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Presidential Scholars Thesis

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Church and State in the Early Fifteenth Century:

Henry V's Persecution of the Lollards

Henry V is often remembered for his battles in France and as the heroic figure portrayed in Shakespeare's plays. Yet the golden hero of English history began his reign faced with domestic, religious, and political challenges. Henry IV's usurpation of the crown ushered in the fifteenth century, and his son recognized that the support of the church could help ensure the stability of the Lancastrian reign. Domestic turbulence was exacerbated by the growing development of a fairly new phenomenon in England: heresy. In this paper, I will argue that Henry V chose to side with the church against the heretical Lollards not simply out of religious duty but because it helped strengthen the political stability of his reign in England which the Lollards were undermining. After showing how the Lollards were perceived as contributing to political unrest in England, I will examine the specific steps which Henry took in response to this movement, culminating in the suppression of the 1414 uprising led by Sir John Oldcastle. This suppression served a double political purpose: not only was Henry able to eliminate the political threat of the Lollards by persecuting them according to the church's wishes, but he was able to enhance his political control over the church itself by this persecution.

Modern historians often treat Lollardry under Henry V as either a chapter in the life of the king, an epilogue to a life of Wycliffe, or a prologue to the Reformation. In this project I hope to combine these views and explore Lollardry during the reign of King Henry V from a variety of angles. I have gathered

material from works on Henry V, Wycliffe, and Lollardry and tried to separate fact from fiction. Fortunately, scholars have spent considerable time assessing the reliability of the primary accounts.

By compiling different interpretations of Henry V and the Lollards, I hope to explore fully the interaction between crown, church, and heretics in the early years of the fifteenth century in England in an effort to show the political motives that influenced Henry V's persecution of the Lollards. England in the early fifteenth century provides one example of the way in which the state exploited religion. Henry V assumed active leadership in the persecution of the Lollards in accordance with the doctrine of the Catholic church, not out of pure spiritual motivation but as a means of solidifying his kingship. My purpose is to examine this political element in Henry's decision to persecute this group.

Before the fourteenth century, England had been largely free of heretical opposition to orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine. Then, in the last half of the fourteenth century, Oxford scholar John Wycliffe raised a challenge in the church that spread far beyond his academic setting, spurring people from all backgrounds--lay and clerical alike--to become attentive to their own personal consciences and dissent to Catholic doctrine if they felt that it strayed from Jesus' apostolic teachings.

Wycliffe's heretical teachings began rather late in his career, and his views became increasingly unacceptable to the

Catholic Church. He touched upon many subjects, especially highlighting the abuses of the priests and hierarchy. He threatened the supremacy of the priesthood by his ideas of dominion by grace, which required that the priest be pure in soul before he could exercise dominion over his flock. Wycliffe believed that pilgrimages, images, and indulgences should be abolished, that the church should not amass secular wealth, and that the word of God should be translated into English for all to read. It was this appeal to the laity that was the greatest danger to the church. Unlike earlier critics, Wycliffe "was prepared to leap the academic fence and appeal to highly placed laymen to enforce what his fellow clerics would not yield."¹

He won the support of John of Gaunt and some others in the nobility by his proposals that the state should play a greater part in the administration of church property. Indeed, Wycliffe was first employed by King Edward III to help justify royal rather than papal control over church appointments.² This is an early instance of the state's willingness to exploit religious beliefs for its own benefit, a time-honored tradition that can also be seen in the Lancastrian alliance with the church for the secular aim of buttressing political stability.

Secular rulers such as Edward III and Richard II were willing to support Wycliffe while his arguments served to

¹J.R. Lander, Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth-Century England (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1979), 113.

²Christopher Allmand, Henry V (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 280.

strengthen their government, but Wycliffe's upper class supporters did not necessarily share his theological views. When he began to attack transubstantiation, Wycliffe's usefulness to his patrons ended: they could no longer use his theological arguments because adopting such a radical view would hurt their political position, no longer serving to strengthen it. As Lander writes, Wycliffe "mistook the opportunist tactics of his employers for rigid principles."³ Instead, they were simply using his views when they could serve their own political purposes, not because they necessarily believed in his theological conclusions.

Royal and noble support for Wycliffe drastically decreased as his views became more radical. Though he lost the overt support of the royal court, Wycliffe's influence spread outside of the nobility through his followers, his vernacular translation of the Bible, and the copies of his sermons and tracts. "Poor priests," dressed in russet robes, preached in English for all to hear. They, like their listeners, were of the lower class. These itinerant preachers would preach from Wycliffe's sermons or other Lollard writings, speaking of sin, salvation, and the misdeeds of the clergy. At gatherings of the sympathetic, passages from Wycliffe's translation of the Bible would be read aloud, accompanied by a tract (usually written by Wycliffe or Nicholas Hereford, one of his closest disciples) giving an

³Lander, 113.

explanation.⁴ The Lollard stress on the vernacular was bitterly contested by the church hierarchy, and the chronicler Henry Knighton complained that the Bible read in the vernacular "becomes more accessible and familiar to laymen and to women able to read than it had heretofore been to the most intelligent and learned of the clergy."⁵

Although Wycliffe urged that every person read the Bible, he was not a political revolutionary. The Peasant's Uprising of 1381 was not led by his disciples, and he tried to avoid social implications in his teachings. Nevertheless, a certain amount of spiritual egalitarianism grew out of the Lollard heresy, which is shown most clearly in the fear that it produced in the English nobility. Contemporary anti-Lollard chroniclers saw these religious views as inferring revolution and revolt. They believed that the Peasant's Uprising was a direct result of Wycliffe's teachings, or at least they used this propaganda as a further way to discredit the Lollard movement. The St. Albans writer, already hostile to the heresy of Wycliffe and his followers, was anxious to draw a lesson from the uprising connecting heresy to social revolution.⁶ The chronicler Walsingham wrote that John Ball, the common priest who led the revolt, "taught the perverse doctrines of the perfidious John

⁴D.D. Lechler, John Wycliffe and His English Precursors (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1884?), 445.

⁵Henry Knighton, source unspecified, quoted in Lechler, 445.

⁶Margaret Aston, Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 4.

Wycliffe."⁷ This, as well as Knighton's claim that Ball was Wycliffe's John the Baptist, preparing the way for Wycliffe,⁸ were false. There is no support for the alleged association between Ball and Wycliffe.⁹

Wycliffe worked through the powerful, anxious that common folk should avoid theological debate, lest they misinterpret the Gospel and fall into heresy.¹⁰ Although there is no evidence to support any connection between Wycliffe's teachings and the revolt, the allegations expressed by the chroniclers represented "a considerable and undeniable body of contemporary opinion which apparently believed, and acted on the belief, that there was such a connection."¹¹ Lollard heresy and political revolt were, from the early days of Lollard activity, linked in the minds of many.

Parliament soon acted upon the question of how to prevent unrest and upheaval. Aston recounts that one of the most important outcomes of Parliament in the early 1380s was "legislation which gave statutory authority for the issue of commissions to sheriffs and other local officials, upon certification of a bishop in chancery, to arrest and imprison troublesome preachers."¹² Their aim was to curtail the

⁷Walsingham's Chronicon Angliae, 320-1, quoted by Aston, 4.

⁸Aston, 5.

⁹Aston, 6.

¹⁰Lander, 113.

¹¹Aston, 7.

¹²Aston, 5.

activities of the persons who "in certain habits under the guise of great holiness"¹³ preached in churches, cemeteries, markets, and other public places without proper ecclesiastical license, "endangering souls, the faith, the church and the whole realm."¹⁴ This decree was not immediately used to destroy Lollardry, but the ability to condemn individuals who preached without proper license would remain as ammunition in the growing desire to suppress the movement.

