

Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Humanities

***THESES OF THE PHD DISSERTATION***

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VOX, IMAGO, LITTERA: NICHOLAS LOVE'S "*THE BLESSED LYF OF  
JESU CHRIST*"

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## SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

*A Meditationes Vitae Christi*,<sup>1</sup> a work attributed to Bonaventure, but written by the Franciscan Johannes Caulibus, enjoyed a great popularity. It was composed in the early fourteenth century, and around 1400 it was translated into Middle English by a Carthusian monk, Nicholas Love, with the title *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*.<sup>2</sup> Love's work was addressed to the laity to serve private devotion through meditation. The *Mirroure* contained the official approbation of Archbishop Arundel,<sup>3</sup> appended to it in 1410, guaranteeing its appropriateness for the instruction of the faith and the refutation of Lollardy. The very rapid dissemination of the text was partly due to the popularity of its source text but also, in the same measure, to this approbation. The *Mirroure* was one main device of the official Church in the fight against the Lollard heresy. The main focus of my dissertation was to seek a new and more comprehensive understanding of how Nicholas Love built his strategies against Wyclif's ideas into his translation, how his work exerted his influence against Lollardy both by its text and the illuminations of the text, and also how he responded to the new demand for devotional creativity of his lay readership. Thus my work attempted at producing a modified image of how Love related to his lay audience in allowing them access not only in the theologizing vernacular but also to spiritual experience.

Michael G. Sargent, in his recent edition of the *Mirroure*, provided a detailed analysis of the anti-Wyclifite stances present in the text. He did not claim to have presented a full list of these, and he concentrated mainly on inserted passages which Love himself endowed with a note *contra Lollardos*, or on the lengthier inserted passages on the sacraments. However, from my research on the text I concluded that an important part of the programme was built in more indirectly as well in the text of the *Mirroure*, touching upon more aspects and points of critique exercised against Lollardy

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<sup>1</sup> *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, szerk. Balduinus Distelbrink, *Bonaventurae Scripta: authentica, dubia vel spuria critice recensita*, Subsidia scientifica Franciscalia 5 (Rome: Istituto storico cappuccini, 1975). A modern angol fordítás: Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ, An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. Ital. 115* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Michael G. Sargent, szerk. *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ. A Full Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005.)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Arundel (1353-1414), Archbishop of York from 1388, then Archbishop of Canterbury from 1399.

than previously considered. In Chapter 2 supported this thesis by a textual analysis of the *Mirroure* considering several factors of the process of translation, that is, the compilation, the inclusions of original passages and source study. By doing so, I added to the understanding of Love's originality as a translator in his concern to combat heresy.

I found it important and attuning with the characteristics of its time that the *Mirroure* should be regarded in its complexity as being a text not only written but also copied into a manuscript: as a product which exerted its influence on its readers also through its material forms, by its visual appearance and its illustrations. Therefore I undertook a study to find out whether the illuminations of the *Mirroure* manuscripts could or did carry similar anti-Lollard messages.

The two manuscripts, which contain a surprisingly large cycle of illuminations, are those of the National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 18.1.7, kept in Edinburgh, and the New York Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 648. These manuscripts contain texts of great importance, and the illuminations, mainly those of the Advocates copy, are among the finest of late medieval English illuminations. Supported by Kathleen L. Scott's investigations about the influence of Lollardy on the style of book-production and illumination,<sup>4</sup> I focused on the reflection of this influence in the iconography. Following the study of Ann Eljenholm Nichols<sup>5</sup> on the Lollard influence on the sacramental representations, I attempted to complement it with a closer look study of manuscript illumination, also investigating other iconographic themes besides the sacramental representations. I conducted my research on the implications of an anti-Lollard campaign taking the text-image context as a coherent unit. By the comparative study of the two manuscripts in Chapter 3, I investigated the way the anti-Lollard programme was encoded not only in the text but also in the illustrations of the text. In doing this I contributed to the understanding of Lollardy, not only as affecting the style of image-production of guilds and illuminators,<sup>6</sup> but also as a factor influencing the illumination of manuscripts from an iconographical point of view, investigating the choice of pictorial cycle, pictorial content, iconography. I also focused on how the illuminations in the two manuscripts form, each in turn, a special context to the text.

