forced to modify his earlier strictly literal interpretation¹ ; every part of it had to be taken without qualification ; it contained all that could be known, and it could not be modified in the slightest degree.² However, its truths were not all equally accessible ; like St. Augustine, Wyclif recognized an implicit as well as an explicit meaning in its words. Hence the need for informed exegesis, the principles of which Wyclif founded in a combination of metaphysical truth, the testimony of the saints and other canonical statements. Together these constituted the *sensus catholicus*.³ Wyclif accordingly looked to metaphysics and authentic tradition as the means of understanding the Bible. He was not therefore advocating a doctrine of *scriptura sola* or merely exegesis. He regarded the truth as contained within the words of the Bible, to be discovered by a recognition of the true being which they denoted with the aid of those divinely inspired : above all, St. Augustine as well as most of the early Fathers and later authorities like Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor and Robert Grosseteste—a sign of his continuing place in the Oxford tradition.⁴ Where Wyclif did stress the individual believer's responsibility was in knowing and defending the Bible with such aids against the falsities of the present hierarchy ; indeed he should be prepared to adhere to the words of the Bible even if he could not understand them.⁵

It was here in the effective exclusion of the church from the dialogue that Wyclif went beyond previous scholastics. He was

¹ *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 14, 20.

² *Ibid.* p. 475 ; *De veritate sacre scripture* (Wyclif Society, 1905-7, 3 vols.), i. 1-2, and *passim*.

³ Wyclif's *Triologus* (Oxford, 1869), ch. 31, bk. III, contains a concise account of his view of scripture.

⁴ *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 36 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 61.

appealing to scripture over the heads of the hierarchy and at the same time disavowing the church. If the reason was its betrayal of Christ's teachings, the grounds were metaphysical. Wyclif translated St. Augustine's division of the faithful into the two cities of the heavenly and the earthly, into metaphysical terms. Instead of referring the separation of the damned and saved to the next world, Wyclif made them eternal and ever-present. Where St. Augustine had treated them all as members of the church in this world, whatever their final destiny, Wyclif from the outset identified the elect as alone of the church; the damned, called by Wyclif the foreknown (*presciti*), were eternally excluded. The status of each remained the same for eternity. Here the nature of Wyclif's thought is clearly revealed. Eternally distinct conceptually, saved and damned remained so also ontologically. Each represented a different mode of being which could not merge, even temporally.

The effect was to transform the traditional notion of the church. It became defined by Wyclif as the body of the elect (*congregatio predestinatorum*).¹ Those who were truly of it were bound together eternally by the grace of predestination, enabling them to remain in a state of election until the end²; it gave them immunity from the consequences of even mortal sin. Here, too, eternal truth overcame temporal vicissitudes. The church was outside both space and time; it was not a physical entity, but in being wherever the elect were, whether in heaven, purgatory or on earth.³ It had thus existed before the Incarnation, its *esse intelligibile*, like that of anything else, having been for all time.⁴ In the same way, the damned equally were of one congregation with Antichrist at their head and composed of the three classes of infidels, heretics and those not chosen. Furthermore, lacking the grace of election, their grace in this world, however great, did not suffice for their salvation; they therefore remained in mortal sin, even though temporally in grace.⁵ Each body was therefore eternal and its membership irrevocable.

The overriding consequence of this division was Wyclif's

¹ *De ecclesia* (Wyclif Society, 1886), pp. 2, 7. See also *De civili dominio*, i. 288.

² *De ecclesia*, pp. 107, 111.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 8, 99.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 106.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 63, 102-3, 139.

denial of any visible identity to the church. In contrast to his insistence upon the indestructibility of God's word as given in the Bible, he stressed that in this world neither the saved nor the damned were known¹; this remained a mystery, save for a special revelation. Such an attitude was utterly disruptive of ecclesiastical authority; for if only those chosen by God were of the church, and they could not be known, there was no reason for accepting any visible priestly authority, or indeed for such authority at all, since the elect and damned remained what they were regardless of what happened in this world.

