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CHAPTER TEN
PREPARING FOR EASTER: SERMONS ON THE EUCHARIST IN ENGLISH WYCLIFFITE SERMONS
Jennifer Illig

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 decreed that “all the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter.” Although some people in the late Middle Ages received the Eucharist more often, for most, receiving the sacrament became an annual event that took place only at Easter. According to the late John Bossy, across medieval Europe, the Easter communion naturally brought together all members of the community. The Eucharistic celebration was commonly followed by a parish feast that would emphasize the ties of unity within the community. As a result, sermons for Easter Sunday were designed to prepare people to have the proper disposition for the reception of communion.

During the remainder of the year, sermons and devotional manuals from England and the Continent emphasized the importance of having a proper interior disposition in order to spiritually receive the Eucharist when a person attended Sunday mass. For instance, in The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris), a late fourteenth-century explanation of the sacraments and teachings of the church, the writer, a wealthy Paris burguer, wrote for his young wife: “when men and women be at church to hear divine service, their hearts should not be at home or in their fields, nor in any other things of this world; and they should not think of temporal things, but of God, in purity, singleness and sincerity, and should pray devoutly to Him.” While such manuals as well as sermons often describe the Eucharist in terms of the doctrine of transubstantiation, it seems that the primary focus of these writings is not to present theological treatises on the nature of the Eucharist, but to prepare members of their audience...
for the spiritual reception of communion most of the year and actual reception at Easter.\textsuperscript{6}

Although emphasis on correct attention and participation in the sacramental life of the church, and particularly the Eucharist, is commonplace in the late Middle Ages, it is not something that is often commented upon in relation to Wycliffite texts. Wycliffite Christians are better known for their varieties of Eucharistic theologies, as laid out, for instance, by J. Patrick Hornbeck II, than for a pastoral Eucharistic theology focused on the reception of communion. In fact, much scholarship has pointed away from an emphasis on reception. Margaret Aston suggested in her essay “Lollard Women Priests?” that Lollards (to use her term) most often held meetings centered around preaching rather than the celebration and reception of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{7} More recently, Fiona Somerset, while pointing out that lollard writings do not necessarily deny the efficacy of the sacraments or suggest that people should not participate in them, has suggested that “lollard writings emphasize ‘gostili’ or spiritual reception [of the Eucharist] through knowing about Christ’s life, believing he is God and man, and keeping the commandments.”\textsuperscript{8} It seems important to note that for most of the liturgical year, such spiritual reception was precisely what mainstream texts were calling for as well.\textsuperscript{9} Following the pattern of the mainstream church, at least one group of Wycliffite writings seems to be particularly interested in providing instruction concerning both the spiritual and actual reception of communion: the \textit{English Wycliffite Sermons} (EWS).

In this essay, I will first present some brief comments on reading \textit{EWS} in their liturgical order, exploring the way in which the liturgical year influences the sermons’ teaching about pastoral subjects. I have elsewhere shown the influence of the liturgical cycle on diverse pastoral topics such as Christ, Mary, and prayer to be significant.\textsuperscript{10} For the sake of space here, I will focus on the Eucharist. I will begin my discussion of the Eucharist in \textit{EWS} by establishing the contours of the Eucharistic theology found there. I will then show that during the Lenten season and at Easter, the writers of \textit{EWS} discuss what the Eucharist is and how to have the proper disposition to receive it. By offering these teachings at this time of the year, the writers of \textit{EWS} prepare the members of their audience for their Easter communion. This work of preparation situates \textit{EWS} closer to mainstream church practice on the Eucharist than the varieties of Eucharistic theologies found in \textit{EWS} would seem to suggest.
As is well known, the 294 sermons of EWS take their lections from the Sarum Missal. Although the sermons in EWS are clearly associated with specific liturgical days and events, scholars have most often used them as a source for Wycliffite understandings of specific doctrines rather than analyzed them as liturgical texts. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is the organization of many EWS manuscripts, which present the sermons as five separate sets: the Sunday gospels (set 1), the common of the saints used for saints’ feast days when no specific sermon had been provided (set 2), the proper of the saints used on specific feast days (set 3), the weekday gospels (set 4), and the Sunday epistles (set 5). The second reason has to do with the general approach taken by many scholars of Wycliffism and lollardy. Somerset notes that “selective readings of lollard writings often attend only to their most polemical passages, or what is most heretical in the terms set by bishops seeking out deviant belief and practice, or what is most similar to later protestant views.” By picking out sermons based on polemical issues, the wider context of the sermon cycle and the wider possible use of the sermons within the liturgical year are invariably ignored.

