

## JOHN WYCLIF: CHRISTIAN PATIENCE IN A TIME OF WAR

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*[John Wyclif (d. 1384) was well acquainted with the medieval traditions of just war and crusading articulated by theologians and canon lawyers. Yet he had become disillusioned with a Christian society that exploited these traditions to pursue destructive policies of repression and conquest, thereby forsaking the eternal Law of Christ. For Wyclif, the Law of Christ calls upon Christians to conform themselves to the poor and humble Christ of the Gospels. While Wyclif never rejected the possibility of a just war in principle, he believed that it was all but impossible in practice. Even where a nation might have a just claim, the better path is always the way of Christ, suffering evil patiently rather than inflicting sufferings upon one's neighbor.]*

BY THE TIME THE ENGLISH THEOLOGIAN John Wyclif was teaching at Oxford University in the latter part of the 14th century the Christian West had already developed highly sophisticated theological and legal doctrines regarding the status of non-Christians outside of its borders and dissenting Christians within. Wyclif was well versed in these doctrines, but he remained deeply suspicious of the motives of the kings and prelates who relied upon them to justify their military campaigns and forceful repression. Despite the many arguments provided by the lawyers and theologians that permitted Christians to take up arms, Wyclif called upon his fellows to put away legal niceties and imitate the poor and humble Christ who suffered patiently out of love for his flock. No matter what canon law may allow, the Catholic is called to follow a higher standard, what Wyclif refers to as the Law of Christ, nothing less than a comprehensive Law of Love. Perhaps it is not surprising to hear Wyclif complain that his own views receive scant attention inasmuch as he is advocating sacrifice and the foregoing of claims to temporal power and possession, however justified they may be under human law. Indeed, the voices of people such as Wyclif have

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largely been ignored or shouted down throughout history, but this voice from the past may yet resonate in the present. Letting past voices speak for themselves, giving them the hearing they may never have received in their own day, can itself be a spiritual task. The calling of the historical theologian is to facilitate that task.

### THE CENTRALITY OF DOMINION

Wyclif's theory of dominion or lordship (*dominium*) has received due consideration from modern scholars.<sup>1</sup> He set forth his theory in his massive 1376 *De civili dominio*<sup>2</sup> which advocated a controversial reform program calling for total clerical disendowment. Its radical nature was not lost on his fellow ecclesiastics, leading Pope Gregory XI to condemn 19 propositions drawn from the work in May 1377.<sup>3</sup> Because Wyclif's doctrine of dominion lies at the heart of his whole conception of a properly ordered Christian society, its basic tenets must be sketched at the outset if we are to better understand his theories on war, peace, and justice. Wyclif held that all dominion ultimately rests with God and is subsequently dispensed to human beings who justly partake of that dominion provided that they abide in a state of grace.<sup>4</sup> In itself this is not a novel position; the papal apologist Giles of Rome said much the same thing at the outset of the 14th century. The crucial difference between the two men is that while Giles placed the papacy at the top of a descending scale of mediated grace, Wyclif argued that the just receive grace directly from God with no need of priestly mediation. Human dominion over the earth, which was lost in the Fall, has been restored through Christ's Passion, thereby establishing the righteous in a state of evangelical dominion that allows them to share in God's eternal dominion.<sup>5</sup> Those who are in the state of grace are adopted children of God, possessing rights to the whole world, while those in mortal sin have no rights to any dominion at all.<sup>6</sup> At the heart of Wyclif's call for reform is

<sup>1</sup> The best monograph on the subject is Stephen E. Lahey's *Philosophy and Politics in the Thought of John Wyclif* (New York: Cambridge University, 2003). For a very good shorter treatment see: Michael Wilks, "Predestination, Property and Power: Wyclif's Theory of Dominion and Grace," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965) 220–36. See also Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (New York: Oxford University, 1985) 42–55; Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 546–49.

<sup>2</sup> The dating of all works throughout depends upon Willliell R. Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> See *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 36th edition, ed. H. Denzinger (Rome: Herder, 1965) nos. 1121–39.

<sup>4</sup> *De civili dominio* I, i, ed. R. L. Poole (London: Wyclif Society, 1885) 5–8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* I, ix, 62–66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* I, i, 1–2.

the principle that all claims to civil dominion depend upon the claimant's enjoyment of restored evangelical dominion. And it is because rightful dominion demands the proper use of what God has entrusted to human beings that any abuse constitutes a sin against divine dominion amounting to theft, thus demanding immediate forfeiture.<sup>7</sup> If it is true that all dominion belongs to God alone, such that human beings only administer it,<sup>8</sup> the question remains as to who will be entrusted with this administrative task. For Wyclif the ardent royalist, the administration of Christian society falls not to the pope, but rather to the king who serves as God's vicar on earth.<sup>9</sup> As the kingdom is one body, one Christian people, so the King of England must regulate his clerics and see that they live in accordance with the Law of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

### Dominion and the Rights of Non-Christians

Having just set forth his theory of grace-based dominion in the *De civili dominio*, Wyclif recognizes that it could be used to justify the expropriation of non-Christians. His opponents will argue, he tells us, that if it is lawful for kings to disendow sinful priests in order to avert them from their sins, then it is all the more lawful to remove temporal goods from infidels, thereby turning them from the mortal sin of their infidelity. In response, Wyclif admits the principle that Christian kings are bound under penalty of mortal sin to correct sinners and see that the gospel is proclaimed to their own people, but it does not follow that they are bound to extend this to Jews and Muslims. The king's first duty is to correct the enemies within his own realm. Only after he has succeeded in converting them should he turn to the infidels. In fact, says Wyclif, the domestic enemies (caesarean prelates) do far more harm to the Church through their avarice, and prove themselves greater enemies of the cross of Christ and evangelical law, than do Jews and Pagans. Truth be told, the Church would do a much more effective job at converting the infidels were she to return to the primitive evangelical poverty she has since forsaken. Unfaithful Christians are the ones to blame if other nations will not come to the faith. For while they preach the rejection of temporal goods and say we must aspire to charity and peace, the fact is that there are no people on earth who more ardently seek after civil dominion and property, thereby working against the virtue of charity.<sup>11</sup> This is a theme we will encounter again; rather than dwelling

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. I, vi, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. I, iv, 28.

<sup>9</sup> *De officio regis* I, ed. A. Pollard and C. Sayle (London: Wyclif Society, 1887) 4–5.

<sup>10</sup> *De potestate papae* XII, ed. J. Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1907) 377.

<sup>11</sup> *De civili dominio* II, ii, 8–9.

on the supposed evils of the infidels, Christians would do better to conform their own lives to the gospel ideal, which for Wyclif is characterized by charity, peace, and humility.

At the outset we can concur with the assessments of some modern scholars. Lahey believes that Wyclif's theology of grace-based dominion exhibited in *caritas* led to a fair bit of tolerance, even if he was not an explicit advocate for such with regard to Jews and Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that Wyclif's discussion of Jews is largely free from the vitriol that pervaded the works of some medieval Christian authors.<sup>13</sup> Muldoon regards Wyclif's position toward the infidel societies as quite traditional, based upon a just war theory that allowed for defense rather than aggression. He likens Wyclif to Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) on this point, since neither man reckoned grace necessary for dominion in non-Christian societies.<sup>14</sup> In a separate monograph, Muldoon has demonstrated how Pope Innocent IV was the first to draw up a comprehensive theory of papal relations to infidel societies. The pope has jurisdiction and power over the infidels *de iure*, but not *de facto*. As such, the dominion of infidel rulers outside of the Holy Land must be respected in all but extraordinary circumstances. Given the pope's responsibility to see that the gospel is preached to all people, he has the right to send missionaries into the lands of infidel rulers; only should they be refused entry could he call for invasion by Christian armies. Similarly, were an infidel ruler to persecute Christians living in his land, the pope could legitimately remove him from office. It is of note that the great decretalist Hostiensis specifically rejected Innocent's argument and revived the theory of the early 13th-century canonist Alanus Anglicus that infidels had no right to dominion and property, inasmuch as dominion pertained only to those who live by the grace of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

To my knowledge Wyclif never appealed to Innocent IV on this matter, but this may well be due to the fact that Innocent's whole program presupposes an extremely exalted view of the papal office that Wyclif could not accept. Wyclif is content to press his case based upon the Christian virtues of charity and humility. In a 1377 Advent sermon he outlines three kinds of patience that Christians are called to exhibit: that which over-

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Lahey, "Toleration in the Theology and Social Thought of John Wyclif," in *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cary Nederman & John C. Laursen (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) 39–65.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Christopher Levy, "Useful Foils: Lessons Learned from Jews in John Wyclif's Call for Church Reform," *Medieval Encounters* 7 (July 2001) 125–45.

