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**Dangerous Sanctity: John Capgrave's *The Life of St. Norbert*  
and its Literary and Cultural Significance**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in **English** from  
The College of William and Mary

by

James C. Staples

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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**April 29, 2010**

### Attacks on Capgrave as Author

Are the works of John Capgrave worth studying? The critical tradition would presume no. The literary craft of Capgrave's hagiographic and historical poetry and prose has not received the attention it deserves even as scholars have been reassessing his contributions to English political and literary culture. Capgrave, a member of the Friar Hermits of St. Augustine, wrote his literature in East Anglia during the first half of the fifteenth century, a period which many modern scholars refer to as a "cultural wasteland" largely because of the Church's limits on potentially heretical activity. Too often a reader will toss one of Capgrave's works aside as yet another negligible product of this wasteland, artistically insignificant, not adding anything of importance to English literature. Critics such as F.J. Furnivall in the late nineteenth century and, more recently, H.S. Bennett in the mid twentieth century have seen his works as tedious and laborious; Bennet says, in agreement with the former, "Dr. Furnivall speaks of the poem [*Life of St. Katherine*] as 'worthless,' and this is very nearly the truth . . . for its slow-moving pedestrian verse does nothing to reconcile us to the *longuers* of the narrative."<sup>1</sup> Generally following the trends of nineteenth-century scholarship, earlier twentieth-century critics have rejected Capgrave's contributions with uninterested dismissal.

Even some scholars who have attempted to re-evaluate Capgrave more highly have slighted his literary merits. During the 1970s, Jane Fredeman attempted to redirect critical examination of Capgrave's work away from his poetic style and towards other literary features by focusing on how the author has achieved "careful manipulation of the scene and setting" by giving them "a dimension through dramatization which they do not

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<sup>1</sup> H.S. Bennet, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 152.

have in the Latin original.”<sup>2</sup> She also defends his familiarity with writing conventions, as regards the language, meter, and stanza form of his time, and noted the difficult task he faced in translating prose Latin *vitae* into Middle English poems, in rime royal more specifically. She does, however, state dismissively: “By any definition of poetry Capgrave’s writing would be found wanting...it is not patterned or varied to arrest the reader’s attention at crucial moments, and it is not always even particularly harmonious.”<sup>3</sup>

Fredeman’s most potentially damning criticism of Capgrave’s writing, however, is that it does little to reveal the life and times of the poet to his reader; she believes that a gap exists between the author’s text on the one hand and his social and political environment on the other. She highlights Capgrave’s reaction, or lack thereof, to the Lollards in his texts:

Apart from notes on the doctrinal issues raised in the early days of the church, condemnations of Wyclif and Oldcastle, a few references to Lollard activities in the years before his *Chronicle* ends in 1417, and explanations of the specific heresies the saint combated in *The Life of St. Augustine*, he does not touch the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Because Fredeman believes that Capgrave does not “touch the subject” of Lollards, the heretics condemned by the Church in the late fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries for being followers of John Wyclif, she argues that Capgrave does not write literature reacting to his surrounding society. She additionally suggests that readers have no access to the thought of the author, John Capgrave, by reading his texts. Although she defends his

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Fredeman, “John Capgrave’s First English Composition ‘The Life of St. Norbert,’” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 57 (1975): 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Fredeman, “The Life of John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393-1464),” *Augustiniana* 29 (1979), 206.

familiarity with writing conventions, Fredeman presents the writing of the author as entirely uninfluenced by the times in which he lived.

Capgrave: Genius or Bore?  
Winstead's Response

Jane Fredeman's assessment that Capgrave was entirely uninfluenced by the fifteenth century, I believe, is wrong. Even from Fredeman's foundational biography of Capgrave, "The Life of John Capgrave, O.E.S.A.," we see that he was far from dull-witted and, thus, he very likely intended a sophisticated agenda in his *vitae* despite their purported dullness. Throughout his life and especially after his death, John Capgrave, in fact, received praise for his intellectual abilities. Capgrave, who lived from 1393 until 1464, became a member of the Friar Hermits of St. Augustine around 1416. His prior-provincial recognized his academic abilities and allowed Capgrave to pursue those abilities in higher education, which the author proceeded through quickly because of his "extra-ordinarily rapid preferment."<sup>5</sup> Those involved in his education assumed that after Capgrave received his Bachelor's degree, which he received with a very high honor, he would continue straight into pursuing the degree of the *magisterium*.<sup>6</sup> His contemporary Osbern Bokenham, an Augustinian poet like Capgrave who wrote the fifteenth-century *Legends of Holy Women*, "never achieved the reputation for learning or the distinguished patronage that Capgrave did."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Capgrave's order named him prior-provincial, the highest position one could achieve as an Austin friar, for two consecutive terms.<sup>8</sup> A century later, the English Reformation controversialist and historian John Bale

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Fredeman, "The Life of John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393-1464)," 211.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

refers to him as “the most learned of the Augustinians,”<sup>9</sup> a title which emphasizes the amount of respect that Capgrave’s work attained, one that is specifically notable because of the intellectual prestige held by the Augustinian order in late medieval England.

When modern critics approach the writings of such a learned author, this most intellectually prestigious man of fifteenth-century England, we would expect them to be, like Capgrave’s contemporaries, impressed by the intellectual quality and superior knowledge that his work displays; however, as stated at the opening of this paper, critics dismiss his texts, especially those in the vernacular, as “worthless.” We can react to this dismissal in two ways: we might agree with it, postulating that Capgrave’s writings received praise from his contemporaries solely because they stood out as relatively excellent in the so-called “cultural wasteland” of the fifteenth century; or, we might dismiss the dismissal by arguing that perhaps the author’s genius exists in subtleties that can easily be overlooked when the texts are removed from their religious and social contexts. The latter is the track taken by Karen Winstead, a recent scholar of Capgrave who has done much to restore his literary reputation; Winstead indeed argues that Capgrave’s texts, primarily his vernacular works, are works of sophistication that indirectly call for the church to adopt a more liberal, yet paradoxically, more traditional approach to orthodoxy, to once again become the Church of such Christian fathers as Augustine and Jerome who were more elastic in their views than the hierarchy of Capgrave’s day. She states that the fifteenth-century author wrote with subtlety in order to mask a dissent from orthodox practices that would be dangerous to voice openly in this very conservative century:

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<sup>9</sup> “...Augustinianorum omniu[m] doctissimus.” John Bale, *Scriptorum Illustrum Maioris Brytanniae Catalogus* (Westmead, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1971), volume 1, page 582.

When we look more deeply into his writings, beyond their surface reflection of the intellectual and political conservatism of the English Church and State, we find an independent mind at work, expressing itself through the adaptations, evasions, codings, and diversions that fifteenth-century authors mastered, perforce, as means to convey something other than prevailing orthodoxies.<sup>10</sup>

According to Winstead's argument, Capgrave's genius lies in his creation of a code through which he quietly yet significantly critiques the ecclesiastical politics of fifteenth-century England. In the light of Winstead's argument, Jane Fredeman's aforementioned view that Capgrave's vernacular texts do little to reveal the life and society of the poet must be viewed with suspicion.

Karen Winstead's analysis of Capgrave's methods largely focuses on his poem *The Life of St. Katherine*. She reveals that Capgrave's work does possess literary merit, especially when the author incorporates surreptitious critiques of the Church into an apparently orthodox text; however, through her analysis of *The Life of St. Katherine*, she generalizes about the author's other works, specifically saying that Capgrave presents all of his saints as intellectuals: "To have some intellectual aspirations seems almost a condition of sanctity for Capgrave,"<sup>11</sup> she argues. When dealing with the *Katherine* text, she convincingly argues about the author's concern for the decreased intellectualism of the fifteenth century; however, she pays very little attention to *The Life of St. Norbert*, a text where intellectualism plays a minimal role in the overall career of the saint. By largely using *The Life of St. Katherine* as a basis on which to generalize about concerns proposed by all of Capgrave's vernacular works, Winstead makes certain assumptions

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<sup>10</sup> Karen Winstead, *John Capgrave's Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

about his other texts, including *The Life of St. Norbert*, which she does not defend through specific literary analysis.

Like Winstead, I too recognize the literary merit of the Augustinian author's vernacular texts; I argue herein specifically that the author's poetic translation, *The Life of St. Norbert*, subtly examines many of the controversial issues of the fifteenth century, specifically those proposed by the Wycliffite heresy, and that it records Capgrave's disagreement with how the Church responded to this heresy. The source for Capgrave's poem is a twelfth-century Latin *vita* of Norbert of Xanten, a reformer and founder of the Premonstratensian order. Capgrave uses this unquestionably orthodox story about an unquestionably orthodox saint in order to disagree with the Church's most notable response to the heresy, the thirteen very conservative Constitutions created by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in the first decade of the fifteenth century. These Constitutions limited the previous generation's more lenient approach to potentially heterodox preaching, literature, translation, and academic study. Through this heavy-handed response to the heresy, Capgrave suggests, the Church breaks with its less legalistic tradition concerning orthodoxy, and he suggests that the Church too easily divides Christians into categories of "orthodox" and "heretodox."

By creating a narrowed definition of "orthodox," based on a set of laws, the Church inevitably created a distinct "other." Anyone who failed to completely follow this strict legalism of the Church would be condemned by the Church as heterodox. As R.I. Moore argues in his *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*,<sup>12</sup> any Church built on legalism creates division in the body of Christ, because any member of the body who

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<sup>12</sup> R.I. Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1987).



does not follow its laws becomes an “other.” This “other” could be a heretic, a Jew, or a leper, but in fifteenth-century England it could also be an orthodox, yet unlicensed preacher, preaching the Gospel. I argue that Capgrave employs *The Life of St. Norbert* to contest the necessity of labels such as “orthodox” or “heretical.”

Although I agree with Winstead that one of Capgrave’s overall concerns regarding his society was the loss of the intellectualism that had flourished previously in the fourteenth century, I disagree with her idea that Capgrave’s main concern in *The Life of St. Norbert* is to present Norbert as an intellectual. Instead, I believe the author continuously stresses that Norbert was an unlearned preacher, a status that was condemnable by Arundel’s Constitutions. I argue that Capgrave presents such a protagonist in order to indirectly criticize the conservative legalism of his society, specifically the preaching restrictions. Because the Church associated unlearned preaching with Lollardy, I find it very significant that Capgrave would choose a source for translation that specifically featured a sanctified yet unlearned preacher. Capgrave not only presents St. Norbert as “lewid,”<sup>13</sup> he additionally says that many of Norbert’s Prmonstratensians were “ydiotes” (1899), thus presenting orthodox preachers of the twelfth century as potentially worthy of condemnation under the laws of the fifteenth-century Church. A strictly legalistic view of orthodoxy defines Norbert as “other” in the saint’s new, fifteenth-century setting. He becomes comparable to those despised Lollards, specifically through his role as preacher, because the Church condemned anyone as heretical for preaching without a proper license or authorization. Capgrave’s

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<sup>13</sup> John Capgrave, *The Life of St. Norbert*, Ed. Cyril Lawrence Smetana (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1971), line 326.

All further quotations from Capgrave’s *Norbert* will be from Smetana’s edition and cited parenthetically in my text.

concern in *The Life of St. Norbert* is religious unity, more than anything else. He reveals how easily one can divide the body of Christ through the restrictions proposed by the many laws reacting to Wyclif, and, although this partially concerns his fear for the loss of intellectualism, this fear is encompassed in his overall concern for religious unity.

Capgrave, therefore, ingeniously reveals how the preaching restrictions of the fifteenth century create division within the Church, even to the point of branding a saint as a heretic, and he responds to these restrictions through Norbert's own defense of preaching, which I will discuss in more detail later. Capgrave's rhetoric of defense against the many preaching restrictions of the fifteenth century noticeably compares to a Wycliffite rhetoric of defense. Through this Wycliffite rhetoric, Capgrave indirectly compares his protagonist to those who were condemned as heretics by the late medieval Church; even more significantly, the translation suggests that such a rhetoric actually came from a traditional Church rhetoric, emphasizing a unity between those whom the Church persecuted as Lollards and the traditional Church. Furthermore, Capgrave's text explicitly compares Norbert's story to that of Paul's, the ideal Christian preacher. Paul, too, could be called a Lollard by Capgrave's Church. Paul preached without specific ordination from a religious authority. He also resisted the legalism of the religious authority of his day, preaching a unity that comes only through the message of Christ. Most significantly, as a saint, Norbert resembles Christ, because any quality of Norbert that can be called saintly is so called by its comparison to Christ. Because of this comparison, a saint by definition is an *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ).<sup>14</sup> If, then, Norbert's qualities as a poor preacher causes him to resemble both Paul and Christ, what keeps the Church from lumping Paul and even Christ into this definition of heretical

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Salih, ed. *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 14.

“other”? In order to create a true sense of unity within the Church, the Church must rid itself of the legalism which so blatantly divided it.

### John Wyclif’s Vision of Unity

The English Church’s heightened fear of “the other” developed directly after and partly in response to the popular Wycliffite heresy. As Kantik Ghosh details in his *Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*, John Wyclif, a professor at Oxford during the second half of the fourteenth century, desired to bring unity to a Church that he saw as divided, like Capgrave. He believed that the polysemous, or multivalent, habits of medieval scriptural exegesis, resulted in discord. Because the many varying interpretations of a scriptural passage often appeared to conflict with one another, and at times with the literal text itself, Wyclif desired one single authority through which unity in religious doctrine could be established; he concluded that this authority was the Bible itself, mainly in its literal meaning. John Wyclif, thus, ironically saw himself not as a divisive figure but as one whose efforts would lead to a unified Church. He desired to create, through his preaching and scripturally based writing, unity out of the fragmentation that he recognized in the multiple religious institutions of his day.<sup>15</sup> The somewhat contradictory polysemy of religious authority could best be seen, according to Wyclif, in the division of the body of Christ into different religious orders of monks, canons, and friars, with each order stressing a different view of a holy life. In response to this division, Wyclif proposed that the only true way to divine God’s intention for mankind was by studying the Bible in its literal sense, void of any sort of

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<sup>15</sup> A good description of the “classless gender-blind society” created by Wycliffite translations of texts into English, specifically the translation of the Bible, can be found in Ralph Hanna III, “‘Vae octuplex,’ Lollard socio-textual ideology, and Ricardian-Lancastrian prose translation,” *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

glossing. Wyclif, thus, desired to eradicate the very polysemy which provided him the means to initially propose his heterodox views.<sup>16</sup>

Wyclif recognized that Church unity could best be achieved through a single authority, the literal meaning of scripture, yet that meaning, to be authoritative, had to be divinely inspired. Kantik Ghosh refers to Wyclif's idea that scripture should be understood only through "divine knowledge" as "Augustinian *sapientia*,"<sup>17</sup> and he contrasts it to "Aristotelian *scientia*," a different medieval approach to scripture. Aristotelian *scientia*, as Ghosh defines it, "sets out to examine the Bible as a complex textual object which offers to its devoted, rationalist student a growing body of information about the way it works," whereas Augustinian *sapientia* "looks instead to illumination: the truths of sacred scripture are vouchsafed through prayer and divine grace to him who lives a life of virtue and rectitude."<sup>18</sup> Anyone who lives rightly (*recte vivendi*) has access to *sapientia*, a divine understanding of the singular message of scripture. *Sapientia*, thus, sees the unity underlying all differing interpretations of the Bible.

Wyclif adapted both the Aristotelian and Augustinian approaches to scripture in his *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, but he attached a greater importance to divine *sapientia* and *recte vivendi*. Because he wished to reestablish the unity of Church he saw as divided, Wyclif argued that *scientia*, when turned towards scripture, led to too many differing views of the message contained in the Bible and so must be carefully weighed

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on Wyclif's desire of unity, through the single authority of Scripture, see Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> For more information on St. Augustine's approach to Scripture, see Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Kantik Ghosh, 23.

against *sapientia*. Ghosh discusses how Wyclif applied these two seemingly polar approaches to scripture, yet he stresses the heresiarch's emphasis on divine inspiration:

Wyclif, in his universalising attempt at limiting the cognitive role of the individual—thereby discounting the inevitability of hermeneutic variation—seeks instead to stress the fixity, stability and determinateness of biblical meaning. In this scheme of things, the Bible becomes a coherent system of signifiers informed by an accessible and clarifying divine will.<sup>19</sup>

Wyclif uses this Augustinian approach to scripture because the Church can achieve unity only through God, revealed in his Word. Wyclif and his followers sought to bring the singular unifying message of the Gospel to those members of the Church who had incorrectly interpreted it and wrought discord. Because Wycliffites believed that it was crucial that all Christians had access to the divine message, they translated the Bible into English. Although Wyclif no longer recognized Biblical glosses as authoritative in themselves, he did not completely dismiss traditional exegesis; he saw many commentaries, specifically the works of St. Augustine and the other patristic writers, as “handmaidens” to scriptural understanding.