To resituate the sermons within their late medieval liturgical context, the sermons should be read, not thematically or according to their five sets, but according to their place in the liturgical year. Because EWS is based on a model year rather than an actual one, I arranged the sermons in the order of a year in which they might be used. By 1404/05, the year I chose, all of the sermons contained in EWS would have been composed, but the most severe restrictions on vernacular biblical translation and on Wycliffism more broadly, namely those implemented by Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s 1408/09 Constitutions, would not have been put into place. This method of reading the sermons uncovered a number of interesting things. For instance, themes presented on a Sunday are sometimes continued on the following weekdays. During the second week of Lent, for instance, almost all of the sermons discuss meekness or its opposite, pride. In addition, Mary is mentioned throughout the liturgical year—at least once a month. Such occurrences are easier to recognize when the sermons are arranged in liturgical order.

The most interesting findings from reading the sermons liturgically, however, have to do with the Eucharist. In EWS, there are twenty-one...
sermons that discuss the Eucharist. \(^{15}\) Eighteen of these can be assigned to particular dates. \(^{16}\) Nine of these occur in the period from Septuagesima to Easter. This means that half of the sermons that refer to the Eucharist in the course of the liturgical year occur disproportionately in the two-month period during the Lenten season up to Easter. \(^{17}\) That there is a high concentration of sermons on the Eucharist during the Lenten season should come as no surprise. Given that most lay people would receive the Eucharist at Easter, Lent would be an appropriate time to make sure that believers were familiar with teaching on the Eucharist.

EUCARISTIC THEOLOGY

The Eucharistic theology found among the sermons of EWS is largely dependent upon John Wyclif’s teachings about the Eucharist. As is well known, Wyclif’s Eucharistic theology developed over the course of his lifetime in reaction to the teachings of the mainstream church on the doctrine of transubstantiation. \(^{18}\) The term *transubstantiation* was first officially used at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. At that time, it had only been in use in theological circles for about seventy years and was still subject to multiple interpretations. As both Gary Macy and Ian Christopher Levy point out, the council did not define what *transubstantiation* meant. Rather, it introduced it into the church’s official vocabulary for discussions about the Eucharist and, specifically, used it to defend the notion of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. \(^{19}\) In the years that followed, transubstantiation continued to have multiple definitions. However, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the definition formulated by Thomas Aquinas became dominant. Aquinas says that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. \(^{20}\)

Wyclif did not deny the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. What he did deny is Aquinas’s definition, which he dismisses as allowing for an “accident without a subject.” \(^{21}\) Despite very clearly dismissing Aquinas’s definition of transubstantiation, Wyclif, according to Stephen E. Lahey, did not do much to develop an alternate theory of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist beyond asserting that Christ is indeed present. \(^{22}\) Wyclif’s assertions are based on his belief that Christ in Scripture teaches that he is present in the Eucharist. Scripture must be read properly in order for Christians to hold correct beliefs. In the case of the Eucharist, Christ’s presence is guaranteed
by the scriptural words, “Hoc est corpus meum.” There must be, according to Wyclif, a continual identification of the bread as bread with Christ’s body because Christ, who Wyclif asserts cannot lie, says so.23 If the substance of that bread were to be destroyed in the course of the statement, then Christ would be made a liar.

In many ways, the teaching on the Eucharist in EWS is influenced by Wyclif. With Wyclif, the writers of EWS reject the scholastic understanding and language of transsubstantiation. In sermon 166 for feria three in the fourth week of Lent, the writer comments on John 7:16 that Christ sometimes speaks by his humanity and sometimes speaks by his divinity.24 The writer then connects this to the Eucharist by insisting, “And wolde God þes heretikis in mater of þe sacrid oost conseuyeden þis speche, and vndir-stooden wel Ambrose þat þis oost is not bred aftir þat it is sacrid, for it is not aftir principaly bred but þe body of Crist by uertu of his wordis, and þanne shulden þey shame of þer feyned accidentis.”25 In support of the doctrine of transubstantiation, orthodox theologians often cited Ambrose’s assertion that the host was not bread but God’s body. According to the writer of sermon 166, these theologians have misunderstood Ambrose, who says that the host was not primarily bread, but the body of Christ by virtue of the words Christ spoke.26 If they truly understood Ambrose, the writer concludes, they would be ashamed of their invented accidents. In this way, the writer makes very clear that the language of accidents, when associated with the Eucharist, is simply untenable.