In 1387 Parliament had issued a mandate against the Lollards, and a year later Richard II commanded his subjects in Nottingham to "repress the errors of Wycliffe."¹⁵ Ironically, just as Wycliffe had taught that the church should be under control of the secular ruler, in 1388 the king's council decided to act with the church in seizing heretical writings. Richard did not, however, actively persecute the Lollards. Indeed, his court contained a group of upper class sympathizers dubbed "Lollard knights." Lollard sympathizers were tolerated, but not encouraged, in Richard II's court. These nobles were particularly attracted to the Lollard position that the church should be disendowed. A Lollard text dated before 1410 demonstrated how the gentry looked upon the church as a possible source of wealth, explaining that the redistribution of "clerical

¹³Rotuli Parliamentorum, ed. J. Strachey (London, 1767-77), iii, pp. 124-5, quoted in Aston, 5.

¹⁴Aston, 6.

¹⁵Lechler, 450-1.

temporalities could be used to find 15 earls, 1,500 knights, 6,200 esquires and 100 almshouses, as well as maintenance for 15 universities and 15,000 priests, and additional revenues for the king."¹⁶

More general Lollard challenges to the clerical hierarchy extended to the condemnation of pilgrimages and the monastic life. In particular, the Augustinian friar Peter Pateshull's accusations against his own order began fervent animosity between the friars and the heretics.¹⁷ The Lollards had no creed or firm doctrine distinguishing themselves from the Catholic church, but were characterized by their individual sense of responsibility for their own belief. The nearest thing to a statement of Lollard belief came in the form of a petition posted on the doors of St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Hall in 1395. This was even presented to Parliament through Sir Thomas Latimer and Sir Richard Story, though it was largely ignored and not considered by Parliament.¹⁸

This Lollard Manifesto claimed that pilgrimages and praying before crosses was idolatrous. It also denied transubstantiation as a "feigned miracle" and denounced the contemporary priesthood as necromancers, alienated from Jesus' apostolic intent and unable to grant absolution.¹⁹ The Bill condemned war,

¹⁶Aston, 21.

¹⁷Lechler, 446.

¹⁸Lechler, 446.

¹⁹Allmand, 284.

criticized indulgences, and questioned the right of the church to own land or combine King and Bishop in one person. Furthermore, it decried the celibacy of the priesthood and "vows of chastity taken in our Church by women."²⁰

Partly in response to the Lollard Manifesto, the Oxford leadership of the Lollard movement was targeted by the church hierarchy. Although Wycliffe had retired to Lutterworth in the last years of his life,²¹ his ideas were spread by his followers, with Oxford remaining the heretical epicenter of England. Archbishop Courtenay, recognizing the threat that the university presented as a center of Lollard activity, said that "the university is the nurse of heresies"²² and decided to crush Oxford's support for Lollardry. His successor, Archbishop Thomas Arundel, persisted in the effort to rid Oxford of heresy, hobbling Oxford both in scholarship and preaching. By 1408 he required a monthly audit of any university members who had courted heterodox teachings, and ultimately threatened excommunication and expulsion from the university.²³ By the accession of Henry V, Oxford had become staunchly Roman Catholic,

²⁰Lewis, History of John Wiclif, 337, translated from the Latin by Lechler, 448.

²¹Wycliffe was buried in consecrated ground at his death in 1384. It was not until the Council of Constance, over 30 years later, that his bones were dug up, burned, and thrown into the river.

²²Quoted in Anthony Kenny, ed., Wyclif in His Times (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 73.

²³Lechler, 457.

promising Henry V in 1414 its active support in the arrest and persecution of Lollards.

Even before the Lancastrians, the archbishop had royal support regarding the transformation of Oxford from a center of heresy to a center of Papist support. Richard II assisted Courtenay by instructing the Oxford Wycliffite Rygge in mid-July of 1382 to search out those favoring Wycliffe and such followers as Hereford, Repingdon, and John Aston.²⁴ Richard also expelled Robert Lychlade from the university "because of his long teaching there and elsewhere of 'nefarious opinions and conclusions and detestable allegations repugnant to the catholic faith.'"²⁵ Two years later, the bishops also asked Parliament to sentence heretics to death,²⁶ although this was not passed at the time. Like many other Oxford supporters of Lollard ideas, Lychlade was restored in 1399 on the order of Henry IV, who said that he was expelled without reasonable cause.²⁷ Henry's benevolence, however, should not create a false image of tolerance. While he restored many of these Oxford Lollards and his son supported some academic independence, Henry quickly showed his desire to eliminate the Lollard heresy in accord with the wishes of the church and to encourage stability.

After the decline of the Oxford Lollards and the death of

²⁴Kenny, 73.

²⁵Quoted in Kenny, 76.

²⁶Allmand, 284.

²⁷Kenny, 76.

Wycliffe himself in 1384, Lollards were composed mostly of shopkeepers and those of the lower social groups. They were tied together by their desire to purify religion and promote individual conscience among the laity, as Jeremy Catto writes.²⁸ During the last fifteen years of the fourteenth century, they began to assume the right to ordain.²⁹ The loose network of Lollard families began to consolidate and expand to aid the circulation of Lollard sermons and tracts. Notable disciples of Wycliffe like Swinderby, Aston, and Hereford moved westward, concentrating their efforts on the border of England and Wales. Holding to no particular set of beliefs, these heterodox believers shared a determination to seek out the gospel for themselves, whether Canterbury or Rome approved or not.

With the advent of the house of Lancaster, England began to employ a method to control the Lollards which had long been used on the continent: Lollards were sent to the fires for their heresy. Until the *Heretico Comburendo* act of 1401, there had not been any special legislation in England against heresy. Nor had there been anything that tied the church and state together in the way that the administration of the death penalty did.³⁰ While the church could call for such punishment for heretics, only the secular power could carry out a death sentence. The

²⁸Jeremy Catto, "Religious Change Under Henry V," in Henry V: The Practice of Kingship, ed. G.L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 99.

²⁹Lechler, 445.

³⁰Lander, 115.

fact that England began to persecute heretics to the death, then, signals a new accord between the church and state.

This church-state cooperation came as a direct result of the usurpation of the English throne by Henry IV. Henry took the crown of England on 30 September 1399, and realized that he needed to cooperate with the church in order to lend greater stability to his crown and ensure its continuity. Shortly after his coronation, he was faced with allegations that Richard II was alive, renewed revolts in Wales, and a plot by some English earls.³¹ Such turbulence was a threat to his life as well as his reign, and it is hardly surprising that he would seek the support of the powerful church in his attempts to retain the crown of England.

Heresy was the clearest point of alliance between church and state because it was a widely held view that treason and heterodoxy went hand in hand. As Allmand writes,

It is clear that heresy was now seen not merely as a threat to ecclesiastical authority and discipline. In the minds of an increasing number of people, it was becoming a danger to secular authority, a step reflected in the growing involvement of the temporal power in the tracking down and punishing of heretics, which had been taking place since at least 1388.³²

The persecution of Lollardry became a way to combat these other threats as well as encourage theological orthodoxy.

One of the leading figures in the elimination of the Lollard heresy was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel. At

³¹Allmand, 285.

³²Allmand, 285.

