Readings from John Wycliffe’s Works

As Touching the Right and Title of the King and the Pope

Setting apart the minds of learned men, and what might be said in the matter, either by the canon law, or by the law of England, or the civil law; it resteth now only to persuade and prove the affirmative part of this doubt, by the principles of Christ’s law. And first I prove it thus:—

Every natural body hath power given of God to resist against its contrary, and to preserve itself in due estate, as philosophers know very well. Insomuch, that bodies without life are endued with such kind of power (as it is evident) unto whom hardness is given, to resist those things that would break them, and coldness, to withstand the heat that dissolveth them. Forasmuch then, as the kingdom of England (after the manner and phrase of the Scriptures) ought to be one body, and the clergy with the commonalty the members thereof, it seemeth that the same kingdom hath such power given it of God; and so much the more apparently, by how much the same body is more precious unto God, adorned with virtue and knowledge. Forsomuch then as there is no power given of God unto any creature, for any end or purpose, but that he may lawfully use the same to that end and purpose, it followeth that our kingdom may lawfully keep back and detain their treasure for the defence of itself, in what case soever necessity do require the same.

Secondly, the same is proved by the law of the Gospel; for the pope cannot challenge the treasure of this kingdom, but under the title of alms, and consequently under the pretence of the works of mercy, according to the rule of charity.

But in the case aforesaid the title of alms ought utterly to cease: ergo, the right and title of challenging the treasure of our realm shall cease also in the presupposed necessity. Forsomuch as all charity hath his beginning of himself, it were no work of charity, but of mere madness, to send away the treasures of the realm into foreign nations, whereby the realm itself may fall into ruin, under the pretence of such charity.

It appeareth also by this, that Christ the head of the church, whom all Christian priests ought to follow, lived by the alms of devout women, Luke vii. 8. He hungered and thirsted, he was a stranger, and many other miseries he sustained, not only in his members, but also in his own body, as the apostle witnesseth, 2 Cor. viii., “He was made poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich.” Whereby in the first endowing of the church, whatsoever he were of the clergy that had any temporal possessions, he had the same by form of a perpetual alms, as both writings and chronicles do witness.

Whereupon St. Bernard, declaring in his second book to Eugenius, that he could not challenge any secular dominion by right of succession, as being the vicar of St. Peter, writeth thus: “That if Saint John should speak unto the pope himself as St. Bernard doth unto Eugenius, were it to be thought that he would take it patiently? But let it be so, that you do challenge it unto you by some other ways or means; but truly by any right or title apostolical, you cannot so do; for how could he give unto you that which he had not himself? That which he had he gave you, that is to
say, care over the church; but did he give you any lordship or rule? Hark what he saith: ‘Not bearing rule (saith he) as lords over the clergy, but behaving yourselves as examples to the flock.’ And because thou shalt not think it to be spoken only in humility, and not in verity, mark the word of the Lord himself in the Gospel: ‘The kings of the people do rule over them, but you shall not do so.’”

Here lordship and dominion is plainly forbidden to the apostles, and darest thou then usurp the same? If thou wilt be a lord, thou shalt lose thine apostleship: or if thou wilt be an apostle, thou shalt lose thy lordship: for truly thou shalt depart from the one of them. If thou wilt have both, thou shalt lose both, or else think thyself to be of that number, of whom God doth so greatly complain, saying, “They have reigned, but not through me; they are become princes, and I have not known it.” Now if it doth suffice thee to rule with the Lord, thou hast thy glory, but not with God. But if we will keep that which is forbidden us, let us hear what is said: “He that is the greatest amongst you (saith Christ) shall be made as the least; and he which is the highest, shall be as the minister;” and for example, he set a child in the midst of them.

So this then is the true form and institution of the apostles’ trade: lordship and rule is forbidden, ministration and service commanded.

