JOHN WYCLIF—ALL WOMEN’S FRIEND?

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Wyclif raised the specter of women priests, bishops, and popes to further his argument that every predestined person is truly a priest, but he offered no coherent or cohesive advocacy of female ministry.

"He was evir (God wait) all womanis frend." Thus Gavin Douglas, in a passage in the Middle Scots translation of the Aeneid that he completed in 1513, sought to excuse Chaucer for depicting Aeneas as a false traitor in love, thereby calling in question the twelve years of labor that Virgil had put into his poem. One could expect nothing else from Chaucer, argues Douglas, since he was a friend to all women. This passage is, of course, very well known and rightly has received much attention. Less well known is the charge by Thomas Netter (ca. 1377–1430), Carmelite theologian and confessor of King Henry V, that the main target of his righteous indignation, the heresiarch John Wyclif, was a shameless worker for women:

Wyclif himself was not embarrassed to labor frequently on behalf of woman (non evbuit pluricr laborare pro fœminis) in his book On the Power of The pope, to the end that she might be suitable as a priest of the church, or a bishop, or a pope. I am ashamed to tell this story about a Christian man, a story which will be known to the Jews, will make a mockery of faith, and will be a scandal for the Saracens. But on the other hand, I am afraid to hide a whirlpool of such foulness especially since from this very place [that is, this text] I believe that his followers have assumed the authority of ordaining women priests, who are celebrating masses and other sacraments, being "readerses" (lectores) of the Scriptures and "preacheresses" (predicatrix) in the gatherings of Lollards.²
My purpose here is to consider the material in chapter 11 of Wyclif’s De poestate pape (written in 1379) that provoked this outburst and to ascertain if Chaucer’s controversial contemporary might also merit the appellation of “all women’s friend.” At the outset it must be admitted that what Wyclif actually said is a lot more equivocal, indeed slippery, than Netter admits.

De poestate pape sets in stark opposition the church of its time in all its imperfection and corruption and Wyclif’s view of what the church should be and essentially is. In the final analysis he says that it comprises the elect, those predestined to glory (the predestinati) as opposed to those “foreseen” to be heading toward damnation (the presai). According to Wyclif, anyone who is properly named the head of the church on earth has to be a close follower of Christ, the ultimate and eternal head of the church. This amounts to the view that the pope should be one of the elect and the most perfect person possible. But, he continues, the reality has been, and is, quite different, with many evil men—limbs of the devil rather than of Christ, as Wyclif puts it—daring to claim such exceptional power, a claim that is illegitimate given that they were not in a state of grace.

All of this is consequent on Wyclif’s theory of dominion, which centers on the belief that the right to hold power, whether spiritual or secular, depends on grace; consequently (at least, on the simplest formulation) only the elect can rightly hold and exercise the high offices of priest, bishop, pope, and king. However, the specific consequences for holy women are far from clear in the eleventh chapter of De poestate pape, despite the solidarity that Netter’s attacks confers on them. Here Wyclif contrasts the ways of Christ, who teaches of Himself in a hidden manner, with those of Antichrist, who promotes himself in a blatant, inordinate, and faithless manner—this following from Wyclif’s observation that the pope of his time promotes himself over Christ, even though Christ is the only true head of the church. Then, out of the blue, we are told that “against this” (the antecedent is unspecified) many argue that a woman or a layman can be pope, on grounds of their holiness. After Christ’s Ascension, the Virgin Mary followed Him more closely than any other person, and a layman can be better in his moral behavior than many a priest. But, Wyclif continues, against the first of these two propositions may be raised the objection that women are excluded from such high office because they are insufficiently like Christ in respect to the infirmity of their sex. No matter how holy a woman may be, propter infinitatem sexus she is neither permitted to pray publicly in church nor allowed to pray therein with her head uncovered. He adds that a woman cannot be the head of the church and is not sufficiently close to Christ: presumably Wyclif has in mind here corporeal closeness and the burden of symbolism that the male body bears in scholastic exclusions of women from the priesthood, for he says that by the same argument both a woman and an angel are barred from being named pope. But was there not once a female pope, called “Agnes” (this being the same figure as “Pope Joan”), as we read in Ralph Higden’s Polychronicon? Wyclif does not seem to doubt the truth of this account, but by no means does he approve of Agnes’s actions. It is evident, he declares, that she falsely trafficked with the name of pope. Here, it would seem, is further proof of the decadence of the papacy.

