
Wyclif, the “Hussite Philosophy,” and the Law of Christ

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In the first meeting of the Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice colloquium in 1994, Professor Vilém Herold described the importance of Wyclif’s doctrine of the divine ideas as it appears in *Summa de Ente I* treatise 5 for understanding what he described as the “Hussite philosophy.”¹ Herold, whose edition of this treatise [forthcoming], had spent considerable effort in exploring the centrality of this most metaphysically realist element of Wyclif’s thought to philosophical dialogue at Charles University at the beginning of the fifteenth century.² Despite the importance of the reality of the divine ideas and the role they play in creation, though, Herold noted that it was not a part of the subject matter of Wyclif’s *Summa Theologie*, his later collection of treatises on the sacraments, the church, the papacy, and the place of secular lordship in reform. Even without reference to this doctrine, he argued, it played an important role in helping to define Bohemian understanding of the need for a universal adoption of God’s law as the basis for the church’s governance.

I will argue here that Herold was correct, and supplement his argument with attention to several treatises included in the *Summa Theologie* that contain just the connection necessary to animate his idea. Following this, I will provide an example of how the theoretical vision of Wyclif regarding the divine ideas plays out in one of the later works of Jan Hus, *De Sufficiencia Legis*. In so doing, I do not claim to have the last word in discussing the relation of this element of the *Summa Theologie* to the “Hussite philosophy”; indeed, I hope that this will serve as a useful theme for studying Hussite thought in its many variations. Further, comparing similarities between Wyclif and Hus has long been a tactic used by scholars to draw inaccurate conclusions about the relation between the two thinkers. This is far from my purpose; instead, I aim only to show how an idea began to develop and take hold in Hussite thought.

¹ Vilém Herold, “Platonic Ideas and the ‘Hussite philosophy,’” BRRP 1 (1996) 13–16.

² See his *Pražská Univerzita a Wyclif*, (Prague, 1985); “Die Philosophie des Hussitismus: Zur Rolle der Ideenlehre Platons,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus, Verzögerte Aufklärung, v. I: Vom Konstanzer Konzil zum Auftreten Luthers*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Vienna, 1996).

Divine Ideas and Divine Law: The Link Between the *Summae*

A note on texts will be useful here. The two large *Summae*, namely the *Summa de Ente* and the *Summa theologie*, are very likely two sets of treatises that Wyclif redacted during his final years at Lutterworth. Several of the treatises of the first *Summa* suggest earlier service as collections of *distinctiones* for a *Sentences* commentary, while several of the treatises of the second give evidence of having been extensively re-worked. Of the treatises that interest us here, *De Ideis* is evocative of the subject matter discussed under the heading of *I Sententiae* Q.36, *De Mandatis Divinis* appears to have been revised from a much briefer commentary on the Decalogue akin to Grosseteste's *De Decem Mandatis*, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* gives evidence of having been composed over three years (1376–1378), and *De Civili Dominio* was begun in 1375, and added to as debates transpired over the coming two years.³ Our discussion of the connection between the two collections, namely the relation of the divine ideas to the sufficiency of Scripture for governing the body of Christ will draw from these three treatises.

The Book Analogy

Scholastic theologians normally understood there to be a connection between formal metaphysics and moral theology, but few envisioned one that was as immediate as Wyclif's. His metaphysics is remarkable because of the strong isomorphism he perceived between language and being. His position has rightly been called "propositional realism" because he understood everything we would describe as "fact" to be metaphysically structured in the same way as a sentence is; there are subjects and predicates that correspond to the way we form them in language.⁴ This leads Wyclif to a complex realism that he describes in the treatises included in *De Logica* and *Summa de Ente*, most notably the two treatises on universals and divine ideas.⁵ He applies this position to morality in *De Mandatis Divinis*, and in doing so makes some remarkable assertions about how sin harms creation. A good way to begin

³ On dating Wyclif's *Summas*, see Williel Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif: An Annotated Catalogue* (Toronto, 1983), and Gillian Evans, *John Wyclif: Myth and Reality*, (Oxford, 2005) 108–113; my discussion in "Wyclif's Trinitarian and Christological Theology," in *A Companion to John Wyclif Late Medieval Theologian*, Ian Levy, ed., (Leiden, Boston, 2006) 132–134, and Lahey, *John Wyclif*, (Oxford, 2009) 143–145. For a more nuanced analysis of a developing nature of the structure of the *Summa de Ente*, see Ivan Mueller, "A 'Lost' *Summa* of John Wyclif," in Anne Hudson, Michael Wilks, eds., *From Ockham to Wyclif*, [Studies in Church History Subsidia 5], (Oxford, 1987) 179–183.

⁴ Laurent Cesalli, "Le 'pan-propositionalisme de Jean Wyclif,'" *Vivarium* 43 (2005) 124–155

⁵ See Alessandro Conti, "Wyclif's Logic and Metaphysics" in Levy, ed. *A Companion to John Wyclif*, 67–126; also Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 65–101.

understanding this “realist morality” is with a claim that, from another writer, might be poetic.

The whole perceptible world is a book that those who understand naturally consider in its particular parts as letters of the alphabet; from these they move forward to its composition as things formed into syllables. Third, when they have for themselves contiguous things, or the consequential ones that [the things] present, then they read the book at a superficial level.⁶

He means that we put together facts in our mind as they are in reality, just as we put together ideas by reading letters on a page and forming words and sentences. It is our nature to read the book of nature, which itself is organised into sentences of subject and predicate. The created world is given its order, consistency, and coherence by the universals that have a higher being than the substances and accidents that instantiate them. These universals are themselves at the apex of creation, and are the purest and most perfect of all created things; Wyclif says that our mind must push past created things to their universals, and recognise that these universals are themselves but reflections of the eternal purity of the ideal exemplars in the divine mind.