<sup>14</sup> James Muldoon, "John Wyclif and the Rights of Infidels," *Americas* (Academy of American Franciscan History) 36 (1980) 301–16.

<sup>15</sup> James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250–1550* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1979) 4–16.

comes the flesh, that which overcomes the world, and that which overcomes the devil. The first suffers the penalty of fasting and mortification of the flesh. The second suffers the injuries endured in the plundering of temporal goods. And the third suffers insults and threats for the sake of Christ. Wyclif then admonishes his fellow Christians who have no one to blame but themselves for their woes. Drunkenness and care for worldly things are the reasons why the infidels are able to conquer Christians today. If the infidels are to be overcome, this will only happen when Christians start to practice the virtues and observe the Law of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

### JUST WAR DURING THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR

When Wyclif wrote about war in the late 14th century his primary concern was not war with the Muslims, but with the French. And when he wrote about crusading it was not against Islam, but against fellow Christians during the Great Western Schism. It will be best to approach these topics in chronological order so as to examine the changing circumstances Wyclif is reacting to as he address the responsibilities of Christian kings as well as the role of the clergy in times of war. As already noted, Wyclif's *De civili dominio* dates to 1376, in the last years of King Edward III's long reign, and thus during the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). At the time Wyclif is writing one should know that, with the rise of the common infantry, battles had become much bloodier. There were no ransoms for common men as there might be for the nobles, and the weapons and close-order style of fighting made it very hard to take captives. As for the scale of losses, consider that as many as 10,000 men died at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.<sup>17</sup> Nor should one imagine that war in the 14th century affected only the combatants. Raids (*chevauchées*) were carried out by soldiers who were not guaranteed any pay, which meant that they were expected to make do with what they found in enemy lands. English raids into France could muster thousands of men who would pillage and lay waste to the land, thereby destroying the means of production and undermining confidence in the French king's ability to protect his people. In fact, the area around Cambrai was laid waste early on in the Hundred Years War; so devastating was the suffering of the common people that Pope Benedict XII sent 6,000 gold florins for their relief.<sup>18</sup>

In his epoch-making canon law collection, the *Decretum* (c. 1142),

<sup>16</sup> Sermo 25, in *Sermones* IV, ed. J. Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1890) 216–17.

<sup>17</sup> Clifford J. Rogers, "The Age of the Hundred Years War," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. M. Keen (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999) 136–60.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Allmand, "War and the Non-Combatant in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Warfare: A History* 253–72.

Gratian had defined a just war as one that is waged by edict for the recovery of goods and the repelling of enemy invasion.<sup>19</sup> Here in 1376 Wyclif recounts what had become the three classic theological conditions for a just war: lawful authority, just cause, and right intention.<sup>20</sup> One finds these three criteria expounded by Thomas Aquinas in the previous century. Aquinas said there must be the authority of the sovereigns on whose command the war is waged, inasmuch as they bear the sword to protect the society entrusted to them. Second, there must be a just cause for attacking another people, namely that they had committed some wrong. And third, a right intention must abide among the combatants such that they seek the promotion of the good and avoidance of evil. In fact, a war will be unlawful, even having satisfied the first two requirements, if the third is lacking.<sup>21</sup>

Wyclif, however, relates these criteria through the lenses of his own theory of grace-based dominion. By the first condition, the one waging the war must be in a state of grace and thus have a right to dominion or vindication of injury under both human and divine law, without which whatever he does will be done unjustly. Wyclif compares the state of the combatant's soul to the good or bad tree that can only produce fruit in kind (Matthew 7:17–18). As we must do all things in love, and thus in the justice of Christ, so the combatant must be fighting for divine justice and not for civil dominion. Following Augustine, Wyclif argues that war is not a good *per se*, but ought to be used as a means to peace, just as an incision can be the means to bodily health. Yet as war can be so spiritually perilous, it is best to take on Christ's easy yoke and follow the *lex Christi* that always proves the best means to peace. Princes would be advised, therefore, to consult their priests and Holy Scripture to determine whether all the proper conditions have been met.<sup>22</sup> This last point is crucial. Wyclif con-

<sup>19</sup> *Decretum* C. 23, Q. 2, c. 1, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol. 1, ed. E. Friedberg (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959) 894: "Iustum est bellum, quod ex edicto geritur de rebus repetendis, aut propulsandorum hominum causa." With slight variation, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XVIII, c. 1; PL 82.639b-c. See also Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum* 10, c. 116; PL 161.727a.

<sup>20</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 240: "Supposito ergo ex alibi declaratis quod tres condiciones necessarie rectificant iustum bellum, scilicet iusta vendicacio, licita auctorisacio et recta intencio . . ."

<sup>21</sup> *Summa theologiae* 2–2, q. 40, a. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 240–241, at 241: "Ideo dicit Augustinus epistola ad Bonifacium . . . vult enim dicere quod bellum non est per se bonum, sed mediare debet ad pacem, sicut incisio vel amara pocio ad corporis sanitatem; et sic lex Christi que facillime, securissime, et brevissime mediat ad pacem oportunam lex est in isto actu maxime attendenda. Rectores igitur reipublice consulendo presbiteros et scripturam possunt cum istis circumstanciis debellare." See *Decretum* II, C. 23, Q. 1, c. 3; Friedberg 1:892; quoting Augustine, Ep. 189; *CSEL* 57;135: "Non pax quaeritur, ut bellum excitetur, sed bellum geritur, ut pax adquiratur."

sistently emphasizes the intention of the combatant, that he must not have his mind set on fame, lust for dominion, or the zeal to vindicate his own injury. As these are easy traps to fall into, so war is the most dangerous of arts when it comes to observing the rules of charity, which are themselves necessary for salvation. Hence if it was unlawful in the Old Testament to invade without special revelation, it is all the more so in the age of the New Testament where fraternal charity should be universal and adhered to even more intensely.<sup>23</sup>

### The Right Intention of the Combatant

Wyclif raises the standard of proper intention to rather high, perhaps even unrealistic, levels as he measures all human behavior by the *lex Christi*, an uncompromising rule of humility and charity. The Law of Christ forbids fighting for temporal goods, thereby rendering all such battles illicit. Ideally, says Wyclif, the goods of all Christians would be held in common. Ownership is a burden to be rejected, not fought for. And so, throughout the New Testament, fighting of this sort is never approved but always prohibited.<sup>24</sup> He laments that the reality of war means not only that simple innocent people are killed on both sides, but that the survivors eventually fall from grace as the rigors of battle harden them in their hatred. The irony is that all those who go to war for the love of civil possessions rather than love of neighbor sin mortally, such that they end up forfeiting the right to the very civil dominion they are seeking. Thus princes are advised not to expose themselves to the spiritual danger of using war to seek civil dominion without a special revelation from God. And if by chance the prince really is waging war to correct an unjust occupation he would still do better to correct his enemy with an example of humility, thereby accruing spiritual goods for having relinquished his own rightful claims. Wyclif's keen, if cynical, view of human motivation leads him to conclude that there simply are no winners in the end. War corrupts all sides, the invaders and the invaded, as all are equally caught up in the scandal of pride, wrath, and avarice. He can only voice his astonishment at the prelates who are counseling the most merciful King Edward to invade France.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. xvii, 242–243.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. xvii, 233–234: “. . . sed longe plus distat a lege Christi pro temporalibus sic pugnare. . . . Similiter, cum omnia bona christianorum debent esse communia, et esse proprietarium sit onus atque abiectio . . . Similiter, in lege Christi foret pugna huiusmodi, si esset licita approbata, sed in toto novo testamento non videtur pugna huiusmodi approbata sed potius reprobata.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. xvii, 238–239, at 239: “Nec dubium quin altrinsecus spoliantes et spoliati, invadentes et invasi nunc fastu, nunc ira et nunc avaricia se reciproce scandalisant.”

