Jnl of Ecclesiastical History, *Vol. 61*, *No. 1*, *January 2010*. © Cambridge University Press 2010
doi:10.1017/S0022046909991436

Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority among Three Late Medieval Masters

by IAN CHRISTOPHER LEVY
Lexington Theological Seminary
E-mail: ilevy@lextheo.edu

John Wyclif (d. 1384), Thomas Netter (d. 1430) and Jean Gerson (d. 1429) had a good deal in common. They were all theologians, and thus 'masters of the sacred page' by trade. They all recognised the absolute authority of Scripture in matters of the Catholic faith over and against any pretensions of canon law. What separated them, therefore, was not the recognition of authority as such, but rather the correct application of that authority. Wyclif exercised his rights as a university master to dissent from ecclesiastical determinations that ran contrary to the truth as revealed in Scripture. Netter and Gerson set out to curb this sort of magisterial excess which they believed would inevitably lead to the destruction of all proper norms of authority within the Church. Rather than being a simple tale of heresy and orthodoxy, therefore, this late medieval conflict turned on the question of professional expertise, rights and responsibilities.

The medieval theologian was by definition a 'master of the sacred page' ('magister sacrae paginae'). This was not a romantic sobriquet, but a job description. The theologian was a licensed biblical expert; the object of his study was the most authoritative text in Christendom. This essay will examine three late medieval theologians, all of whom sought to establish orthodox doctrine upon the foundation of Scripture and, more precisely, Scripture as it lives within the ecclesiastical tradition of the saints and holy doctors. The three theologians in question are John Wyclif (d. 1384), Thomas Netter (d. 1430) and Jean Gerson (d. 1429). It would come as no surprise if the latter two were found to have a good deal in common given their common enemies: the Wycliffites and Hussites. The fact is, however, that both Netter and Gerson share many central principles with Wyclif regarding the authority of holy Scripture and the vital role of the larger Catholic tradition. What is more, Wyclif and Gerson have strikingly similar views regarding the literal sense of Scripture and the sanctity of the biblical exegete. Certainly, what unites all three is an abiding commitment to their

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

roles as *magistri sacrae paginae*. Wyclif is the odd man out in this drama because he found himself on the opposite side of ecclesiastical power. Yet his entire reform programme is driven by his sense of himself, not as an outsider fighting the powers that be, but as a licensed authority entitled to render judgement on all matters pertaining to the Catholic faith. Indeed, this is what made the entire struggle against the Oxford and Prague dissenters so difficult; they were part of the establishment themselves.

First a few words about the medieval master generally and the theological master specifically. Hailed by popes as 'stars of the firmament', the medieval masters enjoyed a series of rights and privileges owing to the attainment of a degree that made them universally recognised experts in their field. And among the masters, theologians were at the top of the ladder, followed by canon lawyers, civil lawyers, masters of arts and those of medicine. The theologians were *ex officio* to teach what is useful for attaining salvation, and for their defence of the faith they would receive the heavenly reward of the aureola. With their exalted status came responsibility, however. No matter their erudition, masters were also expected to be of upright character, men who shunned the vices of the world. Brilliant as they might be, they were to remain humble. When they engaged in scholastic disputation it was not to be in search of vainglory, but rather as part of a sober quest for the truth.[1]

Yet even where they may have found the truth, the masters did not have the last word in medieval Christendom. The term *magisterium* denoted intellectual authority, but doctrinal authority rested with the pope and bishops.[2] Despite the recognised expertise of the masters only papal and conciliar doctrinal pronouncements were deemed fully 'authentic', whereas those of the doctors were 'scholastic' and 'magisterial'. It is important to note, however, that the doctor was permitted to expound upon issues that had not yet been declared articles of belief and was only required to revoke his position if proved contrary to the Catholic faith.[3] And it was generally

[1] Some excellent studies include Ian P. Wei, 'The self-image of the masters of theology at the university of Paris in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries', this JOURNAL xlvi (1995), 398–441; Jacques Verger, 'Teachers', in Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *A history of the university in Europe*, Cambridge 1992, i. 144–68; Astrik Gabriel, 'The ideal master of the mediaeval university', *Catholic Historical Review* lx (1974), 1–40; Gabriel le Bras, 'Velut splendor firmamenti: le docteur dans le droit de l'église médiévale', in *Melanges offerts à Etienne Gilson*, Toronto 1959, 372–88; R. Guelluy, 'La Place des théologiens dans l'église et la société médiévales', in *Miscellanea Historica in honorem Alberti de Meyer*, Louvain 1946, 571–89; and Jean Leclercq, 'L'Idéal du théologien au moyen âge', *Revue des sciences religieuses* xxi (1947), 121–48, and 'La Théologie comme science d'apres la littérature quodlibétique', *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* xi (1939), 351–74.

[2] Olga Weijers, *Terminologie des universités au XIIIe siècle*, Rome 1987, 134–5.

[3] G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Quasi stellae fulgebunt: on the position and function of the doctor of divinity in mediaeval Church and society', in D. W. D. Shaw (ed.), *In divers manners: a St Mary's miscellany to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the founding of St Mary's College, 7th March*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hoped that if a master did stray too far the matter would be resolved through fraternal correction before having to resort to coercive measures.[4]

Complicated theological questions were not always easy to settle, of course, and many theologians bristled at the thought of prelates having the last word on an issue that had not received the full scrutiny of the masters. The Parisian theologian Godfrey of Fontaines vehemently objected to prelates unilaterally deciding what is orthodox and heretical. Godfrey made it clear that even the decisions handed down by popes are open to scrutiny, and that it is precisely for the theologian to inquire into those decisions and determine their validity.[5] Godfrey would not be intimidated in his quest for the truth no matter that he might offend the powerful. When dealing with questions pertinent to the faith the theologian was obliged to speak the truth and would sin if he refused. Indeed, it belongs to the very nature of his public office that he teach the truth.[6] Needless to say, this led to some heated confrontations, as when the Parisian secular masters challenged the rights awarded the mendicants by Pope Martin IV's 1281 bull *Ad fructus uberes*. Godfrey, along with Henry of Ghent, sought to have the bull overturned only to be berated by Cardinal Benedict Gaetani (later Boniface VIII) who prohibited any further discussion of the matter and even suspended Henry from teaching for his temerity.[7] This sense of the inalienable right of the theologian to dissent from the decisions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was very much alive in John Wyclif.

1539, St Andrews 1990, 11–28. See also Yves Congar, 'Bref historique des formes du "magistère" et de ses relations avec les docteurs', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques* lx (1976), 99–112.

[4] J. M. M. H Thijssen, *Censure and heresy at the university of Paris: 1200–1400*, Philadelphia 1998, 9–34; Takashi Shogimen, 'From disobedience to toleration: William of Ockham and the medieval discourse on fraternal correction', this JOURNAL lii (2001), 599–622; William J. Courtenay, 'Inquiry and inquisition: academic freedom in medieval universities', *Church History* lviii (1989), 168–81.

[5] 'Ad rationem pertinet de dubiis, et de illis post inquistionem iudicare et determinare. Sed ea quae condita sunt a papa possunt esse dubia. Ergo ille sapiens praecipue ratiocinandi potest inquirere et determinare. Sed doctor in theologia debet esse inter alios de numero sapientum': quodlibet iii, q. 10, in *Les Philosophes belges*, ed. M. de Wulf and A. Pelzer, Louvain 1904, ii. 218.

[6] 'Praeterea doctor theologicus debet dicere veritatem in fide et moribus. Sed peccat si recusat determinare veritatem quae ad fidem pertinet, et praecipue si aliqui deviarent a fide': quodlibet xii, q. 6, in *Les Philosophes belges*, ed. J. Hoffmans, Louvain 1932, v. 105; 'Cum ergo doctor veritatis habens officium publicum docendi veritatem': ibid. v. 107.

[7] Alan Bernstein, 'Magisterium and license: corporate autonomy against papal authority in the medieval university of Paris', *Viator* ix (1978), 291–307; Mary Martin McLaughlin, *Intellectual freedom and its limitations in the university of Paris in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*, New York 1977, 238–45. For a close analysis of Godfrey and Henry on these issues see also Wei, 'Self-image', 421–30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

John Wyclif

Throughout his decade-long conflict with the ecclesiastical hierarchy John Wyclif was acutely aware of his magisterial status; it was his licence to advise and correct. Wyclif's views on Scripture have had a fair amount of attention over the last fifty years.[8] What has not received attention, however, is the way in which Wyclif's perception of his role as a *magister sacrae paginae* shaped his reform programme. It should be clear at the outset that none of Wyclif's medieval adversaries faulted him for exalting holy Scripture; their quarrel was with his interpretation of what all sides recognised as a supremely authoritative text.[9] When Wyclif speaks about the nature of Scripture itself he can sound quite traditional. There are certainly some similarities to the thirteenth-century theologian, Henry of Ghent, for example. Well known is Wyclif's view that holy Scripture on its highest level is the 'book of life', while on its next level it consists of the eternal truths inscribed therein.[10] Already, one hundred years earlier, Henry of Ghent was saying that holy Scripture contains the eternal truths that have been transcribed by the rules of the eternal light of Wisdom itself.[11] Appealing to the Wisdom of Solomon (vii. 26), Henry described Scripture as the brightness of the eternal light, and the mirror without taint, which is capable of refuting all error.[12] Wyclif appealed to this very same verse when he portrayed Scripture as eternal and indelible, the very radiance of eternal light, that flawless mirror of divine majesty. It is 'the foundation of every Catholic opinion, the exemplar and mirror designed

[8] Most recently Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite heresy*, Cambridge 2002, and also Alastair Minnis, 'Authorial intention and the "literal sense" in the exegetical theories of Richard Fitzralph and John Wyclif', *Proceedings of the Irish Academy* lxxv (1975), 1–31; Michael Hurley, '"Scriptura sola": Wyclif and his critics', *Traditio* xvi (1960), 275–352; and Beryl Smalley, 'The Bible and eternity: John Wyclif's dilemma', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* xxvii (1964), 73–89. The most sympathetic account can be found in Paul de Vooght's classic *Les Sources de la doctrine chrétienne*, Bruges 1954, 168–200.