Had Wyclif stopped there he would have sufficiently undermined the *raison d'être* of the church as traditionally conceived. On his definition it required neither priests nor sacraments, merely conformity with God's word and Catholic tradition, in the sense earlier defined. Yet Wyclif could not entirely abandon himself to the full rigour of his own logic. He neither went the whole way in rejecting the sacraments or the priesthood, nor was he prepared to leave those who violated Christ's law to their future judgement at the hands of God. He intervened with his own condemnation of those whom he regarded as of Antichrist. There was therefore an ambivalence in Wyclif's attitude to the church directly engendered by his metaphysics. As time went on the pulls between his metaphysical and moral notions of the two bodies of Christ and Antichrist became virtually irreconcilable. He at once denied that any pope or priest could claim to exercise his office without a special revelation (itself beyond visible proof),² and he treated the Bible as evidence to deny most of the attributes of the existing church—wealth, hierarchy, coercive power, independent jurisdiction, the very existence of offices like that of pope and cardinals—and to anathemize those who upheld them as traitors to Christ.³ Here Wyclif said little that was new; the novelty lay in the metaphysical and ecclesiological

¹ *De ecclesia*, p. 251; also *De civili dominio*, i. 25 and *Opus evangelicum* (Wyclif Society, 1895-6, 2 vols.), iii. 216.

² *De potestate pape* (Wyclif Society, W.S., 1907), p. 176; *De ecclesia*, p. 31; *De civili dominio*, i. 381.

³ The references here are too numerous to be included, but see, e.g. *Sermones* (Wyclif Society, 1887-90, 4 vols.), ii. 58, iii. 78, 426-9; *Opera minora*, p. 255.

framework within which he applied it. Like Marsilius of Padua and other critics of the church, he contrasted the virtues of poverty, humility, charity and equality to the present abuses of worldliness and wealth, and the growth of what he called a "Caesarian" hierarchy. He also attributed the decline of the church to the Donation of Constantine by which the church under Pope Sylvester I had first come to accept endowments and so entered on the path of cupidity and sin.¹ Like the Franciscan Spirituals, he extolled Christ's poverty as the supreme virtue and the height of simplicity and purity. To those who sought to follow Christ it could never be foresworn²; and to return to this original apostolic state was the way back to Christ.³ It should go together with the renunciation of all dominion and civil authority.⁴ This remained Wyclif's message for the reformation of the church, from *De civili dominio* onwards, repeated with increasing vehemence to the end of his life. It went together with an equally growing conviction that all offices save those of priest and deacon, which had alone existed in the primitive church, were unscriptural and their holders usurpers.⁵ It led Wyclif to perhaps his most revolutionary step of rejecting the authority of the church hierarchy altogether, pope and cardinals first and foremost. Christ alone was head of the church, its chief abbot.⁶ Towards the pope Wyclif's hostility grew after his condemnation by Gregory XI and especially with the outbreak of the Great Schism in 1378. When he came to write *De potestate pape* in 1379 he added to his previous metaphysical grounds for not accepting the visible ecclesiastical hierarchy the same arguments, drawn from scripture, which had been used by Marsilius of Padua sixty years earlier. These followed two main directions. The first was that spiritual power was entirely

¹ *Opera minora*, pp. 204, 226; *De blasphemia* (Wyclif Society, 1893), p. 61; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 70; *De civili dominio*, iii. 59, 217.

² *De civili dominio*, iii. 60, 242, 444; *Trialogus*, pp. 302, 378-83.

³ *De ecclesia*, pp. 371-2.

⁴ *De civili dominio*, ii. 145 ff., iii. 60 ff., 445 ff.; *De potestate pape*, pp. 83, 200-1; *De ecclesia*, pp. 184-7, 365.

⁵ *De potestate pape*, pp. 35, 372; *De civili dominio*, i. 380; *Opera minora*, pp. 142-3, 305; *Trialogus*, p. 296; *De simonia* (Wyclif Society, 1898), p. 43.

⁶ *De civili dominio*, ii. 166; *De ecclesia*, p. 31; *Trialogus*, p. 263.

independent of human agency ; hence no man could exercise it or confer it on others.¹ Only if a priest, or pope, acted for God did his sentences of excommunication or absolution carry any power.² Wyclif here went beyond Marsilius in adding that since God gave his power without visible sign there was no means of assessing a priest's powers.³ Although Wyclif did not go so far as openly to deny the role of priests and the sacraments entirely, what he said went far towards depreciating them. He remained ambiguous over the question, unlike Hus, as we shall see. Certainly he attacked auricular confession and absolution as unscriptural, but he never openly counselled refusing to take the sacraments even from a priest of known bad character.⁴ At the same time, he stressed the power of the saved layman to hear confessions and give pardons.⁵ But the supreme test of a priest's standing was whether or not he preached ; to do so was his first duty as Christ's disciple. Any priest who failed to preach failed as a priest.⁶ That so many did so fail added to Wyclif's general indictment of the priesthood.

