

Chapter 9

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

Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy

Nicholas Love, the prior of the Carthusians of Mount Grace, translated the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* into Middle English around 1410, entitling it *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesu Christe*, as a means to provide his readers with material for private meditational devotion.¹ The *Mirror* was composed as part of an existing rich tradition of manuals written to instruct and aid meditation and contemplation. Nonetheless, because of Love's explicit claim that he wrote his work primarily for an active, lay audience, the *Mirror* was a new initiative. This characteristic of the text attracted critical attention. The idea that the *Mirror* was intended for meditation has been pressed with new vehemence and insight by Michelle Karnes.² Her main thesis is that Love, in translating the *Meditationes*, created a new, much more restrictive work that consciously distances his readers from any advancement from meditation towards the practice of high contemplation, unlike its Latin original. My interpretation is a somewhat modified one. Although it seems true that many late-

¹The most recent edition of the text was made by Michael G. Sargent, ed., *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). For the *Meditationes*, see *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, ed. Balduinus Distelbrink, *Bonaventurae Scripta: authentica, dubia vel spuria critice recensita*, Subsidia scientifica Franciscalia 5 (Rome: Istituto Storico Cappuccini, 1975). The modern English translation of the work is provided by 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). For a more recent translation, see *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, translated by F. X. Taney, A. Miller, and C. M. Stallings-Taney. (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999).

²Michelle 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).

Z. Péri-Nagy (✉)
Faculty of Teacher Training, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary,
Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: peri.zsuzsanna@kre.hu

medieval mystical texts, like that of Love, do differentiate between the 'professional' contemplatives, who are favoured with access to high contemplation, and the laity, who are mainly offered the lower meditation, I find some fine tuning is necessary. Although Love himself formulated his endeavour to fit the text to the needs of his lay audience several times in his work, one should not always take his pronouncements at absolute face value. His text, in my interpretation, by a close reading yields a more complex picture both of his endeavours and of its outcome. I would assert that although the primary aim of Love was teaching and fostering meditation, and although he did not expect such endeavours from the part of the majority of his readers, he did not exclude his audience from the possibility of reaching and experiencing the phase of contemplation.

9.1 Sacramental Exposition, Mystical Experience and Christ's Presence in the Soul

Love fashions his text for the majority, the 'commune', who will stay contented with meditation, the success and accessibility of which he can guarantee. However, he does not exclude the possibility that some of his readers may aspire to more. For them, he constructs a web of helpful accessories that may offer assistance in acceding to contemplative experiences. These accessories are of different sorts, and permeate the text of the *Mirroure* from beginning to end. Love applies another main strategy as well: he raises the expectations of his readers about reaching mystical encounters. Love achieves this goal by the narration of his own mystical experience, which he inserts in the exposition about the Last Supper and which he alludes to later, in his *Treatise on the Sacrament*. This present paper will focus on these two parts of Love's text.

The exposition of Love's sacramental doctrine embedded into the Last Supper scene is a very rich text, still offering room for ample research, even though M. G. Sargent, Sarah Beckwith and David Aers have already done some work on it.³ It may be briefly characterised by doctrinal correctness, a surprisingly sophisticated theological terminology in English, and a similarly complex rhetoric, directed against the Wycliffite tenets denying transubstantiation. I detect another essential element in Love's discourse: Love's unique idea of linking Eucharistic doctrine to mystical experience.

Love built his Eucharistic teaching into the text of the *Mirroure* in two places, into the chapter containing the scene of the Last Supper and later into his *Treatise on the Sacrament*. In both places the account of the mystical encounter is preceded by the narration of several other miracles of the Eucharist, many of which contain visionary

³ See Sargent, *Mirroure*, Introduction; Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body. Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 41; and David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 12–28. Aers's discussion of the *Mirror* is on pp. 12–28 and 165–73.

experiences. The *Treatise*, being much longer, develops his main argument. Love prepares some of these by the Last Supper passage. One main element of this argument is a contrast built between reason and miracle, which represents the domain of unreasonable transcendental realities having their own irrational, yet still valid transcendental logic. This contrast will be elaborated upon more fully with masterly rhetoric art in the *Treatise*.

