

EXAMINING THE COLLABORATIVE PRESENCE OF ACADEMIC AND POPULAR INTERESTS IN LOLLARD HOMILETICS

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The past fifty years of scholarship on John Wyclif and the Lollards has largely neglected to examine the rhetoric of Lollard sermon writing. Many prominent scholars of the field, including Anne Hudson and Margaret Aston, have largely dismissed the possibility of a coherent, distinct Lollard rhetoric because of John Wyclif's own suspicions of theory and rhetoric in the liberal arts.¹ In this paper, I want to challenge this neglect and dismissal, and offer an analysis of homiletic rhetoric to gain insight into the interactions and syntheses of academic and popular interests during the development and spread of Lollardy. The fundamental functions of Lollard rhetoric I identify, explication and exhortation via Scriptural justification and plain speech, are present in Wycliffite sermons that span decades and audiences, and suggest a consistent homiletic rhetoric developed to draw popular lay audiences into a critical, reflective, unified Christian body, where ecclesiastical hierarchies and restrictive knowledge yield to individual study and communal discourse on Scripture. As marginal, heterodox believers, Lollards risked violent persecution when they participated in public rhetoric; the stakes of effective homiletics were life-or-death. I will argue, in this paper, that the foundation of explication through argumentative summaries and division and amplification in Lollard homiletics was laid by the academic training many early Wycliffites had at Oxford, where John Wyclif first published anti-clerical tracts in defense of an invisible church of true believers. The exhortation of the audience, I

¹ Kantik Ghosh, "Logic and Lollardy," *Medium Ævum* 76, no. 2 (2007): 251-253, <https://doi.org/10.2307/43633173>.

will argue, influenced by the desire to reach unlettered lay audiences beyond the borders of the university, emerges from the use of personal appeal and inclusive phrasing. Drawing from two sermons from the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle, *Dominica quinta post festum Trinitatis* and *Dominica prima Aduentis Domini*, as well as William Taylor's 1406 sermon preached at St. Paul's Cross, I will demonstrate the continued presence of academic and popular interests in the development and spread of Lollardy during the last decades of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century through the key elements of Lollard homiletic rhetoric, explication and exhortation.

The English Wycliffite Sermons were part of a lengthy sermon cycle developed for use across the liturgical year. The sermon sets each correlate to a season in the liturgical calendar, and each sermon references a Gospel reading assigned for the day on which it should be read, likely have been taken from a companion lectionary, which Lollards created and distributed for use in lay communities.² Anne Hudson suggests that these sets of sermons may have been composed between 1372 and 1412,³ with popular circulation beginning soon after that, having dated the ownership of some extant manuscripts to the mid 16th century (Bodleian Library MS Douce 321), the early 15th century (Robert Taylor MS, Princeton), and the end of the 14th century (Bodleian Library MS Additional A. 105).⁴ Given this dating work, it seems likely that a mid to late 14th century composition and wider late 14th century and early 15th century distribution brought these sets of sermon cycles to lay people and parish priests across Southern and Central England. William Taylor, who delivered an infamous polemic against corrupt clergy at St. Paul's Cross in 1406, was a master of arts at Oxford and a notorious Lollard, who repented and relapsed multiple times before being put to death for heresy in 1423.⁵ Though a single copy of Taylor's sermon survives in Bodleian Library MS Douce 53, an associate Lollard, William Thorpe, claimed that it was widely distributed in English and Latin.⁶ To compare these texts to their orthodox counterparts, I will use Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi* and Thomas of Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi*. The *Forma praedicandi* is such an average synthesis of 14th century *ars praedicandi* (the art of preaching) that James J. Murphy, in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, uses it as a standard measurement of sermon rhetoric in later Medieval university homiletics.⁷ Basevorn's examination of Oxonian preaching is useful for this paper, especially in his observation that the Parisians, unlike the

² Anne Hudson, "Lollard Biblical Scholarship," *The Premature Reformation* (Clarendon Press, 1988), 234.

³ Anne Hudson, "A Lollard Sermon-Cycle and its Implications," *Medium Ævum* 40, no. 2 (1971): 142, <https://doi.org/10.2307/43627721>.

⁴ Anne Hudson, "The Manuscripts," *English Wycliffite Sermons, vol. 1*, ed. Anne Hudson, (Clarendon Press, 1983), 50-97.

⁵ Anne Hudson, "Introduction," *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Anne Hudson, (Oxford University Press, 1993), xiii and xxi-xxiii.