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1996), vol. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *Seeable Signs. The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments 1350-1544* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1994)

<sup>6</sup> See Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*.

Chapter 4 addresses questions of the dissemination of the text as well as those of manuscript ownership attesting to the influence the text and the illuminations could exert on their readership. I also treated here the issue of the composition of the audience, making some interpretative attempts on the basis of internal evidence of the *Mirroure* and considering external factors.

In Chapter 5 I addressed the issue of meditation versus contemplation examining the question: in what measure did Love offer the practice of meditation to his readers, debating the position postulated by Michelle Karnes who claims that he was restrictive, not allowing contemplation. The *Mirroure* did not formulate explicitly as a goal to help his readers attain contemplation. However, in the course of his text, Love did not limit himself to presenting only an exclusivist model of meditation from which all traces of reaching to higher contemplation are excluded. After a short summary of the context offered by other contemporary works on meditation-contemplation, in the course of revealing the hints Love offered his readers about how to reach contemplation, I treated several questions. The first was Love's altered instructions about meditation-contemplation, the second his concept of the exegetical work such imaginative meditation demanded from the readers, the third was the study of what kind of audience Love addressed when creating the several strata of his work including advice on contemplation, the fourth the different ways how Love introduced his instructions on contemplation, the fifth the restrictions he imposed on the imaginative activity of his readers, the sixth his recounting of his own contemplative experience, and finally a short analysis of how Love formulated his anti-Wycliffite messages in relation to his theory of acceding mystical-contemplative experience in the *Treatise on the Sacrament*.

In the last chapter of my dissertation I used the context of some late medieval sermons written to instruct against the doctrines of the Wycliffites. I did so to highlight the originality of Love's strategies used for the same purpose. Preaching was a powerful tool in the hands of the Church to combat heresy, and the similarities of audience, of the genres and the same instructional effort present a common background against which the similarities and differences of the strategies the authors of the selected sermons and those of Love could be projected. I put Love's *Mirroure* in the context of some sermons which were addressed to a very similar, mixed audience and also contain anti-Wycliffite messages. I chose examples of sermons which are characteristic of their types, encompassing a large scale. The chosen homiletic texts form a chain of successive steps

from the written treatise in the form of a sermon (Love's *Treatise*), through the written sermon meant to be read (the *Macaronic sermons*<sup>7</sup>), followed by sermons written to be delivered to a mixed audience (*The Ross sermons*<sup>8</sup>) and finally closing with sermons written definitely and emphatically to be delivered mainly to the most common, massively illiterate laity (John Mirk's *Festial*<sup>9</sup>). The success of the works of Love and Mirk, in opposition to the macaronic-Ross doublet, was due to the subtlety of their anti-Lollard and pro-orthodoxy strategy. Whereas the authors of the macaronic sermons and those of the Ross sermons used a harsh admonitory tone, Mirk and Love presented their anti-Lollard criticism in milder terms. They most presumably were aware of the doctrinal heterogeneity of their audience, that is, knew of the multiplicity of effects, ideas, and views which characterized their late-medieval English believers and they tailored their strategies accordingly.

In conclusion, I attempted to present Nicholas Love's *Mirroure* as an effective and well structured and formed masterpiece. It confronted the manifold challenge of Lollardy, at the same time it catered for the new demands of his readership for spiritual enterprises. In this "project" of his, Love used similarly manifold devices in ways which have so far not been revealed by scholarly work. My investigations resulted in showing a modified image about how late medieval orthodox authors reacted to the challenge of Lollardy. Beside the harsh repression exercised by the Church in several cases, some of its defenders also learned to value certain undeniable achievements of Wyclifites and made attempts at using these for their own purpose to strengthen their believers in their orthodox beliefs. Nicholas Love was one of these authors. The popularity of his translation attests to the success of his strategy.

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<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons. Bilingualism and preaching in late-medieval England*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Middle English Sermons*. Ed. Woodburn O. Ross. EETS Original Series 209, 1940. (Milwood, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1987)

<sup>9</sup> *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. Ed. Theodor Erbe. EETS Extra Series 96, 1905. (Milwood, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1987)

## ***OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ***THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE INDIVIDUAL ANALYSES***

### *The Text of *The Mirroure of the Blessed Life of Jesu Criste**

Complementing previous works done by Michael Sargent<sup>10</sup> and Kantik Ghosh,<sup>11</sup> I attempted to enlarge our understanding of how Love created his strategy against Wyclifism in his translation.