At the outset of *Causa* 23, the section of the *Decretum* devoted to the Christian use of force, Gratian had raised the question whether war does not by definition violate the tenets of evangelical law. He will conclude that waging war is not a sin so long as it is not waged for the sake of plunder. Taking his cue from Augustine, Gratian argues that the patience counseled by Christ (Matthew 5:39) refers to the inner disposition of the combatant's heart.<sup>26</sup> Further on in the *Decretum* Gratian commented that vindication must not be sought for the love of vindication itself, but out of zeal for justice; not so that hatred may be exercised, but that depravity corrected.<sup>27</sup> Wyclif would seem to be in line with this classic position, when insisting that we are bound under pain of mortal sin to keep the commandments of God and never persecute our brother unless out of fraternal love, thus loving him more than all goods of fortune. And yet when theory moves to practice, Wyclif is notably pessimistic, stating flatly that in the midst of war it is actually impossible to keep this commandment, which means that it is impossible to avoid sin in war, thereby rendering it unlawful for a Catholic to fight.<sup>28</sup> Thus what is possible in principle proves all but impossible in practice, seeing as the combatant would have to maintain a consistently virtuous wrath. A virtuous, as opposed to vicious, wrath is directed against a sinner out of zeal for justice and the good of the Church, as when Phineas slew the fornicators (Numbers 25:7–8) and Mattathias struck down the idolaters (1 Maccabees 2:44–47). Such wrath does not seek to vindicate personal injury nor do evil to the enemy. It is born out of love, as when Christ cast out the money changers (Matthew 21:12–13) and referred to Peter as Satan (Matthew 16:23).<sup>29</sup>

### Lawful Authority

Just as Wyclif sets a high standard for proper intention, so he does also for sufficient authority that amounts to authorization from Christ himself, the Head of the Church. And yet Christ's own law counsels peace not war, which means that the prince will have to await some special revelation that Christ has authorized any such action as a lawful war. Wyclif recounts the

<sup>26</sup> *Decretum* II, C. 23, Q. 1, c. 7, Friedberg 1:894: "Ex his omnibus colligitur, quod militare non est peccatum, et quod precepta paciencie in preparatione cordis, non ostentatione corporis servanda sunt." See Augustine, Ep. 138; *CSEL* 44.138.

<sup>27</sup> *Decretum* C. 23, Q. 4, c. 54; Friedberg 1:928: "Ex his omnibus colligitur, quod uindicta est inferenda non amore ipsius uindictae, sed zelo iusticiae; non ut odium exerceatur, sed ut prauitas corrigatur."

<sup>28</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 236–237: "Sed in bellis impossibile est hoc servare, ergo in bellis impossibile est non peccare et per consequens non licet catholico sic bellare."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* xvii, 237.



standard view that the goal of every war must be peace, but argues that following the evangelical counsels is surely the best means to such an end, for were one to promulgate them there would then be no reason for war in the first place.<sup>30</sup> Waging war on the basis of a divine revelation is not so far-fetched in Wyclif's England. In January 1377, while the papacy was still in Avignon and the war against the French was not going well, two royal officials addressed Parliament extolling the virtues of King Edward III. This was the king's last Parliament and the one in which Richard was named as heir to the throne. Here the crowd was told that divine favor rested upon England because Edward and his family had been blessed by God in a way none had been before. What is more, the peace promised to Israel by the Psalmist (Psalm 128:6) was in fact meant for England, the true inheritance of God. Indeed, God would not have honored England with such victories over her enemies were she not the *hereditas Dei*. And now God has sent forth Richard like the very Son of God to redeem his chosen people.<sup>31</sup> While Wyclif was a champion of an *Ecclesia Anglicana* guided by the king and free from all papal interference, he was also well aware of how this idea could be abused in order to justify the most unevangelical ends.

If Wyclif is going to make the evangelical counsels (not just the precepts) the standard for determining the justice of war, he still must contend with objections based upon the divinely sanctioned wars of the Old Testament. Augustine had dealt with this same issue when debating the Manichees. In his *Contra Faustum*, Augustine offered his classic theory of divine dispensations. God deals with his people in various ways through different stages of history, thereby permitting war in the time of the patriarchs and yet calling for peace in the age of grace. Augustine did, however, allow that in this latter age good men, acting in obedience to God or some other lawful authority, may wage war where right conduct requires them to act, thus inflicting corporeal punishment for the sake of a greater spiritual good. That being said, he was well aware that the real evil of wars is their violence and revengeful cruelty. And it is for that reason that he said that the inner disposition of the combatant is of critical importance.<sup>32</sup> And, as Markus

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. xvii, 243.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Wilks, "Royal Patronage and Anti-Papalism," *Studies in Church History, Subsidia* 5 (1987) 135–63, at 130–32. See *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (London: 1767) II, 362, para. 11, as quoted in Wilks, 131: "... paix sur Israel, pur quel Israel est a entendu l'eritage de Dieu, q'est Engleterre."

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XXII, 74–79; PL 42.447–453. In his *City of God* Augustine writes of how the wise man laments that he is faced with the necessity of waging just wars, for if they were not just he would not have to wage them. Under no illusions as to the reality of war, Augustine finds that anyone who considers their horrors and cruelty will see their misery. Grief, says the saint, is the only response to war. See *De civitate Dei* XIX, 7; CCL 48.671–672.

observes, while Augustine he did not reject just war, he was deeply troubled by the enthusiasm of many Christians who, from the time of the Emperor Theodosius, imbued war with religious significance.<sup>33</sup>

Wyclif charges his opponents with having missed a central distinction between the two testaments. That earlier period of world history was marked by a juvenile affection for temporal things that in turn prefigured the affection for spiritual goods in the time of grace. Like Origen, Wyclif thought that the wars of the Old Testament patriarchs were figures of the spiritual wars to be fought in the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> Just as the legal and ceremonial obligations have passed away, so in all things shadow has ceded to truth. And like Augustine, Wyclif recognized that each age has its own peculiar set of circumstances that God takes into consideration. The Old Testament fathers received a unique law when they were surrounded by infidels such that they were authorized by God to wage war against his adversaries. Times have changed; the New Testament commandment is to preach the gospel to every creature and love all men by forgiving them the injuries they inflict, just as Christ did. It is by imitating the humble and patient Christ that the nations should be converted.<sup>35</sup>

### The Role of the Christian Knight

The medieval Church needed to find a place for the warrior class, those aristocratic men-at-arms. They were to be the defenders of their country and their faith. According to Gratian's *Decretum* it is lawful for Catholics to mount a defense against heretics, to take up arms against enemies of the Church, to defend one's country against barbarians, and to fight against robbers and pirates.<sup>36</sup> The *De civili dominio* was designed to give solid theological support to the lay nobility in their ongoing power struggle with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Wyclif himself enjoyed the protection of the most powerful man in England: John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. It stands to reason, therefore, that Wyclif would outline the role of the knight in Christian society. Traditionally knights (*milites/bellatores*) were understood to have only one essential function in society: to wage war. As Wyclif explains the duties of the knight he argues that military campaigning is not their sole purpose. The knight has important tasks to perform right here at

<sup>33</sup> R. A. Markus, "Augustine on the 'Just War'," in *The Church and War*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 1-13.

<sup>34</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 247. See *Decretum* II, C. 23, Q. 1, c. 1; Friedberg 1:890; quoting Origen, *Homilia XV In Librum Iesu Nave*; PG 12.897a-b.

<sup>35</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 249: "In novo vero testamento cum praeceptum est evangelium predicari cuilibet creature et omnes homines diligere remittenda est iniuria cuilibet instar Christi, cum per hoc medium omnes gentes debent converti."

<sup>36</sup> *Decretum* C. 23, Q. 3, c. 3-6; Friedberg 1:897.

home. He must use coercive power where need be to defend the goods of fortune belonging to the worshippers of God and preserve them from injustice. And he must also use his coercive power to defend them from those would do damage to their goods of nature through violence, as when Paul found protection with the Roman soldiers (Acts 23:12–24). The knight may also fight for the goods of virtue, thereby defending the Law of Christ. In this vein, Wyclif echoes the traditional line that only obstinate rebels against the Church, as opposed to the more malleable sort who can be dealt with by the clergy, are to be delivered to the secular arm and duly castigated by these knights of peace. It is even lawful for knights to fight against ferocious enemies of the laws of Christ, and against infidels, provided that it has been revealed to the clergy that they are to be castigated by the corporeal sword, having neglected previous exhortations.<sup>37</sup> As Wyclif notes in a later sermon, in addition to fighting against the enemies of Christ, knights should be serving God by performing the seven works of mercy. He is cognizant of the realities of a soldier's life and its attendant spiritual dangers. Christ and the Holy Spirit declare that oppression and invasion are prohibited if not done out of charity, though soldiers are quite prone to transgress this boundary. They must not incite war, something which they are also very prone to do. And they are to abide quietly in charity and not murmur for temporal goods, since it is clear that the knight's duty stands principally in the service of God, having put away temporal wars.<sup>38</sup> Wyclif recognizes that in a properly ordered society there will be men-at-arms whose job it is to enforce justice and keep the peace. What he does not countenance, however, is a professional class of conquerors and killers.

