The church of All Hallows is packed. The Abbot of Leicester is there with his clerks, as is the mayor of the town. Many priests and friars are there as well, some well-known and others not. Laypeople cram the church so thickly that some stand on stools to see out over the crowd. The object of their fascination is a woman, Margery Kempe, who kneels in front of the altar, praying for the grace and wit to acquit herself well.

This is not Margery Kempe’s first run-in with the law. Already, she has been accused multiple times of heresy, of wantonness, and of being a general pest. A deeply mystical woman who claims to speak directly with Jesus Christ, Kempe knows passages from the Bible at a time when this knowledge is barred to all outside of the clergy, much less to a woman. At a time when white is a symbol for virginity, Kempe, who has born her husband fourteen children, travels frequently in all white garb. She is known to sob constantly, in loud, chronic fits of religious zeal that irritate all those around her.

Her fame had, thus, preceded her to Leicester. She had been taken on the orders of the mayor not long after entering the city, and he accused her of being a “false strumpet, a false
Lollard.”¹ She was arrested, along with two of her friends in that city, and interrogated. At one point, she feared that her interrogator would rape her.

Against the backdrop of the staring crowd, Margery is brought before the abbot and told, under oath, to recite the Articles of Faith. She begins with the Eucharist. “Sirs,” she says:

I believe in the sacrament of the altar in this manner, that whatever man has taken the order of priesthood…if he says duly those words over the bread that our Lord Jesus Christ said when he made his Last Supper among the disciples…I believe it is his very flesh and his blood and no material bread nor ever may be unsaid be it once said.²

When she finishes reciting the Articles, the clerics present seem to be satisfied. She had now sworn against the heretical views of the Lollards, after all. But the mayor, who is determined to see her punished, is not. He castigates her violently, criticizing her morals just as he had earlier. Margery again defends herself and her tone, telling the mayor that she has never in her life been unfaithful to her husband, “whom I am bound to by the law of matrimony, and by whom I have born fourteen children. For I want you to know, sir, that there is no man in this world that I love so much as God, for I love him above all thing, and, sir, I tell you truly I love all men in God and for God.”³

On that day, as she had before and would have to again, Margery proved herself sufficiently orthodox to escape punishment. Despite this, her reputation as a heretical Lollard continued to cling to her. The story of Margery, which was dictated to two different men under the close supervision of the protagonist herself, is set during a time of religious and social upheaval in England, and is important for what it says about Lollardy, a heretical movement that was widely persecuted during her lifetime. Time and time again, her forbidden knowledge of scripture caused authorities, both temporal and religious, to accuse her of this heresy. Margery is

² Ibid., 84.
³ Ibid., 85.
thus an excellent critical lens through which to understand how English society understood Lollardy.

Lollardy as it is understood today is the common term for a form of heterodox religious belief that sprung up in England in the fourteenth century and remained until King Henry VIII reformed the English Church in the mid-sixteenth. Very generally speaking, Lollardy’s roots were in the beliefs and writings of Oxford theologian John Wyclif and his followers, known as Wycliffites, who were considered heretical for their staunch anticlericalism and rejection of transubstantiation, veneration of images, and the temporal dominion of the clergy. For purposes of clarity, I will make a distinction here between two terms: “Wycliffism,” which denotes an adherence to John Wyclif’s theological ideas whether strictly or loosely, and “Lollardy,” which represents the broader field of English heresy after 1381, which included many Wycliffites.

Historical scholarship has at times a tendency to impose order over nuance. I believe that this has been the case with the Lollard movement. Lollardy was not in itself a united movement, but a diverse one, which could vary in form, organization and belief between localities and classes. Even the word ‘Lollard’ itself was flexible. As well as referring to Wycliffites, the term was culturally construed to encompass begging friars and laypeople who held unusual religious views. Where ‘Wycliffite’ refers specifically to a certain theology, ‘Lollard’ is a much more amorphous term. I intend to argue that alternate or interchangeable meanings of the word are important to any understanding of ‘Lollardy;’ to ignore this diversity is to capture only one element of the picture. Two specific case studies are presented here. First is John Ball, the wandering preacher and social revolutionary who, though considered a Wycliffite by hostile chroniclers, merits a more suitable definition. Secondly, Margery Kempe’s story is one of the most telling examples of the multivocality of religious life during the fifteenth century. Margery,
a dynamic but polarizing character, who broke contemporary social codes and maintained a
deeply personal relationship with Christ, was accused of Lollardy time and time again. Even
though she was repeatedly shown not to be a Wycliffite, as we saw from the story that begins
this paper, she continued to be known as “the greatest Lollard in all this country” and inspired a
less than stellar reputation across England.  

The historiography of the Lollard movement is interesting in that, for centuries, it was not
evaluated in its own context. Since the Reformation, scholarship on Lollardy has been
understood almost solely through the lens of Protestantism. Three major historiographical trends
can be identified with regard to Lollardy. In the first approach, which ran from the sixteenth
century until roughly the end of the nineteenth, Lollardy was seen as a direct precursor to
Protestantism and Wyclif as the “Morning Star of the Reformation. Rather than a medieval
movement, it was seen as the opening skirmish in a larger historical battle, and it was understood
that the Lollard movement transitioned peacefully and cleanly into the Reformation.

The second approach was prominent from the early twentieth century, the “Protestant”
notion that Lollardy directly influenced the Reformation in England was challenged by an
opposite “Catholic” strain of thought, which dismissed the Lollards almost entirely, arguing that
they were too scattered and peripheral by the sixteenth century to have had any real impact.
However, discomfort with this historiographical question became apparent, and by the 1990s, a
distinct field of Lollard studies was emerging, the scholars of which understood the movement as
inherently medieval They remained committed to nuancing the picture not only of heresy, but
also of orthodoxy.

Thus, rather than studying the theology of John Wyclif and the Lollard movement on
their own merits, the major historiographical focus has been, until very recently, a skirmish on

4 Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, 95.
the outskirts of the Catholic/Protestant divide, as Peter Marshall has pointed out in his work on Lollard historiography. The important question was not an understanding of Lollardy in context. Instead the historiography of most of the twentieth century attempted either to vindicate or play down the movement’s relationship to the rise of Protestantism in England.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, Lollardy provided a perfect means to add legitimacy to the cause of church reform. Many Wycliffite tenets, including criticism of transubstantiation, pilgrimage, and excess among the clergy, later were taken up by the reformers of the sixteenth century, and executed Lollards such as John Oldcastle became martyrs rather than dangerous heretics.\(^5\) As indicated above, Wyclif, by the nineteenth century was the “morning star of the Reformation,” a distinctively English figure in the timeline of the Reformation. Thus, during the Victorian period and the early part of the twentieth century, the Lollard movement was part of a narrative of “Protestant triumphalism.” Whig historians such as George Macaulay Travelyan wrote that a direct line of influence connected the Lollards to the Protestants, and that the transformation from one theology to the other was more or less seamless.\(^6\)