Excerpt from Wycliffe’s Wyckett

[V.] And the Holy Ghost descended upon the heathen, as he did upon the apostles in Jerusalem, as it is written (Joel ii.); and Christ were so merciful to send the Holy Ghost to the heathen men (Acts viii. x.), and he made them partakers of his blessed word; why should it then be taken from us in this land that be Christian men? Consider you whether it is not all one to deny Christ’s words for heresy, and Christ for an heretic? for if my word be a lie, then I am a liar that speaketh the word; therefore if my words be heresy, then am I a heretic that speaketh the word; therefore it is all one to condemn the word of God in any language for heresy, and God for an heretic that spake the word; for he and his word is all one, and they may not be separated; and if the word of him is the life of the world, as it is written, (Matt. ii.) “Not only by bread liveth man, but in every word that cometh out of the mouth of God;” and every word of God is the life of the soul of man, as saith St. John, (1 John ii. 27) “that thou have anointing of the Holy Ghost, and thou have no need of any man, but teach thou in all things,” which is his blessed word, in whom is all wisdom and cunning, and yet ye be always to learn as well as we. How may any antichrist for dread of God take it away from us that be Christian men, and thus suffer the people to die for hunger in heresy and blasphemy of man’s law that corrupteth and slayeth the soul, as pestilence slayeth the body? As David beareth witness, where he speaketh of the chain of pestilence; and most of all they make us believe a false law that they have made upon the secret host, for the most falsest belief is taught in it.

[VI.] For where find ye that ever Christ or any of his disciples or apostles taught any man to worship it? For in the mass creed it is said, “I believe in one God only, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten and born of the Father, before all the world: he is God of God, light of light, very God of every God, begotten and not made, and of one substance, even with the Father,
by whom all things be made;” and the Psalm, “Quicunque vult,” there it is said, “God is the Father, God is the Son, and God is the Holy Ghost; unmade is the Father, unmade is the Son, and unmade is the Holy Ghost.” And thou then, that art an earthly man, by what reason mayest thou say that thou makest thy Maker? Whether may the made thing say to the maker, “Why hast thou made me thus?” or may it turn again, and make him that made it? God forbid! Now answerest thou that sayest every day that thou makest of bread the body of the Lord, flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, God and man; forsooth, thou answerest greatly against reason, by these words that Christ spake at his supper, on Serethur’s day, at night, (Matt. xxvi.) that Christ “took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples and apostles, and said, (Mark xiv.) “Take ye, and eat ye, this is my body which shall be given for you. And also he taking the cup, and did give thanks, and gave to them, and said, Drink ye all hereof; this is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed out for many into the remission of sins;” as saith Luke, (Luke xxii. 19) “When Jesus had taken bread, he gave thanks, and brake it to them, and said, Take ye, eat ye; this is my body that shall be given for you: do ye this in remembrance of me.”

[VII.] Now understand ye the words of our Saviour Christ, as he spake them one after another, as Christ spake them. For he took bread and blessed; and yet what blessed he? The Scripture saith not that Christ took bread and blessed it, or that he blessed the bread which he had taken. Therefore it seemeth more that he blessed his disciples and apostles, whom he had ordained witnesses of his passion, and in them he left his blessed word, which is the bread of life, as it is written, “Not only in bread lived man, but in every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. iv.) Also Christ saith, “I am the bread of life, that came down from heaven.” (John vi.) Therefore it seemeth more that he blessed his disciples, and also his apostles, in whom the bread of life was left more than in material bread; for the material bread hath an end, as it is written in the Gospel of Matthew xv., that Christ said, “All things that a man eateth goeth down into the draught away,” (Matt. xv.) and it hath an end of rooting; but the blessing of Christ kept his disciples and apostles both bodily and ghostly. As it is written, that “none of them perished, but the son of perdition, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.” (John xvii.) And often the Scripture saith that “Jesus took bread, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take ye, eat ye; this is my body, that shall be given for you.” But he said not, “This bread is my body,” or that “the bread should be given for the life of the world.” For Christ saith, “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” (John vi.)