With an eye on confuting the Lollard heresy, Love writes that the Apostles "left their natural reson of manne, beleuyng without any doute, þat he [Christ] was god & miht not erre. And so most þou do þat wolt fele & haue þe vertu & þe gostly swetenes of þis blessed sacrament!"⁴ (Italics mine.) Thus Love conjectures that a conscious suspending of natural reason and of its speculations is needed to accept the miracle of the sacramental presence guaranteed by the authority of Christ as described in the Scriptures, equated with the authority of the Church. Furthermore, Love, with an ingenious turn, states that this acceptance of the correct Eucharistic doctrine will serve as a prerogative for feeling the mystical sweetness of the Eucharist. He develops further the logic of this conflict between reason and miracle, as he designates the essence and constitution of the sacrament of the Eucharist as "reasonable," and shifts the working of the miraculous element to the domain of the effects of it. Eucharistic presence creates miraculous, that is, transcendental states and experiences in the chosen souls: "gracious & resonable making & ordinance of þat blessed sacrament, and after þe gret worþines & merveyulous worching therof in chosen soules to confort & strenging of oure feiþ."⁵ Love even calls for a conscious activity in all his readers, assuming that those who humbly accept the Eucharistic teaching of the Church will be rewarded by the experience of feeling the miraculous sweetness of it: "And so by inwarde consideracion tast we þe swetnes of þis heuenly foode."⁶ He will strengthen and further develop this argumentation in the *Treatise*. After sporadically mentioning only chosen souls, Love includes all faithful orthodox readers in the camp of those who are granted access to enjoying this sweetness.

This instruction seems similar to those given for the fruitful usage of the techniques of meditation, where the feeling of the sweetness of devotion is the result of the working of the intellect and imagination. The sweetness of devotion is to be differentiated from the experience of the sweetness given as a gift, instilled from above, in a rapture, or in a similar state of mystical experience. Love uses both types of "sweetness." He often alludes to that of devotion, a fruit of meditation: "þat wolt fele þe sweetnesse & þe fruyt of þees meditacions."⁷ On the other hand, "sweetness" also can mean the special gift which signals the state of contemplation. James of Milan wrote that one who meditates on Christ's earthly life "will be rescued from the depths, brought to innermost secrets, and lifted to the highest heights with

⁴ Sargent, *Mirroure*, p. 149.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

sweetness."⁸ Love quotes the same taste of "dulcor", the "sweetness" in his exposition about the Eucharist, as a mystical experience.

Love, in his attempt to offer assistance to those who aspire to more elevated spiritual experiences, informed his readers of how to reach mystical encounters. He describes this presence in very similar terms as the often quoted authorities use on contemplation. The same conceptual and terminological set will be applied in the case of his main topic: in the narration of his own mystical experience.

Love explicitly states that he recounts his visionary experience to confute the Lollard tenets about the Eucharist. He presents his narrative after a long exposition of the orthodox Eucharistic teaching formulated in contrast to the Lollard tenets. He introduces his experience with these words:

Bot here in confusion of alle fals lollardes, & in confort of alle trewe loueres & wirshiperes of þis holi sacrament (...) I sal say more ouer sumwhat in speciale þat I knowe sopely of þe gracious wirching in sensible felyng of þis blessed sacrament, þe which merueylouse wirching & felyng aboue commune kynde of manne sheweþ & proueþ souereynly, þe blessed bodily presence of Jesu in þat sacrament.⁹

Later, in his *Treatise*, Love repeatedly formulates his endeavour to equip his readers/hearers against the erroneous doctrine of the Lollards by the testimony of miraculous events about the orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation. In this passage he works for the same aim: the mystical experience, endowed with a heightened credibility and with a convincing dramatic touch, as recounted quasi first-hand, is intended to convince the readers, whether orthodox, hesitant or Lollard, of the veracity of the doctrine of the Church about the true nature of the Eucharist, that is, the real presence of Christ in the Host.

The description, that is, sharing a first-hand mystical experience, strongly implies that such a phenomenon may be close, within reach. This effect is strengthened by Love's precision that the experience happened in the course of meditating on the Passion, as a sudden, unexpected, but notwithstanding natural fruit of it. Love writes in terms which allude to Paul's recounting of rapture in 2. Corinthians 12, 2, blurring the identity of the person who experienced the mystical encounter, thus veiling, at the same time revealing the autobiographical nature of the narration: "þere is one person þat I knowe now lyuying & peraventure þere bene many þat I knowe not."¹⁰ It is also noteworthy that Love does not specify whether the recipient was lay or cleric, although presumably he writes about his own experience, thus suggesting that it could happen to all.