⁶ Anne Hudson, "William Taylor's 1406 Sermon: A Postscript," *Medium Ævum* 64, no. 1 (1995): 100, <https://doi.org/10.2307/43629677>.

⁷ James J. Murphy, "The Art of Preaching," *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 342-343. And Robert of Basevorn, "Forma Praedicandi," in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, ed. J.J. Murphy, (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 344-355. ⁸ Basevorn, "Forma," 351.

Oxonians, "use an eighth method...the authority of Holy Writ."⁸ Thomas of Chobham's *Summa*, written around 1220, offers detailed insight of orthodox treatments of allegory and the use of *captatio benevolentiae* to manufacture agreeable audiences.⁹ I will also reference John Mirk, an orthodox writer known for his guides for parish priests, who produced his own vernacular sermon cycle known as the *Festial* in the late 14th or 15th century.¹⁰ His sermons bear some resemblance to Lollard homiletics, but, unlike the Lollards, he depends heavily on the *Legenda aurea* as a Scriptural authority, explaining, "I haue drawe this treti sewyng owt of *Legend aurea* with more addyng to..."¹¹ These texts, alongside a brief assortment of writings (sometimes tentatively) attributed to John Wyclif, like the *Tractatus de Regibus* and the *Last Age of the Chirche*, are the principle primary sources I have used for this paper. For the sake of this paper, I will use the term "preaching" and its sibling "homiletics" loosely, not by the definition in the *ars praedicandi* of mass instruction, but as a catch-all for the practice of composing and sharing formal interpretive responses to Scripture to an audience greater than the writer themselves.¹²

The *Tractatus de Regibus*, though not definitively attributable to John Wyclif, lays out clearly the aim of the Lollard movement: "trouthe schuld be openly knwen to alle maneres of folke..."¹³ Jean-Philippe Genet, editor of *Four English Political Tracts*, estimates a date of production for the *Tractatus* in the 1380s, which probably indicates composition during the first abuses against heretics known as "lollards."¹⁴ The concern for accessible Scriptural truth and allusions to Lollard persecution in defense of vernacular religious writing indicates an author who wanted to defend Lollard thought and who harbored strong anti clericalist tendencies.¹⁵ The use of "trouthe" in the above sentence, contextualized by the author of *Tractatus*' clear Lollard sympathies, points towards not a political or intellectual truth, but a spiritual truth—Lollard sermons and polemics frequently referred to Scripture as truth, as in *Dominica quinta*, which calls Christ, "a cornerston [who] growndeth al trewth."¹⁶ This concern for truth in the *Tractatus de Regibus* is followed by a defense of vernacular religious

⁸ Basevorn, "Forma," 351.

⁹ Thomas of Chobham, "Summa de arte praedicandi," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. Rita Copeland, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 628.

¹⁰ Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *Medium Aevum* 56, no. 2 (1987): 217-218, <https://doi.org/10.2307/43629105>.

¹¹ BL, Cotton MS Claudius A.ii, fol.3v cited by Susan Powell, "Mirk, John," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published online September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18818>.

¹² Murphy, "Art of Preaching," 307.

¹³ "Tractatus de Regibus," in *Four English Political Tracts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jean-Philippe Genet, (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5.

¹⁴ "Introduction," *Tracts*, 2-3. See also: Aston, M. E. "Lollardy and Sedition 1381-1431." *Past & Present*, no. 17 (1960): 1-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/649784>.

¹⁵ "Tractatus," *Tracts*, 5.

¹⁶ "Dominica quinta," *Sermons*, 241.

writing—"trowthe moveþ mony men to speke sentencis in yngelysche..."¹⁷—which was foundational to the translations, glosses, compilations, lectionaries, and sermons Lollards produced and distributed to unlettered lay communities.¹⁸ This formula, seeking ultimate truth and finding it through expansive access, defines the rhetoric of Lollard homiletics. The origins of this focus, made manifest in an emphasis on vernacular homiletics and translation, probably emerged from John Wyclif's early perceptions of a corrupt, materialistic Church that dominated religious life. In 1353, he published "The Last Age of the Chirche," a political tract that forewarned the end of the world brought about not by sinful individuals but by the hierarchies of greed and ambition he saw in the Church.¹⁹ Wyclif began to develop his reformist, anti-establishmentarian, anti-clerical doctrine at the University of Oxford, where he was educated and employed as master of Balliol College.²⁰ Oxford, in the second half of the 14th century, was a powerhouse of theology and the liberal arts; given the associated volume of theological resources and literate scholars at Oxford, it seems likely that it was an early core of Oxonian Wycliffite allies and sympathizers, whether inspired by Wyclif or working with him, who undertook two translations of the Bible into the vernacular.²¹ The production of vernacular Bible translations followed Wyclif's theological and academic interest in lay access to Scripture, an important element of religious life when laboring under the impression of an irredeemably corrupt and ambitious church.²²

