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## **Lay Preaching and the Lollards of Norwich Diocese, 1428-1431<sup>1</sup>**

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The following case-study of Lollards in Norwich diocese is in two parts. The basis for the study is a collection of records of heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich from 1428 to 1431.<sup>2</sup> This collection offers us a picture of the community life of these Lollards and possible evidence of such lay Christians preaching. This is problematic because scholars today are influenced by modern, and largely Protestant, ideas about preaching which themselves have their roots in the late medieval Western Church. Modern scholars may restrict their understanding of what constitutes preaching to formal sermons by designated persons in a church, churchyard or other public sites, such as market-places; the laity would be excluded from this activity because for much of the medieval period they were explicitly not permitted to preach. Moreover, those who recorded the acts of any lay persons who might think they were preaching were themselves usually representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities and reinforced this narrow, orthodox definition of who in fact could preach. I shall seek to demonstrate that preaching cannot be restricted to such formal situations. Rather, preaching should, I argue, be considered as one of a range of acts that form part of the transmission of the faith and the living of the gospel. This allows us to identify what might constitute preaching in the eyes of unorthodox or heterodox people, and having done this I shall turn to look for specific evidence from Norfolk in the early fifteenth century. What we find is a tightly-knit community of Lollard believers offering an excellent picture of how they practised and disseminated their faith. It is an intriguing glimpse into the daily life of the period and the varying forms of social relationships and means of communication in that society.

*Problems researchers face in the medieval Latin terminology for preaching*

One of the findings at the Louvain-la-Neuve Medieval Sermon Studies Symposium (in July 1992)<sup>3</sup> concerned the semantics of the term *sermo*, particularly because the modern English translation ('sermon') lacks the wider semantic range that is present in Latin. It was agreed that scholars should refrain from translating it into English as 'sermon', but translate it instead as 'discourse' or 'a talk', in the sense of 'to give a talk'. Certainly in classical Latin usage *sermo* referred to informal discourse, whereas *oratio*, for instance, represented a more formal speech. This distinction between the formal and informal certainly still applied in medieval Latin where *sermo* is a generalized word for discourse; but there are more specific terms for *sermo* that relate, for instance, to formal, specific contexts, such as *collatio*, or a specific type of sermon, an (*h*)*omilia*, say. So, modern English 'sermon' which conveys contexts of a cleric at a pulpit in a formal setting can only represent one part of a wider semantic range present in the Latin.

Likewise the term *predicatio* is ambiguous: it derives from a first conjugation verb *pr(a)edicare*. Definitions for the verb offered in Lewis and Short are: 1) to cry in public (like a town crier); 2) to announce; 3) to praise or commend (something); and 4) to preach (the gospel).<sup>4</sup> In du Cange we have: 1) *verbum facere ad populum*; and 2) *concionari in ecclesia*.<sup>5</sup> In Niermeyer we have: 1) to announce, predict; 2) to bear out (a truth), expound (a doctrine), preach; 3) to preach the Gospel; and 4) to preach before (a person), to lecture, to sermonize.<sup>6</sup>

But *pr(a)edicare* also has connections with *pr(a)edicere*, a third conjugation verb. This verb does not appear in the medieval Latin dictionaries of Du Cange or Niermeyer since it retained its classical senses, but in Lewis and Short the definitions offered are: 1) to mention beforehand; 2) to foretell or predict; 3) to give warning (of something); 4) to advise or warn or command; and 5) to proclaim (such as at an auction).<sup>7</sup> There are quite a number of such parallel verbs in Latin, one in the third conjugation, another in the first. By examining several of these we can detect a common relation between such parallel verbs. For instance:

<i>capere</i> (3 <sup>rd</sup> conj.)	to seize or grasp (= a finite action)
<i>captare</i> (1 <sup>st</sup> conj.)	to hold on to (= often a zealous or ongoing action)
<i>pellere</i>	to drive, or beat something forward
<i>pulsare</i>	to go on driving, or to beat

<i>educere</i>	to lead out (e.g. to lead a horse out of a stable)
<i>educare</i>	to educate (e.g. to train a horse in a skill)
<i>dicere</i>	to say, state, make an assertion
<i>dictare</i>	to say often, assert repeatedly.

It is clear therefore that in these parallel verb forms the verb in the third conjugation denotes a single action whereas the first conjugation verb denotes an iterative, progressive or frequentative action. It is undoubtedly the case that in such parallel verbs the third conjugation verb is the earlier of the two.<sup>8</sup> Therefore in the context of *predicere* and *predicare* we can see the underlying connection as *predicere*: to foretell, and *predicare*: repeatedly to foretell, and consequently to preach.