And regarding the good, the most beautiful, and the most pure, it is clear that not all [beautiful things] but beauty itself shines out from the Word; if, indeed, beautiful things would be produced in creation in the genera of things, in that sense they are shadows of that splendor in the first light, and they are made equal in being pleasing to the created power of perception, how much greater [are they] in their eternal exemplars, where they are made equals in the first light and are really the source of light according to the perception of the Lord, to whom they are coequals? ... they are in the existence of things in their proper, lesser or less pure kinds with respect to the first [being] that they have within [the divine mind] since their home is better and more beautiful in the soul than is the material home for which they provide the exemplar.⁷

The delight we take in perceiving something beautiful or pleasing comes from our recognition of its closer connection to the universal it instantiates, and if we are properly oriented in our spirit, we recognise our delight to be not in the thing, or the universal, but in the Creator, the highest object of love. But without knowing that created things have their eternal exemplars

⁶ *De Mandatis Divinis* [DMD] 7, 60/20–29.

⁷ DMD 11, 103/6–23.

in the divine mind, we cannot rightly understand, and cannot properly love, this connection God provides for us. We end up simply taking delight in the things themselves. “Hence they sin damnably who suppose that the exemplary ideas are useless to us, or [that] the existence of them in their kinds are more useful; a creature cannot profit without the power of these ideas, because there is no diminished being in the intelligible, just as a thing has its species in intelligible being... an honest cognition of an artifact of man is more beautiful than the artifact itself.”⁸

Wyclif’s theory of the divine ideas is particularly relevant to his understanding of the philosophical basis for Scripture hermeneutics, which itself is the foundation for his conviction that Scripture is sufficient for the governance of the church. Wyclif had a tendency to describe complete sets of facts and beings as books. He describes the whole of creation as a book in *De Mandatis* 7, the contents of the divine mind as a book “in which all things in nature are written in order” in *De Ideis* 5, and the eternal Word as the exemplary idea for Scripture in *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* I.6. This means that all creation is a “book”; the sum of all facts past, present and future, and the divine mind is a book, all actualities of all creation, past, present and future, as well as the exemplary form for Scripture, “a leaf from the Book of Life.” Further, creation is Christ the Word manifest in created effect, past, present and future, and the divine mind is Christ containing all created acts as creating cause. Finally, Scripture is a manifestation of Christ as the Wisdom containing every truth. Thus created being, Christ in effect, is a book that is eternally read by the divine mind, the Word (Christ as cause), the effect of which is Scripture, an iteration of Christ, another book containing in its eternal essence every created truth.⁹

These books are really all the same thing; the divine mind is identical to the eternal Word, or Christ, who created the world and is the incarnate “Book of Life” to whose being all Scripture points.¹⁰ The eternal Word who creates is the divine author, and the record of that creation, the divine mind understanding all created act, is the eternally written. It is important to remember that Scripture does not exhaust the divine mind’s contents; he says, “the whole of sacred scripture is one word of God.”¹¹ What is significant is the isomorphism holding between created truth and Christ, which is most fully realised in Scripture. In what sense are we to understand how Christ the eternal Word “reads” Christ, the act and realised being of creation, and how the effect of this reading factor into the Christian moral life?

⁸ DMD 12, 111/21–30.

⁹ See *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* I.16, translated in *John Wyclif On the Truth of Holy Scriptures*, Ian Levy, transl., (Kalamazoo MI, 2001) 97–101.

¹⁰ Ian Levy, “The Fight for the Sacred Sense in Late Medieval England.” *ATR* 85 (2003) 165–176.

¹¹ *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* II.1, cited in Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, (Cambridge, 2002) 23.

The Consequences of Sin

God has crafted the universe from the stars down to the smallest parts of the earth in a grand, perfect ordering, in which the being of each creature is linked to the being of every other creature in a complex web. Wyclif notes philosophers have long called this a “golden chain” of being. The foundation for this golden chain is the interrelation of the divine ideas within God’s perfectly unified understanding. Since there is a divine idea for every single creature in creation, and since that idea has associated with it every single act of that creature, it follows that, if the ideas are interrelated at the level of God’s understanding, every single act of every creature has an impact on every other creature. This means that every time anyone sins, that sin effects not only God’s understanding of that person, but it has negative consequences for everything else in creation. “It is not possible for anyone to sin mortally without sinning both against his neighbour and against God, or indeed without injuring the whole universe in every single creature.”¹²

Scholastics agreed that sin is harmful to creation, but in a much more general sense. For example, Aquinas explained that sin harms nature, but that nature must be understood as having several senses. The sense in which nature in general, and human nature in particular is a source of the powers that human beings have, is not harmed by sin. The good of our nature which is an inclination to virtue is damaged by sin, and the gift of original justice has been utterly destroyed by it.¹³ Of course when Cain sins by murdering Abel, he brings harm not only to Abel, but to Adam and Eve as well as to himself. But Wyclif is arguing that, by virtue of the harm that Cain’s sin does to himself, he injures the Humanity in which he participates. In so doing, Cain injures every other instantiation of Humanity, every other person that ever existed or will exist. And in injuring Humanity, Cain injures every other Universal for which there is a divine idea, every species, every predicate, including dogs, antelopes, bacteria, stars, and running, flying, being just, and so forth. Sin literally harms everything in Wyclif’s ontology.