However, around the turn of the twentieth century, this dominant view began to be questioned, and an opposing, “Catholic” strain of thought surfaced that rejected the idea of Lollard influence in the Reformation. Francis Aidan Gasquet, for example, could argue that, though a similarity existed, any direct connection was illusory.\(^7\)

Following the First World War, this view gained prominence as a reaction against the “Reformation triumphalism” of the pre-war period. Henry Maynard Smith wrote that Lollards

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\(^7\) *Ibid.*, 298.
had little in common with each other, much less with later Protestants. Rather, Maynard Smith used a contemporary analogy to illustrate the situation of the Lollards. They were the communists of their day—occasionally tolerated, occasionally hunted, and never very well-liked by the population at large.\(^8\)

The “Protestant” view had reasserted itself by the end of the Second World War, and again Lollardy had its place as the progenitor of religious reform in England. Arthur Ogle himself had a contemporary analogy to share: the Church, he asserted, was a totalitarian state. Ernest Gordon Rupp and David Boughton argued as well that the survival of the Lollards into the sixteenth century was in itself hard evidence of its impact on Protestantism.\(^9\) This view remained dominant throughout the 1960’s. It was articulated by historians such as Geoffrey Dickens and Joseph Dahmus, who saw Wycliffite theology as a clear anticipation of the Reformers,\(^10\) even as Dahmus played down the power of the Lollard movement as a whole, making the bold claim that after Henry V’s actions against the Lollards, “the movement, which was always small, disappeared overnight.”\(^11\)

During the seventies and eighties, the idea that Lollardy provided a clear path to the Reformation fell prey to a strong reassessment that played down the importance of the Lollards in the years before the beginning of the Reformation.\(^12\) Essentially, this was a revised statement of the “Catholic” approach. Margaret Bawter, for example, characterized Lollardy as little more than a weak irritant to the Church, while Christopher Haigh pointed out the absence of Lollard communities in parts of England such as the North.\(^13\) Other scholars emphasized the

\(^8\) *Ibid.*, 301.
\(^12\) Ian Forrest, “Lollardy and Late Medieval History,” in *Wycliffite Controversies*, 122.
complexities of the religious issue. Eaman Duffy argued that traditional Catholicism, far from being in danger during the centuries preceding the Reformation, was strong and pervasive. J.J. Scarsbrick wrote that the Reformation was not initially popular anyway, and took a while to develop.\textsuperscript{14}

During the nineties, Lollardy gradually began to receive more attention in its own right, and began to move away from the shadow of the Reformation. A great deal of scholarship was done by Margaret Aston, who worked to complicate the picture of Lollardy and attack the idea that it was a homogeneous “sect,” while emphasizing its relevance.\textsuperscript{15} Efforts were also made by scholars to establish Wycliffite ideas as an expression of late medieval European piety, alongside Jean Gerson, Gerard Groote, and Catherine of Siena.\textsuperscript{16}

As a result, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Lollard studies grew into its own as a distinct sub-discipline, and scholars generally tried to avoid the question of the Reformation altogether, instead focusing on Lollardy as a purely medieval movement, driven by the concerns of its own time. This is the third, most current approach. Ian Christopher Levy, in his essay “A Contextualized Wyclif: Magister Sacrae Paginae,” put forth an image of Wyclif as a thinker in tune with his age, who through interpreting the Bible, was doing nothing that his status as a theologian did not permit him to do.\textsuperscript{17} Anne Husdon, in the meantime, worked to soften the perceived boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, arguing that, while all was black and white to Wyclif’s most fervent detractors, the relationship between the two was in truth much more complex.\textsuperscript{18} J. Patrick Hornbeck showed that Lollard communities varied in their beliefs

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 310-13.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ian Forrest, “Lollardy and Late Medieval History,” in \textit{Wycliffite Controversies}, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 131.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ian Christopher Levy, “A Contextualized Wyclif: Magister Sacrae Paginae,” 54-55.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Anne Hudson, “‘Who is my Neighbor?’: Some Problems of Definition on the Borders of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 84-85.
\end{itemize}
even over short distances, emphasizing gray areas even between groups of Lollards in a given locality.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, Steven E. Lahey argued that Wyclif’s theology was based in nominalist medieval philosophy and was indebted to the work of St. Augustine as were his detractors.\textsuperscript{20}

In recent years, a great degree of interdisciplinary activity has contributed to the growth of Lollard studies. Literary analyses by Matti Peikola, Mary Raschko, Helen Bari, and Alastair Minnis have made more prominent the variation and complexity of the movement. Rob Lutton, in “Lollardy, Orthodoxy, and Comparative Psychology,” evaluates Lollard and Catholic belief together using the Whitehouse theoretical model of religion.\textsuperscript{21}

The growing interdisciplinarity of Lollard studies has caused some contention. Ian Forrest in particular has asked the question of how much of it is too much. He testifies that historians of Lollard studies need to assert the needs of their own discipline against what he perceives as a movement of the scholarship from history to literary studies. While he expresses appreciation for the great amount of work on Lollard texts done by literary scholars such as Anne Hudson, he believes that the massive growth in that line of scholarship jeopardizes understanding of the world in which Wyclif and his successors lived, focusing instead on a simple examination of the texts themselves.\textsuperscript{22} Shannon Gayk, on the other hand, has argued the opposite, calling for a “new formalism” from which to critique Lollard writings, noting that it is vital to understand the form of the texts, not simply the context.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} This model recognizes two “modes” of religion: The first is the imagistic mode, which relies on iconic imagery, devotion to saints, mysticism, ritual, folk practice and festivals. The second mode is doctrinal, and emphasizes clerical culture, dependence upon religious texts, religious instruction, preaching, and hierarchy. Lutton argues that Lollardy characterizes a mix of these two modes.
\textsuperscript{22} Ian Forrest, “Lollardy and Late Medieval History,” in \textit{Wycliffite Controversies}, 121-22.
Thus, the turn of the century has seen a renaissance in the study of the Lollard movement, which emphasizes it in its role as a complex, diverse movement and part of a larger medieval context in which new forms of piety were being tested and explored, rather than simply as a precursor to reform in the sixteenth century. I intend to analyze Lollardy in line with this third historiographical tradition—looking at Lollardy in its place as a late medieval movement which emerged from late medieval needs, and was as diverse as those needs. The thesis of this work is that although there is an overlap between Wycliffism and Lollardy, they were never synonymous. Loosely speaking, they were, respectively, the academic and cultural manifestations of a similar set of beliefs. Essential to Wycliffites was that all should have access to the scriptures, the rejections of transubstantiation, criticism of saints and relics, and anticlericalism. A similar list of characteristics of Lollardy is less viable because of the variability of the term. However what is clear is that although Wycliffism and Lollardy were not directly equivalent, although both came out of the same cultural and religious climate of late medieval England.