In sermon E47, for the seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, the writer, glossing Ephesians 4:5–6,27 condemns diversity in teachings about the Eucharist: “And heere trowen cristen men þat dyuerse þat ben in þe sacrid host makiþ dyuerse in þe chirche, and þis mot nedis make aftir dyuerse at þe day of doom, and make sum men be take to heuene and sum men to go to helle.”28 Multiple understandings of the Eucharist mean that some people are going to go to heaven and some people are going to go to hell because, as the writer goes on to explain, Paul teaches that there is only one faith. The particular problem that the writer identifies is not knowing what the host is. The writer explains that Christ says, and the saints that come after him affirm, that the consecrated host is Christ’s body in the form of bread. This is what Christians believe: Christ’s body and bread can coexist. What they should not hold is that it is either an accident without a subject or nothing at all. Those are the beliefs, the
The writer of sermon E47 explains that the source of heretical beliefs about the Eucharist is a false reading of scripture. In formulating heretical teachings about the Eucharist, the writer says that those other people are not following what Christ says. Rather, they deny what scripture actually says and present it in a way that supports their heretical teaching.

This relationship between a proper understanding of scripture and the proper understanding of the Eucharist is emphasized by Wyclif and is seen in other EWS sermons. Sermon 176 for Saturday of the fifth week of Lent takes as its lection John 6:54–72. Following the lection, the author emphasizes that there are two kinds of eating and two kinds of food, spiritual and bodily. The problem that the author identifies with the way that John 6 is commonly interpreted is that the words of the Gospel are often applied to the Eucharist. The writer points out that in the timeline of the biblical narrative, Jesus’s discourse in John 6 took place well before the institution of the Eucharist at the last supper. As a result, Christ could not have been talking about the Eucharist when he was giving this particular speech. However, the writer goes on to suggest that if the words are properly understood, many, though not all, can be applied to the Eucharist.

In discussing the Eucharist, the writer of sermon 176 employs a distinction between bodily and spiritual presence. The writer explains that Christ had flesh here on earth, and that flesh can be identified with God’s body, which is now in heaven. Because Christ’s flesh and blood are in heaven, people can only partake of them through spiritual eating. The bread of the Eucharist is truly bread and is eaten bodily by those who receive it. At the same time, it is God’s body “in figure” and God in nature. This can seem confusingly contradictory: How can the sacred host be figuratively God’s body and naturally God’s body at the same time? The answer would seem to lie in Wyclif’s notion of the sacramental sign.

In his discussion of Wyclif’s Eucharistic theology in De Eucharistia, David Aers explains that orthodox discourse on the Eucharist had developed a binary: “either Christ’s Galilean body is present in the sacrament or Christ’s body is not present. Either the presence of Christ’s body is of the real, literal, carnal kind apparently illustrated by Eucharistic miracles . . . ; or there is no real presence, merely tropes for an absent Christ.” Wyclif rejected this binary because he believed that it was the product of a misunderstanding of sacramental signs and the way that those signs function for
humanity. Instead, Wyclif develops a different model of understanding sacramental signs that, disregarding this binary, presents Christ as both present and absent. As Aers explains, Wyclif “affirmed that the body of Christ is both present ‘allegorically or sacramentally’ and present transformationally, ‘really but sacramentally’ in the consecrated sign.” At the same time, Christ’s physical body—the “Galilean body”—is absent. The writer of sermon 176 likewise denies that Christ’s physical body is present while he maintains that God’s body is present. It is figurative, but not merely memorial in the way that some later lollard texts are, such as Wycklyffes Wycket.

