future general council, and it has been said of the decree *Pastor aeterni*, promulgated in 1516 by the Fifth Lateran Council, that "to the papal prohibition of appeal to a Council was now added a condemnation of the [conciliar] theory itself." But *Exsurget* represented the views of only one faction in the church and the crucial phrases of *Pastor aeterni* are too restricted in meaning to constitute any unambiguous condemnation of conciliar theory. In particular, it should be noted that *Pastor aeterni* does not spurn the superiority decrees of Basel, nor is there any mention of Constance or any rejection of *Haec sancta*. Such a move would not have been regarded as redundant at the time, for Ferdinand the Catholic, in the instructions to his representatives at the council, had explicitly suggested the need for a formal repudiation of *Haec sancta*. But then, even Ferdinand did not think the notion of papal superiority to the council extended to an heretical pope or to one whose title was in doubt. Without the marked persistence of such ecclesiological hesitancies into the Age of Reformation, it would be hard to explain the failure of the Council of Trent, despite the challenge laid down by the novel Protestant ecclesiologies of the day, to promulgate any dogmatic decree on the nature of the Christian church.

71. See the text in Doussinague, append., p. 539: "Por poner voz a Su Santidad en el concilio que aquellos dos decretos se revocen expresamente y se haga nuevo decreto que declare que el Papa es sobre el concilio excepto en el caso de la eresia como dicta el canon XI Papa XI, dio... y en el caso que dió a tres son elegidos en común por Santi Pontifices que juntos en estos dos casos el Concilio pueda conocer y sea juez de la causa del Papa y no en mas." (italics mine).

CHAPTER 4 · DIRECTIONS OF HERESY: THE COMPLEXITIES OF DEVIATION

[Hus] writes [in his *De excelsa*] that "the dissension has arisen because priests of Christ have preached against the pestiferous crimes of the clergy." But this is not true, for long ago, when Hus was still in his father's loins, there were sound and weighty *luptuosi et olim magni* preachers in the realm of Bohemia who preached against the simoniacal heresy and against... the avarice, sensuality, pride, and luxury of the clergy. But they did not mix the errors of Wyclif's forty-five articles into their sermons, and they taught the people to hold and believe what the Roman church held and believed... and therefore dissension did not arise among the clergy of Bohemia then as it has today.

—Stephen Paldě

The word "heresy," which denotes an individual choosing, is older than Christianity, and the religious phenomenon it has been used to denote is almost as old. Only during the doctrinal debates of the patristic era did the word come gradually to acquire the definition current in theological circles throughout the Middle Ages—namely, the pertinacious maintenance of doctrinal error by a Christian in defiance of ecclesiastical authority. Thus defined, it clearly possessed a disciplinary as well as a doctrinal dimension; what was involved was not simply error but rather the stubborn choosing to persist in error in the teeth of correction by the appropriate magisterial authority. And, as such, heresy posed a continuing threat to the medieval church from as early as the twelfth century.
Any attempt to come to terms historically with the nature and reality of that threat must surmount unusually difficult obstacles. In common medieval usage, and amid the intricate intermingling of the religious and political that was characteristic of the era, the strict theological definition of heresy was not necessarily adhered to. Controversialists were not always very discriminating in hurling accusations of heretical depravity at their opponents; nor, as the case of Joan of Arc so well attests, were powerful enemies necessarily squeamish about bending such accusations to purely political ends. Even when the theological definition did prevail, the doctrinal issues involved were often very intricate and the perception of error was to a remarkable degree in the eye of the beholder. Historians today are still debating the reality of John Hus's alleged heterodoxy. And anyone interested in the heresy of the Free Spirit must perforce face some startling facts. The Mirror of Simple Souls, the work from which were drawn the erroneous propositions for which Marguerite Porete, a Beguine from Hainault, was burned in 1310, was approved in the fourteenth century by the distinguished scholastic Godfrey of Fontaines (d. ca. 1306), and in the fifteenth by Pope Eugenius IV. It was copied many times in late-medieval monastic circles, was translated from the original French into Italian, Latin, and Middle English, and was rendered into modern English and published under the aegis of the English Benedictines in 1927, complete with official nihil obstat and imprimatur. \(^1\) It is symptomatic of the continuing difficulty of interpreting such materials that whereas the historian responsible for attributing the work to Marguerite Porete regards it as clearly heretical, three more recent accounts portray it, respectively, as an orthodox manifestation of mysticism of the Dionysian, transformational type, as perhaps marginally heretical, and, more puzzlingly, as 'both orthodox and of the Free Spirit.' \(^2\)

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1. Romana Guarnieri, who in 1946 identified the book as the work of Marguerite Porete, gives its history and provides an edition of the original French text in her "Il movimento del libera spirito" (see especially pp. 513–635). The modern English version is that of Kirchberger.
2. Thus Orchel, pp. 55–60; Lerner, Henry, pp. 200–208; McLaughlin, p. 40.

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Directions of Heresy

That these two examples are drawn from the late Middle Ages should not be taken to signify that the phenomena they serve to illustrate were restricted to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, even though (or perhaps because) the evidence available for this period is much more extensive than that surviving from earlier centuries. The explanation lies in the nature of much of that additional evidence. The very growth of the threat posed by heresy had led at the end of the twelfth century to the supersession of the traditional (and frequently merely reactive) role played by the bishops in containing it, first, by that of papal legates charged ad hoc with the task of detecting and combating doctrinal deviation, and then, during the pontificate of Gregory IX (1227–41), by the machinery of the Inquisition, organized and operating as an independent institution staffed by the friars and directed by the papacy. The Inquisition, which had a continuous history beginning in the early thirteenth century, did not operate in every European country or in any given country all of the time. But wherever and whenever it did operate, it tended to detect the presence of heresy and accordingly left a body of inquisitorial records tempting to the historian in their volume and their apparent precision.

The seeming objectivity of such records, however, should not blind us to the fact that the "confessions" they preserve were frequently elicited under torture and usually in response to stereotyped patterns of questioning set forth in the inquisitorial manuals. The manuals themselves owed much to the memory of the classical heresies of the ancient church and something also to the condemnations of positions later identified as erroneous. \(^3\) As a result—and nowhere, it seems, more obviously than in relation to the heresy of the Free Spirit—the polemics directed against heresy and the records themselves tend to assimilate the individual example to the textbook case, and to suggest, accordingly, a uniform program or a coherent organization where none perhaps existed. Thus the specific instance is treated less as an isolated outburst than as the momentary surfacing of an as-

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3. On the nature and importance of these manuals, see Dordaine.
sumedly continuous stream of heretical deplity moving under
ground across the centuries. These tendencies suggest the de-
\nFrom Waldensians and Joachites to Lollards
and Hussites