### The Right to Self-Defense

Wyclif admits that it is lawful to use force to repel force, though not by invading another, but rather by defending the homeland. In this instance Wyclif is following a centuries-old legal principle. At the outset of his *Decretum*, Gratian, following Isidore of Seville, states that natural law (*ius naturale*) is common to all nations, maintained by an instinct of nature and not by a particular constitution. Among other things, natural law allows for the repelling of violence through force (*violentiae per vim repulsio*).<sup>39</sup> The decretists and decretalists followed suit and allowed this sort of self defense to all people under natural law and the law of nations (*ius gentium*), thereby accepting the principle of Roman civil law that violence could be repelled by violence. Still, certain conditions had to be met. The defensive

<sup>37</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xvii, 254–55.

<sup>38</sup> Sermo 13, in *Sermones* III, ed. J. Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1889) 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Decretum* I, c. 7; Friedberg 1.2. See, Isidore, *Etymologiae* V, c. 4; PL 82.199b.

action had to be immediate (*incontinenti*), and in order to be blameless had to be carried out in moderation (*moderamen inculpatē tutele*).<sup>40</sup> In other words, the right of self-defense was not to be used as a pretext for some future attack or barbaric blood-letting. Wyclif repeats the position of the canonists on these two points of immediate and moderate inculpable defense. Immediate, he says, means while the enemy is invading, and then with such moderation as the defense demands. Only then it is inculpable before God and man.<sup>41</sup>

Having said all this, Wyclif remains forever wary of anyone's ability to meet the requirements for even the legitimate defense against invasion. While it is lawful for a layman to defend his homeland, Wyclif warns that given the spiritual difficulties involved in such action it is always far more dangerous than following the counsels of Christ.<sup>42</sup> But whereas it is permissible for laymen to stand and fight, the priest is told to flee if a violent enemy wishes to kill him. If it happens that he can flee no further, or cannot evade the enemy, he has three options. First, he may resist him with arms and moderate mutilation, but this is a secular and dangerous way of proceeding. Second, he may throw him to the ground and hold him down with the fraternal care of charity. The third option is the most secure: having prudently spoken some soothing words to his enemy in order to preserve charity, the priest will humbly suffer death. Wyclif recounts here a rather ingenious argument which he will then proceed to reject, namely that the priest ought to kill the invader before he himself is killed; for by killing the invader the priest would thereby save this man from committing the mortal sin of homicide. But Wyclif finds that this line of action runs counter to the whole school of martyrdom. Instead, I should love the soul of the enemy more than my own body; but that need not push me to homicide, nor must it lead to the damnation of my neighbor's soul. Through patient suffering one may acquire the celestial aureole by softening the wrath of the enemy which would otherwise mean the death of his soul. By laying down my life for the invader in charity he would thus become my friend, thereby profiting not only me and him, but the whole Church through this glorious martyrdom. For there is no greater cause of martyrdom than the defense of the Law of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

But Wyclif's opponents argue that self-defense is founded upon the law

<sup>40</sup> Frederick H. Russell, *Just War in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University, 1975) 131–33.

<sup>41</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xviii, 260.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* xviii, 272–73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* xviii, 273: "Nam ego acquirerem ex paciencia corpori meo repositam aureolam, mitigarem iram hostis ubi occisa anima dampneretur, et sic ponendo animam meam pro ipso, quem ut sic facerem amicum, proficerem utrique nostrum et toti ecclesie per gloriosum martirium."

of nature that permits one to repel force with force. Since all animate and inanimate bodies naturally resist the forces that strive to destroy them, so human beings too must follow the indispensable law of nature. Yet Wyclif counters that just as inanimate things do not resist unless for their own good, so neither should man. We ought not scandalize our brethren by either word or deed. Instead, by patience and goodwill we can overcome the invader and in this way repel corporeal force with spiritual force. After all, God has granted clerics the arms of the apostles and the patience of the martyrs so that we might be able to conquer the adversaries of the cross of Christ through good works.<sup>44</sup>

### The Role of Clerics in War

Wyclif is opposed to priestly engagement in any actual fighting, a position which is certainly in keeping with traditional theory. He notes that it is one thing to fight and another to give counsel about fighting; one thing for a priest and another for a layman; one thing for Old Testament priests and another for New Testament priests. Here he has recourse to the *Decretum* which states that certain things, such as clerical violence, which had been lawful in the Old Testament, are now prohibited. Wyclif declares it illicit for a priest to fight in any cause, though he is permitted to give prudent counsel to the combatants and offer spiritual suffrage.<sup>45</sup> Of course, in an age when the higher clergy wielded considerable temporal power, some argued that it is just as lawful for them to use their might in their own defense as it is for secular lords. Wyclif's response is memorable: priests also have reproductive organs like secular lords, but have castrated themselves to become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.<sup>46</sup>

At any rate, Wyclif's views on clerical violence were mainstream. Aquinas also opposed clerical participation in combat. The holy office is centered around the altar; it is not about shedding blood, but being willing to shed one's own blood for the sake of Christ. The clergy are to protect their flock with the spiritual sword, only resorting to excommunication where need be. As such, prelates and clerics may not take up arms, though they can minister spiritually to those fighting for a just cause, exhorting and absolving them. It is not that war is inherently sinful, says Thomas, but it does not befit the clerical office. To fight a just war may even be meritorious, but clerics are called to works of greater merit.<sup>47</sup> Within his *Decre-*

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. xviii, 274–75.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. xviii, 261–62. See *Decretum* II, C. 23, Q. 8, c. 14; Friedberg 1:956. The rubric reads: "Quedam in ueteri testamento licebant, que modo prohibentur."

<sup>46</sup> Sermo 13 in *Sermones* III, 103.

<sup>47</sup> *Summa theologiae* 2–2, q. 40, a. 2.

tum Gratian comments that priests are not to bear arms, but should exhort those who take up arms when fighting the enemies of God.<sup>48</sup> As for the later canonists, they recognized that ecclesiastical authorities could declare war against enemies of the Church, but clerics were only permitted to travel with the army and offer spiritual aid; they were not to engage in any fighting.<sup>49</sup> Bear in mind that during the Hundred Years War the clergy had a duty to arm themselves and serve as a home guard. Bishops and religious houses in the south of England were to provide defenses against French raids. Furthermore, as the king's clerks, priests were responsible for raising funds for war and procuring equipment. And in the field they not only served as chaplains, but handled mundane activities like the distribution of pay. On the home front they informed the people of the war's progress and urged them to pray for victory.<sup>50</sup> As we shall see, some clerics went further than this.

Rather than occupying their time with worldly concerns and corporeal warfare, Wyclif wanted the clergy to take up a heroic spiritual battle that may indeed lead to their own bodily deaths. Martyrdom was a theme that ran consistently through Wyclif's works and became more urgent as the years went by. Here in 1376, with his great call for a *Reformatio ecclesiae*, he beseeches his fellow priests to suffer death if need be to achieve this end. He castigates himself and his fellows for their tepid attitude during this supposed peace of the Church. There are more reasons for martyrdom now than there were for the many saints who have since been canonized. The consequences of pushing reform will be dire, he warns, as many false clerics are going to react violently to any infringement upon their privileges. Were we to sharpen the theological virtues with the sword of Christ and attack the carnal peace that abides among the so-called clergy of today we would find that death and persecution surely follow. He calls upon the true soldiers of Christ to put away temporal possessions and subject their necks to the service of the *lex Christi*, defending it in preaching and scholastic disputation even to the point of shedding their own blood if need be, since faith assures us that whoever perseveres to the end will be saved (Mark 13:13).<sup>51</sup> For all that, it must be admitted that during his own lifetime there is no record of Wyclif or his Oxford followers enduring anything more than the threat of violence or imprisonment.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Decretum* 23, Q. 8, pars 2; Friedberg 1:954.

<sup>49</sup> Russell, *Just War* 111–12.

<sup>50</sup> A. K. McHardy, "The English Clergy and the Hundred Years War," in *The Church and War* 171–78.

<sup>51</sup> *De civili dominio* II, xviii, 274.

<sup>52</sup> See Michael Wilks, "Wyclif and the Great Persecution," in *Studies in Church History*, *Subsidia* 10 (1994) 39–63.