Despite Wyclif's substantial misgivings of liberal arts education and formal theological instruction, his time at Oxford and the subsequent development of Lollard thought there was indispensable in the invention of a Lollard homiletic rhetoric.²³ Years of theological and logical study as a secular theologian inevitably put Wyclif and his intellectual allies in close quarters with traditional Church authorities like Gregory, Jerome, Augustine, and Bede, evident in the frequent references to them in Lollard texts.²⁴ The existence of a distinct Oxonian homiletic, too, probably influenced, in some part, the pursuit of plain speech and Scriptural reference in Lollard preaching. Robert of Basevorn, in the *Forma praedicandi*, a tract on the normative Medieval Western European approach to preaching, makes a point of mentioning the elaborate ornamentation and influence of classical and

¹⁷ "Tractatus," *Tracts*, 5.

¹⁸ Fiona Somerset, "Introduction," *Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings after Wyclif*, (Cornell University Press, 2014), *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3138591>, 11.

¹⁹ John Wyclif, *The Last Age of the Chirche*, ed. James Henthorn Todd (Dublin University Press, 1840).

²⁰ Anne Hudson, "Wyclif, John," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published online September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30122>.

²¹ W.J. Courtenay, "Theology and Theologians from Ockham to Wyclif," in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume II*, (Oxford University Press, 1992), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199510122.003.0005>, 1-3. See also: Hudson, "Lollard Biblical Scholarship," *Premature Reformation*, 247, and Fiona Somerset, "Textual Transmission, Variance, and Religious Identity Among Lollard Pastoralia," in *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378-1536*, ed. Soukup Pavel, (Brepols Publishers, 2013), 75.

²² Wyclif, *The Last Age*.

²³ Ghosh, "Logic," 190.

²⁴ Hudson, "Biblical Scholarship," 250 and 257. See also: William Taylor's 1406 sermon.

poetic allegories characteristic of the Oxford style, which were two elements of preaching the Lollards rejected alongside the popular complex of allegorical interpretation in favor of focused Scriptural analysis and straightforward appeal, neither of which were favored in the Oxford style.²⁵ In the same sermon manual, too, Robert of Basevorn also diagrams methods of division and amplification and points out that strategy as a popular tool in Oxonian preaching, which I will analyze later in this paper as a key tool of Scriptural interpretation in Lollard rhetoric.²⁶ It seems to me that the influence of the academy on Lollard homiletics was not wholly negative—indeed even the effort to reach popular audiences through plain speech, identified in *Tractatus de Regibus*, could, in part, be an echo of Gregory the Great's exhortation in *Pastoral Rule* to adapt preaching for the capacity of the audience, given, as noted above, substantial reference to Gregory in Lollard texts.²⁷ Given the Lollard desire for lay audiences, appeals to lay experience and lay issues without the trappings of academic discourse would seem to prove most effective; though employed for heterodox and heretical ends, its approach was not itself revolutionary.

The administrative institution of Oxford was the site of cyclical defense and rejection of Wycliffite thought. As a haven for reformist, anti-establishment discourse far from the seat of the diocese of Lincoln, Oxford afforded Wyclif the intellectual and physical space necessary to produce texts like "The Last Age of the Chirche," and to boldly defend his heterodoxies against Pope Gregory XI after the Pope attempted to convince Oxford to oust him in the early 1380s.²⁸ In the early 15th century, the fires of Lollardy were still bright enough to alarm powerful officers of the Church. As an organization with stakes in political and ecclesiastical support, Oxford ultimately bent to the zealous archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* produced a list of errors and heresies found in Wyclif's texts, and witnessed a mass burning of his books in the city.²⁹ Even then, fellows and tutors objected to the destruction of Wycliffite texts.³⁰ These tensions, emerging from a movement immersed in academic discourse and study but suspicious of the formal institution of the liberal arts and frustrated by the clerical departure from Scriptural dependence, are evident in the rhetoric of Lollard homiletics in both appeals to popular audiences and the retention of analytical division and the framing of arguments. The line between popular and academic interests we might see in Lollard rhetoric is not a clean one – each element I will examine appears, to varying degrees, representative of both the heritage of academic convention and the pursuit of lay access to Scripture and communal discourse.

²⁵ Basevorn, "Forma," 351.