Courtenay's death in 1396, Arundel took over the ecclesiastical position.³³ He immediately showed his willingness to continue his predecessor's attempts to enforce orthodoxy. In early February of 1397, Arundel convened a synod that condemned many of Wycliffe's doctrines.³⁴ He worked to subdue Oxford's academic freedom, which (as noted above) was occasionally manifesting itself in overly-liberal theological sympathies. When Henry IV took the crown from Richard II, Arundel participated in the new alliance between church and state, playing a very special part in Henry's government as well as retaining leadership of the church in England. In this new alliance,

. . .the persecution of the Lollards entered upon a new phase. It was to the hierarchy that the house of Lancaster owed its elevation to the throne, and the king must repay their assistance by the unscrupulous and sanguinary repression of their foes. The king and the hierarchy were now at one; and for the first time in the history of England the sword was drawn for the suppression of religious opinion.³⁵

Near the end of January, 1401, Arundel opened the Canterbury Convocation. The main business of this Convocation, the Archbishop maintained, was to confront heresy among laity and clergy.³⁶ In February, a priest with strong Lollard

³³Richard II had banished Arundel from England on charges of treason, a move due to internal tensions and not necessarily related to Arundel's actions against heresy. Henry IV reinstated Arundel upon his usurpation.

³⁴Lechler, 450.

³⁵Lechler, 451.

³⁶Peter McNiven, Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV: The Burning of John Badby (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), 80.

inclinations was called before the Convocation. William Sawtry was intimidated into recanting, but upon release continued to teach various heretical views. On February 12, 1401 he was brought back before Arundel's Convocation, given another chance to recant, and charged as a lapsed heretic. While he had attempted to remain neutral in his spiritual claims, he eventually contradicted his carefully worded statements, and said that the bread "remained very bread, and the same bread which was before the words [of consecration] were spoken."³⁷ He was condemned as a heretic and stripped of his clerical position.

Before the fifteenth century, the church had the primary authority in the punishment of heretics. Execution, however, was beyond the limits of the church's power. When ecclesiastical demand for the death penalty began to increase, church-state interaction became more intimate. After Sawtry was charged as a relapsed heretic, the king (with Parliament's backing) anticipated the new role of the government in the punishment of heretics, and commanded that Sawtry be burnt. Sawtry was executed at Smithfield, as McFarlane relates, "prophesying death and destruction for the king and kingdom."³⁸ With this, England had its first Lollard martyr, though Sawtry had not known that death was a possible punishment for his heretical views.³⁹

³⁷McNiven, 85.

³⁸K.B. McFarlane, John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity (London: English Universities Press Ltd., 1966), 151.

³⁹McFarlane, 151-2.

While Sawtry was being interviewed by Arundel's Convocation, the secular powers had been discussing the enactment of a law that would allow the state to execute heretics. In 1397, the church requested the State's aid in administering stronger punishment of heretics, relinquishing some of its monopoly in the enforcement of orthodoxy. There would have been no reason for the church to want or need the intervention of the state without the desire for execution, which only the state could administer. When the church had appealed to Richard II's Parliament, their request for state intervention had been largely ignored. By the reign of Henry IV, however, the king was more willing to persecute the Lollards. While the church gave up some of its powers of sentencing to the state, the institutions and interests of church and crown were firmly joined in the campaign against heresy.

The 1401 clerical petition to Parliament requesting the enactment of stronger measures against heretics stressed the desirability of a church-state alliance by discussing not only the evils of heretical views, but specifically "asserted that the Lollards were inciting men to sedition and insurrection, and causing dissensions among the people."⁴⁰ This was, as McNiven notes, an express recognition that heresy was "a heinous crime against the state as well as an offense against the Church."⁴¹ The connection between heresy and treason was a common theme in

⁴⁰McNiven, 87.

⁴¹McNiven, 87.

the history of Lollardry, as it gave the crown both an incentive and a justification for its actions enforcing Catholic orthodoxy. The clerical petition asked parliament to fix a penalty to deal with the unrecanting heretic.

The emergent statute, called the *Heretico Comburendo*, gave room for the church to counter a broad range of threats under the title of religious deviance.⁴² It allowed bishops to retain some power to imprison those convicted of heresy, but also gave them the ability to turn over persistent or relapsed heretics to the state, "to be by them burned on a high place before the people."⁴³ Additionally, the statute forbade all books that deviated from Catholic orthodoxy and stated that no one may set up unauthorized schools through which they might teach "their most wicked doctrines and opinions."⁴⁴ Condemning these schools, or "conventicles," implied that Lollard gatherings discussed not only theology, but the overthrow of the king, or called on the reinstatement of Richard II to the throne. Such readiness to call upon Richard II, in particular, was a threat that both Henry IV and his son would confront and react against. The *Heretico Comburendo*, then, gave the kings a recourse to such treasonous allegiances, allowing them to punish those who claimed that Richard II was still alive.

Such claims were extremely dangerous for the Lancastrian

⁴²McNiven, 94.

⁴³Wilkins, *Concilia*, III., 254, quoted in Lechler, 452.

⁴⁴Quoted in McNiven, 93.

dynasty. If Richard II were believed to be alive, that would make Henry IV's usurpation even more illegitimate and unsubstantiated than it already was. By the spring of 1402, McNiven writes that

seditious activity on behalf of the late king seemed about to develop into a full-scale movement. Letters were sent to possible sympathizers which purported to come from Richard himself.⁴⁵

Because Lollards tended to look back to the reign of Richard II as a time more amiable to heterodoxy, Henry IV regarded this as insidious treason and desired to eliminate heresy even more strongly. Sheriffs and Bishops were soon instructed to investigate and arrest anyone spreading the rumor that Richard II was alive and hiding in Scotland.⁴⁶ After 1406, the message of the crown's opposition to heresy and attendant treason was strengthened by the official appointment of Archbishop Arundel to the office of Chancellor of England. Henry IV's willingness to show his intent toward heresy added to the anti-heretical legislation as a threat toward those who persisted in Lollard belief.

The *Heretico Comburendo*, passed by the end of the 1401 Parliament, did prompt some to recant and publicly return to orthodoxy rather than face martyrdom. Late in February, the Wycliffite John Purvey was brought before the Convocation and soon bowed to the wishes of the church. Sawtry had not known

⁴⁵McNiven, 95.

⁴⁶McNiven, 95.

that execution would be his ultimate punishment, but the passage of the *Heretico Comburendo* and the public anticipation of that statute emphasized by the public burning of Sawtry ensured that Purvey did realize the consequences of standing firm in his heretical beliefs. Purvey had never been caught for his heretical views, and thereby escaped the charge of relapsed heretic. Such a charge of obstinacy would have immediately meant his death by burning. Able to recant but unable to publicly continue to preach the orthodox Catholic doctrine, Purvey disappeared.

While Henry IV was embracing the new cooperation between church and state, Prince Henry also was instrumental in strengthening the state's ability to profit from the persecution. He, too, had a vested interest (both in landed property and his future ascent to the throne) in quelling instability. In reaction to a fierce sermon with Lollard proposals, the prince and other supporters petitioned the king in 1406 to "take firm action against those who aimed at undermining Church, faith and sacraments."⁴⁷ This petition relied on the reasoning that once heterodox agitators denied the church's right to own land, they would turn to the political realm. Unless the king prevented these enemies of the church from trying to take away its right to hold land, the petition maintained, the kingdom would be destroyed by the denial of any secular lords to hold land.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Allmand, 287.

⁴⁸Allmand, 287.

The petition to the king again cited gatherings in secret places as well as public sermons, stating that the heretics had, as Aston quotes,

"wrongly and evilly excited and publicly provoked the people of your realm to remove and take away their temporal possessions from the prelates and ministers of holy church" which might further incite the people "to remove and take away from the temporal lords their possessions and inheritance, and so to make them common, to the open commotion of your people, and the final destruction and subversion of your kingdom for all time."⁴⁹

Furthermore, the petition touched upon the prince's vulnerability by urging that the king should eradicate rumors that Richard II was still alive, which was a vital step for the new crown in protecting against claims of illegitimacy by a deposed king. These acts were not directly named as treasonous, but since these actions of heresy could lead to the destruction and subversion of the kingdom, the charge of treason remained implicit for anyone who supported or claimed to be Richard II.

