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The writings of John Wyclif (c.1330–84) do not make for easy reading. During much of his life he was known as the author of works on logic, philosophy and theology, subjects which led to the formation of strong views on the absolute truth of the Scriptures, on predestination, on the *lex caritatis*, and on dominium (lordship, authority), which he regarded as being founded on God-given grace. However, from about 1373 onwards his works became more concerned with contemporary, secular issues, not least with the morality of England's long war with France. Although many of Wyclif's writings were edited and published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it has been the marked increase, in recent decades, in the study of both war and peace in the Middle Ages, not least the morality of war and violence, that has made a systematic study of his views desirable. This Rory Cox has now provided.

Medieval thinking about the legality and the conduct of war had a long history. Plato had regarded war against 'barbarians' (non-Greeks) as natural, although he had stipulated that it should be fought 'efficiently', without undue excess. To Aristotle, war was a means of achieving peace for the good of the community; it should be waged, however, with the authority of the community's leadership. For Cicero, war had to be fought for a just cause or end, sanctioned by authority. For him, war was a means of avenging injuries and of ensuring society's defence. The need to secure the Roman world's safety through readiness to guard its frontiers legitimised the use of force.

By the fourth century, as that world became Christianised, a variety of opinions regarding the morality of war, of man killing man, and in what circumstances, came to be voiced. Ambrose argued that the defence of a society or a person against unjust physical hostility was morally justified; it was an act of Christian charity (*caritas*). In Augustine's view, war was punishment for sin which obstructed the advance of peace. Blending elements of Roman law with Christian theology (just cause and authorisation by legitimate authority from one, correct intention from the other), he argued that justice and, with it, peace should be seen as the end of a just war. In this way he justified violence waged against those, including heretics, who threatened the peaceful order of society.

Augustine's views demonstrated their influence when the Bolognese canonist, Gratian, compiled the *Decretum*, his manual on canon law, in 1140. 'A just war', he declared, 'is that which is waged from an edict, and in which injuries are avenged'. From that statement emerged three conditions required to make a war 'just', at least as far as most of medieval Christendom saw it. Conflict implied a just cause; it required an 'edict' (formal sanction) from a recognised authority (emperor, king or other sovereign ruler) to make it legitimate; and it assumed a proper intention (avenging a wrong done) to gain it moral justification. These basic conditions, still much referred to – and debated – in our own time in discussion regarding the legality and morality of war, would have constituted the intellectual climate inherited by Wyclif in the second half of the 14th century.

Having set the historical context, Cox shows how Wyclif rejected it. Take, for example, the matter of the 'just cause'. This might refer to an attack

intended to further a legal claim to territory (just in the eyes of the aggressor), or to action taken to counter such an attack (just in the eyes of the defender). In both cases the parties fought for what they regarded as 'justice'. Many would agree with this approach. But not Wyclif, who argued that there was no case for any resistance. The Christian, who should prefer the teaching of the New Testament to that of the Old Testament, must be patient and (literally) long-suffering, ready to respond to violence not with more violence but by offering the other cheek. Accepting the teaching of Christ in a very literal way, Wyclif made the *lex evangelica* his yardstick: men's actions should be governed by the greatest of the commandments, love of neighbour. In the spirit of charity (*caritas*) which should dictate all human behaviour, defeat and hardship should be borne with patience. Man should never succumb to the base desire either to avenge a wrong or to dominate, for both went against the precepts of charity. Men should forgive, as God forgives. Any punishment was for God alone. No cause could justify the waging of war, whether offensive or defensive. Not surprisingly Cox describes such an attitude as marking 'a seismic break from traditional just war theory'. Similarly, a conflict waged even with the approval of a legitimate authority (a condition intended to prevent local, often petty conflicts from breaking out) was ruled out of court. In this case Wyclif's rejection of traditional thinking emanated from his theological views on the relationship between authority and grace. The proper exercise of authority, he argued, depended on the grace bestowed by God upon an individual. Such an act was moral and legitimate only if it was that of a person in a state of grace. However, who could tell if a man was in the state required for him to exercise authority properly? Only God knew that. The doubt fatally undermined the basis of all authority, including that of declaring a war to be 'just'. Arguing that a ruler, in deciding upon a resort to violence, was demonstrating a lack of *caritas* towards his enemy (which, in itself, strongly suggested that he lacked grace), Wyclif invalidated his claim to exercise authority, thus making his decision to fight unjust. Arguing in this way, Wyclif ignored all earlier Christian tradition and teaching regarding the need for a 'just' war to be legitimised by a recognised authority. The third traditional condition for a 'just' war, that of correct intention, would also be rejected. Here, one senses, the author has greater sympathy with Wyclif's views, although these too ran contrary to traditional thinking. How, the question was (and remains), could 'proper intention' be measured, and appropriate and proportionate actions defined? Certainly not as one might measure a solid or a liquid. The reality of action might not live up to the most moral of intentions: too much depended upon the *humanitas* of the soldiery, notorious for its lack of discipline. If judged by the excessive actions of those involved in fighting, might the spirit of 'proper intention' not be lost? Here Wyclif was reflecting not only his own views but something of those of the wider society in which he lived. It can be no coincidence that his age, increasingly aware of the unhappy experiences of the non-combatant, was coming to see the actions of the soldiery as harsh, cruel and excessive, lacking the spirit of *caritas* upon which Wyclif placed such great emphasis. When Chaucer