²⁶ Basevorn, "Forma," 353.

²⁷ Gregory the Great, "Pastoral Rule, Book III, Chapter 1," trans. James Barnaby, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff, (Christian Literature Publishing, 1895).

²⁸ Wyclif, *Last Age*. And "The Condemnation of Wyclif 1382 and Wyclif's Reply, 1384," ed. Oliver J. Thatcher, in *The Library of Original Sources, Vol. V: The Early Medieval World*, (University Research Extension, 1907), 378- 382.

²⁹ Hudson, "Early Wycliffite Movement," 83-85.

³⁰ Hudson, "Early Wycliffite Movement," 85-86.

Although it is difficult to point to a specific year as the inauguration of significant popular participation in Lollard thought, it seems likely that, upon the completion of the vernacular translation of the Bible and the formation of sermon cycles like the English Wycliffite Sermons, a distribution of copies of those texts would have commenced—after all, they were created to offer a popular righteous alternative to the greed and preoccupation the Lollards saw consuming the orthodox Church.³¹ The General Prologue of the Later Version Wycliffite Bible tells us point blank that, "holy writ is the scripture of peoples, for it is made that all peoples should know it."³² As a tradition entrenched in the interests of dissident academics, one looking for adherents beyond the walls of Oxford colleges, there was a necessary rhetorical transition away from formal *disputatio* and theoretical discourse towards a style of preaching that appealed to and included the lives of working Christian people. I believe this was defined, in Lollard sermons, by the application of exhortation where the straightforward plain speech of personal appeal and inclusive phrasing were emphasized. By refusing the ornamentation of the Oxonian style, which Robert of Basevorn suggests, which prioritized syllogistic arguments and moral fables over the Bible, the Lollards opened up rhetorical space to refer both to Scripture and to the actual experiences of popular audiences to construct rhetorical arguments.³³

Margaret Aston, Anne Hudson, and Fiona Somerset have collectively built a strong case for the distribution of sermon cycles and companion glosses and commentaries to Lollard communities for collective study, a departure from the conventional image of poor, wandering heretical preachers.³⁴ Aston's chapter on Lollardy and Literacy is a particularly astute analysis of the collaborative framework of the circulation of Lollard texts and thought around lay communities. She points out that, given the relatively low rates of English literacy in lay populations and the limited copies of Lollard texts, it is prevailingly likely that many adherents engaged with the texts in small groups, or even house churches, with sympathetic community members.³⁵ Some sermons, like William Taylor's 1406 sermon at St. Paul's Cross, was at least initially delivered by its composer in a public space, but others, like the English Wycliffite Sermons, may have been written, organized, copied, and distributed for recitation and study by extended Lollard communities not directly associated with Oxford.³⁶ It seems important to point out, here, that the use of vernacular homiletics was not exclusive to Lollard preachers. John Mirk, an orthodox writer, produced a sermon cycle he called the *Festial* with the intention of helping

³¹ Anne Hudson, "A Lollard Compilation and the Dissemination of Wycliffite Thought," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 23, no. 1 (1972): 66-68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23960011>. See also: Somerset, *Pastoralia*, 75 and Margaret Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1984), 199-203.

³² Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 197.

³³ Basevorn, "Forma," 350.

³⁴ Hudson, "A Lollard Compilation," 65–81. Margaret Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 195 and 199. Somerset, "Introduction," 20.

³⁵ Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 195 and 199-203.

³⁶ Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 195 and 199-203. And Somerset, "The Lollard Pastoral Program," 67-68.

unlettered priests deliver sound orthodox sermons to their congregations.³⁷ But as I established above, the important distinction between Mirk's *Festial* and Lollard homiletics the distinction which reentrenches the comingling of academic and popular interests in Lollard rhetoric, is the use of Church authorities: Mirk leans heavily on the *Legenda aurea* where the Lollards employ Scripture and lay religious experience.³⁸ Without the academic interests of the earliest Wycliffite translators and writers, the rhetoric of Lollard homiletics may have looked nearly identical to Mirk's *Festial*. But the foundations of resistance to the homiletic rhetoric so popular at Oxford, and especially Wyclif's frustration with the endless "equivocations" of the liberal arts, pushed Lollardy away from Mirk's orthodox doctrine and towards a fundamental prioritization of Scripture to interpret the Gospel alongside the exhortations that tried to appeal to popular audiences.³⁹

To better pick out the threads of popular and academic interests in the formation of a Lollard homiletic rhetoric that appealed to popular audiences, I offer a close reading of four elements of Lollard rhetoric: argumentative summary, analysis by division and amplification, personal appeal, and inclusive phrasing. *Dominica quinta post festum Trinitatis* and *Dominica prima Aduentis Domini* from the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle and William Taylor's 1406 sermon at St. Paul's Cross are my case studies.