"The point of departure for the development of mediaeval sects was
the Gregorian reform and revolution within the Church. In both di-
rections its influence was decisive; in the sphere of the development
of the Church this influence was direct; in the sphere of sect-formation it
was indirect." The flood of scholarly work on medieval ecclesiastical
and religious history that has been rising steadily during the half cen-
tury and more since Ernst Troeltsch made this classic assertion has
done little to question and much to vindicate the fundamental accu-
\n7. It was in 1321 that the last Cathar bishop whom we know to have worked in west-
\n8. In the words of the inquisitor Bernard Gui, Mollat, ed., Bernard Gui, 1: 55. There
\n9. Translation in Wakefield and Evans, eds., pp. 201–8.
to his control. The decree _Ad abolendam_ issued by the Council of Verona in 1184, anathematizing among others "the Humiliati or Poor o' Lyons," accelerated this process of rejection.10 Although its enforcement was at first sporadic, and although Valdes himself and his original followers from Lyons sought to keep the door open to reconciliation with the authorities, the next few decades witnessed a gradual slide from schism into outright heresy. During that period, nonetheless, they succeeded in spreading their message into the Dauphine area of Piedmont (always to remain their particular strongholds), as well as into Provence, Germany, and Lombardy, where they entered into the legacy of other groups similarly moved by the ideal of the apostolic life and a concomitant inclination to anticlericalism. Although their earlier appeal had extended to the lower clergy as well as to the laity and appears also to have transcended the distinctions of social class, they came to draw their adherents almost exclusively from the ranks of the laity and, after about the mid-thirteenth century, from the ranks especially of artisans and peasants, perhaps predominantly from the poor and unlettered. Being "the religion of the small man," clinging to the simplicity of the Gospel message as the Waldensian preachers intuited it, the Waldensian sect enjoyed "the distinction of being the one international medieval heresy to attract wide support from the peasantry."11

The reverence of the Lyons group of Waldensians for the person of Valdes had proved early on to be too much for their Lombard confrères and, along with the latter's Donatism, had led to a split between the two groups, French and Italian. An attempt at reconciliation in 1218 had proved abortive. Nevertheless, the individual characters of the two groups did not preclude a common loyalty to the ideal of the evangelical life of preaching and poverty that Valdes had held up before them. Something similar may also be said about the differences in prevalent beliefs and practices that gradually became evident between the Waldensians of Germany and Central Europe and those of Italy and southern France. Unlike the former, the latter came into contact with ideas of Catharist provenance, and, if the records of the inquisitions held in the Piedmontese valleys during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are to be believed, Catharist influence may be seen in some of their rites and beliefs.12 Nevertheless, behind these and other regional accretions and variations, and behind analogous fluctuations across time, can be detected the lineaments of a body of common commitments—not so much a shared doctrinal corpus as the familiar consequences of a certain fundamental disposition common to all. Basic to that disposition was the stubborn insistence on living the life of the Gospel as they themselves directly apprehended it, a life of rigor, simplicity, and poverty, at the heart of which lay the struggle to maintain the exacting moral ideal that Jesus himself had taught. The established church, with its hierarchy and harlotry, its qualifications and compromises, its stress on "institutional" rather than subjective holiness, had long since submerged that ideal (or so they believed, though with varying degrees of intensity) in a "Pharisaical" tradition that could no longer be regarded as fully Christian. Hence their eventual rejection of the authority, the priesthood, the sacraments, and the ritual of the Roman church, the worldly church that had sold out to Constantine. Hence their insistence that purity of spiritual and moral life was the true condition for the exercise of ecclesiastical authority and that they alone, therefore, could validly administer the Eucharist, hear confessions, and remit the sins of their fellow believers. Hence, too, their radical simplification of the religious life, their refusal to take oaths, their rejection of the doctrine of purgatory, of prayers for the dead, of saints' days and the intercession of saints, of so many of the ritual observances characteristic of Latin Catholicism. Hence, finally, despite their public attendance at the regular parish mass, their private sectarian aloofness. "Everywhere pressure welded together the rank and file, and transformed the earlier movement of awakening within the Church of Valdes's day into a heretical

10. See Lambert, pp. 71–73.
11. Lambert, pp. 158, 161. For the social origins of the Waldensians, see also Goulet and Molnár, pp. 163–85. It is worthy of note that the Hussites who encountered surviving Waldensians in Bohemia, while honoring them as fellow evangelicals, were also somewhat disillusioned by their poor intellectual caliber; see Lambert, pp. 153–54. For an account of Waldensian-Husite contacts, see Goulet and Molnár, pp. 211–82.
12. See Lambert, pp. 161–62, for a skeptical appraisal of these records.
counter-Church"—though one held together, it must be admitted, less by any formal organizational structures (which tended to weaken across time) than by the commitment and tenacity with which the superiors (or "perfect") pursued their lives of missionary preaching, bringing their simple Gospel message to schools, homes, and places of work. 13

Their energetic missionary spirit and the quality of moral and religious life characteristic of their preachers best explain, perhaps, their enduring vitality and extraordinary staying power—leading the German Waldensians more than once in the fifteenth century to put out feelers for union with the Hussites of Bohemia, and enabling their southern brethren in Burgundy, Piedmont, and the Durance to withstand over the course of two centuries repeated inquisitorial and military attacks, culminating in the crusade launched against them by Innocent VIII in 1488.

In their longevity, as in so many other things, they contrast sharply with "the brothers and sisters of the sect of the Free Spirit and voluntary poverty" (as they called themselves on one occasion), who, during the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, attained much notoriety and a certain prominence, at least in the hostile chroniclers and in the records of the Inquisition. Even on the basis of the most uncritical and credulous reading of the available evidence the Free Spirits cannot be said to have constituted an organized movement or cohesive sect. And the most recent accounts, the authors of which have clearly absorbed Grundmann's warnings about the danger of taking the Inquisition records at face value, reflect a critical, somewhat skeptical, handling of the sources and have been enriched by the discovery that (contrary to earlier assumptions) some Free Spirit writings have in fact survived. 14


What we see, then, is a heresy that can no longer be assumed to be connected with the pantheistic views for which Arnauld of Benez was condemned at Paris in 1210, or with the views of Orletif of Strassburg later on. Instead, the Free Spirit made its first appearance in Swabia in the latter part of the thirteenth century and was attributed by the decree Ad nostram of the Council of Vienne to the Beghards and Beguines of Germany. That decree depicted it as a heresy involving no less than eight erroneous propositions, the gist of which is as follows: that in this earthly life a man can attain to such perfection that he is incapable of sin; that such a man, having attained to a degree of perfection in which sensuality is completely subjected to reason, no longer needs to fast and pray and can permit his body whatever pleases it; that such a man is no longer subject to human obedience or to any precept of the church; that he can attain final blessedness in this life, does not require the light of glory to be raised to the vision and enjoyment of God, and has no need of the acts of virtue necessary to imperfect men; that the sexual act is no sin when nature inclines one to it, and that there is no need to show any sign of reverence before the elevated host. 15

Charges framed on the model of these condemned propositions were periodically leveled throughout the fourteenth century, usually against Beghards and Beguines, and in east-central Europe as well as in more westerly localities such as the Strassburg region, Thurinigia, and the Low Countries. It has been claimed that "it was in Hussite Bohemia that the Free Spirit . . . reached its highest medieval development"—indeed, that without it "the [Hussite] revolution might not have taken place." But the evidence supporting this claim has been controverted, as have also the Free Spirit connections with (and, indeed, the very existence of) the fanatical "Adamites," those intriguing advocates of "ritual nudity and sexual emancipation" whom the Hussite general John Ziska allegedly destroyed in 1421. 16

In any case, charges of Free Spirit sympathies in general trail off in the

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earlier part of the fifteenth century; by the latter part of that century we begin to lose sight of the Free Spirit altogether.