We may summarize the possible semantic range of *predicare*:

- certainly, it did have a specific reference to preaching, that is by clerics in a public address, in pulpits, at crosses and so forth;
- it could mean 'to announce';
- it could mean 'to foretell or predict', the link coming (a) through the grammatical link with *predicere*, and (b) through one of the two senses of the prefix *pr(a)e-*, namely to say *before* in a temporal sense;
- developing the other sense of the prefix *pr(a)e-*, meaning *before* in a spatial sense, as in 'in front of', 'to do something in front of', we are led to Niermeyer's second sense of *predicare*: 'to bear out a truth', or 'to expound a doctrine'. From this sense we see a close link developing between the verbs *predicare* and *docere* ('to instruct') which leads us into questions of content, particularly the preaching and teaching of matters of doctrine and interpreting the Sacred Page.

In short, we have 'to preach', 'to announce', 'to foretell or predict' and 'to bear out / carry forth a truth' or 'to expound a doctrine'. Equally, there are terms, even synonyms, that are closely related to the acts being described here: for instance, related to *sermo*: *collatio*, *disputatio* and (*h*)*omilia*; and to *predicare*: *concionari*, *hortari* / *exhortari* / *adhortari* and *admonitio*, *docere* and *doctrina*.

The key point is that when we as modern scholars consider sermons and preaching we seek references to *sermo*, *predicare* and their variants and assume that we are indeed focusing on sermons and preaching. However, the wider semantic possibilities described above indicate that we should be focusing on a broader range of activities than is suggested by our narrow understanding of these terms in modern English. This requires a change in conceptual frame. Scholars have to consider carefully whether a specific preaching act is being considered or whether the Latin

terms are being used in a broader sense, such as 'someone giving a discourse' for *sermo*, or 'someone foretelling something' or 'taking forth a truth' for *predicare*. A thorough study of the Latin sources may indicate a multiplicity of non-clerical individuals carrying out such activities. The onus is on us to narrow down these activities further and ascertain what precise acts are being represented.

### *Practical usage of these terms*

First, it is important to recognize that so-called collections of *sermones* often do not represent delivered sermons. Research into Middle English sermons is still heavily influenced by the studies of G. R. Owst in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> He made a number of general observations on sermons that I believe are now damaging: first, that sermons were a form of mass medium (so far so good), and that by studying them we could gain insights into everyday life and morals from a parish-level standpoint; second, that the sermon collections usually represented some version of sermons that were actually delivered (constituting either preliminary notes by preachers, or 'lecture-notes' based on keywords or *divisions*, notes taken by the congregations, or subsequent writings-up by preachers).

There is, I believe, a growing consensus among medieval sermonists that sermon collections can have very different purposes and purposes that are not directly related to sermons actually delivered. For instance, a sermons collection that I worked on by one of Wyclif's followers (Philip Repyndon) is almost certainly more akin to a biblical commentary than to a collection of model sermons, if by 'model sermon collection' we are thinking of the *Dorme secure*-type whereby lazy clerics can sleep secure in the knowledge that they have a ready-made sermon prepared for them which they need only read out. Rather, what Repyndon is doing in his sermon-collection is bringing together a wide range of authorities in a compilation based on a verse-by-verse commentary on the Sunday gospel pericopes of the liturgical year. It is an attempt at making available this scholarship in a practical form. That is why he chooses not to write this compilation-commentary on a particular NT book, or on a gospel-harmony, but on the selection of passages that required exegesis each Sunday. Presumably he hoped that preachers sharing his rigorist tastes could read through this compilation of commentaries (both in the literal and spiritual senses), gain a better understanding of the pericope and, either use it solely for spiritual reading, or plunder it in composing their own sermons.<sup>10</sup>

Second, let me summarize what seems to have been happening to preaching

before and after the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils. By the eleventh century the inheritance of Gregory the Great's church model of three orders, one of which was the *predicatores* or *doctores*, was still alive. This *ordo predicatorum* with pastoral responsibility (that is the secular clergy, but principally the bishops) was characterized by 'teaching by word and example' (*docendi verbo et exemplo*); in other words preaching and instruction were almost interchangeable but certainly not restricted to oral speech. But, following Bon Sweetman's thesis,

During the eleventh and twelfth century, the age-old apostolic model of perfection took on new meaning. Focus shifted from the communal life described in the Acts of the Apostles to the mendicant life of preaching described in the Gospels. In other words, apostolic perfection came increasingly to be associated with an apostolate in the world and centred around preaching.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of the canons regular and wandering hermits, and the demand for preaching within the rapidly urbanizing centres of Europe led orthodox and heterodox alike to consider preaching to be the new model of perfection for all Christians.

Pastoral care, then, or at least preaching, was to be carried out by all Christians of whatever ecclesiastical order. If one made distinctions at all among Christians on this score, authority to preach lay in the degree to which a minister's life conformed to the model of apostolic life. In this light, the Church's traditional *praedicatores* looked inadequate, whereas heterodox preachers such as the Cathari *perfecti* seemed apostles reincarnate.<sup>12</sup>

Rolf Zeffass's *Der Streit um die Laienpredigt* continues the story.<sup>13</sup> From Innocent III's time and following the Fourth Lateran Council there appears to be an attempt by the Church authorities to lock the stable door after the horse has bolted. A host of diocesan synods clamp down on preaching by the laity and the decrees attempt to define, regulate and control preaching acts. It is a result of this process that 'sermon' and 'preaching' have gained the narrow sense that they retain in English today. Yet these synodal decrees of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries make clear by their bans that preaching by the laity was quite a common occurrence. The decrees:

- restrict preaching to the clergy (the *ordo doctorum* or *predicatorum*), and not to the likes of the Beguines;

- stipulate that preaching must be in public, and cannot take place in *conventicula* or 'schools', nor indeed in caves;
- state that preaching should be in regulated places, preferably church land, that is, not in streets or squares;
- link preaching to learning (*doctor* is equated to *predicator*) and there are statements that the laity should be restricted to reading vernacular works;
- stipulate that preachers must be authorized or licensed.

