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This essay takes up a historiographical problem: the relation between the movement of religious dissent provoked by John Wyclif in the 1370s and the English peasant rising of 1381.[1] It is, strictly considered, a historiographical problem and not a historical one: since not a whit of compelling evidence has been successfully adduced in support of any direct relation, the real question is not so much whether there was one as why some of us keep looking for one. I once argued the influence of religious dissent on (or, better, the appropriation of it by) the 1381 rebels,[2] and now think that that argument, though not implausible, poses the wrong question; so the present essay involves a good deal of *retractio* and a certain amount of retraction. It is some comfort that my rashness in this matter put me in honourable company. Rodney Hilton, whose real attention was elsewhere, suggested in passing that native traditions of doctrinal dissent were part of the mix that blew up in 1381.[3] Anne Hudson made the same suggestion I did in the same year, on partly different grounds.[4] In recent years, the heresy and the rebellion keep regular company in scholarship; sometimes with simply the sense that they

[1] My thanks to those who offered questions and comments at the conference, especially Rosamond Faith, Zvi Razi, and János M. Bak; they have kept me thinking, and caused me even to re-treat my re-treatment of the problem.

[2] S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1994), 73–101.

[3] R. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973), 213. He was speaking of a pre- or extra-Wycliffite tradition of dissent (see also p. 231); though he perhaps confused more than he clarified by calling this tradition 'Lollardy'. That choice implies a supposition probably correct, that is, that Lollardy properly so called in effect incorporated individuals and groups already, though in idiosyncratic and isolated ways, in a position of dissent; see S. Justice, 'Lollardy', in D. Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), 670–1, 683–4.

[4] A. Hudson, '*Piers Plowman* and the Peasants' Revolt: A Problem Revisited', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 8 (1994), 96–8; see also ead., *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 68.

thematically belong together,[5] sometimes some substantial connection proposed or supposed between them.[6]

The most interesting case is Margaret Aston's 1994 essay querying the rising's possible connection with Wyclif's eucharistic heresy, which rejected the orthodox account of how the bread and wine at mass became the body and blood of Christ. Her conclusion is unequivocal—'No evidence exists to suggest that any of [the rebels] . . . was in any way moved by Wycliffe's arguments, or guilty of denying the worship owed to the eucharist'[7]—but her rhetoric is not. It is always risky to guess at another scholar's rejected hypotheses; but she so tirelessly catalogues sacramental resonances that one feels that she *must* have started out suspecting Wycliffite influence, and concluded by reluctantly declaring the suspicion disconfirmed. In fact, the terms in which she dismisses the case for heretical influence suggest how natural it would have seemed to her: '[The rebels'] actions may indeed have reflected radical questioning of social boundaries, *but* doubts about sacramental teaching were not on view':[8] the adversative betrays her expectation that 'questioning of social boundaries' and 'doubts about sacramental teaching' normally would be found together.

Aston's eventual conclusion is quite correct; there is no evidence linking any rebel, John Ball apart, to heresy, or linking any rebel action in 1381 to any heretical teaching, eucharistic or otherwise. (It seems at least symbolically significant that the only figure of documented Wycliffite commitments with *any* connection to events linked to the rising was a lawyer, whose connection was assessing the initial poll tax in Oxfordshire.)[9] Nor is there any language in the revolt that must have come from dissenting sources, though there

[5] E.g., R. F. Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, 1999), 6.

[6] E.g., J. M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton, 1995), 157, 166–8; E. Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2003), 209–10.

[7] M. Aston, '*Corpus Christi* and *Corpus Regni*: Heresy and the Peasants' Revolt', *Past and Present*, 143 (1994), 46.

[8] Ibid; my emphasis.