By heading this Parliamentary petition, we can see that Prince Henry realized the need to ally with the church against these heretics, even if he politically vied with Archbishop Arundel, who occupied a high place in the king's confidences. Lollards could threaten his future as King of England, the prince believed, because the threat to religious orthodoxy was closely tied (or perceived to be joined) with threats to the very stability of the civil order, and by extension to the crown itself. More importantly, he realized that fighting treason

⁴⁹Rot. Parl., iii, p. 583, quoted in Aston, 24.

through the church's charges of heresy could solidify his reign while at the same time gaining power over and support from the church.

While the *Heretico Comburendo* discouraged the overt growth of the heresy among the nobility, there is evidence that the knightly class retained some sympathy for Lollard ideas of the disendowment of the church. Such feeling, while shared by many heretics, seemed to be primarily motivated by desire for financial gains rather than disbelief in transubstantiation or other major Roman Catholic doctrines. The church's position as a powerful and wealthy institution presented a lucrative target for any who agreed, or seemed to agree, with the Lollard precept that the church should not hold earthly temporalities. Despite the 1401 statute with its threats to Lollardry, the early fifteenth century still shows several occasions where the nobility seemed willing to trade orthodoxy for material gain. At Worcester in 1402 and 1405, Aston recounts that at times of "royal need and clerical reluctance to pay," various knights proposed sending home the bishops who were present "penniless and horseless."⁵⁰ The 1404 Coventry Parliament witnessed a show-down between knights and the archbishop over church ownership of land. Parliamentary demands for the confiscation of the church's property were only silenced when Arundel threatened excommunication.⁵¹

⁵⁰Aston, 23.

⁵¹McNiven, 170-1.

The knightly quest for material well-being peaked during the parliament of 1410. A group of knights with Lollard sympathies (at least regarding the material poverty of the church) presented a bill in Parliament that demanded "a systematic disendowment of the Church's lands in favor of the king, which would provide funds for the creation and endowment of new earls, knights, esquires, almshouses, and universities."⁵² While many of the knightly flirtations with heterodoxy might be explained by the desire to benefit from the church's wealth, the bill's detailed reckoning of the benefits to be gained by stripping the church concluded with a bit of sermonizing that closely resembles Lollard thought. The knights piously claimed that they were

advocating the resumption of ecclesiastical temporalities for the spiritual good of the clergy. Those who enjoyed material possessions were like worldly lords, and could not possibly discharge their religious duties while they were living lives of pleasure and idleness and setting so bad an example to the laity that hardly anyone feared either God or the Devil any more.⁵³

Yet a postscript to the bill returns to the pragmatic desire for selfish gains, and it is easy to believe that the piety of looking out for the best interests of the church was a pretext, even if it relied on Lollard ideas. Instead, we can assume that for the most part, as McNiven continues, "their prime aim was a massive redistribution of the landed wealth of the country in

⁵²Allmand, 289.

⁵³McNiven, 193.

favour of the laity,"⁵⁴ instead of a promotion of general heresy at the expense of the church.

The Prince's reaction to this bill is not known, but this bill did arise when the Prince was in control of the council. This plan would have financially benefitted the crown to a great degree, which may have led the prince to sympathize with the proposal. Yet we do not know if the prince was even aware that an attack on the church's material possessions would be raised in parliament. He remained neutral in the ensuing debate about the petition, neither declaring his opposition nor supporting the proposals of commons.⁵⁵ In any event, discussion of the petition was forbidden by the king. Tradition, too, has assigned to the prince the role of supporting his father's unequivocal condemnation of Commons' scheme, Walsingham suggests.⁵⁶ Yet even in the contemporary materials, a glimmer of speculation remains that the prince's attitude might be equivocal. Indeed, it was possibly this hope that encouraged the Commons to try such a radical proposal.⁵⁷

While the prince might or might not have looked favorably upon such a plan to acquire material goods at the expense of the church, we cannot overlook the prince's actions against heretical

⁵⁴McNiven, 193.

⁵⁵McNiven, 195.

⁵⁶Walsingham's Historia Anglicana and the St. Albans Chronicle, quoted in McNiven, 196.

⁵⁷McNiven, 196.

activity and in support of the church, not limited to his part in petitioning the king in 1406 to use greater lay involvement in the suppression of Lollardry. Furthermore, a petition intended to protect those arrested for Lollardry was rejected shortly after the 1410 plan.⁵⁸ As Allmand notes, the evidence does not support the improbable idea that "a far more radical proposal would have been accepted by the Prince if one of such lesser significance had been refused."⁵⁹ While we cannot be sure about his personal stance against heterodoxy or ignore his close association with men of dubious orthodoxy, we are certain that by the time of his kingship, Henry V had unequivocally decided to persecute heresy.

The Parliamentary attack on the church's material possessions created a feeling of anxiety and a need to reassert Catholic doctrine. Neither Arundel nor the king chastened Commons for their proposal, perhaps out of the realization that the group was still essential to the financial well-being of the government.⁶⁰ It was also possible that such an attack might have led the Commons to wholeheartedly back the prince, who might have used the support to further encroach on his father's power.⁶¹ The chosen tactic to battle anti-orthodox tendencies, then, was to strike from a different angle. As McNiven points

⁵⁸Allmand, 290.

⁵⁹Allmand, 290.

⁶⁰McNiven, 198.

⁶¹McNiven, 198.

out, there were three essential requirements that limited this counterattack on anticlericalism:

First, it could not be made at the direct expense of any of the parties in the complex maneuverings within the parliament. If anyone was to suffer, it had to be someone who, by the criteria of those with authority or influence, mattered to no-one. Secondly, an example had to be made in such a way that no-one, whatever their political affiliations or aspirations, could fail to give it their approval without setting themselves completely outside the bounds of a Christian society. Thirdly, it needed to reflect the total abhorrence with which deviations from the Church's laws were regarded.⁶²

John Badby was the man that fit the requirements of this demonstration of Catholic orthodoxy, the first known victim of execution for heresy since Sawtry in 1401. A tailor from Evesham, he was interrogated and entreated by the most powerful people in England, and remained firm in his convictions. We know little about him apart from his immediate trial and death, at which Prince Henry played primary role. Badby had been examined by a commission headed by Arundel regarding his beliefs about the Eucharist. He held some basic Lollard tenants but overall was of a more radical sort than the general Lollard. He appealed to reason, convinced that the host remained bread regardless of the ritual consecration. Badby continued with the belief that even "Christ sitting at supper could not give his disciples his living body to eat."⁶³ Denouncing the veneration of the host as

⁶²McNiven, 198.

⁶³Source unspecified, quoted in George Macaulay Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 335.

idolatry, he remarked that if transubstantiation were true, as Hutchison writes, "the priest's blessing of the sacrament would make 20,000 gods in England at every Mass."⁶⁴ Instead, he said, even the least living creature created by God deserved more veneration than something fashioned by human hands--whether it was labelled the body of Christ or not.⁶⁵ Further striking at the authority and legitimacy of priests, he maintained that "John Raker of Bristol [or any good person] had the same power and the same authority to make the body of Christ as any priest."⁶⁶

Faced with the ecclesiastical interrogation, Lechler remarks that the tailor remained "firm in the rough common-sense way in which he repudiated transubstantiation."⁶⁷ Repeatedly exhorted to embrace orthodoxy to no avail, he was condemned as a "persistent and incorrigible heretic,"⁶⁸ but delivered into secular hands accompanied by the ecclesiastical plea that his life be spared. Regardless of clerical wishes, Badby was sentenced to death by the king and taken to be burned at Smithfield in London on March 5, 1410.

