

VERNACULAR APOCALYPTIC: ON *THE LANTERNE OF LIȜT*

Nicholas Watson
Harvard University

ABSTRACT

The Lanterne of Liȝt's reputation as an archetypal product of the middle phase of the Lollard movement is confirmed in the main studies devoted to the text, those by Lilian Swinburn from 1917 and Anne Hudson. Hudson depicts *The Lanterne of Liȝt* as belonging to what she calls the "confessional mould," whose goal is to provide a more or less comprehensive Wycliffite creed. She thus uses the text both to flesh that creed out and to look for information on the topic of Lollard education. My aim in this reading of *The Lanterne of Liȝt* is to worry this depiction a little by pointing to some problems that emerge when we look both at the text and at the articles condemning it more closely, and then to think about the implications of these problems for our understanding of the Lollard movement.

KEY WORDS: *The Lanterne of Liȝt*, Lollardy, Henry Chichele, Arundel's *Constitutions*, vernacular language, book trade, devotional works.

RESUMEN

La reputación de *The Lanterne of Liȝt* como producto arquetípico de la fase media del movimiento lolardo ha sido confirmada por los dos principales estudios dedicados al texto: el de Lilian Swinburn de 1917, y el de Anne Hudson. Hudson muestra *The Lanterne of Liȝt* como perteneciente a lo que ella denomina "molde confesional," cuya finalidad es proporcionar un credo wyclifita más o menos íntegro. Utiliza, pues, el texto para añadir consistencia a lo que sabemos sobre tal credo e información sobre el tema de la educación lolarda. Mi propósito en la lectura de *The Lanterne of Liȝt* es cuestionar esta perspectiva y señalar algunos de los problemas que surgen cuanto consideramos atentamente el texto en relación con los artículos que lo condenaron y pensamos en las implicaciones de estos problemas para nuestro entendimiento del movimiento lolardo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *The Lanterne of Liȝt*, lolardismo, Henry Chichele, *Las constituciones* de Arundel, lengua vernácula, comercio de libros, obras devocionales.

In August 1415, an elderly London skinner of some standing named John Claydon was burned as a relapsed heretic on the orders of the archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chichele, largely for possessing a copy of a vernacular treatise called



The Lanterne of Liȝt, and for saying that he agreed with its contents. Where and by whom it had been written is not known, but *The Lanterne of Liȝt* must have been almost brand new when Claydon had his handsome parchment copy made for him by a scribe called John Gryme, who spent two days reading it over and correcting it with Claydon before it was bound. Both the two surviving manuscripts of the text and its 1535 print (see note 2) refer in some detail to what must be Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409 (see below), and Claydon's arrest—which seems to have happened because the text excited him so much that he could not stop talking about it—brought it to the attention of the authorities for the first time. After obtaining Claydon's admission that he agreed with the book and had it read to him often, Chichele had it examined by four friars, Thomas Palmer, John Lamley, Richard Donington and Thomas Winchilsea, who drew up a list of errors in fifteen Articles. This list—which survives in Chichele's *Register* and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*—confirmed the reported opinion of Thomas Falkener, the Mayor of London who ordered Claydon's arrest, that the book was “the worst and the most perverse that ever he did read or see.” According to the Articles, which I somewhat compress here, *The Lanterne of Liȝt* identifies the Court of Rome with the head of the Antichrist, the bishops with his body, and the “new sects” of monks, canons, and friars—which should be dissolved, as Christ sought to root out the Pharisees—with the Antichrist's tail. It also speaks out against sumptuous decoration and elaborate singing in churches, the insatiable begging of the friars, the sale of indulgences, the veneration of images, and the requirement that preachers must have a license from their bishops. It argues that alms should only be given to the virtuous; insists that obedience is owed to prelates only if they “keep vigil in sacred prayer for the souls of those in their care, in order to give the lord a faithful account of them”; describes the Church as consisting solely of the congregation of faithful souls, who are predestined to salvation, not of all the baptized, both elect and reprobate; and denies, so the Articles claim, the doctrine of transubstantiation. On the basis of this characterization and Claydon's earlier general statement of support for the book, Chichele had Claydon burned without further ado, depriving him of his right to speak in his own defense (as others in his situation were allowed to do), while bestowing on him his posthumous role as proto-Protestant martyr and sealing *The Lanterne of Liȝt* reputation as a typical product of the middle phase of the Lollard movement.¹