The way in which Love describes his experience identifies it with contemplative rapture. Although he uses the terminology of classical treatises on contemplation, the rhetoric of the scene betrays an intense personal implication: a genuine personal voice radiates from it. The essential attributes of a contemplative ecstasy are all present. First, the unexpectedness of the event, the admiration and awe caused by

⁸ James of Milan, *Stimulus amoris*, *Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi* 4 (Rome: 1905), prologue, p. 3: "ab infimis eripitur, ad intima colligitur, ad summa erigitur cum dulcore."

⁹ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 152.

¹⁰ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 152.

the experience is suggested, just as Richard of Saint Victor defined it in his *Benjamin Maior*: meditation is transformed into contemplation.

If the mind after a long time of searching finally finds the truth, then it usually happens that it receives the new insight with appetite, gazes at it with wonder and jubilation and stays in this amazement for a long time. This means to exceed meditation within meditation and to proceed from meditation to contemplation. Because the characteristic of contemplation is to dedicate itself to that which it sees full of joy and with astonishment/admiration.¹¹

Contemplation is "a sight of admiration,"¹² which "exceeds its capacity of understanding."¹³ Love writes in similar terms: "in trefynge of that blisshed sacrament with the ynwarde sight of his soule and deuowte meditacioun of his precieuse sith with oute comparisoun the hyzeste likynge that eny creature may haue or fele as by way of kynde in this lyf."¹⁴ Walter Hilton, a contemporary and great favourite of Love, and the author of a very successful manual on meditation-contemplation, *The Scale of Perfection*, also uses similar concepts when describing the ecstatic rapture: "But thanne thorough openynge of the goostli yye into Jhesu, the love is turned and the soule is reised up aftir here owen kynde above alle bodili creatures; and thanne the bihaldynge and thenkyng and usynge of hem is goostli, for the love is goostli."¹⁵

In Love's narrative the transcending of the human, natural faculties is present by reaching into another domain where spiritual understanding takes the place of the natural cognitive faculties. The sense of the divine presence is accompanied by excessive sweetness and joy, paralleling Guigo II's description in his *Scala Claustralium*:

*Reading is a busy looking into the scriptures with an attentive mind. Meditation is a studious activity of the mind, which searches for some hidden truth under the guidance of one's own reason. Prayer is a devout turning of the heart to God to get evils removed or to obtain good things. Contemplation is a certain elevation of the mind above itself, being suspended in God, tasting the joy of eternal sweetness.*¹⁶ (Italics mine.)

¹¹ *Beniamin maior* I, 4 (Aris, 10,13–17): "Nam veritatem quidem diu quaesitam tandemque inventam mens solet cum aviditate suscipere, mirari cum consultatione, eiusque admirationi diutius inhaerere. Et hoc est iam meditationem meditando excedere et meditationem in contemplationem transire. Proprium itaque est contemplationi iucunditatis suae spectaculo cum admiratione inhaerere." In Marc Aeilco Aris, *Contemplatio. Philosophische Studien zum Traktat Benjamin Maior des Richard von St. Viktor. Mit einer verbesserten Edition des Textes.* (Frankfurt/Main: Josef Knecht 1996), 9, pp. 28–30.

¹² *Beniamin maior* I, 4 (Aris, 9,25–28): "Contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa vel certe sicut praecipuo illi nostri temporis theologo placuit, qui eam in haec verba definivit: Contemplatio est perspicax et liber animi contuitus in res perspicendas usquequaque diffusus."

¹³ Cf. *Beniamin maior* V, 9 (Aris, 133,15–134,18).

¹⁴ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 225.

¹⁵ Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas Bestul, TEAMS Middle English texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 2000) p. 238.