In the standard formula of Lollard sermons, the transition from Gospel reading to exhortation is marked by a sentence summary of the lection assigned for the day. The sermons of the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle, following the lectionary readings of a liturgical calendar, begin with some iteration of the phrase "þis gospel telliþ," and a subsequent demonstration of the moral lesson found in the reading: in a posture of militant simplicity, it offers the pressing point of the freestanding Gospel reading.⁴⁰ Both *Dominica quinta* and *Dominica prima* demonstrate this well. In *Dominica quinta*, when the preacher begins, "The story of þis gospel telliþ good lore how prelatys schulden teche folk vnder hem," they echo existing Lollard anti-establishmentarianism in the implication that the priests, clerks, and mendicants of the Church have not preached as they should.⁴¹ Seated in the historiographic arguments made by Aston, Hudson, and Somerset for the gatherings of Lollard adherents to hear the recitation of vernacular Scripture and attendant sermons, the role of a summary here, in Lollard sermons, appears different from the role of a summary in, for example, Mirk's *Festial*, and similarly distinct from the establishment of a theme in Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi* or Thomas of Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi*. In the sermon manuals, thematic statements are accompanied

³⁷ Fletcher, "John Mirk," 217.

³⁸ Powell, "Mirk, John."

³⁹ J.I. Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356-1430," in *History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2, ed. J.I. Catto, (Oxford University Press, 1992), 190.

⁴⁰ See, for example: *Dominica iiii Sermo* 35 (368), *Dominica secunda Sermo* 2 (227), *Dominica v post Pascham Sermo* 27 (588), *Dominica ij post Trinitatem Sermo* 32 (614) from the *English Wycliffite Sermons* vol. 1 ed. Anne Hudson.

⁴¹ "D*ominica quinta*," 240.

by a period of *captare benevolentiam*, or capturing goodwill, in pursuit of an agreeable, trusting audience.⁴² The argumentative summary of Lollard homiletic rhetoric rests on the assumption, to a certain extent, that its audience has at least a preliminary understanding of the Gospel itself, it having been read before the sermon from a lectionary or a Gospel gloss. Likewise, it does not seem concerned with endearing the audience to the preacher. The summary, so released from a literal synopsis of the reading, concerns itself with the consequences of the text for the lay audience to whom it speaks, serving, at its most straightforward, as a thesis of the sermon. The summary makes the sermons, as a whole, plain: they are concerned with the use of Scripture as a guide, reflecting literally a pursuit of justice and righteousness for the invisible church of believers. Following the argument for a continued presence of academic and popular interests in the spread of Lollard homiletic rhetoric, we see, in the argumentative summary, the structural impulse of the *ars praedicandi* in the formation of an initial proposal and the advice of Gregory the Great to tailor sermons to the qualities of the audience.⁴³ Likewise, we see the effects of community access to vernacular Scripture through the changing role of the summary as a thesis, rather than synopsis, to address the specific needs of a lay population who can themselves pursue the study of Scripture.⁴⁴ *Dominica prima* is an even more explicit representation of this. Instead of referencing hierarchies of access and responsibility, *Dominica prima* makes a universal appeal: "This epistle of Poul telluþ ow þat men schulden byge þer tyme."⁴⁵ The preacher draws the listener into a private reflection – instead of measuring the righteousness of authority, as in *Dominica quinta*, the listener must measure her own righteousness. Again, bearing the likely context of Lollard sermon readings in mind, Lollard audience probably had heard the preceding Gospel reading and had existing sympathies for the Lollard emphasis on personal study, given the often private, and sometimes covert, nature of these religious meetings.⁴⁶ Argumentative summaries, which encouraged communal participation and personal reflection, offer insight into the dissident academic resistance to the tradition of *captare benevolentiam* and the benefit of straightforward Scriptural commentary for popular lay audiences with a basic vernacular comprehension of Scripture.

The second and third elements of Lollard sermon rhetoric together synthesize plain speech and Scriptural justification, and explication and exhortation. Though distinct, they work together: dense Scriptural analysis via division and amplification to justify a call to true faith, like to abandon the false hope of a corrupt Church, and a personal appeal that grounds the call to dissident faith in the stakes of contemporary working lay lives.⁴⁷ In a framework of dual interests, I would place personal appeal

⁴² Basevorn, "Forma," 347-348. And Chobham, "Summa," 628.

