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## The Native Roots of Early English Reformation Theology

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*Mr Stackhouse, who is assistant pastor at the King's Church, Amersham, probes into the theology of the Lollard movement.*

It is notoriously difficult in any period of theological restatement to identify and categorise the various influences that contribute towards change. This is particularly so in any attempt to discern in the shaping of early English Reformation theology distinct traces or even faint echoes of Luther, Erasmus or Zwingli. To isolate any one particular theological background is problematic in that the theology of this period tends to be an amalgam of different ideas. Attempts have been made however, and rightly so, to come to some conclusions as to the theological roots of this early part of Reformation history and not surprisingly the view of American Lutheran historians, such as N. J. Tjernagel, is that the main ideas were in fact determined on the continent by Luther. According to this view the leading advocates of the Reformation in England, Tyndale and Barnes, were nothing more than disciples of Luther himself. Moreover, Anglicanism, as expressed in the 39 articles, was fundamentally Lutheran.<sup>1</sup> Others stress the influence of the Swiss reformers upon the theology of the English Reformation. The influence of Zwingli and Calvin is undoubtedly felt later on, but William Clebsch argues that Swiss theology was already at work, in this earlier period, in displacing Lutheranism in England.<sup>2</sup> It is not the purpose of this essay, however, to highlight these continental influences. That the English Reformation owed much to Europe is undoubted and receives a great deal of scholarly attention. As such there is a tendency to emphasise the decisive nature of the new ideas from abroad but ignore, or at least underestimate, the survival of a very strong native stream of influence in the form of Wycliffite or Lollard dissent, as derived from the previous century. It is this search

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<sup>1</sup> N. J. Tjernagel, *Henry VIII and the Lutherans*, 189.

<sup>2</sup> W. C. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 312-13.

for the native roots of early Reformation theology that is the purpose of this essay.

Of course it is debateable whether in fact Lollardy survived into the Tudor period for it to act as an influence on early Reformation theology. The strength and scale of Tudor Lollardy is far from clear and the traditional perception of widespread heresy on the eve of the Henrician Reformation may be exaggerated and represent nothing more than a Whig-Protestant oversimplification. Arguably most Reformation historiography is coloured by the fact that the Protestant cause eventually succeeded and this has led inevitably to the search for incipient Protestantism at the grass roots. This is understandable but perhaps misleading in that it can attribute to the Lollards greater significance than they actually possessed. Some historians would contend that this retrospective approach is the main weakness in the writings of heresiologist John Foxe, who is regarded by his critics as nothing more than a crude propagandist of the Protestant cause.<sup>3</sup> However in his seminal work *The English Reformation* A. G. Dickens contends that Foxe's failure is not so much to exaggerate but, in the light of later records not available to him, to underestimate the strength of Lollardy.<sup>4</sup> The main point, according to Dickens, is that his methodology and research is thorough and need not be so easily dismissed because of its dissimilarity with modern historical method. Drawing, therefore, upon Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and upon his own research, Dickens himself stresses the enduring strength of Lollardy in the Tudor period in areas such as Buckinghamshire, Essex, Yorkshire and London. It is this brand of native Protestantism that eventually merges with Lutheranism and acts as a pressure for change.

In recent years both Dickens and Foxe have come under the scrutiny of a revisionist school of Reformation history. All that Dickens' evidence reveals, argues Christopher Haigh, is not the numerical strength of Lollardy or a Proto-Protestant movement but the sharpening of persecution by ecclesiastical authorities of what was a vague and often incoherent attitude. He states that 'Lollardy was not quite a figment of episcopal imagination but it was a highly amorphous phenomenon'.<sup>5</sup> Clearly there is little consensus on the matter of Lollard strength and little time in this essay to discuss it further. Not all would agree with Dickens' analysis of the effects of

<sup>3</sup> J. F. Mozley, *Foxe and his book*, defends Foxe against Maitland and Gairdner.

<sup>4</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> C. Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised*, 4 see also M. Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation* whose assessment is that 'far from being a springboard for the Protestant Reformation the heretics seemed like an irritant', 64.