Prince Henry was among the notables at the burning, and joined the leaders of the church in asking the heretic to recant,

⁶⁴Harold F. Hutchison, King Henry V: A Biography (New York: John Day Co., 1967), 63.

⁶⁵McNiven, 207.

⁶⁶Allmand, 290.

⁶⁷Lechler, 453.

⁶⁸Lechler, 453.

even as he was chained to a cask sitting atop a pile of wood. Badby would not retreat from his position that the host "is consecrated bread, and not the body of God."⁶⁹ The wood was ignited, and when Badby felt the fires he cried out to God, "Mercy!" Possibly misunderstanding the direction of the entreaty, the Prince ordered that the burning wood be raked away from the base of the cask and the tun be removed, again offering pardon to the heretic if he would only recant. Indeed, Henry even plied Badby with offers of money and favor. Again, the tailor refused, and Henry ordered that the fire be relit. Badby joined the ranks of the martyrs of England.

Why did Prince Henry attend the execution? There was no precedent that encouraged his attendance. He could have been offering a visible statement of support for orthodox Catholicism, affirming that the government would continue to take part in the persecution of heretics. By this emphasis of the crown's role in deciding the fate of heretics, the prince's attendance was possibly also intended as "an assertion of authority by the secular power over its spiritual counterpart."⁷⁰ While Henry IV did not underline his determination to lead the church in the enforcement of orthodoxy, his son was more willing to anticipate his later actions as king, and demonstrate his desire not only to cooperate with the church, but in important ways to establish the secular dominance in the spiritual institution. This becomes

⁶⁹Source unspecified, quoted in Lechler, 453.

⁷⁰Allmand, 291.

slightly more plausible when viewed in terms of the prince's political rivalry with Arundel. While it had not stopped church-state cooperation, it is very possible that Henry was hoping to persuade Badby to recant when the Archbishop failed in order to gain more power in Henry IV's government at Arundel's expense.

Additionally, why did Henry stop the fires to make another attempt to persuade Badby? If the prince was desiring to make a statement of his authority regarding the punishment of heretics, the order to stop the execution gave him the spotlight. Earlier, he had shared his efforts to persuade Badby with Arundel and other clerics. Now, however, the prince stood alone in a demonstration of his authority.

After appealing to Badby with favor and allowance, Henry ordered the execution to continue. Medieval logic would laud the merciful inclination of its future king, but reason that if, as Hutchison writes, "a good bargain was refused, let the law take its course."⁷¹ In ordering the fire to be rekindled, he showed himself to be "the truly medieval and orthodox prince--the heretic must be destroyed, and justice is more important than sentimentality."⁷² Trevelyan states the prince attended the burning with the best of intentions, because "though he thought it his duty to persecute, he was not cruel, and could not unmoved see Badby go to his fate. . . .The hope and pride of England had come in person to implore a tailor to accept life, but he had

⁷¹Hutchison, 64.

⁷²Hutchison, 64.

come in vain."⁷³ While the attempts to gain Badby's recantation had failed, the airing of his views might have helped to frighten others into submission to orthodoxy either by the example of his death or by the extremism of his heresy.

Prince Henry's reaction at the burning of John Badby foreshadowed his own attitude as king. After the death of his father, Henry V acceded to the throne of England on March 21, 1413. He relied heavily on elaborate and very public displays of his piety, showing that his orthodoxy was unquestioned. Certainly, he was concerned for his father's soul, funding masses to be said for both himself and the deceased Henry IV. Catto suggests that his multiple foundations of monasteries was a conscious attempt to "place the monarchy at the spiritual centre of English life."⁷⁴ Whether motivated out of genuine faith or not, Henry would work with the church as even more closely than his father had done, using this church-state cooperation to gain a great degree of power over the church itself. He saw church and state as two sides of the same power, with himself at its head.⁷⁵ Toward this end, he continued to take a stance against heresy, finding this a very useful tool to enhance his power.

Henry IV had seen that he must work with the church because his fate was entwined with the Catholic hierarchy in England, and his son also realized that the church was an important ally.

⁷³Trevelyan, 335.

⁷⁴Catto, 110.

⁷⁵Lander, 55.

While more secure in his throne than his father, Henry V faced disorder, which was particularly unruly in the border areas. Surely Lollard heresy conflicted with Henry's chosen stance of defender of Catholic orthodoxy. Yet it was more the political implications of Lollard teaching and the reform of the traditional social order that was the driving force behind the union of church and crown in the persecution of heresy.

Badby's fate, heralding this church-state union, had proved a powerful example, successfully driving Lollard believers underground. Meetings of the heretics were now conducted in private. Wycliffe's tracts and translation of the Bible into English were still widely circulated, but most Lollard activities were clandestine.

While Richard II had tolerated so-called Lollard Knights at his court and Henry IV had not actively sought to eliminate them, most had either died or publicly reverted to orthodoxy by the accession of Henry V. Furthermore, the execution of Badby ensured that there would be no more parliamentary strikes at the church. Interestingly, we do not know Henry's personal feelings regarding Lollard tenants, just as we are unsure of his predecessors' beliefs. Particularly while on the Welsh campaigns, he had been closely associated with several men of (or strongly suspected) Lollard sympathies. Included among these companions were Sir John Greyndore, Sir Roger Acton, and Sir John Oldcastle, who would marry into the title of Lord Cobham. Greyndore was a servant of the duchy of Lancaster, a member of

the Prince's household, and later appointed by Henry V to be justice itinerant in south Wales.⁷⁶ Acton, in the prince's service in 1403, would later be executed for his alleged treason and heresy in the wake of the 1414 rebellion. Most importantly, however, was Oldcastle, who was Henry's close companion-in-arms during the Welsh campaigns. He would later lead the 1414 rebellion against the king, and evade the authorities for several years before finally being apprehended, hanged, and burned.

The author of the Gesta Henrici Quinti, who was present at the 1414 uprising, portrays Henry V as a leader blessed by God, and stresses his faith and piety. The author writes that Oldcastle was

one of the most valued and more intimate members of his household. This man, of great popular reputation, proud of heart, strong in body but weak in virtue, dared to presume not only against the king but also against the Universal Church.⁷⁷

He largely blamed Oldcastle's heterodoxy for his seditious attack on the king, stating that he was

poisoned. . .by Wycliffite malevolence. . .he became as it were the leader and captain over those turbulent people who throughout divers parts of England had been grievously afflicted by such a malignant disease.⁷⁸

Sir John Oldcastle was probably about ten years older than Henry V. He had participated in Henry IV's 1400 Scottish

⁷⁶Allmand, 288-9.

⁷⁷Gesta Henrici Quinti: The Deeds of Henry the Fifth, trans., Frank Taylor and John S. Roskell (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3.

⁷⁸Gesta, 3,5.

expedition and fought with Prince Henry during the Welsh campaigns against Owen Glendower. He served in parliament in 1414, as justice of the peace in 1406, and as a sheriff two years later. He was rewarded for his services by Henry IV, who granted him a lifetime annuity of 100 marks.⁷⁹ When Oldcastle married his third wife,⁸⁰ he acquired the title of Lord Cobham. His wife, Joan, was heir and grand-daughter of John, Lord Cobham of Cooling. As a baron, Oldcastle was summoned to the House of Lords.

Oldcastle's heterodoxy was probably not suspected at this time. Within the next few years, however, suspicions would build until Henry V's accession. Arundel learned in Spring 1410 that Oldcastle had a chaplain who advocated the Wycliffite view, and was allowing the chaplain to live under his roof.⁸¹ Upon discovery, the chaplain went into hiding, but Arundel began to watch Oldcastle closely.⁸² It is probable that Oldcastle was a recognized Lollard leader by this time, likely influenced by Lollard preachers William Swinderby and Richard Wyche.⁸³ The location of his properties near the Welsh marches also indicated a higher likelihood of exposure to Lollard ideas, as many of the

⁷⁹McFarlane, 160.

