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Revaluing Vernacular Theology: The Case of Reginald Pecock

Sarah James

Reginald Pecock is the most controversial 'orthodox' theological figure of the fifteenth century. As the bishop of St Asaph he preached in support of absentee and non-preaching bishops in the late 1440s, and as the bishop of Chichester he achieved the dubious distinction, in 1457, of being the only bishop to be formally accused of heresy during the century. The religious, philosophical and educational concerns and convictions which Pecock developed throughout his career are available to modern readers in a number of substantial prose treatises, all those extant being in the vernacular.

In this essay I argue that the study of Pecock's writings challenges two connected and widely held beliefs about religious writing in the fifteenth century. The first of these beliefs is that theological writing in the vernacular was *prima facie* regarded as heretical; the second is that official intolerance of theological debate was widespread and resulted in the decline of vernacular theology into cautious and derivative dullness. Such views have been proposed and elaborated by distinguished medievalists such as Jeremy Catto, Anne Hudson, Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson.[1] Thus on the subject of the use of the vernacular, Hudson suggests that 'by the time of bishop Alnwick's investigations in 1429, knowledge even of the elements of religion, of the creed, the Pater noster or the Ave in English constituted accepted evidence of heresy'.[2] Catto, on the question of official suppression of theological debate, asserts that during the reign of Henry V 'we can see a confident, coherent religious leadership emerging . . . systematic in its attempt to control opinion and establish a measure of orthodoxy'.[3] Dissenting voices have been few; while David Lawton has gone some way to redressing the specific accusation of dullness in English poetry, he notes that in so doing he is attempting to reverse a 'consensus of earlier criticism that saw fifteenth-century English poets as reverse alchemists transmuting Chaucerian gold into Lydgatean lead'.[4] Fifteenth-century prose, especially

theological prose, remains largely unrehabilitated, and the present paper offers an assessment of the small corpus of Pecock's texts with such rehabilitation in mind.

In Section I, I examine the heresies which Pecock abjured following his trial in 1457. I then consider his works more broadly in the light of the supposed dangers of the vernacular and of theological argument mentioned above, and hope to demonstrate that the received opinion of these dangers requires considerable modification.

I

Pecock's biography may be briefly summarised.[5] Born (possibly in Wales) in the late fourteenth century, he was at Oriel College, Oxford, by 1414. In 1424 he received the benefice of St Michael's Church, Gloucester, a position he resigned in 1431 in order to take up the post of Master of Whittington College, London. In 1444 he was provided to the see of St Asaph, and in 1450 he was translated to Chichester. In the autumn of 1457 he was accused of heresy, tried and found guilty; he abjured in December of that year. Other legal processes relating to his trial continued during the following year, and early in 1459 he was confined to Thorney Abbey, where he was deprived of writing materials; he may have died shortly afterwards.

Although Pecock appears to have been a prolific writer, only six texts survive: *The Donet, The Folewer to the Donet, The Poore Mennis Myrrour, The Reule of Crysten Religioun, The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* and *The Book of Faith*.[6] Dating the texts is difficult, as Pecock was in the habit of working on several books simultaneously and was an indefatigable corrector and reviser. However, a rough chronology can be suggested, attributing the *Reule* to 1443, the *Donet* and *Poore Mennis Myrrour* to the period 1443-49, the *Repressor* to 1449, the *Folewer* to 1453-54 and the *Book of Faith* to 1456-57.[7] Each of the texts survives in only a single manuscript.[8] This is perhaps unsurprising; as a convicted heretic Pecock had to watch the burning of his books at St Paul's Cross in December 1457, and later in the same month there appears to have been a second burning in Oxford.[9] It is quite possible that other, lower profile bonfires took place. However, if a letter subsequently sent by Edward IV to Pope Sixtus IV in 1476 is to be believed, Pecock's writings were certainly not entirely eradicated by actions taken in the immediate aftermath of his trial:

> [A]fter the death of the said Reginald, the writings and treatises composed by him multiplied in such wise that not only the laity but churchmen and scholastic graduates scarcely studied anything else, so that the pestiferous virus circulated in many human breasts.[10]

What is perhaps rather surprising is that the texts which survive are all vernacular; Pecock frequently refers to his writings in both Latin and English, and one might suppose that the vernacular texts would be the very ones which the authorities would most wish to eliminate. Yet one of the manuscripts – that of the *Repressor* – appears to be the actual copy produced for inspection during Pecock's trial, which may suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury or some other person closely involved with the trial decided to preserve at least some of Pecock's work.[11]

An examination of Pecock's alleged heresy would seem to start most usefully from a review of his abjuration of December 1457, which lists the heresies of which he was found guilty. Pecock appears to have abjured twice, first in Latin at Lambeth on 3rd December, and then in English at Paul's Cross the following day; it is worthy of note that within this second, vernacular abjuration the heresies themselves are recorded in Latin, and read as follows:

> Quod non est de necessitate salutis credere quod Dominus noster Ihesus Christus discendit ad inferos;
> Item, quod non est de neccessitate salutis credere in Spiritum Sanctum;
> Item, quod non est de neccessitate salutis credere in Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam;
> Item, quod non est de neccessitate salutis credere in sanctorum communionem;
> Item, quod Ecclesia vniversalis potest errare in hiis que sunt fidei;
> Item, quod non est de neccessitate salutis credere et tenere quod illud quod consilium generale et vniversalis Ecclesia statuit, approbat seu determinat in fauorem fidei et ad salutem animarum est ab vniversis Christi fidelibus approbandum et tenendum et quod reprobat, determinat seu condempnat esse fidei catholice vel bonis moribus contrarium ac ab eisdem pro

> reprobato et condempnato esse credendum et tenendum. [12]
> [That it is not necessary for salvation to believe that our Lord Jesus descended to Hell;
> Item, that it is not necessary for salvation to believe in the Holy Spirit;
> Item, that it is not necessary for salvation to believe in the Holy Catholic Church;
> Item, that it is not necessary for salvation to believe in the communion of saints;
> Item, that the universal Church is able to err in matters of faith;
> Item, that it is not necessary for salvation to believe and to hold that those things which a general council of the universal Church ordains, approves or determines in favour of the faith and for the preservation of souls, should be approved and held by all of those faithful to Christ, and that those things which it reproves, determines against or condemns as contrary to catholic faith or against good habits, are thereby to be believed and held to be reproved and condemned.]

An examination of Pecock's works in the light of these confessed heresies is, on the whole, a frustrating and rather unproductive experience. Only the first of the listed heresies is unequivocally demonstrable; in his discussion of Christ's redemptive role in the *Donet*, the descent to Hell is omitted:

> . . . he suffrid peynful passioun and hard deeþ vndir pounce pylate, bi departing of his soule from his body, but euer wiþoute eny hurte to his godhede; which body also laie deed in þe supulcre, and was aȝen quykened in þe iije daie to lijf bi aȝen coupling of þe bodi to þe soule (p. 88, ll. 1-5).

In the *Book of Faith* Pecock, using the structure of a dialogue between father and son, debates this point of faith specifically. The questioning son notes that 'þe doctour sutel' – Duns Scotus – considers Christ's descent into Hell to be 'an article of necessarie feiþ'.[13] Pecock in the persona of the learned father disagrees, arguing that this article of the Apostles' Creed did not originate with the apostles themselves. He proves that it was a later interpolation by pointing out that Augustine omits it from his treatise on the articles of faith.[14] Since the article did

not come into existence until after the time of Augustine, Pecock reasons that the requirement to believe in the descent to Hell must arise from some later ruling of the Church. However, just prior to this point in the book Pecock has demonstrated that the Church, while it may introduce new observances, cannot and should not invent articles of faith which are not attested by Scripture:

> [I]t semeþ þat þe clergie ouȝte not induce or constreyne þe oþere peple in [to] bileeue and feiþ of oþer pointis and articlis as vpon þe feiþ of whom is hanging oure saluacioun: þan ben expressid in þe litteral sense of holi scripture (fol. 125v).[15]

Thus Pecock demonstrates to his own satisfaction that belief in the descent into Hell is unnecessary to salvation, and is described as an article of faith erroneously, since it lacks Scriptural grounding. It is notable that while such an argument seems perilously close to Lollard views concerning the primacy of Scripture, his accusers chose not to charge him with holding those views on Scripture himself.