¹⁶ Guigo II, *Epistola de vita contemplativa*, 84, 32–38: "Est autem lectio sedula scripturarum cum animi intentione inspectio. Meditatio est studiosa mentis actio, occultae veritatis notitiam ductu

Finally, the union with this divine essence occurs in Love's text. This union is described in quasi-erotic terms (just as in the rich tradition of contemplative literature), and the heavenly nature of the place or state of the experience is also evoked: "A lorde Jesu / in what delectable paradyse is he for that tyme that thus felep that blessed bodily presence of þe in that preciouſe sacrament · þoruſ the whiche he felep him ſenſibly / with vnspeakeable ioye / as he were ioyned body to body?"

The transcendental nature of this union is also alluded to by emphasising the intensity of a feeling which exceeds the limits of human capacities of endurance, where without divine sustenance the experience of heavenly joy could not be borne alive:

...þoruſ þe whiche ioye and likynge alle the membres of the body ben enflawmed of ſo delectable and ioyfulle an hete / þat hym þinkeþ ſenſibly all the body as it were meltyng for ioye / as wax doþe anentes the hote fyre · ſo ferforþ that the body myzt not bere that excellent likynge / bot that it ſcholde vtterly faille / nere the graciouſe kepyng and ſuſteynynge of the toucher / oure lorde Jesu / abouen kynde.¹⁷

Love also emphasises the incomprehensible nature of the experience by human cognitive faculties, stressing that no one may understand the true nature of it unless he has experienced it as well as the impossibility of verbalising it. One essential element of Love's recounting is the incongruent linking of the spheres of cognition with that of sensation: he repeatedly says that "no man knoweþ bot he that felep it", and "no man fully and in truth knowe it but onely he that in experience felep it", and so on, suggesting that true cognition in ecstasy happens through the senses, where, in the transcendental realm, these faculties are united. Consequently, the experience recounted by Love proves to be one of classical contemplative ecstasy. Love designates his experience as the "merueylouse wirching & felyng aboue comune kynde of name!"¹⁸ The same notion of "merueylouse" signalling divine intervention and intention, appears later in the *Treatise*, where Love expounds and plays with its multiple meanings.

Love closes the narration of his experience by a further interpretation of the wonderful, transcendental nature of it:

Þuſ haue I vnderſtande of þe foreside graciouſ, wondurfulle & myraculoſe wirching of oure lorde Jesu, ſhewyng ſenſibly his bleſſede delectable bodily presence, in þat moſte excellent ſacrament of þe autere, in maner as þe foreſide perſone þat felt it miht telle it ſo in partie, & als I koude ſhortly & imperfitely write it, & þe which miraclouſ wirchyng to

propriae rationis investigans. Oratio est devota cordis in Deum intentio pro malis removendis vel bonis adipiscendis. Contemplatio est mentis in Deum suspensae quaedam supra se elevatio, aeternae dulcedinis gaudia degustans." In Guigo II, *Epistola de vita contemplativa (Scala claustralium)*, in E. Colledge and J. Walsh, eds. *Guigues II le Chartreux: Lettre sur la vie contemplative (L'Échelle des moines)*. Douze méditations, Introduction et texte critique, Traduction française par un chartreux. Maurice Laporte, Sources Chrétiennes 163. (Paris: 1970), 82–123. For the English translation of Guigo's text see Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations* (New York: Doubleday-Image, 1978), and Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection. An Exploration of Christian Spirituality*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984).

¹⁷ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

my vndirstonding hauing consideracion to alle þe circumstance therof passed many gret miracles þat we redene shewede in þis holy sacrament, in als miche as þe witte of þat bodily felyng passed in certeyne þe witte of siht, & had lasse of straunge likeresse, & more of þe self sobfastness.¹⁹

What is more original and surprising is the further equating of the divine presence of Christ with that of the Holy Spirit, by pointing to the identity of the mystical experiences: perceiving Christ's presence in the Eucharist is compared to the presence of the Holy Spirit felt by the Apostles at Pentecost. Thus Love creates a theologically interesting compound, at the same time validating the personal experience with Scriptural and liturgical sources:

And þerwip also in þe body he felp sensiblye þe bodily presence of oure lorde Jesu in manere as it is seide before, with so grete ioy & lyking þat þere can no tonge telle....And as it semep þat ioyful felyng in þe body is like to þat holi chirch singed of þe Apostles & disciples at þe feste of Pentecost, when þe holi goste was sent to hem sodeynly in þe likeness of fire withoutforþ, & vnspekable ioy in hir bodies withinforþ, þat is þat hir bowels filled with þe holi goste ioyede souereynly in god. þat blessed be euere, & souerenly for þis hie zift of grace to man.²⁰