¹ See *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*, ed. E.F. JAMES, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947) 132-8, which lists the condemned articles in full; *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. George Townsend (New York: AMS P, 1965), Volume 3.531-5 offers a less-than-accurate translation of the Register, whose theological terms are occasionally actively misleading. John Claydon's career as a dissenter is reconstructed in various passages of Margaret ASTON, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon P, 1984); and in Charles KIGHTLY, “The Early Lollards: A Survey of Popular Lollard Activity in England, 1382-1428,” Diss. U of York, 1975.

This reputation is confirmed in both the modern studies that make significant use of the text, Lilian Swinburn's pioneering edition for the Early English Text Society from 1917 and Anne Hudson's *Premature Reformation*.² Hudson depicts *The Lanterne of Li Lizt* as one of a group of Lollard works in what she calls the "confessional mould," whose goal is to provide a comprehensive Wycliffite creed: the creed, as she sees it, of a sectarian religious group which is no longer merely a radical party within the Church but has now become convinced of its status *as* that Church. She thus uses the text both to flesh this Lollard creed out and to look for information on the topic of Lollard education (reasonably enough, since the education of devout illiterates like Claydon is the text's clear aim). My own aim in this preliminary reading of *The Lanterne of Lizt* is to worry this approach to the text a little by pointing to some problems that emerge when we look both at the text more closely, and then briefly considering the implications of these problems for our understanding of the Lollard movement. There can be no denying that *The Lanterne of Lizt* is a truly radical text (in a strict etymological sense), which does say much of what the theologians who examined it claimed it says, and which understandably generated in the civil and ecclesiastical authorities a furious determination to expunge it—for its identification of the current ecclesiastical hierarchy and the orders of monks, friars and canons with the Antichrist; for its subversive analysis of the true nature of obedience to superiors; and for its specific critiques of contemporary liturgical practice. In view not only of its ideas but of the lucidity and often beauty with which it expounds them, it is not surprising that Chichele was anxious to deprive Claydon of a platform for publicizing the book's doctrines by allowing him to speak in his own defense (unless it was that his status as an *illeteratus* made this idea preposterous). But the strictly theological grounds on which the text was condemned were weak, and Chichele and his theologians knew they were weak. Hudson and Swinburn both point out that the crucial article claiming that *The Lanterne of Lizt* denies the doctrine of transubstantiation is a chimera, which links the text's teaching with a central tenet of Wyclif's thought only by

² Anne HUDSON, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988) (this contains several discussions of the *Lanterne*, but see especially 211-14); *The Lanterne of Lizt*, ed. Lilian M. Swinburn, Early English Text Soc., OS 151 (London: Oxford UP, 1917). Quotations from the *Lanterne* are taken from Swinburn's edition, with references to page and line numbers; for ease of reading, I have eliminated "thorn" and "yogh," and regularized u/v and i/j variation and the ampersand ("&"), but for reasons that will become clear have kept MS punctuation, including use of the symbols "/" and "||." Swinburn edited London, British Library MS Harley 2324, and I have spot-checked her edition against the manuscript, and against the other surviving manuscript, Harley 6613. The printed edition by R. Redman (1535) is also useful (Short Title Catalogue 15225), but varies in certain respects; for a study (emphasizing similarities more than differences), see Anne HUDSON, "No Newe Thyng': The Printing of Medieval Texts in the Early Reformation Period," *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis*, ed. Douglas Gray & E.G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) 153-174.