cited the line 'Radix malorum est cupiditas', the condemnation of greed which it reflected summed up the feeling of many regarding the undisciplined behaviour of contemporary soldiery. Wyclif will have had much support for his view that, in the light of the principles of what is termed *ius in bello*, the actions of soldiers, vis-à-vis the non-combatant in particular, should be much more tightly controlled. If not, the spirit of *caritas* would be all too easily diluted, before disappearing altogether. While Augustine had argued that it was not necessarily against charity to kill a man in the pursuit of peace, thus making violence aimed at securing justice permissible, Wyclif taught that it was the exercise of *caritas*, not violence, which more easily brought about the state of peace. Violence was not only wrong; it didn't pay, either.

And what of the soldier whose business was fighting wars? To contemporaries his moral failings were only too apparent, as Wyclif and many others were quick to point out. Since, according to Wyclif's way of thinking, war should be banished, the soldier should have no part to play in conflict of any kind. Rather, Wyclif saw his role as encouraging the creation of a peaceful social order through the enforcement of the *lex Christi*, the law of love contained in the New Testament. His scene of activity should be found at home, not on a foreign battlefield.

Theological considerations coloured all Wyclif's ideas on matters which we would consider 'political'. His views on the place and role of government (*dominium*) in human society verged on the negative; it was the product of the Fall and of sin, and led to a desire to dominate and, almost inevitably, to war. His theology and, in particular, his teachings on grace undermined even what appeared to be the most stable of authorities. Here his ideas contrasted starkly with the generally positive notions of the classical era, and even with the more negative (or punitive) character of such ideas found in the early and central Middle Ages, many reflecting Augustine's view that *dominium* was little more than power intended as punishment for sin. These views had been largely reconciled in the 13th century by Aquinas and others, the process involving acceptance of the Aristotelian view that political life and institutions (both positive) were necessary for human and social development. But Wyclif would have none of this. He condemned aggression as provoked by a desire to acquire and dominate. As for the right of self-defence, he did not recognise it. Given his ideas, and the particular circumstances of his time, it is hardly surprising that Wyclif should be a strong critic of English policy towards France, which he saw as one of war fought for the acquisition of territory and power hiding under the guise of an attempt to regain what the French had 'unjustly' seized. Rather than make war for such purposes, the true Christian should be guided by the *lex evangelica*; wars of acquisition (under whatever pretence they were fought) were contrary to the teaching of the gospel, while wars of defence should give way to the patient acceptance of attack (and defeat). In his later years Wyclif had increasing opportunity to denounce wars fought by members of the English royal family in France and elsewhere. Similarly, his condemnation of bishop Despenser's 'crusade' in Flanders in 1383 would be total. All clerical participation in violence received Wyclif's utter condemnation. Where the

law of Christ ruled in a society founded on love (*caritas*), the use of force and violence should play no part.

If we can call Wyclif a 'pacifist' who rejected totally 'just' war doctrine in favour of non-violence and non-resistance to all forms of attack, we have to see his ideas in the wider context of a theology and philosophy created from his scriptural views. These led him to stress the *lex caritatis*, the importance of grace as the basis of all dominium: the true Christian should never impose himself upon others, in particular if this required the use of force. Violence used against another human being was violence aimed against one created in the image of God; a sacrilegious act. Rather than oppose violence, however, the Christian, guided by the law of the New Testament, should be ready to suffer, to take up his cross and follow his Master. Suffering involved no sin; on the contrary, it gained merit for the sufferer. As the gospels emphasised, Christ offered no resistance to those who sought to kill him; the true follower must do the same. By so doing, he was atoning for the sin of the person who did him harm, an act of *caritas*, of perfect Christian love, in action.

The author places this thinking in its wider historical setting when he emphasises the interest shown among Wyclif's contemporaries in martyrdom, suffering freely accepted with patience, following the example of Christ. Pictorial art and works of spiritual guidance form a body of evidence of admiration for those who had suffered physically at the hands of enemies while, like Christ, offering no resistance. Non-resistance was a response to violence encouraged by the teachings of Christ and, above all, endorsed by his reaction to torture and execution on a cross.