What, then, of their views? The allegations of Ad nostrum may have been based on the list of "errors" plucked rather clumsily from Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls.17 Despite those charges, the picture that emerges is a cautious and nuanced one, far removed from the older sensational evocations of a movement of antinomian libertines, advocates of a mystic eroticism, of "promiscuity on principle." That exotic interpretation of the Free Spirit has been given renewed currency in recent years by the pertinent sections of Norman Cohn’s splendid book.18 It reposes, however, on evidence of dubious veracity; it tells us less about the actual beliefs and practices of the Free Spirits than about the darker fantasies of their hostile contemporaries and the unwitting incomprehension of their clerical interrogators. Despite all the suspicions, rumors, and actual charges, the alleged antinomianism of the Free Spirit remains a quæstio disputata. If it did indeed occur, it was clearly very much at odds with their well-attested commitment—shared with the adherents of so many other late-medieval religious movements—to the pursuit in poverty and self-abnegation of the apostolic ideal. The picture is one of a spiritual orientation that was "closely related to the orthodox mystical movement of the later Middle Ages and grew out of a concern for a life of spiritual perfection." That spiritual orientation was, in effect, far more typical of the late medieval search for God and godliness that has commonly been supposed. Free Spirits believed that they could attain union with God on earth, but they thought that they could only reach that state by means of bodily austerities and spiritual abnegation and that attainment of the state resulted in detachment from daily concerns rather than in radical engagement in them.19

This stress on the final state of union with God and the concomitant detachment from the externalities of religious life helps account for the recurrent charges of antinomianism and libertinism levied against the Free Spirits. A similar stress is to be found in the writings of unquestionably orthodox mystics who warned their own charges against the seductions of a false and heretical freedom of the spirit. It seems clear that the Free Spirits, by too unqualified an affirmation that the perfected soul might in its life be absorbed wholly into God, did indeed go beyond those mystics. Their affirmation exceeded even that of Meister Eckhart, to whom their writings were sometimes attributed, who was accused of a series of heresies, including autotheism (identification of self with God), but of whose "radical traditionalism and orthodoxy," Dom David Knowles has said, "there is no longer any doubt."20 Few ventured so far as to profess formal pantheism, but the charge of autotheism, and with it the circumvention or minimizing of the sacramental mediations of the church, seems fully justified. In an arresting formulation that has often been cited, Sister Katherine is depicted as having said to her confessor: "Rejoice with me, I have become God." Less strikingly, but still rather dangerously, Marguerite Porete in the Mirror of Simple Souls depicts the "annihilated" soul as "joined and united to the Holy Trinity," indeed, as God "by right of Love." Even more dangerously, she goes on to stress the consequent freedom of that "annihilated" soul (united already as it is with God) from all externalities, for it no longer needs to "seek God by penance, nor by any sacrament of Holy Church, nor by thoughts, nor by words,"21

Although those who argue for a link between the heresy of the Free Spirit and the views espoused by the radical chiliasm of the Hussite revolution (the Taborites) envisage an ultimate blending between the antinomianism attributed to the Free Spirits and the millenarianism associated with the Joachist tradition, few of those who

21. See the partly heretical tract "Dai est Sweeter Keatrei Meister Eckhartzs Töchter von Strickherr," in Pfeiffer, 2: 464–65; Miroir des simples ames, chaps. 88, 21, 85, in Guarnieri, pp. 572, 541, 586. The last statement (p. 586) in its totality reads: "Cesse [Ami], qui tel est, ne quiet plus Dieu par pénitence ne par sacrament nul de Sainte Eglise, ne par pensées ne par paroles ne par œuvres, ne par creature d'uyc ne par creature de lassus, ne par justice ne par miséricorde ne par gloire de gloire, ne par divine cognoissance ne par divine amour ne par divine louange."
can be identified with any certainty as Free Spirits seem to have been moved by millenarian yearnings, or, indeed, by historical theories of any sort, and the Joachist tradition was itself of very different provenance.

The Joachist tradition can be traced quite explicitly to two Italian authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Joachists are usually linked with the rigorist, or "Spiritual," wing of the Franciscan order, which by the end of the fourteenth century had come increasingly to comprehend its own tribulations as champion of the doctrine of apostolic poverty in terms of the Joachite prophetic tradition. The doctrines that came to form that tradition were variations on, harmonics of, or even derivations from the works of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202), the famous Calabrian monk who had been abbot of the Cistercian house of Carazza before becoming the founder of the Order of San Giovanni in Fiore, which eventually included more than thirty houses. He was an exegete rather than a theologian, or perhaps a poet of sorts rather than either (Marjorie Reeves dubs him "a poet of the meaning of history"). His thinking, largely symbolic, was complicated by a penchant for numerical speculation. In two great works, the Liber Concordiae and Expositio in Apocalypsin, he elaborated along trinitarian lines a temporal schema embracing the whole history of mankind. He saw human history as falling into three great epochs, each divided into seven ages, associated with the seven angels of the Apocalypse, or forty-two generations, each of approximately thirty years' duration. The first age was that of the Father, aligned approximately with the Old Testament era; the second was that of the Son, aligned with the era of the New Testament and destined to endure if each of the generations was still to last thirty years (that was unclear) until around 1260; the third age was to be the era of the Holy Spirit. Each age had its own distinguishing characteristics. The first, which had had married men as its leaders, had been an age of the flesh, of fear and suffering, of servitude, law, and knowledge. The second, led by clerics, was an age of flesh and spirit, of faith and action, of filial

22. Reeves, p. 132.

obedience, of grace and partial wisdom. The third, of which St. Benedict had been the precursor and for which a new order (or new orders) of religious would prepare the way, was to be led by monks. It would be the age of the spirit, of charity, of contemplation, the age of liberty and of ever greater grace, the age not of knowledge or merely partial wisdom but of revelation—the age, indeed, in which the "everlasting gospel" (evangelium aeternum), mentioned in the Apocalypse (Rev. 14:6), and which Joachim associated with the angel of the sixth seal, would finally be disclosed.

Whether Joachim himself actually envisaged the supersession in the coming "third era" of the traditional sacramental order, the emergence of a new "spiritual" church, and the appearance of a new revelation has remained a subject of scholarly controversy. 23 He may merely have intended to suggest the spiritualization of sacramental practice, the revivification of the church, and the unfolding to the faithful of the old Gospel in its full spiritual significance. "Today," Marjorie Reeves has said, with "the distinction between what Joachim taught and what certain crazy Joachites proclaimed" well established, "we no longer consider seriously the accusation that Joachim expected a third Testament to supersede the first two." But, while exculpating him from heresy and affirming that "his intention was entirely faithful to the Church," even she admits that "when his imagination took eagle's wings it swept him far, and sometimes beyond the bounds." 24

As a result, he left plenty of room for the "crazy Joachites" who came later to exploit his arresting vision in very different and clearly heretical ways. And none did so more strikingly or more influentially than the young Franciscan Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, who in 1234, while residing in his order's house of studies at Paris, wrote his Introductio in evangelium aeternum. In effect he identified the "everlasting gospel" with the writings of Joachim himself, claimed that that


strong throughout much of the fourteenth century, enters the
twentieth as a rapidly dwindling trickle, and, like the heresy of the Free
Spirit, petered out in the latter half of the same century.

About this denouement there was something not uncharacteristic.
Throughout the heartland of western and central Europe the fifteenth
century witnessed a decline in the vigor and lasting power of heretical
dissent. But the triumph of the forces of orthodoxy in those regions
was shadowed by the emergence of new and powerful heterodoxies in
lands on the eastern and western peripheries to which heresy had pre-
viously been foreign.25 And the heresies in those peripheral regions,
those of the Wycliffites in England and the Hussites in Bohemia, have
been seen as inspired directly by the heterodox teachings of a single
man, in each case a theologian and prolific author with strong aca-
demic roots and powerful political affiliations as well.