Now that the scope of sin’s threat to the world is clear, some means of keeping man from it is necessary. The first section of *De Mandatis* (cc. 1–6) is a general introduction to the relation of right and justice, the basis for all lordship. This is followed by analysis of the relation of the Old Law to the New Law, and the basis for Christian obedience to the latter, which is the Law of Christ (cc. 7–12), which culminates in what Wyclif entitles the “Delightful Treatise on Love.” This serves as a natural connection to the first commandment, and the remainder of the book addresses the Decalogue. Our interest here will be in recounting how Scripture, containing the Old and New Law, contains all that is necessary for governing the church.

¹² DMD 5, 39/14–17.

¹³ *Summa Theologicae* IaIIae Q.85 a.1; *De Malo* Q.4 a.6

The mind of God contains an idea of the Right, Wyclif explains, that is the measure and standard for all that is truly right in creation.¹⁴ If something is incommensurate with God's idea, there is no sense in which it can ever be legitimate. Hence, it is absolutely necessary that all understand God's will. Wyclif's opponents may argue that people can understand basic moral truths of the universe without divine revelation, but Wyclif dismisses this as insufficient. God has ordained that all mankind receive the Old and New law as certain guides to the divine will, without which no real comprehension of justice is remotely possible. There are certainly cases of pagans constructing just laws, Wyclif admits, but their justice is accidental, and only just by virtue of their agreement with divine will as expressed in Scripture.¹⁵ Theologians who forget the primacy of Scripture are likely to miss this truth.

The Scripture

In *De Dominio Divino* he explains that anything that is the proper subject of the natural sciences is also the subject of theology. Theologians, he explains, begin understanding created beings through contemplation of the divine ideas, and move to the highest and most all-encompassing truth-bearing created being in creation, namely Scripture.¹⁶ From this, he can move to contemplation of its eternal exemplar, the eternal Word of God and its continuing Incarnation in Christ, and from thence to the Godhead Itself.¹⁷ Take away the centrality of the divine ideas for the metaphysical understanding of creatures, and the instantiative relation Scripture has with the eternal Word becomes less easy to grasp. It is easier to assume that the Bible is simply a collection of texts compiled and written by people who may have been divinely inspired, but were people just the same. But so long as theologians maintain this emphasis on the divine ideas, the connection of Scripture and the eternal Word remains, and the necessity of *lex Christi's* dominance over all created law is self-evident.

The Sufficiency of the Law of Christ for the Church

Wyclif's position regarding the need for the church to be divested of all secular lordship is well known, and need not be rehearsed here.¹⁸ At stake is not simply the fact that the temporal world taints the Church's mission of

¹⁴ DMD I, 4.

¹⁵ DMD c. 3, 23–24.

¹⁶ For reference to the divine ideas, which he also calls *rationes exemplares*, see *De Dominio Divino* I c. 9, 62/18.

¹⁷ *De Dominio Divino* ed. R. L. Poole (London, 1890) Bk. I, 7, 43/3–21.

¹⁸ See Stephen Lahey, *Philosophy and Politics in the Thought of John Wyclif* (Cambridge, 2003).

salvation, but the fact that as Christ's body on earth, it must be free from all effects of sin, particularly including secular dominion. Eradicating civil lordship from the ecclesiastical government leaves two alternative means of organising the Church: either through God's law as promulgated through Scripture, or through a mixture of this and a set of man-made laws based in Scripture but more applicable to the needs of a corporate entity in the world. The latter possibility may seem inimical to Wyclif's ideas, given his almost constant assertion that Christ's law is sufficient for governance of the church, but it is not.

Had mankind not fallen, and remained in a state of innocence, the law of Christ would have been immediately evident to human reason. There would have been no private property, no exclusive rights to nature, because the perversion of the will that is a consequence of sin would not exist. Wyclif envisions a life without anxiety, pain, and conflict, in which all goods are shared communally.¹⁹ The Fall has made this impossible to realise again without divine assistance, and this is what happened with Christ's organisation of the disciples. The Book of the Acts describes exactly this community, in which all disagreements are resolved through judgement according to Christ's teachings, ownership is communal, and harmony defines the entire enterprise. Had the Church not been given over into the machinations of secular society by the Donation of Constantine, it would have certainly remained in this pristine state, in which only Christ's teachings govern Christians.²⁰

Lex Caritatis

Wyclif introduces an important distinction into the mix in *De Civili Dominio* II. The *lex Christi*, which is identical to Scripture in general, and the New Testament in particular, is informed by an animating principle he calls *lex caritatis*. This Law of Love, which he describes fully as the force binding humanity to the divine legislator in *De Mandatis Divinis* cc. 11–14, is what is fundamental to Christ's life and teachings.²¹ Human laws that correspond to *lex caritatis* are just, while those that do not conform are not. "Insofar as some law leads closer to conformity to the law of nature in which all things should be in common without civil ownership, it is the more perfect. If the law of Christ were universally duly observed, I am certain that the law would suffice in itself and that human law would be superfluous."²²

¹⁹ See *De Statu Innocencie*, published in *De Dominio Divino* as an appendix.

²⁰ For a complete discussion of this subject, see William Farr, *John Wyclif as Legal Reformer* (Leiden, 1974) 42–77.

²¹ For an English translation of this section of DMD, see *Wycliffite Spirituality*, J. Patrick Hornbeck, Stephen Lahey, Fiona Somerset, eds., (New York, 2013) 84–87

²² *De Civili Dominio* [DCD] II c. 13, 154/26–155/7

This is important because it allows Wyclif to include additional human laws among the precepts and counsels necessary for the continued life of the church in the world. Using this principle, Wyclif is able to envision a just place for a pope and an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the need for a body of canon law with which to protect the church from secular temptations and habits that otherwise would corrupt it. If Wyclif were at all disposed to republican theory, the relation could conceivably be that of a political philosophy to a constitution upon which a body of laws rest. The political philosophy would be the Law of Love, the constitution would be the life and teachings of Christ as proclaimed by Scripture, and the body of laws would be the canon law insofar as it develops the *lex caritatis* for the demands of society.