⁴³ Gregory, "Pastoral Rule, Book III, Chapter 1." Basevorn, "Forma," 347-348.

⁴⁴ Somerset, "God's Law," 91.

⁴⁵ "Dominica prima", 475.

⁴⁶ Aston, "Lollards and Literacy," 199.

⁴⁷ For examples of calls to dissident faith, see: "Dominia quarta," (236), "Dominica quinta," (245) "Dominica iiij," (556) in *English Wycliffite Sermons*.

under the popular wing and division and amplification under the academic wing – as I have mentioned before, though, and by the nature of these emergent siblings of Lollard rhetoric, the line between academic and popular interest in the spread of Lollardy through homiletic rhetoric is quickly blurred by the mission to yield unto lay audiences access to critical Scriptural interpretation. William Taylor's 1406 sermon at St. Paul's Cross is particularly demonstrative of this. Unlike the production and distribution of the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle, with its discreet sets of sermons and a clear liturgical calendar, Taylor's sermon was a freestanding polemic delivered in a public space.⁴⁸ His sermon is occupied by a concern for the quality of preaching in the Church, and in his argument against the clergy, he draws his audience, presumably at least in some part lay and unlettered, into a common resistance of the invisible church of believers against the visible institution of the worldly church.⁴⁹ This is particularly clear when he frames the consequences of clerical neglect as the commonplace sin of a generic believer:

"But as men weren wont aftir feyned turnyng in lente turne azen to her synne, so shal þei heraftir,—and þat for defaute of þe breed of Goddis law mynystrid for hem in ensauple and word."⁵⁰

The rhetorical strategy of self-identification, which allowed lay audiences to recognize themselves, or their neighbors, in the greater context of Scriptural and ecclesiastical life, is a denouement of plain speech and popular interest. It comes after a dense application of Scriptural reference and justification in the academic tradition of division and amplification.

Robert of Basevorn references, in the *Forma praedicandi*, the rhetorical tool of division and amplification as a method of breaking down and justifying individual elements of a whole verse, fable, or poem to make a larger interpretive point.⁵¹ To execute division and amplification well, the audience benefits from knowing what the reading to be divided and amplified is and what the interpretation of that reading is meant to be; essentially, the argumentative summary initiates a process of division and amplification in Lollard rhetoric. By the time William Taylor offers common ground to his audience, he has established a solid Scriptural foundation for both a condemnation of the Church and a personal stake in the union of believers. He begins his sermon with three Scriptural quotations from Matthew, John, and Isaiah (given the length of his sermon, it seems natural to use a greater volume of verses; sermons from the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle, being much briefer, commonly address the single Gospel reading) and, over the course of nearly 300 lines, references Romans, Thessalonians, Zachariah,

⁴⁸ Hudson, "Biblical Scholarship, 234. And *Wycliffite Texts*, "Introduction," xiii.

⁴⁹ Matti Peikola, "Congregation of the Elect: Patterns of Self-Fashioning in English Lollard Writings," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 102, no. 2 (2001): 217, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43344819>.

⁵⁰ Taylor, "Sermon," 10-11.

⁵¹ Murphy, "Art of Preaching," 324 and Basevorn, "Forma," 352-353.

Ezra, the First Epistle of Peter, Genesis, Revelations, and Hebrews to clarify his interpretation of the "þre maner breed of þe whiche spekiþ þe scripture."⁵² The basic elements of amplification are reflected in Taylor's sermon, and in Lollard homiletics at large, by the systemic breakdown and analysis of the lection assigned to reach a particular Scripturally supported conclusion (or, perhaps, to use Scripture to defend a desirable conclusion). This structure appears grounded in academic experience and exposure to the conventions of *ars praedicandi*—considering Taylor's own background as a master of arts at Oxford, and as an evidently accomplished homilist, he seems as likely as any other academic Lollard to have recognized the structure of Oxonian homiletics identified in the *Forma praedicandi*.⁵³ Just as Lollard speech writers may have left behind the rhetorical strategy of *capatare benevolentiae* (traditionally an appeal to the emotional impulses, and superficial interests, of a broadly uneducated audience) to accommodate the shifting needs of lay audiences, I believe the strategies of division and amplification in Lollard homiletics suggest surviving strains of *ars praedicandi* in Lollard sermons widely, but in particular Taylor's 1406 sermon, again modified to attend to the needs of a newly critical unlettered audience. The key is the consistent, thematic blurring of academic and popular interests within both discreet and collaborative rhetorical elements. Lollard homiletics, though remarkably consistent over decades of persecution and marginalization, are not perfectly uniform, and the distinction of individual backgrounds (like Taylor's Oxonian tenure) probably influenced the employment of academic or popular strains of Lollard rhetoric to address the needs of the audience.⁵⁴