[9] For a thorough examination of Wyclif's medieval critics see Mishtooni Bose, 'The opponents of John Wyclif', in Ian Christopher Levy (ed.), *A companion to John Wyclif: late medieval theologian*, Leiden 2006, 407–55.

[10] 'primus est liber vite … secundus est veritates libro vite inscripte secundum esse earum intelligibile, et utraque istarum scripturarum est absolute necessaria': *De veritate sacrae scripturae* vi, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, London 1905–7, i. 108; 'Primo enim scriptura sacra signat Jesum Christum librum vitae, in quo omnis veritas est inscripta … Secundo modo signat veritates in ipso libro vitae inscriptas, sive sint rationes exemplares aeternae sive veritates aliae temporales': *Trialogus* iii.31, ed. Gotthard Lechler, Oxford 1869, 238–9; cf. Ian Christopher Levy, 'John Wyclif's neoplatonic view of Scripture in its Christological context', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* xi (2003), 227–40.

[11] 'sacra scriptura candor est lucis aeternae, quis continet veritates aeternas a regulis lucis aeternae transcriptas': *Lectura ordinaria super sacram scripturam*, ed. R. Macken, Leiden 1980, 7.

[12] 'Est autem advertendum quod proprie dicitur [scriptura] "candor lucis." … Nec tamen est tam obscura, quin contra omnem errorem clara est et manifesta. Et ideo tertio sacra scriptura est speculum sine macula, quia continet veritates claras': ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to examine and extinguish all manner of error and heretical evil'.[13] In keeping with the notion of Scripture as the eternal and perfect mirror, Wyclif contended that nothing could be deemed heretical unless proven to contradict Scripture. And if Scripture is the absolute standard by which to judge heresy, then it falls to the theologian – precisely in his role as *magister sacrae paginae* – to determine what is orthodox and what heretical.[14] Theologians are the best guides for the very reason that they understand holy Scripture's unique *modus loquendi* and thus will be able to judge which laws are really in keeping with the testimony of the saints and which are merely human inventions.[15] All of Wyclif's efforts at reform rested on this claim to professional expertise.

It should be recalled that the theologian, as master of the sacred page, was granted unique access to holy Scripture. Only the full-fledged master (as opposed to the bachelor) was competent to expound upon the mystical senses of Scripture, and he was accorded the best hours of the day to present his lectures.[16] Theologians jealously guarded such privileges and were especially upset when they saw the masters of arts trespassing into their territory. Hence at Paris in 1272, for instance, a statute was passed that strictly forbade the arts masters from determining theological questions.[17] Wyclif, for his part, lashed out at unqualified members of the arts faculty testing out their logical-grammatical theories on holy Scripture. As a newly incepted doctor of theology in 1372 Wyclif railed against these untrained grammarians who, knowing nothing of the *mysterium scripturae*, mangle its subtle discourse. Only the theologians, he insists, may plumb the depths of Scripture's hidden senses.[18] Authority in these matters turned on one's rank within the academic community.

[13] 'veritas enim est ibi permanencior, quia eterna et indelebilis, liber est serenior, quia candor lucis eterne et speculum sine macula, Sap. Septimo': *De veritate sacrae scripturae* vi (i. 111–12); 'tum quia [scriptura] est fundamentum cuicunque opinioni catholice, sed et exemplar est speculum ad examinandum et extigwendum quemcunque errorem sive hereticam pravitatem': ibid. i (i. 1–2).

[14] 'Non enim licet hereticare aliquid nisi docendo quod sit Scripture sacre contrarium … Ex quibus patet quod solus theologus debet hereticare dampnabile; solum enim iste scit quid est hereticum, qui scit esse Scripture sacre contrarium. Et per idem cum nove constituciones, que non fundantur in Scriptura sacra, sunt superflue et inique': *De civili dominio* i. 44, ed. R. L. Poole and Johann Loserth, London 1885/1900–4, 437.

[15] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xxvii (iii. 63).

[16] Palémon Glorieux, 'L'Enseignment au moyen âge: techniques et méthodes en usage a la faculté de thélogie de Paris, au XIIIe siècle', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* xxxv (1968), 108–19.

[17] See John Wippel, 'The condemnations of 1270 and 1277 at Paris', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* vii (1977), 169–201.

[18] 'Conceditur tamen cum Doctore [John Kynyngham] quod rudium grammaticorum, et polemicorum, ac aliorum quorum animus est phantasmatibus temporalium involutus, non est sic loqui, cum margaritae non sunt spargendae inter porcos; sed altissimorum theologorum ac

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In 1377 Wyclif set out upon a wholesale defence of the literal sense of Scripture against abuses at the hands of the arts faculty, some of whom argued that Scripture was often illogical when read literally. Against this narrow conception, Wyclif argued that the literal sense of Scripture is whatever the Holy Spirit primarily establishes for the sake of leading the faithful soul upwards into God, thereby incorporating various mystical senses and figures of speech as needed.[19] Wyclif expressed a commonly accepted principle when he insisted that Scripture has its own logic and is always true *de virtute sermonis*, that is, according to the intended sense of the author. And it is because Scripture speaks in this unique and sublime way that he also believed that theologians should model their own discourse on that of the 'sacred page'.[20]

The parameters of orthodox discourse hinged upon one's faithfulness to the logic of Scripture, but that is not to say that Wyclif was a slave to the explicit verbal formulation of the biblical text. Rather, he chose to follow Augustine in the belief that all truth is ultimately found in Scripture, 'whether explicitly or implicitly', such that Scripture remains the final measure of orthodoxy.[21] Wyclif was aware that theological speculation unchecked by a sacred and eternal standard could easily lead to heretical conclusions. It is in this vein that he observed how the church Fathers had been wary of introducing novel and non-Scriptural terminology into theological discourse lest it provide an opening for heretics to corrupt orthodox teaching. Yet when doctrine was sufficiently secure they were willing to allow non-Scriptural terms that had since been approved by the Church. Such terminology is acceptable precisely because it faithfully expresses Scriptural truth. Wyclif only cautioned, therefore, against a

eos intelligentium, quando loquuntur de veritatibus supra tempus, et praeter tempus, illud mysterium.': *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, ed. W. W. Shirley, London 1858, 463; 'nos autem sub auctoritate Scripturae decet pro loco et tempore sic loqui, ut sensus celatus plus pateat theologis diligentibus veritatem': ibid. 468.

[19] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* vi (i. 119–20).

[20] 'quod [scriptura] est vera de virtute sermonis secundum quamlibet eius partem et quod professores scripture sacre debent sequi eam in modo loquendi': ibid. i (i. 2). Note that a Paris statute of 1340 declared that a word derives its force/meaning ('virtus') from the author's intention rather than its strict grammatical sense; the literal sense is the intended sense: *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. Heinrich Denifle, Paris 1889–97, ii/1, 506; cf. William J. Courtenay, 'Force of words and figures of speech: the crisis over *virtus sermonis* in the fourteenth century', *Franciscan Studies* xliv (1984), 107–28.

[21] 'Et cum secundum Augustinum omnis veritas sit in scriptura sacra vel explicite vel implicite, patet quod nulla alia scriptura capit auctoritatem vel valorem, nisi de quanto sua sententia a scriptura sacra sit derivata': *Trialogus* iii. 31, p. 240; cf. *De doctrina christiana* ii.42.63, CCSL xxxii. 76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recklessness that had scant regard for the parameters set by Scripture and the ancient doctors.[22]

Wyclif's comments on the western addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed offers a rare glimpse into his understanding of doctrinal development relative to scriptural authority. In fact, his position bears striking similarity in places to what Thomas Netter will espouse fifty years later. In his 1370 *De trinitate* Wyclif readily admits that the Holy Spirit's procession from the Son is not explicitly stated in Scripture. What is more, the Council of Constantinople (381) clearly asserts that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.[23] Yet, while the Greeks may be upset with the Latins for altering the creed, one must take into consideration the emergence of heresies that compelled the Western Church to act as it did for the preservation of the faith. In 381, says Wyclif, there was no need to add that the Spirit proceeds from the Son because it had not yet been challenged by heretics. The *filioque* clause, therefore, did not amount to an addition of some newly-discovered truth, but was simply the ancient truth presented in a more explicit form.[24] Actually, says Wyclif, there are many Catholic truths which are taught by the saints and doctors of the Church that are not 'expressly' posited in Scripture. All sorts of things are catholically taught in the Church which are not expressed in the Gospel, such as Christ's descent into hell, matters pertaining to the administration of sacraments and the publication of creeds. Having said that, Wyclif is hardly deeming Scripture an insufficient source of Catholic faith. For the fact remains that every philosophical truth can be found in holy Scripture, such that the holy doctors, led by reason, will be able to bring to full expression the truth hidden therein. Hence Wyclif will conclude that the Spirit's procession from the Son does indeed 'follow from the sense of Scripture' if not from the precise words.[25]

[22] 'quod sancti doctores in primitiva ecclesia racionabiliter formidabant in materia fidei introducere novellos terminos preter scripturam propter veneni formidinem, quod abscondi posset ab hereticis. Verumptamen detecto sensu et limitata significacione terminorum ab ecclesia, satis secure potest catholicus uti terminis, licet non fuerint in textu scripture exemplati … vel si exceditur, caveamus de terminis concernentibus materiam fidei, et sequamur antiquos doctores et sanctos magis probabiles, sed pre omnibus scripturam sacram': *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xiii (i. 309).

[23] *De trinitate* xvii, ed. Allen DuPont Breck, Boulder 1962, 173–4.

[24] 'Pro isto notandum quod secundum diversitatem temporum et pululaciones heresum erant diversa concilia diversas hereses dampnancia': ibid. 178.