- Anti-Lollard messages had already been implanted in the compilation by a deliberate reorganising of the original material. This resulted in the creation of such emphasised thematic groups as the scandal-group and the great sacramental section.
- Besides the passages are annotated with the inscription “contra Lollardos” and apart from those detected by Michael Sargent some other passages could be identified as carrying anti-Lollards hints, thus a more hidden network of polemics against Wycliffites was created. I highlighted as relevant with regard to Lollardy Love’s treatment of themes as the *contra superbiam* one, personal and prescribed prayers, the Virgin, and the representation of spiritual realities taught by the Church, though invisible for the “bodily syght,” such as the Trinity, the Celestial Hierarchy and finally the real presence in the Eucharist.
- I found evidence that Love used Suso’s *Horologium* as an inspirational source for the expository part of the *Treatise on the Sacrament*, introducing new elements into the sacramental instructional discourse.

### *The Text and the Images*

The illustrations of the two richly illuminated manuscripts, through their common features, allowed me to deduce that the two manuscripts share a common programme, which is attested by:

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<sup>10</sup> Michael G. Sargent, ed., *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ. A Critical Edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686* (New York: Garland, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature)*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

- the several indirect allusions to the Eucharist,
- the missing Last Supper scene,
- the Trinitarian representations, abhorred by Lollards,
- the figure of Judas as a dissenter,
- the stressing of the legitimacy of the Church and its teaching by the Teaching Christ
- and most of all by the Celestial Hierarchy, represented so often (which is unique), throughout both pictorial cycles, with the climax in the Coronation scene.

The presence of all these motifs demonstrates that the illuminations are in perfect congruence with the aim of the text of the *Mirroure* and do reflect, through their methods, the programme of strengthening the faith of the believer in the sacraments and also of the feeling of belonging to the legitimate Church.

#### *The Question of Readership and the Reception of the Mirroure Manuscripts*

The *Mirroure* manuscripts enjoyed a wide dissemination from the clerical milieu, through the aristocratic families, down to the moderately wealthy urban strata. By the modes of dissemination and the display of the illuminated manuscripts in this chapter speculation was made about their possible influence, reception, and about the composition of the readership Love was conjecturing for his work.

- The Advocates manuscript, being in the possession of the wealthy aristocratic Grey family, was most presumably displayed for a large number of the household membership and guests, attesting to the wealth but also to the piety and orthodoxy of his owners, and thus reaching a wide readership.
- The common programme of the two illumination cycles is not continued by the incunabula of the *Mirroure*. Although several of the printed editions of the text contain cycles of woodcuts, these do not betray the same anti-Lollard intention as the manuscript illuminations of the Advocates and Morgan Mss.

- Defining the audience Love could have in mind when writing his translation is a complex task as it demanded a close textual study as well as an investigation into the contemporary habits of practising religion, by a populace, which was far from being homogeneous regarding their religious colouring. My reading of the *Mirroure* offered a more varied picture than Love's brief statements that he intended his work for the "symple soules, men and women." Besides the committed orthodox, Love also thought of those whose degree of orthodoxy is "hard to define" as his intended audience, may also be of Lollards. This hybridity was characteristic not only of the readership but also of texts. I studied the collection of miscellanies of the Pierpont Morgan library which contains the intriguing company of the *Mirroure* next to the Brigittine extract and the Lollard tract advocating biblical translation. I found the explanation most evidenced that the latter found its way next to the *Mirroure* as its origin and ideological filling may not have been identified as dangerous heretical material.

### *The Mirroure: Some Directions Towards Contemplation*

The other axis of my investigations was the nature of the *Mirroure* as meditational manual. Modifying Karnes's views that Love diminished the purport of his original text as he banned all clues, which would help his readers attain contemplation,<sup>12</sup> I stated that Love was building elements into his text encouraging even contemplation. I supported this point on the basis of numerous textual evidence found in the text of the *Mirroure* and of the *Treatise* attached to it, and considering the context offered by other texts advancing contemplation. Love's originality consists in the fact that he did not exclude the possibility of contemplation even of a consciously targeted active, lay readership, besides his primary aim to offer them material for meditation.