⁸⁰The marriage was in 1408, and Oldcastle was Lady Cobham's fourth husband.

⁸¹Gesta, Appendix I, 183.

⁸²McFarlane, 161.

⁸³Allmand, 294-5.

heretics had fled to the border countries during Henry IV's reign.

By September 1410, Oldcastle had definitely taken a prime role in the heretical movement in England. Within a year, he wrote two letters to Bohemia, congratulating both King Wenceslas and a nobleman who supported the Hussites and encouraging them in the struggle against the antichrist, the pope in Rome. By this time, the church knew of his heretical inclinations, but did not publicize their knowledge. It is unsure whether Henry himself knew of his friend's religious beliefs, but there is no evidence that he did know. Oldcastle remained in royal favor throughout Henry IV's reign. In Autumn of 1411, the Prince sent him to help command the force to relieve the Burgundian party in France. "If the prince still regarded him as a trustworthy subordinate," McFarlane writes, "there cannot have been any widespread knowledge of his Lollard sympathies."⁸⁴

Almost immediately after Henry's accession to the Lancastrian throne, however, Arundel approached him with charges of Oldcastle's heresy. Henry privately tried to bring Oldcastle back to Catholicism, but had no more luck than he had with Badby. While it is possible that the king welcomed this chance to use a figure from the top levels of society to demonstrate his opposition to Lollardry, it is more probably that the Oldcastle affair was a forcing of Henry's hand. Whether reluctant to let his friend stand trial as a heretic, Henry was bound, by this

⁸⁴McFarlane, 162.

time, to stand by the church and publicly enforce orthodoxy. With this commitment, he could no longer overlook public heresy, even in a friend. Whether he could have ignored Oldcastle's heterodoxy had it not been public knowledge is a moot point: Arundel's convocation had brought evidence of Oldcastle's heresy to the king in June 1413.

If Henry had sided with Oldcastle, it is quite possible that he would experience difficulty in further acting as the defender of orthodoxy and lose his ability to influence the church to the extent to which he was accustomed. At the beginning of his reign, Henry decided, much as his father did before him, that the church was an important tool in the preservation of social stability. Had he chosen to side with an associate over the wishes of the church, Henry would have no longer been perceived as the defender of catholicism. Unable to get Oldcastle to recant, his political choices and goals demanded that he take a firm stance against heresy, regardless of the heretic. Furthermore, Henry would soon be leading a force into France, and needed both the legitimacy that the church's backing strengthened as well as the assurance that there would be no upheavals in England while he was away. Being seen as a persecutor of heresy had other advantages: Henry would be able to lead any campaigns against the Lollards, thereby giving him an important position within the church hierarchy itself. By taking up the church's orthodox standard, then, he began to exert a large amount of influence in the church itself, thus extending his power in

England.

Oldcastle did try to elude the church's condemnation by other means short of recantation. He confessed in the presence of the king that Lollard tracts found in a raid on an illuminator's shop in Paternoster Row did indeed belong to him. Yet he qualified this admission by saying that he had only browsed through them, and not understood the passages that so thoroughly shocked the king,⁸⁵ and agreed that they were worthy of condemnation. Such an evasion did not end questions about his orthodoxy. The clergy prepared more extensive indictment:

Oldcastle was alleged to have uttered and maintained heretical doctrines in many places, to have given aid and comfort to Lollard preachers and to have terrorized those opposed to them. In short he 'was and is the principal harbourer, promoter, protector and defender' of heretics.⁸⁶

Arundel, sensitive to the social position of Oldcastle and the possible embarrassment to the king, consulted Henry about proceedings. Henry asked for time to try and persuade the heretic, and then promised "to throw the full weight of the secular arm on to the side of the church."⁸⁷ He gave up his efforts after two months, giving the church permission to begin proceedings against Oldcastle.⁸⁸ When Henry authorized Arundel to begin the trial, the heretic left Windsor and locked himself

⁸⁵McFarlane, 163.

⁸⁶McFarlane, 164.

⁸⁷McFarlane, 164.

⁸⁸Gesta, Appendix I, 184.

in Cooling Castle. He ignored two citations, but finally responded to a royal writ and returned to London on September 23,⁸⁹ where he was arrested and confined in the Tower of London.

Ecclesiastical proceedings against Oldcastle, headed by the archbishop, began the day that he was arrested. Records show that Oldcastle was treated with consideration and fairness, and given ample time to prepare his answers and publicize his views. Arundel asked him pointed questions regarding transubstantiation and the sacrament of confession, and Oldcastle was at first ambiguous about his stance. He soon denied that popes, cardinals, or bishops could determine what should be believed about such matters.⁹⁰ Arundel gave Oldcastle two more days to think over his positions, then reconvened the convocation with a conditional offer of absolution. Oldcastle refused to be absolved by anyone other than God. He firmly maintained that the bread remained bread even after the words of consecration were spoken, stated that confession to a priest was not necessary, denied that the cross was to be adored, and stated that the church hierarchy made up the antichrist. He warned the audience that his judges would lead them to hell.

Arundel excommunicated Oldcastle and turned him over to the secular arm. The Gesta author stresses that Oldcastle was convicted by his own confession, and that he was "handed over to

⁸⁹McFarlane, 165.

⁹⁰McFarlane, 165.

the secular arm for further punishment according to the established laws of the realm."⁹¹

The king, perhaps in hopes of convincing Oldcastle to recant,⁹² deferred sentencing for 40 days. Whether out of friendship or (as Walsingham suggests) because "he did not want a sinner lost without some effort being made on his behalf,"⁹³ Henry returned Oldcastle to his imprisonment in the Tower of London.

Oldcastle must have realized that Henry would not and could not avert his ultimate death. Henry was bound by his choice to defend Catholicism as well as the laws and customs established during the last decades. The burning of Badby had shown that while Henry would go to great lengths to convince a heretic to recant rather than to die, if these offers were ignored he would not halt the execution. Henry's political aims dictated that at this point, he needed to side with the church. Undoubtedly aware of this, Oldcastle escaped from confinement on the night of October 28, probably with the help of Lollard friends. Henry's proclamations demanding his return did no more than searches or rewards. Oldcastle remained in hiding.

⁹¹Gesta, 5.

⁹²The author of the Gesta would have us believe that Henry's 40 day deference was charitable, "in the hope of leading back the lost sheep from the waylessness of his error to the way of truth (from which the dogmas of evil men had led the foolish man astray), ordered him for a time to be put in chains in the Tower of London." Gesta, 7.

⁹³Allmand, 296.

Walsingham portrayed Oldcastle as a man driven by lust for power. Therefore, the chronicler claimed, Oldcastle "endeavoured, led by Satan, at one and the same time to arm the laity in order to despoil the Church and also to limit both heavenly and terrestrial authority in order to enlarge his own."⁹⁴ Such a negative portrayal is without basis, negating Oldcastle's probably genuine piety as well as his former loyalty to king and country. But after being condemned by both church and crown, escaping the Tower, knowing that he would be executed if apprehended, he and other Lollards began to plan an uprising that would challenge the existing social and religious order.

Rather than being a rebellion fueled by Oldcastle's personal quest for power, however, it is quite possible that he played only a small part in the planning of this uprising. He could not emerge from hiding until immediately before the rising was to begin, and his fugitive status made free movement difficult. Nevertheless, news of the planned uprising filtered through Lollard groups, largely through the activities of the heretic clergy. The gathering point was to be St. Giles Fields on January 10, 1414, just outside the walls of London to the northwest of Temple Bar.