[25] 'Secundo dico quod multa catholica sunt docta per sanctos et doctores ecclesie qui non sunt expresse posita verbaliter in scriptura. … Patet enim quotlibet esse docta catholice in ecclesia quae non sunt expressa in evangelio, ut patet de descensu Christi ad inferos, de quotlibet condicionibus sacramentorum, et edicionibus symbolorum et conciliis diversis. Sed quia in scriptura sacra est omnis veritas philosophica et in sanctis doctoribus racione duce veritas philosophica occulta est sepius manifesta, ideo dico tercio quod eque expresse sequitur ex sensu scripture quod spiritus sanctus procedit ex filio sicut et procedit ex patre': ibid. 179.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wyclif might happily abide the language of the great creeds, therefore, but he regarded the language surrounding the scholastic doctrine of transubstantiation as an extraneous modern addition to the faith, unwarranted by Scripture.[26] The problem with transubstantiation was not the word itself, but the fact that the word conveyed a concept that was at odds with the greater *sensus scripturae*. It is not a matter of novel words, but novel concepts, which can only be conveyed by these words.

Eliciting true doctrine from the text of Scripture and the statements of the Fathers is the work of theologians. Not only did Wyclif insist that he was more qualified to understand holy Scripture than the masters of arts. He also staked his claim to *auctoritas* as a *magister sacrae paginae* against the canon lawyers, the *doctores in decretis*. In doing so Wyclif took his place among a long line of theologians who asserted their rights to judge matters of orthodoxy and heresy. The masters of the 'sacred page' regarded theology as the *scientia divinae scripturae* and often equated theology with holy Scripture itself.[27] Theologians liked to point out that theirs was the principal science because it is based on the divine authority of holy Scripture, whereas the science of canon law hinged on the merely human authorities of the lawyers' own glosses.[28] William of Ockham made the case for the theologians succinctly. Only in theology is the Catholic faith handed down fully and explicitly. Everything in canon law that pertains to the rule of faith is ultimately derived from theology by virtue of the fact that theology is the higher science and canon law the lower. Theologians treat the science whose immediate author is God, from whom comes the whole of the Catholic faith. This is why theology is the touchstone of orthodoxy; only that which can be proven contrary to theology will count as heresy no matter the decisions of pope or council. So it is that the pope ought to rely principally on theology and only

[26] 'quanto magis moderna ecclesia fugeret a seductivo satrapa capere tam terminos extra fidem scripture quam eciam sentenciam a scripture extraneam. Nam isti termini *accidens* et *subiectum* ad sensum loquencium in ista materia sunt satis extranea': *Sermo* lviii, in *Sermones*, ed. Johann Loserth, London 1887–90, iii. 507.

[27] Consider, for instance, how, as he establishes the authority of theology as a science, Thomas Aquinas employs the terms *sacra doctrina* and *sacra scriptura* interchangeably: *Summa theologiae* i, art. 1 q. 1.

[28] R. James Long, '"Utrum iurista vel theologus plus proficiat ad regimen ecclesiae": a *quaestio disputata* of Francis Caraccioli: edition and study', *Mediaeval Studies* xxx (1968), 134–62; R. W. Southern, 'The changing role of the university in medieval Europe', *Historical Research* lx (1987), 122–46; G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Exponents of sovereignty: canonists as seen by the theologians in the late Middle Ages', in Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and sovereignty: essays in honour of Michael Wilks*, Oxford 1991, 299–312; Takashi Shogimen, 'The relationship between theology and canon law: another context of political thought in the early fourteenth century', *Journal of the History of Ideas* lx (1999), 417–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

secondarily on the sacred canons when pronouncing what is Catholic and what heretical.[29]

True to his vocation, Wyclif defended the primacy of theology, praising it as the highest of the sciences for the unfailing way in which it proceeds, the nobility of its subject matter and the principle of its ultimate goal. Only theology begets and rejuvenates the members of the body of Christ. Thus, given its uniquely sublime status, any science that would oppose theology must be diabolical.[30] Such exaltation of theology is meant to serve the goal of reform. Having mastered this science, theologians are the ones best equipped to reveal the true faith to the people; they will rescue the Church from sin and heresy.[31] They will do so based upon the sacred canons of holy Scripture, itself the foundation of all ecclesiastical law. For Scripture surpasses all human canons in usefulness, authority and subtlety. This is not to disparage canon law as such, for Wyclif allows that much of canon law is really an abbreviated form of divine law. Unfortunately, though, what ought to have remained purely evangelical began to be corrupted with the Donation of Constantine.[32]

In order to restore the integrity of canon law – so that it might again function as an expression of the divine law found in Scripture – there must be a return to the law-giver. The *auctoritas* of any law depends upon the *auctor* of that law. For Wyclif, all authority is ultimately rooted in a person, the divine person of Christ the Word. The law of Christ, as conveyed principally in Scripture, is infinitely more authoritative than any human tradition, precisely because it finds its source in the divine law-giver. The law that has been handed down to human beings by uncreated Wisdom proves to be the best means to peace in the world – hence Wyclif's dismay at its being corrupted by human traditions i.e. the proliferation of papal decretals.[33] Now he can only lament that human law is leading people to forsake the wholly sufficient law of Christ that has been handed down in Scripture.[34]

Wyclif does not lay the blame solely upon the heads of the canonists, however; much of the responsibility rests with his fellow theologians. Actually, Wyclif admits that some canon and civil lawyers prove to be good theologians at times and are actually better acquainted with the substance of theology and its attendant virtues than many doctors of theology. This, he says, can be traced to the negligence of theologians as well as the attention lawyers give to theology, which is the very lifeblood of their science.[35] There may be a few noble canonists out there but most, according to Wyclif, treat the theological faculty as a superfluous bunch of trouble-makers. Nevertheless it must be admitted that Wyclif may have caricatured the position of the

[29] *Dialogus* I.i.2–5; in *Monarchia S. Romani Imperii*, ed. M. Goldast, Hanover 1611; repr. Graz 1960, ii. 400–3.
[30] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xx (ii. 146–7).
[31] *Sermones* xxviii, i. 257–8.
[32] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xxiv (ii. 268).
[33] Ibid. xx (ii. 129).
[34] Ibid. xx (ii. 131).
[35] Ibid. xxiv (ii. 235).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

canonists when he claimed that they consider papal decretals to be of equal authority with the Gospel and of even greater authority than the letters of Paul, since the pope is supposedly entitled to dispense against the Apostle and correct the Gospel. Indeed, says Wyclif, any theologian who would dare confine the pope's authority to a Scriptural foundation is labelled a heretic.[36]

If the best of canon law is a restatement of divine law, which is itself ultimately rooted in holy Scripture, then it can be useful in the governance of the Church. And so long as the pope governs the Church by way of such law, Wyclif will accept his authority. He admitted that the pope has the right to pass laws for the good of the Church provided that these statutes are in accord with holy Scripture.[37] Once again, though, everything stands under the judgement of holy Scripture because of Scripture's unique authority resting upon its divine authorship. A papal decretal is a mere human creation, whereas the entirety of Scripture is directly authorised by God.[38] Still, Wyclif allows the pope to function in his traditional role as arbiter of Scripture's meaning just so long as he abides by the Holy Spirit's intended sense, which has itself been approved by the Church's holy doctors. If, however, the pope were to forsake the true interpretation of Christ's Law as it is embodied in holy Scripture, then faithful Christians would have the right to resist him since he would thereby prove himself disobedient to God.[39] Everything Wyclif has said here is perfectly orthodox. Indeed, he could appeal directly to a text attributed to Pope Urban II in Gratian's *Decretum* which states that in those instances where Christ, the Apostles or the holy Fathers have clearly defined something the pope cannot pass any new law, but rather must defend these precedents. And if the pope were to attempt to undermine apostolic doctrine his error would deprive his judgement of any force.[40]

The fact is that the supreme authority of holy Scripture is maintained throughout the *Decretum*. In the opening distinctions, which deal with the nature of law and authority, Gratian enlisted a series of passages drawn from St Augustine which makes it very clear that the canonical Scriptures take precedence over the writings of the Fathers and those of the bishops.[41] Hence, even as it is certainly true that the pope is the final authority in the settling of cases, he is still bound by the parameters set by Scripture and the

[36] Ibid. xx (ii.134–5). In fact, the canonists would only have said that the pope can grant a dispensation from an evangelical counsel (not a precept) and from an apostolic ordinance so long as it was not an article of faith: Walter Ullmann, *Medieval papalism: the political theories of the medieval canonists*, London 1949, 50–5.

[37] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xv (i. 403).

[38] 'quelibet epistola decretalis est condita per aliquem papam, Cristi vicarium cum suis subditis; quelibet pars scripture sacre immediate et proxime autorizatur per deum, igitur conclusio': ibid. xv (i. 395).

[39] *De civili dominio* iii. 17, p. 331.

[40] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xxi (ii.176); cf. *Decretum*, C. 25 q. 1 c. 6, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Emil Friedberg, Leipzig 1879, i. 1008.

[41] *Decretum*, D. 9 cc. 3–10 (Friedberg, i. 17–18).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

creeds.[42] The lawyers themselves continued to support this principle. Brian Tierney points out that the canonists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries agreed that Scripture contained all the revealed truths of the Christian faith whether implicitly or explicitly.[43] And Thomas Izbicki notes that, although by the end of the thirteenth century the canonists were arranging their authorities differently – according decretals greater weight in matters of Scriptural interpretation than patristic authorities – Scripture was always accorded the principal place.[44] Even deep into the fifteenth century the papalist Juan de Torquemada (d. 1468) is referring to holy Scripture as the *lumen et regula* by which all doctrines are to be examined. Indeed, no doctor is to be believed except to the extent that his teaching is in accordance with the authority of Scripture or manifest reason. This also means that the pope and council must yield to any theologian who can render a superior Scriptural argument. Only after the pope and plenary council, acting in concert, render a decision on a matter of faith does that decision achieve finality.[45] It seems fair to say that the conflict between theologians and lawyers did not centre on the authority of Scripture as such – even if theologians may have portrayed the situation that way – but rather on who should have the final word in deciding matters that affected the life of the Church. In this vein, one is reminded of Gratian's comment – when weighing the relative authority of patristic commentaries and papal decretals – that it is one thing to decide cases and another to explicate Scripture. For in the deciding of cases one needs not only *scientia*, but also *potestas*. Thus, when it comes to explicating the Scriptures, the Fathers take precedence, but in deciding cases they must defer to the pontiffs.[46]

Having said all this it must be must remembered that Wyclif was not forced out of Oxford University because he praised Scripture and protested against the influence of canon lawyers. It was because of the theological conclusions that he reached. To Wyclif's enemies – many of whom were theologians themselves – Wyclif was a prime example of the proud master run amok. It all came to a head in 1380 when a commission of Wyclif's fellow Oxford masters censured him for his views on the eucharist and ended his career at the university.[47] Throughout it all, however, no one questioned the

[42] *Decretum*, D. 19 c. 7 (Friedberg, i. 62).