After describing what the Eucharist is, the sermon writer discusses the reception of the sacred host:

And, but if his be etun gostly in eting of þe sacrid oost, ellis men taken not wrpiþ þe sacrament more þan a beeste. And for þis gostly eting many of þe wordis heere ben referrid gostly to eting of þe sacrid oost. But þis oost is etun bodily and gostly of summe men. But Crist body in his kynde is not etun bodily . . . . But euere wite we þat þis oost is uery bred in his kynde, and in figure Goddis body by uertu of Cristis wordis. But þus it is not of Cristis fleys and his blood in his kynde.

People must receive the sacrament spiritually. If they do not, they are no better than animals. Some men—presumably those who accept the doctrine of transubstantiation—say that the host is eaten both bodily and spiritually. Christ’s physical, fleshly body is not eaten—that would be cannibalism. God’s body, though, is present in the host in a way not precisely defined. The sermon writer admits that he does not really provide a full explanation and quotes John 6:65: “But þer ben summe of þou þat trowen not to þes wordus,’ for Iesu wiste fro þe bigynnyng which men weren not trowynge, and who was to traye hym.” The writer then points out that Christ sometimes spoke “mystely.” Hence, the precise way in which Christ is present is not defined, and the writer does not seem interested in pursuing a precise definition because that would push him beyond the limits of what scripture says.

While Stephen Pink has argued that for the writers of EWS, hearing the word of God replaces receiving the sacrament, it seems important to note that the host itself remains an object of discussion and never do the sermon writers say that a person should not receive it. In fact, the Eucharist
Jennifer Illig is repeatedly referred to with some reverence as the “sacrament of the auter” or “pe sacred hoost.” The only negative language that the writers use about the Eucharist is to deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. Rejecting the doctrine does not necessarily mean rejecting the practice. It could just mean assigning a different significance to it. In sermon 176, it seems that eating the host spiritually is a necessary addition to mere physical eating. As shown in the previously quoted passage, to eat only physically leaves a person no better than a beast. The sermon writer, though, does not seem to be saying not to receive the host at all, but rather adds further meaning to that reception.

From the sermons discussed, it should be clear that despite—or perhaps because of—the influence of Wyclif on the writers of EWS, the sermons do not articulate a uniform or particularly precise teaching on the Eucharist. However, they do maintain that Christ is present in some way and that misunderstandings of the Eucharist, rooted in a false reading of scripture, are heretical. Importantly, reception of the Eucharist is not excluded by the writers of the sermons.

PREPARING FOR EASTER

Although the sermons of EWS reject the contemporary formulations of Eucharistic theology, they maintain the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the Christian. During Lent, when the majority of the sermons on the Eucharist appear in EWS, the writers present catechesis and directives on the spiritual reception of the Eucharist. For instance, sermon E17 for the second Sunday of Lent teaches that people should “erre not in þis sacrud oost but graunte þat it is two þingis, boþe bred and Godus body, but prin-cipally Godus body.” The sermon writer offers a direct teaching about what he believes the Eucharist is: both bread and God’s body, but principally God’s body. Sermon 44 for Passion Sunday offers a similar reading, referencing both Ambrose and Augustine: “And on þis maner semeþ Ambrose to graunte þat þe sacred breed is not aftur breed but Godis body, for hit is not aftur principally breed, but Godis body in maner as Austyn seip.”

Sermon 162 for feria five in the third week of Lent, like sermon 176, discussed earlier, describes the way to receive the Eucharist: “it shal be chewed in mouþ of soule, fortretid godely by skylis, and siþ it shal be hid in mynde, as mete is hid in mannus stomac and þere moue men to worche werkis of
loue, as God biddiḥ. After a brief discussion of what typically happens to bread when it is eaten, the writer comments, citing Augustine, that when a person spiritually receives the Eucharist, the recipient is turned into Christ as a result of what he eats. The writer continues that the Eucharist is the foundation of all virtues, and therefore, a person should maintain faith in it and by it, be moved to follow God’s law.

The writers of the two sermons for Easter Day, sermons E22 and 46, prepare the members of their audience for the Easter communion by using language that calls to mind the coming communion and by emphasizing the virtues. In this, they are very much like contemporary sermon writers. In his Easter sermon, John Mirk emphasizes the importance of purifying the soul by confessing sin and practicing virtue. Immediately before Mirk presents the exemplum that he includes in the sermon, he instructs: “good men and woymen, I charch you heyly in Godys byhalue þat non of you to-day com to Godys bord, but he be in full charyte to all Godis pe-pull; and also þat ʒe be clene schryuen and yn full wyll to leue your synne.”