forcing its meaning. Actually, the text endorses no specific eucharistic theology, and accepts all seven traditional sacraments, as it accepts the idea of purgatory.³ But as I shall show, Hudson and Swinburn are wrong to endorse the claim of Chichele's board of theologians that *The Lanterne of Lizt* gives a rigidly predestinarian and hence sectarian view of the Church.⁴ The text does describe the Church eschatologically or anagogically—viewing it from the perspective of an imminent Day of Judgement—but it never implies that some baptized are predestined to salvation and others preknown (*prescitus*) to damnation, and I see nothing unorthodox in its salvation theology. Even the text's identification of the ecclesiastical hierarchy with the Antichrist is polemical and political, rather than embodying a theological claim. Its case is that the present-day officers of the Church, especially prelates and members of the religious orders, are irredeemably corrupt, rather than that the offices themselves are and always have been illegitimate (although it does come close to making this more extreme claim about the religious orders). In short, it proves remarkably difficult to pinpoint any precise moment in the text where its radicalism can be shown to be strictly "heretical," according to formal theological definitions of that word. What I want to suggest in the outline given here, then, is that Chichele did not have Claydon so summarily burned on the confident grounds that *The Lanterne of Lizt* was too heretical for any other punishment to be merited, but, more anxiously, on the opposite grounds: that despite the threat its vernacular exposition of a radical ecclesiology represented and the obvious need to get rid of it, it was not clear how the text was heretical at all.

The Lanterne of Lizt is constructed as a thirteen-chapter exposition of the structure of the Church and the nature of its desecration by the Antichrist during the Last Times before the Day of Judgement, the times in which the text situates its composition and readers. Since "who that wole not resceyve Crist; in peyne of synne he is compellid and constreyned to resceyve Anticrist," and since the presence of Antichrist is revealed in many aspects of the contemporary Church's life—both in its general corruption and in specific perversions like the constraints imposed by Arundel's *Constitutions*—it is as well that "in this tyme of hidouse derknes somme seeken the lanterne of *Lizt*," the same lantern the book holds aloft for all to see (4.8-11). Like the author, who compares himself to the apostles—who "weren not graduat men in scolis / but the Holi Goost sodenli enspirid hem; and maden hem plenteuous of heuenli loore"—those who seek the light are often not

³ See *Premature Reformation* 211, note 210; Swinburn *Lanterne*, x, note 3. On the number of the Sacraments, see 35.7-8: "Fulfille thou thi mynsterie; mynstring the sevene sacramentis freeli;" on Purgatory, see 35. 25-28: "Whilis this liif durith in erthe; this chirche is clepid. Militaunt / And whanne it slepith in purgatory; thanne is sche clepid the chirche slepand / But whanne sche hath rest of al hir traveile; thanne is sche clepid the chirche triumphaunt."

⁴ See HUDSON *Premature Reformation*, 318-320, which, I shall suggest, is mistaken in accepting the theological reading of the *Lanterne* given in the Articles as accurate.



the learned (5.16-17).⁵ The text does employ certain academic devices, especially those of the proof text (almost always quoted first in Latin, not a practice invariably followed in Middle English radical texts) and of the *distinctio*; in a sense, the whole of *The Lanterne of LiȒt* is no more than a sustained *distinctio* on the words “Antichrist” and “Church,” and Claydon and his scribe’s concern for the correctness of Claydon’s copy is in keeping with the text’s careful and, in a sense, learned self-presentation. But the light shone by this textual lantern, must, if it is to reach all those who need it, be a vernacular light: “For as fer as the light of this lanterne schineth; so fer derkness of synne and cloudis of the fendis temptaciouns vanischen away and moun not abide / And algatis whanne the lanterne lightneth into the hert; it purgeth and clensith from corrupcioun / it swagith and heelith goostli soris.”