It is likely that Wyclif wrote the second book of *De Civili Dominio* to respond to critics of the first book. His earlier argument had been far less subtle: Christ's law is sufficient for the governance of all human life, he stated, and any additions men made to it were either superfluous because already entailed by it, or blasphemous accretions.²³ Human laws are not ruled out; but they all must be in line with Christ's law, which is the exemplar for all just governance in creation.²⁴ His explanation in the second book allows for considerably more breadth in a legal system designed for the church militant.

So we perceive a direct connection between Wyclif's conviction that God has an idea for each creature in creation, as well as one for the universals that organise them, and for the higher principles by which all of creation is given form and order. Among these ideas is an idea of the Right, which is commensurate with the acts of God's will, and of a piece with God's idea of Scripture, the perfect law. This perfect law is best understood as the *lex caritatis*, the Law of Love, by which all creatures are united together in God's understanding, and which also serves as the foundational pattern for Christ's life and teachings as shown in Scripture. Scripture, rather than the creation of people writing in time, is an eternal thing, of which our Bibles are iterations. Contained therein are the best and clearest principles and counsels for the guidance of human life, and for the church. Had we not fallen, we would not need its revelation, but through the Incarnation, we are able to understand its directive power. Had the church not fallen in accepting the Donation, it would not need anything more than Scripture for its governance, but through the continuing power of the Law of Love, it is able to build a body of law with which to guide it in a post-Donation world. This reasoning unites the metaphysics of the *Summa de Ente* with the ecclesiology of *Summa Theologie*, and proved influential to the "Hussite philosophy".

²³ DCD I c. 17, 119–124.

²⁴ DCD I c. 20, 139–147.

Lex Christi and Wyclif's Moral Theology in Hus

Making connections between Wyclif and Hussite theologians is problematic when dealing with topics as broad and deep as moral theology. It is one thing to point to cases in which a theologian is making obvious use of something Wyclif said, which is not always difficult, especially when the particular work's editor has helpfully made note of the fact. But to take an idea like the supremacy of the Law of Christ over human law and ethical theories, and make a distinct connection to a Hussite theologian's argument, particular a theologian wary of making explicit reference to Wycliffism for fear of having his opponents dismiss him out of hand, is something else. Complicating matters is the fact that Wyclif was certainly not the first to argue for a return to a Christian society governed by the pure law of the gospel. As Frantisek Šmahel observes in his comprehensive study of Hussitism, as early as the mid-twelfth century, such a call had been voiced by Stefan von Lissac, and fourteenth-century Bohemia had been filled with Waldensian preachers making similar proclamations.²⁵ Again, Matěj of Janov had extolled the need for the church to return to its roots in simplicity in his *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, although his call was for an internal reform carried out by the clergy.²⁶ Matěj's conception of the authority of Scripture as absolute for the functioning of the religion, though, and his "reductivist" rejection of later accretions to the purity of the law of the New Testament certainly qualify as sufficiently similar to Wyclif's approach as to warrant consideration in this discussion.²⁷

The telling note is Wyclif's emphasis on love as lying at the base of God's law code for Christians. His argument in *De Mandatis* is sufficiently original in its use of this idea as the binding agent connecting God to creation, and to Christians in particular, and thereby providing a foundation for a homiletic program for teaching the Christian life, that it is worth looking for evidence of this in Hussite writings. Again, the question of originality arises: just because a theologian is writing about love for God or one's neighbour, why must it follow that he is articulating Wyclif's thought? Of course, it need not. But if the theologian is using this idea to argue the sufficiency of the Law of Christ for the Christian life, and if there is evidence for some kind of textual connection to Wyclif's works, it is possible that the theologian has Wyclif's moral theology in mind.

²⁵ Frantisek Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, (Hanover, 2002) 544.

²⁶ Howard Kaminsky, HHR, 21.

²⁷ Jana Nechutová, "Matěj of Janov and his work *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamentum*," BRRP 2 (1998) 15–24

Hus and *De Sufficiencia Legis*

Scholars agree that central to Hus's thought was the idea that Christ's law is sufficient for the governance of Christians. At the Council of Constance, this association drew the ire of his opponents. Of these, likely the individual who read most deeply in Wyclif's thought was Thomas Netter, author of the *Doctrinale*. This text was used through the fifteenth century and beyond to define Wycliffism, and by implication Hussite ideals.²⁸ Indeed, he makes the direct connection in the Preface, saying "this abominable heresy [Hussitism] even with the name changed, did not cease to cause rebellions, fighting, slaughter, and calamity everywhere."²⁹ Netter made use of several collections of Wyclif's works, and the text that comes up the most in the lists of these collections is *Dialogus* (*De Mandatis* appears as well).³⁰ The entire third book of the five-book work is devoted to refuting the general thesis that the perfect religion is only the law of Christ. That the law of Christ is perfect law is not at issue, of course; it is how Wyclif uses it to exclude monastics and later elements of the Roman tradition against which Netter argues most vigorously.³¹ That Netter was a Carmelite certainly plays a part in the extensive refutation of Wyclif's anti-fraternalism in this book, but among the errors for which he condemns Wycliffites are "they affect piety and decry vices, and they mix in Holy Scripture, so that they may deceive the more simple with their artifice. Not only with their words, but also with their habits do the Wycliffites make their comparisons, so that they may seduce through the opinion of a good life."³²

The nature of the centrality of *Lex Christi* in Hus's thought is not as clear, though. Is it, as Howard Kaminsky has argued, an ideology that leads to revolution? Or does this centrality have a more spiritual, less upsetting presence? Kaminsky admits that Hus's own writings feature *Lex Christi* more as an inspirational ideal, and argues that its effects in the works of his immediate fellows, including Jakoubek of Stribro and Nicholas of Dresden, are where to find the revolutionary materials.³³ Bernard Töpfer considers the place of *Lex Christi* in Hus's thought by reflecting on Hus's ecclesiology. He traced

²⁸ Kevin J. Alban, O. Carm. *The Teaching and Impact of the Doctrinale of Thomas Netter of Walden (c.1374–1430)* (Turnhout, 2010) 238–259.