Secondly Wyclif, like Marsilius, appealed directly to scripture to indict the present hierarchy. In particular, he pointed to the absence from the Bible of any mention of popes, cardinals or bishops. Here he followed Marsilius's exegesis of Matthew xvi. 18 and 19 to deny the Petrine basis of papal primacy. Both he and Marsilius rejected the claim that the pope had succeeded Peter as head of the church, taking the rock of the church to mean Christ instead. Peter's primacy referred to his own personal qualities not powers that had been transmitted to succeeding Bishops of Rome.⁷ Peter, however, had not even been Bishop of Rome ; Paul had more right to that title. Nor had Rome then been supreme among the local churches : Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem had been at least her equals.⁸ Accordingly Wyclif, like Marsilius, with the aid of citations from the chron-

¹ *De potestate pape*, pp. 14-15.

² *Ibid.* pp. 16, 26-28.

³ *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁴ *De blasphemia*, p. 140.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 140 ; *De potestate pape*, p. 266.

⁶ *De veritate sacre scripture*, ii. 137, 138, 156, 173, 179 ; *Polemical Works* (Wyclif Society, 1883, 2 vols.), i. 261.

⁷ *De potestate pape*, pp. 76, 97, 135, 173, 178, 218-19, 232.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 94, 111, 140-1, 150, 165-79, 195-7, 215.

iclers, concluded that the pope had no claim to be head of the church. Once again he took the argument further in denying the very *raison d'être* of the Pope and other prelates for having no scriptural basis and for violating Christ's teachings. The pope was a mere man where Christ had been God ; together with the cardinals he had gained his place by usurpation.¹

In branding them as Antichrist for acting unscripturally, Wyclif was, of course, being inconsistent with his metaphysical premises that the damned and the saved were unknown. In the writings and sermons of his last five years, he dwelt increasingly upon the church's visible betrayal of Christ's evangelical life and teaching.² Wyclif saw its source in the church's endowments and the use of force to maintain its privileges together with the crimes which they engendered : these included simony in tithing first fruits, excommunication for non-payment of tithes, litigation, patronage, false indulgences and so on. Here Wyclif echoed the cry of moral reformers throughout the Middle Ages, as he was in his turn to be re-echoed by Hus and his confrères.

Wyclif, however, did not stop there. He sought the dissolution of the church as an independent corporation. For this he turned to the king; in appealing to him to return the church to its archetypal purity, he was also responding to his own theoretical presuppositions of what the church should be. He was sufficiently convinced of its independent existence, outside all space and time, to countenance its physical dismemberment as in its own interests. Restored to Christ the priesthood would again follow his example of a life of poverty and preaching.³ To achieve it the king and the lay lords were to expropriate the church's possessions and withdraw its civil rights.⁴ Instead of

¹ *De potestate pape*, pp. 102-4, 106-7, 108-9.

² Wyclif gave ten signs of Antichrist, including seduction from Christ's teachings, the making of human laws which were unscriptural, failure to preach, worldliness, assertion of civil jurisdiction by ecclesiastics, the use of force, arrogance, lack of humility, attacking foes.

³ E.g. *De potestate pape*, pp. 89, 101-2, 198, 341 ; *De civili dominio*, i. 330-1, 450, 469, 470-8, ii. 14, 18, 22, 23, 24, 32, 115, iii. 25 ; *De ecclesia*, pp. 190-2, 292, 294, 337-45, 372.