[43] Brian Tierney, 'Sola scriptura and the canonists', *Studia Gratiana* xi, Rome 1967, 345–66.

[44] Thomas Izbicki, 'La Bible et les canonists', in Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon (eds), *Le Moyen Âge et la bible*, Paris 1984, 371–84.

[45] Hermann Schuessler, 'Sacred doctrine and the authority of scripture in canonistic thought on the eve of the reformation', in Guy Fitch Lytle (ed.), *Reform and authority in the medieval and Reformation Church*, Washington, DC 1981, 55–68; 'scriptura sacra est lumen et regula: ad quam et secundum quam omnes doctrine doctorum ecclesie veniunt dirigende et examinande … nulli doctori creditur nisi quatenus dictum eorum aut scripture sancte auctoritas aut manifesta ratio roborat': ibid. 61.

[46] *Decretum*, D. 20 ante c. 1 (Friedberg, i. 65).

[47] *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, 110–14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

orthodoxy of his sources – only their interpretation. Wyclif had mined traditional materials to make his case; his works are replete with quotations drawn from the Fathers and large samples of canon law. Nor was Wyclif opposed to glossing such authoritative texts; there was a venerable tradition not only of biblical, but also of legal, commentary that he continually evoked.[48] What Wyclif does object to, however, are those modern postilators who seek to impose their own logic upon the sacred text. He marvels at their arrogance as they set aside this faithful tradition in favour of their own personal interpretation. Having lost sight of the inherent authority of the tradition, they are destroying the very text that they were meant to defend. Yet genuine exposition, like a dutiful handmaid, seeks only to explain and disclose her lady's intentions. Wyclif is struck by the irony that one is forbidden to gloss papal decretals, except to confirm the tenor of the words and clarify them in keeping with their intended literal sense ('de virtute sermonis'). That being the case, then one is surely obliged to observe the logic of Scripture – itself the form of Christ's words – which is more perfectly composed and more duly authorised than a mere decretal. The Holy Spirit has presented the law of Scripture in the form that the Church was meant to observe, thereby surpassing all created authority. Hence Wyclif's refrain that the Catholic theologian is obligated to study Scripture's manner of speaking so that he can correctly grasp its meaning, which is only possible when one becomes acquainted with its logic.[49] The words of Scripture need not be repeated verbatim by commentators, but the sacred sense that they convey must be preserved. Reverence for the *modus loquendi scripturae* will facilitate the disclosure of the *sensus scripturae*.

Wyclif allows for faithful exposition, therefore, but it must proceed within the basic parameters that Scripture itself has established. Many of the Church's exegetes have faithfully conveyed the logic of Scripture, and such exegetes were not confined to the patristic era. Wyclif praised the pious interpretation of both Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyra.[50] The problem, as Wyclif sees it, is that his opponents are no longer controlled by the tradition. If they can gloss texts to support whatever meaning they like – for example that eucharistic accidents exist without subjects – then they could go on to gloss away the entire history of Christ's life. It is not the act of glossing itself that so disturbs Wyclif, but rather the unbridled power that the glossators arrogate for themselves when they are no longer bound by

[48] Consider, for instance, Wyclif's appeal to Johannes Teutonicus' *Glossa ordinaria* on the *Decretum* in his *De civili dominio* ii. 11, pp. 121–2; cf. *Glossa ordinaria*, Paris 1601, cols 1768–9.

[49] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xv (i. 386–7). Wyclif is referring specifically to the bull of Pope Nicholas III, *Exiit qui seminat*, in *Decretales Gregorii* IX, 5. 12. 3 (Friedberg, ii. 1120–1).

[50] 'unde doctor de Lyra, licet novellus, tamen copiosus et ingeniosus postillator scripture': *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xii (i. 275); 'unde sanctus Thomas parte prima Summe … ecce, quante sancti doctores laborarunt ad excusandum scripturam sacram a falsitate': ibid. iv (i. 73).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the tradition.[51] It all boiled down, therefore, to the authoritative interpretation of Scripture, the decrees and the holy doctors. For his part, Wyclif protests that he has no desire to scandalise the Roman Church: 'I understand my sayings on this matter [the eucharist] to be in accordance with the logic of Scripture, and also in accord with the logic of the holy doctors and the decree of the Roman Church, which I suppose to have spoken prudently.' All the trouble can be traced to the recent glossators who have distorted the sacred witnesses to serve their own ends.[52] Throughout his tribulations, whether concerning civil dominion or eucharistic presence, Wyclif made it clear that he would retract his remarks if they could be proven heretical by way of Scripture and the saints.[53]

The problem, of course, was that Wyclif did not believe that his opponents had made their case, which meant that he was free to continue in his protests. He asserted the authority inherent to the magisterial position he held; he was an expert and would not back down. Like Godfrey of Fontaines, Wyclif believed that the theologian has a sworn obligation to speak the truth no matter the disruption it may cause. More evil, says Wyclif, can be traced to keeping silent than promulgating the truth. When one knows the truth it would be a sin of omission to remain quiet. In fact, one is never culpable for speaking the truth even if it results in some punishable indiscretion. More people prefer to remain silent, though, rather than join Wyclif in his noble endeavour for fear of losing their temporal possessions and a servile fear of their superiors.[54]

If Wyclif viewed himself as a true Catholic rooted firmly in the tradition, he also embraced another age-old Catholic principle: that the mysteries of

[51] 'Item, si sine auctoritate scripture licet variare vocando sacramentum, quod ipsa vocat panem, non panem sed quantitatem vel aliam vanitatem (et non est finis potencie sic glosantis), videtur quod totam scripturam sacram pari auctoritate poterit sic glosare et sic totam fidem scripture antiquam pervertere et novam inducere, ut totam historiam gestorum Christi negare ad literam et glosare ad suum oppositum; et sic de aliis que in biblia inseruntur': *De apostasia* iii, ed. M. H. Dziewicki, London 1889, 49.

[52] 'Intelligo autem dicta mea in ista materia secundum logicam Scripturae, nec non secundum logicam sanctorum doctorum et decreti Romani ecclesiae, quos suppono prudenter fuisse locutos. Non enim valet scandalizare totam Romanam ecclesiam … et non obstante errore glossantium, ista fides mansit continue in ecclesia, etiam apud laicos': *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, 119; 'Ista autem septem testimonia sic inficiunt glossatores, quod dicunt tacite omnia talia dicta sanctorum debere intelligi per suum contrarium, et sic negari finaliter cum Scriptura': ibid. 128–9.

[53] *De veritate sacrae scripturae* xiv (i. 356).

[54] 'prima: longe plura mala orta sunt per tacenciam veritatis, quam per eius promulgacionem … cum igitur omnis omissio culpabilis in obligato dicere verbo et opere, veritatem sic tacencia … diccio autem veritatis numquam est culpabilis, licet forte quandoque per accidens ipsam concomitetur indiscrecio et sequatur illacio mali pene': ibid. xiii (i. 316); 'tercio videtur, quod veritatis tacencia principaliter propter periculum subtraccionis comodi temporalis vel perturbacionis auditorii ex veritatis displicencia gravati testatur timorem servilem': ibid. xiii (i. 318).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Scripture are only revealed to those who conform themselves to Christ. This has troubled some modern scholars who believe that Wyclif lapsed into a radical subjectivism whereby the biblical text could only be understood by the pure and humble.[55] Yet this may not be an entirely fair assessment. After all, the principle that humility and sanctity are indispensable to accurate exegesis is as old as the Christian faith itself (cf. 1 Corinthians ii. 6–13). St Augustine insisted that genuine comprehension of the sacred text comes only to the reader who is humble of heart, rooted in charity and subjected easily to Christ.[56] For Christ is the true teacher who must illuminate our minds if we are to grasp the truth.[57] St Bonaventure maintained that knowledge of Christ is the foundation upon which one understands holy Scripture, such that no one can ascend to this understanding apart from the infused faith of Christ.[58] As Christ is the Truth, says Bonaventure, so it is impossible to know the truth except through him.[59] The Uncreated Word is the principle of all true understanding, the most noble key for the soul that has been purified by faith.[60]

Indebted to this same Christological tradition of exegesis, Wyclif contends that if anyone hopes to discern the logic of Scripture, he must draw close to Christ, who is the subtlest logician of all. This, in turn, demands that the reader purify his heart, since Scripture's mysteries are hidden from the proud and the vain. The true disciple of Scripture must begin with a virtuous disposition, but he is not embarking on a solitary journey. For even as he humbly accepts the authority of Scripture he also adheres to the witness of the holy doctors.[61] Still, the truth will only become clear with the assistance of the one illuminating *Magister* – Christ the Light and the Principle of all knowledge. The exegete must be conformed to Wisdom himself, all the while believing in order to understand.[62] 'The Christian should conform his own sense to the sense of Christ if he is going to understand Scripture … and conform his own logic to the logic of Christ.'[63] In fact, the Christian must be so assimilated to Christ that he can be said to become Christ himself.[64]

[55] Hurley, '"Scriptura sola": Wyclif and his critics', 350; Minnis, 'Authorial intention', 25; Ghosh, *Wycliffite heresy*, 60.

[56] *De doctrina christiana* ii.42.63, CCSL xxxii. 77.

[57] *De magistro* xi.38, CCSL xxix. 196.

[58] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, *prologus*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. R. P. Bernardini and P. Romatino, Quarrachi 1882–1902, v. 201.

[59] *In Hexaëmeron Collatio* i.13, *Opera omnia* v. 331.

[60] Ibid. iii.9, *Opera omnia* v. 345.