That Pecock was guilty of the second of the listed heresies cannot be confirmed by a study of his extant works; indeed, in the *Repressor* he specifically asserts his belief in the Trinity: 'thre persoones ben oon God' and 'God is iij. persons' (I, 39 and 83). In the *Donet* he discusses the nature of God in some detail:

> God is oon being, oon substance infinite . . . iij persoonys, fadir, sone and holy goost; of whiche persoonys þe first, which is þe fadir, bigetiþ and bringiþ forþ euerlastingli þe secunde persoon, whiche is þe sone; and boþe þe first persoone and þe secunde bringen forþ and spiren euerlastingli þe iije persoone, which is þe holy goost. And þerfore þe fadir is not þe sone, neiþir þe fadir is þe holi goost, neiþir þe sone is þe fadir or þe holi goost. and alle þese bringyngis forþ ben doon withynne þe same substaunce, withynne þe same beyng, and in þe same godhede (p. 85, ll. 4-5 and 9-18).

This understanding of the nature of God seems entirely inconsistent with the suggestion that Pecock did not consider it necessary to believe in the Holy Spirit. Likewise the fourth heresy is also refuted in the *Donet*: 'y bileeue þe comunyng of

seintis or of holy men to be' (p. 104, ll. 4-5). This last reference arises during a discussion of the Apostles' Creed, and although Pecock is prepared to question the attribution of authorship, he has no doubts as to the value of the Creed itself: 'þe crede of þe apostlis ben þe al hool noumbre of alle þo articlis to be bileeuid' (p. 104, ll. 28-30).

The other three heresies abjured by Pecock are perhaps less easily dealt with; Green suggests that they 'may be based on the general tenor of Pecock's thought' rather than on anything specifically mentioned in his writings.[16] Of course, since the extant texts probably represent only a small proportion of his total output, these charges may relate to points raised in texts which are now lost. However, it is possible to identify likely sources for the heresy allegations in the *Book of Faith.*

The third heresy charge may have its root in a rather complicated passage on the nature of belief, arising from the son's assertion that the Apostles' Creed requires Christians to believe in 'þe general holi chirche in erþe' (fol. 89r). The father qualifies this assertion with a distinction:

> [I]t is not oon and þe same forto trowe a þing to be and forto trowe to þe same þing . . . y may and ouȝte bileeue þe feend to be and ȝitt y ouȝte not þerbi forto bileeue to þe feende (fol. 112r).

With this distinction in mind, it is clear that the article of the Apostles' Creed requires no belief 'oþer þan þis þat oon holi vniuersal chirche is and what folowiþ þerof' (fol. 112r); it specifically does *not* require Christians 'forto bileeue to þe holi vniuersal chirche þat is to seie forto bileeue þat þe holy vniuersal chirche seiþ and techiþ trouþe' (fol. 112v). In other words, while it is necessary to believe in the existence of the holy universal Church, there is no requirement to believe in the pronouncements of that Church. Pecock suggests that this article originated as an anti-heresy strategy, intended to suppress the establishment of diverse churches by insisting on belief in a single Church (fol. 113r). The logic of the distinction which Pecock employs is seemingly irresistible, although the conclusion is surely one of the most astonishing at which he could have arrived.

Thus Pecock appears technically to be innocent of the third charge, although it is unsurprising that he should find himself misunderstood; at the same time he does appear to have condemned himself as regards the fifth charge, concerning the Church's ability to err in matters of faith. However, the latter

should be considered along with the sixth heresy, since both relate to the capacity of ecclesiastical authority to err. Again the *Book of Faith* is our starting point, this time at the point where the father suggests that attempts to convert heretics sometimes involve claims that 'þe clergie namelich gaderid togidere in a general counseil may not erre and faile aȝens eny article of feiþ neþer may determyne amys aȝens trewe feiþ'; such attempts are, he believes, doomed to failure 'for þis conclusioun is so vnlikeli to be trewe' (fols 2r-v). Pecock may appear to have convicted himself with such a statement, but it does need to be read in context; for him, 'it is not al trewe þat bi holi men is in parchimyn ynkid', since all men are by their nature fallible (fol. 26v). Thus the Church and its councils are bound to err from time to time, and therefore the Church must always be prepared to examine its beliefs to make sure they are in accordance with the true faith. This examination, if carried out in a properly self-critical manner, would result in the speedy detection and correction of any errors. Even so, the duty of Christians is quite clear to Pecock: 'we owen to bileeue and stonde to sum seier or techer which may faile while it is not knowe þat þilk seier or techer þeryne failiþ' (fol. 3v). So alongside the acknowledgement of the Church's fallibility lies an admonition to Christians to retain their belief in that fallible Church; hence while the fifth and sixth charges of heresy may technically be correct, it is only at the expense of a certain degree of decontextualisation. Kelly takes a rather different view of the *Book of Faith*; he suggests that it is

> a piece of special pleading, an argument specially devised for a particular purpose . . . The whole book is one of those logical exercises dear to the scholastic heart: supposing the Church may err, can we still prove that the laity ought to obey it?[17]

This suggests that the *Book of Faith* is actually an extended exercise in devil's advocacy, rather than a reflection of the beliefs, doubts and questions which Pecock may actually have had about ecclesiastical authority. I am not entirely convinced by this view, since Pecock, far from presenting it as a supposition, makes it abundantly clear that he believes the Church can err:

> [W]hat euer god affeermeþ to be trewe: is nedis trewe. and so trewe: þat it is to be preferrid in credence aboue what þe chirche in erþe and þe chirche in heuen may determyne into þe contrarie (fol. 44v).

Furthermore, the vernacularity of the text may caution us to be wary of ascribing to it such a sophistical purpose. Traditionally such exercises were the preserve of the learned and Latinate, and while, as we shall see, Pecock was prepared to push back the boundaries of vernacular writing, his choice of language was always a conscious decision. Nevertheless, Kelly's conclusion is the same as that which I have suggested: while Pecock may be guilty in the strict sense of having cast doubt on the Church's infallibility, a broader examination of context and intention would reveal that his position is underpinned by a firmly orthodox conviction that the laity should believe the pronouncements of the clergy, whether true or otherwise.

On the basis of the above it appears that only the first of the charges is obviously justified, and at least two are directly contradicted in Pecock's writings, despite his confession and abjuration. We might also note that no direct reference appears to have been made, either to Pecock's use of the vernacular, or to the wider issue of the validity of theological debate. In view of the critical consensus concerning the centrality of these issues in fifteenth-century textual production, these omissions require explanation, and it is to this that I now turn.

II

If we examine Pecock's extant works and his references therein to his other writings, now lost, we can identify two main concerns. The first, which is central to the *Donet*, the *Folewer*, the *Poore Mennis Myrrour* and the *Reule*, is broadly educational; the second, which is addressed in the *Repressor* and the *Book of Faith*, is answering Lollard critique of the contemporary Church and its practices. Although these concerns may appear very distinct, they frequently overlap. Pecock sought to examine and clarify the rules of Christian faith, to codify them and present them in a unified body of writings which would be accessible to ordinary Christians. In embarking on such a project, Pecock was following a practice which had been allowed and indeed positively encouraged by the established Church since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which had formalised the requirement for annual confession. This in turn led to the production of numerous confessional manuals to assist the process. Many theological handbooks in the vernacular followed, including Pecham's Lambeth Statutes of 1281 and Thoresby's Catechism of 1357.[18] After Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions of 1409, however, new projects along these lines may have been of

doubtful legitimacy.[19] Nor was it simply a question of the changing climate of the times; as Kelly notes, even before 1409 vernacular theology was 'expected to be of a dogmatic rather than an analytic kind' (p. 40, n. 2). But there was another more immediate reason for Pecock's undertaking. As academic Wycliffism gradually transformed itself into Lollardy, the education of the laity, specifically with regard to the Scriptures, became a major concern of the heretics. Anne Hudson notes the concern of contemporary churchmen that Lollards were operating 'schools and conventicles', and there is some evidence to suggest that the Lollard emphasis on the authority of Scripture at times resulted in surprising levels of literacy.[20] In his role as defender of orthodoxy, Pecock realised what many of his contemporaries apparently did not – that if Lollards were busily engaged in the education of converts to their own heretical beliefs, then the ecclesiastical establishment should be equally busy educating orthodox believers and those already tempted by and/or practising heresy. Thus in his four 'educational' texts he was concerned with preventing the spread of heresy, while in the two more polemical works he hoped to cure those already 'infected' with Lollardy.