Though the term “Lollard” is used today almost exclusively to refer to proponents of Wycliffite theology, the meaning of the word in the late Middle Ages was nebulous. The word itself originates with hostile chroniclers, and its connotation was entirely negative, while their supporters tended to refer to them simply as “poor preachers.” However, as Andrew Cole has demonstrated, the “Lollards” of the early chronicles are not exclusively Wycliffite. They are also undereducated or vagrant members of the mendicant orders. In the late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, John Langland demonstrates multiple uses of the word “Lollard.” He understands them on one hand as lazy beggars and on the other as godly hermits worthy of praise. In neither case is the connotation purely Wycliffite.
By the 1390s did Wycliffites had begun to co-opt the term “Lollard” to describe themselves. However, I will argue here that the meaning of the word remained vague and diverse well into the fifteenth century, and, rather than specifically referring to Wycliffism, could denote certain kinds of social undesirability, unusual religious belief, or vagrancy. The life of Margery Kempe, whom we met earlier, an orthodox woman who was often accused of being a Lollard, is the most vivid example of the word’s flexibility. The diverse nature of the term “Lollard” in turn demonstrates the heterogeneous state of English religious life, and the blurry, tenuous line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

I will focus on three different people who will function as case studies for the flexibility of the word “Lollard.” The first is the cleric and author William Langland, who though not a Lollard himself, gave one of the most even handed definitions of the word. The second is the populist preacher John Ball. The third is Margery Kempe.

A great deal of context is necessary to understand the world into which John Wyclif first began to preach his views, since no critical movement grows out of a vacuum. During his life and those of the later Lollards, the western church was in a state of flux. It had been for most of the fourteenth century before then. The bare facts, necessary to understanding this period in context, are these: in 1309, the seat of the papacy had shifted from Rome to Avignon in the wake of a conflict between Philip the Fair, king of France (d. 1314), and Pope Boniface VIII (d. 1303) and, briefly, his successor, Benedict XI (d. 1304). The move was controversial, and in 1376 Pope Gregory XI moved the papal court back to Rome. By this point, Wyclif had been writing for some time; it had been at least two years since the publication of *De Dominio Divino*.24 Gregory died soon after, and conflicts among the popes, the cardinals, and the people of Rome led to the

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24 Wyclif used this text to argue that the clergy should not hold property. Takashi Shogimen, “Wyclif’s Ecclesiology and Political Thought,” in *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy (Leiden: 2006), 199.
election of two sitting popes, one remaining in Rome, the other in Avignon. This conflict lasted from 1378 to 1417, and, along with the years in Avignon, severely damaged the prestige of the papacy.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the loss of credibility that the Church experienced during the schism, the religious life of Europe remained surprisingly vibrant. In particular, a movement toward lay piety became increasingly clear. Men and women disillusioned with the state of the Church began to find other ways to express their faith, through communities such as Gerard Groote’s Modern Devotion,\textsuperscript{26} and through mystics who attuned directly with God himself, such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe in England.\textsuperscript{27} Fascination with magic, witchcraft, and the occult intensified among the laity.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, despite the conflict in the Church, men and women in Europe found out ways of their own to God. This piety led also to criticism of the Church for its slackness, its temporality and affluence, and its failure in dealing with the religious issues that faced it.

Another development that is important to understanding Wycliffite theology is the conflict between the Church and the states of Europe over how much power the Church had over them. Both King Edward I (d. 1307) and Philip the Fair of France (d. 1314) had clashed with the papacy, primarily over issues of secular taxation of the clergy; indeed, it was Philip’s conflict with the papacy over this issue that ultimately lead to the Avignonese residence.\textsuperscript{29} Intellectual attacks on papal power came also from Marsilius of Padua, who in the first half of the fourteenth century.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[25]{Joseph Dahmus, \textit{A History of the Middle Ages} (New York: 1995), 376.}
\footnotetext[26]{Steven Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe} (Yale University Press, 1980), 96-97.}
\footnotetext[28]{Ozment, \textit{The Age of Reform}, 205.}
\footnotetext[29]{\textit{Ibid.}, 378-79.}
\end{footnotes}
century advocated for a clear subjection of the church to the state, in a manner similar to later arguments that Wyclif himself would make on the subject.

In addition to attacks on the Church’s political power, there was an increasing outcry against the temporal wealth of the church, led by a sect of the Franciscan order known as the Spirituals. The Spirituals believed that the church should exist in a state of apostolic poverty and refrain from the ownership of property. This was a direct threat to papal power, and the Spirituals and clerical poverty were condemned. Poverty, according to the papacy, should be a spiritual renunciation of wealth, not a physical one. Thus, the environment that shaped Wyclif and the Lollards was one in which the Church was coming under attack on a number of fronts, while lay religious life remained strong.

Wyclif himself was born sometime between 1331 and 1335 to minor gentry in Yorkshire. He matriculated to Oxford University, and by 1356 had a bachelor of arts. By 1360, he held the title of Master of Balliol College. His ordination to the priesthood had most likely occurred by 1361—a title he held for only a year before resigning.

Wyclif took up the study of theology in 1363, and by 1373 was a master, and began to write. He served a brief stint as warden of Canterbury College, but left at the order of Pope Urban V, because of a dispute over whether the college should be a solely secular or monastic institution, during which he argued the former. This incident has been said to have colored his opinion of the mendicant orders.

Possibly by 1371, but certainly by 1374, Wyclif was taken into royal service where he helped to negotiate between the crown and the papacy. At this time, it is thought that he became

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32 Ibid., 12-13.
33 Ibid., 13-14.
acquainted with his future protector, John of Gaunt, the brother of the king and the immensely powerful Duke of Lancaster.  

With the death of Edward the Black Prince in 1376, King Edward III’s only son, and Edward’s own death a year later, Gaunt became arguably the most powerful man in England, though highly unpopular among the commons. It has been suggested that Gaunt used Wyclif as a political tool against the papacy. However, most scholars suggest that the relationship between Gaunt and Wyclif, which lasted many years and protected Wyclif from multiple attempts by the Church to charge him with heresy, was of a more symbiotic nature. Wyclif’s views on church/state relations were purely his own and represent a logical development from his earlier thought, but they also supported Gaunt’s interests.  