Moving on to the matter of whether a righteous layman can be pope, Wyclif declares that, in the realm of sheer logic, this is quite possible. Here the “absolute power” of God is implicated, that principle of ultimate possibility that is well known to us from recent scholarship on fourteenth-century nominalist theology and philosophy, particularly the thought of William of Ockham, though the idea is of both earlier and wider currency. The realm of the potestas absoluta is best understood not as one of action but rather as one of capacity, comprising all the possibilities open to God, out of which He chose or chooses to do certain things, or to establish certain laws or procedures, de potestas ordinata. Whatever God has done, does, or will do, falls within His ordained will, and most of this is understood as the present orders of nature and salvation. However, by His absolute power God could, for example, make an essence without existence, produce an accident without its subject, make the body of Christ be present in the absence of the host, remit guilt and punishment without created grace—and, indeed, destroy the air in a house while conserving its roof and walls, make water without any qualities at all, or create a human being without color. All these examples are taken from Ockham’s quodlibetal questions.

For Ockham, as for his contemporaries in general, such extraordinary activities are restrained only inasmuch as God cannot do anything that involves a contradiction. For example, the potestas absoluta cannot produce infinitely many things simultaneously, conserve a thing along with its contrary, or make contradictories true at the same instant. But this seems a relatively minor statute of limitations. The potestas dei absoluta remains quite awesome and can operate in ways that are surprising, even shocking, as viewed from the perspective of the status quo. It should be emphasized, however, that here we are dealing with things that God is able to do but might never do.

The extreme logical possibilities that Wyclif has in mind, at this point in his argument, are explained thus:

It is clear that logically a layman can be pope. It seems possible by the absolute power of God that everyone now living could be a limb of the devil or that the church’s clergy would cease to exist (desit clerus ecclesiæ), which would be even more marvelous. (P. 272)
If I understand this correctly, in the first instance Wyclif is saying that _de potestas dei absoluta_ any living person, no matter how pious he or she may be, can become an agent or instrument of the devil. If God wills this to happen, then so it shall be. The second extreme situation is less clear. In what sense would the entire clergy cease to exist—perhaps be rendered unable to function in terms of priestly power, despite the fact that all its members were properly ordained and formally appointed to various offices in the church? This interpretation seems to fit with what Wyclif proceeds to say; there is no reason to suppose that he was imagining the possibility of a wholesale divine massacre of the priestly class. He identifies as a "necessary proposition" the fact that there are many people, who lived or are living during the period that extends from the time of the Ascension until the Day of Judgment, "who are holier than those others who possess clerical _ordo_ and status in a way that is repugnant to divine ordination" (p. 272).

Indeed, if the entire clergy was corrupt in comparison with the laity, then God could suddenly enlighten some layperson so that he would live in a holy, pure, and proper way according to the divine will. And then that person would be a cleric, even though he had learned none of the seven liberal arts and had not been ordained by human hand according to the episcopal rites. The evidence does not prove that this is what _has_ happened (_de facto_). Wyclif continues, but it seems to suggest that such a thing _can_ happen through the absolute power of God. The importance of personal worthiness, which ultimately means worthiness in the sight of God, is then affirmed. It is fitting that all the faithful should approve the choice of God in such matters, because one man does not choose another for some dignity or other without considering him to be worthy. But if a man is truly worthy, then he has been chosen by God as being worthy of trust. And so, no one ought to choose a man for an important position unless he thinks him chosen by God (p. 272).

A major caveat: Wyclif is not claiming this argument unequivocally as his own here, although its import is clearly in line with doctrine that is at the very center of his theology. Neither does Wyclif pursue it at this point; the prospect of female ministry recedes into the far distance as he chooses to inveigh against the notion that the primacy of the Roman Church should claim supremacy over all ecclesiastical functions and rites. This leads into a prolonged discussion of the symbolism of priestly vestments. From this rambling discussion the key question eventually emerges: Does the church really need the leadership of dubious pontiffs? Wyclif's answer is in the negative—it would continue to exist, and function perfectly well, without them. Nothing would be lost thereby. _Ordo_ would continue to operate, priests would still exist, and all of the sacraments would survive—for even a simple priest can administer any of them. In case of necessity a layman can baptize, so why then cannot a _sacerdos simplex_ perform those rites that the pope claims as his prerogative? "Human laws or constitutions cannot contend against the law of God," or are to be believed unless they are in accord with reason (p. 307).