In the case of the English Wycliffites, at least, that interpretation is
substantially correct. Having drifted into political as well as ecclesias-
tical radicalism and been driven underground by the combined forces
of church and state, the Lollards were destined to see the fifteenth
century out as fragmented, localized groups.26 They were composed
largely of tradesmen and artisans, lacking national organization and
betraying the type of variation in belief that one could expect such
circumstances to produce. Shorn of the last remnants of their
academic tradition and deprived of influential leadership in the years
after 1414, when Sir John Oldcastle organized a disastrous Lollard
march on London, dead as a political force after 1431, when one of
their plies came to the attention of the authorities, the Lollards ended
by stressing above all moral and practical issues. The Bible should be
made available in English to all, they urged, even the unlearned;
clerics should concern themselves with preaching rather than with the
sacraments; sinful priests were not to be credited with the power to

25 Though there had been some movement of Waldensians into Bohemia; see Con-
er and Molinar, pp. 211–82.
26. Or “mumbler,” as the bishops came to call them as early as 1387, using a Mid-
dle Dutch term of abuse that had long since been applied in the Netherlands to
Beggars and Beggians.
perform the sacraments; images were not to be worshiped— as John Morden of Chesham said to his (orthodox) son-in-law: "[They] be but stocks and staves for they cannot help themself; how can they helpe the[e]? And the worshipp of them is but idolatry." 27 And so on. Much in this Lollard prostration with the apostolic ideal and evangelical simplicity suggests an affinity with the Waldensians.

Their distinctive and continuing rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation, however, signals that the links with Wycliffe's own more theoretical theological commitments were never entirely broken. Those links become more evident if we push back to the early years of the fifteenth century, or the last years of the fourteenth—to the teachings of William Sawtrey (d. 1401), the first Lollard to be put to death under the provisions of the new antiheresitical statute De erroretico comitando, or to the "Twelve Conclusions" circulated in Westminster by Lollard partisans while Parliament was sitting in 1395. At that time two successive archbishops of Canterbury, William Courtenay (d. 1396) and Thomas Arundel, were laboring hard to root out the Wycliffites from the University of Oxford, "the church's principal recruiting ground in England" and "the platform from which their opinions could be disseminated among the higher clergy in each new academic generation." 28 Indeed, had not their efforts been so effective, there is little reason to think that the Lollard movement, graced by the type of educated clerical leadership it was in fact denied, would not have succeeded in maintaining a more coherent and thoroughly committed to Wycliffe's own theological views.

What, then, were his views? They were, in the first place, those of an aging, disappointed, angry, and increasingly frenzied man, most of them committed to writing during the last eight years of his life (1376–84). Wycliffe was a priest with a distinguished academic career at Oxford who had entered the royal service as a propagandist during one of the recurrent border conflicts between crown and papacy over the division of ecclesiastical spoils. Academic prominence and zealous political service notwithstanding, he had somehow failed to

secure the type of ecclesiastical preferment that one might have expected his industry and talents to have assured him. Not that he was not reasonably well provided for with benefices—too well, indeed, to enable him to avoid the characteristic clerical vices of absenteeism and pluralism, though not well enough to shield him from the temptation of saving a little money at the cost of becoming a negligent pluralist. Nor well enough, it may be, to enable him to engage in (unsuccessful) litigation at the papal court to recover the position he had lost as Warden of Canterbury College without engaging also in the practice that ecclesiastical reformers often denounced as "chop-churching." 29 It is possible that during the period 1373–75 he was the candidate of the royal council for the bishopric of Worcester (again unsuccessful); it is certain that in 1375 he was insulted by Gregory XI's failure to redeem a repeated promise to appoint him to a prebend at Lincoln; it is certain, too, that around this time he began to harbor feelings of persecution.

These details are worth mentioning because they have been aduced, along with other factors, to explain the deepening radicalism of his later years, when he succeeded in alienating so many of his former supporters by denying the divine institution of the papacy and by challenging the church's official eucharistic teaching. Other factors include the mounting clerical criticism of his radical reliance upon the authority of Scripture and of his views on ecclesiastical property—the growing threat, therefore, of actual persecution—and his own reval- vulsion at conditions at Rome after the onset of the Great Schism, as well as the arrogance and irascibility of his native temperament. Similarly nontheological factors have been invoked to explain the vehemence and radicalism with which he struck out right and left at the papacy, the bishops, the lower clergy, the sacraments—indeed, the whole traditional structure of the medieval church—during his last

27. Thomson, Later Lollards, p. 91.
29. McFarlane, p. 29, suggests that it was in order to raise the necessary money for the lawsuit that Wycliffe in November 1368 exchanged his rectory at Fillingham in Lincolnshire for the less valuable one of Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire, receiving from the broken who arranged the transaction a cash payment reflecting the differing values of the two benefices. See also McFarlane, p. 26, for Wycliffe's failure to meet his responsibilities as an absentee incumbent in relation to his canony and prebend in the collegiate church of Westbury-on-Trym.
two years, after he had withdrawn from Oxford to his parish of Lutterworth in Leicestershire. He has been depicted as exhibiting during these years a "sensile fanaticism," as the possible victim of high blood pressure, as goaded on by "disappointed ambition" or "swept along by resentment." 30 Even a biographer as fundamentally sympathetic as Workman was led, indeed, to admit that it was "difficult to decide whether we have here signs of a growing fanaticism, the result of conscious defeat, or proofs of the ill effects of his first stroke." 31

Although it would be hard to overestimate the importance of such factors, it would certainly be possible to do so. Ill health, temperament, disappointed hopes, changes in the ecclesiastico-political temperature and pressure undoubtedly do help to explain why Wycliffe was moved to advance some very radical propositions in theological matters. They throw but little light, however, on the process that led him to the particular positions he actually did adopt. Those positions—on the church, the priesthood, the sacraments, the Eucharist—become comprehensible only against the background of a series of commitments, philosophical as well as theological, matured over the course of a lifetime's study, teaching, and deliberation. Though intellectually (but oddly) overlook the fact, ideas exert their own logical pressures on the minds that think them; premises yeam for their congruent conclusions.

Nowhere, it has been claimed, is this more fully evident than in relation to the difficult teaching on the Eucharist that Wycliffe set forth in 1379—80 in his De apostasia and De eucharistia. After 1379 he began to deny the official teaching that at the consecration of the mass the bread and wine are transubstantiated, remaining bread and wine only as accident or in appearance, their substance having been transformed into the body and blood of Christ. He was nudged in that direction at least in part by his ultrarealism in metaphysics. For that ultrarealism involved the insistence that intelligibility and being are to be identified, that whatever the human mind conceives as an entity corresponds not merely to an external reality but to a divine archetype

50. Thus Delanoue et al., 2:978; McFarlane, pp. 84—85.
51. Workman, 2:311.

(see intelligible) that is possessed of being, eternal and indestructible: "Hence bread once in being could not be annihiliated; even when transubstantiated its own essence continued to coexist with the new substance which had been engendered." 32 And with this "remanentism" went the insistence that the consecrated host "is not the Lord's body but its efficacious sign," and that when we see the host "we ought to believe not that it is itself the body of Christ, but that the body of Christ itself is in a sacramental manner concealed in it." 33