In order for his project to succeed, certain conditions were required: Pecock needed to address the problem of language, and he also needed to establish a structure and style which would best fit his didactic intentions. The linguistic choice, of course, was between Latin, the traditional language of theological discourse, and the vernacular, which has since come to be regarded as *prima facie* evidence of heresy. In fact Pecock had recourse to both Latin and English for his texts, and it is clear that the decision to use the vernacular for any given work was a conscious one; it is equally clear that he recognised that such decisions were likely to be challenged. In the *Folewer* he offers a rather curious justification for discussing the use of Common Wit in the vernacular:

> Certis, þis mych wolde not y haue write here in lay tunge, ne were þat y hope þis present book schal be translatid into latin tunge; And parauenture, if y schulde abstene me here now fro writyng herof in lay tunge, y schulde neuer write it, neiþer in lay tunge neiþer in latyn tunge (p. 29, ll. 31-36).

This odd passage suggests that Pecock recognised a distinction between topics suitable for discussion in the vernacular and those more appropriately addressed in Latin. Nevertheless, this would not prevent him treating the latter in English, if

the alternative was not to write about them at all. Yet this apparent reasonableness glosses over what is rather a radical practice; Pecock chooses to produce this 'learned' material in English first, and only later, if at all, will he translate it into Latin.

In the prologue to the *Reule of Crysten Religioun*, Pecock offers a different justification for using the vernacular; here it is not the subject-matter but the intended audience which determines the language he will use:

> If eny man wole aske and wite whi þis present book and þe bookis to hym perteynyng y make in þe commoun peplis langage, herto y answere þat þis present book, and alle oþere bookis to him longing maad in þe comoun peplis langage, ben so maad principali forto adaunte, rebuke, drive doun and conuerte þe fonnednes and þe presumpcioun of ij soortis of peple (p. 17).

The two sorts of people Pecock has in mind are those who rely for religious authority entirely on vernacular versions of the New Testament, and those who also accept other vernacular writings, which Pecock regards as 'teching vnsauerily, vnseemely, vnformaly, rudely, boistoseli, vnsufficiently, suspectly . . . vntreuly and perilosely' (p. 18), as authoritative – in other words, the Lollards. A third group of people will also benefit from reading his works: 'weel disposid men of þe lay partie' will receive doctrine from them and will be stirred to greater devotion to God and his laws (p. 19). These three categories of target audience confirm Pecock's twin objectives of answering Lollardy and providing orthodox Christians with instruction suited to their needs. The lack of instruction for the orthodox is detrimental to faith, and 'dooth miche sorow among simple lay peple, yuel lad forth bifore and wors confermed bi a wickid scole of heretikis, which is not ȝit al quenchid' (*Repressor*, I, 44). So Pecock calls for a 'schort compendiose logik . . . [to be] deuysid for al the comoun people in her modiris langage', enabling people to understand formal arguments and to recognise when conclusions follow and when they do not (I, 8). This is consistent with Pecock's belief in the importance of reason, a point to which I shall return later.

As we have seen, the education of laymen had a long and orthodox history, but it did also have certain unforeseen consequences. The most dangerous of these in the eyes of the established Church was the increased production of vernacular texts on theological matters, an increase which Arundel's 1409

Constitutions sought to contain. However, the example of Pecock should encourage us to consider the question of the relationship between heresy and the vernacular more closely. If the arguments of Hudson, Watson and others are correct, Pecock's extensive use of the vernacular would appear to be an obvious and amply-attested example of heresy. Hudson suggests that Arundel's seventh Constitution, banning the unauthorised translation of Scripture into English, was extended in practice to cover all theological writing in the vernacular, while Watson argues that fifteenth-century vernacular theology is restricted by the Constitutions primarily to translations, and is cautious and limited in scope.[21] Yet at no point in Pecock's trial is there any evidence that his use of the vernacular in itself was questioned.

Hudson suggests that a consciousness of the dangers of the vernacular arose as early as the 1380s; the first mention of Wycliffite writings in English as well as Latin appears to date from 1388.[22] From this starting point debate continued until, in 1409, Arundel issued his Constitutions (drafted two years earlier), which clearly demonstrated the importance of the vernacular to contemporary conceptions of heresy. Hudson concedes that scholars might be overestimating the connection between heresy and the vernacular, but concludes that this is unlikely. She offers the case of Pecock as proof of such a connection: 'If lollardy were to be refuted, then Pecock conceived that it could only be refuted by means of the medium the heretics themselves used, the English language'.[23] She cites the evidence of Thomas Gascoigne to demonstrate that the use of the vernacular was the reason for Pecock's downfall.[24] However, while we have already seen that Pecock did indeed use the English language specifically for its impact on the Lollards, the charges laid against him make no mention of his choice of language. This may suggest that he is not the best possible subject to demonstrate Hudson's point. Furthermore, while Gascoigne certainly has strong objections to Pecock's use of English, he does not seem to me to provide compelling evidence that use of the vernacular was the main concern of those who initiated action against Pecock:

> [E]t magnae causae movebant clericos et dominos temporales *multum contra eum, sc. quod scripsit altas materias, i.e.* profundas, in Anglicis, quae pocius abducerent laicos a bono quam ex vero simili plures ducerent ad bonum.[25]
>
> [And great causes stirred many clerks and temporal lords against him, for instance that he wrote high, that is, weighty,

> matters in English, which rather led lay people away from good than led a like number to good.]

Where does this leave our examination of links between the vernacular and heresy? Certainly in the case of Pecock the authorities chose not to raise the question of his use of the vernacular, even if they considered it important.[26] Of course, this is not to suggest that there was never perceived to be a connection between heresy and use of the vernacular, but caution needs to be exercised when relying upon such a connection. While it may have been of great importance, for example, at the start of the century, or in the diocese of a particular bishop, it is quite possible that it became less so over time, or under a different bishop. We may also need to reconsider Hudson's assertion that the seventh Constitution was interpreted more widely than its terms suggest; while in some circumstances the authorities may have extended the idea of Scriptural translation to include all theological writing, however mundane, the evidence of Pecock's works indicates that this was certainly not the case by the mid-fifteenth century. In addition, we should remember that the Constitutions prohibited *unauthorised* Scriptural translation rather than Scriptural translation *per se*; one of the great early-fifteenth century vernacular theological works is Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (1410), a text which contains translations of passages from Scripture and extensive biblical commentary. This text appears to have gone through a process of approval by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and may even have been produced for the specific purpose of establishing such an approval procedure.[27] Thus we should be wary of jumping to any conclusions based on a writer's use of the vernacular, without a close consideration of other circumstances affecting the text's production.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the use of the vernacular made Pecock's works available to a much wider audience than would have been the case had they been written in Latin, and that those works contained within them references, sometimes very detailed, to heretical beliefs. Pecock's intention, as we have seen, was to defeat the Lollards by comprehensively answering their arguments in a language they could understand, but this method could prove to be a double-edged sword. If heretics could read the *Repressor* and see their arguments defeated, orthodox Christians could also read the book and learn more about Lollard views. The linguistic accessibility required to convert heretics might also serve to create them. Thus this particular example of the use of Lollard techniques against Lollardy itself proves to be extremely problematic in practice.

The fact that the list of heresies appears in Latin in the English abjuration demonstrates that this possibility was not lost upon the ecclesiastical authorities; they had no wish to hear Pecock repeat his allegedly heretical tenets in a language which could be understood by most of the people present in the crowd.

III

The structure which Pecock favoured for his educational project was that of dialogue or debate; of the six extant texts, five are in the form of a dialogue between a father and son, while the sixth, the *Repressor*, utilises a structure of argument and counter-argument that has much the same effect. The heretical possibilities opened up by the use of the dialogue form are considerable, and Pecock is conscious of its dangers; in the *Book of Faith* he seeks to protect himself from possible detractors:

> Also siþen y haue chose forto make summe of my bokis in foorme of a dialog bi togider talking bitwixe þe sone and þe fadir. y wole loke aftir þat þo bokis haue þe fauour which such dialogazacioun or togider talking and clatering ouȝte haue and may haue. which fauour perauenture sum hasty vnconsideres schulen not aspie. and schulen þerfore perauenture þe soner impugne (fol. 9r).

It is worth pausing to consider this passage for a moment. Pecock characterises his preferred structure as 'dialogazacioun or togider talking and clatering', a series of descriptions with an unusually suggestive semantic range. 'Dialogazacioun' is a neologism, a recognition by Pecock that the vernacular lacked a precise term for the process he had in mind.[28] Its novelty would surely have struck a contemporary reader; it appears to suggest that these texts will offer something different, something never before seen. 'Togider talking' is much more neutral, whereas 'clatering' is quite definitely a pejorative term.[29] It may seem odd that Pecock should introduce such a negative term into his self-justification (the *MED* compilers certainly appear to have been troubled by it), but I believe that this is precisely the point. It is not only 'dialogazacioun or togider talking' but also 'clatering' which 'ouȝte haue and may haue' his readers' 'fauour'. For Pecock, vain, foolish and even heretical arguments should be discussed just as much as those of

established orthodoxy, if only that they may be refuted. But the peculiarity of the passage extends further: 'ouȝte haue' suggests that such 'fauour' is denied, a position which we might expect given Arundel's eighth Constitution, which forbids the repetition of heretical views, even if they are repeated only for the purpose of refuting them.[30] Yet 'may haue' appears to indicate that there is in fact no prohibition in place. Thus this passage renders problematic the assumption that the fifteenth-century authorities would not tolerate theological debate.