⁴ *De officio regis*, pp. 210, 211-13 ; *De veritate sacre scripture*, i. 28, 93.

living on endowments those of its priests who were worthy would be supported by alms ; the remainder would have nothing.¹

Wyclif accordingly looked for palpable means to give effect to a palpable programme ; he displayed none of the vague aspirations of the various prophetic sects of Joachists. In his treatise *De officio regis* he sought to establish the king's supremacy over all men, including priests. The king's power corresponded to Christ's divinity, whereas that of the priest was to be compared with Christ's humanity.² The king, as God's vicar, stood apart from the rest of mankind ; to resist him was sinful. Even tyrants were divinely ordained and had to be suffered, provided that God's law was not violated.³ Like Marsilius, Wyclif maintained that the church's temporalities were dependent upon the king, who had unchallenged power in his own kingdom.⁴ Moreover, it was the king's function to exercise coercive authority, even over the church : he could correct and banish evil priests, sequester church property, even demolish churches in an emergency and convert them into towers for defence.

Here again Wyclif had gone beyond his original ecclesiological brief ; for metaphysically there was no more means of knowing whether a king was damned or saved, and so could licitly exercise power, than a priest. His doctrine of royal power enunciated in *De officio regis* thereby effectively superseded his earlier teaching on lordship in *De civili dominio*. On the one hand, the church was excluded from civil and spiritual jurisdiction on metaphysical and biblical grounds. On the other, kings and secular lords to whom it could have applied with most force—namely, that only those in grace could rightly exercise dominion over others—were expressly endowed by Wyclif with scripturally sanctioned authority. His earlier declaration in *De civili dominio*, that only grace could confer temporal lordship,⁵ which could not be achieved by conquest or coercion, had little consonance with the doctrine he enunciated three years later in *De officio regis* and reiterated in his subsequent works. Even had he not done so, his notion of

¹ *De officio regis*, p. 59 ; *De civili dominio*, i. 56, 311-12 ; *Opera minora*, pp. 23, 171.

² *De officio regis*, pp. 13, 16, 137, 143.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 4-6, 346 ; *Opera minora*, pp. 165-6, 375.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 66, 118-20.

⁵ *De civili dominio*, i. 1.

dominion and grace which he developed from Richard Fitzralph was singularly devoid of immediacy. Like the rest of his treatment of the church hierarchy Wyclif required more pragmatic means to establish his case.

His doctrine of the eucharist, on the other hand, was the final development of Wyclif's metaphysics. It largely dominated the thinking of his last five years to the point of obsession. Unlike the notion of dominion and grace, that of the eucharist grew directly out of his metaphysics. For the previous fifteen years before its final formulation in *De eucharistia* and *De apostasia* Wyclif had tried various approaches to reconcile the doctrine of transubstantiation with his own conception of being as indestructible.¹ He was not the first to have been concerned with explaining how the bread and wine of the sacrament became Christ's body and blood. Nor did he ever deny that the change took place. What he found it impossible to accept was that the bread and wine were no longer bread and wine after transubstantiation although they continued to appear as bread and wine. For Wyclif, this would have meant that accidents could subsist independently of substance. This he rejected as contrary to the metaphysical truth that being was indestructible. Once in being, bread and wine could not be annihilated. Accordingly, even when transubstantiated their own essences as bread and wine must continue to coexist with the new substance which had been sacramentally engendered. As defined by Wyclif in his later works the eucharist was "the body of Christ in the form of bread and wine".² Such a conception came close to what was later to be the doctrine of consubstantiation.

That it could have become the hallmark of Wyclif's heresy is as much an indication of how far Wyclif had become identified with unorthodoxy as of the intrinsic nature of his eucharistic teaching. Not only did he continue to uphold the sacramental truth of transubstantiation; he also evinced a genuine concern over the blasphemous consequences of the prevailing view. To permit knowledge to be confined to accidents without revealing an underlying substance would put men at the mercy of their

¹ *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, p. xv.

² *Trialogus*, p. 149.

senses and mean the end of all true knowledge.¹ It would also mean idolatry since men would then be worshipping mere accidents.² Similarly, to identify the bread and wine with Christ's body and blood would be blasphemy in identifying him with what was material and corruptible; the priest would then be breaking Christ's body when he broke the bread; and an animal eating the host would be eating Christ.³ Above all, it would give the priest the power of making Christ's body when he celebrated mass. Accordingly, Wyclif's own solution was to treat the transubstantiation of the host as both natural and supernatural; the bread and the wine remained bread and wine, but the body of Christ was now added to them. The change involved not the destruction of the bread and wine but their coexistence with Christ.⁴

Despite the comparative innocuousness and moderation of his eucharistic teaching it marked Wyclif's final alienation from the church—although only among disciples and followers did it become the heresy of remanence.