[9] This is Thomas Compworth the elder, convicted of heresy concerning tithes and auricular confession in 1385; M. Jurkowski, 'Lollardy in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire: The Two Thomas Compworths', in F. Somerset, J. Havens, and D. Pitard (eds), *Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2003), 73–95; though see W. M. Ormrod, 'The Politics of Pestilence: Government in England after the Black Death', in W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley (eds), *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), 166–7.

is some that could have. Arguments for connection between the two movements have generally hinged, first, on apparently suggestive convergences of language and concerns and, second, on assertions of historians contemporary with the event.[10] The former we will come to shortly. The latter need to be considered immediately, for their significance has been mischaracterized: these assertions are not weak evidence that the rebels had Wycliffite thoughts, but pretty strong evidence that they did not. It is generally allowed that Walsingham's and Knighton's assertions about the rebels' Lollard sympathies prove little, because of their evident hostility to Wyclif, and their tendentious desire to embarrass him with responsibility for anything that might be laid at his door.[11] But we can say more: they are so eager to produce a connection that the tenuousness of the connections they do make is eloquent. Knighton can say no more than that John Ball prepared the way for Wyclif, as John the Baptist did for Christ; he almost pedantically avoids suggesting any contact or influence between them.[12] Walsingham can scatter direct blame on the friars for the rising, but not on Wyclif: to bring the latter into the story, he can do no better than say that the Rising was a divine punishment for heresy, and can assert no causal relation other than the inscrutable decorum of

[10] Hudson (n. 4 above) makes a different case for Wyclif's influence in 1381, which unfortunately confuses the question of his influence with that of his reaction. She finds that Wyclif's comments on the revolt in *De blasfemia* are more sympathetic than they have been thought. But that Wyclif had measured thoughts about the rebels does not prove that they had any thoughts about him. Indeed, rather the contrary, for her argument inadvertently discredits one piece of evidence for Wyclif's influence: by showing that Wyclif makes no effort to distance himself from the events of June, she forces us to conclude that Wyclif apparently saw no unlucky similarity between the rebels' actions and his doctrines.

[11] Classically, M. Aston, 'Lollardy and Sedition', *Past and Present*, 17 (1960), 3–5; most recently H. Eiden, '*In der Knechtschaft werdet ihr verharren . . .': Ursachen und Verlauf des englischen Bauernaufstandes von 1381* (Trier, 1995), 397, who concurs with the suggestion of R. B. Dobson, 'Remembering the Peasants' Revolt 1381–1981', in W. H. Liddell and R. G. E. Wood (eds), *Essex and the Great Revolt of 1381* (Chelmsford, 1981), 6–7, that their accusations either reflect or coincide with an effort by Archbishop Courtenay to do the same. My remarks about Knighton and Walsingham apply also to W. W. Shirley (ed.), *Fasciculi zizaniorum magistri Johannis Wyclif cum tritico* (Rolls Series, 5, 1858), 273–4, but its belated testimony does not deserve separate consideration.

[12] G. H. Martin (ed.), *Knighton's Chronicle 1337–1396* (Oxford, 1995), 242. It may bear witness to even less sense of connection between the two than even this might suggest; see the compelling remarks on Knighton's composition in G. Martin, 'Knighton's Lollards', in M. Aston and C. Richmond (eds), *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1997), 33–4.

God's justice.[13] Either of these writers, it is clear, would gladly have traced the rebellion back to Oxford; it is therefore significant that neither thought he plausibly could.

This conclusion might suggest dark reflections on any attempts to trace the thinking of the rebels, and the relation of that thinking to religious sources, both of which have recently been occupations mostly of literary scholars;[14] such aspects have won less attention in the 'hard' studies that have yielded the most distinct and concrete progress in study of the revolt, by concentrating on archival material while skirting or ignoring the conceptual activities of the rebels.[15] It would be easy to conclude that less material, more intellectual elements of the uprising are irrecoverable and perhaps comparatively unreal; and while few historians would now explicitly dismiss them, 'cultural' concerns, especially conceptual ones, get rendered without much complexity or sense of pertinence, and with a sense that they are at best epiphenomenal. The persistent reluctance among historians who use