Lollardy in providing a groundswell of pre-Reformation dissent. Even so the purpose of this essay is not to debate the existence of a coherent Lollard movement but to examine evidence for the survival of Lollard thought in early Reformation theology. By this we understand the survival of Lollard thought in the context of a wider reformation movement on the continent which was beginning to affect England. The period of study does not go beyond the late 1530's although the view of J. F. Davis is that Lollardy continued to be prominent even during the years of the Marian persecution.<sup>6</sup> Our study concentrates on popular heresy as well as the theology of those in the Cambridge circle who either abjured or died for their convictions. Special attention is given to William Tyndale as representative of this group, known otherwise as 'Little Germany'. Cranmer, Latimer and other Protestant Reformers from this circle had obviously found ways to reconcile their theology with the emerging Henrician Church but they will not be discussed here.

On first impressions it may well look as if continental rather than native theology was making the most impact upon the English scene, especially in the aftermath of the events at Wittenberg. The burning of Lutheran books in London in 1521, the establishment of a Lutheran cell at the White Horse Tavern Cambridge, and the circulation of Tyndale's New Testament in 1525 all would seem to point to the early rise of Lutheranism. Of course there were some areas where one might expect to find it. The immigrant community of the German Steelyard in London was a natural recipient of Luther's ideas.<sup>7</sup> Some of the forbidden tracts received here may even have circulated in the English merchant community. Further evidence of the influx of Lutheran ideas may also be found in the arrival of the first English Primers. Butterworth detects in George Joye's *Hortulus* the influence of Luther's *Betbuchlein* and *Kleiner Katechismus*.<sup>8</sup> Indeed certain tenets of Lutheran belief do seem to feature in the doctrinal documents of the Church of England under Henry VIII.<sup>9</sup> A more realistic assessment, however, of the spread of Lutheranism is given by Clebsch when he states that by 1528 only six

<sup>6</sup> J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation in S/E England 1520–1559*, 109–49. Davis catalogues cases of Protestant preachers during Mary's reign who espoused the sacramentarian views of the Lollards.

<sup>7</sup> S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 109. See also Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, 45–6.

<sup>8</sup> C. C. Butterworth, *The English Primers*, 33. Similarly a primer edited by William Marshall, which appeared in 1534, contained in its pages free translations of Luther's sermons.

<sup>9</sup> B. Hall, 'The early rise and gradual fall of Lutheranism in England' in *Reform and Reformation* SCH ed. D. Baker, 116.

Protestant writings, apart from Tyndale's New Testament, were available in English.<sup>10</sup> It means that certainly at the popular level Lutheranism would have great difficulties in making its ideas known. It is at the level of popular dissent that an investigation into the matter of Lollardy can begin.

It does appear, in many instances, that at this popular level it was native Lollardy rather than any continental theology, German or Swiss, that was making the greatest contribution to early Tudor heresy. In his investigations into heresy in the diocese of York, A. G. Dickens notes that evidence of continental thought is almost negligible. The trials of three immigrant Dutchmen, in York and Worksop, between 1528–35 prove interesting in that their beliefs 'show every sign of native English Lollard inspiration'.<sup>11</sup> Admittedly four of the offending tenets held by the Dutchmen were also characteristically Zwinglian, namely the denial of transubstantiation, of images, of prayers to saints and of purgatory. (Indeed Dickens's notes also faint traces of Anabaptist beliefs). However the whole list of heresies could not possibly be Zwinglian even less so Lutheran given the absence of justificatory aspects.<sup>12</sup> Lambert Sparrow, alias Hooke, promised in 1533 not to keep, teach or trade Luther's books but this need not denote on the part of the York judges appreciation of any continental influences upon the Dutch heretics. Luther in this respect is used merely as a representative, indeed the representative, of the general heretical tendency at large. That Lutheranism had barely infiltrated popular piety is confirmed in the case cited by Dickens of a Hull sailor Robert Robynson, who was amongst a group who had actually seen Lutherans worshipping on the continent. The fact, however, that Robynson's trial in 1528 is decidedly Lollard and not Lutheran in character would appear to be due to the fact, according to Burnett, a fellow traveller, that the Lutheran sermons preached in Bremen and Friesland could not be understood by any of the party.<sup>13</sup> After 1528 a whole cast of heresy cases in the diocese reveals a series of beliefs, none of which would have seemed out of place a century earlier. Dickens notes two exceptions where the impact of continental reform could be felt. They are significant in that they concern the influence of continental ideas on two educated men. One was the parish priest, Richard Browne, and the other, William Senes, a schoolmaster. The phraseology 'that the sacrament of thalther did but present the bodie

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<sup>10</sup> W. C. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 241–2.