[VIII.] Also Christ saith in the Gospel, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except the wheat corn fall into the ground and die, it bideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” (John xii.) Here men may see by the words of Christ, that it behoved that he died in the flesh, and that in his death was made the fruit of everlasting life for all them that believe on him; as it is written, “For as by Adam all die, even so by Christ shall all live, and every man in his own order; for as one clearness is in the sun, another in the moon, and a star in clearness [is] nothing in comparison to the sun, even so is the again rising of the dead men. For we be sown in corruption, and shall rise again incorruptible; we are sown in infirmity, and shall rise again in virtue; we are sown in natural bodies, and shall rise again spiritual bodies.” (1 Cor. xv.) Then if Christ shall change thus our deadly bodies by death, and God the Father spared not his own Son, as it is written, (Matt. Mark, Luke,) but that death should reign in him as in us, and that he should be translated into a
spiritual body, the first again rising of dead men; then how saith hypocrites that take on them to
make our Lord’s body too, whether make they the glorified body, either make they again the
spiritual body, which is risen from death to life, either make they the fleshly body, as it was
before he suffered death? and if they say, also, that they make the spiritual body of Christ, it may
not be so, for that thing that Christ said and did, he did it as he was at supper, before he suffered
his passion, as it is written that the spiritual body of Christ rose again from death to life. (Matt.
xxviii.)

[IX.] Also he ascended up to heaven, and he will abide there till he come to judge the quick and
the dead: and if they say that they make Christ’s body as it was before he had suffered his
passion, then must they needs grant that Christ is to die yet: for by all Scriptures he was
promised to die, and that he gave lordship of everlasting life.

Furthermore, if they say that Christ made his body of bread, with what words made he it? not
with these words, (Hoc est corpus meum) that is to say, in English, “This is my body;” for they
be words of giving, and not of making, which he said after that he brake the bread, then
departing it among the disciples and apostles. Therefore if Christ had made of that bread his
body, [he] had made it in his blessing, or else in giving of thanks, and not in the words of giving;
for if Christ had spoken of the material bread that he had in his hand, as when he said, (Hoc est
 corpus meum) “This is my body,” and it was made before, or else the word had been a lie; for if
ye say, “This is my hand,” and if it be not a hand, then am I a liar: therefore seek it busily, if ye
can find two words of blessing, or of giving of thanks, the which Christ did, and that a [ll] the
clers of the earth knoweth not, for if ye might find or know it those words, then should you wax
great masters above Christ, and then ye might be givers of his substance, and as father and maker
of him, and that he should worship you, as it is written, “Thou shalt worship thy father and
mother.” (Exod. xx.) Of such as desire such worship against God’s law, speaketh St. Paul of the
“man of sin that enhanceth himself as he were God. And he is worshipped over all things as God,
and showeth himself as he were God.” (2 Thess. ii.)

[X.] Where our charge be guilty in this, deem ye or they that know most, for they say that when
ye have said, Hoc est corpus meum, that is to say, “This is my body,” the which ye call “the
words of consecration,” or else of making; and when they be said over the bread, ye say that
there is left no bread, but it is the body of the Lord; but truly there is nothing but a heap of
accidents, as whiteness, ruggedness, roundness, savoury, touching, and tasting, and such other
accidents. Then if thou sayest that flesh and blood of Christ, that is to say, his manhood, is made
more, or increased by so much as the ministration of bread and wine is, then thou must needs
consent that that thing that is not God to-day, shall be God to-morrow; yea, and that thing which
is without spirit or life, but groweth in the field by kind, shall be God another time. And we all
ought to believe that he was without beginning, and without ending, and in his manhood
begotten and not made: (Matt. i. Luke i. Psa. xvi.) for if the manhood of Christ were increased
every day, by so much as the bread and wine draweth that ye minister, he should wax more in
one day by cart-loads than he did in xxxii. years when he was here in earth. And if thou makest
the body of the Lord in those words, Hoc est corpus meum, that is to say, “This is my body,” and
if thou mayest make the body of the Lord in those words, “This is my body,” thou thyself must
be the person of Christ, or else there is a false God.
[XI.] For if it is thy body, as thou sayest, then it is the body of a false knave, or of a drunken man, or of a lecherer, or full of other sins; and then is an unclean body for any man to worship for God. For and Christ had made there his body of material bread in the said words, as I know they be not the words of making, what earthly man had power to do as he did? for in all Holy Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Apocalypse, there be no words written of the making of Christ’s body; but there be written that Christ was the Son of the Father, and that he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and that he took flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, and that he was dead on the third day, and that he ascended to heaven very God and man, and that we should believe in all Scripture that be written of him, and that he is to come to judge the quick and the dead, and the same Christ Jesus, King and Saviour, (Heb. i.) was at the beginning with the Father and the Holy Ghost, making all things of nought, both heaven and earth, and all things that be in it, working by word of his virtue; for he said, “Be it done,” and it was done, (Gen. i.) as whose works never earthly man might comprehend, either make. And yet the words of the making of these things by me, written in the beginning of Genesis, even as God spake them, and if ye cannot make the work that he made, and have the words by which he made it, how shall he make him that made the works? and you have no words of authority, either power left you on earth, by which ye should do this, but as ye have feigned this craft of your false errors, which some of you understand not.