It is precisely this development which is opposed by Wyclif and the Lollards. A group of Lollards based at Leicester stated in 1388 that '*quilibet laicus potest sancta evangelia ubicumque predicare et docere* (any lay person is able to preach and teach the holy gospels anywhere)'. For the authority to preach is a duty imposed on all Christians, not one restricted to and regulated by the clergy.<sup>14</sup>

In considering preaching by the laity we are proposing an active and positive role for the laity by using a new conceptual frame and methodology, one not concerned simply with identifying those deviant lay men and, particularly, women, who dared to preach (in the narrow sense) without the Church's authorization. Instead we are proposing a spectrum of preaching acts, many of which the laity could quite legitimately practise. Examples of such practitioners would include: people who bear witness to the gospel through the example of their lifestyle (e.g. hermits, heterodox groups, *mulieres sanctae*); people who exhort others or give warning to them, concerning morals and the like (such as Margery Kempe); people who teach the faith, perhaps in 'conventicles' or 'schools' (the Lollard schools); people who speak about the faith in public places, such as streets and squares (the Beguines); people who act as spiritual advisors to others (Peter the Comemaker); people who deliver formal sermons, in what I have called the narrow sense (juridical preachers, such as Robert d'Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, 1309-43, certain kings of Aragón, or Italian lawyers); and people who are visionaries or prophets and foretell events (Birgitta of Sweden and many more).

The content of such preaching cannot therefore be restricted to formal sermons as we understand them. The transmission of the faith and the living of the gospel are core components of these broadly-defined preaching acts. In the context of this broader definition I will now examine the response of literate readers of the Bible and other religious writings and the memorizing of passages from such texts by the semi-literate or the illiterate, through the particular case of the Lollard communities in the diocese of Norwich in the early fifteenth century.

### *The Lollards of Norwich diocese*

There exists a series of trial records from Norwich diocese for the years immediately following the sentencing of William White, the first active Lollard in the diocese to have been sentenced and killed for his beliefs. These trial records give probably the most detailed description of the beliefs and practices of any Lollard community from the early fifteenth century. The documents used in this study have been edited. They are the record of the trial of William White in the anti-Lollard Carmelite compilation, the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*,<sup>15</sup> and the records of the heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich from 1428 to 1431 edited by Norman Tanner from Westminster, Diocesan Archives, MS B.2.<sup>16</sup> I shall concentrate on the earliest twelve trials, which are the most informative for our purposes and which date from September 1428 to April 1429.

White was one of the leading disseminators of Lollard beliefs and practices in the early decades of the fifteenth century. He had previously been active in Kent but had been forced to abjure before the archbishop of Canterbury early in 1428, after which he escaped to East Anglia. He was again tried, this time in Norwich in September 1428, following which he was burnt as a relapsed heretic. White had been charged with thirty heretical or erroneous beliefs, one of which centred on preaching. Item 24 of this charge-sheet read as follows:

We state, object and itemize to you that after your aforementioned abjuration and contrary to it, you have held, affirmed, written and taught that, 'Each faithful person, even if not sent or licensed by diocesans or ordinaries, notwithstanding the Church's constitution established to the contrary, may freely preach the word of God, since (in your own words) blessed Wyclif proves in his [writings] that that same person is cursed for ceasing, on account of the excommunication of Antichrist, to make public the gospel of Christ to the people which hungers and thirst for God's law'. The said William White professed and pleaded guilty in law there and then at court that he had held, affirmed, written and taught this article after his aforementioned abjuration.<sup>17</sup>

We have, therefore, a leading Lollard in 1428 dying for the belief (amongst others) that every faithful Christian (a code-term for a fellow Lollard) should make public and



preach freely the gospel of Christ and such believers are condemned if they do otherwise, particularly in the face of ecclesiastical opposition.

Surprisingly, in the records of these heresy trials there is almost no mention of preaching; instead, there is a great concentration on 'schools' or 'conventicles' of heresy as the principal means of transmission of heresy. Indeed, in the first batch of cases from September 1428 to April 1429 we gain a detailed insight into these means of transmission of faith, and they include teaching, proselytizing, study and the reading and exposition of texts. Notwithstanding, preaching may have been a feature of these lay-centred faith-communities. One argument for this is that William White's beliefs, and the Norfolk Lollards' generally, of a priesthood of all believers, implies that they condoned any lay person performing all proper priestly functions, including preaching. Furthermore, the clerics cited as preaching Lollard beliefs may have considered themselves to be laymen. A second argument is that the procedures and impetus for these trials and the form in which their records are preserved may, intentionally or otherwise, have excluded or neglected references to preaching where preaching did in fact occur. The third argument is that the Lollard communities may have believed themselves to be preaching, but the church authorities failed or refused to recognize such acts as preaching.