²⁹ Thomas Netter, *Doctrinale*, (Venice, 1757) xxviii.

³⁰ Thomas Netter, *Doctrinale*, xxx. See also Anne Hudson, "Thomas Netter's *Doctrinale* and the Lollards," in *Thomas Netter of Walden, Carmel in Britain, IV*, Johan Bergstrom-Allen and Richard Copley, eds. (Faversham, 2009) 182. "Netter's most frequent quarries were all the late works from Wyclif's Lutterworth period, the *Dialogus* and its supplement... the *Opus Evangelicum* and the sermons..."

³¹ Netter, *Doctrinale*, III c. 6, 718–722.

³² *Ibid.*, iii. The work's table of contents serves as a useful overview of the many dangers of Hussitism in the 1420's and '30's. "In July 1427, Pope Martin V used the occasion of receiving Book V... saying 'Your first work which you wrote against the heretical Hussites pleased us.'" Alban, *The Teaching and Impact*, 239

³³ Kaminsky, HHR, 41.

the development of Hus's use of Wyclif's ideal of a church governed by *lex Christi*, arguing that Hus embraced the idea of the Church as the body of the Elect, as is clear in *Sermo de Ecclesia* [1410] while avoiding the rejection of a clerical hierarchy and the Donatism that Wyclif believed followed on this idea. But while bishops and priests have a place, Christ alone must be recognised as being the supreme and only head of the Church. Even at his most radical, Töpfer argues, Hus never advocated the kind of full-scale up-ending of the church that Wyclif seems to have envisioned. "At the center of his interest," he writes, "stands a clear, straightforward transformation of ecclesial proportioning, not a total transformation of a law-constructed material social organisation."³⁴ Kaminsky, he implies, perceives too much of the revolutionary in Hus. Šmahel's understanding of Hus's use of the centrality of *Lex Christi* avoids concern about its suitability for revolution, and emphasises its place in guiding Hus's pen. The centrality of *Lex Christi* as disclosed in the gospels, he argues, provides Hus the philosophical standpoint to subvert violence and social inequality to submission to God. In other words, "the social order of his times should and must be corrected by the spirit of God's laws, or bettered, and should not be changed from the ground up..."³⁵ More recently, Ivana Dolejšová has emphasised the importance of orthopraxy in understanding Hus's thought. She perceives him as incorporating *Lex Christi* into much of his personal pastoral writing as well as in his more formal thought.³⁶ She identifies Hus's emphasis on *Lex Christi* in defining the Christian life as an attempt to uphold the unity of those who are governed by it, to protect them from division, and to establish a central means whereby people might live peaceably together. Hus's explanation in *De Ecclesia*, she explains, became the cornerstone for the logic of the Articles of Prague.³⁷

In what follows, we will discuss a later work of Hus that summarises his conviction that *Lex Christi* is all that is needed for regulating the church, *De Sufficiencia Legis*. It is interesting in that it gives unmistakable evidence that Hus had embraced many of the tenets of the *Summa Theologie*, but also suggests that he had retained something of Wyclif's doctrine of divine ideas. First we will examine Hus's thought regarding Scripture and the divine ideas in his earlier, *Sentences* commentary, to establish that he was aware of the importance of the divine ideas in this theological approach, and then we will move to the later work.

³⁴ Bernard Töpfer, "LexChristi, Dominium, und Kirchliche Hierarchie bei Johannes Hus im Vergleich mit John Wyclif," in Seibt, ed., HENC, 162.

³⁵ František Šmahel, "Das Ideal einer Gerechten Ordnung und Sozialen Harmonie im Werk des Magisters Johannes Hus," in HENC 203–211.

³⁶ Ivana Dolejšová, "Eschatological Elements in Hus's Understanding of Orthopraxis," BRRP 4 (2002) 127–141.

³⁷ Ibid, 132.

Hus on Lombard's *Sentences*

Hus is not known as a great metaphysician, but his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* is useful in our discussion here. We know that he completed this commentary in 1409, five years after Wyclif's realism had become criminalised at Charles University. It is likely that Stanislaus of Znojmo played an important role in guiding Hus through this commentary, and given his own retreat from Wyclif's metaphysics, it is reasonable to suppose that Hus would say little directly suggesting Wyclif's realism.³⁸ Earlier scholars have complained about this, dismissing the commentary as bland and uninteresting.³⁹ But accompanying Flajšhans's edition of the *Sentences* commentary is Hus's *Incepcio*, an earlier set of questions not usually found with a *Sentences* commentary. Several manuscripts have this *Incepcio* along with the *Sentences* commentary, suggesting that at least some of Hus's early readers thought it worth appending to help in understanding something about the commentary. Read without the *Incepcio*, the *Sentences* commentary is remarkable for its care in avoiding either an Ockhamist conceptualist position, or a Scotist or a Thomist position. With the *Incepcio* as introduction, though, the *Sentences* commentary takes on a distinctly Wycliffite cast, particularly given the connections made between the conception of Scripture and the place of the divine ideas.