Some of the participants in the rebellion were encouraged by promises of material reward: Thomas Noveray of Illston on the Hill (Leicester) is said to have sold his possessions before taking up arms, presumably because he expected to reap far more

⁹⁴Gesta, 11.

from the fruits of the rebellion.⁹⁵ Such reports were later widely circulated, stressing claims that the Lollard agenda would not stop at the impoverishment of the church, but would continue to take property from the laity.⁹⁶ For most Lollards, however, this uprising was an act of desperation rather than greed. The leadership of the movement had shifted from nobility to the lower classes: there was only one knight other than Oldcastle implicated in the 1414 uprising, and no one of higher rank. As Trevelyan writes,

Although many of the upper classes had been influenced by the doctrines of the sect, and although many continued to nurse dislike of the wealth, the insolence, and the overgrown privileges of the clergy. . .there were found but few gentlemen ready to share during the fifteenth century the lot of a proscribed and rebel party.⁹⁷

As the Lollards lost their knightly support, they also lost their moderation.⁹⁸ Certainly the movement was composed of larger numbers of artisans, and perhaps this allowed its more radical members to dominate.⁹⁹

⁹⁵Aston 25.

⁹⁶Aston, 26.

⁹⁷Trevelyan, 338.

⁹⁸Aston, 37.

⁹⁹Aston, 37. Aston suggests that those who participated in the rebellion were only a small minority of extremists "who were not at the heart of the continuing doctrinal movement. Some, strictly speaking, may not have been heretics at all" (Aston, 37). If the government used heresy as a way to combat treason, then, a converse movement might have been occurring where radical social reformers used Lollardry to further their own causes (Aston, 38). Another statement of this view can be seen in McFarlane's interpretation of the aftermath of the 1414 uprising. He points out the fact that

Lollard attempts to change England through parliamentary channels had failed miserably. The accession of Henry V and his overt determination to support orthodoxy and continue the persecution of heresy further closed any avenues of change. Indeed, it is possible that they realized that no change could occur while Henry was on the throne. As McNiven writes,

After March 1410, no serious hope remained that lay support would come their way within the framework of the established political system. For those sufficiently determined, the only hope of success now lay in rebellion against the Crown. . . . For years the Lollards had been accused, to all appearances falsely, of plotting and fomenting lay sedition. They had taken the blame for the more politically dangerous activities of men whose opinions on religious matters, in so far as they were relevant, were consistently opposed to their own. A sympathetic observer might argue that the Lollards could perhaps not be blamed for at last deciding to live up to a reputation which they had originally not deserved.¹⁰⁰

The Lollard rebellion had two elements: an assassination attempt upon the king, and a mass uprising several days later outside of London. Henry and his brothers spent Christmas 1413 at Eltham, a country suburb southeast of London. The royal plan was to remain there to celebrate the Epiphany (Twelfth Night). At the last moment, someone involved in the conspiracy told the king of plans to assassinate Henry and his heirs while entering

only a small portion of Lollards were burned as heretics, even while they must have know that death was inevitable whether they confessed to heretical views or not (McFarlane, 177). This can be seen to support Aston's position that the uprising was dominated by individuals looking for wealth and property rather than by religious reformers. Such an interpretation is interesting, but I feel that this does not shed light on Henry V's motivations and actions regarding the Lollards.

¹⁰⁰McNiven, 225.

the court in the guise of actors. The Lord Mayor of London acted immediately upon Henry's discovery of the plot, and a few men were arrested in London before they had set out for Eltham.¹⁰¹

Briefed by spies concerning the Lollard plans at St. Giles Fields, Henry moved to Westminster on January 9. The king made no attempt to stop the provincials from reaching London, but took his place with the army covering the road to Westminster.¹⁰² The London gates were closed, preventing those of Lollard sympathies from joining the rebels outside the walls. As Trevelyan writes, "as fast as the bodies of rebels came up from the villages, they were seized or dispersed. Before dawn all was over save hanging."¹⁰³ The rebels were no match for the trained army, and the resultant skirmish involved very little actual fighting. As soon as the scattered rebels unexpectedly encountered the king's forces in the pre-dawn hours, they fled. Some were apprehended, and others struck down if they resisted. Included among those who escaped was Oldcastle himself.

The legal records show a response to calls for a heretical uprising of 300 people at most, far from the contemporary chroniclers' estimations of 20,000.¹⁰⁴ Even accounting for the numbers of Lollard sympathizers who could not march to London because of the distance or other prohibitions does not reconcile

¹⁰¹Allmand, 298-9.

¹⁰²McFarlane, 169.

¹⁰³Trevelyan, 338.

¹⁰⁴Allmand, 299.

these numbers. Similarly, contemporary tales of the rebels' intentions and motives are probably far too ambitious, coming to us solely through the reports of their enemies and persecutors. It is likely that the Lollards had no clear plan of action beyond the battle outside of London.

This contemporary overestimation and continued overemphasis of the threat of the rebels is a persistent theme to the chroniclers' reports of Lollard presence in England. Such a portrayal of imminent danger and massive upheaval was a sincere fear of the chroniclers, but certainly such attitudes were a powerful impetus toward rallying forces around the Catholic royal banner.

The official charges against the rebels used heresy to make the treasonous acts appear more hideous, and included

plotting the death of the king and his brothers, with the prelates and other magnates of the realm, the transference of the religious to secular employments, the spoliation and destruction of all cathedrals, churches, and monasteries, and the elevation of Oldcastle to the position of regent of the kingdom.¹⁰⁵

On January 11, the king appointed commissioners to draw up lists of suspects and to collect evidence against them. Suspects were to be jailed until the king and council had decided what to do with him or her.¹⁰⁶ "Soon afterwards," McFarlane continues, "the business of trying prisoners was committed to the justices

¹⁰⁵Rot. Parl. iv. 108a, quoted in Gesta, 2-3.

¹⁰⁶McFarlane, 171.

of King's Bench."¹⁰⁷

Over 80 offenders were arrested in the uprising. Sixty-nine were condemned as traitors on January 12, 1414, and 38 were executed the following day.¹⁰⁸ Four more were executed on January 19. The end of January saw Oldcastle's esquire, John Brown, caught and executed, while Acton was also judged and hanged.¹⁰⁹ Of the 38 executed on the 13th of January, seven were hanged and burned both as heretics and traitors, and 31 were hanged simply as traitors. Significantly, then, only one in five were condemned for reasons including their religious beliefs.¹¹⁰

We are not sure whether the rebels were primarily motivated by their piety or by their greed. Their contemporaries saw them as both. The link between heresy and revolutionary treason had been painstakingly drawn, and the king himself encouraged this association to be perceived because it gave him greater influence as the suppressor of the movement.

The fact that so few of the rebels were burned as well as hanged is better examined in terms of the intentions of the officials rather than to downplay the religious motivation of the rebels. Henry had long committed himself to combatting heresy and restoring social stability. As indicated earlier, by condemning heresy he had certain options opened to him in terms

¹⁰⁷McFarlane, 171.

¹⁰⁸Allmand, 299.

¹⁰⁹McFarlane, 171-2.

¹¹⁰Allmand, 299.

of gaining authority over the church hierarchy, acting as the executor of its wishes. Such a function served the king well when the Lollards were perceived as a threat to the crown itself.

Yet after the decisive crushing of the Lollard uprising, the king faced a different situation. There was no longer a threatening feeling that the Lollards were growing and threatening traditional ways of life. Now Henry looked upon a defeated group whose members were either killed, scattered and driven underground, or imprisoned. At this point, then, Henry was able to concentrate on the issue of treason rather than heresy. If, as I have suggested, heresy was a tool for Henry's political aims, then it is in the aftermath of the 1414 uprising that Henry was able to concentrate on driving home a condemnation of treason against the king.