### *Preaching and transmission of the faith from the trial records*

Among sixty trial records there may only be four direct references to preaching. In the first trial, that of John Wardon from Loddon (in Norfolk) we have the statement that 'Wardon had regular access in the vill of Bergh Apton and elsewhere to schools and sermons and teachings of these heretics [namely William White, Hugh Pye and Thomas Burell]'.<sup>18</sup> In the trial in 1430 of a chaplain, Robert Bert, from Bury St Edmunds (Suffolk), it was asserted that 'within Norwich diocese Robert held, affirmed and preached to the people that in no way should tithes be provided to any churchman who is in mortal sin; also that no honour is to be shown to images of the crucifix, Mary or any saint; also that pilgrimages must not be made'. Bert, in fact, denied holding or preaching these beliefs.<sup>19</sup> In another trial from 1430 John Skylan from Bergh Apton abjured the following belief, 'that the cursed Cayfaces, bisshopes, and here proude prestes every yer make newe lawes and newe ordinances to kille and brenne alle trewe Cristis puple which wolde teche or preche the trewe lawe of Crist, whiche [law] they hede and kepe cloos from knowyng of Goddis puple'.<sup>20</sup> The fourth reference, from the trial of Margery Baxter, which we shall examine later, describes how the

church authorities prevented William White preaching, and literally 'speaking out' (*predicare*) the word of God to those gathered at his burning.

In contrast to the lack of detail about preaching, schools of heresy or conventicles of heretics are mentioned throughout the trial records and their avoidance by penitent suspects is almost invariably stipulated and required in their abjurations of heresy.

Narrative passages from the early Norwich trials provide excellent detail and allow us to distinguish several ways in which the Lollards transmitted their faith. The accusation of sheltering heretics and attending gatherings or schools is common. Typical is this accusation against John Godesell, a parchment-maker from Ditchingham, that he 'frequently received into his house notorious, well-known heretics, and sustained, supported, concealed and maintained them and that this same John Godesell knowingly allowed these same heretics to hold schools and to read books in his homes and that he was himself their disciple'.<sup>21</sup> Godesell confessed all this and to harbouring people in his homes on repeated occasions and he listed six heretics (two of whom were priests) 'and others' in his circle. In the neighbouring village of Tunstall a carpenter, John Baker or Ussher, was tried for Lollardy. He admitted, amongst his beliefs that 'he had had one book from John Bung from Beighton, in the said diocese, which book contained in it the Pater Noster and Ave Maria and Credo written in the English tongue'.<sup>22</sup> Baker went on to say that, in addition to the teaching and book-supply from John Bung, a wright called John Pyry from a different east Norfolk village (Martham) had taught him other errors and heresies 'through information and doctrine'.<sup>23</sup> The same phrase (*ex informacione et doctrine*) was used of Bung, which suggests that Pyry also supplied reading materials and formal instruction.

In addition to the lists of charges and the abjurations, which are normally restricted to the suspect's beliefs and only tangentially describe the means of transmission, there also exist some records of depositions. These typically are more vivid and provide greater narrative detail. Two of these from the early Norwich trials add to the picture of the communal life of this Lollard community.

John Burell was a servant of the Mone family from Loddon. During his examination for heresy he said that his brother Thomas three years earlier (that is, in about 1425/6) had taught him the Pater Noster, Ave Maria and Credo and 'the precepts of God in English', that is the Ten Commandments, with appropriate Lollard interpretations of, say, the first commandment on false images.<sup>24</sup> He learnt other heretical beliefs from his master, Thomas Mone, who 'often said [them] in the presence of this witness'<sup>25</sup> and once in the presence of John Josse of Loddon and other

neighbours of his'.<sup>26</sup> Such talk was evidently common in Loddon but the records here only use the verb *dicere* and not *predicere* to describe this activity. Furthermore, John Burell was taught (*docere*) by his brother, Thomas, and by Richard Belward (a member of an active Lollard family of several generations from nearby Earsham), by William Wright, Thomas Mone and an unnamed follower, possibly Mone's former servant.

So, the study and reading of written materials, word of mouth and formal instruction were all central to the transmission of this group's faith. But we also have a beautiful cameo of this group communing together on Easter Sunday 1428, overtly flouting the regulations for abstinence on Sundays and holy days, if not church attendance too.<sup>27</sup> John Burell stated before the diocesan notary that:

On the morning of Easter Day 1428 he saw in 'Le Botery' behind the old stall (*scannum* or high bench) of the hall of Thomas Mone of Loddon's homestead (*mansio*) a quarter of a cold, cooked, stuffed piglet. And Burell<sup>28</sup> suspected that this piglet was killed, prepared and cooked on the advice of the wife of Thomas Mone, and also that the remainder of this piglet was eaten on the aforementioned Easter vigil by Thomas Burell, brother of John Burell, and the wife of Thomas Mone, by John Pert, servant of the said Thomas Mone, and by another man dressed in a russet cloak<sup>29</sup> whose name Burell said he did not know. And on the said Easter Day the wife of Thomas Mone sent the remainder of the piglet with her daughter to the home of Thomas Burell.