In this way, he connects the reception of communion, for which people would “com to Godys bord,” with the life of virtue and the confession of sin.

In a dominical sermon collection from the late-fifteenth century, the writer of one of the Easter sermons claims that his purpose is to discuss “þe very disposicion þat every cristen sowle scholde have in rescyving of þis blessyd sacrament, it is neþer in dente ne in ventre, but pryncipallly in mente. It is neþer ‘In þe tethe ne in the wombe’ ne in bodily apparens owtetwarde; but specyally grownde þe in stedfaste feythe of mans soule.” For this writer, as for the writers of EWS, reception of communion involves not just the ability to receive the Eucharist physically; it also means being prepared spiritually for reception. The writer of this Easter sermon, like the writers of EWS, then explains that the proper preparation involves instantiating the virtues in one’s life. Using the language of a feast, he says that the table “must be sett vpon þe grownde of owre feythe and hope” and is covered with a cloth of charity. These virtues, practiced in this life, prepare a Christian to worthily receive the Eucharist while he or she is alive and to enter heaven upon death. The remainder of this essay will show that although the writers of the Easter sermons in EWS present variant Eucharistic theologies, they, like their contemporaries, call people to worthily receive the Eucharist at Easter.
Sermon E22 is cited by the sermons’ editors, Anne Hudson and Pamela Gradon, and by Hornbeck as a sermon that presents a Eucharistic theology that is “purely memorial” or a “commemoration of Christ’s passion.”\textsuperscript{57} The sermon describes that those who eat the sacred host “ete Crist goostly, þat is to haue muynde of hym.”\textsuperscript{58} According to Hornbeck, this phrase “seems to move beyond the notion of Christ’s localized presence, however spiritual. For this preacher, to receive the host is to call to mind Christ and his passion, not to receive Christ as present in the Eucharistic elements.”\textsuperscript{59} As will be shown, this seems to be overstating the case.

In sermon E22, the writers’ discussion of the Eucharist begins by quoting the third part of 1 Corinthians 5:7 and then continues with commentary:

\begin{quote}
Þe þridde word þat Poul seip þyueþ cause of þes two before and seip for certeyn þat owre pasc Crist is now sacrified. For, riȝt as fadris maden þerf breed for to ete þer pasc lomb, so men eton þe sacred oost to ete Crist goostly, þat is to haue muynde of hym, how kyndely he suffrede for man. And such a fruytous muynde of Crist is gostly mete to þe soule, and goostly etyng of Cristus body þat þe gospel of Iohn spekulþ of.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

The first thing to note is the interjected “now” in the biblical passage. In adding this “now” to the text of the scripture, the writer gives the paschal sacrifice of Jesus a present immediacy. The scriptural text on its own is in the passive present—“Crist is sacrified.” By adding the “now,” the writer firmly establishes the activity of Christ’s sacrifice in the present of the community to whom he is speaking. The sacrifice of Christ—“how kyndely he suffrede for man”—is what communicants should have in mind as they eat the consecrated host. Having these ideas in their minds will be the proper spiritual food for the soul. With this appropriate mental disposition, the person will be able to spiritually eat of Christ’s body in the way that “Iohn spekulþ of.” It seems possible that this spiritual eating that John speaks of is that found in sermon 176, discussed earlier.

The problem with reading E22 as a merely memorial Eucharistic theology is that the writer seems to be uninterested, like most of the other writers of EWS, in theoretical discussions about Christ’s presence in the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{61} He admits that his notions of spiritual eating are colored by John’s gospel, but there is nothing more beyond the reference. Elsewhere in EWS, such as in sermon 176, the description of spiritual eating does not
necessarily exclude belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements or even exclude reception of communion. Notably, sermon 176 was written for the Saturday of the fifth week of Lent and would have been used just a week before sermon E22.62

The way that sermon E22 is most like contemporary Easter sermons is in the writer’s emphasis that Easter is the time when people should “clene forsake synne.”63 The writer points out that sin comes in many forms and that the best way to get rid of sin is to treat sins like weeds and pluck them out from their roots. It is only then that a person will begin to have a disposition that will not draw that person to sin again.64 This is the disposition that is necessary for the Christian to receive the Eucharist.