Four sets of questions make up the *Incepcio*, with one set of questions preceding each book of the *Sentences* commentary. The first question addresses Scripture's nature as a body of truths affording a real connection between the viator and Christ. When one reads and comprehends the truths contained in it, one is doing more than reading a book written by people; one is affording Christ a place within oneself, making it easier thereby to live by his commands. In the questions that accompany this first question, Hus discusses his contemporaries' arguments about theological issues connected to this question, in which discussion the question of the divine ideas arises. Štěpán Pálež, Hus suggests, has articulated a conception of the role divine ideas play in understanding the Incarnation that leaves something to be desired, but Hus does not attempt to rectify it. The second set of questions begins by returning to this issue as critical for our understanding of the relation of God to creation. The divine ideas exist eternally in the divine mind, are realised in creation, and realised again as we understand creation, thereby allowing us to see how God's will suffuses creation. Both sets of questions cover a wide range of issues, and they do not suggest a fully developed philosophical outlook, but then, neither does the *Sentences* commentary do more than brush

³⁸ Stanislaus wrote a commentary on Wyclif's metaphysics in which the divine ideas figure importantly, but soon thereafter was compelled to abjure from Wycliffism. See Stanislav Sousedik, "Stanislaus von Znaim (1414) Eine Lebensskizze," MPP 17 (1973) 37–56

³⁹ Dom Paul DeVooght, *L'Hérésie de Jean Huss* (Louvain, 1960) 56

up against the metaphysical questions that entail treatment of the divine ideas.⁴⁰ He mentions them as having real being in I.D.35 a.3, saying, “nothing that God knows is based in a creature, but in the divine idea of it.”⁴¹

Scripture occupies an important place in Hus’s theology, of course, and the first question of the *Inceptio* begins with consideration of the means by which the Trinity has given it to mankind for salvation. It is identical with knowledge, wisdom, and the highest teaching, which makes it the same as the Word of God. Thus, “it follows that every truth directive for man in serving his God ought to be believed either implicitly or explicitly in Holy Scripture, and held as such, since all of it is the law necessary for the fulfillment of the faith.”⁴² He then concludes that Scripture is from the highest cause, and is of divine things. But he absolutely stops at identifying it with the divine ideas, commenting that he offers his conclusion to “my master Štěpán Pálec, bachelor of holy theology, for correction, as he is most wise in metaphysics.” This is shortly before he notes that there are weaknesses in Pálec’s teachings about divine ideas, as mentioned above. It is indeed possible that Hus did *not* think that Scripture was connected to the divine ideas, but nowhere does say anything about the connection, despite having made it clear that he has a clear understanding of all the elements needed to make the connection. Given the danger he might have stumbled into had he asserted the connection between Scripture and the divine ideas, and the almost certain opprobrium he would have experienced from his peers had he explicitly denied the connection, it is probably best to recognise that Hus meaningfully says nothing about it.

De Sufficiencia Legis Christi

Probably the best example of Hus’s argument for the centrality of *Lex Christi* is his *De Sufficiencia Legis Christi ad Regnandum Ecclesiae*.⁴³ Here he distinguishes between the Law of Scripture, which includes all just human law consonant with Scripture in addition to Scripture, and the Law of Christ, “taught by Christ at the time of his life and the apostles, required for the rule of the church militant.”⁴⁴ Christ’s teachings, he continues, are designed especially for the internal spiritual life of a Christian; at their heart is the cultivation of *caritas* in the soul. If there were more added to it, Hus continues, it would either be implicit in Christ’s law, contradictory to it, or impertinent. This argument, prepared for the assembled notables at Constance, did little to help Hus, who seems to have been seeking to find common ground with

⁴⁰ *Super IV Sententiarum* Vaclav Flajšhans, ed., (Prague 1904); *Inceptio* I:3–12; *Inceptio* II:12–20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154/28–29

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.062.

⁴³ *Historia et Monumenta Joannis Hus*, (Nuremberg?, 1715) 55–60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

the Council. Given the light in which Walden portrays this argument, its error was likely perceived as manifest when the title was read aloud. One would expect to find a direct correlation to Wyclif's argument in Hus's *Expositio Decalogi*, but aside from a fairly innocuous division of the two tablets into those dealing with the Love of God, and those dealing with the Love of one's neighbor, there is no evident connection.⁴⁵

Loserth has emphasised *De Sufficiencia Legis*'s dependence on Wyclif, suggesting that it may have been written before Hus went to Constance, given the extensive sections from *De Civili Dominio* that appear in it. "That, accordingly, which Hus intended to deliver at the Council before the assembled fathers, was nothing else but Wyclif pure and unadulterated."⁴⁶ R. R. Betts rightly points out that this is not mere repetition of Wyclif's words, but a very selective reading of him. Loserth ignores Hus's Czech writings, Betts says, and was mostly looking for a ghost of Wyclif in some of Hus's Latin works.⁴⁷ The question that matters for *De Sufficiencia Legis* is not so much one of whether Hus made use of Wyclif's words, for he certainly did. The issue is the place of the idea of the centrality of Christ's law for the governance of the church; how much of Hus's argument is Wyclif's, and how much is his own? And how has the idea as articulated by Wyclif in the two *Summas* evolved?