But above all, Wyclif emphasized through his theory of Lordship and Grace that the only rulers who are fit to rule, be they secular or spiritual, are those who live according to God's will in sinless *recte vivendi*. The Bible can be fully understood only through God's inspiration, achieved as a result of *recte vivendi*, and, thus, preaching the truth can occur only as a result of that same inspiration resulting from *recte vivendi*. In order to spread his views to the masses, Wyclif explicitly called out to those he termed “poor priests” to preach his ideas to the laity. Modern scholarship seems to agree that Wyclif's calls to “poor priests” are “not motivational speeches for his squads of ‘lollards’

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 24.

waiting in the wings to do their master's bidding"<sup>20</sup>; instead, by "poor priests," Wyclif denotes any Christian, cleric or lay, male or female, who has renounced earthly things, who lives according to an "apostolic practice in opposition to dominant prescriptions.... For Wyclif, the 'poor priest' was more closely associated with a life of poverty and labor, as he says Christ understood it, than any contemporary friar."<sup>21</sup> As Wycliffites began preaching Wyclif's ideas to the laity and exciting many lay men and women to in turn become preachers, the Church reacted quickly, with the intention of stopping these preachers. As a term of abuse, Henry Crumpe first used the derogatory word "Lollard" in reference to the Wycliffites in the early 1380s, and this term eventually became synonymous with "Wycliffite."<sup>22</sup> The Church responded to this growing "Lollardy" with a very conservative, rigid definition of orthodoxy, intended to stop the spread of heresy, and which ended the period of intellectual freedom of the fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

#### Arundel's Constitutions and Lyndwood's Gloss

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, proposed his constitutions in his own attempt to create unity in a Church that was threatened by the divisive heresy initiated by John Wyclif. Arundel, during the first decade of the fifteenth century, enacted his list of constitutions in which he outlines ecclesiastical restrictions on vernacular religious writing, on preaching, and on free academic debate on some theological topics. These constitutions served as the primary means through which the Church could completely establish its authority as a guarantor of doctrinal unity, especially in matters concerning the orthodoxy of preachers. The first five of these

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Cole, *Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>23</sup> For more information on John Wyclif and the Wycliffites, see Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

constitutions directly concern preachers. The first two authorize only those who are “privileged by law”<sup>24</sup> or who have otherwise obtained a preaching license to preach, while the next three concern the subject matter of sermons, specifying that preachers should specifically avoid discussing the sacraments. The sixth and seventh constitutions ordain that no one should read unauthorized texts written by Wyclif or his contemporaries, or any vernacular translations of the Bible. The eighth, ninth, and eleventh establish the episcopal control of orthodoxy in the universities, while the tenth states that a chaplain cannot celebrate Mass at Canterbury without the correct letters. The final two prescribe the penalties and procedures for disciplining anyone who does not follow the constitutions.<sup>25</sup> In his establishment of this hierarchical authority, Archbishop Arundel desired that same unification of the Church that Wyclif himself sought.<sup>26</sup>

I have discovered evidence, additionally, that the preaching rights of Austin Friars and Premonstratensians were restricted by the constitutions, and thus Capgrave’s Wycliffite-flavored rhetoric of dissent could be reacting to limitations placed on himself

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<sup>24</sup> “in jure privilegiata.” *Constitutions, 1408*, <http://www.umilta.net/arundel.html>.

<sup>25</sup> All of Arundel’s Constitutions can be found at *Constitutions, 1408*, <http://www.umilta.net/arundel.html>.

<sup>26</sup> As Nicholas Watson argues in his “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England,” the Constitutions were written in an attempt to return to a simpler or at least less intellectual, way of religious thinking, specifically for the laity. By limiting the understanding of Christianity to affective piety and the basic requirements of faith proposed by Pecham’s Syllabus of 1281, the Church could ensure that people would not be engaged in pursuing their own personal interpretations of Scripture or the sacraments. In the thirteenth-century, Pecham’s Syllabus made it necessary for preaching *literati* to teach the *illiterate* the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Seven Deadly Sins. With this knowledge each lay person could more fully understand his or her faith; however, while Pecham’s Syllabus requires these core truths as minimum requirements of lay piety, Archbishop Arundel made them the maximum requirement. Arundel feared that a layperson, extensively educated in theological understandings, could possess his (or her) own interpretation of Scripture. If this layperson began preaching without having been accepted by a clerical authority, someone fully knowledgeable in authoritative orthodoxy, the unlearned preacher could easily lead those listening into heresy. The Constitutions maintained that only those men fully qualified in their understanding of religious doctrine could preach to others, and the topics of that preaching would not exceed the simplified subject matter of basic tenets of faith. Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409.” *Speculum*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct. 1995): 822-864.

Pecham’s Syllabus can be found in F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney, ed. *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 892-918.

and on the order founded by Norbert. These limitations are described in William Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, published in 1430, ten years before Capgrave concludes *The Life of St. Norbert*. William Lyndwood, a canon lawyer of St. David's and the "Official" of the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote the *Provinciale* as a gloss on the ecclesiastical decrees enacted in English provincial councils under the presidency of the Archbishops of Canterbury.<sup>27</sup> As H. Leith Spencer discusses in her *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, Lyndwood devotes significant attention to the vague wording of Arundel's constitutions. In the first constitution, the restrictions on preachers are said not to affect those preachers "privileged by law"; however, by not explicitly naming who the Church "privileged," the first constitution raised the question of which preachers were actually expected to obtain a preaching license before they preached. The vague wording of the constitution allowed the Church to limit any preachers the hierarchy wished. Spencer says, "The answer [to who was restricted] was not only unclear, but there was a vested interest, especially among seculars and monks, in maintaining the ambiguity which had long surrounded the preaching rights of the friars."<sup>28</sup> Seculars and monks used the ambiguity of the first constitution to claim that they had authority over the friars' preaching rights, although this was not Arundel's intention:

Arundel received reports that his "wholesome statute" was being used contrary to his wishes to obstruct both friars' hearing of confessions and their preaching; in March, he issued a letter to the clergy of the [Canterbury] Province in which he declared explicitly that any request put to friars of any of the four Orders to produce letters from the Ordinary before allowing them to preach was, as he put it, "contrary to the plain spirit of this statute."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> H. Thurston, "William Lyndwood", *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09471b.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 166.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-171.



Arundel's ambiguous law had not been intended to limit the preaching of the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, or Carmelites; however, no matter how the archbishop attempted to remedy this ambiguity, the seculars and monks continued demanding that all preachers possess licenses to preach. In 1430, Lyndwood published his *Provinciale*, in which he comments on the effects of Arundel's first constitution. Although Arundel gave full permission to the friars of the four orders, Lyndwood's gloss records that, at least by 1430, the Church granted the right of unlicensed preaching only to the Franciscans and Dominicans; Lyndwood specifically records that the Church denied the Augustinians' (and Carmelites') right to preach without license, unless they "were to be deemed for this purpose to be honorary members of the other two Orders."<sup>30</sup> Lyndwood's gloss specifically states, in reference to the preaching restrictions: "You can take the example of the Augustinian and Carmelite brothers, who are not validated in regards to preaching by law along with the Preachers and Minors (Dominicans and Franciscans), unless they have a special privilege concerning that."<sup>31</sup> I have translated *fratribus Augustinensibus* as "Augustinian brothers," specifically because I believe that the Church restricted both the preaching of the Austin Friars as well as the Premonstratensians,<sup>32</sup> who followed an Augustinian rule. Certainly Capgrave considered the Premonstratensians to be fellow brothers observing the same rule, since he refers to the two orders in his prologue as a single religious order: "That of o reule þei and we be alle./Wherefore o kynrod men may us now calle/Vndir o fadir & doctoure of oure feith" (48-50). Because of the evidence of

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<sup>30</sup> Leith Spencer, 426, n. 122.

<sup>31</sup> "Potes ponere exemplum de fratribus *Augustinensibus* et *Carmelitis*, qui non censentur circa prædicationem eodem Jure cum Prædicatoribus et Minoribus, nisi super hoc habeant Privilegium speciale" (translation mine). Lyndwood, "De Hæreticis," *Provinciale*, 289. Quoted in H. Leith Spencer, p. 426, n. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Siegfried Wenzel states that we lack evidence of Premonstratensian preaching in England. Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 287, n. 43.

the *Provinciale* (1430), Capgrave's protest against preaching restrictions in *The Life of St. Norbert* in 1440 would make perfect sense. By being required to have their orthodoxy verified through licensure, the Augustinians become no better than the Lollards in the eyes of the Church, potential heretics and causers of disunity.

### The Text and its Saint

It is surprising that *The Life of St. Norbert* should offer a dissenting voice against the episcopacy's rigid response to John Wyclif, as the work appears an unremarkable exercise in translation. Capgrave wrote the fifteenth-century poem as a translation of a twelfth-century Latin prose hagiography, the *Vita Sancti Norberti*, at the request of a Premonstratensian abbot, John Wygenhale, for his abbey at West Dereham in Norfolk.<sup>33</sup> The Latin *vita* actually exists in two forms, commonly referred to as *Vita A*<sup>34</sup> and *Vita B*,<sup>35</sup> most likely an expansion of the "more authoritative" *A*.<sup>36</sup> It is apparent, however, that Capgrave used *Vita B* as his source, because he includes details found in *B* that are not in *A*. Aside from emphasizing different episodes of the saint's life, the two accounts of Saint Norbert's life very rarely differ; Capgrave at most times closely follows *Vita B*. Like the author of *Vita B*, John Capgrave uses wonderment through miracles, visions, and encounters with devils to edify his readers.<sup>37</sup> Since such edification was one of the chief

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<sup>33</sup> To learn more about late medieval English Premonstratensians, see Joseph Gribbin, *The Premonstratensians in Late Medieval England* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> *Vita "A" Sancti Norberti*, trans. Theodore J. Antry, [http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita\\_a/vita-A%20Sancti%20Norberti.htm](http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita_a/vita-A%20Sancti%20Norberti.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Latin citations of *Vita B* come from *Migne, Patrologia Latina*, vol. 170, columns 1253-1350. English citations come from *Vita "B" Sancti Norberti*, trans. Theodore J. Antry, [http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita\\_b/vb\\_toc.htm](http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita_b/vb_toc.htm).

<sup>36</sup> This view was proposed by Roger Wilmans in the mid nineteenth-century, after his discovery of the shorter *Vita A*. Wilmans argues that *A* is earlier because it presents more "factual" events in Norbert's life, rather than the more fantastic *mirabilia* of *B*. Reactions to his views can be found in O. Mannl, O. Praem., "Zur Literatur über den heiligen Norbert," *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 35 (1959), 5-14.

<sup>37</sup> Cyril Smetana, 13.

functions of the hagiographic genre, Capgrave's *Norbert* looks as orthodox as its Latin source. Certainly Capgrave's text appears consonant with Christian truth.

Capgrave effects this appearance of simple, if not simplistic, orthodoxy through his choice of methodology, his emphasizing that he closely follows his source. Such translation was viewed as a guarantee of orthodoxy. According to Nicholas Watson, English writing of the fifteenth century became much less original than compositions of the fourteenth century in response to Arundel's constitutions, largely focusing on the translation of orthodox texts from Latin or from Anglo-French or other vernaculars. These texts appear cautious in their approach to spiritual discussions and completely avoid the intellectually challenging and potentially subversive subject material of the previous century.<sup>38</sup> Capgrave's use of a translation follows this general trend, so that his translation appears to verify the orthodoxy of *The Life of St. Norbert*: if any of his readers find theological fault in the subject matter presented in the story, any suspect heterodoxy derives from the source, not from Capgrave himself. By comparing *The Life of St. Norbert* with its source *Vita B*, one quickly discovers that Capgrave did translate the Latin very closely into English. He occasionally adds some of his own personal commentary in a first-person voice, or removes entire episodes from the story, but his *Norbert* does not differ greatly from its source. In fact, Cyril Lawrence Smetana, in his introduction to his 1977 edition of *The Life of St. Norbert*, states:

The changes Capgrave made in translating his text are hardly original or innovative. Capgrave belongs to the same school of hagiography as the author of the *Vita B*...He is, therefore, content to convey both the *sensus* and even the *verbum* so far as the exigencies of his verse permit...He frequently refers to the source before him and to his complete dependence on it, but he is by no means a slave to the text. He questions the meaning of some passages, explains others, criticizes the author for his rambling

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Watson, 832-833.

narrative and for his failure to provide precise information. Yet he makes no effort to correct these faults once he has made it clear that they are not his own.<sup>39</sup>

Capgrave, I believe, limits his additions to his text in order to emphasize his conveyance of an orthodox source and, thus, his own orthodoxy. The relatively few additions create the appearance that the text has been translated from the twelfth- to the fifteenth century almost completely unaltered; thus, the text retains the same orthodoxy that it had when it was first written.

Capgrave's apparently unremarkable translation of such an orthodox text nonetheless allows him to incorporate a dissenting voice, albeit a muted one. As Sherry L. Reames notes in her study of Chaucer's hagiography, "Artistry, Decorum and Purpose," Chaucer used the protection that translation provides in his legend of St. Cecilia to critique unjust contemporary rulers. Reames argues, "The ancient saint's legend [was] a genre which provided an ideal screen for potentially dangerous ideas, in Chaucer's society, because it was so clearly identified with orthodoxy and yet so full of material that did not necessarily uphold the late medieval status quo."<sup>40</sup> Although translations of hagiography suggested a presentation of unexceptionable material, Chaucer's example suggests that mere translations may actually be a means to voice artful dissent. By using a "screen" of orthodox hagiography, Capgrave, like Chaucer,

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<sup>39</sup> Cyril Smetana, 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> Sherry Reames, "Artistry, Decorum and Purpose in Three Middle English Retellings of the Cecilia Legend," *The Endless Knot: Essays in Honor of Marie Boroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 177-99, 199.

Additionally, Lynn Staley argues that Chaucer employs a certain amount of rhetorical care in writing his saint's life on Cecilia, emphasizing that he translated his text from a source, in order to downplay anything that may be misconstrued as erring from the Church's authority; yet, Chaucer focuses his audience's attention on his personal *intent*, "not by adding to the tale, but by editing what is superfluous to the point he wishes to make. Both his choice of source-texts and his editing are acts of interpretation and refiguration designed to provide an image of the holy." David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 201, 207.

employs the methodology of a translation in order to propose less-than-acceptable ideas safely.

Capgrave in fact may have learned this strategy by reading Chaucer. Capgrave may be employing Chaucerian elements in his translation of the *Life of St. Norbert*, including the rime royal stanza and the valedictory command, “Go litil boke” (154),<sup>41</sup> two features of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. The most significant Chaucerian element in the text, however, is his incorporation of a self-conscious and self-undermining [Chaucerian] narrator. In *The Life of St. Norbert*, the narrator frequently interrupts the story to emphasize both how faithfully he has followed his source, and how he has resisted against adding any detail that he has not found there. In a scene, for example, where Norbert miraculously sneezes out a spider after swallowing it during the Eucharist, Capgrave emphasizes that he did not invent such a miraculous occurrence: “And as oure book ful notabily can report,/Before þe autere where he gan knele,/Aboute his nose yekyng gan he fele/...And in a negyng sodeynly þoo he brast./With negyng alsoo eke he cast/The grete ereyn rith oute at his nose” (271-273, 277-279). In another episode, the devil causes two of the Premonstratensians to hate each other, even to the point of wishing to kill each other; Capgrave’s intrusive narrator says that his source never describes how this divisive situation was resolved: “Wheythir þei were mad at on aftir þis tyme/Mi book tellet not withouten doute,/Ne I myselue list not for to ryme/Neythir of here vertues ne of here cryme/But if I fond therefore sum auctoryte” (1990-94). In both episodes, Capgrave interrupts the story to assure the reader that he

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<sup>41</sup> At the end of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, the author presents his book to its audience saying, “Go, litel bok, go” (line 1786) which Capgrave incorporates into the conclusion of his *Life of St. Norbert*: “Go litil book to hem þat wil þe rede” (4096). Chaucer’s quotation comes from Geoffrey Chaucer, “Troilus and Criseyde,” *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

relates only the information that he finds in his source, emphasizing the authority and validity of the information. As Winstead argues in “John Capgrave and the Chaucer Tradition,”<sup>42</sup> the passivity of Capgrave’s “narrator-translator” serves the purpose, for Capgrave at least, of presenting controversial issues in such a way as to avoid criticism from the Church. The author asserts that he acts merely as a translator, transmitting the information recounted in orthodox writing; however, he makes use of this narrator in order to present additionally controversial material without being charged with heterodoxy. Capgrave’s passive role as a translator and narrator presents the facts in such a way that readers must make up their own minds on the issues, without Capgrave receiving any negative reactions.