II

Wyclif's doctrines, then, were part of a total outlook. Even if there were inconsistencies and the parts lacked symmetry, they were united by a set of philosophical presuppositions which gave his thinking continuity if not always coherence. The same cannot be said of Hus. He was first and foremost a reformer in the moral and practical tradition of his Czech forerunners, like Milíč of Kroměříž and Matthew of Janov.⁵ The main lines had been formed by the time both Hus, and Wyclif's works, entered upon the scene. Wyclif—whose writings probably became influential at Prague from the last decade of the fourteenth century—came to be treated as a symbol in the dispute between the reformers and their adversaries at Prague. Hus defended the

¹ *De apostasia* (Wyclif Society, 1889), p. 120; *De eucharistia* (Wyclif Society, 1892), pp. 78-80.

² *De apostasia*, p. 129; *De eucharistia*, pp. 14, 63, 284; *Trialogus*, pp. 261, 263, 268, 269.

³ *De eucharistia*, pp. 11-13; *Trialogus*, p. 272.

⁴ *De apostasia*, p. 210.

⁵ See my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. 611-19.

forty-five articles, said to have been extracted from Wyclif's work and condemned at Prague in 1403, as much on principle as for their doctrine; for him as for his confrères Wyclif was the reformer who had expressed the same ideals for which they were struggling. The fact that Wyclif's teachings had been first proscribed by the theological faculty at Prague, then under the influence of the German masters, added point to Hus's defence of them.¹ It stimulated Hus to study Wyclif's works and to embrace his realism in opposition to the prevailing terminism or nominalism of the Germans who dominated the theological faculty. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish between Hus's allegiance to Wyclif as an individual and his doctrinal adherence to Wyclif's teaching. It was in the first respect that Wyclif's influence upon Hus was so profound; in the matter of doctrine their divergences are as striking as their affinities.

To begin with, Hus had neither Wyclif's extremism nor his metaphysics as an intellectual framework, however much he accepted the same brand of realism. Moreover, unlike Wyclif, comparatively little of what he wrote was of an academic or formal nature. Beyond such exercises as his Commentary on the *Sentences* and his various university disputations (*Quodlibeta*)—all strikingly unoriginal works—most of his output was even more than Wyclif's in response to immediate issues. Hus could have said all that he said without the aid of realism; and where it had directly affected Wyclif's eucharistic doctrine Hus remained markedly orthodox.

Since this was one of the main issues between Hus and his adversaries, both at Prague and later at Constance, the difference is particularly instructive. Hus was accused in 1409 of having preached remanence as early as 1399, a charge he never ceased to deny. His writings support him. From the treatment of the eucharist in the fourth book of his Commentary on the *Sentences* to his final work on the subject, *De cena domini* written in 1415, during his imprisonment at Constance, Hus held to the orthodox position of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine.² Where

¹ See my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. p. 623.

² In *Historia et Monumenta Johannis Hus et Hieronymi Pragensis* (Nuremberg, 1558, 2 vols.), i. 40^r.

he did seem to lean towards Wyclif was first in emphasizing that the change was due to Christ not to the priest, and second in calling the bread Christ's body: this was characteristic of Hus's flirting with Wyclif's expressions to reach a different conclusion. In this case by bread he stressed that he meant the sacramental bread.¹ He thereby took up Wyclif's theme of distinguishing between the bread in its natural and what he called its "super-sacramental" form. He also seems to have been preoccupied by the same real problem which Wyclif raised, that if the bread and wine no longer remained as bread and wine after consecration, to eat the host would be to eat Christ. To overcome it, Hus distinguished between Christ's form, which was the sacramental bread, and his substance which inhered within it; both were Christ, but when the host was eaten, Christ was not affected.² Thus, as so often, Hus performed the delicate act of putting Wyclif's words into an orthodox setting; it was a dangerous game to play, and to malicious tongues it provided powerful ammunition against him which helped to bring about his downfall at Constance.