## CLERICS, POPES, AND SCHISM

In 1379 Wyclif composed his *De officio regis*, a typical "mirror for princes" to aid the young King Richard II who had recently ascended to the throne. There had been a major new development since the writing of the *De civili dominio*, however, namely the outbreak of the Great Western Schism the year before, as England aligned with the Roman Urban VI against the Avignon Pope Clement VII. As one would expect, Wyclif says that war is only lawful when waged for the sake of charity toward God and neighbor. But he is now more forthright in expressing his distrust of the clergy, here warning the king not to follow those clerics who counsel their secular lords to go to war for worldly honor and dominion. Let them instead seek works of perfection, joyfully suffering injury in hope of greater reward.<sup>53</sup> A king should be content with one kingdom and not seek to conquer another unless perhaps he receives a special revelation telling him to destroy the enemies of God.<sup>54</sup> Wyclif exhorts the king to consider all the effort and expense spent on warfare that could more easily be applied elsewhere for the sake of God. Indeed, the whole enterprise smacks of foolishness, especially since, having fortuitously obtained victory, the victor is all the more prone to sin.<sup>55</sup> He marvels at the perversion of the order of charity, as kings go to war against foreign enemies when they should seek first to correct the many crueler enemies within their own kingdom. Let them forego war and instead live as evangelical men, correcting their enemies in some more fitting way than demanding restitution even unto death. And in point of fact, says Wyclif, they usually end up punishing the innocent more severely than the guilty.<sup>56</sup>

Wyclif finds that waging war within Christendom is not only contrary to Scripture, but is even against natural law.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the whole of created nature is a *liber naturalis* telling us how we ought to love God and neighbor.<sup>58</sup> We see the mutual suffrage at work not only for the human race, but for the entire created universe that testifies to us that every man ought to love and serve his neighbor.<sup>59</sup> God gave humanity the law of nature so that human beings might love and care for one another. Yet the human race has undergone a monstrous transformation. Wolves love their fellow wolves and serpents their fellow serpents, while men love horses and dogs more than their fellow human beings, treating one another so cruelly. Moreover, by the law of nature every man is a servant of God and subject to him, to whom alone vengeance is reserved.<sup>60</sup> Hence the modern warrior must ask

<sup>53</sup> *De officio regis* XII, 261.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 262.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 272–73.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 263.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 262.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 271.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 262.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* XII, 265.

himself whether God has revealed to him that he has been instituted as the one to seek God's vengeance. For without such revelation the war will be unlawful. Unless he proceeds chiefly from love, so that he invades his neighbor for the sake of mitigating his evil, and not for temporal gain, then the whole affair will be damnably infected.<sup>61</sup>

### The Counsel of Clerics

Wyclif thought the king would best be served by the wise counsel of a circle of theologians who could demonstrate that war is far more dangerous today than it was in the Old Law. The Old Testament saints waged war by divine revelation against the infidels for the sake of the inheritance that the Lord had granted them. But modern people are without such revelations, though they do have the counsels of Christ which are more obligatory than the dictates of any earthly prince or spiritual superior. It is far safer to conform oneself to the Law of Christ than to take a chance on what is most likely going to be unjust war. Once again taking a jab at the clergy, he says they should be counseling peace instead of squandering the alms the secular lords have given them. And secular lords should beware the lies of Antichrist when he invokes the precept of natural law that one is permitted to repel force with force (*vim vi repellere*) on the grounds that beasts do the same. This may well be true, but princes are called to a higher standard, to imitate the King of Peace who suffered patiently.<sup>62</sup>

Wyclif is convinced that it is the clergy who are really pushing for war. He attacks the notion that princes who confer goods upon the Church end up prevailing in battle, noting that the Saracens likewise argue that Muhammad is greater than Christ when they defeat Christian armies with their prayers. Better to take a spiritual tack, for we would be dearer to God were we to prevail over the enemies of our soul and abound in peace, maintaining the apostolic poverty of the Church, and keeping the counsels of the *regula christiana*.<sup>63</sup> Wyclif also charges the prelates with a sophistical use of the spiritual sword which only leads to war. When wielding that sword does not suffice to bring them the lucre and temporal honor they seek, they argue that recourse to temporal war is lawful, all the while forgetting Christ's command that Peter sheath his sword (John 18:11).<sup>64</sup> Rather than resisting the enemy violently, everyone should be willing to make the great migration from this age, accepting with joy the transference from misery to beatitude. But many clerics have been blinded by the prince of this world, thereby abolishing the apostolic teaching which would much rather suffer the death of the body than that of the soul. Nor is Wyclif moved by his opponents' admission that, while they do not walk so perfectly as the

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. XII, 263.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. XII, 278.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. XII, 276-77.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. XII, 270.



martyrs and confessors, they still proceed safely enough down the path of salvation. These days, says Wyclif, many pass along the wide road of a false peace, when it is the priests above all who are called to imitate the way of the apostles in their spiritual fight. Rather than promulgating the gospel of the apostles, however, they look to the pseudo-Christ; rather than take up the struggle of the martyrs they seek riches and honors.<sup>65</sup>

### Warring Popes

The Schism was underway by 1378 and very much on Wyclif's mind as he writes about just war. In 1381 at Paris, Pierre d'Ailly outlined two basic ways to end the Schism: the *via rigoris* and the *via amoris*. The first which advocated force, also known as the *via facti*, was held by those who wished to proceed as they would against schismatics, that is, by way of excommunications and the waging of war. The *via amoris* could in turn be broken down into three facets: the calling of a general council, separate councils, and voluntary abdication followed by a new election. As Swanson notes, though the way of force may ultimately have been an unrealistic means for resolving the entire conflict, in the early stages, while each side was convinced of its own righteousness, a military victory would have been proof of divine favor. Actually, force was already being used on a smaller scale as both sides sought to expand the territories of their own subjects.<sup>66</sup>

In a work dated to early 1378, Wyclif declares it nothing less than a mortal sin for the English Church to give financial support to the pope in a war against fellow Christians. Indeed, the very fact that such a war is born of the clerical desire to hold civil dominion renders it invalid from the start. Furthermore, it is unlawful for any layman to wage war except out of love for the neighbor he is fighting, whom he ought to love in body and soul more than all temporal goods and worldly dominion. Wyclif appeals to the canonist Guido de Baysio that anyone who kills another commits a sin, unless he does so in the manner of a father castigating a son, namely out of love. And yet here is a case, says Wyclif, where the pope is authorizing wars for the sake of dominion, itself contrary to the papal office, inasmuch as it clearly exceeds all paternal correction. And in so doing he sins mortally. There is no way the pope can claim to be a humble follower of Christ when he pursues such attacks out of his lust for domination.<sup>67</sup> Wyclif also has recourse to Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Consideration* where the saint in-

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. XII, 273–75.

<sup>66</sup> R. N. Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism* (New York: Cambridge University, 1979) 45–49.

<sup>67</sup> *De paupertate Christi* VIII, in *Opera minora*, ed. J. Loserth (London: 1913) 25–26. See Guido, *Rosarium* 23 Q. 5, *Excommunicatorum*. Guido is commenting upon Gratian's *Decretum* C. 23, Q. 5, c. 47; Friedberg 1:945.

structed Pope Eugene III to wield the spiritual, not the material, sword. Wyclif is not going to let the secular lords shirk their responsibility here either. For as Saint Paul teaches, the one who consents to the crime is also guilty (Romans 1:32). Thus kings sin gravely when they not only consent, but even encourage such crimes, as they transfer the goods of the kingdom for this cause under the guise of alms. Wyclif concludes that while it is lawful for a secular lord, under the proper circumstances, to go to war and to seek the counsel of priests, it is never lawful for a pope to authorize such a war for the sake of his own secular domination. That being said, he still admits the traditional view that the pope may ask secular lords to invade obstinate infidels or barbarians who would otherwise consume the goods of the Church.<sup>68</sup> The wars between two rival popes hardly meet this criterion.

### THE FLANDERS CRUSADE

Wyclif's later writings about war are dominated by the Flanders Crusade led by Bishop Despenser of Norwich under the auspices of the Roman Pope Urban VI. It would be fair to say that this crusade managed to encapsulate everything Wyclif abhorred in the late medieval Church. In November 1378 Urban VI had issued a bull granting indulgences to those who took up arms against the schismatics; it was published in England in the spring of the following year. Then in March 1381, Urban issued two bulls which granted Bishop Despenser the power to grant indulgences for all those who took part or contributed to the crusade against Clement VII. Note that these indulgences promised full remission of sins (*plena remissio peccatorum*).<sup>69</sup> The friars were very much involved in the selling of these indulgences, while Archbishop Courtenay preached the crusade and declared all those who opposed it heretics. In May 1382 Despenser received another bull to preach against schismatics and take action against his adversaries. He set sail for the Continent on May 16, 1383 planning to take with him 3,000 men-at-arms and an equal number of archers. Just five months later the French were in control of all the towns Despenser had

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. VIII, 26. When quoting this passage Wyclif conveniently skips Bernard's concession of the two swords (spiritual and material) to the papacy in his famous reading of Luke 22:38. See Bernard, *De consideratione* IV, 3, 7 in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 3, ed. J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963) 454. On Wyclif's reading of Bernard, see Paul de Vooght, "Du 'De Consideratione' de saint Bernard au 'De Potestate Papae' de Wyclif," *Irénikon* 25 (1953) 114–32.