Mention of baptism by a layman brings Wyclif's mind back to consider further the argument that if a layman can baptize so he should also be able to confirm, consecrate, and administer any of the other sacraments. The usual argument against this proposition, Wyclif notes, is that it involves a non sequitur because of the difference between baptism and the other sacraments, baptism being more necessary than the others. But rather than lingering over that difference here, Wyclif returns to the _potestas absoluta_ of God in posing the question, Can God directly bestow priestly powers on certain unlikely individuals—including women? Some thirty-four pages (in Lounsbury's edition) from the time that Wyclif first raised the issue of female ministry, he now returns to it:

Those who base subtle arguments on the absolute power of God ( _subillantes in Dei potestas absoluta_ ) say that inasmuch as God can communicate the power of making and administering any sacraments whatever not only to a layman but also to a woman or any other irrational creature, therefore such a person can (indeed) administer sacraments of this kind. I don't think that anyone will impugn this point, since there are many things which are necessary in absolute terms, which it is useless to preach to the people. And so I proceed broadly in this manner by limiting my discussion to legal power and the ordained power of God. Therefore I lay aside the examination of such conclusions, by revealing Catholic opinions, which I think are of benefit to the church. (P. 308)

The recondite speculations of professional theologians were not meant to travel beyond the privileged confines of the schools—hence the remark that there are many things possible _de potestas dei absoluta_ that it would not be appropriate to mention in sermons. No need to shock the layfolk! But what is even more intriguing about this passage is the way in which it qualifies his earlier statement about the relationship between God's absolute power and irregular ministry (p. 272). Now Wyclif is distancing himself somewhat from the notion that women can be priests by the _potestas dei absoluta_, that God can choose to communicate sacrificial power to a layman or a woman or "any other irrational creature." His point is that this is a view put forward (or a view of the type that is put forward) by those who make subtle arguments involving the absolute power of God. Wyclif's own attitude to an argument that places women among "irrational creatures" is unclear, but the general tone here certainly does not imply approval for those _subillantes_. This impression finds support in Wyclif's move away
from their type of argumentation: he will limit his discussion to "legal power" (that is, what is legally possible in the here and now, as recorded by canon law) and the potestas dei ordinata (that is, what is possible within what we have become accustomed to regard as the normative, the present orders of nature and salvation).

Thomas Netter will have none of this evasion. Having cited the passage from De potestate pope we have just reviewed, he juxtaposes it with a principle culled from another of Wyclif's works, the Tri Lopez: "Deus nichil potest facere nisi quod fiat."

God cannot do anything except what He does. Faced with this principle, Netter declares, a man of good faith could not do anything other than conclude that if God can convey to a woman or brute beast the power of confecting the Eucharist then He does so. Hence the absolute and ordained powers of God are one and the same power (in Wyclif's thought, as here characterized by Netter), it being impossible to maintain any distinction between them. And if this fact is not sufficiently clear already, Netter continues, it becomes utterly obvious even to Wyclif that he is going to limit his inquiry to what is legally possible and in accord with the divine power of God. In other words, Netter sees the move as further proof that the “power distinction” is not a real option for Wyclif. As I have already noted, Wyclif had simply said that he was not taking up the option of arguing de potestas dei absoluta (and in the process, disparaging those who have done just that), but rather was focusing on the “ordained” order of things. But for Netter this is symptomatic of one of his opponent's core beliefs. The contingencies in question (communicating sacerdotal power to a laity, a woman, or “any other irrational creature”) do not belong to some distant realm of ultimate possibility. They may well be happening right now. And that is the view for which Wyclif must be held to account.

Thus Netter seeks to find a position from which he can get a clear shot at his elusive target. That task becomes much easier thanks to certain robust statements that Wyclif makes in De potestate pope shortly following his engagement with those subtilanies in Dei potestas absoluta (pp. 308–309). The monstrosity of sin in a man who is destined for damnation would be a greater impediment to the reception and lawful ministration of whatever sacraments you please than would bodily monstrosity, no matter how great, or the gender (distincio sexus) of a woman who is predestined to glory and adorned with the virtues. And yet, Wyclif continues, many men give more weight to the visible sign that has a human origin than to the invisible sign to which God has given a greater weight—as is illustrated by the story of the puella Agnes (Pope Joan), as narrated by Ralph Higden. In this case it is “human laws which say that she did not perform papal acts, and that she was not lawfully elected because of the unsuitability of her [female] body.”