Next closely allied to remanence was the question of the sacramental powers of sinful priests. Here, Wyclif and Hus were closer together in that, as we have remarked, Wyclif never decisively came down for or against. But, on the other hand, Hus showed none of Wyclif's equivocation. He accepted the distinction, which Wyclif passed over, between the office and the person, itself indicative of a different conception of priestly authority. So far as their office was concerned, all priests could consecrate and administer the sacraments, because their power to do so arose from their office. If, however, a priest was personally unworthy then he would be performing his priestly functions unworthily and equivocally.³ Moreover, he did so "to his own prejudice in despising God's name".⁴

Hus, then, conceived the nature of a true priest in fundamentally different terms from Wyclif. It was moral (owing its

¹ Ibid.

² *De corpore Christi in Opera omnia*, ed. V. Flajšhans (Prague, 1903-7, 8 vols.), i. fasc. II, p. 11.

³ *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 39^r.

⁴ Ibid. 39^v.

inspiration to Matthew of Janov) where Wyclif's was metaphysical. Wyclif's distinction between the saved and the damned meant that anyone not of the elect could *ipso facto* not be a true priest. Hus, on the other hand, began from the traditional position of mortal sin as a personal state which disqualified the individual concerned—as distinct from the nature of the priesthood itself. He maintained that position throughout his trial at Constance, despite his having adopted Wyclif's conception of the church in his *De ecclesia* written in 1412: an indication of the unsystematic character of his thought. For Hus a true priest was one who remained true to God. Even in *De ecclesia* and afterwards he continued to make conformity with Christ's precepts the touchstone. A priest, whatever his personal qualities, remained a priest within the visible church and was due the respect of his office. Thus, in contrast to Wyclif's equivocation, Hus explicitly acknowledged that there were good and bad priests within the church who shared their order in common.¹ They were the instruments in bringing God to the faithful.² If Hus's own position was equivocal, this came from attempting here—as in so much else—to combine Wyclif's metaphysics with his own essentially moral and practical outlook.

The one point at which he himself became irretrievably implicated in Wyclif's heterodoxy was over the nature of the church, although, as we have just mentioned, his own different point of view showed through. His most radical break with tradition was his rejection of the pope as head of the church. He reached this position in *De ecclesia*³ and maintained it henceforth to the end. This work was the crystallization of Hus's own experience in his struggle against ecclesiastical authority. It is as much an *apologia pro vita sua* as a theoretical treatise. Written during his exile from Prague in 1412, it formed the basis of Hus's condemnation at Constance in 1415. It shows clearly the relation between Hus's thinking and that of Wyclif. It is here that its main interest lies, rather than in any intrinsic merits of the

¹ *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 256^v.

² *Posiciones, recomendaciones, sermones*, ed. A. Schmidtová (Prague, 1958), p. 174.

³ *Tractatus de Ecclesia*, ed. H. S. Thomson (Cambridge, 1956).

treatise itself. Hus was essentially a moralist ; his best works were those in which he was denouncing some evil or injustice, as in his polemics against his erstwhile confrères, Stanislav Znojmo or Stephen Páleč,¹ and his attack on simony in the Czech work of that name.²

De ecclesia in its structure illustrates the cleft between the theoretical and moral in Hus's approach. It falls into two parts : the first concerns the nature of the church ; the second the practical issues with which Hus was himself confronted.³ He began by taking over Wyclif's definition of the church as the body of all the predestined, past, present and future. As early as 1405 Hus had put it forward in his synodal sermon of that year ; but it had then been only one of three definitions and he had then and later adhered to the traditional view of the church as the body of all the faithful.⁴ In *De ecclesia* Hus also followed Wyclif in excluding the *presciti* eternally from membership of the church and making Christ its sole head.

When it came to the practical implications, however, Hus's—or rather Wyclif's—definitions soon tended to break down, and for much the same reasons in both cases. It was logically impossible at once to assert ignorance of who is damned and who is saved and to damn those who betray Christ. To identify the sinners was to know what had been defined as unknowable. Neither Wyclif nor Hus was prepared to remain silent on such grounds. In *De ecclesia*, theory was for all practical purposes left behind once Hus turned to the failings of the pope and the church hierarchy. The *presciti* became a moral rather than a metaphysical category ; rather than only one church of the elect, Hus tended more towards Matthew of Janov's distinction within the church between the communion of the elect and the mass of the faithful.⁵ Moral purity became their distinguishing mark. In particular Hus diverged from Wyclif over both the distinction between the office

¹ *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 255^v-264^v, and 265^v-302^v.