<sup>11</sup> A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the diocese of York 1509–1558*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

of Christe' suggests a Zwinglian influence on Browne. Similarly one may suspect that Senes held the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's glorified body, when he says 'for God is here upon my hand, in my body, in this stulpe and everywhere'.<sup>14</sup> After 1537 Dickens notes the trials of sacramentarians who could either be Zwinglian or Lutheran but even here the atmosphere of the trial remains decidedly Lollard.

The extent to which continental ideas were assimilated at this popular level is admittedly a difficult one to investigate. The ecclesiastical machinery of the time was undoubtedly more used to detecting Lollardy and had set its procedures accordingly. Yet even here the evidence reveals that during the tenure of Bishop Tunstall of London ecclesiastical procedures were not so ignorant of Lutheranism that it could not be recognised when it did appear. The trial of Geoffrey Lome, who was charged on grounds of espousing Lutheran ideas, is a case in point. In his trial a distinctively Lutheran view that 'faith only is sufficient without good works to bryng a man to hevyn' was abjured.<sup>15</sup> The same belief appears in the recantation of Thomas Garrard in 1528 before Tunstall. In fact as early as 1521 Wolsey had circulated to the bishops a list of Lutheran errors. One would expect therefore an awareness on the part of the authorities of what was distinctive to Lutheranism as opposed to Lollardy. If this is the case, then the outstanding, and perhaps surprising feature of heresy trials from this period is the lack of reference to Luther and the reappearance of longstanding Lollard themes. Even the list of *mala dogmata* drawn up by convocation in 1536 contained few items incompatible with the English heresy. Essex Lollards, John Pykas and John Tyball had evidently some contact with continental ideas before their investigations. Nevertheless their views regarding the sacraments, confession, saints and pilgrimages could be construed as those of Lollardy. The examination in the trials of William Raylond is significant in that he details, conveniently for our purposes, the eucharistic views of his associate John Pykas. Pykas' ascription of the word to the eucharistic presence, a view he espoused apparently in Raylond's own house, is characteristically Lollard and dates back to fifteenth century Lollardy, in particular the views of Thomas Man.<sup>16</sup>

That Tudor heresy is decidedly Lollard in character is indeed the view presented by Foxe in *Acts and Monuments* concerning

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–41.

<sup>15</sup> London reg Tunstall 122v as cited by A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 500.

<sup>16</sup> L&P 4029 as cited by J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, 58–62.

persecution in the diocese of Lincoln. The trials of heretics in the Chilterns gives evidence of the survival of Lollard thought in what was a traditional stronghold. The main charges of speaking against pilgrimages, images and the worship of saints, as well as the demand for the Scriptures in English are nothing more than the old heresy updated. Attacks upon these things are of course common throughout reform movements in Europe. Indeed one historian notes that, in areas as close as Rickmansworth, such iconoclasm bears the mark of the radical reformer Carlstadt.<sup>17</sup> But given the geographical location and the strength of Lollard dissent in the Chilterns area it is perhaps safe to assume that what Foxe detects can accurately be described as Lollard. Mention in the trials of the book of James and Wycliffe's *Wicket* form immediate connections with the old dissent. From the many references in Foxe it is clear that the *Wicket* was in wide circulation amongst the Tudor Lollards and was possibly the means by which Wycliffe's sacramental views were disseminated and retained by later Lollards. The appeal to Wycliffe himself and the representation of his views on the sacrament are aspects of the Tudor heresy that Foxe makes note of in the case of John Stilman.<sup>18</sup> It is Foxe after all who identifies Wycliffe as the morning star of the English Reformation and so it is perhaps understandable that he should place the Tudor heresy unmistakably in the context of English rather than German thought. Foxe argues: 'if they think this doctrine be so new that it was not heard before Luther's time how then can such great persecution before Luther's time be here in England'.<sup>19</sup>

It may well be that the ecclesiastical courts were inept in detecting the new Lutheran ideas. Moreover, the evidence suffers too many limitations for us to make firm conclusions. Overall it does seem, however, that the Reformation on the continent was having a limited impact upon English popular religion. The evidence testifies rather to the potency in some areas of Lollard thought. Indeed all the essential theological teachings of Lollardy seem to be intact. What does seem to be missing in the evidence is the philosophical underpinning of these views in the ideas of dominion or predestination.<sup>20</sup> The most that can be said here is that some streams of Lollardy, as they emerged, were never able to incorporate these more abstract concerns of its founder. Thus what emerged was a form of Lollardy, indebted to Wycliffe on issues such as the sacrament but

<sup>17</sup> M. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 211.