[61] 'unde solebam dicere, quod virtuosa disposicio discipuli scripture specialiter stat in tribus, scilicet in autoritatis scripture humili acceptacione, in sui et racionis conformacione et sanctorum doctorum testificacione.': *De veritate sacrae scripturae* ix (i. 198).

[62] Ibid. ix (i. 201).

[63] 'et patet, quomodo ex conformitate sensus cristiani ad sensum Cristi oportet intelligere scripturam … sic necesse est, cristianum conformare logicam logice Cristi': ibid. xvi (ii. 20).

[64] 'oportet enim, cristianum esse per assimilacionem quodammodo ipsum Cristum': ibid. xxii (ii. 184).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conformity to Christ begins with the reading of Scripture for it is there that one encounters the love of God made manifest in the poor Christ.[65] And fulfilling Christ's word of love will lead to final perfection and eventual deification.[66]

It is not enough simply to have received a university degree or be counted among the regent masters. The true theological expert is a model of Christian piety who has gained a deeper comprehension of Scripture's subtleties precisely by conforming himself to the divine person who stands at the heart of Scripture. Wyclif was not proposing to measure the worth of a master by some set of arcane criteria; he was extolling a long-standing ideal. Personal sanctity was one of the job requirements of the medieval theologian. Nevertheless, when this principle is cemented to the other broadly accepted tenet that no prelate – not even the pope – is immune from error,[67] there will be no way to extract any concessions from John Wyclif.

Thomas Netter

Thomas Netter, an Oxford-trained theologian himself, had by 1430 completed his massive *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae* in which, as Anne Hudson notes, he attempted to 're-establish the orthodox credentials of the English church'.[68] In the most painstaking fashion, Netter sets out to reclaim the Catholic tradition from Wyclif once and for all. In the midst of all the polemics, however, Netter presents a coherent position not only with regard to specific doctrines, but on the very process of determining Catholic doctrine itself. Andrew Jotischky has remarked that 'Netter's *Doctrinale* summarises and honours a century of Carmelite historiography in presenting the history of the Church as an unbroken chain whereby the contemporary Church was secured to the firm moorings of the age of the Apostles and early councils.'[69] Thomas Turley has found that Netter, like his fellow Carmelites, John Baconthorpe and Guido Terreni, believed in the sufficiency of holy Scripture. Popes and councils possess authority in their connection to the primitive Church and have Scripture and the Fathers to lead them to the truth. In this vein, though, Turley thinks that Netter, like his Carmelite predecessor Guido Terreni, 'classicised the primitive church so thoroughly

[65] Ibid. xx (ii. 143–4).

[66] *Sermones* lviiii, i. 385–6.

[67] Cf. the famous canonical passage: 'si papa suae et fraternae salutis negligens reprehenditur inutilis et remissus in operibus suis … quia cunctos ipse iudicaturus a nemine est iudicandus *nisi deprehendatur a fide deuius*': *Decretum*, D. 40 c. 6 (Friedberg i. 146).

[68] For information on the life of Netter and production of the *Doctrinale* see Anne Hudson, 'Netter, Thomas', *ODNB* xl. 444–7.

[69] Andrew Jotischky, *The Carmelites and antiquity: mendicants and their pasts in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2002, 189.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that there was little room for any concept of development'.[70] Michael Hurley, on the other hand, believes that Netter did allow for a certain degree of development amidst his strict adherence to the immutable ancient faith. Still, it is the temporal continuity of the Church that is of central importance to Netter as opposed to the merely geographical; the enduring tradition forms Netter's authority rather than the present *magisterium*.[71] F. X. Siebel likewise locates the authority of the Church for Netter principally in its historic extension, the accordance of testimony from the time of Christ up until the present. Siebel concludes that Netter never fully resolved his position regarding the authority of the present *magisterium* and that in the end the authority of the Church militant rested in its agreement with the Apostolic faith.[72] Netter certainly relied upon the ancient faith preserved across the centuries. Yet he also proposed a nuanced and flexible view of tradition that sought to balance the inherent authority of the primitive Church with the ever-changing exigencies facing the living Church from generation to generation.

First of all, there is no doubt but that Netter believed that the authority of the Church is subject to the authority of Scripture. Indeed, he contends that the authority of Scripture surpasses the authority of all the doctors and even that of the whole Catholic Church. But there is still no disjunction between the two, since the Church is contemporaneous with holy Scripture, stemming as it does from the side of Christ, joined as bride to groom, body to head. And since the faith of the Catholic Church assents to the faith of Scripture one must never question it, for the testimony of the Catholic Church is itself the object of the Christian faith.[73] In matters of doubt, therefore, we ought to ask what the Apostles believed – but not only the Apostles. We must also look to their successors and thereupon to esteemed men, and the Catholic doctors down to our own day. By examining their writings and discerning where they agree we will then be able to locate the truth. Hence it is not simply a matter of consulting the most primitive sources; one begins there but that is not the end of the process. The Church is built upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles (Ephesians ii. 9), but they are just that, the foundation. The construction of orthodoxy continues with the work of the Apostles' successors.[74]

[70] Thomas Turley, '*Ab apostolorum temporibus*: the primitive Church in the ecclesiology of three medieval Carmelites', in Rosalio Castillo Lara (ed.), *Studia in honorem Alphonsi M. Stickler*, Rome 1992, 559–80.

[71] Michael Hurley, 'A pre-Tridentine theology of tradition, Thomas Netter of Walden', *Heythrop Journal* iv (1963), 348–66.

[72] F. X. Siebel, 'Die Kirche als Lehrautorität nach dem "Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae" des Thomas Waldensis (um 1372–1431)', *Carmelus* xvi (1969), 3–70.

[73] *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei Catholicae*, Venice 1757; repr. Farnborough 1967, i. 348–52.

[74] 'Ita nempe in dubiis fidei debemus inquirere quid senserunt Apostoli, quid successores Apostolorum, et deinceps viri probati, et usque ad haec nostra tempora Catholici Doctores,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Having established the necessity of an authoritative interpretative tradition, Netter accuses Wyclif (albeit unfairly) of retreating from the human fellowship and the assembly of ecclesiastical men so that he may rely solely upon the Scriptures and the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit. Scripture may reign supreme, but written authority is not sufficient for ascertaining the truth apart from the harmonious understanding of the Church. There is no revelation, Netter insists, that does not occur within the greater witness of the Catholic Church. So it is that any path that deviates from the one trod by the successors of the Apostles can only lead to sacrilege.[75]

Throughout it all, however, Netter never loses sight of the authority of holy Scripture. In fact, he specifically rebukes those who misuse Augustine's famous remark that he would not have believed the Gospel unless the Church had so moved him. Netter rejects the arrogance of those who take this remark as an occasion to exalt the authority of the decrees of the Fathers over that of the holy Scriptures. Such efforts are not only inept, says Netter, they are downright foolish. After all, Philip was not greater than Christ because he led Nathaniel to believe that Christ was the one predicted in the Law and Prophets.[76] Just like Wyclif, therefore, Netter is absolutely clear that ecclesiastical authority must always serve Christ and his laws, and thus is inferior to the laws of Christ and the holy Scriptures.[77]

In the midst of the eucharistic debates Wyclif had impugned Duns Scotus for having accepted transubstantiation based solely upon the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council.[78] Yet Netter (rightly) points out that Wyclif has really distorted the Subtle Doctor's position by making it seem as though he only accepted this doctrine because the Church decreed it and not because it is true in itself. In fact, says Netter, Scotus is quite clear that it is not in the power of the Church to make anything true or false; that power belongs to God. The Church merely explicates what has been handed down to her by the Holy Spirit, who is the very author of Scripture. The faith of Scripture

relinquerunt in Scripturis; et secundum quod ipsorum verba concordant; sic elicere veritatem. … Sic enim dicimur *Superaedificati super fundamentum Apostolorum et Prophetarum*. Qualiter ergo Apostoli consuluerunt Prophetas, ita justum est, ut consulamus Apostolos, et deinceps Apostolorum haeredes et temporum successores': ibid. i. 338C–D.

[75] 'Dum tamen scripta authoritas non certificat sine concordi intellectu Ecclesiae; nec revelatio sine teste. Omnis alia via quam per successores Apostolicos, qua omnes ante nos credentes intrabant, est *sacrilega*': ibid. i. 339D.

[76] 'Nec tamen hic laudo supercilium, quod quidem attollunt, volentes occasione hujus dicti, decretum Patrum in Ecclesia majoris esse authoritatis, culminis, et ponderis, quam sit authoritas Scripturarum. Quod quidem non tam videtur ineptum, quam fatuum; nisi talis quis dicat Philippum fuisse majorem Christo': ibid. i. 349A–B; cf. Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti* 5, *PL* xlii. 176.

[77] 'Omnis ergo Ecclesiastica authoritas cum sit ad testificandum de Christo et legibus ejus, vilior est Christi legibus, et Scripturis Sanctis necessario postponenda': *Doctrinale* i. 349C.

[78] See Wyclif, *De eucharistia* ix, ed. Johann Loserth, London 1892, 274.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

does not derive its truth from human explanation; rather all human comprehension must be conformed to the inherent truth of Scripture. Indeed, it is not even by the will of the church Fathers that Scripture derives its authority, but because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. God reveals its true sense to men and thus compels the Church to explicate Scripture accordingly. In fact, no papal decretal or conciliar decree can derive its meaning purely from human authority as if human beings were free to construct the faith.[79] Such words could just as easily have come out of the mouth of Wyclif himself.