² Translated by M. Spinka in *Advocates of Reform* (Library of Christian Classics, XIV, London 1953), pp. 196-278.

³ It divides at chapter 11.

⁴ *Historia et Monumenta*, ii. 28^r ; See my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. 663.

⁵ *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. 617-18.

of priest and the person and in a less rigorous application of Wyclif's notion of the grace of predestination. Hus seemed prepared to accept any evidence of grace as a sign of predestination.¹ Moreover, Hus explicitly made moral probity the test of a true priest: "If he is manifestly sinful", he wrote, "then it should be supposed, from his works, that he is not just, but the enemy of Christ."² This is tantamount, as we have suggested, to applying the test of a true priest in this world and not waiting for the final judgement in the next.

Hus, like Wyclif, was thereby denouncing the present hierarchy on moral grounds, but his attack was at once more moderate and more personal. Following his distinction between the office and the person, Hus was prepared to acknowledge that the pope and cardinals were the most dignified part of the Roman church and that they should be treated as such so long as they remained true to Christ.³ He did not, however, recognize their headship of the Catholic church. They could sin and err, as the egregious example of Pope Agnes—who had reigned as John VIII for two years, five months, until her sex had been revealed—showed.⁴ Again, Hus followed Wyclif and Marsilius in denying that Christ's commission to Peter had given the Bishop of Rome primacy over the rest of the church.⁵ Christ alone was head of the church and the universal church alone infallible. To put the pope and cardinals in his place was to put man before God.⁶ For Hus, as for Wyclif, the papacy was a human institution, the creation of the emperor Constantine; the word pope was not in the Bible.⁷ For that reason it could be dispensed with.⁸

Although Hus did not set up the same opposition between the present hierarchy and the Bible, he, too, made the scriptures the touchstone of canonical authority. Papal decrees were the work of fallible men, and had none of the imperative obligation of the Bible as the word of God.⁹ In his Commentary on the *Sentences* Hus called the Bible "the most certain, profound and worthy"

¹ E.g. *De ecclesia*, p. 39.

³ *Ibid.* p. 48.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 48, 57-62, 66.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 101 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 56, 106, and *Historia et Monumenta* i, 262^r.

² *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 48, 103, 107, 141, 233.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 51-52.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 172-3.

source of all knowledge because its subject was the divine.¹ He rejected Pálec's description of the Bible as something inanimate ; it was, on the contrary, the book of life, indispensable to the true Christian.² Indeed, to a greater degree than Wyclif Hus based himself upon its authority for his argument together with citations above all from the Fathers. Like Wyclif he placed St. Augustine as supreme among them.³ Hus particularly stressed the importance of such authorities in helping to understand the Bible.⁴ This sense of being on the side of true Catholic tradition enabled him to confront the hierarchy and ultimately disobey it in the name of Christian truth. He especially attacked simony and failure to preach God's word as the marks of Antichrist : the category extended to a pope who was guilty of such failings.⁵ Simony he regarded as including all payments for spiritual ministrations, including those made to the pope and papal reservations.⁶ Hus also believed with Wyclif that the remedy for the church's ills lay in a return to its primitive state of apostolic simplicity ; but unlike Wyclif he did not advocate wholesale expropriation by the temporal powers as the means to achieve it. Priests who persisted in living sinful lives should be shunned by the faithful and tithes withheld from them.⁷ Where revenues were excessive lay lords should have power of confiscation and in the case of simoniacs suppression.⁸ To eliminate simony Hus counselled the revival of the ancient practice of election to spiritual offices in the presence of the people.⁹ Correspondingly preaching should be made obligatory. Nothing should be allowed to stand in its way, not even the bans of superiors.¹⁰ How important Hus regarded preaching may be gauged from his public defence in 1412 of two of Wyclif's condemned 45 articles on the subject. Article 14 had stated that those failing to hear or preach God's word because of excommunication were traitors to

¹ *De ecclesia*, p. 20.

² *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 262^r.

³ *De ecclesia*, p. 121.