In pursuit of these benefits, all the text’s care is thus for its pertinence to the reader, relevance to the times in which it is written, and accessibility. The Middle English translations the text gives of its Latin quotations —especially those from Scripture— are thus defiantly indifferent to the scholarly standards of exactitude evolved by the translators of the Wycliffite Bible, wrenching proofs texts into strange shapes to fit the needs of arguments in a fashion that seems a good distance from the careful exegetical reasoning of earlier Lollard writing, even at its most polemical. The most important example, structurally, is the interpretation, early in the *Lanterne*, of Psalm 9.21, “*Constitue domine legis latorem super eos.*” This is used as a proof text for the assertion that “the first saught [assault] of anticrist is constitucioun,” then translated as, “Lord, suffre thou to ordeyne a lawemaker upon the peple; in peyne of her synne. for thei wole not consent to the trouthe” (17.19-22) before being applied to the 1409 *Constitutions* of Arundel, largely by means of a silently assumed pun on the first word of the verse, *constitue*. In the succeeding exposition, Arundel implicitly becomes the “lawemaker,” while the “Lord,” startlingly, merges with the figure of the Antichrist:

That is thus to mene. Anticrist useth fals lucratif or wynnynng lawis as ben absoluciouns. indulgence. pardouns. privelegis. and alle othir heuenli tresour. that is brought in to sale for to spoile the people of her worldli goodis / And principali these newe constitutiouns. bi whos strengthe anticrist enterditith chirchis. sumneth prechours. suspendith resceyvours. and priveth hem ther benefice. cursith hearars. and takith away the goodis of hem. that fortheren the precheing of a prest; yhe though it were an aungel of hevене. but if that prest schewe the mark of the beest. the whiche is turned in to a newe name. and clepid a special lettir of lisencc; for the more blyndyng of the lewid peple. (17.22-18.4)

For the *Lanterne* author, the climate of persecution and control which the *Constitutions* engendered is, perhaps, what makes such eschatologically particular reading of Scripture necessary. Indeed, as the legislation that has rendered the

⁵ REDMAN’S 1535 edition omits this passage; Harley 6613 omits all but the first clause.



Lanterne's own brand of unlicensed "apostolic" evangelism both illegal and newly important, the *Constitutions* are themselves a proof text of the *Lanterne's* assertion that the Antichrist's reign over the Church is truly begun. In the rest of the passage, which continues to draw on schematically slanted translations of passages of Scripture, "constitucioun" is but the first of Antichrist's five final assaults, succeeded by "tribulacioun," "Inquisiscioun," "persecucioun," and "execucioun," all of them well under way as the text is written, and all leading up to what the text presents as an imminent end: the overthrow of the Antichrist, the conversion of Christian and Jews, and the reign of God on earth (17-22). As a text in part generated by the *Constitutions* and surrounded (as John Claydon found out) by the "hidouse derknes" of tribulation, inquisition, persecution and execution, the *Lanterne* is thus itself to be taken as a sign of the imminent end.

As striking as its use of Scripture is the care that has gone into the text's layout, punctuation, and especially its prose, whose seductive eloquence must have been one of the major reasons the text was examined and burned. The semi-regular rhythmic prose of much of the *Lanterne* makes the whole text as evocatively imprecise as its translations from Scripture. In this prose style, periodic units are subdivided into two clauses (like the two halves of a verse of the Psalms), each containing three or four primary stresses. (This structure, which slightly resembles that of alliterative verse or semi-verse such as is found in *The Lay Folks's Catechism*, but which I have not found in other Middle English prose texts, is scrupulously articulated by the punctuation of both the surviving manuscripts.) Passages written in these pairs of clauses are typically organized around a dichotomy between the true and the false, or around the application of an extended metaphor. Here, for example, is part of a comparison between the sea—into which the net of the earthly Church has been cast in order to draw up good and evil alike—and the Seven Deadly Sins, which weaves trochaic and iambic patterns (sometimes with a second unstressed syllable) into a singsong cadence:

As the tempestis of the see; ben hidouse and perilouse for the nett / So pride that
wawith in this world; is ful noiouse to Cristis chirche / of beaute of fortune of
goodis of grace; al dai men bollen in highenes of herte //

The see watir is al bittir; and ful sowrische in the tasting / And this world is ful of
envie; that is ful bittir for to taast / with haate as bittir as the soot; that noon
unneth can corde with othir //

On the see cometh grevouse stormes; with pirwittis that greven soore / And in this
world riseth wratthe; with hanger of herte that doith miche tene //

In the see no grasse mai growe; neither as fer as it may flowe / but it wastith al the
grounde; and makith it nakid withouten fruyte / And in this world is vicious
slouthe; that stroieth vertues in bodi and soule / And makith man foltid in hise
wittes; in every parte where ever he strecche //

(The last paragraph in particular also uses rhyme and assonance.) In very many passages such as these, *The Lanterne of Ligt* insists on its pertinence to all by organizing its prose so scrupulously for the ear more than the eye. According to Chichele's *Register*, Claydon's first encounter with the text was when he heard part

of it delivered as a sermon, and this prose style does seem to belong to a public, more than a private, mode of address: a mode suitable both for learning by heart and for recitation to small groups such as those the *Register* tells us gathered on feastdays to hear it in Claydon's household.⁶ Whether or not Claydon was truly illiterate, it is not surprising he should have preferred to listen to its carefully memorable vernacular cadences.

Given this emphasis on accessibility, it is equally unsurprising that *The Lanterne of Lizt* should be so explicitly interested in defending the use of the vernacular against those who would prohibit that use. Such is the text's sense of apocalyptic crisis, though, that rather than arguing for the legitimacy of scriptural translation (as did other vernacular works in circulation in London around the time of its composition), it presents a world in which this argument is already lost, and the composition and circulation of vernacular books leads almost inevitably to their destruction:⁷

Ayen this comaundement; the fende in his membris / settith wacche and bisie spie; where that he may fynde / ony peple that wole rede; prive or apert/ Goddis lawe in Engliche; that is oure modir tunge / anoon he schal be sumned; to come aforne his iuggis / to answeare what is seide to him; and bring his book with him / and either he must forsake his book; and reding of Engliche / and algatis he schal forswere; to speke of holi writ // Thei sein lyve as thi fadir dide; and that is ynow for thee / or ellis thou schalt prisoun; as if thou were an heretike / and suffre paynes many and strong; and ful lickli the deeth / but tho wilt revoke thi worde; and make an open wondirment / at thi parische chirche at home; or in comune place // And with this thei prisoun; many an houngrly soule / wherof growith in this rewme; a grevous goostli moreyn // (100.1-13)

In this passage—which is from ch. 12's very lengthy exposition of the Ten Commandments—*The Lanterne of Lizt* anticipates both its own fate and the fate of readers like Claydon, pre-scripting the process by which its appeal to the many would be kept from all but the few by the machinations of the limbs of the Antichrist. Again, the text presents itself as thoroughly involved in the apocalyptic world it describes, its own persecution and likely destruction a necessary part of the End Times.

Despite its use in preaching and for public reading, the genre of *The Lanterne of Lizt* is that of the personal compendium or manual often called in Middle English a “form of living”: It contains instructions on how to live one's life, in a handy,

⁶ See *Register of Henry Chichele* 133-35. The Register's account of Claydon's hearing “a sermon preached at Horsleydown [in Southwark] which was written in this book [the *Lanterne*]” may be the closest the historical record can bring us to the author of the *Lanterne*, perhaps the most likely candidate to have preached this sermon.