[XII.] For it is prophesied, Isaiah vi. and xlii., chapter of Matthew xiii., and Luke viii., Mark iv., “Ye shall have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not, and ye shall see prophecies and ye shall not understand, lest they were converted, for I hide them from the hearts of those people; their hearts are greatly fatted, and this thing is done to you for the wickedness of your errors in unbelief; therefore be ye converted from your worst sin;” as it is written, when Moses was in the hill with God, (Exodus xx.) the people made a calf, and worshipped it as God, “And God spake to Moses, Go, for the people have done the worst sin to make and worship alien gods.” (Exod. xxxii.) But now I shall ask you a word, answer ye me; Whether is the body of the Lord made at once or at twice? is both the flesh and the blood in the host of the bread? or else is the flesh made at one time, and the blood made at other time, that is to say, the wine in the chalice? If thou wilt say, “It is full and whole the manhood of Christ in the host of bread, both flesh and blood, skin, hair, and bones;” then makest thou to worship a false god in the chalice, which is unconjured when ye worship the bread; and if ye say, “The flesh is in the bread, and the blood in the wine,” then thou must grant, if thy craft be true, as it is not in deed, that the manhood of Christ is departed, and that he is made two times: for first thou takest the host of bread, other a piece of bread, and make it, as ye say, and the innocent people worship it. And then thou takest to thee the chalice, and likewise marrest, makest I would have said, the blood [XIII.] in it, and then worship it also; and if it be so, as I am assured, that the flesh and blood of Christ ascended, then be ye false harlots to God and to us; for when we shall be household, ye bring to us the dry flesh, and let the blood be away; for ye give us after the bread wine and water, and sometimes clean water unblessed, rather conjured, by virtue of your craft; and yet ye say, “Under the host of bread is the full manhood of Christ.” Then by your own confession must it needs be that we worship a false god in the chalice which is unconjured when we worship the bread, and worship the one as the other; but where find ye that ever Christ or any of his disciples taught any man to worship this bread or wine?
Therefore what shall we say of the apostles that were so much with Christ, and were called by the Holy Ghost? had they forgot it to set it in the creed when they made it, that is, Christian men’s belief? or else we might say that they knew no such God: for they believe in no more gods but in Him that was at the beginning, and made of nought all things, Hebrews the first, Psalm cci., visible and invisible; which Lord took flesh and blood, being in the virgin the same God. But ye have many false ways to beguile the innocent people, and sleights of the fiend.

For ye say that in every host either piece is the whole manhood of Christ, either full substance of him. For ye say, “As a man may take a glass, and break the glass into many pieces, and in every piece properly thou mayest see thy face, and thy face not parted; so,” ye say, “the Lord’s body is in each host either piece, and his body not parted.” And this is a foul subtil question to beguile an innocent fool.

[XIV.] But will ye take heed of this subtil question, how a man may take a glass and behold the very likeness of his own face, and yet it is not his face, but the likeness of his face? for and it were his very face, then he must needs have two faces, one on his body, and another in the glass. And if the glass were broken in many places, so there should be many faces, more by the glass than by the body, and each man shall make as many faces to them as they would: but as ye may see the mind or likeness of your face, and it is not the very face, but the figure thereof, so the bread is the figure or mind of Christ’s body in earth; and therefore Christ said, “As oft as ye do this thing, do it in mind of me.” (Luke xxii.) Also ye say, “As a man may light many candles at one candle, and the light of that candle never the more nor never the less; so,” ye say, “that the manhood of Christ descendeth into each part of every host, and the manhood of Christ never the more nor less,”—where then becometh your ministrations? For if a man light many candles at one candle, as long as they burn there will be many candles lighted, and as well the last candle as the first; and so by this reason, if ye shall fetch your word at God, of god make god, there must be many gods, and that is forbidden in the first commandment. (Exod. xx.) And as for making more, either making less of Christ’s manhood, it lieth not in your power to come there nigh, neither touch it, for it is ascended into heaven in a spiritual body, (Matthew xxviii.) which he suffered not Magdalene to touch, when her sins were forgiven to her. (John xxviii.)