The gospel sermon for Easter Day, sermon 46, also takes up a discussion of the Eucharist. Toward the end of the sermon, after the writer has completed his commentary on the scriptural passage, he notes that the person using the sermon for preaching might want to continue to speak about the gospel, but that it is common for the preacher to discuss “þe sacrament of þe auter, and how men schal disposon hem now to take þis sacrament.”65 As in sermon E22, the “now” in this passage emphasizes the immediacy of the writer’s purpose: to prepare people to receive their Easter communion. The writer then compares those coming to church on Easter Sunday to the women who went to the tomb early in the morning. Likewise, the Christian believers should come to church early on Easter Sunday to receive the sacrament. They must leave behind their sins so as to be ready to properly receive the Eucharist.66 The writer then tells the members of his audience that to properly receive the Eucharist, they should clothe themselves with the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity. As discussed earlier, this emphasis on the virtues is common in contemporary sermons.

Using the framework of the three virtues, the writer of sermon 46 is able to explain what the Eucharist is, the disposition that the person should have in approaching reception of the Eucharist, and the purpose of receiving the Eucharist. The first of the virtues, faith, is necessary to understand the nature of the sacramental elements the communicant receives. By the virtue of faith, the communicant knows that the Eucharist he or she receives is God’s body because of Christ’s words, although it remains naturally bread; the presence of God is a sacramental presence.67 The writer denies, as other sermon writers do, the Thomistic definition of transubstantiation and insists that God’s body need not be localized in a single
place because the Trinity is present in all places. However, the sermon writer concludes with the rather ambiguous statement: “But owre byleue is set upon þis poynt: what is þis sacrede host, and not what þing is þere.” It would seem that the writer of the sermon is eschewing an interest in the mechanics of the Eucharistic presence to focus instead on what the sacred host is: God’s body.

The second virtue that the communicant should possess is the virtue of hope for his or her life in this world and, more particularly, for the grace of God to come in heaven. The writer explains, “to þis entent men taken now þis sacrament, so þat by takyn herof þer muynde be fresched in hem to þenkon of kyndenesse of Crist, to maken hem clene in sowle.” By approaching the sacrament with hope of heaven, the communicants’ minds are refreshed and they are able to think of Christ’s kindness and have their souls cleansed in preparation for heaven.

The third virtue necessary to approach the sacrament worthily is the virtue of charity. Without charity, the writer suggests that a person will grow in sin. On the other hand, possessing this virtue truly moves the person into the eschatological feast: “And ȝif we han þis cloþing, takyn þis mete in figure, hit schal bryngon vs to heuene þere to ete Godis body goostly wiþowten eende; and þat is mennys blisse.” If a person has the virtue of charity and receives the Eucharist as a sacrament of God’s body, as suggested earlier in the sermon, the recipient will be brought into the heavenly banquet where he or she will spiritually eat God’s body forever and be in perpetual bliss.

Over the course of the Lenten season and at Easter, the writers of EWS repeatedly turn to teaching about the Eucharist. While their theology is not uniform, it occurs at a point in the liturgical year when reception of communion would be common. This suggests that the writers of EWS saw at least part of their work as a preparation for Easter when “men schulden come to þe chirche to take þis hooly sacrament.”

CONCLUSION

The writers of EWS, like their contemporaries, are engaged in a process of formation in Christian life and faith. In this aim, the sermons of EWS reflect the mainstream church and the culture of that church. Just as the Eucharist was important in the life of any Christian, it remains important
in the life of a Wycliffite Christian. What we have learned from the study of the few Wycliffite sermons presented here is that throughout the season of Lent and at Easter, the sermon writers prepare their audience for the reception of the Eucharist at Easter by offering catechetical teachings about what the Eucharist is and what the proper disposition is in approaching the Eucharist. It is important, after all, to know what is being received and how to receive it. At the same time, that person need not and should not understand the Eucharist in terms of transubstantiation.

The differences in Eucharistic theology between the Wycliffites and the mainstream church are significant. To focus solely on the differences, though, can miss the very purpose of the sermon cycle: to create a program of education and formation in Christianity by providing sermons on the Sunday lections from the Sarum Missal. I am not suggesting that we ignore the differences among EWS and contemporary sermon collections or even attempt to reconcile those differences. What I am saying is that those differences need not be the first or only thing that we focus on when we read these sermons. Rather, we should look at the ways in which the sermons of EWS are like the sermons of contemporary writers. In those instances of likeness, we might well discover that the sermons of EWS are less specifically “Wycliffite” and are, in fact, closer to the life and practice of the mainstream church then we thought.