[13] Similarly, although Walsingham says (whether informedly or not is impossible to judge) that Ball taught Wyclif's doctrines, he gives no specific instances, and does not connect his allegation to the revolt itself; E. M.Thompson (ed.), *Chronicon Anglie* (Rolls Series, 74, 1875), 321. Réville alone seems to have noticed the importance of all this: 'il n'y a pas de lollards parmi eux, sans quoi le chroniqueur de Saint-Alban . . . n'eût pas manqué de leur addresser ce nouveau reproche et d'en faire le plus gros de leurs crimes'; A. Réville, *Le Soulèvement des travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381* (Paris, 1898), 44. It is not, as I had supposed, that Réville forgot the passage in Walsingham, but that he attended more precisely than I did to what it did and did not say.

[14] For excellent examples, see the discussions mentioned in notes 4–6, and also A. Middleton, 'William Langland's "kynde name": Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-Century England', in L. Patterson (ed.), *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530* (Berkeley, 1990), 15–82; P. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992), 33–56; D. Aers, '*Vox populi* and the Literature of 1381', in D. Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), 432–53; Green, *Crisis of Truth*, 198–205; A. Galloway, 'Making History Legal: *Piers Plowman* and the Rebels of Fourteenth-Century England', in K. Hewett-Smith (ed.), *William Langland's* Piers Plowman: *A Book of Essays* (New York and London, 2001), 7–39; Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 171–7.

[15] In addition to the work of the honorand of and contributors to this volume, see for example Eiden, '*In der Knechtschaft*'; Ormrod, 'Politics of Pestilence'; E. B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England* (New York, 1996); A. Prescott, 'Writing about Rebellion: Using the Records of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381', *History Workshop Journal*, 45 (1998), 1–27; H. Eiden, 'Joint Action against "Bad" Lordship: The Peasants' Revolt in Essex and Norfolk', *History*, 83 (1998), 5–30; S. Federico, 'The Imaginary Society: Women in 1381', *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001), 159–83.

conventional record sources to credit ideas of the sort discussed here as media of historical action has re-emerged recently; it sports a more stylish look, which seems at odds with the bluff empirical sobriety of older social and economic history, but it accomplishes exactly the same thing, by insisting that to find ideas in the rising is not so much over-imaginative as coercive and in bad faith; an attempt to discover the principles and aims of the rising can be dismissed thus: 'A great event like the 1381 rising can never be subject to a single master interpretation'.[16] It is hard to imagine disagreeing with this admirable sentiment (except to wonder why only *great* events enjoy this privilege), but also hard to concede that speaking of the rebels' thoughts and purposes commits any infraction against it. For speaking of them supposes no more than that a substantial number of the rebels found their actions mutually intelligible, and inquires into nothing grander than the concrete terms of that intelligibility; and it is on these grounds that ideas may be taken as part of, not impositions on, the events. An obvious example, often discussed, is the rebels' disciplined refusal to take plunder when they destroyed the Savoy.[17] Unless we reject the accounts of that refusal altogether, and it is hard to explain why our sources or their informants would have invented it,[18] we must grant not only that some category of moral judgment was invoked, but, more importantly, that it was pertinent *enough* to *enough* of those present, as an expression of some shared self-understanding, to affect the behaviour of a crowd and therefore the shape of the event. If we do not care what the rebels thought, we risk reaffirming, with some medieval lords, that peasants had nothing but their bellies;[19] and if we do care what they thought, we need to take seriously the moral and theological vocabularies they used.

This bears directly on the historiographical question with which I began. 'If the class struggles of that time appear to bear religious earmarks, if the interests, requirements and demands of the various classes *hid themselves behind a religious screen*, it little changes the actual situation, and is to be explained by conditions of the time':[20] this is Engels, and when we think that revolt has a more natural affinity with heresy than with orthodoxy, we think

[16] Prescott, 'Writing about Rebellion', 18; the sentence quoted refers to Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*.

[17] Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliae*, 289; Knighton, *Chronicle*, 214–15.

[18] Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 91; Eiden, '*In der Knechtschaft*', 237–8.