Love continues the same train of thought in his treatment of the Pentecost scene. Here he expounds on the nature of spiritual experiences which happen due to an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In previous chapters he prepares the introduction of the topic repeatedly, stressing the significance of receiving the Holy Spirit, the utmost Gift, who is sent for all. In the passage about the *Pater Noster*, the Holy Spirit is mentioned as the Divine Person who teaches the prayer that leads to contemplation. Love writes: "For þorh preiere is goten þe zift of þe holi gost, þat techep þe soule al þinge þat is needful þerto."²¹ In the chapter preceding Pentecost, Love prepares for the exposition that is to follow by mentioning again the Holy Spirit as the supreme Gift: "For þen was ziuen þarto þat hye worþies zift, þat is þe holi goste."²² The section on Pentecost follows, which Love fashions according to his own taste, translating only a few sentences at the beginning, then expanding the topic with his original text, thus revealing that he considered it of importance. Interpreting the gospel narrative for this day by actualising its meaning, Love evokes the state of spiritual drunkenness, the equivalent of a mystical experience when one is transported out of natural reason, described by Saint Bernard: "so praying, in hees blessings of gostly swetnes, so þat þou shalt haue so grete lyking in his mynde & in þoo gostly drinkes, þat he shale make þe drunken oft in soule."²³ Then he interprets it:

Loo by þis foreside sentence of seynt bernarde we mowe se in partie, what behouet to receyue þe holi goste & his loue. Wherefore þat we mowe be able to receyue here þat grete zift

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

²¹ Ibid., p. 110.

²² Ibid., p. 217.

²³ Ibid., p. 220.

of þe holi goste & his conforte, & after come to þat blisse þat oure lorde Jesus is nowe steye vp to (...) we mowe folowe sumwat þe blessed life of oure lorde Jesu in þis worlde...²⁴

Love signals that this gift of the Holy Spirit enables exceptional cases of “spiritual drunkenness,” that is, mystical experiences; it is, however, to be wished by all, as it is also the guarantor of attaining the *imitatio Christi* and finally, salvation. Here Love does not differentiate between the special gift of the Spirit and His gift of salvation distributed to every baptised Christian, thus indirectly implying the possibility of anyone receiving both graces. 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”²⁵ feeds his readers with sophisticated sacramental theology, and indicates several paths to contemplative mystical experiences, equipping them against the erroneous doctrine of the Lollards.

9.2 *The Treatise on the Sacrament*

The *Treatise on the Sacrament* is Love’s original work and it is a great piece, attesting to his skills as a thinker and rhetorician. Although it was written with the single aim of expressing orthodox doctrine on the Eucharist, it is of considerable length, 18 manuscript pages. It consists of theoretical elaborations, and the narration of numerous *exempla*, that is, stories of Eucharistic miracles. Notwithstanding the extreme complexity of the text, Love succeeded in creating a compelling unity of content and style, thus revealing his outstanding talent in writing prose. It is all the more surprising that the *Treatise* has attracted sparse critical attention. Elisabeth Salter, discussing Love’s excellent style, deals with the *Treatise* besides the main text of the *Mirroure*, but only minimally.²⁶ Michael Sargent²⁷ offers a detailed description of its content, sources and some of its Anti-Wycliffite pronouncements, but leaves ample room for a more thoroughly applied close reading. Felicity Maxwell devotes a whole chapter to it in her MA thesis on the *Mirroure*, but she focuses mainly on the narrated Eucharistic miracles.²⁸ Kantik Ghosh²⁹ makes sporadic references to parts of the text but does not undertake a systematic study of it.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶ Elisabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love’s “Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ.” Analecta Cartusiana* 10. (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1974).

²⁷ Sargent, *Mirror*, Introduction.

²⁸ Felicity Maxwell, *Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Llife of Jesus Christ: Continuity and Cultural Change*, MA thesis. (Ottawa, Canada: 2008) pp. 76–94.

²⁹ Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 45. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and “Nicholas Love,” in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2004), 53–66.