Capgrave’s *Norbert* indeed faithfully captures an orthodox saint of the twelfth century, but one who indiscriminately preached, as Capgrave himself put it, “to lerned and lewid” (1529), and herein lies the germ of controversy: for the itinerant preaching that made Norbert a Christ-like preacher in the twelfth century would have made him highly suspect in Capgrave’s own fifteenth century. Norbert’s preaching career might not have passed muster in Capgrave’s own lifetime because of the Church’s fear that heresy was easily spread by unlicensed preachers. Capgrave intimates his awareness of the Church’s intolerance of unregulated preaching, and by extension, his own discomfort with such intolerance in *St. Norbert*, and he proposes his reactions to this intolerance. Through the device of his Chaucerian naïve narrator, Capgrave can describe the traits of Norbert which the twelfth-century Church sanctified but which the fifteenth-century

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<sup>42</sup> Karen Winstead, “John Capgrave and the Chaucer Tradition,” *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (1996), pp. 389-400.

Church would have condemned, including Norbert's unlicensed preaching as a "lewid" man.

To more fully understand Capgrave's dissenting intention in *The Life of St. Norbert*, it is best to begin with the prologue. According to Richard Kieckhefer, "These [late medieval hagiographic] prologues help to clarify the author's theological understanding of why the saints should be venerated, and why it was important to write the *vitae*."<sup>43</sup> Readers can, thus, use the prologue as a tool to more fully understand the motivation behind the author's work. John Capgrave's writing style, however, reveals his intention more subtly than do prologues of the *vitae* that Kieckhefer discusses, which are specifically those of the fourteenth century. The Church of the fourteenth century was much less rigid when approaching theological issues, teasing out various ways of understanding certain religious ideas. By the fifteenth century, because of the constitutions' restrictions on theological inquisitiveness, the authorial probing into intellectual issues had to be much subtler. In Capgrave's prologue, one must pay specific attention to any passage that stands out as odd or possibly jarring with the rest of its context in order to begin understanding his project, which is his plea for religious unity.

Capgrave's prologue to his *Life of St. Norbert* begins oddly by emphasizing reservations against translating; the first nine lines contain a querulous tone that comes across as out of place:

Ioye, grace & pees, loue, faith & charite  
Euyr rest upon your goodly religious breest,  
To whom þat I with moost humylite  
Euyr recomende me lowly as youre preest.  
And þoug I be of rymeris now þe leest,  
Yet wil I now, obeying youre comaundment,

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9.

Put me in daungere in þis werk present.

Who schal þese dayis make now ony þing  
But it schal be tosed & pulled as wolle?

(1-9)

Does Capgrave simply incorporate the common “humility topos” of medieval literary prologues, in which the author apologizes for the crudeness of his translation, or does he alert the reader to something more significant? A consideration of Capgrave’s literary milieu suggests the latter. Andrew Taylor argues that when we read Middle English prologues in general, we should not take such protestations at face value. Although most prologues apologize for the simple style, clumsy language, and inept structure of the works they introduce, even the most poetically elegant and rhetorically adept texts begin this way.<sup>44</sup> Chaucer’s prologues, too, apologize, and the apology, Taylor argues, introduces a theme that informs the main body of the work:

When [Chaucer] chooses to identify one of his own texts as dependent on a source, he tends to emphasize passivity, and such passages are usually attached to works that themselves have particularly passive, receptive, or suffering protagonists whose situations are mirrored in the narrator-translator’s passivity, lack of free will, and powerlessness to change the preordained plot.<sup>45</sup>

Chaucer’s narrator is passive, that is, because his protagonist is passive. When looking at Capgrave’s “humility topos,” one notices his line “And þoug I be of rymeris now þe leest...” (5), which corresponds with the same Chaucerian trepidation that Taylor mentions. Capgrave may have learned Chaucer’s technique of making his narrator share his chief character’s situation. In his case, Capgrave fears a dangerous situation, the same situation that Norbert was in: being accused of heresy for criticizing the Church of

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Taylor, “Authorizing Text and Writer,” *The Idea of the Vernacular* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



his day. The bishops of the twelfth-century Church “accused [Norbert] before here iustise/As þoug he of faith an heretik were” (332-333), and Capgrave fears the potentiality of similar charges against himself.

Capgrave suggests that readers might react violently to his work when he states that he has been “Put...in daungere in þis werk present” (7) and he fears that his text “þese dayis...schal be tosed & pulled as wolle” (8-9). Capgrave’s words here exceed the usual apologetic tone of the common “humility topos” and suggest that he is actually fearful about the reception of his poem, that he is anxious that his work, and perhaps himself, will be torn to pieces. Capgrave certainly exaggerates his fear concerning his poem’s reception, and I believe that this exaggeration reveals his scorn towards the Church’s narrowed definition of orthodoxy; the Church is so combative that it will even torture books. Capgrave’s fear may have been genuine, but its hyperbolic expression suggests that his prologue, perhaps, parodies the defensiveness that results from an over-scrupulous society.

Capgrave may be fearful of accusations of heresy, but he defends himself and his work as orthodox. He establishes this orthodoxy through his laudable intention of safeguarding the unity of the Church. As Capgrave states it, “Now let hem rende, for I have myn entent” (12). The author literally states that he desires religious unity between the Premonstratensian Order and his own, saying:

That of o reule þei and we be alle.  
Wherefore o kynrod men may us now calle

Vndir o fadir & doctoure of oure feith,  
Floure of doctoris, Austyn is his name...

O lord Ihesu, of alle religious men  
Abbot and maystir, bring us to vnyte”

(48-51, 64-65)

On the surface, Capgrave desires a unity between his own order and the Premonstratensians, for their orders are “vndir o fadir & doctoure of oure faith”; they both follow an Augustinian rule. Capgrave emphasizes his belief that although the Austin Friars and Premonstratensians literally belong to separate orders, they can be united, at least in essence, as a singular Augustinian Order. I believe this desired unity, moreover, encompasses all Christians, especially since St. Augustine is a father of the Church, making all Christians “o kynrod” and, thus, “o reule.” Furthermore, by naming Christ abbot, the author argues that his explicit *entent*<sup>46</sup> of unity between the Austin Friars and Premonstratensians implicitly suggests a desired unity of all Christians, as the Order of Christ. Capgrave suggests that the division of the body of Christ into religious orders could be overcome by emphasizing the features that unite Christians rather than divide them. This statement directly responds to Wyclif’s discomfort with the division of the Church into separate orders, because it suggests that unity can exist in the midst of differences. Just as Wyclif saw divisions of the Church most visible in the existence of multiple religious orders, so does Capgrave.

By writing a poem about unity to such a predictably divided audience, Capgrave suggests that his *entent* of religious unity possesses a didactic quality. He subtly suggests to his audience how to eliminate the divisive legalism of the society of the fifteenth century and replace it with the unity exemplified in the life of a traditional saint. The author craftily creates a kind of trap for his readers: if his Church does “race” (19) and

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<sup>46</sup> The word *entent* suggests something more than the modern “intention.” It essentially combines the Latin rhetorical *intentio*, which was the statement of a work’s meaning, with the author’s personal motivation for writing or translating a text. Ruth Evans and others, *The Idea of the Vernacular* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 328-329.

“rend” (20) his text as he predicts, the Church inevitably condemns itself as the very cause of division to which he reacts. I argue that Capgrave’s *entent* is to signal the need to dispose of the excessive laws, specifically those requiring preaching licenses, in order to create the unity that he describes in his prologue. By stating that the Church may find objectionable material in his translation, Capgrave ironically charges the Church with breaking from its less-restrictive tradition, suggesting that the fifteenth-century English Church possesses a kind of heterodoxy through its disregard for this tradition. The orthodox unity that Capgrave desires can be restored only if the Church returns to a more latitudinous definition of orthodoxy, as in Norbert’s day.

#### Norbert, the Poor Priest

In *The Life of St. Norbert*, Capgrave reminds his readers of a Church which had far fewer rules, in which ordained priests could preach with far less restriction, providing in the figure of St. Norbert an example worthy of imitation, whose life presents this twelfth-century ideal. Capgrave argues by implication that the fifteenth-century English Church needs to return to the days of St. Norbert when irregular preaching was tolerated; however, Capgrave had to ensure that his readers would know that the author’s poem, his translation of a twelfth-century saint’s life, contains a message for his contemporaries. Capgrave, thus, includes details in his translation that suggest that Norbert’s days are an idealizing mirror of his own, a picture of a present that could be.

Capgrave suggests a political parallel between the twelfth-century Holy Roman Emperor, Emperor Henry V, and his own king at the opening of the first chapter, in which the author presents the historical setting of Norbert’s life, translating his source very closely: “Herry the yonger was lord & alsoo gyde/Ouyr alle þe empyr þat tyme as

seith oure book” (75-76). Capgrave did not add anything significant to this reference to Emperor Henry the Younger, but he had to have noticed the similarity between the Holy Roman Emperor’s name and that of his own king, King Henry VI. Not long after he finished *The Life of St. Norbert* Capgrave wrote his *Liber de Illustribus Henricis*,<sup>47</sup> in which he compares the many important Holy Roman Emperors and English Kings named Henry. Henry VI of England inherited the throne within a year of his birth in 1421: “The day of his accession, of course, came far sooner than anyone—least of all his triumphant father—could have imagined. Within a year, the thirty-five-year-old Henry V would succumb to dysentery...and suddenly the infant Henry VI was King of England and France.”<sup>48</sup> If anyone deserves the title “Herry the yonger,” it would be the infant king of England. Capgrave stresses that this detail came from his source, “as seith oure book,” to emphasize that he did not add this fact solely to create parallels, and yet the comparison remains obvious. By including the Holy Roman Emperor’s epithet, “the yonger,” Capgrave reminds his readers of the infancy of the king and suggests that the king’s age negatively affected the overall society of England.

Capgrave, secondly, parallels the Papal schism of Norbert’s time to one occurring during his own lifetime, suggesting the instability resulting from the divided Church.

Capgrave says:

In þis same tyme, as elde cronicles seyn,  
 Fel a scisme of wech is dool to here;  
 But neuyrþelasse I must telle you al pleyn  
 Swech maner þing as I fynde wrytin here.  
 Too popes regne<d> at ones þat same yere  
 As now þei doo,/God amende þe caas!”  
 (3529-3534)

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<sup>47</sup> John Capgrave (Johannis Capgrave), *Liber de Illustribus Henricis* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Karen Winstead, *John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century*, 116.

Here Capgrave actually notes the comparison between the schism that existed in St. Norbert's time and his own by the phrase, "as now þei doo." In 1130, Pope Honorius II died and four cardinals immediately elected Innocent II as the next pope. Another council of cardinals elected Cardinal Pierleone (Anaclete II) as the pope; thus, two popes served at the same time.<sup>49</sup> The schism that Capgrave describes from his own time could very well be the Great Western Schism that began in 1378; however, because this schism had ended by the time Capgrave began writing *Norbert*, Cyril Lawrence Smetana suggests that Capgrave refers to the results of the Council of Basle, 1439, in which the council deposed Eugene IV for heresy and elected Duke Amadeus of Savoy.<sup>50</sup> The exact schism to which Capgrave refers does not matter for the purposes of this paper; the reference reveals that Capgrave, who desires religious unity as his overall intention, sees this same divisive flaw in his contemporary Church, and he desires a change.

Capgrave creates a third parallel between his and Norbert's time by saying that Norbert lived in "Seyntis [Xanten] sumtyme called Troye" (93); significantly, many people in late medieval England referred to London as a New Troy.<sup>51</sup> The idea of London being the New Troy comes from pseudo-historic accounts of the history of Britain, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in which the Britons descend from and are named after Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas.<sup>52</sup> Whenever an author employs the Trojan motif in literature, the motif often possesses two meanings, since a comparison between that kingdom and Troy suggests not only that the

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<sup>49</sup> Cyril Smetana, 137, n. 3530.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 137, n. 3534.

<sup>51</sup> Because Capgrave incorporates elements of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* into his poem, the allusions to Troy may come from this source, suggesting similar parallels between London and New Troy that Chaucer creates in his poem. For more information on London as the New Troy, see Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Sylvia Federico, xiii-xiv.

kingdom possessed many riches, but also that the kingdom was destined to fall.

Capgrave's initial reference to Troy, when he compares Norbert's homeland to it, comes directly from *Vita B*; however, Capgrave additionally employs the second meaning to the allusion by incorporating a reference to Troy in Norbert's first sermon. In this sermon, Norbert preaches to a group of religious canons about the importance of placing their mind on spiritual things rather than earthly things, and he uses Troy as an example of how earthly things fade away: "These wordly plesaunces ar fals & onstable,/Schort of tyme, wrecchid in prys, euyr able/To turn to corrupcioun, onwrothi to loue,/...Welth is in moment, witesse of Troye" (230-232, 235). Norbert alludes to Troy to remind the canons that ancient Troy fell because of its love for material things, and he warns the canons that, because they too are citizens of Troy, they could face the same outcome. Perhaps Capgrave additionally directs this admonition at his own readers, living in New Troy, in order to both critique the society of late medieval England and offer a way of avoiding a similar fall.

The original *vita*, as it exists from the twelfth century, would have interested John Capgrave because the figure of Norbert in that *vita* indeed practices irregularities on which the English Church would have looked askance. Born circa 1080, Norbert of Xanten eventually became the founder of a brotherhood of canons at Prémontré, commonly called the Premonstratensians or Norbertines. He was born to a noble father who served as vassal to both Emperor Henry IV and Henry V, and in his youth he received schooling in the household of the Archbishop of Cologne. He also served as a courtier to Henry V during his descent into Italy; thus, he became well-versed in literature and courtly life. In his mid-thirties, however, in an episode that obviously

interests Capgrave, Norbert had a conversion experience after nearly getting struck by lightning, and after reflecting on the occurrence, he decided to turn from the frivolity of his secular life and devote himself to serving God. He was ordained a deacon and a priest, and later made a canon by the Archbishop of Cologne. In an attempt to reform the lives of other religious men, he began preaching publicly, dressed in a monastic habit; for this practice, he was criticized because he took on the position of a preacher and wore the garb of a monk, two things that were not suitable for a canon.

In a dramatic response to this criticism, Norbert gave most of his possessions to the poor, and became an itinerant preacher, after having received permission from Pope Gelasius II; following the death of the pope, Norbert sought confirmation of his ministry from the papal successor, Calixtus II, which he received. After failing to reform the clerics of the small Abbey of Saint-Martin in Laon, Norbert decided to move into the forest with a group of hermits; however, the Bishop of Laon convinced them, instead, to move to the site of Prémontré, a move which occurred in the year 1120. On December 25, 1121, Norbert and his followers took a vow to adhere to the Rule of St. Augustine. Although committed to his community, he never remained stable in solitude at Prémontré; instead, he was always returning to the more inhabited towns to preach and raise money for his community. In 1126 Norbert was designated Archbishop of Magdeburg, and he died eight years later.<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of his preaching career, Norbert had faced some persecution from the Church for the heterodox manner in which he preached, for his nontraditional ordination and for his sermons on clerical reformation.

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<sup>53</sup> *Vita B*; although Capgrave's story tells a similar version, I recounted Norbert's biography from the *Vita B*, because it is the most extensive in its details. For a brief overview of a factual description of Norbert's life, set in its twelfth-century context, see Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 87-89.

After being assured of his orthodoxy, however, the Church granted him full rights to preach and even honored him with an archbishopric.<sup>54</sup>

Although the twelfth-century Church named Norbert an orthodox preacher, the fifteenth-century Church would have persecuted as a heretic anyone who preached in the manner Norbert did. In his translation, Capgrave emphasizes the aspects of Norbert's life that the saint shared with the Lollards in order to reveal that the conservative restrictions of the fifteenth century, attempting to define orthodoxy, would have branded the saint heterodox. As if recalling the heresy trials of the fifteenth century, Capgrave spends considerable energy depicting how the Church summoned Norbert before a council "to reformacioun/Of holy church" (317-318), known as the Council of Fritzlar, in order to question him about the seemingly heretical traits of his preaching. These traits include his uneducated preaching, unlicensed preaching through Spiritual inspiration, and sermons against the Church, especially regarding the Church's temporalities. At this council, Capgrave says, "These bisschoppis accused him before here iustise/As þoug he of faith an heretik were" (331-332):

The bisschoppis þat were þere mad deposicioun  
Of a grete defaute, as þei þoutg alle:  
Thei seide it was a ful grete presumpcioun  
That swech a lewid man in despite of hem alle  
Schuld preche in here diosise, Norbert þei him calle.  
Thus sayde þe prelates onto þe legate,  
And he considering here auctorite and astate

Ded somown þis man in alle hasty wise.  
He is come to counsell to geue his answer.  
These bisschoppis accused him before here iustise  
As þoug he of feith an heretik were.  
The first point þei put agens him there

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<sup>54</sup> Although the Church did not officially canonize Norbert until 1582, his position as Archbishop of Magdeburg and his founding of an accepted religious order reveals that the Church viewed him as an orthodox figure.