Questioned on how he knew that this piglet had been eaten in this fashion on the Easter vigil by the said Thomas Burell, the wife of Thomas Mone, John Pert and the other man who was unknown to him, Burell said that he presumed it because all these people had withdrawn secretly, while Thomas Mone was at Horning market, into a particular room, called 'Le chesehous chambr', before noon on the vigil of the said Easter feast and unbeknown to Burell, and eventually on that same Sunday Burell saw all these people come out of the said room.<sup>30</sup>

A similarly evocative narrative exists, concerning Margery Baxter from Martham (Norfolk). In it we can see the support and accommodation she provided William White, the book-carrying and hiding of books that she performed for him, and her connections with the Mones at Loddon and the Belwards from Earsham. We hear from

this deposition against her of how her husband read to her at night and taught her from a book the 'law of Christ' (code for Lollard doctrine) and also of how Margery proselytized in the city of Norwich.

Margery was charged, amongst other things, with knowing that William White was a condemned heretic who was being sought and that 'she received [him] in her home to have it as a safe-house (*pro refugio*) and she guarded, concealed and stowed him away for five consecutive days; and she gave and proffered him as much advice, help and favour as she could; and secretly she carried books of William White from Yarmouth to Martham and stowed them away there'.<sup>31</sup> In the deposition against Margery by Joanna Clifland from Norwich itself we have a series of reports of what Margery said to Joanna, including Margery's eye-witness account of William White's execution at which 'Margery saw that at the place where he was burnt when the said William White wanted to preach the word of God to the people one devil then, a disciple of bishop Caiaphas, struck the same William White on the lips and blocked the mouth of the said holy doctor with his hand so that he could not possibly propound the will of God'.<sup>32</sup>

In relation to talking about the faith, and speaking about it in public Joanna Clifland recounted three episodes of Margery Baxter proselytizing in Norwich. First, 'the said Margery asked this witness (*iurata*) that she and the aforesaid Joanna, her servant, should come in secret at night to the room of the said Margery. There she would hear her husband read to them the law of Christ, which law was written in a book. The said husband used to read to Margery at night and she said that her husband is the best teacher (*doctor*) of Christianity'.<sup>33</sup> The second episode was when 'the said Margery said that she communicated with Joanna West, a woman dwelling in the churchyard of St Mary in the Marsh, concerning the law of Christ, and this Joanna is on a good path to salvation'.<sup>34</sup> The third episode demonstrated the dangers of such public proselytizing. Allegedly, Margery told Joanna Clifland,

'Joanna, it looks from your face that you intend and propose to reveal to the bishop the advice I have given you'. And this witness swore that she never wanted to reveal her advice in that respect unless Margery gave her reason to do so. Then the said Margery said to this witness, 'And if you accuse me before the said bishop, I'll do to you what I did to some Carmelite friar from Yarmouth who was the most learned friar in the whole land'.<sup>35</sup> To which this witness replied and asked her what she had done to this friar. Margery replied that she communicated with

the said friar, criticizing him for begging in this way and that it was not good to offer alms or give to him unless he wanted to cast off his habit and go back to the land (*aratrum*);<sup>36</sup> for this would better please God than following the life of any other friars. Then this friar asked Margery if she knew anything else to tell or teach him. And Margery, this witness asserted, laid out (*exposuit*) for the friar the gospels in the English tongue. Then this friar withdrew from Margery, asserted this witness. Subsequently, the friar accused Margery of heresy. And, on hearing that the friar had accused her in this way, the aforesaid Margery accused the friar of wanting to know her carnally and because she did not want to consent to him the friar had accused her of heresy. Accordingly, Margery said that her husband now wanted to kill this friar and so for fear this friar shut up and withdrew in shame from these parts.<sup>37</sup>

These records describe, therefore, seven methods by which the Lollard faith was transmitted. First, Lollards assisted and protected itinerant teachers and preachers, such as William White. This might even involve secretly carrying books which were too dangerous to be found on the person of such visitors. Second, there were several schools which had quite a formal nature. There was instruction based on the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo and the Ten Commandments, all of which were discussed in English, as were the texts being studied. The texts based on these prayers and the Decalogue were the basis for the study and learning of doctrine. Third, there was a network for circulating reading matter, whether for personal or group study. Fourth, the group lived as a community of faith, living out their belief in shared meals and the renunciation of disapproved practices, such as the regulations on fasting or those for the Sabbath and other holy days. Fifth, we know of private tuition at night: husband to wife, master to servant, neighbour to neighbour. Sixth, we see most clearly in Margery Baxter the public proclamation of their faith through proselytizing. Lastly, in a few cases we have seen public preaching being cited, and in the only two cases where the preacher is named we know that he is a male cleric (namely the Bury St Edmunds chaplain, Robert Bert, and William White, who was a priest).