The government wished to stress disapproval of the treasonous element of the uprising rather than allow that to be overshadowed by a show of orthodoxy. While Henry found the enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy to be helpful to his reign, in this case he might not have wanted anything to undermine his central message condemning treason against the crown. Most importantly, he wanted to make sure the people of England knew that he would brook no challenge to his authority, and to make this message quite clear regardless of religious issues. To those in authority, Allmand writes,

the rising was an attempt to endanger the life of (if not to kill) the king and his brothers who were his heirs, and thereby threaten the succession to the crown of England. This was treason, and open attack upon

authority within the realm, and it had to be dealt with as such in ways that people of the time understood.¹¹¹

Thus, even after the Lollard Uprising of 1414, Sawtry and Badby remained England's only surviving examples of men executed for their heresy alone. Henry's quick and decisive defusing of the Lollard threat to government had shown that the government was firmly in control and able to deal with such threats with confidence and efficiency.

From such a position of unchallenged power, the king began issuing pardons as soon as January 23. He had made his position of power secure, and could begin to show his mercy. The first pardons were issued to individuals, but on January 28 he offered a general pardon (with some exceptions) to those who would sue for it by June 24.¹¹² Henry's actions clearly reveal a man who felt secure and in command of events, as Allmand writes, and "who could act without vindictiveness in the hope of restoring normality as soon as possible."¹¹³

While the king's clemency demonstrates his feeling of security, further assertions of his confidence followed shortly. He proclaimed that Parliament would be held in Leicester, which had once been a center of Lollard activity. At this Leicester parliament of 1414, the issue of heresy resurfaced as a way to gain political goals. Responsibility and obligation was placed

¹¹¹Allmand, 300.

¹¹²Allmand, 300.

¹¹³Allmand, 300.

on the shoulders of every royal and municipal officer for hunting out and destroying heretics. Aston writes that

Secular courts were authorized to receive indictments for heresy, and the justices were henceforth to be commissioned with full powers of enquiry into the activities of all who in sermons, schools, conventicles, congregations and confederacies, as well as by writing, were maintaining heresy.¹¹⁴

Significantly, Henry's parliament passed legislation against heretics at the same time "placing great stress on the work of the courts to restore justice in the north and west midlands. In other words, the king was strongly inclined to see the threat of Lollardry not so much in spiritual terms but rather as part of a wider threat to public order. By doing so, he could not only give it a high profile among the social problems to be faced; he could also exercise a strict control over the means used to combat it. In this way a considerable measure of royal control over the Church was being achieved and maintained."¹¹⁵

While some clerical trials were held and Lollards condemned for their beliefs alone, ecclesiastical sources do not give any picture of mass persecution. Arundel's death on February 19 may have lessened ecclesiastical zeal to persecute heresy, and the defeated and demoralized state of the Lollards might have further encouraged restraint.¹¹⁶

Two years after the uprising, the clerical convocation

¹¹⁴Aston, 43.

¹¹⁵Allmand, 302.

¹¹⁶Allmand, 300-1.

followed in the steps of parliament and "passed a measure providing for regular investigation into suspected cases of heresy and for proceedings to be taken when suspicions proved well founded."¹¹⁷ Biannual clerical enquiries were to be held. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chicheley, and Henry V (according to Lechler) "were, if possible, more vehement against the Lollards than their predecessors had been."¹¹⁸

Now both lay and clerical powers were sworn to seek out and punish heretics. Persecutions continued throughout Henry V's reign, executing Lollard sympathizers who were also charged with conspiring against the king. Kent, in particular, continued to produce trials of heretics for a decade. Additionally, some religious people continued to bring heretics to trial without the incentive of treason.

While the king was secure enough in his throne to be able to give pardons, the first nine months of his reign had shown that the Lollard heresy was an important issue in the attempt to maintain stability in England. Thus, he continued to take a firm stance against Lollardry, both by the parliamentary actions giving officials the responsibility of keeping the heretics under control as well as later sending representatives to the Council of Constance who were instructed to take a hard line against heresy.

He had apparently offered a pardon to Oldcastle in order to

¹¹⁷Thomson, 8.

¹¹⁸Lechler, 457.

secure a safe base in England while he was fighting in France, but when Oldcastle did not take advantage of the pardon by Easter of 1414, this offer of clemency was voided. While Henry might have been willing to drop charges of treason in order to put an end to Oldcastle's subversive period in hiding, it is probable that even if Oldcastle had sued for pardon, he would still have been turned over to the church for a renewal of heresy proceedings.¹¹⁹

Oldcastle remained in hiding, unbetrayed, until Autumn 1417, nearly four years later. Oldcastle was finally captured in Wales, wounded, and taken to London. On December 14, 1417, he appeared before parliament. Since he was already condemned as a traitor and excommunicated as a heretic, as McFarlane points out, he was given a chance to reply but then hanged and burnt in St. Giles Fields.¹²⁰ He remained firm in his beliefs to the very end. The death of Oldcastle did not herald the end of Lollardry, but the intensity of the movement was past.

For all the measures to suppress heresy, it was impossible to eliminate it, though Lollard adherents ceased to declare their beliefs openly. The defeat at St. Giles Fields had made Lollardry more concerned with self-preservation than revolution,¹²¹ driving the movement into deep hiding. Furthermore, the defeat in 1414 had deprived the sect of leaders

¹¹⁹Thomson, 10.

¹²⁰McFarlane, 182.

¹²¹Thomson, 19.

of rank and education, changing the nature of the Lollard heretical movement. The ideas survived now only in isolated individuals, and even the loose network of Lollard believers disintegrated.

During the last years of his reign, Henry and parliament seemed to feel that the Lollards were less dangerous than they had been. There was a general feeling that the scattered group was no longer a threat to the government, and therefore should be left to the church for punishment. "The legislation ends here," Aston writes, "after the melee at St. Giles' Fields, not because heretics had ceased to be a danger, but because England had acquired a full complement of laws to deal with the offending sect."¹²²

Whether or not he was partly motivated by personal piety, a historical examination of Henry V and the Lollards provides an example of church-state relations in which religious concerns were used as a tool to further political aims. Henry had not only underlined the connection between heresy and treason, thus adding legitimacy to his intervention in church affairs, but he had established a personal degree of control over the church hierarchy itself and of ecclesiastical policy.¹²³

The Lollards had called him "the priests' king,"¹²⁴ and this is a telling comment on the church-state relationship.

¹²²Aston, 43.

¹²³McNiven, 226.

¹²⁴Allmand, 305.

Henry was not only protector of the clergy, but its master, too.¹²⁵ The king had made himself a central figure in the church, the "'strong pillar in the middle' upon which the structure [of the church] was to be founded."¹²⁶ Although Henry had preserved Catholic orthodoxy, he had extracted a heavy price from the church hierarchy, increased control of the secular over the spiritual.¹²⁷ "In all but name," Catto writes, "more than a century before the title could be used, Henry V had begun to act as the supreme governor of the church of England."¹²⁸ By working with the church to enforce orthodoxy, Henry decisively secured his twofold political aims: encourage stability through the persecution of heresy and enhancing his power over the church itself.

¹²⁵Allmand, 305.

¹²⁶P.J. Horner, "'The King Taught us the Lesson': Benedictine Support for Henry V's Suppression of the Lollards", Mediaeval Studies, 52 (1990), 211, 214-15, 220, quoted in Allmand, 305.

¹²⁷Allmand, 305.

¹²⁸Catto, 115.

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