Leff has argued cogently for a comparable congruence between Wycliffe's metaphysical commitments and the views concerning the Bible and the church that he expressed in De veritate sacrae scripturae, De ecclesia (1378), and elsewhere. With all his well-attested stress on the sovereign authority of the Bible, Wycliffe cannot be regarded as an advocate of scriptura sola; he was quite willing to admit that a full comprehension of its meaning might often depend on the interpretation hammered out by the church fathers and saints, notably by his beloved St. Augustine. But he did approach a certain fundamentalism that led him to make "the Bible the touchstone of all knowledge and conduct," a means whereby he could stand in judgment on the false claims of the hierarchical Roman church. His ultrarealism led him to view the Bible in a manner suggestive less of Christian tradition than of Muslim attitudes toward the Koran—to regard it, that is, as "a metaphysical entity eternally in being with every word denoting an everpresent reality." 34 At the same time, he regarded the church as in its essence "independent of time and place;"
And that he certainly did not do. But we are left, at least, with little ground for surprise at the radical nature of the conclusions he actually did draw. He periodically refused to accord efficacy to the ministrations of the sinful priest. More consistently he depreciated the function of the priesthood itself. He minimized the importance of the sacraments. He attacked the bases of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; he rejected the traditional claims of the papacy. He generally questioned, indeed, the mediatory function of the institutional church in the economy of salvation, and ascribed to the royal government a predominant role in the direction of that part of the visible church militant that he came to identify with the realm of England.

Despite the obvious appeal of the last point to John of Gaunt, close adviser to Edward III and Wycliffe’s loyal protector, it was outweighed by the extreme and unpalatable nature of his other positions. So it was in Bohemia rather than England that his memory was honored and so many of his writings preserved. That his fellow countrymen spurned his heretical views is not too difficult to understand; that those views found so welcome a reception at the other end of Europe, calls, however, for a more strenuous effort at explanation and the identification of a complex combination of factors.

The first factor was the establishment of a crucial link between Wycliffe’s Oxford and the University of Prague, a link that should not simply be taken for granted. It was only after the outbreak of the Great Schism in 1378 and the concomitant alignment of France with the Avignonese obedience and England with the Roman that substantial numbers of Czech students began to forsake the University of Paris for Oxford. Contacts increased with the negotiations leading up to the marriage in 1382 of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia, sister of Wenceslas IV, king of Bohemia, Holy Roman emperor, and the man who later became Hu’s protector. The strength of those contacts is indicated by the fact that in 1388 a scholarship was founded at Oxford to maintain a Czech student there.

The second factor is the reception at Prague of Wycliffe’s
philosophical realism. At Oxford the admiration for his strictly philosophic views had survived the condemnation of his theological deviations, and by about 1390 Czech students returning to Prague had begun to acquaint their compatriots with his philosophical writings. The metaphysical ultrarealism informing those writings enjoyed a favorable reception in part because the members of the Dominican College, transferred in 1383 from Paris to Prague as a result of the schism, had prepared the ground for it by their own vindication of a Thomistic moderate realism. But the warmth of the reception may also be attributed to the fact that most of the German masters, with whom the growing number of Czechs at the university were in constant conflict, were advocates of the nominalist via moderna. Thus, long before Wycliffe's theological works had begun to appear at Prague, his reputation as an eminent and provocative thinker was well established among the Czech masters. Hus had made copies of four of Wycliffe's philosophical tracts for his own use, and someone later inserted in the margins of one of them, De universalibus, such approving comments as "May God grant Wyclif the kingdom of heaven" and "Wyclif, Wyclif, you will unsettle many a man's mind!".37

His prior reception as a philosopher clearly paved the way for the reception of his theological views when, from the beginning of the fifteenth century—probably after the return of Jerome of Prague from Oxford in 1401—his theological works, too, began to appear at Prague. Their appearance, at least in bulk, resulted from the conscious efforts of two Czech scholars who visited Oxford in 1406–7 and there made contact, it seems, with some of the English Lollards.38 So positive a degree of interest reflects a well-established Czech tradition of ecclesiastical reform. To men formed by such a tradition Wycliffe

37. In Czech the latter statement reads: "O Viklef, Viklef, nejednou ty hla vocle vyskytel!" and Spinka, *Biography*, p. 38 on n. 31, comments that "the word zvyclis is an obvious play on Wyclif's name." Smahel, p. 19, n. 2, notes (and see Spinka) that "according to a paleographical analysis by V. Vojtěch the glosses were not written by Hus."

38. For these contacts see Betts, *English and Czech Influence on the Husite Movement*,” in Essays, pp. 132–59 at 141–42. Also Smahel, especially pp. 20–25.
the erstwhile leaders of the movement’s academic phase who had been accused of Wyckliffite tendencies and had recanted, he was pushed into the forefront of the whole movement. 39

By that time Hus had begun to make the acquaintance of Wyckliff’s theological works. In the next half-dozen years, by his borrowings from those works, his propensity for expressing some of his own views in Wyckliffite language, and his willingness even to defend in public some of the condemned Wyckliffite propositions, he set his feet on the path that led to his condemnation by the Council of Constance in 1415 and his subsequent burning as a heretic. Wyckliff, Losenth claimed almost a century ago, was “the man for whose doctrine Hus went to the stake.” 40 The claim can hardly be contested. It was explicitly as a disciple of the heresarch John Wyckliff, “as a man who had ‘taught, asserted and preached’ his [Wyckliff’s] many errors and heresies,” that Constance sentenced him to degradation from the priestly order and relinquished him to the secular power. 41 Losenth, however, claimed a good deal more. “Hus in reality appears as a genuine Wyckliffe,” he said, and De ecclesia (1413), his most important work, “contains in its dogmatic portions hardly a line which does not proceed from Wyckliff.” Although de Vooght and others have intimated that this assessment may owe more to German condemnation toward a Slav Untermensch than to a truly judicious appraisal of the sources, a Czech historian has recently concluded that “Hus’s doctrine in its final, ripened form is essentially identical with the doctrine of Wyckliff.” 42

39. Note, too, that with the promulgation in 1409 by King Wenceslas of the decree of Kutná Hora, most of the German masters scattered from the University of Prague, thus opening up new opportunities for advancement to Czech scholars. In 1409, Hus was elected rector of the university. For Kutná Hora and its background in the politics of the schism, see Kaminsky, History, pp. 56–75.

40. Losenth, Wycliff and Hus, pp. 177, xvi. The first German edition of the book appeared in 1883.

41. I cite the translation of the sentence in Sprka, Constan, pp. 295–98. The original may be found in Novotný et al., 8: 501–5.

42. In order of citation: Losenth, Wycliff and Hus, p. 156; de Vooght, Heresie, p. ix (cf. Berts, especially pp. 146–48, where he notes that Losenth was one of the German minority residing in Bohemia and ascribes to him ‘strong anti-Czech prejudices’;

The weight of accumulated evidence, however, clearly favors a more qualified conclusion. The editor of the critical edition of De ecclesia, of all Hus’s writings the one that counted most heavily in the minds of his prosecutors, has estimated that in composing that tract Hus took about one-twelfth of the text from Wyckliff’s works, mostly from the latter’s own De ecclesia. More important, for the problem is not one that can be settled by any mere appeal to textual statistics, the editor states that “the borrowed material . . . is so selected and ordered as to make it clear that the argument and convictions behind it are Hus’s own property . . . [H]e has drawn upon Wyckliff’s many treatises for substantiation and elaboration.” 43 And even in this tract, the product of his most Wyckliffite phase, those convictions, it must be insisted, fall somewhat short of Wyckliff’s.