Without the implication of lay participation and personal devotion, the Lollard adaptation of division and amplification fails to account for the most fundamental Wycliffite principles: access to and evangelism of Scripture. Lollard homiletics, for all their analysis and reference, consistently built to an exhortation of the true believer to abandon faith in the structures of the visible Church and adopt the rhythms of personal study and lay preaching as a member of the invisible true church of believers. At the midpoint of Taylor's sermon, he shakes off, for a moment, religious authorities and Church history to address the trouble in his audience. In particular, he warns against congregational complicity in Church corruption (he references a "comun experience," seen when "þe vntauȝt puple excuse her synne bi her autors of synne")⁵⁵ to the point of suspicion of anyone with the "breed of þe gospel," who is not, "þis bisshop, þis persoun and þis preest."⁵⁶ This imagined interaction, using two distinct voices (one speaker, the suspicious sinner, and another narrator who provokes and responds to the sinner) without personal detail, coherent and recognizable without being exclusive, invites the audience, a united force of reception and reaction, to identify themselves with the preacher in a moment of common

⁵² Taylor, "Sermon," 3.

⁵³ Though little is known about Robert of Basevorn, he was clearly familiar with the universities of Paris and Oxford. Murphy, "Art of Preaching," 343.

⁵⁴ Gregory, "Pastoral Rule, Book III, Chapter 1."

⁵⁵ Taylor, "Sermon," 11.

⁵⁶ Taylor, "Sermon," 11-12.

experience. Taylor does not appeal to authority or tradition or even reason – the suspicious sinner demands, "Whi repreuest þou me of my synne?"⁵⁷ given that the preacher is not a clergyman – but instead to quotidian, generic interactions that listeners might recognize in their own lives. It is an appeal to those believers who are, specifically, outside of the spaces of conventional access and power. It is an appeal to the popular wing of the Lollard movement; the critique is only as potent as it is identifiable in the lives of artisans and laborers and servants and traveling preachers. Having amply established the Scriptural precedent of an anti-materialist Church through the convention of division and amplification, Taylor is free to speak directly to the popular audiences that Lollard homiletics sought. By seeking social identification alongside religious belief, he implicates lay people in the stakes of evangelism in the age after a salvific Church. It is an exhortation of the lay, unlettered audience to become active representatives of Lollard Christianity in the smallest, most common exchanges they have, because in those exchanges they find the call to know and share the truth of the Gospel as the Church does not.

In the short-form structure of the sermons in the English Wycliffite Sermon cycle, division and amplification and personal appeal are similarly collaborative. Oriented by the structure of division and amplification and apparently conscious of the stakes of interpretation for the lay believer, the preacher in *Dominica prima* cycles through explication and exhortation by word, line, and verse, to affirm and reaffirm the moral lesson of the Gospel reading. Broadly, the preacher explains that Paul's instruction to men to rise from sleep, "meaneþ by þis sleep synne þat foolis lyuon ynne."⁵⁸ In the remaining space of the sermon, the preacher establishes a reading of Paul's words ("Poul bygynneþ to sture þus to take heed to Godus tyme, and to leese not þis tyme, leeuynge to disserue blisse.")⁵⁹ and refers to the words themselves ("Brepren, *we schulen be wytynge þat our is now us to ryse fro sleepe, for now is oure helpe neer þan it was whanne we byleuedon.*")⁶⁰ many times, methodically moving through the assigned Scripture to call the audience to action. The most fundamental structure of Lollard sermons, explication and exhortation, is engineered to establish basic interpretive justification in order to lay the groundwork for subsequent calls to faith: to pray, preach, or repent. The academic groundwork of interpretive justification by amplification and division supports conclusive calls to faith practice by diverging from wholly theoretical or theological discourse to invite lay people into a critical reflection of their own religious lives. Considering access to Scripture and a basic understanding of it seemed to license, so to speak, Lollard adherents to critically study and publicly preach about Scripture, the sermon itself was probably not the singular point of contact for hearing or understanding Scripture, as it may have been

⁵⁷ Taylor, "Sermon," 12.

⁵⁸ "*Dominica prima*," 476.

⁵⁹ "*Dominica prima*," 475.