***Lollard beliefs about preaching and the functions of the priesthood***

While the trial records appear to offer little justification for assuming that preaching was an important part of the life of this community a cursory glance at what the Lollards believed about preaching and the functions of the priesthood would suggest otherwise. Margery Baxter admitted her belief in a priesthood of all believers: 'All men and all women who are of the same opinion as Margery are good priests and holy church exists in the dwelling places of all members (*omnium existencium*) of her sect'.<sup>38</sup> John Skyllan also believed 'That every good man and good woman is a prest'.<sup>39</sup> A much fuller account is provided in the final trial at Norwich of William White, as we have seen above. Article twenty-four of the thirty specified that the faithful had a duty to preach and article twelve affirmed the universal priesthood of the faithful: 'each faithful person in Christ Jesus is a priest of God's chosen (*electae*) church'.<sup>40</sup>

We have seen that Lollards were prepared to flout church regulations in order to live according to their beliefs and take other risks. So, why is there so little apparent evidence here of preaching activity by them? One possibility is that no such preaching did take place, whether through fear of persecution, lack of available locations or lack of knowledge or training for preaching. In the light of the evidence above two other possibilities seem plausible: that the records and trial procedures that we have used were structured in such a way that preaching was unlikely to come to light or be recorded; or that the Lollards may indeed have believed themselves to be preaching, but the church authorities refused to recognize such acts as preaching.

***Procedures for examining Lollards and the treatment of heterodox preaching***

Anne Hudson has described the procedures for examining Lollards for heresy.<sup>41</sup> She shows how the formulaic questionnaires used in such exercises were drawn up hurriedly for convocations of Canterbury province in July and November 1428. In what she considers a draft to convocation by a canon lawyer there are two questions aimed at eliciting a suspect's beliefs on preaching: '11. Also, whether anyone ought to cease preaching or hearing the word of God on account of excommunication by a man', and '12. Also, if any deacon or priest may preach the word of God without the authority of the apostolic see or catholic bishops'.<sup>42</sup> The first of these remained in the final form approved by convocation, the second was reduced to read, 'Whether anybody may preach the word of God without the authority of the apostolic see or catholic

bishops'.<sup>43</sup> However, it would appear that the questionnaire used in Norwich was different and did not include an examination on this matter. Furthermore, we know that the wordings used by the diocesan notary in Norwich for the denunciation, abjuration, absolution from excommunication and release, and the penance were equally formulaic. The Norwich examinations followed the concerns of the Canterbury province in emphasizing schools, conventicles and the circulation of books as the primary means of transmitting Lollardy with which they were then concerned. So, it is no wonder from such procedures and such recording techniques that so little information on preaching exists. Indeed, it is quite clear that the detail extant in the depositions against the early Norwich Lollards is fortuitous; in later records the depositions from sworn witnesses are absent. While notaries will necessarily have taken such statements they were considered superfluous for the final legal process.

We can add to this the observation that the Church had a separate and more longstanding policy for dealing with heterodox preaching. In the section of the *Decretals* concerned with heretics,<sup>44</sup> directed originally at the Waldensians of Metz, we can detect the framework for the subjects of later investigation for heresy: biblical translations and other books in the vernacular, lay men and women preaching, secret conventicles and preaching in private, not public.

From the earliest days of the dissemination of Wycliffism the English authorities had focused on preaching. In 1382 Archbishop Courtenay of Canterbury and parliamentary legislation of the same year ordered the arrest of heretical preachers operating in churches, churchyards, marketplaces, fairs and at other large gatherings of people.<sup>45</sup> Subsequent bishops' registers talk of preaching in private or in public (*publice vel occulte*). The parliamentary bill of 1401, *De heretico comburendo*, confirmed that heretical preaching was a central Lollard activity which warranted arrest. There are further examples of the early-fifteenth-century church in England placing great energy in licensing preachers. One such was Bishop Repyndon of Lincoln who, in his earlier Oxford days, had been a prominent supporter of Wyclif. One of his first actions as a bishop was the issuing of two major mandates: one (11 April 1405) against unlicensed preachers disseminating heretical opinions in churches, chapels, private houses and suchlike in Huntingdon archdeaconry; the other (24 April 1405), a more far-reaching initiative to encourage theologians and masters of art at Oxford University to become preachers in Lincoln diocese. Indeed, Repyndon authorized a network of scouts at Oxford to identify suitable preachers.<sup>46</sup> It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the church authorities were already separately treating the problem of promoting orthodox preaching and stopping heterodox preaching and this was not an issue that needed to be covered within the context of the examination of heretics.