<sup>18</sup> J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 4, 207.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>20</sup> A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 469.

also emphasising the epistle of James, a doctrine of free-will and a commonsense biblicism. It is a Lollardy which also developed what was only marginal to Wycliffe, namely an attack on images and saints. This radical Lollardy, as it may be termed, tended to predominate in the fifteenth century and survive in popular Tudor heresy. Lollardy may very well have been a rather amorphous movement by this time but theologically it is possible to define it in these terms. For Lollardy to survive at the popular level is not in itself particularly remarkable. What is more surprising is the appearance of some of these same Lollard categories of thought in the preaching and writing of the English reformers, most of whom had an academic background and had first hand contact with the new ideas from abroad. It is to the Cambridge circle that our attention must now turn. The information provided by Pykas during his trial of the content of Bilney's preaching is an interesting point of contact between popular heresy and the early reformers and one which reveals just how far the Cambridge circle had assimilated Lutheran ideas. During his own trial Pykas claims to have heard Bilney preach at Ipswich in 1527. It is Bilney who is regarded by many as the progenitor of Reformation thought at this time. What is interesting is that Pykas' recollections of Bilney's preaching included the advocacy of pilgrimages as folly and that prayers should be addressed to God alone since saints cannot hear prayers.<sup>21</sup> Whatever Bilney's relationship was to the continental reform movement, here at least one of his congregation perceived in Bilney's preaching nothing more than the staple diet of home made Lollardy. This can be applied to the terminology used as well as the theological ideas. An example of this would be in Bilney's view of righteousness. His reported statement that 'man is so imperfect that in no ways can merit be his own dedis' carries with it a negative thrust more akin to Wycliffe than a positive Lutheran affirmation of solafideism.<sup>22</sup> Leaving aside his condemnation of Luther during his trial the articles upon which Bilney was convicted were nothing but a typical description of what can only be described as Lollardy.

Bilney is perhaps untypical of the English reformers in so far as he still accepted papal authority and also the doctrine of transubstantiation. Foxe makes clear with some regret that Bilney was still tied to an orthodoxy unacceptable to the other reformers. Moreover although his iconoclasm carried overtones similar to those of the Lollards it is possible to detect other influences, namely Erasmian,

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<sup>21</sup> L&P 4029 as cited by J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 497.

behind his invective against the saints.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the theology of all the English reformers tends to be eclectic. In the case of John Frith there is an unmistakable connection with the theology of Zwingli through his discipleship to Oecolampadius, whilst Dugmore also detects an English background to Frith's sacramentarianism.<sup>24</sup> Bilney's Lollardy, therefore, needs also to be seen as one thread in the varied matrix of his theology. This seems to hold true for all the early reformers. One may even want to reject the testimony of Pykas as evidence for Bilney's Lollardy. It may reveal only the inability of Pykas to conceive of anything else in Bilney's preaching except his own brand of heresy. All that can be claimed is that there is evidence, to some degree, of Lollard themes in the preaching of this notable reformer. What is important is the fact that even if native roots can be found in his theology it was becoming increasingly difficult to view heresy in isolation from what was happening on the continent. The fact that Bilney was again tried for heresy and put to death in 1531 surely 'reflects the impact of anti-Lutheran alarms focused on a native blend of heresy.'<sup>25</sup> In the aftermath of the events at Wittenberg it was scarcely possible to be a mere Lollard any more, although the appearance of Luther's name in the trials of heretics at this time should not be misconstrued as a sign of the influence of his theology. In the end it is safer perhaps to stick to C. W. Dugmore's dictum that to 'dismiss Bilney as a "Lollard", Tyndale as a "Lutheran", Frith as a "Calvinist" . . . has the sole merit of being a simplification of the issues involved'.<sup>26</sup> Although somewhat anachronistic in the case of Frith, Dugmore's observations will at least prevent us from overstating the influence of Lollardy on any of the reformers.

However, whilst there might be a danger of overstatement with regard to the influence of Lollardy on the early reformers it seems that the occurrence of Lollard themes is too frequent for it to be ignored. Reference has already been made to Frith's sacramentarianism as an expression, at the very least, of Wycliffe's views. From Foxe's account of his trial and his writings on the Eucharist, Davis suggests that 'Frith owed something to his Lollard connections'.<sup>27</sup> It is likely, although by no means certain, that Frith was arrested in 1533 following the penetration of the 'Christian Brethren' by the authorities. Whether the Brethren constituted the 'organized wing of

<sup>23</sup> M. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 167.