[XV.] Therefore all the sacraments that be left here in earth be but minds of the body of Christ; for a sacrament is no more to say, but a sign or mind of a thing passed or a thing to come: for when Jesus spake of the bread, and said to his disciples, Luke the xxii., “As ye do this thing, do it in mind of me,” it was set for a mind of good things of Christ’s body. But when the angel showed to John (Apocalypse xvii.) the sacraments of the woman, and of the beast that bare her, it was set for a mind of evil things to come on the face of the earth, and great stroying of the people of God. (Luke xxii. 19.) And in the old law there were many figures or minds of things to come. For the body of Christ and circumcision was commanded unto a law, (Gen. xvii. 12) and he that kept not the law was slain. And yet St. Paul saith, (Romans ii.) “And neither it is circumcision that is openly in the flesh, but he that is circumcised of heart in spirit, not in letter, whose praising is not of men, but of God.” Peter saith, the third chapter, “And so baptism of like form maketh not us safe, but the putting away of filthiness of the flesh, and the axing of good conscience in God, by the again rising of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, that we should be made heirs of everlasting life, he yeade into heaven, and angels, and powers, and virtues being made subjects to him.” And also the Scriptures say of John Baptist, Matthew the third chapter,
that he “preached in wilderness and said: A stronger than I shall come after me, and I am not worthy to kneel down and unlace his shoe.” And yet Christ said that he was more than a prophet.

[XVI.] Isaiah saith, the xl. chapter, Matthew xi. How many say ye be worthy to make his body and yet your works beareth witness that ye be no less the prophets; for if ye did ye should not teach the people to worship the sacraments or minds of Christ, for Christ himself, which sacraments or figures be lawful that God taught them and left them unto us, as the sacrifices other minds of the old law was full good, as it is written, “They that keep them should live in those.” Paul, Romans x.: and so the bread that Christ brake was left to us for mind of things passed for the body of Christ, that we should believe he was a very man in kind as we, as God in our virtue, and that his manhood was sustained in food as ours be; for Saint Paul saith, “He was very man, and in habit he was found as man.” (Phil. ii. 7.) And so we must believe that he was very God and man together, and that he staid up very God and man to heaven, and that he shall be there till he come to deem the world. And that we may not see him bodily being in this life, as it is written, Peter i.: for he saith, “Whom ye have not ye love, into whom ye now not seeing believe.” And John saith in the first Gospel, “No man saw God, no but the only begotten Son that is in the Father he hath told out.” (John i. 18.) And John saith in his Epistle, the iii. chapter, “Every man that sinneth seeth not him, neither knows him.” By what reason, then, say ye, that be sinners, that ye make God? Truly this must needs be the worst sin, to say that ye make God; and it is the “abomination of discomfort,” that is said in Daniel the prophet, “standing in the holy place; he that readeth let him understand.” (Dan. xi. 32.) Also Luke saith, xxii., that Christ “took the cup after that he had supped, and did give thanks and said, This cup is the new testament in my blood that shall be shed into the remission of sins for man.”