It is in the *Repressor* – the book which owes least to the outward form of dialogue – that Pecock is most in need of his readers' 'fauour', because it is in that text, highly controversial in subject matter, that he loses the protection afforded by a hypothetical questioner. Instead of the enquiring son (who in the other books rarely ventures into doctrinally problematic territory), Pecock goes directly to the arguments of the Lollards themselves, setting them out in full before refuting each of them. The book is structured around eleven 'gouernaunces' for which members of the clergy are blamed by the 'comoun peple' (I, 4); these 'gouernaunces' include the use of images in worship; pilgrimages; clerical ownership of property; and the religious orders, all of which were criticised by the Lollards. Thus, for example, we find Pecock rehearsing a series of fifteen arguments against images and pilgrimages. The first of these notes that images are often justified as 'reminding' signs, but points out that Scripture is itself such a sign, and a much better one (I, 191-92). In response to the counter-argument that images are books for the unlettered, there is an uncompromising proposal for reform: 'It myȝte be ordeyned that alle men and wommen in her ȝongthe schulden leerne forto rede writingis in the langage in which thei schulden lyue and dwelle' (I, 192). The third argument is similarly forceful. It is wasteful to expend greater cost and labour on a less perfect thing than on a more perfect thing, and an 'vnquyk stok or stoon' is less perfect than a 'lyuyng man' (I, 193). The list of arguments develops until it is difficult to remember that these are positions which Pecock intends to argue *against*, and the sense of confusion is exacerbated by the absence of even the thinly characterised 'son' to pose the questions and remind us which side is 'right'. As is the case in other texts with a more formal dialogic structure, the very structure designed to refute the views of heretics necessarily provides a space within which those views are allowed to be aired freely and comprehensively.

In the midst of such confusion it would be easy for a reader, particularly one already unsympathetic to Pecock's project, to assume that Pecock was writing in support of Lollard beliefs. Even the subsequent replies to the arguments do not necessarily help; with his characteristic verbosity, love of detail and tendency to

digress, Pecock's explanations can obscure as much as they reveal. The Lollard allegation that some men treat images as though they are gods meets with a lengthy response describing the heathen belief that gods could enter images, the problems of heathen and Jewish reliance on the judgement of reason, the assertion that after Christ all heathens and Jews have only believed in a single deity, and the concession that those who disapprove of images are entitled to do so, as long as they do not hinder those who disagree with them (I, 244-54). The response is certainly not without relevance but requires careful examination and a determination to maintain a grasp of the argumentative thread in the face of numerous distractions, and this is typical of the text as a whole. Yet there is no evidence that the direct recitation of Lollard arguments led to any of the heresy charges which Pecock subsequently abjured. There are no accusations that he denounced images or pilgrimages, disapproved of clerical possessions or the religious orders. Thus it seems that, however confusing the *Repressor* can be and no matter how intrinsically hazardous the dialogue form, Pecock's accusers were able to recognise controversial positions put forward for the sake of argument and chose not to accuse him of heresy merely for repeating the words of others. Given the wording of Arundel's eighth Constitution, this omission is, I think, highly significant. Pecock's methodology in the *Repressor* also casts serious doubt on any suggestion that theological debate, even of highly contentious issues, was effectively suppressed at this time.

Having selected a language and structure best suited to his didactic purpose, Pecock acknowledges that laymen have differing mental capacities and any attempt at their instruction must take account of this; thus a teacher must 'se to þe capacite of þe leerners' and, where necessary, 'tempre his foorme of techyng and his maner of forþ settyng aftir þat þe capacite and receyuabilnes of þe leerners may bere' (*Folewer*, pp. 12, l. 11 and 13, ll. 7-9).[31] To this end Pecock is willing to produce simplified versions of his work for less able audiences. For example, the *Poore Mennis Myrrour* is a simpler and cheaper version of the *Donet*:

> Not wiþstondyng þat I haue maad þe first parti of þe book clepid 'þe donet of cristen religioun' to be of litil quantite þat welniȝ ech poor persoon maye bi sum meene gete coost to haue it as his owne; ȝit, in to þe moor eese of þe persone poorist in hauer and in witt, I haue drawen þis now folewyng extract or outdrawȝt fro þe first parti of þe seid 'donet'.[32]

To aid those unaccustomed to reading complex theological treatises, Pecock offers advice on how to read his works; for example, he acknowledges that the *Donet* contains certain difficulties, and proposes a solution:

> If eny man be discounfortid for hardnes of þe mater or of þe langage [. . .] turne he into þerof þe viij^{e}, ix^{e} and x^{e} chapitris; and aftirward he haue þese seid chapitris red, y truste to god and to þilk reeders resonable will þat he schal receyue into his laboure chereful counfort, him helping, and his drede and dispeir fer awaie putting and banysching (p. 2, ll.17-18 and 21-25).

Further practical suggestions are given elsewhere; in the *Folewer* he advises those who find the start of the book too hard to 'lepe ouer' to the *Reule* until their minds are more capable (p. 14, l. 30). Such a practice is justifiable 'ffor so doon clerkis in dyuynyte, and so þei musten needis do, and ellis in bookis of dyuynyte þei schulden neuer þryue' (p. 30, ll. 14-16). Pecock here appears to be treading on rather dangerous ground, implying that even learned clerks may not understand everything they read, and also drawing a parallel between lay and clerical reading practices. Laymen following his advice are just like clerks, not bound by the tyranny of the page but free to roam through texts at will. Two different types of boundary are thus under threat here. The integrity of the page and indeed the book, with its sequential argumentative structure, is undermined by the reader's exercise of choice as to what he will read, and in what order. At the same time the boundaries between clerical and lay, learned and uneducated, begin to dissolve. Yet the evidence that Pecock actively sought such dissolution of boundaries is ambiguous; indeed, the opposite seems at times to be the case. For example, in the *Book of Faith* he asks his readers to read the whole book before arriving at any conclusions about it, because 'y drede hasti iugementis' (fol. 6v). He asks that

> [. . .] erring persoonys take longe leiser forto sadli and oft ouer reden þo bokis vnto tyme þei schulen be wel aqueyntid with þo bokis [. . .] and not forto haue in oon or ij. tymes a liȝt superficial ouer reding or heering oonly (fol. 5v).

Other authors similarly offer their readers recommendations or instructions on how to read. For example, in the *Miller's Prologue* Chaucer invites those who do

not wish to hear the Miller's scurrilous story to 'Turne over the leef and chese another tale'.[33] By contrast, at the beginning of *The Cloud of Unknowing* there is a clear instruction to read sequentially and completely:

> I charge þee & I beseche þee, bi autorite of charite, þat ȝif any soche schal rede it [this book], write it, or speke it, or elles here it be red or spokin, þat þou charge hem, as I do þee, for to take hem tyme to rede it, speke it, write it, or here it, al ouer. For, parauenture, þer is som mater þerin, in þe beginnyng or in þe middel, þe whiche is hanging & not fully declared þer it stondeþ; & ȝif it be not þere, it is sone after, or elles in þe ende. Wherfore, ȝif a man saw o mater & not anoþer, parauenture he miȝt liȝtly be led into errour. & þerfore, in eschewing of þis errour boþe in þiself & in alle oþer, I preye þee par charite so as I sey þee.[34]

What we seem to have here is a distinction between different ideas of authorial authority; the *Cloud* author's prescriptive regime contrasts with what we might regard as Chaucer's greater liberalism. It is arguable that Chaucer is in fact adopting this liberal stance as a ploy to tempt his readers, promising them an especially salacious tale under the pretence of warning them away from it. Of course, he is not at this point in the *Canterbury Tales* pursuing an overtly theological project, and this may offer him more latitude to be liberal. For Pecock, however, there is a tension between, on the one hand, a degree of liberalism which his educational aims seem to demand, and on the other, a more prescriptive instinct which seeks to control the reading process in order to ensure that he is understood correctly. Hence the conflicting instructions to read everything but also to skip to other parts of the text, or to another text entirely, if any particular section proves too difficult. But when we examine Pecock's apparent flexibility more closely, it is found to be strictly limited in scope; he does not allow his reader to browse without restraint, but instead seeks to impose an alternative syllabus upon him. Thus, in the passage from the *Donet* quoted earlier, the reader in difficulties is referred specifically to the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters for elucidation; the prospect of reader-controlled study is opened up only to be immediately circumscribed.