Hus does take over from Wyckliff the definition of “the holy catholic, that is universal, church” as “the totality of the predestined” [unium predestinatorum universit], or “all the predestined, present, past, and future.” That definition, which had appeared in some of his earlier writings in the context of the competing view of the church as the congregation of the faithful, he treats as the sole, proper, and determinative one. That is to say, he now makes predestination rather than faith the principle of the church’s unity and excludes the reprobat (praestit) from her ranks. 44 It is true, too, that he concludes, again with Wyckliff, that “Christ alone is the head of the universal church,” and argues that “no pope is the head of that catholic church besides Christ.” Since no man can know whether he or anyone else is of the predestinate, “it follows that no one without revelation may rea-

Robert Kalivoda, Husův ideolog (Prague, 1961), p. 159, cited from Kaminsky, History, p. 37 and n. 110, who notes that “Kalivod acknowledges Hus’s verbal modifications of Wyckliff’s doctrine, but tends to regard these as ‘innessential.’” 43. Thorsson, Hus, p. viii; cf. de Vooght, Husiana, pp. 1–6, for a subsequent summary of the status of the Wyckliff-Hus question, especially in the light of the work of the Czech historian Sollík.

44. Hus, Tractát de ecclesia, chap. 1 and 5; ed. Thorsson, pp. 2, 14–16; Wyckliff, Tract. de eccl., chap. 1; ed. Losenth, pp. 2, 5. Cf. the extended analysis by de Vooght, Husiana, pp. 11–101, where he compares Hus’s views with both Augustine’s and Wyckliff’s.
sonably assert of himself or of another that he is the head of a particular holy church, though if liwed well he ought to hope that he is a member of the holy catholic church, the bride of Christ." All that he is willing to concede to papal claims, then, is that if the pope's works do not gainsay it, we may assume that he is "the superior in that particular [that is, Roman] church." 45

These are radical statements indeed, and Hus was to pay the price for them. But they should not be taken to reflect his endorsement of Wycliffe's entire ecclesiology. Even in De ecclesia he fails to maintain his initial commitment to predestination as the principle of the church's unity. A good deal of the work presupposes, in fact, his failure fully to relinquish the competing view of the church as the congregation of the faithful. His concerns emerge very much in the tradition of the earlier Czech reform as focused overwhelmingly on moral and practical issues, and he certainly steps short of Wycliffe's radical conclusions concerning the status of the sacraments, the role of the priesthood, and the invalidity of the sacramental ministrations of the sinful priest.

Elsewhere, of course, he repeatedly made it clear that his sympathy with Wycliffe's philosophical realism in no way entailed any comparable sympathy with his heretical eucharistic teaching. On this matter Hus was entirely orthodox, and at Constance he struggled hard to convince his judges of that fact and also that he had never held any of the forty-five articles of Wycliffe's condemned in 1412 and again in 1415. In relation to some of those articles, however, his responses were less than candid, and the intricate qualifications he appended to the final thirty erroneous articles drawn from his own writings (notably to article 1 on the definition of the church and article 9 on the papacy) were too ambivalent to persuade his judges of the orthodoxy of his intentions. 46

Of Hus's reliance on Wycliffe's words and ideas it has well been


said that "in almost every case they underwent modification which changed their original import," the change being "almost invariably from extremism to greater moderation, from theory to practice, from metaphysics to morals." 47 Nevertheless, that reliance was overt enough and seemingly so heavy as to secure his condemnation. His judges at Constance had been conditioned by the German masters expelled from Prague in 1409 to think of Bohemia as a hotbed of Wycliffe heresy and were not reassured on that score by Hus's ambiguous formulations. They were alarmed by reports of the vituperative nature of his preaching against the evils of the ecclesiastical establishment and bemused by the bitter enmity shown toward him even by a fellow Czech such as Stephen Páleč. They were misled also by Páleč's charge that Hus had written: "If I should happen to abjure, understand that I do it only with my lips but do not consent to it in my heart." 48 Those judges, themselves no fanatics, clearly found it impossible to believe that Hus was not a more thoroughgoing Wycliffe than he would have them believe. They saw him, in effect, as a revolutionary rather than a reformer, a subversive rather than a saint, and, acting accordingly, they made him a martyr.

Although a tragic misjudgment perhaps, in a way it was a misjudgment shared by the radicals who had come to the fore at Prague since Hus's departure for Constance—such men as Jakoubek of Sríbro and Nicholas of Dresden, who were destined to lead the "Husite" movement into open revolution, heresy, and schism. The very passion of Hus's reforming leadership and the overt nature of his flirtation with Wycliffe ideas, which meant for him dishonor, degradation, and death, eased the way for others to a reader transition from reform to revolution and to a more thoroughgoing assimilation of Wycliffe ideas—especially his ascription to the temporal authorities of sweeping powers in ecclesiastical matters, a point of view not native to the Czech reform tradition. If the martyred Hus was to serve the

47. Löff, Hesec., 2:676.

48. For this see Peter of Málandnice, "An Account of the Trial and Condemnation of Master John Hus in Constance," trans. Spinka, Constat., pp. 96–98. The original is printed in Nowotny et al., 8:25–120.
Husite movement as symbol and inspiration, it was not Hus "as he claimed to be—carefully and fundamentally orthodox in his writings—but . . . Hus as the Council of Constance judged him to have been: turbulent, seditious, subversive." 49

Turbulent enough, indeed, that movement was destined to be Hus's death, and the subsequent condemnation and burning at Constance of his friend and fellow reformer, Jerome of Prague, aroused a veritable storm of resentment in Bohemia that culminated in a revolt against the Romanist clergy who had denounced Hus and Emperor Sigismund, who had betrayed him. Around the markedly non-Wycliffite cause of Utraquism, the demand for giving to the laity communion under both kinds (sub utraque specie)—a demand Hus himself had endorsed only in the last months of his life—the reformers at the University of Prague, their sympathizers among the townsfolk, and their powerful supporters among the Czech nobility and gentry came to unite. As a result, they were able to agree in 1420 on the common religious platform that Jakoubek of Stríbro formulated in the Four Articles of Prague. These articles demanded (1) the free preaching of the Word of God; (2) that the Eucharist be freely administered under both kinds, bread and wine, to all the faithful; (3) that all priests, including the pope, should give up all superfluity of temporal possessions and live as models to all; (4) that the realm be cleansed of all public mortal sins. 50

Their ability so to agree, however, reflected an uncharacteristic surge of national unity in face of German invasion, and the common platform proved incapable of healing the split between the three main groups into which the Hussite movement had already splintered, each in turn racked by its own internal tensions. The platform itself best represented the views of the centrist wing of the Utraquists led by Jakoubek, but it was already too radical for the more conservative wing that included in its ranks such men as John of Jesenice and Peter of Mladaňovice, who had been friends of Hus. But it was not radical enough for the Taborites, the millenarian enthusiasts strong in southeastern Bohemia, who (among other more extreme proclivities) combined Wycliffe's remanentism and depreciation of the sacraments with an eager expectation of the imminent coming of Christ and of his kingdom on earth.

The story of the interaction and subsequent careers of these groups, of the struggles of Hussite armies against the forces of Sigismund, and of the general maelstrom of fifteenth-century Bohemian politics is exceedingly complex and cannot be pursued here. The abandonment of the Taborites by the more moderate Utraquists and the willingness of the Council of Basel to make the concessions to Utraquist liturgical practice and organizational separatism embodied in the Compotatis of 1433 made possible the return of Sigismund to Prague and an uneasy reconciliation of the moderate Utraquists with their Roman Catholic fellow countrymen. But it succeeded in ending neither religious dissension nor political unrest. When the century drew to a close, the legacy of Hus's reform was embodied not only in the quasi-separatist but officially recognized Utraquist church but also in the independent sectarian grouping known as the Unity of the Czech Brethren. That body drew its ultimate inspiration from the teachings of Peter Chelčicky (d. ca. 1460), which owed something to Wycliffe but had much more in common with Waldensian views and were clearly heretical.