Nonetheless, the text of the *Treatise* deserves one. I will limit my investigations to Love's endeavour to treat the complex issue of divinely inspired personal exegesis, which enables the access to the heights of contemplation. In the *Treatise*, just as in the expositions attached to the Last Supper scene, Love creates a direct connection between such contemplative experiences and orthodox belief, positioning the latter as an absolute prerequisite of the first.

Love ingeniously introduces his text with a scriptural quotation which combines the two key concepts on which the whole *Treatise* is built: "*Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum misericors, et miserator dominus escam dedit timentibus se.*"³⁰ (Italics mine.) The notions of "miracle" and "bread" or "food" dominate the whole discourse from beginning to end, deploying a full scale of their semantic and doctrinal richness, creating a web of unusual intricacy. The introductory *locus* already presents a summary of the work, at the same time providing a typological foundation of Eucharistic doctrine. Love continues with implementing the other pillars of his discourse in his text: David prophesied thus about the Eucharist, long before the Incarnation, says Love, before translating his quotation into English. Then, he expounds the meaning of "mete" by identifying it with the Eucharistic bread, and states that this bread is meant for those who "trewly dreden him as hir lorde god, by whiche drede, þei kepen hem out of deadly sinne, & mekely standen in þe steadfast byleue of holi chirch."³¹ Thus, already at this early phase, the identification of the sacrament of the Eucharist takes place in relation to the heretics, who do not submit themselves to the teaching of the Church. The connecting of the sacrament and of the "merveille" follows in which Love alludes to the priest's words during the consecration. The reference to the priest and to the canon of the mass strengthens the orthodoxy of the exposition, as both the necessity of the ordained priesthood and of the act of consecration were denied by Wyclif. The extraordinary accumulation of the word "miracle" serves an important rhetoric aim. In one long sentence Love condenses his conception of the essentials of his doctrinal message: the sacrament of the Eucharist is a miracle, just as all the deeds of Christ are miracles, and the *Mirroure* is destined to testify to it.

*And þis gostly mete he ziueþ, & haþ made þerebye a special mynde of hees merueiles, þat is to sey as þe preeste reherseþ in þe canone of þe messe in mynde of his merueylous & blessed passion, & of his merueilous Resurrexion & of his merueylous & glorious Ascension & generally in mynde of alle þe merueilous werkes & dedes of him in his blessed life here in þis worlde, þe which is tretede in alle þis boke before written.*³² (italics mine)

This over-abundance of the key word is paralleled and prepared by the passage in the Last Supper where Love writes about the "gracious, wonderfule, and myraculouse worchynge of Jesu in his bodily presence." The *Treatise* will consistently keep this proliferation to the end. Love continues by identifying Christ's body present in the sacrament with the same body which was miraculously incarnated, miraculously

³⁰ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 223.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

born, and did “merveilleuse words and dedes,” thus using the classical Credo-like formula of Eucharistic expositions, as mentioned above (thus it also alludes back to the Incarnation-Trinity passage.)

Love uses a varied lexicon denoting the miracle: “miracle,” “merveille,” “vision,” “fair vision,” and “revelacion”. The extensive usage and play with the multivalent meanings of one word are stylistic devices which Love applies also in the case of his other key concepts, namely of “mynde,” and “fele.” Thus he creates a real masterpiece of allusions through spiralling structures of re-occurring concepts which carry the first meaning; in their second occurrence they are already endowed with a new meaning as well. Thus they grow richer and richer in semantic filling, and bring an ever-growing set of allusions to their previous meanings.

Love uses the word “mynde” also in its meaning of remembrance, but also signifying understanding, and several other concepts.³³ His choice of this exact word as a central one for his *Treatise* was surely not accidental. Wyclif’s critique of the Eucharistic presence also revolves around the interpretation of the same word in its scriptural context,³⁴ and Wyclif decided for a limited, “literal” interpretation of it. By an accentuated exploitation of the semantic richness of the same word, resulting in the presentation of its doctrinal multivalence which has a consequence on the Eucharistic doctrine itself, Love counters his opponent using the same weapon.