[XVII.] Now what say ye,—the cup which he said is the new testament in my blood, was it a material cup in which the wine was that he gave his disciples wine of, or was it his most blessed body in which the blessed blood was kept till it were shed out for the sins of them that should be made safe by his passion? Needs we must say that he spake of his holy body, as he did when he called his passion either suffering in body a cup when he prayed to his Father, or he went to his passion, Matthew xxvi., and said, “If it be possible that this cup pass from me, but if thou wilt that I drink it, thy will be done?” He spake not here of the material cup in which he had given his disciples drink, for it troubled not him; but he prayed for his great sufferance and bitter, the which he suffered for our sins and not for his. And if he spake of his holy body and passion when he said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” so he spake of his holy body, when he said, “This is my body that shall be given for you,” and not of the material bread which he had in his hand. Also, in another place, he calleth his passion a cup, Matthew xx., where the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to him, and axed of him that her two sons, when he came to his kingdom, might sit one of his right side and one at his left side. And he answered and said, “Woman, thou wittest not what thou axest.” Then he said to them: May ye drink the cup that I shall drink? and they said, Yea, Lord. And he said, “Ye shall drink of my cup, but to sit on my right hand, it is not mine to give, but to the Father it is proper.” But in that he said, “Ye shall drink of my cup,” he promised them to suffer tribulation of this world as he did, by the which they should enter into life everlasting, and to be both on his right hand.

[XVIII.] And thus ye may see that Christ spake not of the material cup, neither of himself nor of his apostles, neither of material bread, neither of material wine. Therefore let every man wisely
with meek prayers and great study, and also charity, read the words of God and Holy Scripture: but many of you be like the mother of Zebedee’s sons, to whom Christ said, “Thou wottest not what thou axest.” So many of you wot not what ye axe or what ye do; for if ye did, ye would not blaspheme God as ye do, to set an alien god instead of the living God. Also Christ saith, John xv., “I am a very vine!” Wherefore worship ye not the vine for God as ye do the bread? Wherein was Christ a very vine? or wherein was the bread Christ’s body? in figurative speech, which is hid to the understanding of sinners. Then if Christ became not a material, neither an earthly vine, neither material vine became the body of Christ; so neither the bread, material bread, was not changed from his substance to flesh and blood of Christ.

Have ye not read John ii., when Christ came into the temple, they axed of him what token he would show, that they might believe him? And he answered unto them, “Cast down this temple, and in three days I shall raise it again;” which words were fulfilled in his rising again from death. But when he said, “Undo this temple,” in that, that he said this, they were deceived, for they understood it fleshly, and had went that he had spoken of the temple of Jerusalem, for because he stood in it. And hereof they accused him at his passion, full falsely, Matt. xxvi.; for he spake of the temple of his blessed body, which rose again in the third day. And right so Christ spake of his holy body, when he said, “This is my body, which shall be given for you,” Luke xxii., which was given to death, and into rising again, to bliss for all that shall be saved by him. But like as they accused him falsely of the temple of Jerusalem, right now-a-days they accuse falsely against Christ, and say, that Christ spake of the bread that he brake among his apostles; for in that Christ said this, they be deceived, take it fleshly, and turn it to the material bread, as the Jews did to the temple; and on this false understanding, they make abomination of discomfort, that is said Daniel the prophet xi., and Matthew xxiv., standing in the holy place, “He that readeth, let him understand.” Now, therefore, pray we heartily to God, that this evil time may be made short for the chosen men, as he hath promised in his blessed Gospel, Matt. xxiv. And the large and broad way, that leadeth to perdition, may be stopped; and the strait and narrow way, that leadeth to bliss, may be made open by Holy Scriptures, that we may know which is the will of God, to serve him in syckerness and holiness, in the dread of God, that we may find by him a way of bliss everlasting. So be it.

Bull of Pope Gregory XI, 1382

Gregory, bishop, servus servorum dei, to his beloved sons the Chancellor and University of Oxford, in the diocese of Lincoln, grace and apostolic benediction.