⁷ See, e.g., *The Holi Prophete David Seith*, excerpted in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor & Ruth Evans (University Park: Penn State UP, 1999), except 2.5.



one-volume format like that of Richard Rolle's *Emendatio Vitae* or *Form of Living*, or *Pore Caitif*, or the early fifteenth-century *Fervor Amoris*, and both Claydon's copy and the two surviving manuscripts are small handbooks, created for individual users, in which it is the only text.⁸ Like these devotional works, it cultivates an intimate relationship with the individual user whose roots are in monastic traditions of spiritual friendship and the genre of the spiritual epistle; this is a more overtly affective text than we tend to associate with Lollard writing, engages a wider range of emotions, and often seems designed to comfort as much as to inform. *The Lanterne of Lizt* also covers quite a bit of the traditional syllabus of religious truths systematized in Pecham's Syllabus of 1281, outlined by texts like *The Lay Folk's Catechism*, and often acknowledged by texts in the "form of living" tradition; besides its analyses of the six qualities of the Antichrist and anatomization of the Christian's Armour of God, for example, it devotes much space to listing and describing the Seven Deadly Sins and the Ten Commandments.⁹ In short, there is no difficulty in aligning the text with the powerful English tradition of pastoral writing whose vernacular starting-point is *Ancrene Wisse* and whose aim is to cultivate the piety of individual readers by telling them in detail how they can remove themselves from the world and cultivate a life of inner holiness in separation from the sinfulness of their surroundings.¹⁰

Most of what is radical about *The Lanterne of Lizt* comes from its identification of the "world," as it is viewed in this spiritual tradition, with the institutional Church. Just as there are several ways of thinking about the Antichrist—and it takes a careful eschatological reading of the present to see that now the fullest manifestation of the Antichrist is upon us, the last hour imminent—so *The Lanterne of Lizt* distinguishes three forms of the Church: the Church of those who will finally attain salvation—that is, the true Church, whose membership is presently unknown; the "material" or institutional Church—that is, the Church as it appears on earth; and the Church of the devil, headed by the Antichrist—that is, the evil principle at work in the earthly Church, and those who uphold it (appropriately, this third, diabolic Church is given the final ch. 13). When the devil is seen as being in partial command of the world—as he sometimes is, for example, in Rolle's writings—the problem of self-separation from that world is largely a matter of

⁸ See *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, Early English Text Soc., OS 293 (Oxford: Early English Text Soc., 1988); Mary Teresa BRADY, "The *Pore Caitif*: Edited from MS Harley 2336 with Introduction and Notes," Diss. Fordham U, 1954; *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, ed. Margaret Connolly, Early English Text Soc., OS 303 (Oxford: Early English Text Soc., 1994).

⁹ The *Lanterne* lists the twelve articles of the Creed (31.4-16), the Seven Sins (44.16-45.21), and the Commandments (ch. 12), and alludes to the Sacraments, the Corporal Works of Mercy and other items in Pecham's Syllabus.

¹⁰ On this tradition, see Nicholas WATSON, "'With the Heat of the Hungry Heart': Empowerment in *Ancrene Wisse*," *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler & Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell UP), forthcoming.

force: the world is tempting in its gifts of sensuality, power and wealth, but not hard to distinguish from the path of righteousness. But when the devil is seen as in partial command of the *Church* —as he is in *The Lanterne of Lizt*— the major problem is one of discernment, of the danger that the practices and attitudes inculcated by the devil's church will disguise themselves successfully as holy attitudes. Thus most of the rhetorical energy of *The Lanterne of Lizt* has to be directed towards comparing and distinguishing the first and the third of the Churches it describes, the Church of God and the Church of the devil, and many parts of the book are organized around such an opposition.