In the next sentence “mynde” is replaced by the *terminus technicus* of Eucharistic doctrine: “sacramental commemoracion.” The explanation of it follows, now in a blend of common, everyday speech and of a special, philosophical-theological terminology: “he is verreyly & bodily present wip us under an opere fourme but sobely in his owne proper substaunce verrey god & man.”³⁵ Love supports his statement with a scriptural text: “Loo I am with 3ou alle þe daies to þe worlds ende.”³⁶ In a next step Love makes “mynde” of how in the Eucharist the divine and human presence are unitedly present, switching to the terminology used by manuals on contemplation: “not only by þe gostly presence of his godhead bot by þe bodily presence of his manhede.”³⁷ He joins to all this the concept of “merveille” again, qualifying Christ’s Passion, thus adding the other core element of orthodox Eucharistic doctrine: that the Eucharist is a re-enactment of the Passion. Love continues with the narration of the scriptural passage of the instauration of the Eucharist, quoting Christ’s words: “þis doþe 3e in mye mynde.”³⁸

³³ For the variety and changes of meaning of the word “mynde” in the Old and Middle English literature, see Ágnes Kiricsi’s dissertation, *Semantic Rivalry of Mod/Mood and Gemynd/Minde in Old and Middle English Literature*, PhD Dissertation, Budapest, 2005, <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/kiricsi/diss.pdf>, last accessed 26 June 2013.

³⁴ Wyclif, *De Eucharistia Tractatus Maior. Accedit tractatus De Eucharistia et poenitentiae sive de confessione*, ed. Dr. Iohann Loserth. (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1966.)

³⁵ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 224.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Now Love introduces his original invention of connecting the sacramental exposition with the mystical experience, the taste of spiritual sweetness: "þis is þat pre-gostly lyking, & þe sauour & taste of alle sweetness."³⁹ He describes the sacrament as the "swete memoriale and hyzest zift."⁴⁰ He already applied the same concept in his exposition in the Last Supper passage, and this paragraph introduces a whole series of instances where Love presents the same idea in the *Treatise*.

The next sentence again sums up what has been said before, emphasising repeatedly that this gift is given for the faithful, thus implying the exclusion of the unfaithful heretics: "þus oure lorde Jesu of his grete mercy haþ made a lyking mynde of hees merueiles in þis gostly mete, þe which is moste merueile of alle merueiles, ziuynng þis mete specialy to hem þat dreden him."⁴¹ In the following Love enumerates the cases of differing partakings in this mystery of the Eucharist, naming four categories. Those who have a servile love of Christ receive a simple sustenance of their faith, but those with a genuine affectionate love are gifted with a mystical experience of spiritual comfort and sweetness. Love, to describe this state, uses the same quotation of a Psalm which he used in two other instances, both describing mystical union in the *Mirroure*, once in a Bernardian citation and secondly in the narrative of his own mystical encounter: "Aa lorde god how mikel is þe manyfolde plente of þi swetnes, þe which þou hast hidde to hem þat dreden þe."⁴²

Those who do not feel the sweetness are sinners or heretics. "Fele" thus becomes the criterion of belief or unbelief, of being in truth or error, ultimately, of being in grace or out of grace, which is expanded to such extremes as being saved or damned, belonging to Christ or the Antichrist. Love proceeds with a detailed presentation of the error of the Lollards. He lists reprovngly their general attitude (they do not fear God and the Church), their core vice of "presumptuously leuyng vpon hir owne bodily wittes and kyndely reson,"⁴³ and the exact details of their erroneous belief in the Eucharist, presented with a philosophical-theological vocabulary.

Love then treats the core vice, that is the pride of Lollards, and states that their main error consists in their unbelief in God's omnipotence, on account of which they reject miracles. Denying the omnipotence of God makes them worse than the Jews or the pagans, insists our author. Everything which is spiritual, the essence of spirituality, is contained in "merveile", which is "abouen þe reson of man",⁴⁴ and is contrasted with "kyndely reson," which hinders Lollards to recognise the true nature of God's miracles, and finally God himself in the Eucharist.

Love also constructs an antagonism of sight, naming the bodily eye in opposition to the ghostly eye.⁴⁵ Those who rely on their own bodily wit will be denied

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 225.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 226.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

transcendental understanding, and those who seek bodily sight will be denied the spiritual sight of the true nature of the Eucharist, of Christ Himself. Again, the working of the spiritual capacity of mystical recognition serves as a prerogative of embracing the right doctrine.