<sup>69</sup> See Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, vol. 2, ed. H. T. Riley (London: Rolls Series, 1864) 77: "Item, conceditur omnibus transeuntibus suis propriis sump-tibus et expensis, vel etiam alicujus expensis, plena remissio peccatorum, et tot privilegia conceduntur secum transeuntibus [sicut transeutibus] in Terrae Sanctae subsidium conceduntur."

earlier captured as well as Flanders itself. As for the fact that this bishop was leading an army, Aston points out that, while Despenser had exceeded his mandate from Urban by leading the crusade as its military commander, it was really not that unusual for English bishops to take the lead in the battle field. Archbishop Zouche, for instance, had led troops against the Scots at Neville's Cross in 1346.<sup>70</sup>

Wyclif had originally placed his confidence in Urban VI, convinced that he did not authorize the crime of war, but was instead seduced by the false friars (*pseudofrateres*), who are promoting this cause through their preaching and thus despoiling the Church with their bogus collections.<sup>71</sup> Though Wyclif, a secular cleric, had been on good terms with the mendicant orders for many years, he had turned against them with a vengeance by 1381 following their role in the condemnation of his eucharistic theology that led to his expulsion from Oxford. He would now blame the friars for stoking the fires of war particularly through the preaching of indulgences.

### Crusade Indulgences

Indulgences had always been integral to the crusading enterprise, but they were often misrepresented or misunderstood. Key terms such as guilt (*culpa*) and punishment (*poena*) could be used with little precision. As the medieval theologians well knew, indulgences pertain to the relaxation of the punishment (*poena*) that is imposed by a priest following confession and absolution. The remission of sins (*remissio peccatorum*) and the erasure of their accompanying guilt (*culpa*) belong to God alone and are pronounced by the priest following the penitent's confession. It is within the confines of the sacrament of penance that mortal sins are forgiven. Unfortunately, good theology often fell by the wayside when it came to rallying the troops. With the calling of the First Crusade, the Council of Clermont in 1095 properly stated that the crusade will be reckoned as the equivalent for all penance (*iter illud pro omni poenitentia reputetur*).<sup>72</sup> Yet a month after the council, Pope Urban II decreed the remission of all sins for crusaders (*remissio omnium peccatorum*). Not long after that he seems to have corrected himself, however, now saying they would receive a com-

<sup>70</sup> On the Despenser Crusade and its aftermath see, Margaret Aston, "The Impeachment of Bishop Despenser," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 38 (1965) 127-48; Michael Wilks, "Roman Candle or Damned Squib: The English Crusade of 1383," in *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000) 253-72.

<sup>71</sup> *De dissensione paparum*, in *Polemical Works in Latin*, vol. 2, ed. R. Budden-sieg (London: Wyclif Society, 1883) 574.

<sup>72</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought," *American Historical Review* 56 (1951) 472-492, at 480-81.

mutation of penance.<sup>73</sup> Crusading became the specific province of the papacy in the later Middle Ages, as evinced when Hostiensis declared that the right to grant an indulgence is based upon the pope's plenitude of power; the proclamation of a crusade and its indulgence belonged solely to the papal prerogative. And again one is struck by this eminent jurist's definition of the indulgence as the remission of all sins (*remissio omnium peccatorum*).<sup>74</sup>

In late 1382, with the crusade soon to get underway, Wyclif devoted an entire treatise to the subject, the *De cruciata*. He is well aware of the standard position of the canonists, recounting their view that, owing to his plenitude of power, the pope can not only excommunicate his adversaries, but also call for a crusade; and that he may absolve from both guilt and punishment (*culpa et poena*) all those who assist him in a war against whomever he deems an adversary of Christ. But such a pope, says Wyclif, clearly does not follow the way of Christ in humility and poverty, for no one would attempt such a laborious, fretful and doubtful struggle except for the desire for worldly honor and temporal goods.<sup>75</sup> Christ forbade his priests to exercise civil dominion and warned them to expect suffering at the hands of the infidels for the sake of his law on their way to blessedness. Wyclif casts this dispute in the starkest of terms, symptomatic of an evil age. Only a minister of Antichrist could so poison the peace of the Church. It is a manifest lie, indeed the very abomination of the desolation, to suggest that Christ grants such indulgences to those who take up this cause of the devil, for that would render Christ contrary to himself and make him the foremost sinner and disrupter of the Church's peace.<sup>76</sup> It is the devil who seeks to vanquish Christ's gospel, inducing soldiers into the temptation of final impenitence by giving them false hope in the promise of absolution.<sup>77</sup>

The association of reward with death on the battle field was a long-standing Christian tradition adopted from the old Roman notion of a glorious death on behalf of the Roman *patria*. Gratian's *Decretum* appealed to Pope Leo IV (847–855) who said that those who died for the faith and for the salvation of the *patria* merit reward in heaven.<sup>78</sup> And Ivo of Chartres records the words of Pope Nicholas I (858–867) that a soldier dying in battle against pagans and infidels will be made a citizen of heaven. It is said that Almighty God knows who died for the truth of the faith and the

<sup>73</sup> James Brundage, "Holy War and the Medieval Lawyers," in *The Holy War*, ed. Thomas Patrick Murphy (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1976) 99–140, at 119.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 119–20.

<sup>75</sup> *De cruciata* I, in *Polemical Works in Latin*, vol. 2, 589–590.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* II, 592–593.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* X, 628.

<sup>78</sup> Brundage, 117. *Decretum* II, C. 23, Q. 8, c. 9; Friedberg 1:955. The rubric reads: "Celeste regnum a Deo consequitur qui pro Christianorum defensione moritur."

salvation of the *patria*.<sup>79</sup> Wyclif now complains that many are being killed for the sake of this fraudulent spoliation launched by the hypocritical friars. And what makes this especially tragic is that these soldiers have gone to their deaths having been assured by Antichrist that they would ascend to heaven without punishment, while in fact they are dying unfaithfully.<sup>80</sup> There is nothing holy about this war at all; it is just one more bid for civil dominion in the name of Crown and Church which will result in the loss of countless souls.

### A Question of Orthodoxy and Patriotism

One must not forget all the propaganda that accompanied the Flanders crusade. It is a sure sign of the reign of the devil in our own time, warns Wyclif, when the likes of Archbishop Courtenay say that whoever contradicts this mandate, or does not effectively promote it, must be excommunicated and jailed for suspicion of heresy. He laments that those who refuse to take up the cross in Urban's cause are being hit with ecclesiastical censures and many worldly persecutions.<sup>81</sup> And Wyclif complains that those (his own "poor priests") who dissent are being impeded from preaching the gospel, while only those who consent to this crime are permitted to administer the sacraments.<sup>82</sup> When his adversaries claim that the *vox populi* amounts to the *vox Dei*, thereby rendering all who oppose it heretics, Wyclif counters that sheer numbers mean nothing; consider the forty priests set against the one prophet Elijah, who alone remained on the Lord's side (1 Kings 18:22).<sup>83</sup> Nor must one pay attention to the ecclesiastical rank of those who are proclaiming war. Seeing as the pope and his cardinals and their subordinates have renounced patience and charity for the sake of their own vengeance, so God, who is love (1 John 4:8) has renounced them, condemning all their works.<sup>84</sup>

The whole life of Christ as recorded in Scripture resonates with humble patience rather than human vengeance.<sup>85</sup> It is clear that Christ's life was superior to the pope's, and yet Christ prohibited Peter from defending him (John 18:11). By this standard Christ's vicar is hardly permitted to excite men to war for the sake of the caesarean papacy. Nor does Wyclif accept the argument that Christ prohibited Peter only because his action would have impeded the salvation of the whole human race that had to be fulfilled. Christ is all-powerful and could have arranged a different scenario if he had wished to defend his life. But he instead chose to offer an example

<sup>79</sup> Kantorowicz, 481. See Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum* 10, c. 87; PL 161.719d-720a.