For example, ch. 12's account of the Ten Commandments describes them under the unusual rubric "Persecucioun," giving much more space to the Devil's perversions of the Commandments than to their true meaning. After a brief exposition of "I am the Lord thi God... bifore me thou schalt not have noon alien goddis," the text moves quickly on to its real interest, how "the fende hath leied twoo snaris" against this commandment, "and in hem he caccheth the peple; that thei moun not scape / but othir they musten grant his wille; or elles thei schal to prisoun" (81-2):

The firste is clepid obedience; that the fende chalengeth cheveli to be don to him; or to hise leeftenantis / as to prelatys or to prestys; that ben hise officeris / and asken this obedience; what ever thei comaunde / that symple men obeye to hem; in hiye and in lowe // Al this world crieth lowid; aftir this obedience / And seyn, 'Whatever thi sovereyn biddith; thou schalt obeye therto.' (82.6-11)

What follows is not polemic but careful (and politically daring) analysis of the true meaning of obedience as involving submission to the principles properly represented by the bishop, sovereign, or parent to whom obedience is owed, rather than as an attitude that is spiritually worthy in itself. Superiors must therefore be obeyed only if their commands are morally right: "If thei bidde the contrarie; to God and to his lawe / thanne seie thus: 'I must rather obeie to the lord of the soule; than to the lord of the bodi'" (84.12-14). The present-day prelacy belongs to the Antichrist rather than God in large part because it tries to enforce the other kind of obedience, to be lord of the soul as well as the body, and the *Lanterne* is in large part written to denounce this attitude as a snare of the devil.

Even though *The Lanterne of Lizt* confines itself to verbal attacks on sinful institutions and preaches against more activist forms of resistance, proclaiming that God himself will shortly provide a remedy (21-22), this was burning talk in early fifteenth-century England, especially in the context of the text's direct challenge to the legitimacy of Arundel's *Constitutions*.¹¹ But suspicion of the monastic ideal of obedience is ancient, going back to the Desert Fathers and articulated clearly in the

¹¹ For a historical overview, see Peter McNIVEN, *Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV: The Burning of John Badby* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1987).

writings of Rolle; in one sense, the author is here simply preferring an eremitic to a coenobitic way of framing the spiritual life.¹² More important, this attack on the prelacy is not an attack on the idea of the institutional itself, despite the attempt made by the examining theologians to read the text as espousing a clear (and heretical) distinction between the true Church of the predestined and the institutional Church of the baptized.¹³ For the whole problem that necessitates the work's writing is that the few who strive to be members of the Church of God are fully involved with the institutional Church, whose role is to gather all the baptized from the wild sea of the world and offer them hope of salvation, even though few take it. Antichrist has invaded the Church from above, and taken over much of the ecclesiastical superstructure —though the *Lanterne* gives no hint that such a superstructure is invalid. At the parish level, the text's readers are expected to speak out against abuses and defend themselves from the devil's snares, but are assumed to be participants, full members of an undivided, if corrupted, Catholic church. It is because they cannot be sure whether they will resist corruption and so gain salvation that the text is urgently important to them.

Hudson and Swinburn both tend to assume that the text's readers are in the enviable position of considering themselves confidently as members of the first Church, the Church of God, by dint of their divine election; in other words, they follow the articles of condemnation in viewing *The Lanterne of Lizt* as the product of a sect that had, by 1410, quite fully separated itself conceptually and organizationally from the English Church. Yet the text is indignant at such accusations that reformist religion is fundamentally separatist, and goes out of its way to describe how the second (material or institutional) Church can be aligned with the first Church, that of God:

Here schullen we telle; hou the good of the secounde chirche / acordith with the firste chirche; appropurid to God / Feith. hope. and charite; as we han seid afor / knytten God and man togidir; in oonhed of this chirche / this knott is knitt so sikerli; that it schal never more faile / neither here ne ellis-where. (74.6-10)

To make the three-fold chord of faith, hope and charity that can bind the earthly Church to the Church of God, requires “a chaast bodi. a clene soule. and

¹² Rolle distinguishes favorably between solitaries like himself who have declared a *propositum singulare* (an intention to be solitaries) and monks who live under vows as *obedienciarum*. True humility lies in refusing the abjection of obedience in order to attain perfection. See Nicholas WATSON, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), especially ch. 6.