During the 1370s, Wyclif returned to Oxford and began to publish works criticizing the power of the clergy and advocating the superiority of the secular arm to the spiritual. He both published and preached on the subject, and became well-known for his theological views. Wyclif believed that the church should refrain from holding property not for any hatred of the Church, but rather for the Church’s own good; without temporal property, the Church would be able to follow the path and teachings of Jesus without being corrupted by earthly concerns. While the clergy should hold sway over spiritual concerns, the king was, to Wyclif, the source of all temporal power, ordained by God and holding the final say in all matters beyond the strictly religious. Wyclif expounded upon this philosophy of Dominium in the tracts De dominio divino and De dominio regis, written in the years closely following the beginning of his association with

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35 Larsen, The School of Heretics: Academic Condemnation at the University of Oxford, 1277-1409, 128.
36 Ibid.
38 Takashi Shogimen, “Wyclif’s Ecclesiology and Political Thought,” in A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian, 205.
39 Ibid., 199.
John of Gaunt. As will be shown later, criticism of clerical dominium are to be found not only amongst Wycliffites, but also among non-Wycliffite Lollards and authors such as William Langland.

Around this time, work also began on the “Wycliffite Bible,” which was an attempt by Wyclif and others to translate God’s word into English. To Wyclif, the scripture was key to holy living, and he believed that all should have access to it. It is unknown for sure the extent of Wyclif’s actual involvement in the translation, but it is generally accepted that he initiated and guided the effort. However, the church refused to recognize the translation, partly because of Wyclif’s own involvement (particularly later, when his heresy was more notable). More importantly, it was commonly accepted within the church that simpler, illiterate people would not be able to correctly interpret scripture, which would potentially lead them to heresy and heterodoxy. For them, it was much better to have well-educated priests to guide those in the third order, teaching them only those things that were necessary for salvation. Wyclif’s views on the Bible are arguably the place there Wycliffism’s bond to Lollardy is strongest.

By 1376, the pope had caught word of Wyclif’s activities, and early in 1377 Archbishop Simon Sudbury and Bishop of London William Courtenay summoned him to St. Paul’s Cathedral, ostensibly to face charges of heresy. However, the meeting was ineffective, and devolved into an altercation between Courtenay, Gaunt, and Henry Percy, at the end of which Gaunt threatened to drag Courtenay out of the cathedral by his hair.

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42 Ibid., 377.
43 Ibid., 386.
44 Ibid., 379.
45 Medieval society was understood through three “orders.” The first order (those who fight) constituted the ruling classes and nobility. The second order (those who pray) was made up of the clergy. The third order (those who work) was made up of everyone else, whether peasant or artisan.
46 Ibid., 376.
In 1377, Sudbury and Courtenay published bulls from Pope Gregory calling for the arrest and imprisonment of Wyclif. Additionally, he sought a condemnation from Oxford, but the university ultimately demurred, deciding that those views of Wyclif that the pope had singled out were not, in fact, heretical. They were simply badly phrased. The bishops attempted another condemnation at Sudbury’s palace at Lambeth the next year, but this was again interrupted, this time by an agent from Princess Joan, King Richard II’s mother, and a mob of Londoners who lobbied for Wyclif’s protection. The bishops, under this pressure, came to a similar conclusion as was generated in the Oxford meetings; Wyclif’s views were essentially true, but objectionable because they were easily misconstrued by the uneducated.

Pope Gregory died that year, setting in motion the events of the Western Schism (In which two rival popes vied for the allegiance of Christendom) and removing the threat to Wyclif because the papacy was now divided and preoccupied. During this relatively peaceful interlude, Wyclif busied himself “attacking the mendicants, denouncing clerical pluralism and absenteeism, actively calling for the disendowment of the Church, and rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation.” Transubstantiation was another belief that was often shared between the Lollard movement and Wycliffite theology.

Wyclif also challenged the veneration of idols, and attacked the idea of pilgrimages to saints’ shrines, seeing them only as a way for the clergy to bilk others out of their wealth. He never explicitly attacked the concept of saints, but he denounced the opulent shrines that inevitably housed them, considering them. Essentially, he claimed, the bejeweled and gaudy containers that tended to hold relics distracted the good Christian from devotion. Later Lollards

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49 Ibid., 147-48.
50 Larsen, “John Wyclif, C. 1331-1384,” 44.
tended to share this distinction between moderate and immoderate veneration of saintly relics. In fact, after the burning of one prominent Lollard, Richard Wyche, in 1440, his devotees rushed to bring wax images to the site and even collect samples of his ashes.\textsuperscript{52}

In 1381, William Barton, the chancellor of Oxford University, initiated a successful condemnation of John Wyclif. He, evidently surprised by the verdict, appealed to Gaunt, but the duke only instructed him to keep quiet on all issues that had been formally condemned, a command that he subsequently ignored by publishing the Confessio, which further expounded his own views about the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{53} As indicated above, it was arguably his sacramental theology more than any other belief that cemented Wyclif’s reputation as a heretic.\textsuperscript{54} Though not as extreme as to discount the sacraments entirely, he refused to believe that the bread and wine would turn literally into the body and blood of Christ, but rather attributed a spiritual meaning to the sacraments. Essentially, he preferred consubstantiation to transubstantiation.\textsuperscript{55} After Wyclif’s death, some Lollards would take the issue of the Eucharist even further than Wyclif had, denying any literal presence whatsoever in the host.

In the summer of 1381, the outbreak of the Peasant’s Revolt caused serious problems for Wyclif. His enemies were quick to draw connections between the teachings of Wyclif and those of John Ball, a renegade preacher and one of the leaders of the revolt, who may in fact have heard Wyclif preach.\textsuperscript{56} At a time when Wyclif’s views on the Eucharist were becoming known, the rebels chose the feast day of Corpus Christi, which celebrates the Eucharist, as the day of

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{53} Larsen, “John Wyclif, C. 1331-1384,” 48-49.
their convergence upon London. The ties between the issue of the Eucharist and the Peasant’s Revolt were thought by some to go even deeper. Thomas Walsingham, one of the most insistent voices in opposition to Wycliffism to be found amongst contemporary chroniclers, tied Wyclif to the Peasant’s Revolt, but he believed that the revolt itself was God’s punishment on the lords and prelates of England for allowing the Wycliffite heresy to spread. He writes:

> It is the opinion of many that they [the troubles associated with the Revolt] arose especially because of the lack of concern shown by the archbishop and other of his fellow bishops…they were all aware that their children, John Wyclif and his disciples, were behaving dishonorably…concerning the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; and they were defiling the people by extending their preaching far and wide throughout the country…But many believe that the Lord sent this tribulation at that time when the most holy Church was making special mention of the transubstantiation of the Body of Christ; that He punished the archbishop by the dreadful death of martyrdom, because, although it is right to believe that he ended his life as a martyr, yet he was lukewarm in the concern that he should have shown over this heresy.

The issue of the Eucharist was of special importance to Walsingham. For him, theology and politics were unshakably tied; the revolt occurred because the Lollards had been allowed to exist. Thus, to many contemporaries of Wyclif, Lollardy and the revolt were inextricably linked.