But it is difficult to resolve such a problem with certainty, Wyclif continues, "for an election is generally invalid when someone is chosen who is unfit in the sight of God." The influence of Wyclif's dominium-theory is blatant. Presumably he has in mind the story, as reported in Higden's Polychronicon, of how the papissa fornicated with her lover, the result being a child that was born as she made her way from St. Peter's to the Lateran Church. (And, of course, the deceitfully assumed papal power in the first place, having disguised herself as a man.) From that evidence it could well be inferred that she was “unfit in the sight of God” (though Wyclif himself does not spell that out). "And so," Wyclif continues, “human institution has some difficulty in describing a true pope” (p. 309). I presume this to mean that it is practically impossible to come up with a description that will guarantee the election of a truly good pope; men are all too easily deceived by appearances. Since Pope Agnes/Joan was learned and looked like a man, her authority was accepted, but once her female form was discovered it was deemed to debar her from high office. But in the sight of God, the actions she performed as pope could well have been valid, and in the eyes of her contemporaries they were regarded as valid, until the secret of her sex was revealed.

Wyclif is not necessarily speaking in support of Pope Agnes/Joan in particular; we may recall his earlier remark that she falsely trafficked with the name of pope (p. 272). Netter gets it absolutely right, I think, when he declares that here Wyclif "seems to vigorously maintain that a predestinate woman ought not to be debarred by her sex from being ordained to minister whatever sacraments you please. And again, that she can be ordained as a bishop or [even] a pope." In other words, Wyclif was going against traditional belief in supposing that it was not Joan's female form that was the problem but rather her moral state and, hence, whether she was one of the predestinati or the presbicti.

If further support for this reading is needed, it is provided by the way in which Wyclif proceeds to use a passage from St. Augustine's De civitate dei (20.10), wherein the saint refers to the reward that Christ's true followers will receive at the Last Judgment (pp. 312–313): "They shall be priests of God and of Christ: and shall reign with him a thousand years," as the Apocalypse says (20.6), and "this refers not to the bishops alone, and presbyters, who are now specially called priests in the church: but as we call all believers Christians on account of the mystical chasm, so we call all priests because they are members of the One Priest." Augustine adds that the Apostle Peter is referring to those members when he speaks of "a holy people, a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2.9). In Wyclif's view, the real "priests of God" are being described, and they need not be identified with men who are officially designated as such by the church. Ordination by God is far superior to material ordination by men. And from all this, two things are
clear, concludes Wyclif. First, that a woman may be a priest, and it cannot be proved by either canon or civil law that Agnes was not a pope or that her papal actions were invalid. Second, all those men and women who are true members of Christ (that is, destined to glory) are priests, their power deriving from the communion of saints. St. John Chrysostom is credited with "beautifully teaching" this doctrine (p. 313).

At last, Wyclif's views have become sufficiently clear. But he fails to discuss the consequences of his conclusions for the real world or even consider whether they have any. There is no directive for action, no suggestion that the true priests of God (whether materially ordained or not) should step forward and claim exclusive rights of ministry. Indeed, such a move would be difficult if not impossible for Wyclif to make, given his many remarks (in De potestate pape and elsewhere) to the effect that one cannot presume to know the identity of the predestinated. And if we cannot know that, we cannot possibly know the membership of the "royal priesthood." In sum, Wyclif has provided a means of neutralizing his own reasoning concerning dominion. Here is argument rendered impotent, speculation without issue. It was a relatively easy task for Netter to point out that Augustine and Chrysostom were seeking to honor the spiritual status of souls pleasing to God, with no intention whatever of devaluing the normative operation of priestly ordo. Being a member of the One Priest who is Christ, and destined for due reward on Judgment Day, does not authorize one to perform all those priestly powers and prerogatives that, in the here and now, are dependent on ordination by a bishop.