Was þat he preched witgoute auctorite.  
They put eke on him þat in his sermons had he

Many inuectif wordes agens here astaat,  
Wech was to hem grete slaundir þei sayde.  
(323-338)

The bishops accuse Norbert of at least resembling a heretic, if not actually being one, because his manner of preaching possesses heretical traits. Two accusations against Norbert, his unlicensed preaching and his sermons against the Church, come directly from Capgrave's source; yet the *Vita B* significantly never uses the terms "lewid" or "heretik" in reference to the saint. Capgrave's addition of these charges immediately makes the accusations against the saint of the twelfth century comparable to the accusations against the Lollards of Capgrave's lifetime.<sup>55</sup>

The Bishops first charge Norbert with uneducated preaching: "Thei seide it was a ful grete presumpcioun/That swech a lewid man in despite of hem alle/Schuld preche in here diosise" (325-327). The poet emphasizes here, even to the point of elaborating his source, Norbert's role as an unlearned preacher; *Vita B* simply states, "They unanimously began to accuse him before the Lord Conon."<sup>56</sup> Capgrave's inclusion of the word "lewid" makes Norbert look uncomfortably like a Wycliffite. The Church feared unlearned preaching, because if people preached without receiving the clerical education required for ordination, the preachers might not fully understand what they preach to the people. By not fully understanding the subject matter, the preacher could easily preach heterodox material or subject matters not sanctioned by the Church, resulting in the

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<sup>55</sup> Although the Church viewed Wycliffites as uneducated, the followers of Wyclif actually desired to create greater levels of literacy in the laity in order to guarantee the accessibility of the Bible. For more information, see Margarate Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984).

<sup>56</sup> "coeperunt eum ex communi omnium assensu coram prafato domino accusantes redarguere." *Vita B* 8-4.

spread of heresy. Capgrave significantly adds this description of Norbert at a time in the text when the saint faces persecution by the Church, potentially suggesting the Wycliffite significance of this charge.

Like Norbert, many of the Wycliffites preached without receiving the education required by the Church to authorize their preaching, specifically because they believed that the Gospel needed to be preached by as many Christians as possible. The author, in the fifteenth chapter of the prologue to the Wycliffite Bible, for example, cites Biblical verses describing Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem in order to argue that if the priests do not preach the Gospel the "lewid people," like the stones, must cry out. The Wycliffite argues that clerics, who should study scripture and preach it to others, have, instead, sinfully tried to stop all the teachings of scripture; because the clerics no longer proclaim the word of God, the Wycliffite argues, it falls to the unlearned laity to learn scripture and to preach it:

And we English men ben comen of heþene men, þefore we ben vndurstonde bi þese stoonis þat shulden crie holi writ. And, as Iewis, interpretide knoueleching, signifiien clerkis þat shulden knoueleche to God bi repentaunce of synnes and bi vois of Goddis heriying, so oure lewid men, suyng þe cornerston Crist, moun be signified bi stoonis þat ben harde and abidinge in þe foundement. For, þoug couetouse clerkis ben wode bi symonie, eresie and manie opere synnes, and dispisen and stoppen holi writ as myche as þei moun, yit þe lewid puple criep aftir holi writ to kunne it and kepe it wiþ greet cost and peril of here lif.<sup>57</sup>

In this passage, the Wycliffite cites Luke 19:39-40, which says, "And some of the Pharisees, from amongst the multitude, said to him: Master, rebuke thy disciples. To whom he said: I say to you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Prologue to Wycliffite Bible, Chapter 15," ed. Anne Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 67.

<sup>58</sup> All English quotations of the Bible in this paper come from the Douay-Rheims translation. The Latin quotations come from the Vulgate: "et quidam Pharisaeorum de turbis dixerunt ad illum magister increpa

Like the Pharisees, the Church hierarchy has tried to stop the accessibility of Christ's word. They have done this by creating preaching restrictions; thus, the Wycliffites responded by providing an English translation of scripture so that "lewid" people could learn its teachings and begin preaching its messages to others. The Wycliffites' support of unlearned preaching, or so they argue, largely comes out of a lack of clerical preaching.

Notably, the bishops additionally charge Norbert with preaching "witgoute auctorite." Although the saint went through the process of being ordained, the Church claimed that he did not have permission to preach, since he had not received the bishop's permission. He faced the same restrictions that those following an Augustinian rule (Austin Friars and Premonstratensians) face following the required licensure of preachers, dictated by Arundel's constitutions. The licenses that the bishops granted to preachers guaranteed that the preachers' orthodoxy had been examined and had been found acceptable. Even if the bishops found the subject matter of the preachers' sermons acceptable, the very fact that they had to evaluate the preachers' orthodoxy implicitly condemned the preachers as the equals of heretics. The accusation against Norbert, thus, suggests that Norbert's sermons potentially possessed heretical ideas, further emphasizing his similarity to the Wycliffites.

Over all, Capgrave's diction suggests that what the Church was charging Norbert with was akin to Lollardy, had Norbert lived during the fifteenth century. Norbert defines the charge against his preaching as one of "powere vsurped of me," which

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discipulos tuos quibus ipse ait dico vobis quia si hii tacuerint lapides clamabunt" (Luke 19:39-40). Douay-Rheims: *The Holy Bible* (New York: Edward Dunigan & Brother, 1868). *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, ed. Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

directly recalls Bishop Courtenay's preamble to the deliberations against the Wycliffites from the Blackfriars Council of 1382. In this preamble, the bishop states, "No one who is prohibited or not sent ought to *usurp to themselves the office of preaching*, in public or in private, without the authority of the apostolic see or the bishop of the diocese" (emphasis mine).<sup>59</sup> Andrew Cole highlights this accusation against John Wyclif and the Wycliffites, that they "usurp to themselves the office of preaching," by citing the prominence of this phrase in the many writings condemning Wycliffites. He cites not only specific trials but also popular literature, including John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*. According to Cole:

What canonical expressions were uttered in sermons were seen also in the legal proceedings against Wycliffite suspects, repeating the original charges of 1382 against the usurper Wycliffites—from the accusations against the lesser-known suspects...to those against the more notorious...both of whom are said to have usurped the office of preacher. And what was said in both contexts was echoed by John Gower in his Latin poem about the present-day pestilence, the Wycliffites.<sup>60</sup>

Describing Wycliffites as usurpers became so widespread by Capgrave's day, through anti-Wycliffite laws, court trials, and literature, that it would be quite unlikely for Capgrave to be unaware of the connotations of this damning charge against Norbert. Through these Wycliffite connotations, Capgrave undeniably has the Council of Fritzlar accuse Norbert of heresy suggestive of Lollardy, when the Council suggests that Norbert "vsurped" his power to preach.

Capgrave depicts the council as viewing Norbert's unlicensed preaching as a usurpation of clerical power, suggesting the power struggle in fifteenth-century England between the seculars and monks on the one hand and the friars on the other. Norbert, again, restates the Council's charge that he preaches "witgoute auctorite" as a charge of

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<sup>59</sup> "nemo prohibitus, vel non missus, absque sedis apostolicae vel episcopi loci auctoritate sibi praedicationis officium usurpare debeat publice vel occulte." Cited in Andrew Cole, 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Cole, 21.

usurpation of power to preach: “And for ye speke of powere vsurped of me” (365). Capgrave emphasizes the struggle between Norbert’s divine authorization in his preaching, described in more detail below, on the one hand and the Church’s regulated preaching restrictions on the other. This struggle greatly resembles the power struggle between the itinerant preachers and the bishops in late medieval England. Capgrave’s emphasis on the fact that Norbert is charged with usurping episcopal power suggests that the bishops react to Norbert because they fear that they will lose control over their diocese. As I stated above, the ambiguity of Arundel’s constitutions ensured that the monks and secular priests could stop whomever they chose from preaching. They had “a vested interest... in maintaining the ambiguity which had long surrounded the preaching rights,” because this ambiguity guarantees that they have absolute power over who preaches and who does not.<sup>61</sup> By suggesting that Norbert usurped “powere” when he began preaching, Capgrave suggests that the preaching restrictions were often more than an attempt to reduce the spread of heresy; they were additionally a means for the Church hierarchy to maintain power.

The Council lastly accuses Norbert of preaching “inuetif wordes agens here astaet,/Whech was to hem grete slaundir þei sayde.” Norbert’s sermons as Capgrave translates them often contest the authority of the religious hierarchy, which is most significant, since the saint’s reformatory preaching not only shows how similar is Norbert to a Wycliffite, but also provides Capgrave a safe vehicle to preach against his own Church. Throughout, Capgrave suggests that Norbert’s primary purpose was to reform the twelfth-century Church, specifically through preaching religious poverty. Whenever

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<sup>61</sup> Leith Spencer, 166. For more information about this struggle between monks/seculars and friars, see H. Leith Spencer’s *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* in its entirety.

the author discusses the topic of Church reformation, he again suggests parallels between the twelfth and the fifteenth century. The implication is that Capgrave desires poor priests like Norbert to bring reformation to the Church of his day.

I argue that Capgrave's translation, in a sense, represents a kind of prayer to Norbert to return and reawaken a sleeping Church, the author's Church of fifteenth-century England. Capgrave suggests, as I have shown, interesting parallels between Norbert's time and his own, and although he does not explicitly state that his current Church needs the enlightenment brought to it through Norbertine preaching, the combination of these parallels with the actual act of translating the *vita* into English suggests it. A second episode in the text clarifies how closely Norbert compares to Wycliffites, specifically in his reformative preaching. Capgrave translates, from the "book þat lith at Capenbregense" (3852):<sup>62</sup>

In Westphale parties sprang a ful clere lith,  
A post of þe church, a heuenely messagere,  
Norbert called, so grete with God of myth,  
That ful of grace he was and of powere  
Of ful grete continens, of eloquens a good skolere,  
Formere and norchere of holy religioun,  
Whech was eke causere of grete fundacioun

Off many houses þorw out dyuers londes.  
A prechoure of penauns was he witg þe best.  
A trewe berere of Cristes owne sondes  
Was he hold be est and eke be west.  
Thus cryed he to hem þat lay þat tyme in rest  
And knew not God arayetg; he seith þe weye  
Of oure lord and alle his styes ye feye.

(3858-3871)

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<sup>62</sup> Cyril Smetana, 147. This passage comes from a supplemental text known as the *Fratrum Cappenbergensium additamentia ad Vitam*, in which a series of miracle stories related to Norbert's life are described. According to Smetana, all the earliest manuscripts of *Vita B* contained this addition.

Here the author describes Norbert as a man sent by God to bring reformation. God sent Norbert as a “heuenely messagere” in which he preached the words of Christ, those of “penauns,” to everyone he could. God sent Norbert to the world, because God recognized that the Church needed a messenger. The Church, according to this passage, “lay þat tyme in rest/And knew not God arayetg” and Norbert came to them to “seith þe weye/Of oure lord.” Through the enlightenment that Norbert’s preaching brings to the Church, the intellects of those at rest awaken, and the minds can once again remember their God and his will for their life.

The primary subject matter of Norbert’s sermons, especially those urging reformation of the Church, concerned religious poverty; he is literally a “poor priest” of the sort the Wycliffites valued. Norbert begins to extol poverty early in his career. Directly after Norbert’s ordination, he begins preaching. He becomes a secular canon at a church near Siegburg, and upon his arrival, the dean asks him to celebrate the Mass, a customary request that they would make of any “straungere...of worthi degre” (205). Following the gospel reading, Norbert launches into his sermon, “vnware to alle men þat he schuld preche” (219). Norbert preaches a scriptural message about leaving earthly possessions behind and directing oneself towards spiritual things through a state of poverty. Capgrave devotes the most lines to this first sermon of Norbert:

...Þe most þing he þere spak  
Was who we schuld throwe boldly at oure bak

Alle wordly welth and þe intricacioun  
Of worldly felicite....

Swech þingis seyde he þann and many moo  
That made here hertis ful of care and woo.

For al þe ende of his tale turned he to hem

Whch he preched onto & for þis entent  
Seyde he þis sermoun to þo same men:  
He was fro God as a messagere isent  
Rith on hem as þei þat tyme ment.  
He seide, eke, no þing vnpunchid schal be,  
That is doo onclenly agens honeste.

(223-226, 237-245)

Norbert preaches to a group of religious canons about their earthly possessions, and his sermon actually upsets them: “That made here hertis ful of care and woo.” These religious men do not want to hear Norbert’s sermon, and Norbert actually gets reprimanded later in the poem for this sermon, at the Council of Fritzlar. We, again, see Norbert as a messenger of God, bringing that necessary enlightenment to those who had strayed from God’s will: “He was fro God as a messagere isent/Rith on hem as þei þat tyme ment.” This passage even further suggests that Norbert came specifically for the reformation of the Church.

The Church’s nervous reaction to Norbert’s sermon of religious poverty, although the temporal wealth was always a sensitive subject in Church history, actually reflects the English Church’s initial charges against John Wyclif<sup>63</sup> and his later followers. Beginning

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew Cole’s *Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* suggests that Wyclif’s views on religious poverty played an even greater role in the Church’s condemnation of the Wycliffites than scholars have previously noted. Bishop William Wykeham, the Chancellor of England and Keeper of the Privy Seal under Edward III, attended the Good Parliament of 1376, in which Edward III’s limits of power were in question. John of Gaunt, who also attended this Parliament, brought eight charges against the bishop concerning his abuse of the office of chancellor, which included his many temporalities. That November, Wykeham went on trial, and his temporalities were seized after being charged with one offense. The following February, bishop Courtenay said at a council of bishops, that Gaunt’s attack on Wykeham was “an attack upon themselves and upon the church.” Following these accusations, Courtenay “began to trouble a man that contemporaries perceived to be one of Gaunt’s own, a theologian who would endorse the seizing of church temporalities and impugn the excesses of princely bishops like Wykeham.” This man was John Wyclif. That same February, Courtenay called Wyclif in to be tried. Gaunt came to Wyclif’s aid with four doctors of theology to defend the theologian. “The trial—if it can even be called that—was abortive: Gaunt and Courtenay exchange unpleasantries, riots broke out in London, but Wykeham eventually got his privileges back.” Following this, Cole makes a tongue-and-cheek statement: “It would seem too convenient to say that Wykeham owed Courtenay one and thus appropriately joined the Blackfriars Council”; however, soon after, Wykeham helped Courtenay publicize a spreading heresy, the heresy which germinated from the teachings of John Wyclif. Additionally, Wykeham played one of the most active roles in condemning the Wycliffites and the twenty-four Wycliffite conclusions at the infamous Blackfriars Council in 1382. Cole



with Wyclif and continuing throughout late medieval England, Wycliffites preached against the wealth of the clergy. The original Wycliffites were the “poor priests,” and the majority of their sermons and writings at least briefly mention the need for religious poverty. In the satirical text “Epistola Sathanae ad Cleros,” for example, a Wycliffite writes a letter from the point of view of Satan, addressed to clerics. “Satan” laments losing his followers to Christianity, specifically through lives of “mekenes and pouerte.” He rejoices, though, when he can lure Christians away from Christ through riches: “We wrot also in our lettur how þei xuld increase in riches, and hate common beggers and poore men, and þat thei schuld not be poore in dede. Now, to bring þis abowt in such sotyll maner, we tawgt þem...to preache for mony....”<sup>64</sup> This text shows how much the Wycliffites detested ecclesiastical wealth. Followers of Wyclif go as far as to say that this wealth came from Satan himself, attracting Christians away from Christ. Norbert, too, says that the possessions of the canons go “onclenly agens honeste” (245) and these possessions will not go unpunished (244).

Although the Church eventually praised Norbert for his preaching, the reformer’s messages incited negative responses during his own day and would have probably led to condemnation in Capgrave’s, specifically for the subject matter of his sermons which so closely mirrored the sermons of Wycliffites. In 1377, Bishop Courtenay, along with a council of bishops, accused John of Gaunt, and indirectly John Wyclif, for speaking “an

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goes as far as to say that Courtenay and Wykeham had to over exaggerate the spread of Wyclif’s ideas throughout England in order to overcome the “jurisdictional complications in prosecuting heresy within the university.” If events occurred in the way that Cole’s convincing argument suggests, then Wyclif’s outspoken views on ecclesiastical possessions actually caused the reformer’s arguments to quickly and miserably transform into heresies. Andrew Cole, 11-14.