Three Themes: God, Revelation, Church

The contrasting fates of Wycliffe and Hus and the differing destinies of the movements associated with their names reflect in classic fashion the intricate interplay of religious commitment, ecclesiastical authority, and political loyalty that did so much to shape the career of medieval heresy. Not all heresies, however, were as exposed to the molding impact of political factors (one has only to think of the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit), nor is even an approximate alignment between social situation and sectarian allegiance to be taken for granted. Certainly, violence is done to the variety and complexity of medieval heretical movements by Marxist attempts to
portray them as "forms of consciousness," whereby on the ideological level particular groupings of men give expression to the class struggles generated by more fundamental changes in the social and economic temperature and pressure. Whatever the interplay between religious commitment and socioeconomic factors—and it differed from heresy to heresy—the fundamental driving force appears to have been religious. Similarly, the doctrinal positions adopted are best understood as anxious attempts to confront, in the terms suggested by Christianity, the basic religious questions with which men must struggle. Not that such a task of understanding is at all easy. In its full theological development the structure even of orthodox medieval belief was not simple, and the pluralism of medieval deviation presents us with a degree of complexity sufficient to defy any optimistic attempt to reduce it to unity. What we can hope to do—though at the price of a degree of schematization that some may find coercive—is to reduce it to order. And here, once again, Augustine must serve as both initial point of departure and subsequent point of reference.

Central to Augustine's vision of things and the very pivot upon which the whole structure of medieval religious belief turned was his firm appropriation, in the teeth of Gnostic and Manichaean claims, of the biblical visions of God as transcendent Lord of History, sovereign God of might and power, Creator of the universe. He was at constant pains to clarify just what those last words mean and what they imply both for man in particular and for the universe at large. If God made man in his own image and likeness, he made him, nevertheless, as he created the entire universe, not out of preexistent materials or out of his own substance, not working "as a human artificer does, forming one thing out of something else," but creating out of nothing. Between the Creator and all created being there lies, as a result, a difference not merely of degree but of kind—in Kierkegaard's telling phrase, "an infinite qualitative difference." 51

By the late Middle Ages this fundamental apprehension of things had become very much a part of the day-to-day intellectual baggage of those concerned with theological and philosophical questions. It was thus harder for them, perhaps, than it is for us today to perceive its essential novelty, harder, too, to see the gulf that divides it from antique and especially Neoplatonic modes of comprehending the divine and the relationship of the divine to the world in general and to man in particular. Whereas Catharist dualism marked a conscious and far-reaching recession on this point from the purity of Augustine's fundamentally biblical commitments, the radical mysticism of the Free Spirits, it may be suggested, marked an unwitting recession of a different, less extreme but no less significant, kind. The deviation central to the heresy of the Free Spirit was precisely the loss of that sense of "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man involved in the belief that the perfected soul, even in this life, could be absorbed entirely into God on the analogy, for example, of the drop of water in a jug of wine. 52 Given that deviation, the affiliated Free Spirit bracketing of the ecclesiastical and sacramental apparatus whose purpose it was, after all, to bridge the gulf between man and God was no more than an obvious, logical concomitant; and orthodox suspicions of Free Spirit antinomianism, however overblown, were not altogether incomprehensible.

Although the more radical Joachites also came to challenge the efficacy of the "carnal church's" machinery of salvation—and did so not simply for the perfected—their grounds for so doing differed greatly from the rapturous sense of mystic autochthon moving the Free Spirits. To them, as bearers of a prophetic message, the vision of God as sovereign Lord of History was central, and there was no disposition to bridge the gap between transcendent creator and contingent creature. They were driven, instead, by a differing understanding of the way in which God, of his incomprehensible wisdom and mercy, had extended across that gap a loving hand to man.

Augustine had absorbed much from the Neoplatonists. In their books, he tells us, he had even encountered the doctrine of the


52. As we have seen, an image with a long tradition in mystical literature and one employed in differing ways and with varying degrees of heterodoxy; see Lerner, "Image of Mixed Liquids."
preexistent Logos, the Word of whom we read in the prologue to the Gospel according to St. John. What he had not found there, however, was the vital teaching that in the person of Christ Jesus "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), suffering and dying for our sins. That saving teaching he had found only in the Scriptures, which, unlike "the books of the Platonists," identify not merely the goal that men must reach but also the road by which they are to reach it.53 The Juchites, of course, would have denied none of this. And yet the more radical among them proclaimed the advent of a new age with its own unique testament and the supersession, accordingly, of the Gospel of Christ by a new and everlasting gospel. They thus undermined the uniqueness as well as the finality of the scriptural revelation, the centrality of the incarnation in the whole schema of salvation history, and, as a result, the traditional role of the hierarchical and sacramental church, the Body of Christ, and the prolongation of his presence on earth, as the critical focus of man's anxious attempts to encounter the divine.

Viewed from this perspective, the heresies of the Waldensians, of Hus, and even of Wycliffe, however corrosive of the traditional ecclesiastical order, are focused on what in the logic of theology are more subsidiary issues, and so appear in much less radical light. Wycliffe found no problem with the traditional doctrine of divine transcendence or, despite his intense biblicism, with the traditional teaching on divine revelation. His difficulties, rather, were soteriological, and sprang less from any challenge to the theology Augustine had bequeathed to the medieval church than from a too faithful stress on one particular strand in that theology.

In the last chapter, I treated Augustine's doctrine of grace and his doctrine of the church in separate sections, without doing much to relate one to the other. That procedural choice was deliberately made in order to respond to the historical actualities of Augustine's own intellectual development. He had developed the two doctrines independently of each other and at different points in his career. By 411—


12, when he wrote the first of his treatises against the Pelagians, he had long since developed his anti-Donatist doctrine of the church. Early in 411 it had been proclaimed the official teaching of the church, and he made little reference to it in his anti-Pelagian writings. And yet when the two doctrines are brought into mutual contact, they are clearly in tension. Pushed to its logical conclusion, his affirmation of predestination and the irresistibility of grace would have had the effect of depriving the sacramental ministrations of the visible hierarchical church of all importance in the economy of salvation. If salvation was entirely dependent upon the free choice of an inescapable God, not even the most assiduous exploitation of the sacramental channels of grace could do anything to promote the chances of a single individual. Augustine, of course, had not pushed that position to its logical conclusion. But whereas in the context of his writings on grace and salvation he was moved to define the church as the invisible body of the elect, foreknown to God alone, in the context of his writings against the Donatists he had been led to identify the visible church, with its saints and sinners, hierarchy and sacraments, as the true Catholic church and the sole ark of salvation.

The medieval church did not attempt to reconcile these two positions. Whereas Augustine's anti-Donatist teaching on the church became the prevailing orthodoxy, his views on grace and predestination were admitted, as we have seen, only with modifications. But those modifications, it should now be noted, served (though they were not necessarily consciously intended to do so) to bring them into line with that teaching on the church. What emerged was a modified version of Augustinianism that, while affirming man's inability to engineer his own salvation, attributed to him the power, and burdened him with the responsibility, of cooperating with the workings of divine grace. Affirming also the necessity of grace, this version went a long way toward confining its dispensation to those channels of grace called sacraments, the possession of which was the foundation of the church's holiness, and which, to be efficacious, had in most cases to be administered by the priesthood. And it was this version of Augustinianism, packaged and popularized in the Latin West by the
influential writings of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) and underpinning the power and prestige of the sacramental hierarchy, that was to form the bedrock of medieval orthodoxy.