What sort of afterlife, then, did Wyclif's thoughts about women priests have? They lived on in the minds of some of his followers, most notably the Welsh Lollard Walter Brut, who was brought to trial by John Trefnant, bishop of Hereford, in 1391–93. The long list of heresies aduced against him includes the belief that "women have power and authority and make the body of Christ, and they have the power of the keys of the church, of binding and loosing." Yet Brut has relatively little to say on those matters, at least in the trial records. However, in the four questiones (preserved in London, British Library, Harley 31) that were written in refutation of Brut, they are singled out and afforded substantial treatment. Having spent a long time studying these texts, I have come (reluctantly) to the conclusion that the elaborate arguments in favor of female ministry that they include may have owed little to Brut's own views as preserved in the trial records, and we need not leap to the conclusion that Brut's opponents had access to additional records of the Welshman's views that have not come down to us. Rather, these questions may be read as a substantial amplification of what Brut had said, provoked at least in part by the eleventh chapter of De potestate pape. In short, the most extensive treatment of women priests in late-medieval England comes not from the Lollards but from their opponents, who built up their heretical arguments in order to knock them down.

The Harley questiones were written by, and for, professional theologians. They were certainly not intended for consumption by a wider public, and the issues they address do not seem to have enjoyed much of a circulation in vulgar, to judge from the not inconsiderable corpus of surviving Middle English Lollard texts. It is particularly telling, I think, that when Walter Brut appears in Pierce the Ploughman's Creed (at lines 557–63) there is no mention of his views about female ministry. However, it would seem that some notions concerning "women priests" did make it into the vernacular, to judge from the Norwich trial records relating to, for example, Hawisia Moore, who held, "every man and every woman being in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath [as] muche poer of God in al thynges as any prest ordcde, be he pope or bishop." But this scarcely supports the hypothesis that Lollard women actually performed priestly functions. True, there are records that indicate that they proselytized alongside their menfolk, but this is far from proving the existence of "a nascent counter-church" (as Margaret Aston puts it) with laymen and women assuming to administer the sacraments. A few "horror stories" have come down to us, such as Roger Dymock's claim that in heretical conventicles at Oxford and London certain "women (whom they call virgins, but in fact are not their whores) have, I cannot say celebrated, but rather profaned masses." And Thomas Netter himself excitedly reported how, "in the city of London the most foolish of London, set up on stools, publicly read and taught the scriptures in a congregation of men." However, such claims are few and far between. "The fact that we hear so little, even polemically" regarding actual incidents, averts Aston, "suggests the extreme rarity of such proceedings as illicit ordinations or bowdlerized masses, conducted by male or female celebrants." She concludes that what we are dealing with is no more substantial than "plausible gossip"—while accepting that "gossip is also part of history."

I would speculate that some of that gossip—at least the part of it that related to "preachersesses"—reached the ears of that great seeker after "tyrdownes," Geoffrey Chaucer. Maybe his Bible-quoting, argument-toting Wife of Bath was a highly topical construct. But that is the subject for another essay. Let us end this one by addressing the question posed at its very beginning: can Wyclif be regarded as all women's friend, a shameless worker for women in so far as he argued for their equality with men as possible recipients of such divine grace as would empower them to hold high office? Hardly. His views on the subject of female ministry are inchoate, with many loose ends and substantial gaps, some of which I have tried to
fill in above. The story of puella Agnes pulls him in different directions. On the one hand, she affords him proof of the sorry state of the papacy; on the other, the fact that she was “lernede” in “dyvers science” and performed the functions of the papal office raises the possibility that a woman can indeed serve as a priest, bishop, or pope. Then again, Wyclif wants to make the point that Agnes’s contemporaries were (incorrectly) more concerned with her supposedly inappropriate female body than with her moral monstrosity, presumably an allusion to her deceitful accession to the high office of pope and the lusts that resulted in her downfall and public disgrace. It is all too easy for Wyclif to sneer that the earthly church is concerned more with the visible sign of human origin than with the invisible sign that God values more highly: he himself offers no real alternative and indeed (elsewhere) warns us against presuming to decide who is predestined to glory and who is “foreseen” as damned (unless of course God has honored us with a special revelation of the truth). Furthermore, such views as he does express in support of female ministry are interspersed with discussions of other topics (such as the symbolism of priestly vestments) that seem equally, or even more, important to him. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, in hammering home his argument that every predestined person is truly a priest, Wyclif raised the specter of female ministry as a means of gaining attention, but he failed to think through the implications of some of his most startling statements.