We are compelled to wonder and grieve that you, who, in consideration of the favors and privileges conceded to your University of Oxford by the apostolic see, and on account of your familiarity with the Scriptures, in whose sea you navigate, by the gift of God, with auspicious oar, you, who ought to be, as it were, warriors and champions of the orthodox faith, without which there is no salvation of souls, ---that you through a certain sloth and neglect allow tares to spring up amidst the pure wheat in the fields of your glorious University aforesaid; and what is still more pernicious, even continue to grow to maturity. And you are quite careless, as has been lately reported to us, as to the extirpation of these tares; with no little clouding of a bright name, danger to your souls, contempt of the Roman Church, and injury to the faith above mentioned. And what pains us the more, is that this increase of the tares aforesaid is known in Rome before the remedy of extirpation has been applied in England where they sprang up. By the insinuation
of many, if they are indeed worthy of belief, deploring it deeply, it has come to our ears that John
de Wycliffe, rector of the church of Lutterworth, in the diocese of Lincoln, Professor of the
Sacred Scriptures (would that he were not also Master of Errors), has fallen into such a
detestable madness that he does not hesitate to dogmatize and publicly preach, or rather vomit
forth from the recesses of his breast, certain propositions and conclusions which are erroneous
and false. He has cast himself also into the depravity of preaching heretical dogmas which strive
to subvert and weaken the state of the whole church and even secular polity, some of which
doctrines, in changed terms, it is true, seem to express the perverse opinions and unlearned
learning of Marsilio of Padua of cursed memory, and of John of Jandun, whose book is extant,
rejected and cursed by our predecessor, Pope John XXII, of happy memory. This he has done in
the kingdom of England, lately glorious in its power and in the abundance of its resources, but
more glorious still in the glistening piety of its faith, and in the distinction of its sacred learning;
producing also many men illustrious for their exact knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, mature in
the gravity of their character, conspicuous in devotion, defenders of the Catholic Church. He has
polluted certain of the faithful of Christ by sprinkling them with these doctrines, and led them
away from the right paths of the aforesaid faith to the brink of perdition.

Wherefore, since we are not willing, nay, indeed, ought not to be willing, that so deadly a
pestilence should continue to exist with our connivance, a pestilence which, if it is not opposed
in its beginnings, and torn out by the roots in its entirety, will be reached too late by medicines
when it has infected very many with its contagion; we command your University with strict
admonition, by the apostolic authority, in virtue of your sacred obedience, and under penalty of
the deprivation of all the favors, indulgences, and privileges granted to you and your University
by the said see, for the future not to permit to be asserted or proposed to any extent whatever, the
opinions, conclusions, and propositions which are in variance with good morals and faith, even
when those proposing strive to defend them under a certain fanciful wrestling of words or of
terms. Moreover, you are on our authority to arrest the said John, or cause him to be arrested and
to send him under a trustworthy guard to our venerable brother, the Archbishop of Canterbury,
and the Bishop of London, or to one of them.

Besides, if there should be, which God forbid, in your University, subject to your jurisdiction,
opponents stained with these errors, and if they should obstinately persist in them, proceed
vigorously and earnestly to a similar arrest and removal of them, and otherwise as shall seem
good to you. Be vigilant to repair your negligence which you have hitherto shown in the
premises, and so obtain our gratitude and favor, and that of the said see, besides the honor and
reward of the divine recompense.

Given at Rome, at Santa Maria Maggiore, on the 31st of May, the sixth year of our pontificate.