<sup>64</sup> “Epistola Sathanae ad Cleros,” ed. Anne Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings*, 91, 92.

attack upon themselves and upon the church,”<sup>65</sup> in reference to Wyclif’s condemnation of their ecclesiastical temporalities. This council’s response uncannily resembles the Council of Fritzlar’s accusation of Norbert, in which the twelfth-century council charges Norbert’s sermons on religious poverty as “inuetif wordes agens here astaet,/Whech was to hem grete slaundir þei sayde.” The parallels between the Church’s response to Norbert’s reformative sermons and those initial accusations against Wyclif are quite thorough. The underlying comparisons existing between the bishops’ responses to Norbert and Wyclif suggest that Norbert would have faced the same outcome as the heresiarch of the fourteenth century, only because he preached sermons against the Church’s presumed shortcomings.

In response to the Council’s accusations, Norbert defends himself by citing scripture, basing his authority to preach on divine inspiration and on his moral living, unarguably orthodox sources of authority which, ironically, are suggestive of Wycliffite rhetoric:

If I for my preching be now for to blame,  
Wherfore seruyth þat scripture þat seith in þis wyse:  
Whoso turne his broþir from euele fame,  
And fro euele lif he getith him a prise,  
For he is cause þat his broþir schal rise,  
And saue his soule; he hiditg eke þe multitude  
Of all grete synnes, as scripture can conclude.

And for ye speke of powere vsurped of me,  
Whan I took my presthod þe bisschop to me saide:  
Take þe holy goost witg þis new degre,  
Loke þou be as clene as only mayde,  
Be not aferd, aschamed, ne afrayde  
To preche Goddis word, but bere it about  
Boldly and sadly onto euary rout.

(358-371)

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in J.H. Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 30.

Norbert's defense looks unquestionably orthodox. Along with Norbert's quotation of scripture, "as scripture can conclude," the saint argues that he preached through the inspiration of the "holy goost," which he received "witg þis new degre," and he lived "as clene as only mayde." The council could not possibly condemn the saint of heresy after such a defense. In the fifteenth century, however, many preachers on trial for the same reasons Norbert was, attempted to justify their preaching in similar terms, and they were, in fact, persecuted as heretics. H. Leith Spencer, in her *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, describes the condemnation of the unlicensed preacher John Grace in Coventry in 1424:

...Rumour got about...that, despite his protestations which he uttered "in euery sermon þat he made," he was not in fact licensed. And so the prior of St Mary's, Coventry, Richard Croseby, prepared to pronounce anathema in his afternoon sermon on "all tho þat herd the sermon of the said John Grace," but was pre-empted by Grace's arrest. Since this missionary preached "seyng that he was a gracyous man in sayng, and a hooly lyuer, and many marvelous made and shewed," it appears that he based his claim not merely on a pretended license but upon the Lollard dogma that the holiness which was the only true guarantee of any preacher was conferred neither by licence nor by clerical orders.<sup>66</sup>

Although Grace defended his preaching with his Spiritual authority and moral living, the Church responded by accusing him of being a Lollard, simply because his defense sounded a lot like "Lollard dogma." Norbert's almost identical defense should, thus, incite suspicion in the reader, because he too sounds a lot like a Lollard.

By having Norbert cite scripture, Capgrave suggests that although his protagonist is "lewid," he has access to scripture. In the passage I have just quoted from *The Life of St. Norbert*, the saint first justifies his preaching authority by citing James 5:20, which says, "He must know, that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his

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<sup>66</sup> Leith Spencer, 180.

way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.”<sup>67</sup> Norbert suggests by citing this epistle that God has authorized any priest who possessed the ability to “turne his bropir from euele fame” to act on it, so that souls can be saved. Because this verse potentially calls anyone to preach, not just priests, the Church had to guarantee that the laity did not have easy access to such verses, and the English Church did this by denying vernacular translations of the Bible and limiting scriptural sermons; Capgrave suggests that the Council’s negative reaction to Norbert additionally comes through the availability and use of scripture by an unlearned man.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the poem, Norbert specifically preaches the Gospel in his sermons and he even indirectly calls out to the readers to search scripture themselves, suggesting that Capgrave condoned the availability of scripture to the masses. For example, after founding Prémontré, Norbert seeks followers by going into towns and sowing “þe seed wech Crist broutg fro heuene./To euery puple, to euery parisch and route./Preched he the gospel, witg ful mylde steuene” (779-781). Norbert not only defended himself with scripture, he preached it “to euery puple.” In Capgrave’s time, sermons often avoided speaking of the “gospel and difficult matters of theology,”<sup>69</sup> because of the third constitution of Arundel.<sup>70</sup> Although the constitutions had not made preaching the Gospel entirely illegal, they attempted to reduce sermons on the Gospel because these sermons

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<sup>67</sup> “scire debet quoniam qui converti fecerit peccatorem ab errore viae suae salvabit animam eius a morte et operit multitudinem peccatorum” (James 5:20).

<sup>68</sup> In Part I of D.H. Green’s *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, the author discusses the Church’s discomfort with translating religious texts into the vernacular, since an improper reading of the text could result in heresy. For more information, see D.H. Green, “Part I: Reading in the Middle Ages,” *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Leith Spencer, 42.

<sup>70</sup> III. Constitutio. “Quod praedicator conformet se auditorio, aliter puniatur.” According to this Constitution, preachers must take their audience into consideration when organizing a sermon, in order to avoid, for example, teaching an unlearned, lay audience anything too dogmatic or theological. *Constitutions, 1408*, <http://www.umilta.net/arundel.html>.

allowed scripture to be more accessible to the masses. In a second example from the last chapter of the poem, Norbert prophesies based on scripture. Significantly, when the brethren doubt Norbert's prophecy, he says, "...affray you not forþi,/For it is writyn openly in scripture—/If ye wil stody, ye may pleyntly rede—" (3892-3894). Although Norbert actually directs this speech to the canons, who would have been able to receive consolation from scripture, Capgrave implicitly exhorts his readers to pick up scripture and read it as well. The author boldly states that the restriction of access to scripture comes directly from the Devil: "[The Devil's] entente is, if þat ye will lere,/The hertis of þe puple wit slaundir to fere./That þei schuld not þe word of God receyue" (2237-2239). According to Capgrave, restrictions on both access to vernacular scripture and the act of preaching the Gospel come directly from the Devil, and go against God's will. Capgrave, then, seems to suggest through Norbert's apparent ease in discussing scripture that the saint does God's will, and that the Bible should be accessible to "euery puple."

Norbert's ease at openly preaching the Gospel suggests a Wycliffite approach to scripture. John Wyclif is most famous for his translation of the Bible into English, in order to provide scripture to a larger readership. As I have argued earlier, Wyclif believed that the accessibility of the Gospel to all Christians would create unity, as all Christians would have access to a single authority. Later Wycliffites also argued for the necessity of preaching the Gospel, in order to make it accessible to more people, since it cannot be translated:

"Sipen þat þe trouþe of God stondiþ not in oo langage more þan in anoþer, but who so lyueþ best and techiþ best plesih moost God, of what langage þat euere it be, þerfore þe lawe of God written and taugt in Englisch may edifie þe comen pepel, as it doiþ clerkis in Latyn, sipen it is þe sustynance to soulis þat schulden be saued. And Crist comaundiþ þe gospel to be prechid, for þe pepel schulde lerne it, kunne it and worche

perafter. Whi may we not þanne writ in Englische þe gospel and al holy scripture to edificacioun of christen soulis, as þe prechour schewiþ it truly to þe pepel? For, if it schulde not be writen, it schulde not be prechid. Þis eresye and blasfemye schulden christen men putt fro þeire hert, for it is sprongon bi þe fend, fader of lesyngis.<sup>71</sup>

This Wycliffite argues that priests translate scripture in their sermons, so it should be just as orthodox to simply translate the text into a vernacular Bible. Like Capgrave's argument in *The Life of St. Norbert*, this Wycliffite argues, in response to the limitations imposed on vernacular scriptures, and, more significantly, restrictions against preaching the Gospel, that such limitations come from Satan: "Þis eresye and blasfemye schulden christen men putt fro þeire hert, for it is sprongon bi þe fend, fader of lesyngis." The Church feared that providing access to theological ideas, especially through scripture, to uneducated masses could result in heresy. By limiting who had access to the Bible, the Church could guarantee that only men educated by the Church preached, ensuring the orthodoxy of their sermons. Wyclif and his followers reacted to this policy by arguing that the Church acted against Christ's intentions, and, indirectly, Capgrave argues this reaction as well.

Norbert defends the charge that his preaching was "powere vsurped," as I have shown earlier, by arguing that his authority to preach did not come from the Church, but from the Holy Spirit: "Whan I took my presthod þe bisschop to me saide:/Take þe holy goost witg þis new degree" (366-367). According to Norbert, the bishop told him that he received Spiritual inspiration, and thus Divine authority to preach, when the bishop ordained him. Capgrave suggests that ordination alone should validate someone's ability to preach, not the licensure of bishops. If the Spirit inspired Norbert to preach, specifically to save the souls of his brothers, can the Church validly refer to this as a

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<sup>71</sup> "Biblical Translation," *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 107.

usurpation of authority? Norbert emphasizes his validity as a preacher by saying that he received “þe holy goost witg þis new degree,” and, thus, emphasizes his role as a passive vessel, through which the message of God reaches those to whom he preaches. Norbert possessed the order of priesthood and he should correspondingly possess the right to preach.

Throughout the poem, Capgrave alludes to the primary role that the Holy Spirit’s inspiration played in authorizing Norbert’s preaching career. At Norbert’s conception, his mother Hedwig (Hadwidis, in English) received a message from God about her son’s future role as Archbishop. As in Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary, a divine messenger announces to Hedwig that her son will live a life of Divine ministry: “A heuenly vision with a voys had sche/Rith in hir sleep, and þus he to hire sayde:/‘Be mery & glad, woman, & not afrayde;/For he þat is now in þi wombe conceyuyd/A herchbisschop schal be” (103-107). The Spirit tells Hedwig that her son will be a “herchbisschop,” a position whose primary concern in Capgrave’s time would be both preaching and ensuring that other priests preached as well, in order to minister to the masses; thus, the Holy Spirit’s inspiration played a major role in Norbert’s preaching even before his birth. Capgrave continuously suggests this Spiritual inspiration throughout the rest of the text. When Norbert preaches his first sermon, he does so unexpectedly to a house of canons, through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration: “Vnware to alle men þat he schuld preche,/The holy goost, whch he bare aboute,/Stered him to þis holy, þis deuoute speche” (219-221). The Spirit additionally gives him the endurance to continue preaching throughout his life, putting the desire of conversion into his heart: “þe holy goostis techyng/Made him swech þat he coude not blynne,/But euyr soules to heuene wold he wynne” (1389-1391). These

instances of Norbert's Spiritual inspiration come directly from Capgrave's source, yet Capgrave's emphasis on them over any sort of licensure, which Norbert does actually obtain, suggests that Capgrave, like Norbert, believed that Spiritual authority primarily authorized an ordained priest to preach.

Wycliffites defend their unauthorized preaching using similar rhetoric, in which they claim that their authority to preach comes directly from God, through the Holy Spirit, not from the Church. In the Wycliffite text "The Duty of Priesthood" the author argues that since Christ's disciples did not need to seek out ecclesiastical authority to preach, because the authority came from Christ, preachers have even less of a reason to seek out ecclesiastical authority now, in light of the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit:

And here mai christene men se þe falshed of þese freris, how þei letten simple prestis to preche þe gospel to þe folc, for, as þei feynen falsly, noon of Cristis disciplis hadde leue for to preche til þat Petir hadde gouen him leue; and bi þe same skile no prest schulde preche to þe peple but if he hadde leue of þe bischop or leue of þe pope. Þis gospel telliþ þe falsnesse of þis freris lesyng, siþ Crist sente þese disciplis to preche comunli to þe peple wiþoute letter o[r] axing of leue of seynt Petir. And as Petir schulde not graunte þis leue in Cristis presence, so prestis in Cristis presence han leue of Crist whanne þei ben prestis to preche truli þe gospel.<sup>72</sup>

The Wycliffite begins by accusing the members of the Church, and specifically friars, for lying that the Papacy is the source of a preacher's authority. To reveal the ridiculous quality of these "lies," he translates it into Biblical terms: "noon of Cristis disciplis hadde leue for to preche til þat Petir hadde gouen him leue." He then emphasizes the absurdity of this statement: "Þis gospel telliþ þe falsnesse of þis freris lesyng...." Of course Christ's disciples did not need Peter's authorization! Using scripture as his source for this belief, the Wycliffite argues that since Christ did not then expect the disciples to receive permission from St. Peter, the founder of the Papacy, he would not necessitate

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<sup>72</sup> "The Duty of Priesthood," *English Wycliffite Writing*, ed. Anne Hudson, 119-120.



this authorization now. Christ sent out those priests whom he had authorized himself as preachers, in order to “preche comunli.” Unlike Capgrave, however, Wyclif and his followers believed that preachers could preach even if they had not been ordained, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit to a greater extent; the predestined preaching which Wyclif taught suggests why the Church persecuted Christians in the fifteenth century for using this “Lollard dogma.” Like Wyclif, Capgrave, however, did emphasize the primacy of the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration and authorization of his protagonist’s preaching.

Finally, Norbert defends his preaching with the example of his “clene” life, a defense that almost every persecuted Wycliffite used to validate his preaching in the fifteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Norbert says that, upon his ordination, the bishop said to him, “Loke pou be as clene as only mayde,” and the defensive way in which Norbert presents this quotation suggests that his clean life provides the validation for his preaching. This line does not appear in the source at all, strongly suggesting that Capgrave adopted this defense directly from the defensive rhetoric of his day, primarily Wycliffite rhetoric. Later in the poem, Norbert similarly exhorts his fellow Premonstratensians to follow “þe reulis of clene conscience” (1216). He additionally states that the first thing which was “necessarie and profitable to euery congregacioun” was to live with “clennesse in church, & aboute þe autere” (1519). Throughout Norbert’s ministry, living a “clene” life possesses an importance that seems greater than a simple concern for moral living; because Capgrave included this aspect of Norbert’s life in the saint’s defense of his

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<sup>73</sup> For more information on late medieval perceptions of the role of morality in preaching and writing, see Alastair Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer’s Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

preaching, Capgrave suggests that his protagonist, like the Wycliffites, uses “clene” living, in conjunction with his earlier ordination, to authorize his preaching.

According to Wyclif, any preacher who received inspiration from the Spirit revealed his status as an authorized preacher through *recte vivendi*, or “living rightly.” The prologue to the Wycliffite Bible describes *recte vivendi* as a Christian’s rejection of earthly things in order to live a Spiritual life. Through this attempt to live morally, one reveals the Holy Spirit’s presence in his or her life. Wyclif’s prologue says, “And he haþ need to lyue a clene lif and be ful deuout in preiers and haue not his wit occupied aboute worldli þingis, þat þe Holi Spiryte, autour of wisdom and kunnyng and truþe, dresse him in his werk and suffer him not for to erre.”<sup>74</sup> Those living according to *recte vivendi* should not be concerned with worldly things, but should instead prayerfully turn to the Spirit, the “autour of wisdom and kunnyng and truþe.”

To Wycliffites, *recte vivendi* was not only an interior transformation, through which a person’s concern for material things transformed into a concern for spiritual things, it was also an exterior transformation, through which other Christians could recognize the Spirit’s presence in the person’s life. A Wycliffite argues, in his sermon on the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15, that the story could be understood as the description of the son’s ordination as a priest. In the following passage, the Wycliffite compares the stole, which the father places on the shoulders of his son, as both a physical stole placed on the shoulders of a priest and a metaphoric application of *recte vivendi* to the priest’s life:

God seiþ þanne to his seruauntis to bring forþ soone þe first stole whanne  
þei schewen mannes innocence; and þat man is ordeyned of hym to blisse,  
for þis stoole is long and narwg, and makip alle be prestis þat schal be

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<sup>74</sup> “Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible,” *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 71.

saued. And þis lastiþ round wiþ man, for it schal euere be wiþ him in blis.  
Þis stoole is derkid for a tyme bi wickid lijf þat man haþ, but it is clerid bi  
goode aungels and goode men þat comeþ of his vertues.<sup>75</sup>

The Wycliffite argues in this sermon that the stole of a priest, and, thus, the physical process of ordaining a priest, has little meaning in itself; the true meaning of the physical stole comes from its spiritual meaning, in which the stole represents the transformation of the priest's former life into a Spiritual life of *recte vivendi*. The exterior physical ordination only symbolizes the interior spiritual transformation of a priest. This emphasis on *recte vivendi* as an interior ordination reveals why the previously mentioned John Grace defends his authority to preach by stating that he was "a hooly lyuer," and Capgrave additionally suggests that Norbert argues for a similar authority by stating that he lives as "clene as only mayde."