Further, the church authorities had an interest in not recognizing heretical preaching as preaching *per se*. The records of the Norwich trials indicate that where there is evidence of a cleric preaching an error or heresy (in addition to believing, affirming or teaching it) this fact could be listed. However, we have noted that such references exclusively detail errors or heresies spoken by male clerics while preaching in public. There is no admission whatsoever of women or the laity preaching, nor of preaching in private.

It appears therefore that sources written by diocesan officials only recognized the restricted definition of preaching, namely a public discourse by a licensed male cleric from a pulpit or preaching cross. But what term would the Lollards have used for the word-of-mouth public dissemination of faith that we have seen above: Thomas Mone to his extended family and neighbours, Margery Baxter to the citizens of Norwich and even a senior local Carmelite? We have seen in the first half of this paper that *sermo* possessed a wider semantic range (meaning a 'discourse') than the modern word 'sermon', and the semantic range possible for *predicare* and *predicatio* included not only 'to preach' but also 'to announce', 'to foretell or predict' or 'to bear out / carry forth a truth' and hence 'to expound a doctrine'. It is difficult in orthodox circles to see such breadth of semantics being used. This may be a means by which we can square the circle: Lollards in Norwich diocese in the 1420s were certainly announcing, speaking out and, in the terms approved by the diocesan notary, 'communicating' with others, even if they may not have been charged in these trial records with conventional preaching in public.



NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was delivered at the 109<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago on 5-8 January 1995 and subsequently extended and published in a French version as 'La prédication, les Lollards et les laïcs (diocèse de Norwich, 1428-1429)', in *La Parole du prédicateur, Ve-XVe siècle*, ed. by Rosa Maria Dessì and Michel Lauwers, Collection du Centre d'études médiévales de Nice, 1 (Nice: Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, 1997), pp. 457-78. I am grateful to Darleen Pryds for her assistance in developing this line of work.

<sup>2</sup> *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, ed. by Norman Tanner, Camden 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 20 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> '8th Medieval Studies Symposium', pp. 48-62 of *Medieval Sermon Studies Newsletter*, 30 (Autumn, 1992), ed. by Simon Forde and Veronica O'Mara. Open discussion session summarized by David D'Avray, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 1416.

<sup>5</sup> C. du Fresne, seigneur du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Paris: Didot, 1840-50), V, 398.

<sup>6</sup> J. Niermeyer, *Mediae latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 830.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, pp. 1416-17.

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful for the information in this matter offered by Ian Moxon of the University of Leeds. Other examples of this phenomenon include *iacere* and *iactare, fugere* and *fugitare*.

<sup>9</sup> G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926) and G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> Simon Forde, 'New Sermon Evidence for the Spread of Wycliffism', in *De Ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas L. Amos and Beverly M. Kienzle, Studies in Medieval Culture, 27 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 169-83.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Sweetman, 'Dominican Preaching in the Southern Low Countries, 1240-1260' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1989), pp. 30-31. For a summary of this thesis see *Dissertation Abstracts International* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1989), vol. 50A, p. 1771-A.

<sup>12</sup> Sweetman, 'Dominican Preaching', p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Rolf Zeffass, *Der Streit um die Laienpredigt: eine pastoralgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Verständnis des Predigtamtes und zu seiner Entwicklung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, Untersuchungen zur praktischen Theologie, 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 354. For a discussion of preaching see in particular pp. 268-73 and 353-56.

<sup>15</sup> *Fasciculi zizaniorum magistri Johannis Wyclif cum tritico*, ed. by Walter W. Shirley, Rolls Series, 5 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858).

<sup>16</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials* (see note 2 above). See also the article on this work, by Margaret Aston, 'William White's Lollard Followers', *Catholic Historical Review*, 68 (1982), pp. 469-97. For the ecclesiastical context see Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich. 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), and for a more recent study on this Lollard community see Shannon McSheffrey, 'Women and Lollardy: a reassessment', *Canadian Journal of History*, 26 (1991), 199-223.

<sup>17</sup> *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, pp. 428-29.

<sup>18</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> *Iuratus*: literally a 'sworn witness' but translated simply as 'witness' throughout this and future passages.

<sup>26</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Lollard practices in relation to fasting and abstinence from work are described in Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>28</sup> *Iste Johannes*: translated throughout this passage simply as 'Burell'.

<sup>29</sup> Such a coloured *toga* is an allusion to the dress considered characteristic wear of Lollards. See Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>30</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>31</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>34</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 48.

<sup>35</sup> This friar is probably Thomas Netter († 1430) who, though not strictly 'from Yarmouth' was prior of the English Carmelites from 1414, was certainly the most scholarly Carmelite of his generation (and possibly the compiler of the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*) and is known to have been in Norwich for William White's trial in September 1428. I am grateful to Paul Chandler of the Yarra Theological Union (Melbourne) for this possible identification.

<sup>36</sup> For discussion of Wycliffite policy on disendowment see Hudson, *The Premature*

*Reformation*, pp. 337-46.

<sup>37</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, p. 423.

<sup>41</sup> Anne Hudson, 'The Examination of Lollards', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 23 (1972), 407-19; reprinted in Anne Hudson, *Lollards and their Books* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), pp. 125-40, from where the following citations are taken.