[19] '. . . nihil extra ventrem'; the reference is to the abbot of Burton-on-Trent's maxim, preserved in G. Wrottesley, 'The Burton Chartulary', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 5 (1884), 85.

[20] F. Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, M. J. Olgin (trans.), (London, 1926), 51; my emphasis.

as his heirs. And with such thoughts there obviously is no point investigating religion in revolt: if class relations throw off religious language as a merely superstructural expression, then understanding that language adds nothing of value to what must be fundamentally an economic account. Now this may seem the shameless construction of a straw man, since scarcely anyone would now claim that ideology works 'to assure, *in the sphere of ideas*, the social reproduction of the existing society by legitimating the prevailing relations of exploitation and the forms of expropriation of surplus',[21] that it legitimates them by enforcing particular *meanings*. Such a model takes meaning to be something implausibly determinate and manageable, and anyhow seems to imply that one could escape ideology merely by changing beliefs. But a post-Althusserian account of ideology is not finally much better. In some ways it can be more subtle and satisfying—conceptually, because it avoids some of these problems by making ideology produce subjects rather than beliefs or cognitions, and methodologically because it therefore directs our attention less to '*ideas*' than to '*practices, rituals, ideological apparatus*', to the whole life-world sustained by institutions, disciplines, and formations of all sorts.[22] This is undeniably attractive, and aligns itself with a certain 'common sense' so fully naturalized for academic discourse that it can be assumed without being argued ('If you believe, you obey').[23] But it is hard to see that anything would *not* fit the category 'ideological' on this account. An unbounded category is analytically vacuous. And in practice the category does disappear in post-Althusserian analysis: as ideology ceases to be defined by a systematic cognitive relation to economic exploitation, it either becomes absorbed into power as such, or becomes fractured into local practices and loses the systemic character that made the concept useful in the first place; that is, it approaches characteristics of Foucault and of Bourdieu, respectively.

Whatever the reason, we still have the unthinking association of revolt with heresy, a quaint habit of thought quite untouched by theoretical refinement. And I would suggest that the very notion of ideology and the discursive habits

[21] H. Frey, 'Religion as an Ideology of Domination', in J. M. Bak and G. Benecke (eds), *Religion and Rural Revolt: Papers Presented to the Fourth Interdisciplinary Workshop on Peasant Studies, University of British Columbia, 1982* (Manchester, 1984), 14, my emphasis; and see the state-of-nature story by which he tries to define the role of 'religion', 15–17.

[22] L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes towards an investigation)', '*Lenin and Philosophy*' *and Other Essays* (New York, 1971), 169.

[23] '. . . croire, c'est obéir'. P. Veyne, *Les grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes? Essai sur l'imagination constituante* (Paris, 1983), 44. The passage continues: 'Le rôle politique de la religion n'est nullement une affaire de contenu idéologique'.

that go with it—in relation to such questions as these, at least—may buy nothing that historical study should want to have. Insofar as it urges upon us that some religious beliefs or practices were inherently more likely to conserve, or to disrupt, relations of production and exploitation than others, all it buys us is a deeper identification with Walsingham, Knighton, the author of the *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, and those other men of church and government whom Aston wittily describes: 'In the mind of God, and in the minds of men attuned to celestial thought, there was a link between misbelief and mayhem.'[24]

This long preamble done, let us turn to the tale, and look at three instances from the rebellion that either might be or might have been taken, by contemporaries or by historians, to indicate the presence of Wycliffite or dissenting or impious attitudes, and see how they look without that predisposition.