<sup>80</sup> *De cruciata* III, 601.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* III, 600.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* V, 605.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* VI, 610.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* V, 608.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* V, 607.

of patience and did not want his vicar to kill his brethren in defense of the papacy.<sup>86</sup> Christ was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and yet by his loving patience prayed for his enemies when they were unjustly persecuting him (Luke 23:34). How then can such papal persecution follow from this prayer? Christ encouraged his apostles so that they would not fear the death leveled by persecutors and taught them to pray for peace for the people. How then can papal bulls and fake suffrages in the cause of killing bring about peace for the people?<sup>87</sup>

As Scripture will always be the standard by which to judge the worth of a prelate, Wyclif need look no further than the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). No longer confident in Urban VI, he observes how for the sake of his own pride the pope strives against Christ through this phony crusade which will lay down the lives of many thousands. Having abandoned faith, hope and love through the labors of crusading many are killed in both body and soul, seduced as they are by Antichrist's fallacious arguments that run completely contrary to the humility and meekness of Christ. For there is nothing that could be more opposed to Christ, who laid down his life even for his enemies, than the pope who lays down the life of so many of Christ's faithful for the sake of worldly domination.<sup>88</sup> While Christ prohibited priests from bearing the sword and called on us to suffer as he so willingly did, the pope is leading armies funded by the goods of the poor so that he can amass still more of that superfluous refuse for himself and his disciples. Men of blood, says Wyclif, can never be worthy of the priesthood of the King of Peace.<sup>89</sup> The pope's absolution bears no similarity to Christ's. Christ taught that by patiently suffering tribulation and bodily pain one's soul would finally be freed from punishment. Yet the pope promises perpetual indulgences to those who assist him in raising the cross against his enemy, thereby circumventing the charity of Christ which is made manifest in suffering. Indeed the pope's crusading cross is not the cross of Christ but of Antichrist.<sup>90</sup>

Leaders take up the sword and engage in warfare as a sign of their devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the covenant of faith has been broken here, since they would rather defend to the death human charters, while they are ashamed to take up the true meaning of the gospel. Wyclif is forever suspicious of outward displays of piety, whether they be religious habits or the crusader's cross. God is not found in outward voices and sensible things, for he is truly a *Deus absconditus* (Isaiah 45:15). Only this

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. VII, 613-14.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. VII, 615.

<sup>88</sup> *De Christo et suo Adversario Antichristo* XI in *Polemical Works in Latin* vol. 2, 682.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. XIII, 687.

<sup>90</sup> Sermo 16 in *Sermones* IV, 135.

gospel, known through faith and charity, must be defended to the death. The rest is all idolatry as the cause of God is rejected for the cause of men and worldly gain.<sup>91</sup> In spite of what the papal bulls claim to offer, no one has the power to absolve and distribute spiritual benefits unless he has seen by faith or revelation that that they were granted by the Head of the Church Triumphant, namely Christ himself. This crusade was called to defend the holdings of the pope, while Christ calls for his cohorts to defend the gospel through patience. Wyclif and his fellows are accused of being the traitors, but it is the friars who prove themselves blasphemous traitors to God, since there is no way they can know whether God favors the crusade they are preaching without a special revelation.<sup>92</sup>

As Wyclif's final works took on a decidedly apocalyptic tone so now the pope was Gog and the canons, monks and friars were Magog (Revelation 20:8). Prompted by the prideful Gog and Magog, England is now going to war by invading Flanders, thus fulfilling Christ's prophecy of the wars to come at the end of the age.<sup>93</sup> The end times are marked by wars and the rumor of wars (Matthew 24:6). The rumor mongering in his own day Wyclif attributes chiefly to the friars, as they claim it is lawful to invade the territories of an enemy in a cause that God approves. The friars are promoting war while the faithful theologians are never listened to these days (referring to Wyclif confined to his Lutterworth parish since 1381). These true theologians know it is unlawful for anyone to wage war except for reasons of charity and without a revelation of divine approval. The signs of the impending final judgment are quite clear (Matt 24:7–10): nation is set against nation as Muslims and Christians fight one another; kingdom is against kingdom, as England is set against France and Scotland; while the faithful are being slain at the hands of fellow Christians in the Flanders crusade.<sup>94</sup> The friars preaching this crusade are the eschatological false prophets (Matt 24:5) seducing the people with their lies as they proclaim absolution from both guilt and punishment (*culpa et poena*) for all those who assist in this persecution against the rule of charity. And yet when things do not turn out as they had hoped they will manage to cover over all that they had previously promised, counting as they do on the foolishness of the people.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Sermo 14 in *Sermones* IV, 117: "Maiores autem habent gladios deportatos, et omnia ista fiunt in signum cognicionis, devocionis et defensionis evangelii Jesu Christi. . . . Et tamen ex fide scripture Isa. XLV, 15 Deus non est voces vel signa sensibilia sed vere Deus absconditus, ideo suum evangelium debet quilibet usque ad mortem defendere . . ."

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 117–18.

<sup>93</sup> *De solutione Satanae* II, in *Polemical Works in Latin*, vol. 2, 396.

<sup>94</sup> *Expositio textus Matthei XXIV* II, in *Opera minora*, 356–58.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. II, 358.

Wyclif's attacks on the friars became unrelenting. They call themselves doctors of theology, he notes, but doctors of the devil's school would be more fitting, as they publicize the virtue of such absolutions. From the inception of the world no heresy has been so widely promulgated than the notion that it is lawful for a Christian to kill his own brother, and promising freedom from all guilt and punishment to those who pursue this course. Wyclif remarks sarcastically that were the friars to heed their own preaching none of them would remain in England, for they would all be in Flanders.<sup>96</sup> Rather than preparing their feet to preach the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15), the friars stir up wars in the kingdom of God. They are actually worse than the false prophets of the Old Law, who said: "The Lord says this." For the friars say: "My pope says this." And they sin all the more by claiming it is God's will that whoever joins the crusade will be absolved fully from sin and will fly immediately to heaven.<sup>97</sup>

### War is Contrary to the Rules of Charity

In their diabolical sophistry, not only do the friars fail to explain how dangerous war is for secular lords, they lead them to believe that warfare is actually lawful and meritorious. In point of fact the 16 conditions of charity (1 Corinthians 13:4–8) prove that most wars are blasphemous, and thus contrary to the entire *lex Christi*. Since war is illicit unless one is moved by love for the enemy, so that very first condition proves it unlawful for England to wage this war, since love is patient and does not return evil for evil. Were the people to suffer injury humbly they would endure infinitely less suffering in battle than they will in purgatory or hell.<sup>98</sup> Love is kind, but the fire of the Holy Spirit has been extinguished among these combatants, as they seek all possible means to harm their adversaries.<sup>99</sup> Love is not envious, but nothing bespeaks more of envy than kingdoms waging war against one another. Love does not do wrong (Vulgate = *caritas non agit perperam*) and yet in war neighbors are injured and their goods are looted, their homes burned, and they are unmercifully killed. Who could believe this vindictiveness and impiety is not blasphemy against God? Love is not boastful, but the knights (*bellantes/bellatores*) rejoice in parading around, since the evil they do is born of a diabolical pride devoid of any love for their neighbor. Love is not ambitious and yet it is clear that those waging war are ambitious for worldly honors and unjustly-won temporal gain. They seek after the very temporal goods that can only do them

<sup>96</sup> Sermo 4, in *Sermones* IV, 39.

<sup>97</sup> Sermo 15, in *Sermones* IV, 122.

<sup>98</sup> *De fide catholica* VII, in *Opera minora*, 120.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. VII, 120–21.



harm when they should be laboring to acquire charity and the other precious virtues that will lead them to heaven. What could be more foolish than for men to cease being helpers of God, when that would lead them and their brethren through the path of virtue to glory, and instead choose to be the devil's executioners, dragging themselves and their neighbors into hell? Love does not seek the things that are its own, but rather those things that are useful and edifying to Christ and his Church. Yet the knights desire only lucre and honor, thereby putting aside the honor of Christ. Love is not angry, yet the magnates and warriors stoke the fires of anger among their own people. But at the end of their foolish labor, when they add up what they have lost and gained, they will find they have lost their own souls.<sup>100</sup> Love does not propose what is evil. In other words, love ought not plan with sinister intention to do something evil. And yet the whole task of these knights revolves around planning day and night as to how they might confound the neighbors they are pitted against. They devote all their time to this crime and so give no attention to God's honor. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. And yet knights rejoice the most when doing evil and so wickedly afflicting their adversaries. How is this consonant with charity? Love rejoices in the truth, and yet those knights do not wish to act in accordance with God's just judgment. How then can they worthily pray: "Thy will be done"? Love suffers all things, but how can knights foster charity when they are busy seeking after the most vain sorts of honors rather than suffering for the sake of acquiring blessedness? Love believes all things, and yet those knights believe most unfaithfully that the illicit destruction of their enemies will be to their advantage. Does this not destroy charity? Love hopes all things with respect to attaining the good of blessedness, but these knights actually despair unfaithfully since their own deeds make it known that they take on the world's wickedness and so procure their own perpetual punishment. Love bears all things, but these knights do not bear their own injury with humility in the hope that God will finally reward them with blessedness. Finally, love never ends despite all the unjust injury it suffers. But these knights who fight for the refuse of temporal goods and putrid honor soon find that they are bereft of fraternal charity. Clearly then, these knights persevere neither in faith, nor hope, nor charity. Would that the friars preach that faith to the knights instead of remaining silent so as to appease them in the hope of acquiring yet more lucre for their wretched convents. All the friars end up doing is condemning themselves, since their own consent to this enterprise renders them guilty of the death and damnation of so many souls.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. VII, 121–22.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. VII, 122–23.