Still, any similarities between Wyclif and the rebels were at best peripheral. Wyclif certainly did not support the rebellious peasants, condemning them in his treatise *De blasphemia*. Moreover, one of the main targets of the peasants’ rage was his erstwhile protector, John of Gaunt, whose palace of Savoy in London was leveled by the mob. The rebels beheaded Archbishop Sudbury while they were in London, but his successor to the see of Canterbury was none other than Courtenay, who was if anything more determined to see Wyclif...

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silenced than Sudbury had been. Still, Wyclif’s reputation was harmed by the uprising, and he afterward retired from Oxford to his home at Lutterworth.  

Wyclif’s views were condemned on one more occasion by Courtenay at Blackfriars, however, no action was taken against his person, other than to bar him from teaching any further at Oxford, which, since Wyclif had taken his leave of the university previously, meant little. He died in 1384.

Wyclif’s ideas survived the man himself, and those who, like John Ball, espoused anticlerical ideas closely related to or derived from those of Wyclif were known thereafter as “Lollards.” According to most scholarship, the word comes from Dutch, and translates roughly as “mumblers.” Wyclif himself never referred to himself as such. “Lollard” first began to be identified with Wycliffism after 1382, when Henry Crumpe, who had been a part of the council at Blackfriars which had condemned Wyclif previously, venomously referred to Wyclif’s followers as “Lollardos.” It was not until the 1390s that Wycliffites themselves began to co-opt the term.

Andrew Cole’s essay upon the meaning of the term “Lollard” in *Piers Plowman* focuses on the diversity of the term during the late fourteenth century. However, suppression of Lollardy in the fifteenth century caused shifts in the movement which led to a more localized, diverse movement. Wycliffite ideas were repeatedly condemned from many corners after 1384, but little attempt was made to crack down on Lollardy until the reign of King Henry V (d. 1422). During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Wycliffism retained some popularity among the

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62 In his later years, Wyclif continued to write, and in particular began to target the mendicant orders. He refused one last summons from Pope Urban VI, ostensibly because of ill health, but also because the crown forbade him from obliging the pope. Larsen, “John Wyclif, C. 1331-1384,” 59-62.
64 Ibid., 42-43.
genty; some knights identified by chroniclers as Lollards during Richard II’s reign even had connections to the royal household.\textsuperscript{65} It was the gentry, who often moved about the country and kept many connections and different communities in contact.\textsuperscript{66} However, support for Lollardy among the second order\textsuperscript{67} declined decisively after an accused Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle, staged a rebellion in 1414 intending, if later charges leveled against Oldcastle are to be believed, to overthrow the king, remove all prelates, take all wealth from monasteries, and destroy the mendicant orders.\textsuperscript{68} The rebellion was quashed, although Oldcastle himself remained in hiding for four years before being captured and burnt, a testament to the strength of the networks that had been behind the planning of the rebellion.\textsuperscript{69} By 1414, Lollardy was more than an intellectual set of Wycliffite beliefs; it was a political and religious movement.

Public opinion of Lollards, which had been fairly mild before the turn of the century, became much more mistrustful after 1401.\textsuperscript{70} Generally, they were disliked, and were forced to keep their heads down to avoid persecution by the authorities. Major trials of Lollard groups, though rarer after 1431, continued even after the trials of Coventry Lollards in 1511 to 1512.\textsuperscript{71} After 1431, and up until the Reformation, it was largely the third order, particularly the artisanal class, that kept Lollardy alive. Weavers and shoemakers were both professions that had a predilection toward Lollard beliefs. Maureen Jurkowski argues that the group-oriented nature of the weaving trade played a part in this, as did the easy work of the shoemaker. Both had down time during which the craftsmen could read to one another.\textsuperscript{72} The backlash against the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[67] See footnote 45 for a definition of the medieval ordering of society.
\item[68] Aston, \textit{Lollards and Reformers}, 24-25.
\item[70] Aston, \textit{Lollards and Reformers}, 9.
\item[71] Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner, introduction to \textit{The Lollards of Coventry: 1486-152), trans Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner, (Edinburgh: 2003), 2-3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
movement, which cut Lollardy’s ties to the nobility and relegated it to less mobile classes, also destroyed one of the most important means of communication among regional groups.

Arguably, one of the most important aims of committed Wycliffites was to make the scriptures available to all people, an effort which had some success, although the presence of the Vulgate in England, which was effectively made illegal in 1408, lagged behind the rest of Europe on the eve of the Reformation.73 Lollards were less successful in aiding the people to understand the Vulgate.74 Reading, particularly of vernacular holy texts like the Wycliffite Bible, was a hallmark of Lollardy that relates the movement clearly to Wyclif. Perhaps the most prominent, and communal reading and discussion of these texts was important.75 Still, the Church continued to regard such vernacular holy works as dangerous and would persecute those found in possession of them.76

Of all of the contemporary texts usually associated with the Lollards, few are better known than the popular alliterative poem *Piers Plowman*, by John Langland. While very little is known about Langland himself, it is generally believed that he was a cleric. Langland’s relationship to Lollardy is a complex one, and serves to outline the complexities of just what a Lollard was while demonstrating that many Lollard and Wycliffite views could be found both in orthodox circles and in society at large.

Langland, while remaining devoted to the church, shares many similarities with Wycliffe, including condemnation of avaricious, corrupt priests and praise of the value of hard work.77

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73 In 1408, official permission became required for the translation of the Bible into English, as well as its circulation and use. That permission was withheld. Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, 202-3.
Both share a similar biblicism, and in one striking passage, Langland even comes close to mirroring Wycliffe’s views on *dominium*:

> The nobles should have more sense than to transfer property from their heirs to Religious Orders; for the monks are quite unmoved though the rain falls on their altars! Even where they have parishes to care for they live at ease, with no pity for the poor—such is their boasted charity! But their domains are so wide that they think of themselves only as landlords.

Some of the parallels between Lollardy and Langland’s poem are so noticeable that in a later version, Langland had to remove various passages that came too close to outright support of Wycliffite views, including suggestions that laymen could have apostolic authority and praise of “poor preachers,” which was had become a term for Lollard. Although historians have generally refrained from calling Langland himself a Lollard, some, such as Andrew Cole, have questioned this. Cole has rightly argued that while other authors of his time spoke of the Lollards in divisive and black-and-white terms, Langland’s discussion of the “poor preachers” was actually highly nuanced and even-handed even in his revised later text, making sure to distinguish between Wycliffites who lived admirably simple and religious lives, and the wandering, lazy priest typified by the mendicant orders. Cole, in the end, does not explicitly state that Langland was a Lollard himself, but argues that “he [Langland] is not seeing “Lollardy” through the eyes of orthodoxy.”