De Sufficiencia Legis is structured in classical academic style, as a question, (Whether the Law of Christ, true God and true man, is sufficient for the rule of the Church militant?), followed by "it would seem not," definitions, the counterargument grounded in Christ's place as both man and God, ten conclusions that follow regarding his role as legislator, and the five conclusions to be drawn from the assertion that Christ's law is sufficient. Wyclif's words figure throughout the piece, and when *De Sufficiencia* was abridged later, they figure importantly there, also.⁴⁸ To Loserth, this was sufficient for announcing that Hus had done no more than parrot Wyclif. But Hus's careful attention to defining law is worth examination; it is clear that Hus has done more than simply repeat Wyclif's explanation of what a law is and how it works. In *De Mandatis Divinis*, Wyclif had argued that a law is a truth directive of a creature's attaining its proper end. The primary law, he says, is the uncreated right, the truth, as expressed by Christ, "I am the way, the truth, and the light." [John 14:6] In this way, God is most properly the law we must learn and obey.⁴⁹ Insofar as creatures are themselves the realisation of God's

⁴⁵ SSL. Wyclif teaches this in his Sermon on Mt 22:38, *Sermones* IV:409–422; it can be found earlier in Grosseteste, see James McEvoy, "Robert Grosseteste and the Ten Commandments," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 58 (1991) 167–205.

⁴⁶ Johann Loserth, *Huss und Wiclif* (Munich, 1925²) 279.

⁴⁷ R. R. Betts, "English and Czech Influences on the Hussite Movement," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, IV Series, 21 (1939) 71–102. Loserth also ignored Hus's *Sentences* commentary.

⁴⁸ See the Appendix to this article for details.

⁴⁹ DMD c. 4, 30–32.

truths, are themselves a “second law.” Substantial form, directive of the essential characteristics and the potential range of accidents of each creature, is a “formative law,” and conscience functions similarly, being formative of the mind to virtue. Insofar as accidents inhere in substances, they obey the “subjective law,” and insofar as prime matter combines with form as individuating factor, it obeys the “compositive law.”

The ties to Wyclif’s conception of the divine ideas should be evident: the ideas exemplify the order God intends for creatures, and the laws here described bind creatures in the orders of their kinds. Wyclif goes on to describe the binding normative force of the golden rule, the most fundamental and universal of all moral laws. Likewise, he continues, all the other sciences are structured according to their own special bodies of laws: the mathematical laws are what professors of mathematics teach, the laws of natural bodies what natural philosophers teach, and so forth. In general, Wyclif concludes, some laws are created, and others are uncreated: “some are the law of nature, others against the law of nature, and specifying those that regulate human life, some is divine law that regulates in morals, and others human law that orders men so far as the goods of nature, fame, or fortune.” People seem to value the latter more than the former, because cupidity lies at the base of all evil.⁵⁰

Wyclif discusses law again in *De Civili Dominio* I cc. 17 and 18; given Hus’s use of the next two chapters of this treatise in *De Sufficiencia*, it will be useful to describe this discussion as well. Chapter 17 begins with the thesis Hus would take up, namely that *lex Christi* is sufficient for governing all human life, and particularly for the rule of the church militant. As Wyclif would argue in chapters 19 and 20, and as Hus would repeat, Christ is the perfect legislator, and has prescribed the ideal regimen for the health of the human soul. This regimen needs no addition; what appears lacking is either implicitly contained within the law of Christ, or is extraneous to it. Christ’s law binds man to God, and so also to his fellow man, far more effectively than any other law, and is all that is needed for the rule of the church.

The next chapter broadens the scope to include a discussion of divine law, canon law, and civil law as well. Wyclif briefly mentions that divine law is explicated through Christ’s words and teachings, and proceeds to the relation of civil to canon law. Canon law is instituted by prelates, and is meant to coerce those rebelling against the church’s holy rules; these laws either are extraneous to *lex Christi*, or implicit within it. Civil law is the result of the fall of man, and is intended for the regulation of property and all that follows upon that institution. It is a necessary evil, and since the donation of Constantine, has become so mixed into canon law that both bring no end of trouble to the church. This is the basis for Wyclif’s belief that the civil lord should relieve the church of all its property, and reform its governance according to Christ’s law, which is the thesis of the whole of *De Civili Dominio*.

⁵⁰ DMD 14, 32/17–22.

Hus explores the nature of law in *De Sufficiencia Legis*, but not in the terms Wyclif has presented in either of these two treatises. Instead, he makes use of Wyclif's Latin sermon on James 1:22.⁵¹ Law is either nuncupative or true. True law is the truth directive of salvation, and most fully the first truth, considered in the abstract, and more concretely, it is the set of truths in their proper kinds. Some of these are divine, and some are human. The divine truths, or laws, are the law of God or of Christ, as expressed in Scripture, but there is another sense in which any true law that can be implied by Scripture is also the law of God. Human laws are either invented by man, but contained implicitly in Scripture, or they are explicitly derived from Scripture, or they are extraneous to Scripture. The latter can only be described as evil.

One may simply respond to this by saying that Hus just picked another section of Wyclif for articulating his argument in *De Sufficiencia Legis*. This is shortsighted, though; if he had chapters 19 and 20 of *De Civili Dominio* I available to him, it is reasonable to suppose that he had chapters 17 and 18 as well. Why did he not use the description of canon and civil law provided there? Why did he instead turn to a definition of law that already assumes the point he was trying to prove, namely that the law of Christ is all that is needed to govern the church, and indeed all mankind? Certainly in so doing, he set the minds of his audience at Constance against him. Towards the end of *De Sufficiencia*, he admits that canon law is indeed useful in the functioning of the church, just as Wyclif had in *De Civili Dominio* II. Why did he not simply use the definition of law Wyclif provided in *De Civili Dominio* I? The only reasonable explanation is that Hus could not envision a secular lord – king or emperor – being able to relieve the church of its massive wealth and reform it, as Wyclif did. If he wrote *De Sufficiencia* in Constance, as it seems he did, he had already been betrayed by Wenceslaus and Sigismund, which would be enough to convince him that Wyclif's vision was at best a fantasy.