<sup>24</sup> C. W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> M. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> C. W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, 81.



Lollardy' is another matter but Thomas More was not slow to recognise that Frith's views on the sacrament placed him beyond Luther and in the line of Wycliffe, Zwingli and Tyndale.<sup>28</sup> Only the Augustinian friar Robert Barnes can be deemed to have held fast to the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence although even his theology went through some adjustments as he endeavoured to win favour with Henry VIII. That Barnes, the most thoroughbred Lutheran of all the English reformers, also held a number of points that resembled those of the Lollards, could throw into doubt, if examined further, the commitment of Barnes to Lutheranism.<sup>29</sup>

It is the theology of William Tyndale which provides, finally, the most telling example of the dangers inherent in making neat categorisations. If, as Dugmore claims, it is historically inaccurate to attach too much importance to the Lollardy of Bilney, then equally it would be a mistake to ignore the possibility of Lollard themes in Tyndale's theology. It is Tyndale, of course, who is the one most readily linked to developments on the continent. The prevailing opinion is that the bulk of Tyndale's theology, as evidenced in his writings, is almost entirely dominated by Luther, to the extent that Tyndale had no original ideas of his own. Tyndale's biographer S. L. Greenslade expresses this opinion well by questioning whether 'Tyndale had developed any constructive theology to replace the old until he went to Germany and came fully under the influence of Luther'.<sup>30</sup> It was not until fairly recently that this view was challenged by historians who began to put forward other labels as being more expressive of Tyndale. These labels have ranged from Tyndale being seen as a Christian humanist to being regarded as a Puritan!<sup>31</sup> W. Clebsch broke new ground by describing the traditional view of Tyndale's dependence on Luther until about 1530 when he moved towards ideas of covenant and morality.<sup>32</sup> Throughout this debate a Lollard background for Tyndale has often been ignored, possibly out of a fear, in some cases, of being charged with English chauvinism. Only in recent years has this English background for Tyndale been postulated. G. Rupp, thirty years on

<sup>28</sup> D. Broughton Knox, *The Lord's Supper from Wycliffe to Cranmer*, 33.

<sup>29</sup> J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, 73. Even as late as 1531 in his 'Supplications' Lutheran material was supplemented with Wycliffite arguments against saints and images.

<sup>30</sup> S. L. Greenslade, *The works of William Tyndale*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> M. M. Knappen, 'William Tyndale—The First English Puritan' in *Church History* 1936, 201–215.

<sup>32</sup> W. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants*, 31. Whilst working on Deuteronomy Tyndale revised his idea on justification by faith alone and determined that righteous deeds were essential for salvation as well as the reward.

from his first enquiry into the English Reformation now argued 'that he (Tyndale) owed something theologically to Wycliffe's ideas.'<sup>33</sup> The point of making this brief incursion into the historiography surrounding Tyndale is to present the possibility of an alternative reading of Tyndale's theology, rooted in the central themes of Lollardy. The task therefore is to wrench Tyndale from his Lutheran moorings as well as postulating an English background.

Whereas before it was uncritically accepted that Tyndale's major works were translations from Luther's, it is now clear that whilst there is a great deal of similarity it by no means represents plagiarism. Whilst Tyndale was indebted to Luther for the ideas, Dick indicates that in Tyndale's first publication, *The Parable of Wicked Mammon*, he includes numerous interpolations of several paragraphs, expansions within paragraphs and insertions of new clauses within sentences. In fact Dick concludes that direct translation of Luther amounts to no more than 15%.<sup>34</sup> It could equally well apply to Tyndale's other works. Even so the main tenets of Lutheranism are undoubtedly present in Tyndale's theology. There is the stress on justification by faith<sup>35</sup> as well as the sharp antithesis between gospel and law.<sup>36</sup> The view of the law as keeping man in bondage is typically Lutheran. Clearly then, in the main soteriological focus, Tyndale's writing reflects the wider continental reform movement. It emerges already in *Wicked Mammon*, however, that for Tyndale salvation was not merely an external, extrinsic justification expressed in forensic terms, but also a personal transformation.<sup>37</sup> It could be argued that aspects of Luther's theology come close to this idea although increasingly he stressed the declarative nature of righteousness in order to protect his concept of faith alone.<sup>38</sup> Important to our discussion is that there are clues as early as 1528 that Tyndale was more than just a disciple of Luther.