#### *1. The question of distancing*

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<sup>12</sup> Michelle Karnes, "Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ." *Speculum* 82 (2007), 280-408., and Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

- Love made systematic changes to the original Latin text of the *Meditationes* by adding the clusters “by inwarde ymaginacion” or “by devout ymaginacion” to the instructions to the readers about how to meditate. His motivation was rather an attempt to precision than to distance his readers from the scenes to be meditated upon. These specifications did not restrict the space assured to the imaginative freedom of the readers either.

## 2. *The Relation of the Mirrour to Scripture and Exegesis*

- Love shifted the idea of “seeing” applied by the *Meditationes* to a “reasonable supposing” in his *Mirrour* as he was more conscious of the exegetical nature of all imaginary activity which is based on a scriptural text, even if a mediated one. Therefore in his formulations he was more precise, in order to assure a relative correctness of such an exegetical activity. Notwithstanding his concerns born of a heightened consciousness and anxiety for scriptural authenticity, Love encouraged his lay readers to an imaginative personal interpretation of biblical narratives and thus he gives proof of his audacity. This courage allies him with the Wyclifites who also vociferate for a personal reading and interpretation of the Bible by the laity.
- The other common factor between Love and Wyclif is that they both counted on the same agent to guarantee the correctness of such an exegesis: the direct inspirational work of the Holy Spirit, which Love usually (and traditionally) denoted as the work of grace.
- Decisive differences emerge, though: whereas Wyclif was positive about the infinite possibilities of such personal exegesis (or did not dissolve his recognition of the problem of “obscure meanings”), Love set limits to the practice of lay hermeneutics. One limit is that imposed in cases of doctrinal issues of great importance which cannot be interpreted by “natural reason,” such as the Trinity or the Eucharist, where the guaranteeing factor has to be the doctrinal authority of the Church, being corporeally inspired by the Holy Spirit, and thus ensures correct exegesis. The other limiting factor was, paradoxically, the coexisting inexhaustible infiniteness and the limitedness of the Scriptures themselves, rendering each attempt of interpretation reduced, partial and limited, being either individual or institutionalized.

### 3. *Audience*

I found that Love had several kinds of audiences in mind and offered a wider range of spiritual possibilities than hitherto supposed by scholarship.

- The context of the tradition offers another image of Love's alleged conservatism: although aligned with the range of other contemporary works on meditation-contemplation, when taking into consideration the details of composition, the intended audiences, and finally what the text actually reveals, he appears rather revolutionary.
- Besides principally focusing on his lay readership, (the commissioners of this oeuvre,) which counts itself as a novelty, Love was aware of the fact that his text will reach other strata of society as well; that is clerics and monastics, male and female.
- Love wrote for a Latinate lay readership which he did not differentiate much from the unlearned or relatively learned clergy.
- Love honoured his lay readers at least with passages which point towards the advancement to contemplation in a conscious way. Thus Love did actually more for the democratisation of spiritual knowledge than his precursors.
- Instead of operating only with the binary of clerical and lay, Love seems to have had in mind another categorization of his audience as well: a categorization according to their intellectual, furthermore, spiritual affinity. He seems to have operated by supposing also a stratum which, either lay or cleric, was susceptible of the more advanced spiritual depths he offers besides the traditional meditational aid.

### 4. *Access to Contemplation*

Love did not intend to exclude actives from high contemplation definitively, although he did not expect such endeavours from the part of the majority of his readers. He fashioned his text for this majority, the "commune", who stayed content with meditation, the success and accessibility of which he could guarantee. However, he did not exclude that some of his readers may aspire higher, and, which was also a crucial element of the game, these were the ones who were called by divine choice to more. For them, he

constructed a web of helping accessories which might offer assistance to acceding to contemplative experiences. Love applied basically three main strategies:

- Firstly by offering hints, data and further reading about contemplation,
- Secondly by alluding to the possibility of high contemplation, by recounting his own contemplative experience.
- Thirdly, in some passages Love even suggested that all should and could aspire for mystical experiences, and he closed his *Mirroure* by a prayer for the fulfilment of such desires.