NOTES


2. Eamon Duff y, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 93–94; Duff y points out that there were occasionally people who would receive more often. Margery Kempe received weekly and Lady Margaret Beaufort received monthly, but they were the exception rather than the rule (93).


4. Duff y, Stripping of the Altars, 94.

5. Eileen Power, trans., The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris): A


7. “It seems most unlikely that there were ever many Lollards—either men or women—who resorted to administering the Eucharist. We should certainly expect to learn more about it (in the way of formulated questions, if not answers) if they had, and the frequency with which they denied transubstantiation, coupled with their own belief in the sacramental value of the Word, makes it likely that such ceremony as they had centered upon preaching.” Margaret Aston, “Lollard Women Priests?,” in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, by Margaret Aston (London: Hambledon, 1984), 66.


9. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 63, 83–98; Powers, *Goodman of Paris*, 40; Morrison, *Late Fifteenth-Century*, 177. It is possible that the descriptions of what constituted “spiritual eating” vary in lollard and mainstream texts, but that is the work of a different paper.


13. The sermons that discuss meekness are: EWS E17, 41, 155, 156, 158. The sermons from that week that discuss pride or other vices are: EWS 153, 154, and 157.

14. The sermons that mention Mary, along with their dates in 1404/5, are: EWS 127 (19 December 1404: Feria 6 in week 3 of Advent), E4 (21 December 1404: Fourth Sunday of Advent), 89 (24 December 1404: Christmas Eve), 90 (25 December 1404: Christmas Day), 94 (28 December 1404: Sixth Day after Christmas), E7 (11 January 1405: Sunday within the octave of Epiphany), 32 (18 January 1405: First Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany), 99 (2 February 1405: Candlemas), 42 (22 March 1405: Third Sunday of Lent), 102 (25 March 1405: Annunciation), 179 (17 April 1405: Good Friday), 180 (18 April 1405: Vigil of Easter), 189 (6 May 1405: Feria 4 in week 3 after Easter), 49 (10 May 1405: Third
Sunday after Easter), 107 (30 June 1405: Octave of St. John the Baptist), 110 (10 July 1405: Seven Brothers), 112 (14 August 1405: Vigil of the Assumption), 12 (6 September 1405: Twelfth Sunday after Trinity), 116 (8 September 1405: Nativity of the Virgin Mary), and 19 (25 October 1405: Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity).

15. In the order they would appear in the liturgical year, the sermons that discuss the Eucharist are: EWS 125, 30, E13, E17, 158, 162, 166, 44, 176, E22, 46, 197, 206, E35, 111, 8, 59, E47, 67, 75, 85.


17. In 1405, Septuagesima, beginning the penitential season nine weeks before Easter, would have occurred on February 15. Easter Sunday was on April 19. The sermons that reference the Eucharist in this period are E13, E17, 158, 162, 166, 44, 176, E22, and 46.


22. Lahey, John Wyclif, 103.


24. “Jesus answered them, and said: My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent
me.” All biblical quotes are from the Douay-Rheims Bible translation available at www.drbo.org/index.htm.

25. EWS 166/11–16. See also 44/40–43 and 111/56–60 which use Ambrose to discuss the Eucharist.


27. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.”

28. EWS 176/59–64: “And heere ben many men marrid of þe sacrament of þe auter, and referren alle þes wordis to þis holy sacrament. But neþeles men witen wel þat þes wordis weren spokun of Crist longe bifore þat þis sacrament was maad of Crist or ony man. For þe sacrament was maad first upon Shier-Pursday, and longe bifore þat tyme weren þes wordis spokun of Crist.” A similar assertion is also found in EWS 162/38–39 which is also a sermon on John 6.

29. EWS 176/66–72: “And so we shulen vndirstonde fi rst at sum þing is Goðdis body, and nouȝt ellis in his kynde, as þe fleyss þat Crist bar heere, and is nou in heuene glorifi ed, as seyntis shulun be. And of þis fl[e]yss and þis blood in his kynde spekiþ þe gospel, and of þe gostly eting þat men moten ete þis. Þe bred of þe sacrid oost is uery bred in his kynde, and eten bodily, but it is Goðdis body in fi gure, and so it is þe same body þat is Goðdis body in his kynde.”