*Piers the Plowman* is far from alone in lumping the mendicant orders in with the Wycliffites under the term “Lollard.” Many chroniclers and sermonists did the same. Just as contemporary public opinion was harsh toward lordly prelates, so *Piers Plowman* suggests that it

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was hardening toward the friars, who were coming to be perceived as lazy, uneducated idlers who begged when they were perfectly able to work.\textsuperscript{83} Wyclif himself shared this belief about the orders. The Wycliffite work ethic shows clear similarities to that later championed by the Protestants. As Langland’s own opinions and the changing attitude toward mendicants shows, this changing work ethic was not specific to Wyclif’s followers, but exhibits a changing trend in society at large. Still, this did not stop traveling Lollard preachers from being grouped in with the friars, whose dress and bearing was very similar.\textsuperscript{84} Essentially, while some Lollards criticized the mendicants, the mendicants were themselves sometimes classed as Lollards.

Piers Plowman is thus in many ways a perfect text with which to evaluate the Wycliffite work ethic and anti-clericalism. Piers, the symbol of the pious layman who works hard, does well by all, and lives a Christ-like life, is the hero in the end, while almost all of the churchmen portrayed are subject to immense criticism. At one point, Langland even criticizes the pope unfavorably in relation to Piers.\textsuperscript{85} It is thus the hard working, honest, layman that is celebrated by Langland, and in him that he finds an example of the good Christian life.

Langland’s text was certainly popular in Wyclif’s time and after. Indeed, it is arguable that it was too popular. When the Peasant’s Revolt broke out in 1381, Langland’s work, in particular the character of Piers Plowman himself, was used by the rebels to justify themselves. John Ball, a renegade priest and one of the leaders of the revolt, wrote bidding “Pers ploughman / go to his werk and chastise wel hobbe the robbere; and taketh Iohan Trewman and all hijs felawes and no mo, and loke shappe you to on heued and no mo.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus the fictional character

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{85} Langland, \textit{Piers Plowman}, 243.
of Piers, who in Langland is both a mystical figure and a paragon of simplicity and hard work, is
used by Ball as a polemical device, a larger-than-life person to whom to aspire.

John Ball is a central figure in the relationship between the revolt, Wycliffism, and
Langland’s text. Ball had been a thorn in the side of both church and state for many years before
the revolt. In a long career as a wandering populist preacher, he had been barred from speaking
in parishes and churches, excommunicated and eventually imprisoned. Walsingham wrote that,
upon his arrest, he prophesied “he would be set free by twenty thousand of his friends.”
Whether he actually said so is less relevant than the fact that this was exactly what happened.
The freeing of John Ball from prison was one of the earliest actions that the rebels took in 1381,
demonstrating the popularity of his social message, which, unlike his religious message, was
profoundly un-Wycliffite.

Many chroniclers used Ball as a platform from which to attack John Wyclif, and
considered him a committed Wycliffite. For example, Henry Knighton wrote about Wyclif that
“he had as his precursor John Balle, just as Christ’s precursor was John the Baptist. Balle
prepared the way for Wycliffe’s opinions and, as is said, disturbed many with his own
doctrines.” Thomas Walsingham and the author of the Fasciculi Zizaniorum also considered
Ball a devotee and teacher of “the perverse doctrines of the perfidious John Wycliffe.” The
latter even refers to a supposed confession which Ball had made after his capture. It alleged that
Ball had been a Wycliffite for the last two years, and that the Oxford theologian was the source
of his heretical views. If this confession truly existed, it would be the explicit link which could

88 Ibid.
91 “Fasciculi Zizanorum,” in The Peasant’s Revolt of 1381, 378.
tie the two neatly together. However, as R.B. Dobson points out, the authenticity of Ball’s confession is widely doubted. No copy of it survives, and Dobson writes that it seems impossible that a document of such importance would not be more widely referenced and printed.  

Despite the claims to the contrary, since nearly all of that is known about Ball comes from hostile chroniclers, it could be potentially misleading to assume that Ball considered himself a Wycliffite. Walsingham states that Ball had been preaching his views for twenty years prior to the events of the revolt, before Wyclif’s views had entered society at large. This suggests that even if, as the author of the Fasciculi asserts, Ball had been recently attracted to Wycliffite theology and incorporated it into own philosophy, his heterodoxy runs much deeper than simply being the messenger for a later heretic. His social philosophy, biblically based in the idea that all people were created equal by God, was radical for the time and diverged sharply from that of Wyclif, a nobleman who was protected and patronized by members of the royal house and the academic establishment at Oxford. Thus, it would be an oversimplification to refer to Ball as a Wycliffite.

Regardless of the degree to which Ball was or was not a Wycliffite, he was exactly the sort of vagrant preacher who tended to be lumped in with Wyclif’s followers under the umbrella of Lollardy. What Ball represents, whatever his exact theology, is the extreme example of Lollardy’s ties to friars and wandering preachers and the degree to which strict Wycliffism could blend with social grievance and existing heresy, complicating the picture of what exactly “Lollardy” meant.

By the lifetime of Margery Kempe in the fifteenth century, the word “Lollard” was being used to define Wycliffites not only by hostile sources, but also by the Wycliffites themselves.

92 Ibid.  
94 Ibid., 375.
Lollardy was an offense for which an unrepentant practitioner could be burned. After the shocks of the Oldcastle revolt and the earlier Peasant’s Revolt, the word had acquired a distinctly seditious ring. Still, the word “Lollard” remained culturally amorphous and continued to be construed beyond the bounds of Wycliffite theology. Kempe herself is an excellent example of this. Though some of her views and actions resembled Wycliffism, the similarities are slight. Yet Margery continued to be hounded as one of the most notorious Lollards in England.

The preaching and recitation of scripture was, as much as anything else, what landed Margery Kempe in trouble again and again, and the reason that she was accused repeatedly of Lollard activities. On one occasion in Canterbury Cathedral, after her loud weeping had led her husband to leave her alone there, Margery was approached by an old monk. The monk asked her what she knew of God, and she answered by telling a tale from scripture.95 The shocked monk, according to Kempe, told her, “I would you were enclosed in a house of stone so no man could speak with you.” When Kempe left the cathedral, some followed her out demanding that she be burned as a Lollard, a tense situation which was averted only by two passers-by who managed to help Kempe away from the scene. Even outside of England, where the speaking of scripture was not exacerbated by the fear of Lollardy, it was taboo. While on pilgrimage near Aachen in modern-day France, her weeping annoyed a group of pilgrims with whom she had been traveling and a monk chided her for it. She returned by quoting from the psalms, which infuriated everyone in the group and caused them to abandon her to make her pilgrimage alone.96 Kempe was always careful, however, to make it clear that her knowledge of the scripture did not come from reading of vernacular gospels, but rather from conversation with holy men—priest, clerks, confessors. For seven or eight years by her own count, Margery had the company of a local

95 Exactly which story she told is not stated. Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 21-22.
priest, who “read to her many a good book of high contemplation and other books, such as the Bible with doctors thereupon, Saint Bride’s book, Hilton’s book, Bonaventure, *Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris*, and such other.” Margery herself was illiterate. On occasion, those priests who shared this knowledge with her were rebuked for it themselves. Still, the specter of Lollardy made the sharing of such knowledge dangerous for Kempe, and put her in dangerous situations on multiple occasions. Her use of the scripture, which generally was used by her as a defense, only served to incriminate her further.