Wyclif and “Hussite Philosophy”

Hus's description of law as consonant with truth, particularly the first truth considered in the abstract, and the set of truths in their genera considered in the concrete is worthy of further consideration. As was obvious when we surveyed the argument of *De Ideis*, when Wyclif refers to truths in their causes, or in their genera, the reference is either to divine ideas or universals. In this case, their identity with the first truth, which is the divine mind, means that the reference is to the divine ideas. Hus used Wyclif's description from the Latin sermon, in which this reference to the identity of just laws with truth appears verbatim, and it is difficult to escape concluding that this was no accident. It may be because Hus wanted to avoid talk of reformatory civil lords,

⁵¹ See *Sermones* III:239–248.

but it is also possible that he used the sermon description to underscore the connection of *Lex Christi* with the truths of the divine mind.

So Professor Herold's suspicion that there is a tie between the teachings of *De Ideis* and the "Hussite philosophy" is well founded, and as described here, one can trace the doctrine from the theoretical to the practical within Wyclif, and from there into at least one of the important theological figures in the Hussite revolution. It seems likely that other theologians were also familiar with this teaching, given its prominence in the writings of Stanislaus of Znojmo and Štěpán Pálec, and this might prove a useful avenue for further thinking about the place of *Lex Christi* in the Hussite movement.

Appendix

De Sufficiencia Legis appears in *Historia et monumenta Ioannis Hus* in its full form, but an abbreviated version can be found in MS Prague, NK ČR XXIII F 204 86r. This was edited by F. M. Bartoš and P. Spunar in *Soupis pramenů k literární činnosti M. Jana Husa a M. Jeronýma Pražského* Prague, 1965, 72. I append a translation of this abbreviated version to aid the reader in capturing the sense of Hus's argument.

"Know, most beloved, that the law of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, suffices in itself for the rule of the church militant, because Christ commands the church militant to observe his law under pain of mortal sin, as is clear from the course of the same law. But it obligates no creature to anything that it cannot do, because to do so would be unreasonable, therefore the church militant is able to carry out the law of Christ. And insofar as it is obeyed most purely, it is that much the better. It is argued that the order of the law of the universe is enough for the rule of the whole world, but the law of Jesus Christ contains within itself every particular law, therefore the true conclusion is clear, insofar as holy Scripture contains within itself all truth, but all law is truth, therefore the law of Christ contains this best law. The assumption is proven by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana* at the end, where he says, "Whatever a man teaches that it is beyond Scripture, if it is poisonous, he is damned, if it is useful, one finds it therein." Third it is argued when the sufficiency of the law of Christ is not exhausted through the conversion by which it converted the greatly rebellious people in the primitive church to the apostolic life, it is enough to have converted many, and so to individuals of the elect, which they could not do without such a conversion, as is proven by the Apostle in Romans 10. But whatever is enough to have converted, is enough to regulate one in life and mores, since it is simple, therefore the law of Jesus Christ is enough to rule the church militant. Fourth, the greatest power, the greatest knowing, and the greatest benevolence does not give order to something imperfectly, but constitutes a law itself. "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil" from Matthew

5. If he came for this, as he says, and he cannot lie, then without a doubt he has done this.⁵² Fifth, Jesus Christ is the best physician for the soul, as we perceive through the faith, but he does not perfectly cure the soul as would a beloved spouse whom he would leave in a world suffused with sin without having left it a law sufficient to direct it with proper health, therefore Christ has left a sufficient law.⁵³ Sixth, Christ requires nothing of man save love, and the means to it, but all of this is taught most efficaciously in the law of Christ. Seventh, it is argued by deduction to the impossible, for if some other law were required in addition, it would be A, the obedience to which would be daily useful and simple, and for the whole church, for otherwise A would not be good as Augustine says in *De Libero Arbitrio* Book 1, c.5. It is certain that if a law added on to the Law of Christ were more perfect, it should be more beloved by man than the Law of Christ, and its legislator should be more beloved than Jesus Christ, which consequence is blasphemous, and the reasoning holds through this medium just as a law is related to a law, so the law giver is related to the law giver.⁵⁴

“From which it follows that the Law of Christ is more perfect, from which one cannot take anything away, nor can one add anything, according to Proverbs 30[:5–6], “Every word of God proves true, He is a shield to those who take shelter in him; do not add to his words or else he will rebuke you and you will be found a liar.” And so this is the thinking of the blessed Chrysostom in Homily 22, “Every other teacher is a servant to this Law because neither can one add beyond the law from its sense, nor can one take away according to proper understanding, but one preaches just that which is held in the law, nor can human law directive [affect] what divine wisdom says. Thus Solomon says, ‘Neither add to the word of the Lord nor take anything from it, because whoever dares to do this, supposes himself to be more than God.’”⁵⁵ It follows that human laws are included in the divine law, indeed they are the Law of Christ, etc.

“Just as the mechanical and liberal arts [function] according to the purpose of the law of Christ, so one should serve as ruled by it. Mechanics necessarily are of preparing the body, and the liberal [arts] for another just as the seven arts dispose one for understanding Holy Scripture. And civil laws should be for restraining the enemies of the church, and canon laws decreed by the church taken from Holy Scripture should be executed according to due order and method.”⁵⁶

⁵² DCD I c. 17, 119/3–10.

⁵³ DCD I c. 17, 119/11–22.

⁵⁴ Similar structurally to DCD I c. 17, 120/31–35; the phrase “*ut lex ad legem, sic legifer ad legiferum*” appears in DCD III c. 12, 202/7 and in *De Blasphemia* 45.23.

⁵⁵ *Opus Imperfectum* Hom. 22 and Proverbs 30:5–6 both cited in DCD I c. 44, 430–431.

⁵⁶ DCD I c. 17, 124/15–23.