30. On Wyclif, see Levy, John Wyclif, 15.

31. EWS 176/64–66: “many of þes wordis may be wel vndurstonde of þis sacrid oost, who þat knowiþ hem soundely.”

32. EWS 176/66–72: “And so we shulen vndurstonde fi rst þat sum ping is Goðdis body, and nouȝt ellis in his kynde, as þe fleyss þat Crist bar heere, and is nou in heuene glorifi ed, as seyntis shulun be. And of þis fl[e]yss and þis blood in his kynde spekiþ þe gospel, and of þe gostly eting þat men moten ete þis. Þe bred of þe sacrid oost is uery bred in his kynde, and eten bodily, but it is Goðdis body in fi gure, and so it is þe same body þat is Goðdis body in his kynde.”


34. Aers, Sanctifying Signs, 61.

35. Ibid., 61.

36. Th e denial of Christ’s physical presence is made even clearer in lines 82–83: “But þus it is not of Cristis fleyss and his blood in his kynde.”

37. Wycklyffes Wycket (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1828). It is important to distinguish Wycliffite Eucharistic theology from that of the sixteenth-century reformers. Those later reformers had a broad range of Eucharistic theologies. Although early historians of the English Reformation often wanted to identify reformation theologies with Wyclif, it is broadly unfair to do because he and the later reformers are operating out of different intellectual frameworks. For some


41. *EWS* 176/86–88. The italics appear in Hudson and Gradon’s text and represent the biblical text which would have been underlined in the manuscripts.

42. *EWS* 176/89.


44. See, for instance, *EWS* 46/61; 176/59.

45. See, for instance, *EWS* 8/28; 46/77–78; E13/64; 166/12; 67/121; E47/69.

46. See *EWS* 162/49; 46/73–74; 67/164–165; 111/59–60; 59/20; E47/78; 85/108. See also Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 21A/65–66. At least part of what the writers of *EWS* were doing was working toward finding a language to talk about the Eucharist, a topic that would more commonly be discussed in the Latin of the university rather than the vernacular.

47. *EWS* 177/71–73.


49. *EWS* 44/41–43. It should be noted that it is possible that “aftur” here could also take on the sense of definition 8 for “after” in the Middle English Dictionary: “in conformity with, according to.”

50. *EWS* 162/55–58.

51. *EWS* 162/61–65: “But þis bred þat is Crist, etyn gostly of man, may not wende þes þre weyes, for he may not be þus partid ne turnyd into anoþer kynde ne drawen þus into manns body, but he turnyþ man into hym, as man turnyþ mete into his body.”

52. *EWS* 162/65–67: “siþ þis beste bred is grounde of alle uertues of man, hou faste shulde a man holde clere bileue of þis bred.”


55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

58. EWS E22/38–39.
60. EWS E22/35–42.
61. Somerset has, likewise, noted, “it is a pervasive and widespread characteristic of lollard writing about the Eucharist to refuse to explain what happens to the bread and wine at consecration.” Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 280.
62. In 1405, sermon 176 would have been used on April 11 and Easter Sunday was on April 19.
63. EWS E22/1.
64. EWS E22/14–26.
65. EWS 46/61–62.
66. EWS 46/62–66: “And hit is seid comunly þat, as þese hooly wymmen hadden left þer formere synne and take þer fresch deuocion, so men schulden come to þe chirche to take þis hooly sacrament, and þus come wiþ þese wymmen wiþ lyȝt of þe sonne.”
67. EWS 46/68–70: “Byleue is furst nedful, and algatis of þis breed, how hit is Godis body by uertew of Cristis wordis. And so hit is kyndely breed, as Powle seþ, but hit is sacramentally verrey Godis body.”
68. EWS 46/77–78.
69. EWS 46/81–83.
70. EWS 46/91: “And þus, as Austyn declarþ, fowre poynTes þat fallen to makynge of breed techon us þis charite, and algatis to hauþ hit now, for ellys we gregien owre synne in etyng of þis breed.”
71. EWS 46/91–94.
72. EWS 46/64–65.