A clearer distancing from Luther, and a more convincing case for a Lollard background can be seen in Tyndale's view of the law. For Tyndale the law functioned not only to show man his sinful condition but also as a guide to Christian behaviour and ethical

<sup>33</sup> G. Rupp, *Just Men: Historical Pieces*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. R. Dick, *A Critical Edition of William Tyndale's The Parable of Wicked Mammon*, 31–32 cited by D. D. Smeeton in *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale*, 64.

<sup>35</sup> W. Tyndale, *Romans (PS1)*, 508–9. Citing this P. E. Hughes says 'this deserves to be taken as the classic definition of the reformed doctrine of justification' (P. E. Hughes *The Theology of the English Reformers*, 49).

<sup>36</sup> W. Tyndale, *Supplement to the Reader (PS1)*, 389.

<sup>37</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon (PS1)*, 115.

<sup>38</sup> P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 226–33.

decisions. If 'the law killeth the conscience' it is also true that 'faith in Christ giveth lust and power to the law'.<sup>39</sup> Luther's antithesis between gospel and law would never permit such a positive view of the law. Later in the same passage Tyndale asserts that 'if thou do the law it declareth that thou art happy and blessed'.<sup>40</sup> It is a significant, although by no means unique, emphasis and credits Tyndale with an independence from Luther rarely acknowledged. Even Cargill Thompson, who stresses Tyndale's dependence on Luther agrees that 'where Tyndale differs from Luther is in his constant insistence on the Christian fulfilling the law'.<sup>41</sup> J. K. Yost was perhaps the first to notice this aspect of Tyndale's theology but attributed it to a humanistic influence.<sup>42</sup> As with Bilney, Tyndale was undoubtedly influenced by the Erasmian atmosphere that pervaded Cambridge at this time. Because Tyndale's view of the law is also similar to that of Zwingli, one cannot rule out the influence of the Swiss reformer, although the search for a point of contact, literary or otherwise, is a difficult one for the historian.<sup>43</sup> It may also prove to be pointless given that this stress on the law is also found in the writings of the church Fathers. Tyndale's quoting of the Fathers in his polemical works demonstrates his knowledge of them, and possible the shaping of his theology by them. If, however, there is a more recent origin for this view of the law it is not necessary to go any further than Wycliffe. It was Wycliffe who insisted that love and obedience to the law of God was essential. Moreover the distinctive moral tone of the Lollards derived in part from their high regard for the revealed law of God.<sup>44</sup> It would therefore be not unlikely for Tyndale to derive his theology, on this point, from this native source.

It is worth mentioning at this point, as something of an excursus, the very different view that Tyndale had to Luther concerning the epistle of James. Frequently it provides Tyndale's point of reference for much of his discussion on the need for works to verify the genuineness of faith.<sup>45</sup> In terms of theology Tyndale is not saying anything different to Luther. It is noticeable, however, that Tyndale is able to quote with liberty from James and his confidence in its canonicity stands in marked contrast to Luther's opinion of James as

<sup>39</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon (PS1)*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> J. Cargill Thompson, 'The Two Regiments' in *Reform and Reformation*, ed. D. Baker, 32.

<sup>42</sup> J. K. Yost, *Christian Humanism*, 86 cited in D. D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 145.

<sup>43</sup> J. G. Moeller, 'The beginning of Puritan Covenant Theology' in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1963, 51.

<sup>44</sup> A. Hudson, *English Wycliffite Sermons*, vol. 1, 245/19-20.

<sup>45</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon (PS1)*, 60-61, 119-20.

a 'right strawy epistle'. The significance of this for our present discussion is that James, as already stated, has for a long time been recognised as a favourite Lollard text. G. Rupp agrees with Dickens when he states that 'the epistle of James with its simple practical piety and emphasis on the brotherhood was the handbook of the known men'.<sup>46</sup> The case of John Morden of Chesham, who had preserved, amongst other things, the epistle of James in a box for his son-in-law, confirm its continued popularity in the surviving Lollard community.<sup>47</sup> At this point the connection between Tyndale and Lollardy is quite convincing. It is therefore difficult to explain Tyndale's independence of thought from Luther at this departure apart from attitudes already well established in traditional English dissent.