While Pecock clearly desires the comprehension of his readers, it is also important to him that such comprehension should not be achieved too easily; in

the *Folewer* he notes that difficult vernacular works will demonstrate to laymen the need for mediation and education by clerks. Indeed, the humbling of readers is another function of vernacular writings, which can cause laymen to be 'tamyd and repressid and chastisid fro pride and fro presumpcioun' (p. 8, ll. 8-9). Thus we can see that there are important conflicts at the heart of Pecock's educational project. He recognises the need for the education of the laity, and for that education to be designed with the varied abilities of different sectors of the laity in mind. He is equally concerned that his exposition of complicated theological matters should be properly understood. Nevertheless, another part of the purpose of such education is to demonstrate the inferiority of the laity, and their dependence on the clergy. That this should be so is not particularly surprising: genuine as his commitment to education obviously was, Pecock was also a clergyman and keen to uphold the dignity of clerical status. Paradoxically, however, lay readers can only become capable of recognising their own deficiencies and the corresponding superiority of the clergy in the process of becoming less deficient – by reading. Thus these texts share a characteristic noted by Ralph Hanna III in a discussion of the Lollard 'Vae octuplex':

> The Englishness of Lollard texts exists [. . .] to destroy the very nature of clericism itself, its claim to be an exclusive form of knowledge and its effort to constitute that exclusivity both linguistically, as Latin itself, and spatially, as a property of the organized learned library [and] reconstitutes learnedness as potentially available to every person.[35]

Pecock seems to be aiming at precisely this effect in his educational works, even as he emphasises the need for the clericism the works themselves are abrogating. Hence his own claims for his work are undermined as he simultaneously attempts to appropriate clerical discourse to lay use, and to mark it off as separate, requiring special training not available to laymen. This self-consuming conflict is never openly articulated in the texts, and remains a potent source of hermeneutic tension.

Having addressed the questions of language, structure and the mental capacities of his readers, Pecock was aware that economic obstacles remained to be overcome if his project to educate the orthodox and defeat heresy was to succeed. We have already seen that he produced the *Poore Mennis Myrrour* as an easier and cheaper version of the *Donet*, but in the *Book of Faith* he proposes a

more far-reaching solution to the problem:

> It is not ynouȝ þat þe few bokis be writen and made and leid vp or rest in þe hondis of clerkis þouȝ fame and noise be made greet to þe seid lay peple of suche bokis and þat þo bokis schulde opene to hem þat þei erren: but þo bokis musten be distributid and delid abrood to manye where þat nede is trowid þat þei be delid . . . prelates and oþer myȝty men of good . . . musten at her owne cost do þo now seid bokis to be writun in greet multitude and to be wel correctid and þanne aftir to be sende and to be ȝouun or lende abrood amonge þe seid lay persoonys where nede is trowid to be (fols 5r-6r).

Such a proposal was not merely fanciful; Pecock was associated with John Carpenter and John Colop, both of whom were involved in the circulation of 'common-profit' books.[36] Carpenter also founded the Guildhall Library in London as part of the Richard Whittington bequests. Pecock was a beneficiary of Carpenter's 1441 will, from which he received twenty shillings. As well as making twenty-five specific book bequests, Carpenter provided that:

> [I]f any good or rare books shall be found among the said residue of my goods, which, by the discretion of the aforesaid Master William Lichfield and Reginald Pecok, may seem necessary to the common library at Guildhall, for the profit of the students there, and those discoursing to the common people, then I will and bequeath that those books be placed by my executors and chained in that library.[37]

Thus Pecock was in a position to facilitate the dissemination of texts which he identified as a crucial element of his educational project, although it is not clear whether he was able to make use of these connections in order to distribute his own writings more widely.

We have seen that neither Pecock's use of the vernacular nor his pursuit of controversial theological debate directly gave rise to allegations of heresy against him. Given that this is so, it may be interesting to consider whether some other factor in his work might have led to those allegations. I therefore turn my attention to another key feature of Pecock's writings – his reliance on reason – to

see whether this can shed any light on his prosecution for heresy, before briefly considering the circumstances which may have resulted in his trial.

IV

Let us now consider Pecock's overtly anti-Lollard works, the *Repressor* and the *Book of Faith*, and the specific methodology he deploys to defeat the heretics. In the *Book of Faith* Pecock identifies two principal causes of error in 'þe lay peple whiche ben clepid lollardis': the first is '[o]uer myche leenyng to scripture and in such maner wise as it longiþ not to holi scripture forto receyue'; the second is '[s]etting not bi forto folowe þe determynaciouns and þe holdingis of þe chirche in mater of feiþ' (fols 4r-v). Pecock considers the removal of these causes of error to be 'þe profitablist labour whiche myȝte be doon', and he notes that he has written the *Repressor* to address the first cause, while the *Book of Faith* is intended to deal with the second (fol. 4v).

In seeking to meet Lollard objections to the established Church, Pecock recognises that it is not enough simply to assert the truth of the Church's teachings, since the Lollards do not accept the authority of the Church:

> [M]anye of þe lay peple whiche cleuen and attenden ouer vnreulili to þe Bible . . . protesten and knowlechen þat þei wolen not fecche and leerne her feiþ at þe clergie of goddis hool chirche in erþe. neiþer þei as for leernyng and kunnyng of her feiþ wolen obeie to þe clergie or to þe chirche (fol. 1r).

Pecock therefore proposes to proceed by appealing instead to reason in order to persuade the Lollards of their errors. Such a strategy was not new; Aquinas also recognised the futility of appeals to Scripture against pagans, since they did not acknowledge Scriptural authority, '[u]nde necesse est ad naturalem rationem recurrere, cui omnes assentire coguntur' ['whence it is necessary to return to natural reasoning, which all people are inclined to approve'].[38] Early in the *Repressor* Pecock outlines a 'doctrine taken schortli out of the faculte of logik' – the syllogism (I, 8). This is crucial to his deployment of the judgement of reason throughout this and his other works, and accordingly he is anxious that people should understand it perfectly:

> Wherfore certis if eny man can be sikir for eny tyme that these ii. premyssis be trewe, he mai be sikir that the conclusioun is trewe; thouȝ alle the aungelis in heuen wolden seie and holde that thilk conclusioun were not trewe. And this is a general reule (I, 8).

With this striking choice of expression Pecock demonstrates that the syllogism is an infallible instrument of truth, and once it has been accepted as such it can be used to test any statement and uncover previously undiscovered truths. This applies as much to matters of faith as anything else, as he stresses in the *Book of Faith*: 'þe leernyng and knowing of ech treuþe and conclusioun of feiþ muste nedis be hadde and gete bi argument which is a sillogisme' (fol. 11v). The wording here is important: Pecock is quite clearly saying, not that syllogisms *may* be applied to faith, but that they *must* be if the Christian is to be certain of the truth.

That Pecock intends to be understood in this way is clear if we examine the early stages of the *Repressor*, which discuss the inadequacies of Scripture as the sole or primary means of establishing the truths of faith.[39] Pecock begins by asserting that Scripture cannot be the sole ground of truth, since it does not define many things pertinent to faith, such as matrimony and usury. The fact that Scripture does not define these things demonstrates that they pre-existed Scripture, and hence are not grounded in it. By contrast, the book of natural reason is 'writen in mennis soulis with the finger of God' and thus must pre-exist and ground every other truth (I, 20). Logically, therefore, wherever Scripture and reason are at variance, Scripture 'ouȝten be expowned and be interpretid and brouȝt forto accorde with the doom of resoun' – not the other way around (I, 25-26). Thus Scripture is not the ground of all truth, although it may bear witness to the truth and exhort men to follow it. This appears to establish the primacy of reason, both by virtue of its pre-dating Scripture and also because it is not man-made but created by God.

However, matters are rather more complicated than this, and reason and Scripture are both equally necessary in establishing truths of faith. God ordained Scripture to witness moral truths of the law of nature, and also to ground articles of faith. Articles of faith must be grounded in Scripture because they cannot be grounded in the judgement of man's unaided reason; divine revelation is required. Nevertheless reason is still implicated in the process, although we need to turn briefly to the *Book of Faith* for the clearest exposition of reason's involvement.