A common Lollard belief in Margery’s time was that anyone, of any sex or social station, who loved the word of God could preach. Margery’s outspoken nature and strong opinions on religious matters caused problems for her because she was not of the clergy, did not have permission to preach by the local authorities, and because she was a woman. Arguments against preaching by women go as far back as the writings of the church fathers, and served to reserve for the clergy the right to speak about scripture. As Kempe’s experience shows, many clerks bristled to see that privilege impinged upon. On one occasion in York, Kempe defended her use of Gospel to the archbishop by reciting from Luke 11:28: “Forsooth so they are blessed that hear the word of God and keep it.” To counter her, her detractors used Corinthians to argue that women should not preach, but she argued, “I preach not, sir, I go in no pulpit. I use but communication and good words, and that will I do while I live.” Even had she not been a woman, for a lay person to preach would have been frowned upon. In the 1409 response to the threat of Lollardy, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Arundel had passed a number of

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constitutions meant to keep heresy out of the universities and limit Lollard preaching. In the first constitution, Arundel opens with a plan to restrict preaching:

> We will and command, ordain and decree: That no manner of person, secular or regular…shall take upon him the office of teaching the word of God, or by any means preach unto the clergy or laity, whether within the church or without, in English, except he first present himself, and be examined by the ordinary of the place, where he preacheth: and so being found a fit person, as well in manners and knowledge, he shall be sent by the said ordinary to some one church or more, as shall be thought expedient by the said ordinary…. Nor any person aforesaid shall presume to preach, except he first give faithful signification, in due form, of his sending and authority.¹⁰³

Essentially, approval of the Church was now mandatory for any who wished to preach. Kempe thus walked a fine line by sharing her religious inspiration with others. Her gender and the legal bars upon preaching offered, if not a legitimate reason to punish her, were, at the very least a convenient way for Margery’s detractors to attempt to rid themselves of an irritant.

Margery Kempe also made trouble for herself by her dislike of the swearing of oaths, which caused her to admonish religious men on more than one occasion. While at Lambeth, the palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Margery even criticized the archbishop’s own staff, drawing the ire of the assembled clerks and causing one woman in attendance to threaten her, saying “I would you were in Smithfield, and I would bear a faggot to burn you with; It is a pity that you still live.”¹⁰⁴ With this comment, Margery is directly accused of being a Lollard. Smithfield was where the first burnings of Lollards occurred in 1401 and 1410. Indeed, the swearing of oaths was often criticized by Lollards, and the woman’s accusation is in this respect understandable. Undeterred, Kempe soon is invited to speak with Archbishop Arundel himself, to whom she repeats her criticism of his clerks. “My Lord,” she says, “our most high lord, almighty God, has not given your benefice and great goods of the world to maintain traitors to

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him and those who slay him every day by swearing great oaths. You shall answer for them unless you correct them or else put them out of your service.”

She had similar words for the household of the archbishop of York during her stay in the city, in response to the cruel words and accusations of Lollardy that were thrown at her.

Other than the swearing of oaths, and despite the hostility shown to her by many clergymen, Margery Kempe’s book mostly lacks the anticlericalism of the Lollards or even other late medieval texts such as Piers Plowman. However, the criticism of clerical excess and temporality that was common in late medieval Europe does show itself on occasion. During her audience with the Archbishop of York, Kempe relates a parable of her own, about a priest who is lying in a beautiful garden with a pear tree in the center, when he sees a bear come up and defecate on the tree. Unsettled by the sight of the beautiful tree being so befouled, he meets a wise old man dressed as a pilgrim, and tells him of the sight. The pilgrim explains to him:

Priest, you yourself are the pear tree, somewhat flourishing and flowering through saying your service and administering the sacraments though you do so undevotedly, for you take full little heed how you say your matins and your service, just so it is blabbered to an end. Then you go to your mass without devotion, and for your sin you have full little contrition…Afterward all the day after you mis-spend your time, you give yourself to buying and selling, chopping and changing, as if you were a man of the world. You sit at the ale, giving yourself to gluttony and excess, the lust of your body, through lechery and uncleanness. You break the commandments of God through swearing, lying, detraction, and backbiting, and the use of other such sins.

This passage is unique in The Book of Margery Kempe, as it addresses priestly temporality and immorality in ways similar to the Lollards and to Langland. The author of the book makes no more statements of this fashion anywhere else in the book, but its inclusion shows that Kempe

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 91.
107 Ibid., 94.
was familiar and to some extent sympathetic to that common strand of thought, and that she was not blind to injustice in the Church.

Thus, Margery Kempe bears many similarities to the Lollards of her day, as her contemporary detractors so frequently pointed out. As her reputation began to precede her, she was arrested multiple times under suspicion of Lollardy, and often faced the threat of burning. Shortly after her confrontation with the archbishop of York, she was even sought out by two yeomen of the Duke of Bedford, who were to be paid one hundred pounds for bringing to him “the greatest Lollard in all this country or about London either.”\footnote{Ibid., 95.} As she and the yeomen traveled, she was harassed by townsfolk of Hessle, who shouted their hope that she would be burned. It is even said later by the two men who had apprehended her that she was the daughter of Lord Cobham, by whom they presumably meant Sir John Oldcastle, the Lollard rebel of 1414.\footnote{Ibid., 95-7.} On multiple other occasions, she barely escaped further arrest.\footnote{Ibid., 100.}