The first is straightforward. The various accounts of rebel demands in 1381 say little about the church; there is a desire for a general redistribution of clerical wealth that sounds like Wycliffite disendowment; I'll come back briefly to that. But there is the demand for only 'one bishop' and 'one prelate'.[25] Notice first what this demand does *not* entail. It is *not* analogous to that other demand, that there be no lordship but the king's.[26] I submit that a truly symmetrical analogy to 'no lord but the king'—where the point is the qualitatively different courts and tenants' status and rights—would be, not 'no bishop but one', but 'no bishop but God'. In keeping one bishop, the rebels would leave the episcopacy and episcopal function (also, of course, the priesthood and sacerdotal function). It in no sense rejects the principle or logic of ecclesiastical hierarchy. It would, however, eliminate many very significant and oppressive lords, and this is surely its point. The demand *separates* the episcopal office from episcopal lordship, and preserves the principle and function of church hierarchy while eliminating one of its massive incidental inconveniences. The conclusion sounds odd, to be sure; but it seems to follow from taking seriously the best evidence we have.

This instance addresses the question at a broad level of programme and principle: Did the rebels' demands regard sacramental office and lordship as aspects of a single whole? Did they evidence any desire to undo what we might think was a system of cognitive *and* material domination? On this evidence they did not. The next instance addresses the more concrete level of ritual

[24] Aston, '*Corpus Christi*', 46.

[25] '. . . nulle evesqe serroit en Engleterre fors une, ne nulle prelate fors une'; V. H. Galbraith (ed.), *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333–1381* (Manchester, 1927), 147.

[26] '. . . qe nulle seignur ne averoit seignurie fors swelment estre proporcione entre toutz gentz, fors tansoulement la seignurie la roy'; ibid.

practice and belief, and happily coincides with one of Althusser's instances of how 'regular practices . . . of the ideological apparatus' yield actions and ideas that the good subject illusorily feels he has 'in all consciousness freely chosen': '. . . he goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays . . .'[27] I am thinking of the 'millstone eucharist' at St. Albans Abbey. According to Thomas Walsingham, the abbey had, long before, secured its right of multure over its tenants, and symbolized this victory by paving its parlour floor with the handmills it confiscated from them; in 1381, the rebels at St. Albans repossessed these millstones and distributed the pieces among themselves 'like bread blessed on Sundays'.[28] Two scholars have doubted that there was any eucharistic resonance in the action,[29] but that is simply baffling: the Corpus Christi date, the association with bread, the imitation not only of communion but of the fraction of the host, all make a powerful prima facie case for it. To this another has been added: the widely disseminated devotional image of Christ's passion as the milling of grain.[30] Aston thinks that Walsingham saw in this action the bad influence of heresy and thinks that he was wrong. She is obviously correct in this, but one can say more: not only is there no evidence of heresy, and no need for it in order to give a coherent account of the action, but the gesture's manifest force—associating their productive labour, the ancient rights they believed underlay and protected it, and the community to which those rights belonged with the sacredness of consecrated bread and its power to embody the community that celebrated it—depends quite precisely on those elements of orthodox eucharistic theology that Wyclif most urgently rejected.[31]

As I said earlier, Aston concludes that those contemporaries who linked revolt to sacramental heresy misconstrued the rebels' use of language and gestures with eucharistic associations. But it seems worth asking why those associations were there to be misconstrued in the first place, associations which are too consistent and richly detailed to be thought inadvertent.

[27] Althusser, 'Ideology', 167.

[28] Account in H. T. Riley (ed.), *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani* (Rolls Series, 28, 1869), vol. III, 309; see the discussion in Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 168–9.

[29] Rosamond Faith, review of Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, *EHR*, 113 (1998), 427; and I take this to be what Galloway suggests in his game defence of Walsingham: 'it is Walsingham, not the rebels, who provides the . . . eucharistic simile', 'Making History Legal', 37. Note, however, that Walsingham in fact provides no 'eucharistic simile'; he compares the breaking of the millstones not to the Eucharist, but to the distribution of the *pain bénit*; see Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 158–9 and n.

[30] Aston, '*Corpus Christi*', 27–31.

[31] J. I. Catto, 'Wyclif and the Cult of the Eucharist', *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 4 (1985), 269–86.