The problem is not that Wyclif exalts the authority of Scripture, therefore; it is that he (supposedly) forsakes the authority of the Universal, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Netter caricatures Wyclif's understanding of the literal sense, claiming that he hastens to the literal sense ('ad literam') of Scripture in the hope that it will protect him when, in fact, it is the faith of the Church that best interprets the senses of Scripture and declares the falsity of heretical interpretation. One is not a faithful doctor simply because one produces the faith of Scripture. One must follow the faith and authority, not of one particular Church, but of the Universal Church in which the true sense of Scripture is correctly maintained. Nor is one counted as a faithful Catholic for believing in the Trinity according to the articles of the creed, unless one also believes the Catholic Church, that is, whatever teaching she holds to be true concerning the Trinity. For this is the authority that the Lord himself gave to the Church. The Church and her faith are inseparable. One cannot honestly confess the whole creed if one is unwilling to accept the authority of the Church, which is itself an article of the creed.[80]

Netter wants to prove that Wyclif has abandoned the tradition and thus the Church itself. He has turned away from the creed where we confess our belief in the Catholic and Apostolic Church. Yet Church and Scripture cannot be separated, since apart from the authority of the Church's testimony we would not have come to believe the Gospel. Much of the Catholic faith that is contained within Scripture is implicit, and thus in need of the Church's subtle and authoritative interpretation to explicate that same truth. Scripture does indeed state that God is three persons and not three essences, but this is not defined there explicitly ('sed non definitum expresse'). The Church must make explicit what Scripture leaves implicit.[81]

Central to Wyclif's attack on transubstantiation had been its supposed lack of support from Scripture and the larger Catholic tradition. To that end Wyclif had pointed out that the great creeds of the Church never state that the bread and wine cease to remain following consecration. As such, this

[79] *Doctrinale* ii. 390A–91E. See Duns Scotus, *In libri IV sententiarum* iv.11.3.

[80] 'Non ergo inde est fidelis Doctor, quia fidem Scriptura producit, nisi etiam fidem et authoritatem sequatur, non unius particularis, sed universalis Ecclesiae, in qua sola sensus Scripturarum verus habetur': *Doctrinale* i. 360C–D.

[81] Ibid. i. 362A.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

must not be considered an article of faith. Netter refuses to be bound by the creeds in this way. For Netter, the creeds belong to a living Church that unceasingly meditates upon the deposit of Apostolic faith found within the creeds. Their patristic provenance does not turn these fourth and fifth-century documents into strait-jackets designed to confine the present Church's ability to engage in ongoing reflection. Netter points out that, while it is true that someone is reckoned unfaithful for maintaining an error that the words of the creed do specifically address, that does not mean someone is unfaithful for believing in a Catholic truth that is not openly ('palam') asserted by the words of the creed. 'The words of the Creed do not expressly (*expresse*) refute every error; nor do they expressly consent to every Catholic truth.'[82] Yet Netter does believe that the full faith of the sacraments is located implicitly within the creed where it states 'I believe in the communion of saints', since the communion of Christians is found above all in the communication of the sacraments, and the eucharist is chief among them, for that is where the faithful are united to the person of Christ.[83]

Wyclif did not object to all non-biblical terminology, but he did reject terms (such as transubstantiation) that contradict the sense of Scripture. Faced with the fact that 'transubstantiation' does not appear in the biblical text, Netter argues that the Church cannot be restricted to the precise vocabulary of Scripture. Many things are said in the creeds that are not explicitly posited in the Bible, as when we read that Christ is 'God from God, light from light'. But when the Church employs language that is not found in Scripture – often in her battle against heresy – the meaning itself is still Scriptural. How else will we protect the faith, asks Netter, unless through the addition of suitable vocabulary? Thus, even as Netter upholds Scripture as the repository of orthodoxy, he also notes that we believe many things really happened which Scripture does not expressly recount ('expresse non recolit').[84]

Netter is not positing a separate and self-sufficient extra-Scriptural tradition; he is simply saying that the Church will have to draw out the implicit meaning of the biblical text on occasion. Thus, in answer to Wyclif's charge that his opponents have added to Christ's words when they speak of accidents without subjects in the eucharist, Netter responds that this is perfectly legitimate:

> To explain the condition and properties of a thing is not to add to the thing, but rather to express the way in which those [conditions and properties] follow upon the thing in an orderly manner. For, having posited a human being, we do not add anything to him by saying that he is a combination of body and spirit. … So it is that

[82] Ibid. ii. 234D–35B. See Wyclif, *De eucharistia* v. 140. [83] *Doctrinale* ii. 556A–57E.
[84] Ibid. ii. 451E–52E. Netter's defence of the word 'transubstantiation' is reminiscent of the Nicene party's argument for the non-biblical 'homoousios'; cf. Athanasius, *De decretis* v. 21.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[the various aspects of transubstantiation] all follow when one has posited that the body of Christ exists there purely according to its substance.[85]

For Netter, the doctrine of transubstantiation belongs to the Church's continuous process of unfolding the dogma embedded in the Sacred Page. Although Wyclif never worked out such a detailed account, he would not have disagreed with the process that Netter has outlined – only the results in this particular instance.

Netter, like Wyclif, has no interest in adding anything to the faith of the Church. He regards the present Church's faith as materially identical with that of the Apostolic Church; but that is not to say that it is identical in form. That this faith does undergo a formal development is owing to the fact that it is a living entity rather than a static object. When the Fathers at Nicaea declared Christ fully divine, they did so because this position had always belonged to the living faith of the Church ('animata fides Ecclesiae'). The substance of the faith coming down from the time of the Apostles through the succession of bishops until the time of the Council remains the same even though it had not yet been expressly defined as a matter of faith until that point ('non esset expresse definita pro fide').[86]

Hence, even as the Church does not create the faith, it does give voice to the correct expression of its truth. Netter recalls how John Quidort of Paris had (at least tentatively) espoused the doctrine of impanation, thus presenting some other manner of eucharistic presence than the Church had decreed.[87] John had said that to adhere to just one way of defending the truth, to the exclusion of all others, was actually injurious to the truth. For Netter, however, the truth itself dictates the way in which it ought to be expressed. One who believes that the flesh of Christ exists in the sacrament substantially believes the truth, whereas the one who believes in impanation believes the truth in a false way and thus believes nothing ('quia falso modo verum credit, nihil credit'). The truth (*verum*) must not only be believed, but the truth must be believed in the right way (*vere*). Just as the Law of God posits only one way to righteousness (Psalm cxviii.53), so too does the Church propose only one way to the truth when she defines an article of faith.[88] The Church is not merely reciting the ancient faith, for it is the Church – through the holy doctors and bishops – that must determine what the ancient faith really is and how it may be expressed. The ancient faith, for Netter, is a living entity which only exists in and through the living Church.

Because Netter views the Church as a living entity, he recognised that it must also be an evolving entity. He took seriously the historical nature of the

[85] *Doctrinale* ii. 397A–D.

[86] Ibid. ii. 392B–D; cf. Augustine, *De baptismo contra Donatistas* iv.6, *PL* xliii. 159.

[87] For John of Paris see John Hilary Martin, 'The eucharistic treatise of John Quidort of Paris', *Viator* vi (1975), 195–240.

[88] *Doctrinale* ii. 393A–D. For Wyclif on John of Paris see *De eucharistia* vii. 222.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Church, which he believes has always been driven by the demands of the times to express the ancient faith in new ways. In a similar vein to Wyclif in his *De trinitate*, Netter notes that councils will make new declarations of the faith only as the need arises – when the true faith is under attack – and thus they cannot be expected to handle every single circumstance of the truth at the same time. Had there been Wycliffites in the patristic age, says Netter, the Fathers surely would have written against them. Actually, Netter thinks that God did not want to rush matters and reveal everything clearly all at once. God does not personally reveal all things, but instead dispenses many things by means of his creatures in due time so that people may comprehend the importance of each item. So it was that Christ entrusted many things to be instituted by the Apostles and their successors. One might have expected Christ and the Apostles to resolve all the questions that would plague later generations, yet Netter sees divine providence at work as God uses the contingencies of history to work for the greater good. The articles of faith are made clearer as a result of heresy and the attacks upon the Catholic truth. Thus heretics actually provide the Church with an opportunity to declare the faith in a more lucid manner than had once been needed. Simply because the faith had not yet been perfectly expressed at a given time, however, does not mean that it was not yet held. The form of the faith's expression might be new, but the content expressed is still ancient. After much discussion of the truth, the Church will issue a statement of the truth under the authority of a council – a new declaration of the same ancient faith.[89]

Wyclif doubtless would have agreed with much of what Netter has said here, but unlike Netter he had no compelling reason to work out a theory of doctrinal development so carefully. Wyclif had the luxury of constantly being on the attack, which relieved him of the burden of generating a full-fledged and sustainable position on development. His remarks on the matter are rare and scattered; they have to be pieced together. Netter, in all his ferocity, was actually put on the defensive by the Wycliffites. He had to make the case that the present Church was not a corruption of the ancient ideal, but that it was the living manifestation of the very Church that the Wycliffites yearned to recover.

[89] 'Deus ipse non per se omnia, sed per conditas creaturas multa dispensat, ne supervacue crederentur instituti. Et Christus multa discipulis instituenda commisit, et Apostolis item suis successoribus … Plane verum est, omnen articulum fidei lucidiorem factum post resultationem haereticam, et contradictiones catholicas … Hac ergo forma, non novella fides, sed ejusdem fidei nova declaratio authoritate majorum Conciliorum, post multas eventilationes veritatis, succedit Ecclesiae: quia omnes circumstantiae veritatis non poterant simul una hora proferri': *Doctrinale* ii. 455A–56C; cf. Augustine, *De baptismo contra Donatistas* i. 18, *PL* xliii.124–6; cf. also Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* xxii.7, CCSL lxiiii.177.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jean Gerson

In his struggle against Wycliffites and Hussites, Jean Gerson was adamant in stressing the authority of holy Scripture and did so in ways that would have made Wyclif proud. Everything revealed by God is true, says Gerson, and holy Scripture has been divinely revealed by God, whose Word is found in every part of Scripture.[90] Holy Scripture is the rule of faith and, provided that Scripture is rightly understood, there is no authority that can be admitted against it.[91] In the examination of doctrines, says Gerson, we attend principally to whether the doctrine is in conformity with holy Scripture. For Scripture was handed down to us as a sufficient and infallible rule for the governance of the whole ecclesiastical body until the end of time. It is such a perfect rule, or exemplar, that any doctrine which does not conform to it must be rejected as heretical or suspect.[92] Wyclif could not have said it better.