¹³ “Fifth: that nobody predestined to salvation is a member of the Church, but only the person who is finally to merit salvation, since the Church is nothing other than the congregation of faithful souls, who pursue and will persist in pursuing faith and charity both in deeds and in words” (*Register of Henry Chichele* 136). This analysis makes nonsense of the text's careful tripartite distinction of the meanings of “Church.”

goodis treweli disposid / thanne it schal be eekid. with good worde. holi thought. and a perfigte ded / moreovere we must large forthe; schrifte of mouthe. sorow of herte. and amendis makyng”—and so on (74.15-18). The reference here to “schrifte of mouthe,” to oral confession as a prerequisite for membership of the first Church, is a particularly telling instance of the author’s commitment to a traditional understanding of the sacraments, and willingness to disagree with some of his reformist colleagues on specific issues. I see nothing here that would not have thrilled a pre-Wycliffite reformer like Langland or the author of *Book to a Mother*.¹⁴ It is only the text’s explicitness, the product of its apocalyptic sense of impending doom, that gives it a courageous radicalism many other reformist texts avoided.

In conclusion: I have here been concerned to stress the continuities between what we will surely continue to call a “Lollard” work—even though *The Lanterne of Lizt* itself hates this word (11.11)—and broader reformist thinking, and to suggest that what late-medieval prelates and sixteenth-century Protestant hagiographers viewed as a coherent sect which proclaimed a systematic body of doctrines was actually much more heterogeneous and closely tied to the institutional Church. The category “heresy” continues to seem to me problematic as a way of approaching Lollard thought, because of how it replicates a simplification anti-Lollard writers insistently promoted at the time. As we have seen, Chichele’s theologians actually had to invent formal theological errors and impose them on *The Lanterne of Lizt* to get the text out of the way. The term “heresy” was a rhetorical tool used by both sides in the late-medieval English dispute about religious reform to insist on their own rightness and to deny the sinister similarity between almost all their own views and those of their opponents. I am not convinced that good history can be written using it in a descriptive way. Lollard writing is varied and operates on a continuum with other vernacular reformist texts, if indeed we accept the distinction between Lollard and reformist in the first place.¹⁵ As I hope I have shown, the style of Lollard prose is equally varied, and deserves more attention than it has had so far.

I close with a quotation from the devotional ending of *The Lanterne of Lizt*, as a final example of its highly distinctive style, and of the urgent hopefulness of its salvation theology:

Netheles assay in this liif; if ye may leeve the fendis chirche / and brynge youre silf bothe bodi and soule; in to the chirch of Iesu Crist / while grace and mercy may be grauntid; axe of him that offrid him silf / upon a cros with wilful cheere; to save us

¹⁴ “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-woman: Devotion and Dissent in *A Book to a Mother*,” *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000).

¹⁵ Here I respectfully disagree with R.M. SWANSON, “Literacy, Heresy, History, and Orthodoxy: Perspectives and Permutations for the Later Middle Ages,” *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, ed. Peter Biller & Anne Hudson, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).



alle whanne we were loost / For thus it is writen of the wordis of God; that he
spekith to a synful soule / Cant. vi. 'Revertere revertere. Sunamitis' / turne thee
ayen turne thee ayen thou synful soule; turne thee ayen. turne thee ayen. that we
may bihilde thee... yee that desiren in al youre myght; to fynde and have the mercy
of God / and se his gracious face in blisse; ye must have watir of verry penaunce /
from youre herte with ful contricioun; of wille nevere to turne to synne / and if
that ye wil be trewe; and no more breeke this covebant / God wole not that ye be
deed; but that ye have everelastyng liif.

Amen amen. so mot it be. Eende.¹⁶



¹⁶ A version of this paper was first given at a session organized by the Lollard Society at the Kalamazoo International Medieval Congress, in May, 2000, and represents my preliminary findings on its subject-matter. I hope to undertake a more extended study elsewhere.

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