Wycliffe challenged that version of Augustinianism by appropriating Augustine's own doctrine of grace in all its uncompromising fullness—with its insistence on predestination ante praeviam mortis and on the irresistibility of grace, along with its concomitant implication that the church must properly be defined as the invisible body of the predestinate. And once he had done so, such was the rigidity of his commitment to the doctrine that he was nudged under the pressure of attack into a line of doctrinal development directly opposed to that taken by the church itself in the fifth and sixth centuries. Whereas the church in effect subordinated Augustine's anti-Pelagian doctrine of grace to his anti-Donatist doctrine of the church, Wycliffe went a long way toward subordinating his doctrine of the church to his doctrine of grace. Hence, having identified divine predestination as the principle of the church's unity, he was unable to ascribe any effective unity to the visible, institutional church. And having identified divine predestination as the principle of the church's holiness too, he was pushed in the direction of refusing it any objective holiness in virtue of its sacramental ministrations. By an indirect route (the identification of the reprobate by their deeds) he was also forced into sporadic denials, Donatist fashion, of any efficacy to the sacraments administered by a sinful priest.

Hus's explicit refusal to endorse such a denial shows the degree to which he himself stopped short, even in his De ecclesia, of any complete appropriation of Augustine's doctrine of grace and of any comparable subordination to that doctrine of his anti-Donatist doctrine of the church. As a result, Hus failed to bring his theology under any single controlling principle. To the degree, then, that the perplexity of his judges at Constance was really the outcome of theoretical doctrinal considerations, it is altogether understandable. For it was grounded in Hus's own theological confusion.

We are left, then, with the Waldensians. Despite their woes and suffering, their stiff-necked and obdurate resistance to ecclesiastical authority, their alleged willingness in Italy even to stand up and resist their persecutors by force, from our present perspective they emerge as the least radical heretics of all. Not for them any questioning of the traditional understanding of the divine, or of the status of revelation, or of the delicately poised balance between human initiative and divine grace. Their heretical preoccupations, inspired by a divergent reading of the gospels and fueled by the compelling vision of an apostolic purity long since betrayed by the pharsaiscal church of Rome, were focused on problems pertaining to the mediation of grace. Those preoccupations led them to an essentially Donatist rejection of the jurisdiction, hierarchy, and sacraments of that "Constantinian" church and to a congruently sectarian stress on subjective rather than "institutional" holiness.

Of course, in such rejections of the official church and its traditional claims there is a marked convergence among many of the heretical tendencies that surfaced during the late Middle Ages. But it takes no more than a glance at the startlingly disparate doctrinal affirmations that often lay behind such negations to realize that a convergence of attitudes toward religious practice should not always prompt us to expect any harmony of underlying spirit, let alone any identity of fundamental commitment. And that realization is not irrelevant to the enormous amount of attention paid in the past to the continuity of medieval heretical movements into the Age of Reformation.

The Question of Continuity

That continuities existed is beyond question. The swing of historiographic fashion away from "forerunners of the Reformation" should not blind us to that fact. What is in question, however, is the meaning and significance to be attached to those continuities. In this

54. Thus abandoning their own prohibition of killing; see Lambert, p. 336; Leff, Hus, 2: 482–83.
55. Thus in fifteenth-century Bohemia there certainly appears to have been a genuine blending of older Waldensian with later Hussite views, perhaps also (though the claim is more arguable) with Joachite and Free Spirit tendencies, see Kaminsky, History, pp. 171–80, 349–66; Lambert, p. 290; Gooner and Motnar, pp. 211–22.
connection, the schematic presentation of the last section, whatever its inadequacies, will have proved its value if it serves to remind us of two very basic points: first, that the structure of Christian belief has its own internal logic, that comparable choices of fundamental theoretical emphases tend to entail comparable shifts in more practical religious attitudes; second, the partially countervailing point already signaled—that the structure of Christian belief is so complex that shared attitudes toward religious practice may well spring from widely divergent doctrinal premises. Therefore, we should be fortified against assuming any necessarily historical connection between late-medieval heresy and the ideas of the Protestant reformers, whatever their similarities and whatever their shared hostility toward the traditional Catholic system.

It seems appropriate, then, to evince a certain reserve toward claims that some sectarian groups in Switzerland and Germany, usually classified as Anabaptists, reveal the survival in those areas of the heresy of the Free Spirit, or that the view of the Eucharist ultimately adopted by Zwingli was in direct continuity with a tradition of "sacramentarianism... endemic for centuries" in the Netherlands.56 Similarly, the recurrence of chiliastic views among, for example, the Anabaptists of Münster during the apocalyptic years 1533–35 need not be taken to require the postulation of a continuous stream of revolutionary millenarianism stretching back into the Middle Ages. Nor should there be any disposition to exaggerate the contributions of surviving groups of Hussites, Lollards, or Waldensians to the development of Protestantism. The Unity of Czech Brethren, the Lollards, and the French (though not the Italian) Waldensians ultimately threw in their lot with the churches of the Reformation and forfeited thereby their historic separate identities. But the doctrinal inspiration of the Reformation churches was of quite distinct provenance, and the contribution of the surviving heresies was rather that of having promoted, in the regions in which they were prevalent, a certain receptiv-

56. Such claims are advanced in Claesen and in Williams, pp. 26–37.
Continuities, then, indeed there were. But it may help us to keep them in proportion if we note, by way of conclusion, how very much they pale in comparison with the continuity manifested so dramatically in the deepening frenzy of the witchcraft craze. The witchcraft phenomenon gathered momentum throughout the fifteenth century, peaked in the sixteenth, and continued on well into the seventeenth. Such fifteenth-century popes as Eugenius IV, Nicholas V, and Innocent VIII doubtless helped fix the categorization of witchcraft as a heresy, but it was clearly a heresy persecuted with no less enthusiasm by the Protestants than by the Catholics. Even in the Age of Reformation, the ideas about it that were codified in the Malleus malificarum of 1486 (the infamous inquisitor’s manual that was prefaced by Innocent’s bull against witches) seem to have succeeded in exerting a continuing, widespread baneful but serene ecumenical influence on Protestant and Catholic alike.

CHAPTER 5 · MOVEMENTS OF REFORM: STRUCTURAL, MONASTIC, MORAL, EDUCATIONAL

"A rotten pestilence spreads today throughout the whole body of the Church; the more extensive it becomes the more irreconcilable it is; the more deep-seated the more perilous..." If these things were said by the Blessed Bernard, so much the more can they be said now; for since then the Church has gone from bad to worse.
—Pierre d’Ailly (1350—1420)

I cry out, therefore, and publicly affirm... that of all the evils, divisions, schisms, errors, deformities and so on pertaining to and following from the matters I have been touching upon, the cause and origin, and indeed the root, has been and remains today the neglect and disregard of general councils.
—John of Ragusa (1395—1443)

"From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no health in it," said Nicholas of Oresme in a sermon of 1363, applying the old biblical saw to the church of his own day. "Everyone knows," added the preacher at Constance in 1417, "that the reform of the Church Militant is necessary—it is known to the clergy, it is known to the whole Christian people. The heavens, the elements,... and, with them, even the very stones cry out for reform." 1 Certainly, by the