Gerson, no less than Wyclif, also believes that biblical exegesis is a spiritual discipline. Exegetes must not only be intellectually gifted, but also humble in their judgements and immune from vice. They must be erudite not only by way of human reason and effort, but also by divine revelation and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.[93] Gerson warns fellow theologians not to stray from Scripture lest they are led into error like the pagan philosophers. Theology is a deeply spiritual vocation that calls for repentance and prayer that one may penetrate the mysteries of Scripture. For Gerson, the theologian occupied a place of honour and sanctity comparable to that of virgins, widows and the religious. In fact, the theologian's prayer is more

[90] 'Omne revelatum a Deo est verum, et quod Scriptura sacra divinitus est a Deo revelata, sic quod in omni sua parte est Verbum Dei quod transire non potest': Jean Gerson, *Quae credendae de necessitate salutis*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Louis Ellies Du Pin, Antwerp 1706; repr. Hildersheim 1987, i. 22B.

[91] 'Scriptura sacra est Fidei regula, contra quam bene intellectam non est admittenda autoritas, ratio hominis cujuscunque, nec aliqua consuetudo, nec constitutio, nec observatio valet si contra sacram Scripturam militare convincatur': *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie*, *Opera omnia*, i. 457B.

[92] 'Attendendum in examinatione doctrinarum primo et principaliter, si doctrina sit conformis sacrae Scripturae, tam in se, quam in modi traditione … quoniam Scriptura nobis tradita est tanquam regula sufficiens et infallibilis, pro regimine totius Ecclesiastici corporis et membrorum, usque in finem saeculi. Est igitur talis ars, talis regula, vel exemplar, cui se non conformans alia doctrina vel abijcienda est ut haereticalis, ut suspecta, ut impertinens ad Religionem prorsus est habenda': *De examinatione doctrinarum*, *Opera omnia*, i. 12D–13A.

[93] 'Scriptura sacra in expositione partium suarum requisivit et requirit homines Primo praeditos ingenio. Secundo exercitatos studio. Tertio humiles in judicio. Quarto immunes ab affectato vitio … Scriptura sacra in sui primaria expositione habuit homines eruditos, non solum human ratiocinatione vel studio; sed divina revelatione et inspiratione Spiritus Sancti': *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie*, *Opera omnia*, i. 458B.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

effectual than the layman's owing to his clearer view of divine truth and deeper spirituality.[94]

In keeping with his exalted understanding of the theologian in the Church, Gerson maintained that it is for the theologian to decide what constitutes Catholic truth and heresy, while the jurist merely decides what penalty applies in each case.[95] Canon law, while useful, is inferior to both divine and natural law, since it depends upon human tradition more than pure revelation or natural evidence.[96] When it comes to the reform of the Church, therefore, the theologian will take the lead. And this is directly tied to the preeminence of holy Scripture, since it is Scripture that contains divine law, and the theologian – as *magister sacrae paginae* – is principally a biblical exegete. Gerson, moreover, looked specifically to the university theologians, as opposed to the otherwise corrupted theologians within the papal Curia, to render judgement on matters affecting Christian society.[97] This may even bring the theologian into opposition to papal authority. The theologian has an Apostolic role to fulfill; he follows in succession from the Apostle Paul and thus has the right to correct the successors of Peter (Galatians ii.11–14).[98] As Brian McGuire has recently noted, Gerson was convinced that the Paris theological faculty 'remained at the core of the Church's *magisterium* or teaching authority' and thus had every right to weigh in on the validity of papal decretals.[99] This sense of authority is in keeping with Gerson's understanding of himself as a 'public intellectual', as Daniel Hobbins phrases it; the theologian, unlike the canon lawyer, is uniquely suited to address contemporary issues in all their complexity.[100]

In matters of biblical exegesis, itself the province of the theologian, Gerson made a strong case for the literal sense of Scripture – understood as the divinely intended sense, as opposed to the bare letter of the text. For Gerson,

[94] Louis Pascoe, *Jean Gerson: principles of Church reform*, Leiden 1973, 107–9.

[95] *De examinatione doctrinarum*, *Opera omnia*, i. 18B.

[96] *De potestate ecclesiastica et de origine juris et legum*, *Opera omnia*, ii. 252A.

[97] Pascoe, *Jean Gerson*, 89–92. '[T]heologi proprio nomine dicuntur hi qui notitiam profitentur et habent eorum quae proprie dicuntur esse ad theologia hoc est de jure divino, seu evangelico quod idem est, et qui illud sciunt elucidare, defendere, roborare': *Dominus his opus habet*, quoted ibid. 92 n. 30.

[98] 'Ex quibus palam elicitur quod Summus Pontifex qui succedit Petro in apostolatu reprehendi potest publice per doctorem theologum qui in officio praedicationis succedit Paulo': *An licet in causis fidei a papa apellare*, quoted ibid. 91, n. 27. 'Quod si quis praelatorum vellet hujusmodi legem aut diceret habere robus legis divinae, sibi fas esset per theologos aut alios hoc cognoscentes resistere in facie et dicere quod non recte ambulat ad veritatem Evangelii': *De vita spirituali*, ibid. n. 28. See also G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, *Jean Gerson: apostle of unity*, Leiden 1999, 334–5.

[99] Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the last medieval reformation*, University Park 2005, 213.

[100] Daniel Hobbins, 'The schoolman as public intellectual: Jean Gerson and the late medieval tract', *American Historical Review* cviii (2003), 1308–37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

just like Wyclif, the literal sense is that which the Holy Spirit principally intended and which can be drawn from the circumstances of the letter of Scripture.[101] Akin to Wyclif, therefore, Gerson insists that the literal sense of Scripture must not be taken according to the force of logic or dialectic, but more fittingly according to common usage of speech found in rhetoric and thus according to tropes and figures of speech. Scripture, says Gerson, has its own logic which we call rhetoric.[102]

All of this has direct application to Gerson's battle against heresy. Gerson charges the Hussites with a tendentiously selective reading of the biblical text, as they pick and choose the passages that make their case for communion under both kinds (*utraquism*). If, for instance, some will latch on to Christ's words, 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved' (Mark xvi.16) they might believe that faith alone, apart from the other virtues, is sufficient for salvation. But by that same token Gerson could cite the words, 'If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever' (John vi.58), thereby upholding the sufficiency of bread apart from wine in the eucharist. The point is that the literal sense of Scripture manifests itself contextually, balancing the meaning of different passages.[103]

Who, then, will determine the literal sense of Scripture? It will have to be judged by the Church. For the Church is inspired and governed by the Holy Spirit. The individual Christian, says Gerson, is not free to follow just any interpretation that he might choose.[104] In fact, Gerson contends that if the literal sense has been openly determined and received by the Church, one is not obliged to engage in arcane arguments with heretics, but may have immediate recourse to the judicial statutes of punishment.[105] The literal sense

[101] 'Falsum, blasphemum et haereticum est asserere quod sensus litteralis Sacrae scripturae sit aliquando falsus. … dicimus quod aliud est littera, aliud est sensus litteralis … Est enim sensus litteralis vere et proprie dictus ille, quem Spiritus sanctus principaliter intendebat, et qui ex circumstantiis litterae Scripturae sacrae trahi potest et debet, sicut expositores sacri fecerunt et docerunt': *Que veritates sint credenda de necessitate salutis, Opera omnia*, i. 24C–D.

[102] 'Sensus litteralis sacrae Scripturae accipiendus est non secundum vim Logicae, seu Dialecticae, sed potius juxta tropos et figuratas locutiones, quas communis usus committit, cum consideratione circumstantiarum litterae ex precedentibus et posterius appositis. Habet enim Scriptura sacra sicut moralis et historialis scientia suam Logicam propriam, quam Rhetoricam appellamus': *De sensu litterali sacrae scripturae, Opera omnia*, i. 3A. In his rejoinder to the Parisian master Jean Petit's scriptural defence of the murder of the duke of Orleans, Gerson will speak in a similar vein of the *sensus theologicus litteralis*. For an excellent analysis of this dispute see Karlfried Froehlich, '"Always to keep to the literal sense in holy Scripture means to kill one's soul": the state of biblical hermeneutics at the beginning of the fifteenth century', in Earl Miner (ed.), *Literary uses of typology from the late Middle Ages to the present*, Princeton 1977, 20–48.

[103] *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie, Opera omnia*, i. 457D–58A.

[104] 'Sensus Scripturae litteralis judicandus est, prout Ecclesia Spiritu sancto inspirata et gubernata determinavit, et non ad cujuslibet arbitrium vel interpretationem': *De sensu litterali sacrae scripturae, Opera omnia*, i. 3A.

[105] Ibid. *Opera omnia*, i. 3C.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Scripture is inseparable from the greater tradition. It was first revealed through Christ and the Apostles and was elucidated by miracles; thereafter confirmed through the blood of the martyrs; and later made clearer by the arguments of the holy doctors against the heretics. Then came the determination of the holy councils, such that what had been discussed by the doctors might be officially defined by the Church.[106]

While Gerson certainly privileges the ancient Church, he does have confidence in the present Church to uncover the meaning of Scripture. In fact, he believes that the literal sense of Scripture can be defined within the decrees and decretals as well as the records of the councils. And if so defined it must be judged to pertain to theology and holy Scripture no less than the Apostles' Creed. For Gerson, therefore, if the literal sense of Scripture is the divinely intended meaning, then there is no reason why that sense will not be more fully revealed by later documents produced by the tradition. This does not amount to an extra-Scriptural source, but simply a further explication of Scripture itself, which is the ongoing work of the Church. The literal sense so defined must not be spurned as though it were founded on a merely human or positive constitution. It is on this very point that the heretics err, says Gerson, for they think that statements of the doctors, councils and popes are apocryphal or false unless located expressly ('expresse') in holy Scripture.[107] In all fairness it must be said that Jan Hus did not demand that all authoritative statements be based on the explicit wording of Scripture. He only said that one is not required to believe papal bulls unless they are at least implicitly ('implicite') grounded in holy Scripture.[108] And Hus specifically refuted the charge levelled by Stephen Páleč that the Hussites wish to judge all matters by holy Scripture alone and thus reject the Apostles, doctors and the Universal Church. That is a lie, says Hus, based upon a distortion of

[106] 'Sensus litteralis sacrae Scripturae fuit primo per Christum et Apostolos revelatus et miraculis elucidatus, deinde fuit per sanguinem Martyrum confirmatus; postdum sacri Doctores per rationes suas diligentes contra haereticos … postea successit determinatio sacrorum Conciliorum, ut quod erat doctrinaliter discussum per Doctores, fieret per Ecclesiam sententialiter definitum': ibid.