The Condemned Conclusions of John Wycliffe

1. That the material substance of bread and of wine remains, after the consecration, in the
sacrament of the altar.

2. That the accidents do not remain without the subject, after the consecration, in the same
sacrament.

3. That Christ is not in the sacrament of the altar identically, truly and really in his proper
corporeal presence.
4. That if a bishop or priest lives in mortal sin he does not ordain, or consecrate, or baptize.
5. That if a man has been truly repentant, all external confession is superfluous to him or useless.
6. That it is not founded in the gospel that Christ instituted the mass.
7. That God ought to be obedient to the devil.
8. That if the pope is fore-ordained to destruction and a wicked man, and therefore a member of
   the devil, no power has been given to him over the faithful of Christ by any one, unless perhaps
   by the Emperor.
9. That since Urban VI, no one is to be acknowledged as pope; but all are to live, in the way of
   the Greeks, under their own laws.
10. To assert that it is against sacred scripture that men of the Church should have temporal
    possessions.
11. That no prelate ought to excommunicate any one unless he first knows that the man is
    excommunicated by God.
12. That a prelate thus excommunicating is thereby a heretic or excommunicate.
13. That a prelate excommunicating a clerk who has appealed to the king, or to a council of the
    kingdom, on that very account is a traitor to God, the king and the kingdom.
14. That those who neglect to preach, or to hear the word of God, or the gospel that is preached,
    because of the excommunication of men, are excommunicate, and in the day of judgment will be
    considered as traitors to God.
15. To assert that it is allowed to any one, whether a deacon or a priest, to preach the word of
    God, without the authority of the apostolic see, or of a Catholic bishop, or of some other which is
    sufficiently acknowledged.
16. To assert that no one is a civil lord, no one is a bishop, no one is a prelate, so long as he is in
    mortal sin.
17. That temporal lords may, at their own judgment, take away temporal goods from churchmen
    who are habitually delinquent; or that the people may, at their own judgment, correct delinquent
    lords.
18. That tithes are purely charity, and that parishoners may, on account of the sins of their
    curates, detain these and confer them on others at their will.
19. That special prayers applied to one person by prelates or religious persons, are of no more
    value to the same person than general prayers for others in a like position are to him.
20. That the very fact that any one enters upon any private religion whatever, renders him more
    unfitted and more incapable of observing the commandments of God.
21. That saints who have instituted any private religions whatever, as well of those having
    possessions as of mendicants, have sinned in thus instituting them.
22. That religious persons living in private religions are not of the Christian religion.
23. That friars should be required to gain their living by the labor of their hands and not by
    mendicancy.
24. That a person giving alms to friars, or to a preaching friar, is excommunicate; also the one receiving.

Reply of John Wycliffe to his Summons by the Pope to come to Rome, 1384

I have joyfully to tell to all true men that believe what I hold, and legates to the pope; for I suppose that if my faith be rightful and given of God, the pope will gladly confirm it; and if my faith be error, the Pope will wisely amend it.

I suppose over this that the gospel of Christ be [the] heart of the corpus of God's law; for I believe that Jesus Christ, that gave in His own person this gospel, is very God and very man, and by this heart passes all other laws.

I suppose over this that the pope be most obliged to the keeping of the gospel among all men that live here; for the pope is highest vicar that Christ has here in earth. For moreness of Christ's vicar is not measured by worldly moreness, but by this, that this vicar sues more Christ by virtuous living; for thus teacheth the gospel, that this is the sentence of Christ.

And of this gospel I take as believe, that Christ for [the] time that He walked here, was [the] most poor man of all, both in spirit and in having; for Christ says that He had nought for to rest His head on. And Paul says that He was made needy for our love. And more poor might no man be, neither bodily nor in spirit. And thus Christ put from Him all manner of worldly lordship. For the gospel of John telleth that when they would have made Christ king, He fled and hid Him from them, for He would none such worldly highness.

And over this I take it as believe, that no man should sue the pope, nor no saint that now is in heaven, but in as much as he sues Christ. For John and James erred when they coveted worldly highness; and Peter and Paul sinned also when they denied and blasphemed in Christ; but men should not sue them in this, for then they went from Jesus Christ. And this I take as wholesome counsel, that the pope leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ gave them,---and move speedily all his clerks to do so. For thus did Christ, and taught thus his disciples, till the fiend had blinded this world. And it seems to some men that clerks that dwell lastingly in this error against God's law, and flee to sue Christ in this, been open heretics, and their fautors been partners.

And if I err in this sentence, I will meekly be amended, yea, by the death, if it be skilful, for that I hope were good to me. And if I might travel in mine own person, I would with good will go to the pope. But God has needed me to the contrary, and taught me more obedience to God than to men. And I suppose of our pope that he will not be Antichrist, and reverse Christ in this working, to the contrary of Christ's will; for if he summon against reason, by him or by any of his, and pursue this unskilful summoning, he is an open Antichrist. And merciful intent excused not Peter, that Christ should name him Satan; so blind intent and wicked counsel excuses not the pope here; but if he ask of true priests that they travel more than they may, he is not excused by reason of God, that he should not be Antichrist. For our belief teaches us that our blessed God suffers us not to be tempted more than we may; how should a man ask such service? And therefore pray we to God for our Pope Urban the Sixth, that his old holy intent be not quenched by his enemies. And Christ, that may not lie, says that the enemies of a man been especially his home family; and this is sooth of men and fiends.