Other areas of correspondence between Tyndale and Lollardy concern the emphasis on covenant. Some scholars have of course seen in this a parallel with the Swiss reformers. Laughlin suggests the possibility of a Lollard connection when he states that the use of covenant terminology was 'nothing radically new for the English people' who had received it via Wycliffite Bibles.<sup>48</sup> Anne Hudson's extensive work on Wycliffite sermons does confirm this early use of the covenant theme later to emerge in Tyndale.<sup>49</sup> For Tyndale covenant was in fact a unifying force for all his ideas on election, faith, works and law. Even though the full flow of Tyndale's covenant theology is not expanded until later, and is undoubtedly at that stage affected by Zwingli, nevertheless the theme can be seen in embryo as early as 1528 in *The Wicked Mammon*.<sup>50</sup> Further Lollard connections may well be seen in Tyndale's ecclesiology. Like many of the Reformers he regards the church as a small number of hidden believers.<sup>51</sup> At times Tyndale's criticisms of images and the worship of saints takes on a familiar Lollard tone<sup>52</sup> and in his ardent nationalism<sup>53</sup> and concern to promote the scriptures in the vernacular<sup>54</sup> Tyndale bears the stamp not just of Lollardy but of

<sup>46</sup> G. Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition*, 5. see also A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 460-63. (Foxe IV 238) Richard Colins daughter Joan was said to have known all the normal elements of religion in English as well as the book of James.

<sup>48</sup> Laughlin, *Moses' Face* cited in D. D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 157.

<sup>49</sup> A. Hudson, *English Wycliffite Sermons*, vol. 1, 277/46-53.

<sup>50</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (PS1), 105.

<sup>51</sup> W. Tyndale, *Matthew* PS2, 116.

<sup>52</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (PS1), 66. 'That not the saints but God only receiveth us into eternal tabernacles'.

<sup>53</sup> W. Tyndale, *The Practice of Prelates* (PS2), 294.

<sup>54</sup> W. Tyndale, *Obedience of the Christian Man* (PS1), 148-9.

Wycliffe himself. All this is not to deny the very real influence that Luther had on Tyndale. In matters of soteriology and also in the political concept of the two regiments Tyndale was undoubtedly indebted to Luther.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of this brief inquiry is in effect to redress the balance and to suggest a more native source for Tyndale's theology.

Unfortunately it is not possible to be more precise about Tyndale's Lollard connections. Some have attempted to go further and draw a philological comparison between Tyndale's use of English and that of the Lollards. Certainly there are parallels in the use of certain recurring words (true, false), imagery (the tree and its fruit) and even the frequent use of sarcasm.<sup>56</sup> Tyndale's anti-intellectualism does seem very similar to his English predecessors. But philological and stylistic comparisons are notably unsatisfying in their conclusions. Common biblical language and imagery has as much a part to play in Tyndale's writing as that of any particular theological school. More benefit might be gained by developing a study of Tyndale's upbringing in Gloucestershire, an area of notable Lollard strength. In his extensive uncovering of Lollard communities J. A. F. Thompson demonstrates that Bristol and its environs remained an area of Lollard activity up to the 1520's.<sup>57</sup> An interesting attempt is made by D. D. Smeeton to trace the hand of Tyndale behind the publication of three Lollard tracts during 1530/31 which had emerged from Antwerp by printers who also did business with Tyndale. Certainly Tyndale's biographer J. F. Mozley attributes two of the three tracts to him: *The examinacions of Master William Thorpe* and *The praier and complaynte of the ploweman unto Christe*.<sup>58</sup> It is certainly possible, given the circumstances and timing of Tyndale's own exile in Antwerp, that Tyndale was responsible for supervising or editing these tracts. If this is so then it is strong evidence of Tyndale's identification with the Lollard cause. Even if he did not edit these tracts the issues raised within them find parallels in his own works. Whatever the truth behind these claims the overall impression we have gained throughout is that it is not necessary to look solely to the continent for the origins of Tyndale's theology. The similarity between Luther and Tyndale in aspects of soteriology

<sup>55</sup> J. Cargill Thompson, 'The Two Regiments' in *Reform and Reformation* ed. D. Baker, 33.

<sup>56</sup> P. Auski, 'Tyndale's Polemical Prose' cited in D. D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 79.

<sup>57</sup> J. A. F. Thompson, *The Later Lollards 1414-1520*, 20-22.