<sup>42</sup> Hudson, *Lollards*, p. 133.

<sup>43</sup> Hudson, *Lollards*, p. 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Decretales V*, tit. 7 'De hereticis', cap. 12 in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. by E. Richter and E. Friedberg, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1879-81), II, coll. 784-87.

<sup>45</sup> Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Archer, *The Register of Bishop Philip Repyngdon, 1405-1419*, Lincoln Record Society, 57-58, 2 vols (Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1963), I, 7-9 and 21-23. See also Simon Forde, 'Writings of a Reformer: A Look at Sermon Studies and Bible Studies through Repyngdon's *Sermones super Evangelia Dominicalia*', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1985), I, 293-99.



Plate 3: WILLIAM PATTEN

from: William Robinson, *History [. . .] of Stoke Newington [. . .]*

(London: n. pub., 1820), picture facing p. 28

British Library, 1570/1258

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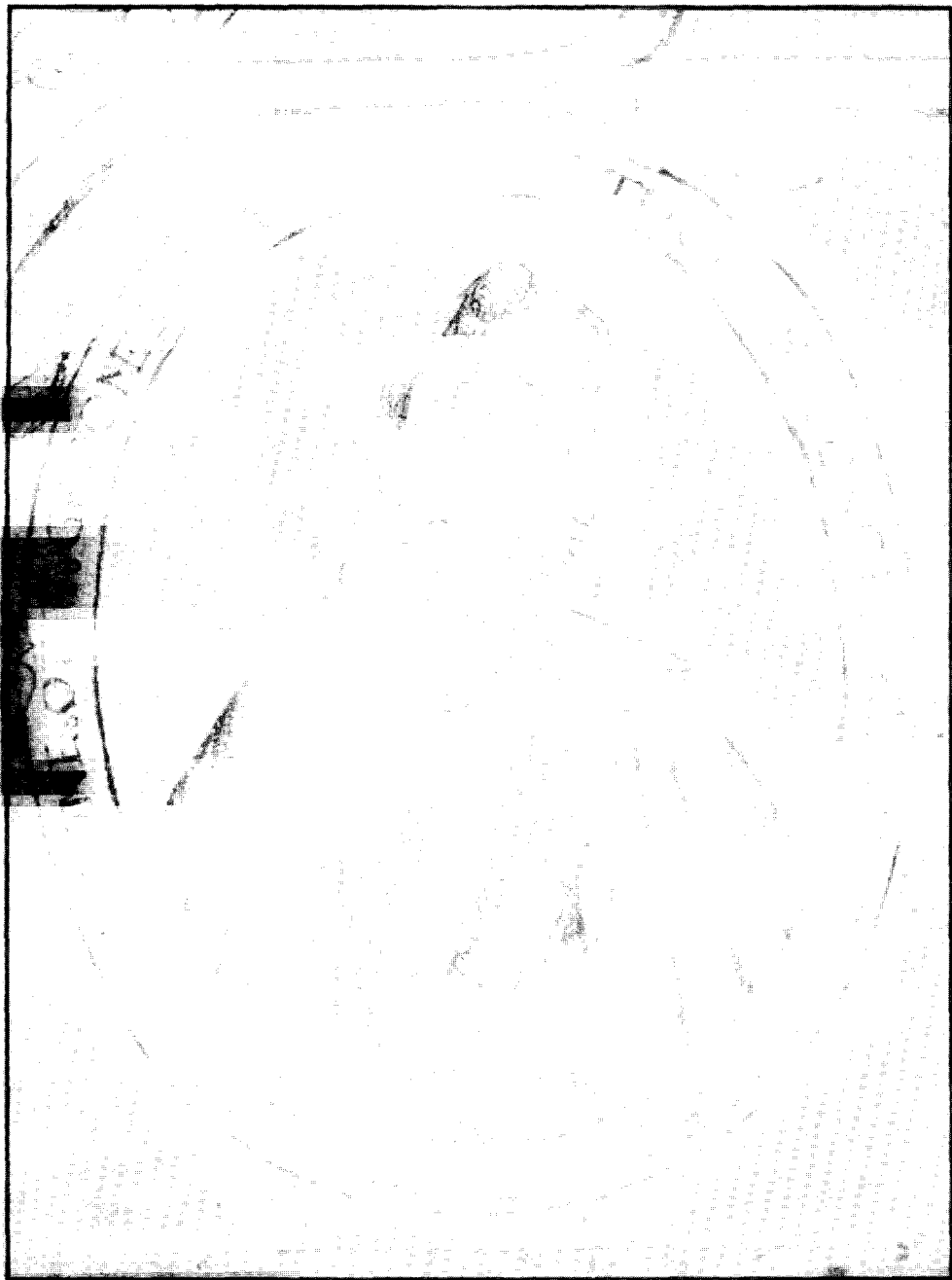


Plate 4: THOMAS GORGES  
British Library, Lansdowne Roll-9  
(By permission of the British Library)