Here Pecock notes that when ascertaining the truth concerning articles of faith, reason is not applied to the causes, effects or circumstances of the said article, but rather to whether God shows or affirms the article to be true; if he does, then the article must be true, since God cannot lie (fol. 16r). Thus even in respect of articles of faith it is possible and indeed necessary to proceed syllogistically.

Returning to the *Repressor* and the counter-argument that reason, being fallible, should be subordinate to Scripture, Pecock replies that all human faculties are necessarily prone to error, but God, being merciful, will forgive us, providing we make the best use of reason that we can, and will accept the will for the deed. As an alternative response Pecock suggests that we should be referring not to reason but to *judgement* of reason, which is expressed in syllogisms – and since syllogisms can never be wrong, judgement of reason must be infallible. A further counter-argument suggests that Scripture is inherently more worthy than reason and should therefore have primacy. Pecock points out that Scripture only grounds articles of faith and not natural law, and since the greater part of God's law is grounded in natural law, it is right that Scripture should accept a subordinate role:

> [A]lle tho trouthis and conclusions Holi Writt takith and borewith out of moral lawe of kinde, and ben not hise as bi grounding, and founding, and prouyng, but oonli bi rehercing, witnessing, and denouncing; and open ynow it is that the grounder and prouer of treuthis is in hem worthier than the rehercer of hem (I, 82).

I have followed this argument at some length because it is important to understand why Pecock gives primacy to reason over Scripture, and also to appreciate that he does recognise limits to the powers of reason in matters of faith. The unadorned claim that Pecock privileges reason may appear shocking until we realise that for him reason is a God-given faculty, that which separates men from beasts and proves that we are created in God's image. Scripture, by contrast, is a man-made entity, existing within historical time and subject to all the limitations of a created thing. So, for example, those who rely exclusively upon the authority of the New Testament are in error, because when the Gospels were written, praising Scripture and recommending its use, much of the rest of the New Testament had not been written (I, 60). How, then, can it safely be relied upon? The logic is indisputable and provides a sound rebuttal of a favoured

Lollard belief.

Indeed, Pecock's methodology has been designed specifically to respond to Lollard arguments in a manner which the Lollards themselves are bound to accept. By positioning the syllogism at the heart of his dialectic he establishes the infallibility of reason and a way of testing that infallibility. The privileging of reason over Scripture in all matters other than those of faith, and the need for the acquiescence of reason even in matters of faith, demonstrates that reason is the prime authority. As reason is the very tool which Pecock will use against the Lollards, this demonstration of its primacy is critical to his chances of success. The fact that Scripture must be interpreted in a manner which is in accordance with reason establishes the fallacy of Lollard reliance on Scripture as the sole source of authority. Thus by a dialectical process not, perhaps, very different from that favoured by Lollards themselves, Pecock is able to present what he must have considered to be an unanswerable argument against Lollard beliefs.[40]

Unfortunately it is an argument as likely to win enemies among the orthodox as among heretics, because while it disposes of the Lollard reliance on Scripture, it does so at the expense of elevating reason to a new status. Pecock himself is aware of the danger of this position and attempts to avoid it by emphasising the layman's need for clerkly mediation:

> Ful weel ouȝten alle persoones of the lay parti not miche leerned in moral philsophi and lawe of kinde forto make miche of clerkis weel leerned in moral philsophi, that tho clerkis schulden helpe tho lay persoones forto ariȝt vndirstonde Holi Scripture (I, 46).

The clerical counsellors should, he stresses, be carefully chosen; poor counsellors are a great cause of heresy (I, 87-89). If learned clerks are unavailable, then he suggests that laymen should read vernacular books, especially those written by himself (I, 47). To be fair to Pecock, such self-recommendation is probably indicative of his genuine belief in the value of his own works, although the publicity may also have been welcome.

Although it is clear that Pecock's reliance on reason may not have endeared him to the ecclesiastical authorities, is there anything in that reliance that could, in mid-fifteenth-century England, be considered heretical? While his apparent down-grading of the status of Scripture seems to carry some taint of heresy, from a purely practical point of view there seems to be little hope of grounding a

charge of heresy in the bald fact that reason is accorded privileged status. For such a charge to succeed it would surely be necessary to examine examples of how reason is applied to theological matters, and demonstrate that these applications give rise to heretical results. Pecock's extant writings suggest that such an examination would offer little scope for accusations against him. Although he asserts that Scripture must be interpreted in accordance with reason, he does not deny the role of divine inspiration in establishing articles of faith, nor does he ignore Scripture as the place divinely assigned for grounding those articles. The evidence of the heresies abjured by Pecock may suggest that his accusers did not find anything specifically related to the primacy of reason which they could formulate into a charge of heresy against him. However, there is another possible reason for their silence on this matter. It is difficult to imagine how the authorities could condemn Pecock for promoting reason over Scripture without appearing to take the opposite view themselves, and privileging Scripture over reason. Yet the assertion of the primacy of Scripture was one of the most prominent characteristics of Lollard belief. Thus by formulating charges against Pecock the orthodox Church might find itself appearing to endorse heretical views. Nevertheless as I now argue it seems clear that this aspect of Pecock's work was particularly unpalatable to those in authority.

The legal process against Pecock appears to have begun with a letter sent by Viscount Beaumont to the king in June 1457, which warns of 'conclusyons labored and subtilly entended to be emprented in mennes herts by pryvy by also unherd meenes to the most pernicyous and next to pernicyon of our faith'.[41] Beaumont has no doubt as to the source of these dangers:

> [T]his pecok this Bisshop of Chichester thurgh presumption and curiosite demed by hym in his own wytte but it soner be extincte and undirstond and by your myght and comaundment to the archiebissop and prelates and doctours examined and yf that be provid so assisted and punished by you (pp. 584-85).

Whatever the real motivation for initiating proceedings against Pecock – a question to which I shall return – it is surely significant that Beaumont stresses his 'presumption and curiosite demed by hym in his own wytte'. Even if reliance on reason is not in itself heretical, it is a habit of mind which is regarded as highly suspicious, the mention of which is likely to stimulate the king to act. That he, or those close to him, did act is of course clear from the ensuing events. The charges

brought against Pecock and recorded in his abjuration do not refer to the question of reason directly, but the thrust of Beaumont's accusation is preserved in the preamble to that abjuration:

> [. . .] I Reignolde Pecok, Bisshop of Chichestre [. . .] confesse and knowlage that I haue before tyme, presumeng of myn owne natural witte and preferring the natural iugement of raison before th'Olde Testament and the Newe and th'auctorite and determinacion of oure modre Holy Chirche, haue holden, feeled, writen and taught othrewise than the Holy Romane and Vniuersal Chirche techeth, preecchethe and obserueth.[42]

This seems to confirm the suspicion that, while the authorities found it either impossible or undesirable to formulate a charge of heresy directly caused by Pecock's reliance on reason, nevertheless that reliance was an aspect of his behaviour which contributed to his downfall.

However, although Pecock did indeed rely heavily on reason, it would not be quite correct to suggest that he had an excessive level of confidence in his own natural wit. While his grand educational project may seem arrogant and his belief in the value of his own works excessive, he is at pains throughout his writing to assure the reader that he is ready to submit to the correction of his superiors. The *Donet*, for example, begins with a lengthy disclaimer:

> [Y] make protestacioun þat it is not myn entent forto holde, defende, or fauoure, in þis book, or in enye oþire bi me writun, or to be writun, in latyn or in þe comoun peplis langage, enye erroure or heresie or enye co[n]clusioun whiche schule be aȝens þe feiþ or þe lawe of oure lord god. and if enye such it happe me to write or offre or purpose or holde, defende, or fauoure, bi enye vnauisidnes, hastynes, or ignoraunce, or bi eny oþire maner, y schal be redi it to leeue, forsake and retrete, mekely and deuoutli, at þe assignementis of myn ordinaries, fadris of þe chirche (pp. 3, l. 20 - 4, l. 4).

He goes on to ask that he be judged, not by his words alone, but by his meaning, 'siþen an errour or heresye is not þe inke writen, neiþir þe voice spokun, but it is þe meenyng or þe vndirstondyng of þe writer or speker signified bi þilk ynke

writen, or bi þilk voice spokun' (p. 4, ll. 9-12). In the *Folewer* he advises his readers that all his conclusions are 'sette forþ bi wey of profre [. . .] and not as for a proof vttirli' (p. 6, ll. 6-7, 18). Later in the same text he asks his readers for their aid in improving his work:

> If eny man schal kunne answere bettir to þese argumentis, or to eny oþire maad, or whiche schal be maad, aȝens my doctrine, y wole preie him forto so helpe myn entent. And if eny man schal kunne correcte and amende or fille my doctrine, y schal preye him of þilk help, and þanke him for it (p. 210, ll. 28-32).