While the context in which Wyclif's thought should be seen is set out with admirable clarity, some readers could wish that Dr Cox had taken the story just that bit further, however briefly, at least into the immediate post-Wycliffite years. Many would like to know how far Wyclif's influence can be traced into the future. Of his influence upon the Lollards (in England) and the Hussites (in Bohemia) we are told little. In the case of England, this might have been remedied, to some extent, by reference to Professor Norman Tanner's readily available edition of the proceedings against heretics in the diocese of Norwich in which some of Wyclif's teachings on war and killing (although not acknowledged as such) were shown to be prevalent some two generations after his death.⁽¹⁾ Notable among these were the statements opposing war of any kind: '*nullo modo licet ... pro aliqua causa pugnare*' (p. 71); '*quod nulli licet pro iure suo hereditario vel pro patria pugnare ... quia sic facientes amittunt caritatem*' (p. 96: see also pp. 53, 58, 61, 158, 160) and the evangelical belief that 'man shuld remitte all vengeance oonly to the sentence of God' (pp. 142, 148). While some of these statements have a recurring, formulaic character, they none the less represent an insight into the survival of views similar to those set out by Wyclif: man must on no account fight; it is wrong to do so either for a hereditary right (how contemporary kings of England would have winced on reading this!) or for one's country (shades of '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*'), since doing so is contrary to charity. Vengeance, it should not be forgotten, is for God alone.

That said, we should be grateful to the author for his labours in what must have been a difficult, if highly rewarding, field to cultivate. Wyclif's ideas divided intellectual, religious and political opinion in his day. There will be no excuse now for the plea that his largely theologically inspired views regarding war are too difficult, too disparate to understand. By placing Wyclif in a long historical context, Cox enables the reader to see where, in terms of his teachings on war, Wyclif 'came from', and what factors influenced his thought and the radical conclusions he was to reach. Although this study is concerned with the views of one man who lived centuries ago, its subject has strong resonances in our own time. Clear and comprehensive in the way it brings together and sets out complex ideas and arguments gleaned from a wide variety of Wyclif's works (tracts and sermons, written in both Latin and English), this study should be of the greatest interest to a wide readership, students of the history of war (Cox rightly claims that some of Wyclif's work should be seen as part of that history), philosophers, politicians, soldiers and others as they debate whether war can ever be 'just' ... or not.

Notes

1. Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31, ed. N. P. Tanner, Royal Historical Society, Camden Fourth Series, 20 (London, 1977).

Author's Response

Rory Cox

I am very grateful to Prof Allmand for his detailed and generous review. Prof Allmand's principal criticism concerns my relatively brief treatment of the afterlife of Wyclif's pacifism, particularly its influence on lollardy and Hussism. Prof Allmand's criticism is entirely fair. Although there are several pages in the conclusion in which I consider this topic (particularly Wyclif's influence on Petr Chelčický), and while I endeavoured to provide references within the footnotes to comparative English lollard works, these were areas of research that I would have liked to develop further. That being said, my reasons for focussing on the intellectual foundations of Wyclif's thought on war, rather than the development of his ideas after his death, were threefold.

Firstly, there has been a trend in recent years to see Wyclif only as an appendage of lollardy. This is partly a result of the success of lollard studies over the last three decades, but the effect has been to encourage a very forward looking view of Wyclif – seeing him as the starting point of English religious dissent – rather than seeing him as the intellectual product of what came before him. Wyclif could not have known or predicted how lollardy (and certainly not Protestantism) would develop after his death in 1384. It is even questionable whether he would have accepted or condoned the views and actions of many who claimed him as an inspiration. Moreover, to read Wyclif only as a means to understand

lollardy (or Hussism), suggests that Wyclif's ideas are not of intrinsic interest in themselves, or reflect little of worth about his intellectual heritage. By adopting what might be considered a backward looking view of Wyclif, it was my intention to situate Wyclif firmly in the intellectual context of the late fourteenth century and the millennium or more of intellectual history which had produced this milieu. The main purpose of this, as Prof Allmand observes, was to highlight just how different and radical Wyclif's ideas about violence were, especially when compared to those that had preceded him.

The second two reasons were the result of limitations of different kinds. My own limitation was the inability to read Czech. While much work on Hussism is available in German, many of the primary texts and secondary literature remain in the original language; without a working knowledge of this corpus, I did not feel confident in making assertions concerning the survival of Wyclif's pacifism in Bohemia. While offering some suggestions for comparison in the conclusion, I was reluctant to speculate further on the complexities of Hussite theology and literature. Without adequate linguistic skills, tracing the history of ideas – difficult and highly nuanced at the best of times – is all but impossible.

The final reason was the strict word limit of the Royal Historical Society's *Studies in History* series. At 90,000 words (including bibliography), volumes in the series are intended to be coherent and streamlined; this is undoubtedly a good thing, but in the case of this study, it meant that some promising paths had to be left for others to explore. I am convinced that further research into the afterlife of Wyclif's doctrine of pacifism, in both lollardy and particularly in Hussism, will yield fascinating results, and it is pleasing that Prof Allmand agrees. If my book encourages other scholars to pursue such lines of enquiry, then I will consider it a job well done.

My thanks go again to Prof Allmand and the editors of *Reviews in History*.