After being accused for his irregular preaching habits, Norbert defends himself with arguments that sound remarkably like the standard defenses of accused Lollards; in Capgrave's translation of the poem, the Council actually accepts this Lollard-like defense as sufficient authority for the saint's preaching, and it grants him a general preaching license. The Council's reaction of Norbert's defense not only differs from the fifteenth-century councils' reactions to Wycliffite defenses, it also significantly differs from Capgrave's source, in which the Council denies Norbert the right to preach. In *Vita B*, Norbert "was unbowed and left them because their testimony against him did not agree. Destitute of all consolation he threw himself constantly into prayer and psalmody relying only on God's help... Thus he was against everyone and everyone was against him."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Sermon on Luke 15:11-32," *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 55.

<sup>76</sup> "Taliter igitur invictus, adjuvante se gratia divina, recessit ab eis, quia non erat conveniens testimonium illorum adversus eum. Omni ergo destitutus solatio, divino tantum fultus auxilio, orationibus et psalmodiis jugiter incumbabat... propter quod ei ipse contra omnes, et omnes erant contra eum." *Vita B*, 8-10, 8-11.

Soon after, Norbert sets out on a pilgrimage to Saint-Gilles in order to receive permission to preach from Pope Gelasius, which the Pope grants. Capgrave, however, completely removes this pilgrimage from his text, and, instead, has Cuno (Conone), the legate of the Council, grant Norbert's authority to preach: "...Conone, þe legate,/Accepted ful goodly his excusacyoun./He made at on þat ere were at debate,/And þoug þat þis man were no graduate,/yet gaue he him leue to shryue and to preche,/As a post of þe church & a goostly leche" (387-392). Capgrave incorporates the same arguments which Wycliffites used to defend their preaching in his protagonist's defense, yet, because the Council grants Norbert a general license to preach, Capgrave implies that these arguments, when paired with an official ordination, should be sufficient. In the fifteenth century, councils condemned many men for the same reasons that the Council of Fritzlar condemned Norbert. These fifteenth-century preachers defended their preaching with the same authorities that Norbert defends himself, yet they were still persecuted.

Although Capgrave makes Norbert look a lot like a Wycliffite through his trial for and defense of preaching, the author also continuously stresses Norbert's orthodoxy in the poem, validating his own.<sup>77</sup> Following the Council of Fritzlar, Capgrave departs from his source to ensure that Norbert receives a preaching license from the Council, as I have described above. The author ensures, through this general license, that Norbert does preach in an orthodox manner, after his initial persecution. Capgrave also stresses the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which is notable since John Wyclif contested

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<sup>77</sup> Although Capgrave was not a Wycliffite, he most likely supported many of the orthodox writings of John Wyclif, since Wyclif's theology was largely based on the writings of Giles of Rome, a famous Augustinian theologian, and the writings of St. Augustine. The Austin Friars, in fact, appear to have supported Wyclif's teachings more than the other mendicant groups because of the influence of their own Giles of Rome on his teachings. For more information on the relationship between the Austin Friars and John Wyclif, see Aubrey Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the time of Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

many of the sacraments, particularly the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. In the scene where a spider drops into the consecrated chalice, which I have already described, Norbert drinks the wine anyway, because he recognizes the wine as the actual blood of Christ: “This man is astoynd with fere & with loue,/Feer for venym, loue for þe sacrament” (257-258). The saint later holds the consecrated bread above a demon-possessed girl; the demon screams out, because he knows that the bread is now the actual presence of Christ: “Til sacry cam, & þan þe deuele sore low,/Lowde he cryed: ‘God, I make a vow./Se, men, þe litil God betwix þe handis too/Of youre Norbert, how he it liftith, loo.’/Thus deueles are aknowe þat heretikes denye!” (1187-191). The only scene that Capgrave added to his source was the first of these three; however, the presence of these scenes validates the suggestion that Capgrave gives Norbert a Wycliffite rhetoric in order to argue that the Church can potentially condemn orthodox preachers with its fifteenth-century laws, not in order to defend the stance of the Wycliffites.

In his translation of *The Life of St. Norbert*, John Capgrave presents a society that looks surprisingly like his own in order to use the life of a twelfth-century reformer to bring reformation to his own society. Although Norbert’s reform in the twelfth century focused primarily on religious poverty, Capgrave suggests the need for an additional reform: the unification of a divided Church. He implicitly argues, by putting a Wycliffite rhetoric of defense into the mouth of his protagonist, that the Church allowed preachers like Norbert to preach more freely in the twelfth century than in his own society. He, thus, punctuates the ways in which the preaching restrictions of his own society, specifically Arundel’s constitutions, resulted in the limitation of perfectly authorized preachers, a limitation that he, as an Austin Friar, experienced as well. Capgrave

suggests that the constitutions, by indirectly condemning Christians through questioning their orthodoxy, divided the Church into categories of orthodox and “other.” In response to this division, Capgrave presents the reformer, St. Norbert, as a preacher of religious unity.

Throughout the text, Norbert preaches peace and unity in response to division and discord. Norbert brings unity to the secular sphere of his society by at one point coming between two princes who were “at grete debate” (555). He exhorts them to stop their fighting in order to find favor with God, because God gives mercy only to those unified in brotherly love. Norbert says to the princes, “...But for Goddis loue I bidde þe þat þou swage/Alle þi malice and thi bittyr corage,/And drawe onto vnyte, as þou art bounde. Forgeue þi neybouris here on þis grounde/Alle here trespaas which þei do to þe,/If þou wilt þat God ouir þi defautes alle/Be propicious...” (571-577). Norbert successfully brings one of the princes to replace the hatred in his heart with “loue and charyte” (589); however, the second prince would not end his grudge. He had fallen prey, as Capgrave put it, to the “sower of discord” (598) who had “congeled his hert, his wil & and his thowt” (599). Soon after this episode, Norbert similarly preaches a sermon of unity to the town of Coriletum. In this sermon, the saint urges everyone to bring an end to any anger or hatred that they possessed, and turn to unity. He claims that he could reform their discord and help them replace it with love and concord, through the people’s fear of God:

There seide he þann a noble sermoun,  
In which he gan trete who men schuld aswage  
Here yrous desires and angry corage,  
And drawe onto pees in al manere wyse,  
For dred of þat hye and rithfull iustyse.

Aftyr þe sermoun he seide to hem alle  
That he wolde reforme alle maner discord

Whech was amongis hem; & þei gunne sore calle  
In name Iesu, wech is oure lord,  
That he schuld brynge to loue & concord  
To men þere present or he thens went.  
He was ful glad to serue here entent  
(626-637)

As Norbert argues, charity brings the unity which he desires, and through this charity, both the secular and religious spheres could replace any discord with concord. Wherever Norbert preached, the saint, who “loued therof so weel the vnytee” (3516), desired to reform the towns and churches with a message of unity.

Norbert’s messages of unity often directly respond to instances of divisiveness symbolized by actual diabolic presences in the text. During a demon possession that occurs in the town of Traiectum, the demon slanders many people in the town, and he causes the townspeople to argue in a “cruell debate” (2304). Norbert says that the people debate because “the deuele had broken here vnyte” (2309). After the demon had been exorcised from the man, it goes into a field and possesses a plowman. The devil causes the man to start scratching and tearing himself, physically suggesting the spiritual division that the devil causes. Capgrave says, “Thus seith þe story: þe deuel had in him place;/Anon he gan to rende himselue and race.” Capgrave, thus, links the spiritual division of the so-called body of Christ with the physical tearing of the body of one of Christ’s followers. By emphasizing the demonic nature of discord, Capgrave argues that any division in the Church results entirely from Satan.

Although division of the Church in the text often directly results from the presence of demons, the text also suggests that Norbert’s reform will heal the

division created by the fifteenth-century legalism. Notably, Capgrave employs the words “race” and “rende” to describe the previously mentioned diabolic division, the same words that he used to describe the potential reception of his text: “Ye noble men, if þat ye list to race,/Or rende my leuys þat I to you write...” (19-20). As I have previously argued, I see this proposed reception as Capgrave’s critique against the conservative legalism of the fifteenth century, a reception filled with suspicion. The author indirectly responds to this suspicious reception of his text by stressing that religious unity does not always result from a stricter definition of orthodoxy. In Capgrave’s text, the Premonstratensians fear that the Rule of St. Augustine does not define orthodoxy as strictly as other religious houses, which could possibly lead to diversity between religious orders. They feared the “dyuers exposiciones þat on þis reule were” (1927). In response, Norbert argues that laws presenting a less rigid definition of orthodoxy do not lead to the division of the Church, as long as the laws emphasize charity as their singular, unifying message. Norbert says:

Felawis, drede not þis dyuersite.  
 Alle Goddis weyis are grounded, witgouten ly,  
 Vpon his treuth and upon his mercy.

Alpoug þese reules be dyuers in manere,  
 Yet are þei not contrarie in no wyse;  
 Thoug þese customes which are vsed here,  
 Be othir men be set in othir assyse  
 In othir place as hem lest deuyse,  
 Yet are þei grounded alle on o charite,  
 Whech is loue of god & neybor here by the.  
 (1307-1316)

Unlike the conservative laws of fifteenth-century England, Norbert and the Premonstratensians follow a list of laws open to interpretation; the “dyuersite” created by



this open-endedness does not lead to discord, because all laws, if they truly come from God, have the single most important Biblical commandment as their foundation, to “love...god & neighbor.” Capgrave uses this message of unity, even amongst diversity, as a message to his own Church. The author argues that one does not need to follow a strict legal code in order to have a unified Church, for strict legalism often only results in causing one to suspiciously “race” and “rende.”

In contrast to the feared violence of the reactions to his own text, Capgrave at one point in the narrative proposes an appropriate response to suspicious sermons, and, by extension, his text. Soon after Norbert founded his religious order at Prémontré, the devil possesses some of the less-educated Premonstratensians whom Capgrave terms “ydiotes” (1899), causing them to teach and preach to the other canons. One specifically begins “Danyeles profecies to expowne & teche” (1913). The uneducated canon preaches a topic that Capgrave considers “misty” (1924); by bringing attention to the obscure topic of the sermon, paired with the preacher’s lack of education, Capgrave suggests that the Church could condemn this preacher as a potential Lollard. Norbert, however, does not interrupt the sermon or call the preacher a heretic, instead, he turns to “a eldeman þere,/Saddest & wisest aftir him of þat hous” (1921-1922), asking him “wheythir it were out perilous/To suffir þis man swech misty þingis to speke” (1923-1924). The elder tolerantly responds to Norbert, “Suffir now, maystir, þis þing for a while./It schal be wistful weel and openly/Wheithir it comth fro þe fendis gile/Or elles it comth be reuelacioun fro hy” (1926-1929). Following this sermon, the demon-possessed preacher falls sick and dies. The elder’s response to Norbert in Capgrave’s text differs slightly, yet significantly, from the source. In *Vita B*, Norbert asks the elder what he thought, and the

latter simply responds, “Good master, it will be clear very soon.”<sup>78</sup> Capgrave’s “eldeman” suggests that, by emphasizing that one must “suffir now...þis þing for a while,” one cannot know *prior to listening* whether the message that the preacher delivers will come from “þe fendis gile/Or elles...be reuelacioun fro hy”; thus, Capgrave suggests that the Church errs when it condemns Lollards simply for breaking the preaching laws. Capgrave’s suggested reaction, in which one listens with discernment and not condemnation, would lead to an environment of unity in his fifteenth-century Church, rather than one of division created by the suspicion and judgment resulting from conservative legalism.

A Wycliffite sermon on the ecclesiastical hierarchy describes the Church’s loss of unity by similarly arguing that the division of the Church results from its legalism. The sermon, like *The Life of St. Norbert*, proposes that only charity, taught to the masses by preachers of the Gospel can truly reunite the Church:

And þanne, as þer is oo bileeue, schulde þer be oon ordre, and charite schulde be norischid more þan it is now,—siþ we witen wel bi dede þat a man loueþ more a man of his ordre þan he doiþ anoþer man þat is of straunge order,—and so oonhed in bileeue and oonhed in ordre shulde gendre kyndli charite among men. But charite is now coold and dyuydiþ þe chirche.... Þis oonhed þat Crist made is wel nyg exilid, and vnstablesse of þe chirche is turned into grauel, and moost cause of þis þing is ypocrisie of men. And bi þis cause Pharisees pursuen trewe prestis þat tellen her defautis and letten hem [of] her wyning, so þat no pursuyt is more ful of enuye ne more perilous to men for cautels of ypocritis. For þis synne þei magnyfien þe witt of her owne men, and seien þat þei passen Goddis lawe and alle þat weren bifore hem, siþ þat Goddis lawe is fals but þese men glosen it and tellen hou it shal be koud and eelde doctours vndirstondun.<sup>79</sup>

This sermon stresses that religious unity had become completely divided through various conflicting authorities of the Church. The Wycliffite specifically brings attention to the

<sup>78</sup> “Magister bone, in brevi manifestum erit.” *Vita B*, 29-8.

<sup>79</sup> “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 80.

diversity of laws in the various religious orders, and stresses that these laws should not keep the orders from uniting under “oo bileue” and “oon ordre” through charity, as Capgrave himself argued through Norbert’s exhortation of his fellow Premonstratensians. The sermon blames the hypocrisy of men as the main cause for the lack of unity, in which the prelates magnify their own knowledge through a false glossing of the scripture. Through their false interpretations of scripture and additional “fals” laws, the members of the Church hierarchy, according to the Wycliffite, divide themselves from everyone else, especially the “trewe prestis” whom they condemn.

In John Capgrave’s *Life of St. Norbert*, we see an Augustinian friar’s prayer for reformation. Whether in response to the overall divisive intolerance created by Archbishop Arundel’s constitutions or specifically to the limitations of his own preaching, discussed in Lyndwood’s *Provinciale*, Capgrave responds with a plea for the creation of one flock. People of the fifteenth century were divided between many polarizing stances, including York/Lancaster, Lollard/orthodox, pro-clerical/anti-clerical, and the multiple Papal schisms,<sup>80</sup> yet Christ called Christians to be unified. Along with these divisive issues, Arundel’s constitutions, which were intended to unify Christians under a precise definition of orthodoxy, actually created a dividing line between “orthodox” Christians and their respective “heterodox” alternatives. Capgrave suggests, through the figure of St. Norbert, that any member of society, including a saintly preacher, could be condemned as a Lollard by the Church. The Lollards, thus, were not specifically Wycliffites, but were any member of the Church who had been penalized in some way based on the Church’s legalism. If upholding the laws leads to orthodoxy, then breaking the laws results in heterodoxy. The division that this creates in the body of

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<sup>80</sup> Karen Winstead, *John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century*, 163.

Christ goes directly against scripture, and Norbert, thus, came to remind this divided Church of God's will of unity.

Through his adoption of the Wycliffite rhetoric in *The Life of St. Norbert*, Capgrave counterattacks a Church that had just Lollardized him. Capgrave's and Norbert's religious orders could no longer freely preach, according to Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, for one reason or another. This limitation on Capgrave overtly compared the author and his community to Wycliffites, along with any other so-called "Lollard" that had faced similar limitations. Capgrave faced the same expulsion from religious unity that the Wycliffites felt, and he desired a change; he directed his attention to a period of reformation, the twelfth century. By translating the life of a saint entirely characterized by his reformatory preaching, Capgrave could, in an orthodox manner, both criticize the institutional Church of his day and instruct it on how to change for the better.

#### A "Very New Seynt Poule"

John Capgrave protests the preaching restrictions of the fifteenth century by presenting an orthodox saint of the twelfth century who would be condemned by these restrictions. Capgrave's St. Norbert, an orthodox reformer of the twelfth-century Church, looks a lot like a Lollard; paradoxically, the twelfth-century saint looks like a fifteenth-century heretic. Capgrave heightens his oblique criticism of the restrictions by identifying Norbert with an important preacher from the days of the early church who would have also been controversial by Arundel's constitutions—Saint Paul. Capgrave increases his negative critique of the hierarchy by suggesting that it would brand Paul, "the Apostle," as a heretic. Capgrave's source, *Vita B*, implicitly links the stories of the two saints by describing Norbert's "conversion experience" in a manner similar to the

Biblical account of Paul's. Capgrave, however, makes the comparison explicit by calling Norbert a "very new Seynt Poule" for the sake of emphasizing, to an even greater extent, that the Church is at fault for its judgment against poor preachers.

Many of the elements of Norbert's life make him resemble his predecessor St. Paul, especially his conversion experience, followed by his life of ascetic apostolic preaching. Through his conversion experience, like Paul, Norbert received his authority to preach primarily through the Holy Spirit, and he relayed God's message to the world:

Thus it befell aftir þat up on day  
With o seruaunt he schul a iornay make  
With fresch hors and with ful fresch array  
In grete hast his viage for to take.  
But sone he gan oute of his pride awake  
Whann he was feses witg leuene & þunderblast,  
Whech made hym and his child agast....