Of course this may be mere window-dressing, an example of rhetorical self-deprecation designed to engage his readers' sympathies, but in view of Pecock's complete capitulation at his trial, including his abjuration of heresies of which he was clearly not guilty, it seems more likely that he was genuinely aware of the contingent nature of many of his conclusions and acknowledged the possibility of correction.

V

It is to the circumstances of Pecock's trial that I now briefly turn. Detailed accounts of the proceedings and the immediate aftermath are available elsewhere, and I will only provide an outline chronology here.[43] In June 1457 Beaumont wrote to the king, urging that action be taken against Pecock. On 22nd October Archbishop Bourgchier wrote to the clergy of Canterbury province, ordering them to cease public denunciations of Pecock as his case was *sub judice*.[44] On 11th November Pecock's books were presented for examination at Lambeth. Pecock abjured his heresies at Lambeth on 3rd December and at Paul's Cross on 4th December. He was absolved and restored to his former state as Bishop of Chichester, and on 13th June 1458 Pope Calixtus III issued a mandate ratifying these actions.[45] In September 1458 Henry VI wrote to Archbishop Bourgchier, declaring that Calixtus's mandate was contrary to the Statute of Praemunire 1353; by the end of the month, the king had ordered that Pecock should be offered a pension if he would agree to resign. By January 1459 this appears to have happened, since Pope Pius II issued a bull appointing John Arundel to Chichester.[46] In April 1459 Pius II ordered an enquiry into Pecock's 'relapse', of

which he had been informed by the King and Queen of England.[47] Some time after this Pecock was confined at Thorney Abbey and deprived of writing materials.[48]

We have seen that the charges brought against Pecock were a mixed bag of the justified, the doubtful and the plainly untrue, yet he confessed to them all. We have further seen that other features of his writings were ignored, even where they may have offered more secure grounds for a heresy charge. The impression made by these curious facts is that of a hastily convened, ill-conceived trial in which the substance of the charges was less important than the fact that they were laid at all, encouraging some commentators to search for political motives behind the action against Pecock. For example, Kelly sees the downfall of Pecock (whose Suffolk connections he takes for granted) as advantageous for the Yorkist party.[49] However, it is difficult to find any proof of a connection between Pecock and Suffolk; furthermore, since Beaumont, whose letter started the trial process, was a Lancastrian and very close to the queen, this seems to indicate that the interest in degrading Pecock emanated from the royal party. Scase suggests that the trial was in fact a reassertion of royal strength over senior clerics, and perhaps especially over the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose promotion to the archiepiscopate took place during the Duke of York's first protectorate.[50] Scase further suggests that 'heresy was linked with the threat of civil disorder and the loss of the monarchy's authority in the minds of Pecock's enemies', and hence it was necessary to act swiftly and decisively to re-establish royal control.[51] This argument is convincing, but I would like to suggest some further explanations for some of the more puzzling aspects of the case.

In June 1457, when Beaumont wrote his letter, the royal party was enjoying a renewed sense of power.[52] The king had joined the queen at Coventry in the autumn of 1456, removing the focus of political authority from London. It seems clear that the queen regarded this as an opportunity to diminish the influence of the Duke of York and the conciliar rule which he represented, replacing it with direct royal authority administered through herself.[53] This may well have appeared an opportune time for a reassertion of royal power over the clergy, particularly the Archbishop of Canterbury, and perhaps Pecock merely had the misfortune to be a rather controversial bishop in Bourgchier's province.[54] However, the French raid on Sandwich in August 1457 changed everything, as the king returned to London to attend to the national emergency. Some commentators suggest that Henry VI remained the effective political power during autumn 1457, but Watts notes that the business conducted by the Great

Council at this time appears more indicative of a return, albeit temporarily, to a conciliar and possibly even Yorkist regime.[55] Thus although proceedings against Pecock were commenced at a time of royalist ascendancy, by the time they fell to be dealt with the political climate had altered substantially. This may explain Bourgchier's warning to his clergy that they should not denounce Pecock – a measure he was surely not obliged to take, and which may indicate a lack of appetite for the action. Further, it may explain the curious nature of the charges drawn up against Pecock. Most importantly, this could be the reason for Pecock's willingness to confess to heresies of which he was not guilty; aware that the trial was simply the final stage of a political process largely superseded by events, and confident (wrongly, as it turned out) that his confession would have no long term adverse consequences, might he not have been persuaded to co-operate simply to conclude matters? His speedy absolution and restoration certainly suggests that Bourgchier had no significant reservations about his suitability as Bishop of Chichester.

This political interpretation of the circumstances of Pecock's trial may also explain the venom with which he was pursued during 1458-59, as the royal power once again re-established itself against the Yorkists. Having watched their plan for the reassertion of authority over the clergy fail to produce any long-term effects whatever, the royal party appears to have taken up the fight against Pecock once more. As the reversal of political fortunes of the autumn of 1457 was itself reversed over the following year, so it was at last possible to secure Pecock's ruin.

VI

While political motives may well have been highly important in determining Pecock's fate, it cannot be denied that in his writings he had given his detractors ample opportunity to accuse him. What is perhaps surprising is that he continued his career for as long as he did before being formally investigated. This may indicate that the political circumstances were not appropriate for such an investigation prior to 1457, but it is hard to believe that no earlier opportunity had presented itself. More convincingly, perhaps it demonstrates that the ecclesiastical authorities were more willing to tolerate both the use of the vernacular and the expression of diverse opinions at this time than has traditionally been supposed. After all, during the preaching controversy of the late 1440s Pecock certainly had many opponents, but he was given the opportunity to explain his position to

Archbishop Stafford and no further action appears to have been taken.[56] Furthermore, there is no indication that Archbishop Bourgchier would have been anxious to institute proceedings against Pecock, had it not been for the exertion of royal influence. We might speculate that Bourgchier would in fact have had some sympathy with Kelly's view of Pecock's works: 'In all this there is little that is strikingly novel, nothing that is heretical, though there is much that might be the subject of theological disputation'.[57] Kelly is too sweeping in his assessment; there are certainly elements of Pecock's writings which are technically in contravention of Arundel's Constitutions. But it is noteworthy that the mid-fifteenth-century ecclesiastical hierarchy was in no rush to accuse him, either because it acknowledged the value of debate upon theological matters, even in the vernacular, or, in the case of Pecock's privileging of reason, because it found it impossible to formulate a heresy accusation which would not reflect badly upon itself.

Thus Pecock's writings indicate a level of toleration of the use of the vernacular, and an acceptance of analytical discussion of theological matters, which may surprise us. Pecock's aims, and the methodology he adopted in order to achieve them, betray indebtedness to the very heresy they were designed to destroy. His ideal of education was shaped in response to the Lollard emphasis on the same thing, and his choice of language was a concession not only to lay people generally, but more specifically to Lollard resistance to the use of Latin: he could not hope to reach them unless he employed their own favoured medium. His appeals to the primacy of reason, while on one level opposed to Lollard veneration of Scripture, nevertheless might also seem to give countenance to the Lollard emphasis on the possibility that each lay person could arrive at his own understanding of matters of faith, without the need for clerical mediation. The use of the dialogue form, and the elaborate argumentative structure of the *Repressor*, both served to provide a textual space within which Lollard opinions could be expressed, perhaps in greater detail and with more consistency than would have been possible even for some Lollard polemicists.

Pecock was writing in this way over a period of some fifteen years, perhaps longer, before any attempt was made to prevent him, and when such an attempt was made, it appears to have been motivated more by political than doctrinal considerations. This must surely compel us to modify our view of the fifteenth century as a time when the use of the vernacular and engagement in challenging theological debate were not to be tolerated. Even if this were true under some circumstances, for example in the period immediately following the

issue of Arundel's Constitutions, it seems clear that by the early 1440s, when Pecock began to produce his writings, a more tolerant approach was evident among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The case of Pecock demonstrates that we cannot take for granted a simplistic view of textual production in the fifteenth century; rather, a more discriminating approach is required, which will recognise the fluid nature of the boundary between the orthodox and the heterodox, the acceptable and the intolerable. The current critical consensus needs to be dissolved, so that fifteenth-century vernacular theology can be viewed afresh in its diversity, and released from the bonds of 'dullness' which have bound it for so long.