<sup>58</sup> D. D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 256-8. Although A. Hudson attributes only the latter to Tyndale on account of the similarity between its preface and the preface of *The Prophet Ionas* which is unmistakably Tyndale's.

should not be allowed to hide the possibilities of a strong native tradition emerging in the writings of this prominent English reformer. At the end of *The Dialogue concerning Heresies* More notes the difference between Tyndale and Luther and himself asserts that 'no man can please Tyndale but Wycliffe, the fyrst founder here of that abominable heresy that blasphemeth the blessed sacrament'.<sup>59</sup> Preference for Zwingli may well lie behind Tyndale's memorial view of the sacrament but it seems that for More the keynote was Lollardy. Tyndale himself makes direct appeal to Wycliffe on a number of occasions, the earliest reference being in *The Practice of Prelates*.<sup>60</sup> It demonstrates the high regard with which he was held by Tyndale but more importantly it is in the same manner with which the Lollards invoked the name of Wycliffe. All this is not to claim that Tyndale was only a Lollard but simply that his ideas are at least influenced by the English dissent.

We are now in a position to make some wider assertions concerning the impact of Lollardy on English Protestantism. For instance, the continued preoccupation with the sacraments throughout the English Reformation can be seen as a legacy of the Lollards. By appealing to the Lollards it is also possible to explain why the Reformed theology of Zwingli and Calvin found a home in England. The themes of covenant, law, and the view of the sacrament all find earlier precedents in the English dissent. Elton notes that the Lollard view of the sacrament 'set up a sympathy for the sacramentarian tenets of the Zwinglians'.<sup>61</sup> It could also be argued that the sacramental theology of the English reformers, derived from Wycliffe, best explains why Lutheranism failed to take root in England. Whilst the learned Barnes might replace the crude Lollard texts, brought to him at his priory by Tybal, with new Lutheran works, nevertheless 'it was not his intellectual Lutheranism which prevailed in the theology of the English Reformation'.<sup>62</sup> That this was so was due in large measure to the inability of the English Reformers to embrace Luther's doctrine of the Real Presence.

The legacy bequeathed by the Lollards to the Reformation has

<sup>59</sup> T. More, *Confutation CW* 8, 587–16.

<sup>60</sup> W. Tyndale, *Preface to 1 John (PS2)*, 224–5 and *Prologue to the Prophet Jonas (PS1)*, 458.

<sup>61</sup> G. R. Elton, 'England and the Continent in the Sixteenth Century' in *Reform and Reformation*, ed. D. Baker, 12.

<sup>62</sup> S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 124.

been noted in other areas. If contempt for the priesthood was a key idea in the English Reformation then it is not hard to find precedents for this in the Lollard movement. Others have noted moreover the contribution made by Lollardy to the iconoclastic tone of the Reformation in England. Its traditional hostility to saints and images undoubtedly left its mark on English Protestant thinking particularly in this early period. Of course some expressions of iconoclastic fervour cannot be traced to the Lollards, and as Margaret Aston states, 'Lollard iconomachy neither caused nor enabled Reformation iconomachy'.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately the continuity between pre- and post-Reformation dissent in these areas of anticlericalism, sacramentarianism and iconoclasm remains merely a hypothesis.<sup>64</sup> In this particular essay, however, we have attempted to demonstrate the continuity between the theology of the early English Reformation and fifteenth century Lollardy. In conclusion it is clear that Lollardy is by no means the only influence in a period noted for fluidity in theological ideas. Nevertheless it is an influence that cannot be ignored.

### **Abstract**

The rapid spread of Luther's theology following the events at Wittenberg is one that is historically well attested. However, in this essay Ian Stackhouse questions the impact that the Reformation in Europe in these early years has upon England. Although Luther and Zwingli undoubtedly have their place in English Reformation historiography, the point being made here is that early English Reformation theology owes as much to the enduring strength of a native brand of heresy dating back to Wycliffe and the Lollards. Promoting a biblical morality coupled with a mild iconoclasm it is Lollardy that surfaces as much as anything else on the English scene. According to the writer this holds true both at the popular level and the academic level. In particular he focuses on the works of William Tyndale and presents him in the final analysis as more a disciple of Wycliffe than Luther.

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<sup>63</sup> M. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 158.

<sup>64</sup> C. Hill notes in *Society and Puritanism*, 145 that certain Puritan teachings can be traced back to Tudor Lollardy.

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