(127-133)

Following the stroke of lightning, God calls Norbert to "Turne agen, þerfor, fro þi lif seculere" (161). Once he had converted, Norbert, like Paul, begins preaching the Gospel, attempting to reform the Church. After Norbert becomes bishop, Capgrave says that the saint lived the "very lyf as ye ful may lere/In þe apostel" (3269-3270). According to Capgrave, Norbert's life mirrored Paul's in that it was an example of ascetic "clennesse" (3264) which drove "ydilnesse" away (3265), emphasizing that Norbert's "clene" life could additionally be found in his model Paul's life. Additionally, Norbert desires to bring this model of the apostolic life (*vita apostolica*) to others. In one episode, Norbert attempts to reform the canons of the abbey of Saint-Martin, who were not "seruyng God in seruyse dyuyne" (718), by urging them to live according to the *vita apostolica*: "He seyde pleynly he wold bryng hem to þat ende,/þat þei schul lyue as þe aposteles ded symtyme" (726-727). These canons refuse to follow this way of life, because Norbert's

exhortation to live by the *vita apostolica* would “compelle hem in harder lyf to be/Thann euyr þei were in ony tyme before” (733-734). The difficulty of this life again suggests the *recte vivendi* by which Norbert lived, emphasizing that the saint’s way of life came from his imitation of Paul. Like Paul, Norbert preached through Divine inspiration and turned from a frivolous life, replacing it with an ascetic life of “clene” living, which Capgrave makes synonymous with the *vita apostolica*.

Certainly no one would claim that Paul was unorthodox; however, Capgrave reminds his readers that the Biblical saint preached against the religious authority of the time, specifically concerning how a faith based on the law could not possibly coincide with the Christian faith. Notably, Capgrave alludes to Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians in which Paul specifically argues that the law cannot save, and that salvation occurs only through the grace of Christ. Capgrave cites this verse to metaphorically describe the construction of the house of Prémontré, built on the foundation of Christ: “Thus upon Cryst, wech is very ground/Of alle godnesse, biggid is this place/Of whik stones sware and no þing round,/Ful of veynys grauen all with grace./The grete werkman aboue he ded race,/Alle þis werk goostly in here soule./So techith us þe noble clerk Seynt Poule” (834-840). This allusion signifies that the goodness of Prémontré does not come from any good works of the Premonstratensians, but entirely from the goodness of Christ, who has “grauen” their souls with “grace.” The verse to which Capgrave alludes describes the law’s invalidity in respect to grace more explicitly:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need (as some do) epistles of commendation to you, or from you? You are our epistle, written in our hearts, which is known and read by all men: Being manifested, that you are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, and written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart. And such confidence we have,

through Christ, towards God. Not that we are sufficient to think any thing of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God. Who also hath made us fit ministers of the new testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.<sup>81</sup>

Capgrave reminds his readers, through the allusion to this verse, that the former law of the Old Testament, the law found on “tables of stone,” has given way to the new law of the New Testament, the law of love written on “the fleshly tables of the heart.” Paul emphasizes that mankind can do nothing to merit salvation on its own; all salvation comes through the “sufficiency” of God. By alluding to verses that explicitly state the incompatibilities between defining orthodoxy through legalistic terms and the Divine gift of grace, Capgrave argues, to a greater extent, against the prescriptive orthodoxy, defined by the Constitutions and other laws, and how this definition led to a non-scriptural division within the Church.

Paul was viewed by medieval culture as a protestor against Jewish law, and by extension, as a protestor against legalism in the Church. This late medieval conception of Paul was drawn from the Biblical book of Acts, as well as from the more highly developed character of Paul in the medieval miracle plays written in Capgrave’s East Anglia, such as the fifteenth-century *Digby Conversion of St. Paul*.<sup>82</sup> The content of the *Digby* play differs little from its Biblical source in Acts, but the play describes the story of Paul’s conversion, adapted from Acts 9, in such a way as to suggest that Paul preached

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<sup>81</sup> “incipimus iterum nosmet ipsos commendare aut numquid egemus sicut quidam commendaticiis epistulis ad vos aut ex vobis epistula nostra vos estis scripta in cordibus nostris quae scitur et legitur ab omnibus hominibus manifestati quoniam epistula estis Christi ministrata a nobis et scripta non atramento sed Spiritu Dei viv non in tabulis lapideis sed in tabulis cordis carnalibus fiduciam autem talem habemus per Christum ad Deum non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis quasi ex nobis sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est qui et idoneos nos fecit ministros novi testamenti non litterae sed Spiritus littera enim occidit Spiritus autem vivificate” (2 Cor. 3:1-6).

<sup>82</sup> Another popular description of St. Paul comes from Iacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*; however, the descriptions of Paul from this source add very little to my argument. Iacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

specifically against ecclesiastical legalism. The Digby play initially presents Paul as a member of the hierarchical establishment, an establishment defined by the play in explicitly Christian terms, although this hierarchical establishment is actually Judaism. As a member of this hierarchy, Paul persecutes Christian preachers, specifically for breaking the laws of the establishment. At the beginning of the play, Paul explains his motivation for persecuting Christians: “I bring them to punyshement for ther trespase./[W]e wyll them nott suffer to rest in no place;/ffor they go a-bougte to *preche and gyff exemplis*,/To destroye our lawes, sinagoges, and templis” (emphasis mine).<sup>83</sup> Paul suggests that he must end the preaching, since Christianity is centered on the preaching of Christ’s followers. While the historical Paul originally persecuted Christian preachers based on Mosaic Law, the Digby play suggests that Paul additionally persecuted Christians based on Church law. The play actually presents a criticism of the legalism of the Church, by comparing Church law to Old Testament codes through the play’s application of Christian names to Jewish authorities and institutions. Paul begins persecuting these Christians for preaching and ignoring the laws at the request of the Jewish “busshopes” Caypha (Caiphas) and Anna. These “holy pristres of hye potestacion”<sup>84</sup> send Saul to Damascus to “subdue rebellions that wyll of frawdnes,/A-gaynst our lawes rebel or transgresse.”<sup>85</sup> As a pawn of this legalistic “Church,” Saul must stop the rebels who create dissent through their preaching; he must stop the Christians who argue that the laws are unnecessary in light of their messiah, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>83</sup> “The Conversion of St. Paul,” *The Digby Plays*, ed. Furnivall (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), lines 25-28.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 591.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 39-40.



At his conversion, Paul learns that laws do not save, and instead, he begins preaching through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that salvation comes from grace alone. He ironically becomes one of the anti-legalistic preachers he had earlier persecuted. The play reveals how God elected Saul/Paul to be a preacher, even though Paul had just converted to Christianity; God, thus, authorized an unlearned preacher. After setting out with two soldiers to arrest any Christian that they encountered on their way to Damascus, Saul falls from his horse in response to a sudden stroke of lightning. Following the conversion experience, Saul turns to Christianity and commits his life to preaching the Gospel of Christ. God soothes the Christian Ananias, who fears Saul's persecutory reputation, by saying:

Be nothing a-drad, he ys a chosen wessell,  
To me assyngned by my godly eleccion.  
He shall bere my name be-fore the kynges and chylder of Israell.  
[B]y many sharpe shoures sufferying correccion,  
[A] gret doctor of benyngne compleccion,  
The trwe precher of the hye deuynete,  
A very pynacle of the faith, I ensure the.<sup>86</sup>

Paul would preach, as God says, through the inspiration of the spirit, in order to reach all the children of Israel. Paul emphasizes this spiritual inspiration in his preaching later in the play when he says, "Grant me, good lord, thy pleasur to fulfyll,/And send me suche speche that I the trwth say,/my entencions prophitable to meve yf I may,"<sup>87</sup> emphasizing that the message comes from God. With this message, he believes he can inspire others, specifically those that he formerly persecuted, to join him in preaching to reach "all this reme."<sup>88</sup> He begins preaching that the religious legalism of the "holy pristes" should be

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., ll. 234-240.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., ll. 507-509.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., l. 307.

replaced with the absolute authority of “holy scryptur,” replacing the laws of the “Church” with God’s law of love.

### Paul, the Lollard

As an unlawful preacher, Paul looks notably like a Wycliffite, and, not surprisingly, the Wycliffites often cited Paul as an authority for their own poor preaching. Not only does Paul preach against the legalism of the hierarchy, he preaches through the authority of Spiritual inspiration, even though he is unlearned; additionally, Paul lives a life of poverty, providing the example of the *vita apostolica*. These traits should stand out as potentially Wycliffite traits. Because of these commonalities, Wycliffites often used Paul’s life in defense of their own authorization in preaching, calling Paul (and the other disciples) “lewd Lollers” who “werk wiþ [their] hands,” in impoverished lives of ministry.<sup>89</sup> One Wycliffite even argues that the deeds of St. Paul, the symbol for apostolic preaching, surpass St. Peter, the symbol of the Papacy, because of Paul’s itinerant preaching, his writings, and his life of poverty:

It semeþ reasonable to feiþful men þat seint Poul þe gloriouse apostle and feiþful techer of heþen men hadde more power as to many þingis to edifie þe chirche, þann Petre hadde... Poule trauelide more in preching and writynge þe gospel and in rennyng aboute as þoroug al þe wor[l]d in werke of þe gospel, and in suffryng willfully mo peynes and harder in his bodi for þe truþe and freedom of þe gospel þanne any oþer apostle dide... Perfore he hadde more power gouen of God to edifie þe... þanne Petre hadde.<sup>90</sup>

In this passage, the Wycliffite praises Paul for his ascetic life of evangelism. The writings and sermons of Paul reached more “heþen men” than those of Peter, according to this author. This text suggests that apostolic preaching more affectively spreads “þe

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<sup>89</sup> “Epistola Sathanae ad Cleros,” *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 93.

<sup>90</sup> “The Power of the Pope,” *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 124.

truþe and freedom of þe gospel” than does the legalizing of the Church, using the indisputably orthodox life of Saint Paul to argue this fact.

When John Capgrave states that Norbert of Xanten is a “very new Seynt Poule,” did he mean to connote this additional web of Wycliffite meanings? Although this question cannot be answered definitely through his writing, Capgrave at least reveals his recognition of a disparity between the Biblical apostolic life and the legalistic Church of his day, specifically in the role of preaching. Along with the author’s citation of 2 Corinthians in *The Life of St. Norbert*, Capgrave calls believers in Christ to preach as the apostles preached in his *Life of St. Katherine* (1445), in which he emphasizes their lack of education, a trait that notably breaks the laws of fifteenth-century England:

Ryght as be twelve ydyotes, seynt Austyn seith  
(He meneth the Aposteles, for thei not lerned were),  
Throwowte the word was sowyn oure feyth  
That every man may know and every man lere,  
Godd wold not wynn us with wysdam ne fere  
But with holy boystysnesse, if I schuld sey soo....<sup>91</sup>

Significantly, he refers to the apostles, the first Christians, as “twelve ydyotes” who spread the word of God through “holy boystysnesse” rather than through wisdom and fear. This passage, read in the context of Arundel’s constitutions, must be commenting on the restricted role of preaching in Capgrave’s society, in a response to the first five constitutions. If the constitutions were in place during Christ’s day, the Apostles would never have been permitted to boisterously proclaim the gospel. They would have had to prove their vast knowledge of the scriptures, obtain a license, preach only the basic tenets of faith, and believe the “orthodox” views that the Church held; thus, through Norbert’s comparison to Paul, one of the twelve idiots, Capgrave alludes to an unlearned man, full

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<sup>91</sup> John Capgrave, *Life of St. Katherine*, ed. Karen Winstead (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), Book 1, Chapter 5, Lines 288-293.

of zeal for Christ, preaching the Gospel. The poet suggests that even the most orthodox preacher of Christianity could be condemned by the standards of the fifteenth-century Church, suggesting how heterodox these standards are themselves and emphasizing the God-given authority that poor priests like Norbert and Paul possess.

By comparing Norbert to Paul, Capgrave additionally emphasizes his mission of unity. By calling preachers to emulate Norbert, through the example that he provides of the saint's life in *The Life of St. Norbert*, Capgrave additionally calls preachers to preach as Paul preached. Using Saint Norbert as a means to indirectly compare the poor preachers of his lifetime to Paul, Capgrave suggests that the persecuted preachers of the fifteenth century actually lived according to Biblical models of the *vita apostolica*. The comparison between the fifteenth-century preachers to those of the *ecclesia primitiva* reveals an additional layer of meaning to the unity that he desires for his Church. Not only does Capgrave call for a unity among the believers of Christ in his day, he also argues for unification with the traditional models of the Church, through an imitation of examples of the twelfth-century Church and, more significantly, with the Biblical model of the *ecclesia primitiva*.

#### Imitatio Christi

Capgrave makes a radical move by making St. Norbert look like a Lollard, worthy of condemnation by the fifteenth-century Church, and then comparing Norbert to Paul, the ideal Christian preacher; he suggests, through this comparison, that Paul's *vita apostolica* and reformatory preaching could merit condemnation in the late medieval Church. The author makes an even more extreme statement by comparing his protagonist to Christ, since any comparison between the saint and Christ effects the notion that

Norbert's preaching, especially in its desire for poverty and unity, works in imitation of Christ's.<sup>92</sup> In the sixth century, Gregory of Tours described each *vita* of saints as an entirely singular phenomenon, since each individual life simply reflects the life of Christ. He says, "Whence it is clear that it is preferable to speak of the life of the fathers than lives, because, although there is a diversity of merit and virtue, in the world one life nourishes all bodies."<sup>93</sup> Thomas Heffernan expands on this quotation in his text *Sacred Biography*, stating:

...the essential reason for [Gregory's] choice of the singular when composing a book of more than one [saint's] life is based on the developing Christian idea that the saints share collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ. In sum, sanctity is derived from the sacred, which is radically singular.<sup>94</sup>

According to both Gregory of Tours and Heffernan, the body of Christ, in its singularity, represents the ideal image of unity. Each member, especially the saints, live a life in imitation of Christ because the saint has conformed to Christ, resulting in Christ-like qualities. The twelfth-century Church must have believed that Norbert shared "collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ." To emphasize how "radically singular" the "life" of the saints is, I wish to show that those same traits which Norbert shares with Paul are equally shared with Christ. Christ most perfectly lived a life of poverty, he resisted legalistic religious authority, he lived unquestionably by the Spirit, and, of course, he preached; however, since these comparisons exist between Norbert and Christ, the constitutions which branded Norbert a Lollard must equally condemn Christ.

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<sup>92</sup> For more information on late medieval explorations of holiness, specifically through an imitation of Christ's humanity, see David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>93</sup> "Unde manifestum est, melius dici vitam partum quam vitas, quia, cum sit diversitas meritorum virtutumque, una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo." Quoted in Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Capgrave, thus, proposes an extreme argument: By presenting Norbert, an *imitatio Christi*, as potentially heretical, Capgrave actually implicitly charges the Church of heterodoxy; any definition of Christian orthodoxy which labels Christ, the absolute standard of orthodoxy, as heterodox, is clearly wrong.

In *The Life of St. Norbert*, Capgrave actually presents Norbert's life as a reflection of Christ's. Norbert has an Annunciation, his own humble Triumphal Entry, and his persecution on Maundy Thursday. I have already described the Annunciation above, a scene in which a heavenly messenger announces to Norbert's mother that she will bear a son who will be an archbishop, comparable to Gabriel's annunciation to Mary: "Be mery & glad, woman, & not afrayde;/For he þat is now in þi wombe conceuyd/A herchbisschop schal be" (105-107). Later, after the Church names Norbert an archbishop, he goes to his diocese in a very humble guise; when he approaches the gates of his palace, the porter does not recognize Norbert as the archbishop because of his humble appearance:

He took no more upon him þan þoug he ware  
On of þe lowhest þat went among hem þare.  
Thei entred into þe cyte & forth to þe paleys;  
At þe grete gate stood porteris with baleys

Whech knew not here lord, he was so pore.  
On of hem stert to him & þus he seyde þan:  
"Beggeris inowe are in at this dore.  
Therfor go bak, withdrawe þe, good man.  
Thou schewist ful weel þat litil good þou can,  
Make space for my lord, he comth ritg anoon.  
(2951-2960)

Norbert enters the city humbly, after he obtained his foretold position of archbishop. He enters in a way very similar to the entry of the Messiah, foretold by Zacharias: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: BEHOLD THY

KING will come to thee, the just and saviour: he is poor, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”<sup>95</sup> Like Jesus’, however, Norbert’s humility causes people to doubt his true identity. The porter says, “Therfor go bak, withdrawe þe, good man./Thou schewist ful weel þat litil good þou can,/Make space for my lord.” The porter does not recognize Norbert as God’s messenger because of Norbert’s humility, comparable to the standard Jewish response to Christ as Messiah. Even later, Norbert faces an assassin on Maundy Thursday, the day on which Christ’s betrayal occurred and his Passion began. When the members of Norbert’s community ask the man why he wished to kill Norbert, he explains that he had been hired by “both prestis & seculere” (3227) to “sle þe bisschop in þis manere” (3229); Capgrave uses the word “treson” (3232) to describe this man’s actions, suggesting a comparison to Judas’ Betrayal of Christ. Norbert responds to this man’s actions by comparing himself to Christ: “Owre cruell enmies haue entised þis man/To do this dede; for þis is þat same day/As þe gospel ful nobilly wisse can,/In which þe Iewis, witg ful grete array,/Sowt oure lord to bring him to abay/...þerfor lete us now doo/As oure lord ded: forgeue all trespass” (3242-3246, 3249-3250). Like Christ, Norbert faces betrayal, and, as Christ forgave the “Iewis,” Norbert humbly forgives the people who desired his death. Capgrave presents the structure of Norbert’s life as an image of Christ’s directly in order to emphasize the saint as an *imitatio Christi*.