[107] 'Sensus literalis sacrae Scripturae si reperitur determinatus et decisus in Decretis et Decretalibus et codicibus Conciliorum, judicandus est ad Theologiam et sacram Scripturam non minus pertinere quam Symbolum Apostolorum: propterea non est spernendus tanquam humana seu posiitiva constitutione fundatus. [Haeretici] dicunt omnes tales Scripturas apocryphas esse vel falsas, nisi ostendatur quod sint expresse in Scriptura sacra: et consequenter negant quatuor Doctores et Concilia, putantes quod ex sacra Scriptura convinci non possint': ibid. *Opera omnia*, i. 3D–4A.

[108] 'Et isto modo non tenetur homo dictis sanctorum preter nec bullis papabilis credere, nisi quod dixerint ex scriptura vel quod fundaretur implicite in scriptura': *Tractatus de ecclesia* viii, ed. S. Harrison Thomson, Boulder 1956, 56.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their works where they had simply asked that their adversaries prove that Scripture supported their arguments.[109]

At all events, Gerson himself never loses sight of the unique authority of Scripture. He makes it clear that the literal sense is 'sufficiently expressed in the books of holy Scripture'. It is true that it can also be found within the works of the doctors, but then only insofar as they are drawing conclusions which clearly follow from Scripture. In this vein Gerson can point to the creeds, which of themselves add nothing to Scripture, but merely express its literal sense – namely the divinely intended sense – in a compendious form.[110] Hence I cannot agree with the conclusion of Posthumus Meyjes that Gerson saw the Church as a 'second source of revelation'.[111] Rather, for Gerson, the Church at any given time in its history is capable of faithfully revealing the literal sense of Scripture within the course of inspired reflection and commentary. It is not a matter of addition, but disclosure.

Even if Gerson might sometimes accuse his adversaries of basing their case solely upon explicit biblical testimony he knew that was not really true. In fact, Gerson's greatest dilemma in his fight against heresy is not that his opponents reject the sacred exegetical tradition. It is that they actually do accept it. He laments that the Hussite Utraquists are haphazardly citing so many doctors in order to bolster their argument. For his part, Gerson demands that authorities be critically evaluated, since not all sources carry the same weight. It is not simply a matter of lining up authorities, for some are more authoritative than others.[112] Even glosses chosen from among the greatest of the church Fathers are not inherently decisive; they still must be contextualised. Holy Scripture, says Gerson, needs to be interpreted not only in its original words, but even in its expositions. The Utraquists can find a gloss in which Augustine seems to claim that reception of the chalice is necessary for salvation, but one can just as easily find a passage where he appears to say the opposite. Taking isolated texts at first sight (*prima facie*) proves nothing. One must examine the competing texts in the context of

[109] 'Postea contra partem nostram accumulat plura mendacia ille doctor [Páleč]: primum mendacium quod *solam scripturam sanctam in talibus materiis pro iudice habere volumus*. In quo dicto asserit, quod nec deum nec apostolos nec sanctos doctores nec universalem sanctam ecclesiasm habere vellemus pro iudice. Traxit autem istud mendacium ex quadam collacione': ibid. xvi, 132–3.

[110] 'Sensus literalis quamvis sit in multis, praesertim in his quae sunt necessaria ad salutem, satis expressus in libris sacrae Scripturae, vel ex illis evidenter consequatur apud eruditos in eisdem libris: nihilominus expedivit tales sensus sub certis articulis compendiose in publicum tradere, quemadmodum de Symbolo Apostolorum et Athanasii factum fuisse cognovimus': *De sensu litterali sacrae scripturae*, *Opera omnia*, i. 4A.

[111] Meyjes, *Jean Gerson*, 326.

[112] *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie*, *Opera omnia*, i. 458d.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

other writings in order to resolve the contradictions.[113] Gerson is thinking in terms of a unified textual tradition encompassing holy Scripture, the Fathers and the decrees.

Yet we are still left to ask where one may turn in what looks like an exegetical stalemate; if each side can call upon yet one more saint, one more decretal? For Gerson, holy Scripture, in its reception and authentic exposition, finally resolves into the authority, reception and approbation of the Universal Church. Even here, though, Gerson by no means abandons the principal authority of the ancient sources. In fact, he believes that one must look especially to the primitive Church which received Scripture and its understanding immediately from Christ, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and on many other occasions.[114] Louis Pascoe finds that, for Gerson, the primitive Church proved to be the most authoritative exegetical standard.[115] And Mark Burrows notes that, at Constance, Gerson increasingly relied upon the tradition of the early Church. Biblical texts must be read within the context of the tradition, thus preserving the 'traditioned sense', as Burrows calls it.[116] This is all true, but the problem is that the Wycliffites and Hussites were doing the very same thing. It was no doubt convenient at times for Gerson to portray his opponents as adherents of a radical *sola scriptura* policy, but it was a massive distortion none the less.

Having established that the primitive Church stands in a unique place, given its inimitable relationship to the incarnate Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, Gerson is still not going to allow the debate to turn into a battle over antiquity. For the Church is governed even now by the infallible rule of the Holy Spirit. Hence, when it comes to the exposition of Scripture, the custom of the Universal Church – guided as it is by the Spirit – is owed greater reverence than the authority of any single doctor or saint.[117] Gerson recognised the futility of battling the heretics over glosses; each side will marshal a plethora of unimpeachable sources and the debate will never end.

[113] 'Scriptura sacra recipit interpretationem et expositionem nedum in suis verbis originalibus; sed etiam in suis expositionibus': ibid. i. 459a.

[114] 'Scriptura sacra in sui receptione et expositione authentica finaliter resolvitur in autoritatem, receptionem et approbationem Unversalis Ecclesiae; praesertim primitivae, quae recepit eam et ejus intellectum immediate a Christo, revelante Spiritu sancto in die Pentecostes, et alias pluries': ibid. i. 459C.

[115] Louis Pascoe, 'Jean Gerson: the "ecclesia primitiva" and reform', *Traditio* xxx (1974), 379–409.

[116] Mark Burrows, 'Jean Gerson on the "traditioned sense" of Scripture as an argument for an ecclesial hermeneutic', in Mark Burrows and Paul Rorem (eds), *Biblical hermeneutics in historical perspective: studies in honour of Karlfried Froehlich for his sixtieth birthday*, Grand Rapids 1991, 152–72.

[117] 'Haec enim est infallibilis regula a Spiritu sancto directa, qui in his quae Fidei sunt, nec fallere potest nec falli … Universalis Ecclesiae circa ea quae Fidei Sacramenta respiciunt et dispensationem ipsorum; quam autoritatem Doctoris unius particularis etiam Sancti': *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie*, *Opera omnia*, i. 459C–D.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Recourse must be had to a living authority, namely, the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Universal Church. Ultimately, Gerson put his trust in a general council. The council – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – is the authentic examiner and final judge of doctrines touching the faith. For any one person in the Church of whatever dignity, even papal, is subject to infirmity and thus can both deceive and be deceived.[118]

Yet Gerson did not place the blame for all the Church's strife solely on the shoulders of the heretics. Rather, he will indict an entire academic culture that has lost all sense of proportion in assessing the relative authority of its sources. There seems to be a dangerous fascination with the written word. One can only marvel, says Gerson, at the authority accorded a single published gloss of some dead doctor. His writings are cited as authoritative in the schools and the courts, despite the fact that this same man would have no such prestige were he alive. All the while, though, the determination of an entire university on some passage of Scripture or law will scarcely be received. It is as if a dead document now has greater authority than the living witness. Nor is Gerson moved by the romanticisation of some previous generation's piety, as if that epoch were free from all the corrupt affections that plague current masters. For there is no reason why such passions could not have distorted the judgement of the dead in their own day.[119]

Gerson has seen that his own world – the world of academia – created this heretical monster. The Prague masters were fully convinced of their own authority. From Godfrey of Fontaines to John Wyclif, the theologians, by virtue of their universally recognised licence, believed that they had every right – indeed a sacred duty – to defend the truth no matter the opposition. Netter and Gerson, themselves eminent theologians devoted to holy Scripture and the sacred tradition, had met their match. Their Wycliffite and Hussite opponents know the Fathers and the decrees backwards and forwards. When these 'heretics' cite text after text they are doing what every

[118] 'Examinator authenticus et finalis Judex doctrinarum Fidem tangentium, est generale Concilium. … Nam persona quaelibet singularis de Ecclesia, cujuscunque dignitatis, etiam Papalis, circumdata est infirmatate, et deviabilis est, ut fallere possit et falli': *De examinatione doctrinarum*, *Opera omnia*, i. 8A–B.

[119] 'Unde valde mirandum videtur apud aliquos considerativos, dum vident quod statim ut Doctor aliquis composuit unam lecturam vel unam compositionem; aut glossam super Decretalibus aut Decretis redegit in scriptis; habetur illa glossa seu lectura in reverentia tali, quod allegatur authentice in Scholis et Judiciis: qui Doctor si viveret, non esset comparandus mille et mille qui jam sunt in vita. Et tamen si tota una Universitas, exempli gratia, quae habet Doctores in omni facultate peritissimos, declararet aut determinaret unam expositionem circa unum passum Scripturae sacrae vel Decretorum aut Decretalium, vix reputabitur aut recipietur hujusmodi testificatio; quasi vidilicet scriptura mortua sit majoris autoritatis quam viva. Et si opponatur, quod in vivis pervertitur judicium propter perversionem affectus; cur non similiter potest dubitari quod in mortuis regnaverint dum viverent passiones judicii subversivae': *Contra haeresim de communione laicorum sub utraque specie*, *Opera omnia*, i. 459D–60A.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press

university master has been trained to do. When they reject some recent ruling as non-binding, because insufficiently authoritative, they are not retreating into the subjectivity of personal inspiration. Instead, they are following the most traditional course of all: entrenching themselves *in auctoritatibus sacris*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991436 Published online by Cambridge University Press