However mistaken the conclusions that chroniclers drew from them, their actions show the rich use by the rebels of a still wider range of theological language. I suggest that the most plausible conclusion is the one we would more easily draw if the case in question were not a revolt, but some other and less contentious form of common action: that it drew on the language, thought, habits and imagery of the worship to which they were accustomed, in characterizing the moral and theological basis for their actions. Normative religious belief could encourage and justify rebellion as well as submission, could provide rebels as well as their lords with resources of self-explanation and self-justification; its presence in the language and thought of the revolt is not a problem, and so does not require us to contrive a Wycliffite solution.

But if this is the case, then events like the rising offer the historian an opportunity as well, which I will approach through one last episode and one last question. The episode is the capture and execution of the prior of Bury, as related in the *Electio Timworth*. Like the case just discussed, this story comes not from one of the originating areas of revolt, but from a monastic borough. The reading I offer is suppositious and speculative, and I would not claim more than plausibility for it; but it could show by what kind of mechanisms, and through what sort of practices, the local communities might have construed normative doctrines, practices, and narratives. The *Electio*, by John Gosford, abbey almoner, is not an easy source to evaluate, largely both uncorroborated and uncontradicted; the most we can confidently say is that its narrative is circumstantially detailed and generally plausible, and that is little enough. It is also generally free from obvious moralizing invention. So it is hard to know what to do with this episode in which Gosford describes how the rebels beat and mocked the prior: 'At times they genuflected before him, saying "Hail, Teacher" [*Ave Raby*]; at times they brought him a cup with nothing in it; at times they wounded him, saying "Prophesy who struck you". Thus all night long they wailed and gnashed their teeth at him, as on the night of the last supper the perfidious Jews did to Jesus'.[32] One's impulse is to dismiss this sort of stuff as mere didactic typologizing, making the prior's death a martyrdom in imitation of Christ. But there is nothing else in his account in the style of such gothic polemic. So let me suggest what I grant is only a possibility, at least to see what it might imply.

Dyer has noted the fact of Corpus Christi processions in three Suffolk parishes that produced rebels.[33] There was in fact a Corpus Christi guild in Bury itself; by the time of the 1389 guild returns (before which we can expect

[32] Thomas Arnold (ed.), *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey* (London, 1896), vol. III, 127.

[33] C. C. Dyer, 'The Rising of 1381 in Suffolk: Its Origins and Participants', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, 26 (1988), 274–87.

no evidence) it sponsored an *interludium*—a dramatic entertainment—for Corpus Christi.[34] It was surely not a Corpus Christi cycle of the fifteenth-century sort, though Gail Gibson has very persuasively located the N-Town cycle in Bury.[35] But we know that there were Passion plays in the south of England by the 1390s at least,[36] and some sort of cycle in York by 1376. Let me suggest that, on the supposition that this *interludium* was a Passion sequence,[37] we could imagine that if something like what Gosford described took place, it might have meant something very different to its agents than it did to him. I can only sketch this briefly. Two elements of existing Passion sequences (all of which, again, post-date the fourteenth century) are pertinent here. First, their aesthetic works from delay and intensification, drawing out the sufferings of Christ in what his captors treat as ludic diversion. Second, the accusations launched against Christ—accusations of irreverence, blasphemy and so on—apply in fact to those who accuse and torture him, the Jewish priests and guards and Roman soldiers. It is an interesting but still obvious didactic move—that those who reject goodness see their own guilt projected onto the object of their hatred—but it works with that first element to provoke the audience's desire to see the *mis*placed punishment *rightly* placed: to see the irreverent and blasphemous and treacherous torturers and judges hoist on their own petard. I have elsewhere discussed moments in which the rebels stigmatized the objects of their hatred, like Archbishop Sudbury, by dramatizing the fake claims to holiness that they claimed these prelates made. In this case, it is possible to imagine the rebels at Bury (townspeople, Gosford claims) replaying the action of a Passion sequence, but

[34] K. Young, 'An Interludium for a Gild of Corpus Christi', *Modern Language Notes*, 48 (1933), 85–6. Even Lawrence Clopper, so devastatingly sceptical about terms like *ludus* and *miraculum*, grants that *interludium* usually designates precisely dramatic performance; L. M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, 2001), 132.