He certainly gained the attention of the theologians who wrote against Walter Brut, and of Thomas Netter. If Netter was outraged by Wyclif’s failure to feel shame for his outrageous advocacy of women, for the heresiarcs’s most recent readers the problem may be rather that he had little cause for shame. It would seem, then, that (unfortunately) we can spare Wyclif’s blushes.

Notes

I am grateful to Dr. Jim Binns for helping me navigate some particularly difficult passages of Wyclif’s Latin, and to W.J. Courtenay for invaluable discussion of the distinction between God’s absolute and ordained powers.


6. The reference is to 1 Cor. 11:3–7, where St. Paul set in opposition women praying with their heads covered and men praying with their heads uncovered, symbolizing the belief that man “is the image and glory of God” whereas “the woman is the glory of the man” and therefore cannot claim “headship.” All Biblical references are to Challoner’s revision of the Douay Bible.


11. Here I refer to the implication of Wycliffite dominion theory that only a person in a state of righteousness has true authority, and therefore the functions that
an unworthy officeholder performs lack such authority and may be spurned. Indeed, such a person should not be appointed to high office in the first place, and if someone actually in power acts in a way that is contrary to his high calling, then his authority is, at the very least, seriously compromised.


14. For citation of important passages (and other passages that complicate the issue), see Michael Wilks, "Predestination, Property, and Power: Wyclif's Theory of Dominion and Grace," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 223–26 [220–26]. Wyclif seeks to reassure those who may be worried by the possibility that a damned priest is ministering to them by stating that no member of such a man's congregation will suffer punishment because of his lack of grace. See *De ecclesia*, ed. J. Lesceth (London: Trübner, 1886), p. 464.

15. Cf. the remarks of Gordon Leff to the effect that, since Wyclif held that God alone knows the state of grace of any individual, therefore his doctrine of dominion remained at the level of pure theory, "singularly devoid of intimacy," with "its practical consequences" being "reduced to nullity." *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1967), 2:59. In a similar vein, Michael Wilks has suggested that Wyclif "took particular pleasure in indulging in lengthy speculation about divine possibilities," knowing "full well that this speculation was to have no immediate results for human life": "("Predestination, Property, and Power," 228). However, Anne Hudson has urged caution in this matter. Addressing Leff's stance, she emphasizes "Wyclif's own use of the theory throughout his own writings" and notes, "even if only God could know the state of grace, man could make a pretty shrewd guess in cases of outrageous behaviour; even if certainty was impossible of access." Furthermore, many of Wyclif's followers spelled out the consequences of his theory, which indicates that it "was not so plainly the academic speculation that modern critics have suggested" (*Premature Reformation*, pp. 360, 362). Therefore it would be rash to undervalue at least the subversive potential of Wyclif's theory of dominion in general and his acceptance of women priests (as one of its consequences) in particular.

16. John Purvey also argued in favor of women priests, in a (now lost) treatise entitled *De compendio scripturarum, patrum ammonitione et canone*, which Netter (on his own account) took from him in prison. For Netter's hostile comments on this treatise, see his *Doctrina 1*, cols. 619, 638–39.


20. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, 1428–31, Camden Fourth Series 20 (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1977), p. 142. Cf. the similar opinions attributed to Margery Baxter (p. 49), John Skylly (pp. 52, 57), John Godesell (p. 61), Sibilla Godesell (p. 67), Richard Fleccher (p. 86), John Skylan (p. 147), William Hardy (p. 153), Edmund Archer (pp. 166), Thomas Mone (pp. 177, 179), and William Mase (p. 205). It seems reasonable to assume that they were following the teachings of the charismatic preacher William White. For White's heretical views, including the belief that quibus fit dilectis in Christo Jesu est sacros sanctae sanctificationis Unigencis, ed. F. W. Stow, *Rolle Series* (London: Longman, 1858), pp. 422–24.


28. The topic of priestly vestments takes up some thirteen pages in Lesceth's edition of *De potestate pepe*—far more than Wyclif allowed to the topic of female ministry, which, if all the relevant statements were brought together, would scarcely occupy four pages (though it would be difficult if not impossible to collate them in this way, given that they appear within larger arguments rather than function as the singular focus of attention).