### The Repercussions of War

Not only do the friars speak of the temporal prosperity England will enjoy through her frequent wars while leading people into bodily and spiritual death, but they are egging on the nation so as to be that much prouder and even more prone to conflict. Other countries will only be infuriated by our abuses, Wyclif warns, and will not soon forget the injury we have done to them. They will store up vengeance against us.<sup>102</sup> Wyclif challenges the friars to say whether they know for certain that England's army really is disposed to God's charity, and whether they are fighting for a divinely sanctioned just cause. Let the friars prove that our leader has received some special revelation assuring us that God has willed that our opponents are to be defeated.<sup>103</sup> See if the friars can prove that our own previous actions were not the cause of these present injuries we are suffering. Were we to bear all things with humility, however, we could then count on God's special assistance. Better that all the basilicas of the friars be destroyed than that the virtue of humility be lost and the nation stirred up to seek such culpable vengeance. Surely the friars must realize that the people will be rewarded in the world to come for the patience they show in this age. God will remunerate the faithful for exhibiting this evangelical virtue of patient suffering. All the while, though, the friars and prelates who should be nourishing the people in the faith of Scripture either neglect this faith, object to it outright, or simply choose to lead them astray with their flattering directives.<sup>104</sup> Wyclif is sure, however, that England's invasion of Flanders will certainly be punished whether it be during the course of the campaign or at some future time.<sup>105</sup>

England has not been attacked; the expedition to Flanders is an unprovoked offensive war that the friars will have to justify. Yet Wyclif reports that the notion of a pre-emptive strike is commonly accepted among his fellow countrymen who argue that England ought to invade other kingdoms without delay lest they harm the English in the future, just as one might do with a neighbor one suspects will commit some evil act in the future. Wyclif writes this off as the very sort of worldly wisdom prohibited by Saint Paul (Romans 12:16).<sup>106</sup> Some are calling for a pre-emptive strike

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. VIII, 124: "Et quantum ad prosperitatem mundanam contingentem nobis Anglicis ex bellis crebris, patet quod est leve verbum, ac si infidelis illud quod dubitat balbutiret. Nam per talia bella sunt multi de nostris tam corpore quam anima perdit ad infernum; est etiam gens superbior et proclivior ad bellandum, et tercio cum regiones alie exasperantur ex nostro insultu, cum non obliviscuntur nostre iniurie, thaurizant nobis vindictam magnam atque multiplicem. . . ."

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. VIII, 124.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. VIII, 126.

<sup>105</sup> *De quattuor sectis Novellis* X, in *Polemical Works in Latin*, vol. 1, ed. R. Buddensieg (London: Wyclif Society, 1883) 281.

<sup>106</sup> Sermon 13, in *Sermones* III, 97.

based upon the classic principle that it is lawful to repel force by force (*vim vi repellere*). They argue that if we do not invade the enemy now they will soon do us unbearable damage, destroying the very Church of England. And so, by the law of nature it serves the greater good of our nation to attack our adversaries first. And again, there is the familiar refrain that anyone who would deny this line of reasoning is a traitor to the king and must be dealt with as an enemy of the nation. Wyclif reckons this line of reasoning blasphemous, hardly in keeping with the humble patience of Christ. No doubt that it is lawful to repel force with force, says Wyclif, but it does not follow from this that one ought to invade a potential invader. For this would destroy the patience of the martyrs and render Christ blameworthy for exhibiting patience when he could easily have overcome his enemies and vindicated himself (Luke 9:22 and John 18:36). By the middle of 1383 Wyclif has lost patience with those he now labels the "stupid decretists" (*grossi decretiste*), and their classic position that natural law permits the repelling of force by force when done immediately and with moderate inculpable defense. Sharing none of their confidence in human moral judgment, he points out that the decretists simply have no idea how to gauge whether a defense really is inculpable. Hence it would be safer to follow Christ's example and humbly await our vindication from the Lord. To abandon the sure and meritorious way of Christ for the pride that runs contrary to charity would put us in the wrong.<sup>107</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Wyclif did not rule out war or the use of force under any circumstances, but he did raise the bar to a standard of justification few could have met. Though he accepted the traditional theory that the goal of war must be peace, he believed that it is impossible to have peace unless one is at peace with God. Every Christian must be trained in the art of spiritual warfare, armed with the weapons of uncreated light. Peace cannot be acquired through corporeal war unless one has first waged a spiritual war, having conquered sin that one may live in the grace of God. Peace treaties among nations are so unstable, says Wyclif, precisely because their goals are not founded upon the war of virtues.<sup>108</sup> Living through the Hundred Years War, knowing the fear and pain it inflicted, Wyclif was under no illusions regarding the prosperity and security that the ever-illusive decisive victory would bring. Returning evil for evil is dangerous for all involved, he ob-

<sup>107</sup> *De fide catholica* VIII, 125: "Et quantum ad aliam particulam, patet quod omnes decretiste vel viventes in seculo nesciunt regulariter tutelam ut inculpabilem mensurare, cum securius esset instar Christi vindictam a Domino humiliter expectare."

<sup>108</sup> Sermo 24, in *Sermones* IV, 209: "...ymmo cum per se finis belli sit pax, impossibile sit pacem haberi sine pace cum Deo ... Et hoc est indubie causa quare

serves, for it only spurs the enemy on to greater evil while rendering oneself condemned before God in the process. Even the supposedly rightful claim to avenge injury only leads to a spiraling escalation of violence, giving occasion to yet further infliction of harm. The war between England and France would never have continued as long as it has, Wyclif laments, except for the fact that the injuries done to both sides were always met with retaliation. The best solution would be to leave vengeance to God, thereby imitating Christ who suffered so patiently. Far better to fight spiritually by praying to God than to wield a sword, beseeching one's enemy to accept peace even if that means suffering death for the sake of following a path the world reckons as foolishness. It is for this reason Wyclif says that he has never advised war, but has advocated taking the spiritually safer route, following the words of Saint Paul: "Beloved never avenge yourselves (Romans 12:19)."<sup>109</sup>

Needless to say, Wyclif's counsel hardly brought an end to the Hundred Years War, nor did it stop Bishop Despenser from leading his ill-fated crusade to Flanders while Archbishop Courtenay was labeling the crusade's opponents heretics. Wyclif's idealized poor Church staffed by humble clerics was never realized either. None of this is to say that Wyclif's efforts were in vain, however. Here in the 21st century, perhaps the same words that were neglected in the 14th century might finally receive the consideration they are due. Wyclif's thoughts about war, peace and charity were a product of his own fractious era, imbued with apocalyptic and anti-papalism, set in a landscape of kings, knights and crusaders. This could not have been otherwise, any more than our own thoughts might be comprehensible apart from superpowers, cruise missiles and nuclear deterrence. For all the differences between these worlds, however, genuine communication is still possible. To use a familiar phrase, we must strip away the husk in order to recover the kernel of the message. Here we have let Wyclif speak for himself, putting his Latin into English, but otherwise allowing his words to abide in their original milieu so that they may retain a good deal of their original force. It should not require too much imagination on the part of thoughtful readers to recover that kernel for themselves, thereby coming to grips with whatever modern parallels and lessons are there to be found.

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paces inite inter regna non sunt stablies, quia non sunt fines fundate in bello virtutum."

<sup>109</sup> Sermo 13, in *Sermones* III, 98–101, at 101: "... via tamen securior foret pugnare spiritualiter non cum gladio aerem verberando sed Deum orando, sic in tractu hostes ad concordiam obsecrando, et in illa reputata vecordia mortem si oporteat paciando. Et istam viam videtur Paulum innuere, quando dicit *non vos defendentes karissimi*."