[35] G. M. Gibson, 'Bury St Edmunds, Lydgate, and the *N-Town cycle*', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 56–90.

[36] The monk of Westminster records a 1393 performance by London clerics that sounds very like a cycle, and would have included a Passion sequence; L. C. Hector and B. Harvey (eds), *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394* (Oxford, 1966), 476, and the *Tretise of miraclis pleyinge*, with a terminal date in the very early fifteenth century, speaks of audiences 'seing the passioun of crist and of hise seintis', C. Davidson (ed.) *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (Kalamazoo, 1993), 39.

[37] That the *interludium* is said to be *de corpore Christi* presents no difficulty; see A. F. Johnston, 'What if No Texts Survived? External Evidence for Early English Drama', in M. G. Briscoe and J. C. Coldewey (eds), *Contexts for Early English Drama* (Bloomington, 1989), 11–12.

correcting the misprision acted therein by replaying it on those who deserve it—on the prior and Chief Justice Cavendish. If they did so—this is the point—the moral and religious basis for these gruesome and violent actions is one that could have been derived, without intervention of the slightest waver of unorthodoxy, from the vernacular but still doctrinally unobjectionable Passion plays.

One question still needs to be posed: What about disendowment? On the one hand, the proposals for redistributing ecclesiastical revenues do sound uncannily like Wyclif's programme.[38] On the other, knowing what they knew of ecclesiastical lords, one might guess that the desirability of appropriation and redistribution was a conclusion rebels might not have needed help reaching. As scholarship stands, I think that there is no way of deciding between those opposing perspectives. But one observation is in order. What most consistently drives Wyclif's arguments for disendowment is not a set of concepts (like use and dominion), but an image—a characteristically Franciscan image, familiar and by this time normative, of the destitute and suffering Christ.[39] But this image was as available to anyone even moderately instructed in the faith as it was to Wyclif, and so were the consequences that might be drawn from it. I continue to find it hard not to imagine that some word of Wycliffite disendowment had reached someone among the rebels, and have argued that there is no difficulty thinking that it might have; but if so, it could not have been, very profoundly, news.

I claimed at the beginning that exploring matters like this could help us better understand the rebellion. I want to conclude by suggesting that it could also help us to a better understanding medieval Christianity as it was encountered 'on the ground'. The last three decades or so have seen a newly vigorous scholarship on western medieval Christianity, of a character vaguely analogous to the vigorous scholarship on rural society that Hilton did so much to energize. In both the contributions are too numerous, and the achievements too rich, to be usefully represented by footnoted lists; as Hilton's name may serve as emblem for the latter, so those of André Vauchez and Caroline Bynum may do for the former. If the last generation of scholarship on medieval Christianity has shown anything clearly, it is that the doctrines, rites, practices and languages of devotion, far from freezing into an unblinking dogmatic stare, exhibited an almost alarming plasticity, that even in its most aggressively normative forms, religious belief and sentiment were conflicted, various and multivocal. The crude and tacit notion of ideology underlies the reflex association of unorthodoxy and rebellion groundlessly and

[38] See especially the details in Galbraith (ed.), *Anonimalle Chronicle*, 147.

[39] Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 83–4; Justice, 'Lollardy', 665–6.

pointlessly assumes that those who rebelled were unable to find and harness orthodoxy's provocative energies. I suggest, by contrast, that the religious elements in the thought of the rebellion are testimony to how that normative religion and ordinary worship could be construed through the experience of groups like those who rebelled; and the seeming appeal of that construction to large numbers of them shows how persuasively it must have seemed to embody what they must have seen and heard when they saw and heard their liturgies. One of Rodney Hilton's lessons was the resourcefulness of local communities; such an approach as I'm suggesting could explore how they used conceptual and imaginative, as well as material, resources available to them.