#### 5. *Restrictions: The Incarnation-Trinity Issue*

An important restriction of Love on unlimited imagination appears in three cases:

- where the Scripture does not provide details,
- on issues where the contemplation of spiritual realities transcends natural reason, as in the case of the Trinity and of the Eucharist. In my interpretation Love's restrictions are to a great extent motivated by his fears of falling into heresy, that is, by his anti-Lollard cares and campaign. The text of the passage of the Incarnation-Trinity is formulated in such a way that it becomes closely related to the mystery of the Eucharist, a mystery truly unattainable by human "reson". The terminology and argumentation are very similar to those which Love will insert into his passages about the Eucharist. Here Love limited the working of the imagination which would lead to the contemplation of divine realities. However, he sweetened his restrictions by creating the atmosphere of partaking, thus also blurring the boundaries between lay and cleric, author and audience.

#### 6. *Sacramental Exposition, Mystical Experience and Christ's Presence in the Soul*

- Love built his Eucharistic teaching into the text of the *Mirroure* in the scene of the Last Supper and later into his *Treatise on the Sacrament*. It may be briefly characterised by doctrinal correctness, a surprisingly sophisticated theological terminology in English and a similarly complex rhetoric, directed against the Wyclifite tenets denying transubstantiation. I detected an essential element of this discourse: Love's unique invention of linking

Eucharistic doctrine to mystical experience, exposed to refute in a more efficient way the Lollard tenets about the Eucharist.

- Love, in his attempt to offer assistance to those who aspire for more elevated spiritual experiences, also used a second strategy. This consisted in informing his readers how to reach mystical encounters. He described this presence in very similar terms as the often quoted authorities use on contemplation. The same conceptual and terminological set was applied in the case of his main topic: in the narration of his own mystical experience, which he inserted in the exposition of the Last Supper and which he alluded to later, and in his *Treatise on the Sacrament*. The description, that is, sharing a first-hand mystical experience strongly implied that such a phenomenon may be close, within reach. Thus Love, in spite of his declaration that he wrote for the ‘symple soules’ who have to be fed with the light milk of doctrine and not with the “sadde mete of grete clargie and of contemplacion”<sup>13</sup> fed his readers with sophisticated sacramental theology and with several paths showing the way to contemplative mystical experiences, to equip them against the erroneous doctrine of the Lollards.

### 7. *The Treatise on the Sacrament*

- In the *Treatise* Love continued the exposition of his original invention of connecting the sacramental exposition to the mystical experiencing of the taste of spiritual sweetness. Those who do not feel the sweetness are sinners or heretics. “*Fele*” thus became the criterion of belief or unbelief, of being in truth or error, ultimately, of being in grace or out of grace, which was expanded to such extremes as being saved or damned, belonging to Christ or the Antichrist. Love formulated his theory in terms of who is worthy or not of the divine grace which grants a transcendental spiritual understanding of the true essence of God’s mysteries, and also a “lyking” pleasure in tasting the spiritual sweetness, the reward of the faithful.

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<sup>13</sup> Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 10.

*Variations of Anti-Lollard Strategies for a Mixed Audience: The Mirroure and Some Late Medieval Polemic Sermons*

Put into the context of some contemporary sermons containing anti-Lollard passages, it became clear that Love treated his readers in the *Mirroure* in a more respectful way than the other authors of sermons, although they might have counted with a very similar audience. Love and Mirk seem to apply the same strategy, although to a different public: Mirk's audience was the common, in the majority completely illiterate stratum, whereas that of Love was constituted mainly of the literate, urban and moderately well-read middle-class. Both authors' concern was to ensure their audience of their sympathetic attitude towards them, which stands in sharp contrast with that of the Macaronic-Ross doublet. Love gave proof of a better psychological sense applying his strategy of refutation in more refined ways. The visible fruit of this is the much greater popularity of his text, together with those of John Mirk, allying Love's ways.

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„Késő-középkori drámák Wycliff gondolatisága ellenében.”

25-27 January 2013: Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English (HUSSE 11) Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, English Department.

“From *Pagina* to *Pulpitus*: Variations of Late-Medieval Strategies from the Manuscript Page to Performance.”

17-18 May 2013: Reflections on the Immediate Experience of God in the European Tradition Conference organised by the Research Group on Mystical Traditions. Károli Gáspár Reformed University, Budapest.

“Confined Meditation or Mediated Contemplation: Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.”

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