However, despite these similarities and her reputation, Kempe was no Wycliffite. Firstly, she was never proven to be one. The Abbot of Leicester, the archbishop of York, and the archbishop of Canterbury himself interviewed her to test her orthodoxy, and each time she was determined not to be, if a nuisance, at least passably orthodox. Also, she genuinely respected the religious position of clergymen, even those opposed to her.\footnote{Some may argue that the respect shown to the clergy in The Book of Margery Kempe is over-amplified because clergymen were the ones responsible for putting Margery’s story into print. In contrast, I would argue that the very fact that she chose a clergyman to record her life illustrates certain respect for them. Whatever the truth of this, the events of her life argue forcefully for her respect for Church and clergy.} It is necessary to take into consideration the close, personal relationships that she had with numerous priests and confessors. If many clergymen were galled by her presumptuousness and shows of emotion, there were many others who genuinely enjoyed her company and remained friendly and supportive, and for
whom Kempe had only good words to say. Archbishop Arundel himself, who was an implacable enemy of the Lollards and wrote the constitutions that attempted to crack down on the movement, was impressed by Kempe during their interview in his garden. Even after Kempe’s bold words condemning his staff, the two carried an enjoyable discussion into nightfall.\textsuperscript{112} When Kempe, who claimed a mystical marriage with Christ, sought her husband’s permission to live chastely and wear the white garments of a virgin on Christ’s advice, she first had to get permission from the Church. For approval, she ended up approaching Philip Repingdon, the Bishop of Lincoln. Repingdon, who had been a theologian at Oxford and a proponent of Wycliffism, had been reprimanded at the Blackfriars council and briefly excommunicated before recanting his Lollardy. However, Repingdon later went on to a star career in the Church, serving as Chancellor of Oxford University, Regent Master of the Augustinian order, and confessor to king Henry IV, who initiated the persecution of the Lollards in 1401. Repingdon himself presided over a number of heresy trials, and would certainly have recognized Margery as a Wycliffite had she been one.\textsuperscript{113} Despite her reputation, Kempe and Bishop Repingdon got along well, and the bishop was more than willing to help her in her unusual request, suggesting that he at least considered her sufficiently orthodox. While in Constance during one of her many pilgrimages, Kempe sought out an English friar who was serving as the pope’s legate. She discussed her spiritual life with him for some time and received many comforting words.\textsuperscript{114} Thus, Margery Kempe consorted during her life with many important churchmen and enemies of heresy, and by each was judged to be perfectly Orthodox, if a little eccentric.

Kempe certainly considered herself a good daughter of the Church and respected its hierarchy and organization. Her life as dictated in \textit{The Book of Margery Kempe} shows how

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{113} Larsen, \textit{The School of Heretics: Academic Condemnation at the University of Oxford, 1277-1409}, 178-9.
\textsuperscript{114} Kempe, \textit{The Book of Margery Kempe}, 46.
different her beliefs were from the Wycliffites in matters of Church doctrine and religious life. During her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Kempe claimed to have been approached by Jesus while praying at the tomb of the Virgin Mary, who told her, “I am well pleased with you, daughter, for you stand under the obedience of Holy Church and because you will obey your confessor and follow his counsel, which through the authority of the Holy Church has pardoned you of your sins and absolved you.”

Margery also tells of a time when she was twenty years old, and:

She was ever hindered by her enemy, the devil, evermore saying to her that, while she was in good health, she needed no confession but could do penance by herself alone, and all should be forgiven, for God is merciful enough. And therefore this creature oftentimes did great penance in fasting on bread and water and other deeds of alms with devout prayers, except she would not show this sin in confession.

This is a direct upholding of Catholic practice, with the Church as the intermediary between the soul and God, and contradicts Wycliffite religious philosophy, which held that the individual needed no such mediator, but could receive through faith alone.

Kempe also displayed in her life great devotion to pilgrimages and images, another orthodox belief which set her apart from Wycliffite theology. She conducted multiple pilgrimages in her lifetime, to the Holy Land and to other parts of Europe. Wycliffites, however, held that pilgrimages were ineffective. She found great beauty in the worship of images as well, and relates one instance of this during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

When they came into good cities, she [a fellow pilgrim] took the image out of her chest and set it in worshipful wives’ laps. And they would put shirts thereupon and kiss it as though it had been God himself. And when the creature saw the

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115 Ibid., 53.
116 Ibid., 7.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 44-57, 167-77.
119 Throughout the Book, Kempe refers to herself consistently as a “creature,” in reference to herself as a creation of God, not as an animal.
worship and reverence that they gave to the image, she was taken with sweet devotion and sweet meditations so that she wept with great sobbing and loud crying.\textsuperscript{120}

Had Wyclif or another Lollard been in the same situation, it is most likely that the response would have been very different. Rather than worshipping God, the Wycliffite would have seen women worshipping an object with no divine quality, stealing glory from God rather than magnifying it.

Margery also believed firmly in the doctrine of transubstantiation, as shown by her interview with the Abbot of Leicester. Indeed, since the Eucharist was such a hot point of contention between Wycliffite and Catholic teaching, it is hardly surprising that this is the first question that the abbot asked of her to verify her orthodoxy. The forcefulness of her assent clearly shows how important her answer would be to her judgment. In addition, the weeping that preceded her confrontation outside of Aachen (see above, 17-18) was sparked by the sight of the Eucharist encased in crystal, near the feast day of Corpus Christi, which celebrates the sacrament.\textsuperscript{121} By Margery’s day, as Carolyn Walker Bynum has asserted, the Host\textsuperscript{122} had become an object of adoration in itself, and a symbol that frequently inspired such awe as it did in Margery.\textsuperscript{123}

The relationship between Margery Kempe and the Lollards is thus highly complex. Though Kempe was obviously not a Wycliffite in her religious life, she came to be widely known as a Lollard as her reputation grew. This suggests that, beyond the legal definition of Lollardy as an expression of Wycliffism, the populace at large tended to understand the word in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 57.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 171.
\item \textsuperscript{122} That is, the bread and wine which converted during transubstantiation into the flesh and blood of Christ.
\end{itemize}
a broader sense, as someone who held religious and social views which contradicted those common at the time.

Curiously, Kempe herself never has much to say about the Lollards. When they are mentioned, it is through the mouth of another, and in the form of an accusation. Her own opinion on the movement is never explicitly stated, nor is Wyclif ever mentioned. For someone as opinionated as Kempe regarding the Christian life, this seems strange. It is possible that this is an example of what Helen Bari has asserted regarding the *Digby Lyrics*, another contemporary religious text that fails to mention Lollardy. Bari terms this silence a “textual excommunication,” which condemns the movement by consciously ignoring it, and underlining the necessity of reform within Church structure.\(^{124}\)

Neither John Ball nor Margery Kempe were pure Wycliffites. But were they Lollards? To an extent, the answer is both yes and no, based on whether one wishes to speak of Lollardy in a purely legal sense, or a broader cultural one. Though Wycliffism was at the heart of what Lollardy was understood to be, this is not entirely the case. The word was often applied to non-Wycliffites. Ball and Kempe thus both complicate the relationship between Lollardy and Wycliffism. This relationship is generally thought to be fairly straightforward—respectively, they are the academic and cultural manifestations of a similar set of beliefs. However, this is a generalization, and I believe that the term should be defined more loosely. The life of John Ball shows that Wycliffite theology could be melded with a revolutionary political philosophy entirely alien to it. Additonally, Ball represents the inclusion of the mendicant orders into early definitions of Lollardy that had been made clear by Langland and other chroniclers. Kempe’s story is important for how it shows the difference between the legal and cultural definitions of

Lollardy, the latter of which was capable of moving beyond Wycliffism to characterize Lollards as representing a number of varying kinds of sedition or unusual religious belief.
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