Norbert’s humble poverty comparing the saint to Christ in his “Triumphal Entry” above is the very *imitatio Christi* that Wycliffites aspired to. In John Wyclif’s text *De Ecclesia*, the heresiarch argues that his own expression of poverty most worthily imitates

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<sup>95</sup> “exulta satis filia Sion iubila filia Hierusalem ecce rex tuus veniet tibi iustus et salvator ipse pauper et ascendens super asinum et super pullum filium asinae” (Zacharias 9:9).

Christ's. In the eighth chapter, Wyclif says, "...a Christian, by impoverished living, should be similar to Christ, foremost in the Christian flock."<sup>96</sup> Wyclif called to "poor priests" to preach his messages primarily because he recognized in their poverty that they were imitators of Christ. Only imitators of Christ can drive the devil away, as Norbert himself says: "Lete us now vse þe same ordynaunce/Whech Crist oure lord with holy obseruaunce/Bad his apostoles that thei schuld vse, and neuyr þis counsell for no þing refuse" (2083-2086). Wyclif additionally reveals that his reformatory messages of poverty, viewed by Courtenay as "an attack upon themselves and upon the church," actually came out of Wyclif's imitation of Christ. Through this view, Wyclif argues that the only true imitators of Christ are the "poor priests."

Norbert's most significant imitation of Christ is his desire for unity within the Church, through his acceptance of all people. Capgrave says that when Norbert preached "to lerned and lewid," (1529) he did so in imitation of "oure lord Iesu" (1528), as a means to reveal the gospel to all in both his "word and ded" (1527). Capgrave additionally says that Norbert received all into his brotherhood at Prémontré, including "ydiotes" (1899): "Now were receyued into þis holi place/Alle maner puple and of al manere degree;/There was non refused þat called on þis grace./Aftir þe gospel seith rith soo ded he,/Oure fader Norbert. 'Alle þat come to me,'/Seid Crist oure lord, 'I schal wel receyue'" (1891-1896). The text cites John 6:37, significantly describing God's grace, which, by definition, is not merited. According to the verse following the one cited by Capgrave, Jesus says, "And this is the will of my Father that sent me: that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have life everlasting, and I will raise him up in

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<sup>96</sup> "Ex istis colligitur quod summum privilegium concessum christiano pro via foret quod, expropriarie vivendo, Christo similis foret anterior in exercitu christiano." John Wyclif, *De Ecclesia* (London: Wyclif Society, 1886), 169.



the last day.”<sup>97</sup> By revealing Norbert’s impartial preaching of the Gospel, to “lerner and lewid,” and his acceptance of all people, Capgrave reminds his reader of the most important aspect of Christ: he, too, impartially provides grace to all who believe in him. Capgrave significantly alludes to the unmerited grace of the gospels in a line which he adds to his source, “There was non refused þat called on þis grace,” in order to emphasize that grace is an unearned gift, provided to all who call on Christ. Capgrave employs Norbert, as an *imitatio Christi*, to remind his readers that following Church laws does not save: the only thing that saves is grace.

### One Flock

Again, I do not mean to suggest that Capgrave supported the Wycliffites; Capgrave presents St. Norbert with Lollard-like traits to reveal that the fifteenth-century Church’s laws could condemn even the most orthodox preachers as Lollards, even Christ himself. I believe that the author recognized the conservative legalism of the English Church, initiated by Arundel’s constitutions, and he recognized how this legalism created unnecessary and even harmful restrictions towards preachers, creating division in the body of Christ. By requiring Augustinian preachers to constantly verify their orthodoxy, the Church condemned them as suspect, indirectly condemning them as Lollards. Capgrave uses a Wycliffite rhetoric in his arguments in order to reassess the standards of his society, questioning whether one can truly define orthodoxy without destroying Christian unity. Andrew Cole, in the conclusion of his *Heresy in the Age of Chaucer*, argues that many orthodox authors of late medieval England employed “Wyclifism” as a new way of approaching concerns that the authors present in their texts:

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<sup>97</sup> “haec est enim voluntas Patris mei qui misit me ut omnis qui videt Filium et credit in eum habeat vitam aeternam et resuscitabo ego eum in novissimo die” (John 6:40).

Accordingly, Wyclifism is less a “context” or “background” of affairs than part of the processes of cultural negotiation itself, an emergent fund of ideas, forms, and rhetorics that helped various medieval authors think anew about the past and the present, about traditions and conventions, aesthetics and politics—about, fundamentally, what it means to write. When Chaucer thinks of vernacular translation, he thinks of Wycliffism. When Hoccleve and Lydgate apply their often topically inflected forms of writing to religious and ecclesiastical issues, they again think of Wycliffism. When Langland and Kempe assess the viability of new forms of religiosity, they, too, think of Wycliffism....<sup>98</sup>

Resembling the authors whom Cole cites, Capgrave uses an engagement with Lollard concerns because this allows him to think through the question of schism, of division. He indirectly asks what is most important to the Church: strict legalism or Christ’s own embrace of all. The author makes his Norbert look a lot like a Wycliffite in order to show how the Church, as it was in the fifteenth century, brought about the destruction of its own unity through its licensure of priests. Capgrave reveals that a greater concern for Christian unity has been superseded by a lesser concern of the Church’s idea of “orthodox preaching.” Through its licensure of priests, the Church has hindered the leaders of the Church from correctly leading the laity, or, to use a recurring metaphor that Capgrave employs, the shepherds can no longer care for their flock, causing the flock to stray.

Capgrave repeatedly compares the people of God to sheep and preachers to shepherds, thereby suggesting that the people of God are vulnerable to the wolf-like devil without a preacher leading them. After Capgrave describes the founding of Prémontré, he says that the devil envied the good deeds of the Premonstratensians. The devil, thus, desired to cause the canons, like sheep, to stray from the rest of the flock: “He had enuye with hem þat were deuoute,/Witg hem þat lithly trespass wold forgeue;/... To Goddis

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<sup>98</sup> Andrew Cole, 186.

seruauntis he is a wikkid reue,/For he wil lede hem from þe flok erraunt,/And make hem eke of here synne auant” (848-849, 852-854). The Latin etymology of the word “erraunt” not only suggests that the devil desires the Premonstratensians to sin, but also suggests that the devil desires them to physically wander away from their fellowship. The devil specifically wishes to destroy the unity of the “flok,” resulting in sin. Capgrave reveals what happens to a flock when it loses its shepherd in a later scene. Norbert leaves his community, and in his absence, the devil attacks the Premonstratensians:

Thus fro þe folde parted with loue and pees  
Is þis scheperde, and forth now is igoo,  
...Oure enmy, þe deuele, is glad now & no moo  
Of þis departing, for mechil care and woo  
Wrouth he to hem in þe absens of þis man.

...Lich a wolf þat comth to a folde,  
First he feseth þe scheep with his chere,  
And aftir ful slyly wil he now beholde  
Who he may þrote hem both there and here  
Aftir with teeth wil he neyh hem nere.  
(1814-1819, 1821-1825)

In this passage, Capgrave directly argues that a flock without a shepherd has very little chance of resisting the devil. He thus implies that anything keeping shepherds from properly leading their flocks, including the preaching restrictions of the Church, results in the erring of the sheep.

The motif of sheep and wolves often occurs in medieval texts as a metaphor for false preachers, including Lollard preachers, in late medieval England. Based on the verse in Matthew, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves,”<sup>99</sup> the Church often described Lollards as wolves in sheep’s clothing, bringing messages that would bring destruction to the listeners. *The*

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<sup>99</sup> “attendite a falsis prophetis qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces” (Matthew 7:15).

*Life of St. Norbert* presents a few consecutive stories concerning wolves in a way quite different from this usual way. In Capgrave's stories, it is sometimes hard to tell the wolves from the sheep. Although these stories came from Capgrave's source, I believe that Capgrave saw them as narratives that could be read allegorically to comment on the Church's persecution of preachers. The first wolf/sheep story (2514-2562) begins with a group of the Premonstratensians going out to cut down some trees. On their way, they see a wolf bearing away its prey, a "litol goot.../For to deuoure him, rith soo is his kynde" (2520-2521). After making the wolf flee and abandon the goat, the brethren take the prey and return quickly to their monastery "to haue a feest" (2524). The wolf follows those who had stolen his prey, and he claws and digs at the gate, trying to get his meal back. After Norbert asks the cause of the problem, the canons confess to Norbert, and the abbot responds, "Ow...þe beest is ful trewe;/For ye ded him wrong, he wold not ellis you sewe/...Fet þe carkeys inne,/Bere it to þe wolf, þe more and þe mynne,/The body, þe skyn lete him haue alle./We wil not þat anothir tyme he pleyne schalle" (2547-2548, 2552-2555). The brethren return the prey to the wolf, and he goes "streyt to wood; þei sei him no more" (2561). Unlike the previous references to wolves, this story actually presents a wolf that Norbert describes as "ful trewe."

I believe that by showing the shortcomings of the canons in this story, Capgrave suggests that the dangerous wolf is not always the one that looks the most like a wolf; he suggests that there may, in fact, exist sheep in wolves' clothing. Although this story comes from Capgrave's source, the parallel of the wolf with the Biblical allusion to wolves stands out to me. I believe that, in the context of the "wolf in sheep's clothing" motif concerning Lollards, Capgrave's story of a wolf that is "ful trewe" jars with

accepted orthodoxy. If the brethren represent the Church and the wolf represents one whom the Church has condemned as a Lollard, the Church still has no right to deny the unrecognized preacher the ability to preach. Because Capgrave emphasizes that the brethren brought the “litol goat” back to their monastery “to haue a feest,” he suggests that the brethren’s desire for devouring the prey parallels that of the wolf, and suggests that they are no better than the wolf. The author additionally compares his text to wool in his prologue to suggest that those who desire to tear his poem apart compare to the diabolic wolves in this context, even though, as members of the Church, they appear to be the sheep of the story: “Who schal þese dayis make now ony þing/But it schal be tosed & pulled as wolle?” (8-9). Like a wolf, the Church, as Capgrave accuses it, desires to tear apart his poem, looking for heterodoxy. At the very beginning of the poem, Capgrave presents his text as a sheep, and indirectly compares the Church to a wolf through its desire to tear his text apart; this metaphor can extend to the Church’s involvement in the destruction of Christian unity. By presenting himself as potentially dangerous to orthodoxy through his translation, Capgrave presents himself, and other unauthorized preachers, as this wolf who is “ful trewe.”

Although the motif of the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” was used by the fifteenth-century Church to warn about the dangers of Wycliffites, the Wycliffites also employed similar motifs; however, they used them to respond to the charges by reversing them as Capgrave does, placing the blame on the shepherd. In a sermon on John 10:11-18, a Wycliffite argues that the responsibility of protecting sheep from dangers lies solely with the shepherd. The sheep’s pasture, according to the sermon, represents God’s law, and

bad pastures represent false laws. If a shepherd goes against God's law, by creating false laws, he does not correctly protect his sheep from danger:

It falliþ to a good heerd to lede hise scheepe in hool pasturis, and whanne his scheep ben hirt or scabbid to hele hem and to grese hem, and whanne oþir yuel beestis assailen hem þanne helpe hem. And herto schulde he putt his lijf to saue his scheepe fro suche beestis. Þe pasture is Goddis lawe þat euermor is grene in truþe, and rotun pasture ben oþir lawis and oþir fablis wiþoute ground. And cowardise of suche heerdis þat dar not defende Goddis lawe witnessiþ þat þei failen in two offices suyng after: for he þat dar not for worldis dreed defende þe lawe of his God, hou schulde [he] defende his scheepe for loue þat he haþ to hem? And if þei bryngen yn newe lawes contrarie to Goddis lawe, hou schulde þei not faile after in oþir offices þat þei schulden haue?<sup>100</sup>

Here the Wycliffite equates the dangerous wolves with the cowardly shepherds who “dar not defende Goddis lawe” against “oþir lawis and oþir fablis wiþoute ground.” The Wycliffite's suggestion of “oþir lawis” seems to allude to Arundel's constitutions, since they limited the role of preachers (shepherds/pastors) without, according to the Wycliffite, having Biblical authority to do so. The Wycliffite sees the suspicion of the Church, expressed through its creation of new laws, as harmful to the flock. Capgrave, I believe, agrees.

A little over a hundred years after Capgrave's lifetime, John Bale indirectly describes the masterful way in which the Augustinian used literature to react to the preaching restrictions proposed by Arundel's constitutions. At the beginning of this paper, I quoted Bale's *Scriptorum Illustrum Maioris Brytannie Catalogus*, in which he refers to John Capgrave as “the most learned of the Augustinians.” He continues by describing the author's learnedness in a most telling way:

He was accustomed to rage against the impudence of prelates and their impious oppressive regimes, saying: Because they would enlarge their fringe immoderately, seeking praise with an ignorant multitude. Likewise,

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<sup>100</sup> “Sermon on John 10:11-18, *English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, 66.

because they were not pastors, but mercenaries, they would expose the sheep to wolves, seeking milk and wool, not souls. He called them thieves of the homeland, wicked laborers: so that for these prelates, there would be truth instead of blame, there would be justice instead of contempt, there would be severity instead of delight.<sup>101</sup>

The Protestant Bale praises Capgrave as *Augustinianorum omniu[m] doctissimus* specifically for his intolerance towards impudent prelates. Bale recognized a reformist reaction in Capgrave's works towards the ecclesiastic officials for being "mercenaries" rather than pastors, attempting to "enlarge their fringe immoderately," suggestive of the Biblical Pharisees Caiphas and Ana described above.

Bale makes use of the same popular wolf/sheep motif in which he says that the prelates "expose the sheep to wolves." Like Capgrave and the Wycliffites, Bale suggests over a century later that the true wolves lived within the community of ordained preachers: "they were not pastors, but mercenaries, they would expose the sheep to wolves...." As mercenaries, they seek "milk and wool," suggesting that their desire is for material possessions rather than justice. Because Capgrave's Order had faced persecution through the many laws restricting preaching in the fifteenth century, he had become, indirectly, one of these wolves. By requiring the validation of orthodoxy through the licensure of Augustinians every time they desired to preach, the Church indirectly condemned the Augustinians as Lollards, and it, indirectly, warned the laity to be cautious around these preachers, as if they are "false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly...are ravening wolves."

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<sup>101</sup> "Adversus praelatorum petulantias atq[ue] impias tyra[n]nides detonare solitus fuit, dice[n]s: Quod immodice suas dilataverint fimbrias, laudem aucupantes apud imperitam multitudinem. Item quod no[n] pastores, sed mercenarii, lupis exposuerint oves, lac & lanam quaerentes, non animas. Hos patriae praedones appellavit, ac malos operarios: ut quibus veritas fuerit oneri, ius co[n]temptui, crudelitas delectationi" (Translation mine). John Bale, 582.

Capgrave most noticeably, according to Bale, finds fault with these prelates for their desire of temporalities, a vice he repeatedly attacks through Norbert, but Bale also suggests the author's response to the preaching restrictions. In the last sentence, Bale says that Capgrave desired "truth instead of blame, . . . justice instead of contempt, . . . severity instead of delight." Capgrave faults the prelates, or those who have permission to grant preaching licenses, with "blame," "contempt," and "delight." Firstly, the word "blame" suggests the restrictions of the Church during this period, and the implicit condemnation of Capgrave's own religious order. Capgrave desires to replace this with "truth," which suggests that the blame with which he charges the Church has no legitimacy. The word "contempt" is used as the counterpart of "justice," which suggests the reaction to preachers of the period. He desires justice from the prelates, but in its place, Capgrave receives contempt. Finally, Capgrave wishes to replace the "delight" of the prelates with "severity," again suggesting the reformist anti-temporality sermons that I have discussed above. In the context of Arundel's constitutions, and specifically Lyndwood's glosses on them, I believe Capgrave proposes his "rage against the impious oppressive regimes" in his *Life of St. Norbert*. Norbert was no heretic in spite of all who accused him of heterodoxy. Neither was Capgrave, in spite of the constitutions that presumed anyone of his order might be. And neither, as well, Capgrave suggests, are some of those his contemporaries reviled as Lollards.



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