⁶⁰ "*Dominica prima*," 475-476.

for the congregations who heard recitations from Mirk's *Festial*.⁶¹ The preacher of *Dominica prima*, therefore, having amply established the point of Paul's words, turns to the Wycliffite conclusion of the reading: "and for þis alle cristene men han nede to knowe byleue of þe gospel, and so to knowe þe lif of Crist, and þe wisdam of hise wordis."⁶² A personal appeal to the stakes of belief, stated simply in the "nede to knowe byleue of þe gospel," reaches the heart of the mission of Lollard preaching. The conclusion of personal appeal, the division and amplification of Scripture, and the argumentative summary are all the elements of the rhetoric of explication and exhortation. That rhetoric, in turn, fulfills Wyclif's emphasis on plain speech and Spiritual justification, developed from background in academic training and an interest in popular outreach, to approach the fundamental tenets of Lollard thought: access to and understanding of Scripture, and a universal authority to preach.

The fourth key element of Lollard rhetoric is that of inclusive phrasing, an approach to authorial identification and ecclesiastical hierarchy that, by the use of first-person plural pronouns, removes the social barrier between preacher and popular audience. Like personal appeal, inclusive phrasing emphasizes the lay interests of Lollardy. In the same way that the explication of these sermons rests largely on a foundation of a received academic background over decades of distribution and circulation of Lollard texts, the exhortations strategically draw attention of lay audiences by appeals to lived experience, calls to faith, and the minimization of social distinction between preacher and audience.⁶³ And as the personal appeal invites the audience to identify with a common Christian struggle, inclusive phrasing draws the preacher into community with the audience, away from a position of condescension or formal spiritual authority. Inclusive phrasing suggests that in the Lollard principle of lay preaching and the personal capacity for discernment is a sense that the preacher of a sermon is not elevated to a position of substantive authority over the audience; rather, the preacher is elucidating the feelings, thoughts, interpretations, analyses, and material struggles as a member of the audience themselves, in order to achieve more precise comprehension and reflection. In *Dominica quinta*, the preacher positions themselves as a learner alongside the audience: "Byfor we goo to spiritual vnderstanding of þis gospel, we schal wyte þat..."⁶⁴ and later, "Hit is no nede to depen vs in this story more þan þe gospel tellith..."⁶⁵ The preacher, in these instances, is as much a member of the audience as a teacher of Scripture. Considering the historiographic evidence outlined in Margaret Aston's survey of Lollard literacy of private services and public recitations, and the likelihood that books were a significant tool of Lollard evangelism, it seems possible, indeed, that the preachers reading these sermons outfitted with inclusive phrasing were themselves not exceptionally well-versed in Lollard

⁶¹ Somerset, "Lollard Parabiblia," 205-207.

⁶² "*Dominica prima*," 479.

⁶³ Hudson, "Establishment of the Wycliffite Movement," 73.

⁶⁴ "*Dominica quinta*," 240-241.

⁶⁵ "*Dominica quinta*," 241.

thought, but actual members of Lollard households and communities learning alongside their audience.⁶⁶ Even publicly delivered sermons like William Taylor's have claims to print distribution afterwards, the production of which would have allowed those freestanding polemics to be read and heard in much the same way as the liturgical sermon cycles.⁶⁷ The rhetoric of inclusive phrasing frames the preacher as an equal participant in Christian life, not a lofty instructor and dispenser of hidden knowledge.⁶⁸ Lollard sermons spoke to make righteous living accessible and imitable.

The rhetoric of Lollard sermons offers unique interpretive insight to the ongoing syntheses of popular and academic wings throughout the development and spread of Lollardy. The employment of plain speech and Scriptural reference are two foundational elements of Lollard rhetoric, which can be subsequently broken down into argumentative summaries, division and amplification, personal appeal, and inclusive phrasing. The structure of explication and exhortation formalizes these elements as systemic parts of a whole Lollard sermon. According to the needs of the audience and the background of the preacher, these elements might be modified or emphasized to highlight particular academic or lay interests, but I have found in each of these four parts influential aspects of the academic and lay wings – one does not stand alone. This lens of interpretation opens up an opportunity to reexamine much of the Lollard homiletic corpus in pursuit of a better understanding of the ongoing contact academic and popular lay interests had during the development and expansion of Lollardy. For future research, a particular emphasis on the sociological and political circumstances of popular expansion might offer a more holistic view of a potential movement away from the academic towards the dominantly popular during the 15th century.

⁶⁶ Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 193-195.

⁶⁷ Hudson, "Postscript," 100.

⁶⁸ Somerset, "God's Law," 91. See also: Somerset, "Pastoralia," 83.

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