NOTES

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[1] See Jeremy Catto, 'Religious Change Under Henry V', in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. by G. L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 97-115 (pp. 97-98); Anne Hudson, 'Lollardy: The English Heresy?', in *Lollards and Their Books* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), pp. 141-63 (first publ. in *Studies in Church History*, 18 (1982), 261-83); Anne Hudson, 'Wyclif and the English Language', in *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 85-103; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 30-31, 117, 166; Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 3-5, 12, 214; Nicholas Watson, 'The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 637-83 (pp. 665, 681); Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-64.

[2] Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 31. The records of Bishop Alnwick's investigations are printed in *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, Camden Fourth Series, vol. 20 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

[3] Catto, 'Religious Change', p. 97.

[4] David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 761-99 (p. 761).

[5] The standard biography is V. H. H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945); much useful additional material is to be found in Thomas Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock: A Contribution to his Biography' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Manchester, 1945). For a convenient summary, see Wendy Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, Authors of the Middle Ages 8 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996).

[6] Kelly identifies a further fifty-one works which Pecock refers to as having been, or to be written: Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', pp. 92-152 and Appendix VI.

[7] This chronology makes use of the various suggestions of Pecock's editors. See *The Donet*, ed. by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, EETS o.s. 156 (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. xvii-xviii; *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, EETS o.s. 164 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. xvi; *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. by Churchill Babington, Rolls Series 19, 2 vols (London: HMSO, 1860; repr. 1966), I, pp. xx-xxii. Kelly is broadly in agreement with these dates: Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', Appendix VI.

[8] The manuscripts are: *The Book of Faith*, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.45; *The*

Donet, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 916; *The Folewer to the Donet*, London, British Library, MS Royal 17 D.ix; *The Poore Mennis Myrrour*, London, British Library, MS Addit. 37788; *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk.iv.26; and *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.519.

[9] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, pp. 102, 108.

[10] *Calendar of State Papers*, Venice, I, no. 451, pp. 134-35.

[11] Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk.iv.26, fol.190v, bears an inscription suggesting that the manuscript was exhibited at Lambeth on 11 November 1457; the dating of the inscription is, however, uncertain.

[12] Pecock's abjurations are preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 789, fols 303^{v}-304^{r}, and are printed in Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, pp. 132-34. All translations from Latin are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[13] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.45, fol.126r. Duns Scotus discusses belief in the articles of faith in his commentary on Peter the Lombard's *Sentences*; see *Librum Tertium Sententiarum*, distinction XXV, quaestio 1, point 4, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. xv (Paris: Vivès, 1894). I am indebted to Dr Christopher Page for his assistance in locating this and the following reference.

[14] The treatise in question is probably the *Sermo de symbolo ad catechumenos*, which omits the descent to Hell; see *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, vol. xlvi (Paris: Brepols, 1969), pp. 181-99. However, Augustine does mention the descent to Hell elsewhere in his works: see, for example, J. P. Migne (ed.), *Epistola CLXIV*, *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols (Paris, 1844-71), vol. 33, cols. 709-18.

[15] This text has been edited by J. L. Morison as *Reginald Pecock's Book of Faith* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1909). I have been unable to consult a copy of the printed edition, and accordingly references are to Trinity College MS B.14.45. Standard abbreviations are expanded without notice and I have used the manuscript punctuation throughout.

[16] Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock*, p. 60.

[17] Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', pp. 181-82.

[18] These have been printed as *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, ed. by Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS o.s. 118 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901).

[19] For Arundel's Constitutions see *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, ab Anno MCCCL ad Annum MDXLV*, ed. by David Wilkins, 4 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1737), III, 314-19.

[20] Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp. 136-37 and 174-84. See also the statute *De haeretico comburendo* (1401), which refers to heretics who 'conventiculas et confoederationes

illicitas faciunt, scholas tenent et exercent' ('conduct illicit conventicles and gatherings, hold and administer schools'): Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae*, III, 252.

[21] See Hudson, 'Lollardy: The English Heresy?', pp. 148-49, and Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', pp. 830-32. It is worthy of note that Watson describes Pecock, along with Capgrave, Bokenham and Lydgate, as 'somewhat marginal' to his discussion, although without explaining why (p. 833).

[22] Hudson, 'Lollardy: The English Heresy?', p. 150.

[23] Hudson, 'Lollardy: The English Heresy?', p. 159.

[24] Hudson, 'Lollardy: The English Heresy?', p. 160.

[25] Thomas Gascoigne, *Loci e Libro Veritatum*, intro. by James E. Thorold Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), p. 214.

[26] It should be noted that the mandates of the Archbishop of Canterbury (October 1457), Pope Calixtus III (June 1458) and Pope Pius II (April 1459) all mention Pecock's English writings without any suggestion of reproof concerning his use of the vernacular: see Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, Apps. 2/vi, 4/i and 4/iii.

[27] See Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent, Garland Medieval Texts No.18 (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. xxiv-xxv and xlv-xlvi for a discussion of this possibility.

[28] While the word 'dialogue' is well-attested in literature before Pecock, this reference to 'dialogazacioun' in the *Book of Faith* is the only example of the word mentioned in the *MED*.

[29] The *MED* offers three definitions of 'clatering': (a) clattering, clanging; (b) noisy chattering, idle talk or argument; (c) dialogue. But the only citation in support of definition (c) is this very passage by Pecock. The verb 'clateren' from which 'clatering' is clearly derived has definitions ranging from 'to clatter' through to 'to talk noisily or too much' and even 'to betray (secrets), spread (slander)', but there is no suggestion of a positive or even neutral meaning.

[30] The Conclusion reads: 'Quod ne quis conclusiones, propositiones, bonis moribus adversantes, asserat [. . .] etiamsi quadam verborum aut terminorum curiositate defendi possint' ['That no one should assert conclusions or propositions opposing good habits [. . .] even if they are able to be defended with curiousness of words or terms']: see Wilkins, III, 317.

[31] This principle would have been available to Pecock from Boethius. It is both explained and practised by Lady Philosophy in her dealings with the stricken narrator; see *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973; first publ. 1918), Book I, V, p. 165; Book II, I, p. 177; Book II, V, p. 199.

[32] Reginald Pecock, 'Poore Mennis Myrrour', in *Donet*, Appendix I, p. 226.

[33] Chaucer, *The Miller's Prologue* in The *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1(A), l. 3177.

[34] *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson (Exeter: Catholic Records Press, 1982), p. 1, ll. 22-31.

[35] Ralph Hanna III, '"Vae octuplex", Lollard socio-textual ideology, and Ricardian-Lancastrian prose translation', in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 244-63 (p. 246).

[36] See Wendy Scase, 'Reginald Pecock, John Carpenter and John Colop's "Common-Profit" Books: Aspects of Book Ownership and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century London', *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), 261-74 (pp. 261-65).

[37] Thomas Brewer, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Carpenter* (London: Arthur Taylor, 1856), pp. 143-44.

[38] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ed. by Ceslai Pera *et al*, 3 vols (Rome: Marietti, 1961), vol. I, I, ch. 2 (11b).

[39] This long and complex section runs from I, 8-104.

[40] For examples of Lollard dialectic see 'Sixteen Points on which the Bishops accuse Lollards' and 'Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards' in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by Anne Hudson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; first publ. Cambridge, 1978). Somerset appraises Lollard and orthodox dialectic in *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience*; for a critique of Lollard practice see Hanna, '"Vae octuplex"'.

[41] *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Report XII, App. ix - The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort, K. G., the Earl of Donoughmore, and Others (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1891), p. 584.

[42] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, App. 6/i.

[43] See Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock*, pp. 49-69; Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', pp. 201-40; Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, pp. 103-16.

[44] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, App. 2/vii.

[45] *Calendar of Papal Letters*, 1455-64, pp. 76-78.

[46] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, App. 4/ii.

[47] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, App. 4/iii.

[48] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, App. 6/vi.

[49] Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', pp. 193-94. For Suffolk's prominence in the royal household during the 1440s, and his subsequent banishment without trial, see John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 216-54.

[50] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, p. 104.

[51] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, p. 105.

[52] For a detailed study of this period see Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 331-50.

[53] Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 335-37.

[54] Archbishop Thomas Bourgchier and his brother Henry, Viscount Bourgchier, were associated with York's conciliar regime: see Watts, *Henry VI*, p. 333, n. 304.

[55] For Henry VI as the significant power during the autumn of 1457, see P. A. Johnson, *Duke Richard of York, 1411-1460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 180-81; for the opposing view see Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 342-43.

[56] Scase, *Reginald Pecock*, p. 96.

[57] Kelly, 'Reginald Pecock', p. 163.