⁴ E.g. his letter written from Constance to his disciple Martin, in F. Palacký, *Documenta Mag. Johannis Hus* (Prague, 1869), pp. 119-20.

⁵ *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 258^{r-v} ; *De ecclesia*, pp. 103, 140, 167.

⁶ *On Simony*, pp. 208, 213 ff. ; *De ecclesia*, pp. 104-5, 113.

⁷ *On Simony*, pp. 252, 273.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 272, 275.

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 268, 270.

¹⁰ *De ecclesia*, p. 190.

Christ. Article 15 had maintained that any priest or deacon could preach without papal or episcopal permission. In support of these Hus declared that preaching was the way of combating Antichrist.¹ It was therefore one of the indispensable tests of a true priest.

In his attitude to laymen Hus did not go so far as Wyclif in making every member of the elect a true priest who could act as such. He was, however, prepared to allow that laymen could judge their spiritual superiors and, if found wanting, refuse them recognition. This was mainly to take the form of withholding tithes, as we have already mentioned. Hus, in his defence of six of Wyclif's condemned articles in 1412, had argued that tithes were pure alms and as freely given could be freely withheld; and those priests who lived contrary to Christ could have their temporalities withdrawn by laymen.² Hus refused the priesthood an inherent superiority to laymen; office, he said in reply to a preacher from Pilsen who had asserted the contrary view, was not superior to merit.³ Although at one point Hus did go so far as to say that every good layman was a priest he neither founded it on Wyclif's metaphysical distinction between the saved and the damned nor did he conclude that the layman could thereby perform the office of priest. He confined himself to the moral that it was better to be a good Christian than a wicked pope or prelate.⁴

So far as the civil role of the church was concerned, Hus invoked the by now common arguments which had grown up against spiritual involvement in temporal affairs. Christ had barred priests from all litigation and secular authority; this included fighting crusades to gain the submission of other Christians, and all sentences of excommunication and granting of indulgences which had not first come from God.⁵ It was on these grounds that Hus opposed the papal bull by John XXIII on indulgences which led directly to his excommunication.⁶ The

¹ *De ecclesia*, p. 158; *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 110^v-134^v.

² *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 118^r-125^v.

³ *Ibid.* 146^v.

⁴ See *Heresy in Later Middle Ages*, ii. 671-2.

⁵ *De ecclesia*, pp. 77-8, 82, 183, 189, 208-16; *Historia et Monumenta*, i. 174^v-175^v.

⁶ *Historia et Monumenta*, 174^v-189^r

pope had no power to remit sins for a period of time unless God had done so first.¹

Ultimately, then, Hus based his position upon loyalty to Christ. He defended all his acts of disobedience to his superiors in the name of obedience to God. He owed little to Wyclif's actual metaphysics on the great moral issues of the time—the status of sinful priests, simony and the other abuses which came from ecclesiastical wealth, worldliness and pride. This was made apparent to his accusers at Constance when, having confidently presented Wyclif's 45 condemned articles for his comments and anticipated endorsement, they were surprised to find that Hus gave only qualified assent to four of them, hedged on another five, and explicitly rejected the remaining thirty six.² Those which he accepted concerned excommunication, preaching, sinful prelates, and obedience to superiors. That is to say those on moral issues and matters of authority. It was on these questions that the consonance of his outlook with Wyclif's outlook lay. Doctrinally, it led to his embracing the same definition of the church as the body of the saved. Although, as we have seen, he was perfunctory and inconsistent in its application, he stood by it from the time of *De ecclesia* onwards, and on it he was ultimately condemned. If Hus was a heretic, it was in this that his heresy lay, even though he shared its practical outcome—the deposition of Pope John XXIII—with his accusers. His successors in the Hussite movement ultimately laid the foundations of the Reformation upon his resistance to papal authority.

The importance of Wyclif and Hus, then, was as forces for reform. They were united less by metaphysics than the conviction that the church must be restored to Christ. If this led Hus into embracing Wyclif's doctrine of the church, their outlook nevertheless remained distinctive as did the movements which they inspired. Even Hus's accusers had finally to recognize that Hus was not a Wyclifite.

¹ *Historia et Monumenta*, 174^v-189^r.

² In J. Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus*, ii. (Prague, 1915), 305*-10*. See also my *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, ii. 676 ff.