Love proceeds with a categorization of the miracles related to the Eucharist. He differentiates between inner and outer miracles. The inner are those which pertain to the true nature of the Eucharist, as Christ's presence in the Host and His presence in all the Hosts of the world without multiplication of His essence. The outer ones are those which testify to this, the Eucharistic miracles. After the exposition of the first type, Love inserts his second great speech of restriction which parallels with the one written in the Incarnation-Trinity section:

perfore it is grete foly & gostly perile to seke curiously in ymaginacion of reson þe merueiles of þis worþi sacrament. Bot it is moste sikere namely to a simple soule, & suffice to sauacion touching þe forseide merueiles & alle oper of þis blessed sacrament, to þenke & fele in þis manere, þus hauen holy doctors tauht, & holi chirch determined, and perfore þus I trowe & fully byleue þat it is in soþenes, þouh my kyndely reson azeyn sey it.⁴⁶ (Italics mine.)

This speech is very similar to its pair in many ways. It reveals that Love saw an inherent unity between the Trinitarian and Eucharistic doctrines, the correctness of which he ardently protects. Nonetheless, in this second passage he adopts a more personal tone. Instead of the partaking usage of the first person plural here Love uses the first person singular, thus creating a direct personal confession of his beliefs. It seems that the significance of the Eucharistic doctrine to be defended urged him to do so.

The second type of miracles openly proves the real presence. First, the story of King Edward the Confessor and of his Earl Leuereiche is narrated. Interestingly, Love chose an *exemplum* in which both the protagonists are men who were not contemplatives, but leading active lives in the world. Their reaction is described in a similar way to that of the ecstasies narrated by Love in his mystical experience and in the scene of Pentecost: "Aftere þis þei boþe of so ioyfulle a siht gostly confortede, & turned alle in to deuout praieres & swete weping teres, were made gostly drunken of þe plente of goddus house, & fedde wip þe riuere of his souereyn ioy & gostly lyking."⁴⁷ (Italics mine.)

The main protagonist of the third miracle is also a secular, a Roman matron who did not believe in the real presence and ridiculed it. As she did not see the divine essence behind the materiality of the bread, her example may have been chosen for having a connection to that of unbelieving Lollards, just as the narration of her conversion was presumably intended to set an example to them.

After the narration of the miracles another theoretical section follows, describing the nature of Lollard dissent in even more detail. Wyclif is never mentioned by name but is described as a great clerk who was led astray by his excellent knowledge and wit and by his pride. The compound "grete clergie", appearing at the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 229.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 231.

beginning in the *Proheme*, and in the *Treatise* several times, is used to signal Love's fear of deception, which leads to error. It is characterizing the Lollards, expressedly Wyclif, who is named as "þe forseide master of Lollardes,"⁴⁸ and as "hir maistere þe wech þorh his grete clergy and kunnyng of philosophye was deceyuede."⁴⁹ Again, Love expounds his theory: "many grete clerkes, þe which leuen so miche vpon hir owne kyndely reson, & þe principiæes of philosophy, (...) þat þei wole not leue þe trewe feiþ taught by holy chirch of þis blessed sacrament, & þerfore þei fele not þe sopfast comfortable effecte of þe merueiles & miracles before seide neiþer opune nor priuely touching þis holy sacrament."⁵⁰

Furthermore, Wyclif is even connected with the Antichrist: "þe comyng of Anticriste & hees disciples, ... & þat by grete clergy of mannus konynng, & by merueiles & miracles worching,"⁵¹ or even identified as the Antichrist: "howe þe diuision in holy chirch, & putte many men in to errour of þis blessed sacrament, by þe fals doctrine of hir maistere þe wech þorh his grete clergy & kunnyng of philosophy was deceyuede."⁵²

The discourse here is also formed using the same key notion: miracle. Now great knowledge and miracles will be coupled. Love inserts a quotation of Gregory the Great who cites the biblical passage describing the last days by the appearance of the Antichrist. Apocalypse, which was already alluded to in the Last Supper exposition, enfolds Love's imagination.⁵³ In his conception, the central test of belief will be the correct doctrine of the Eucharist, the confession of which will be rendered extremely difficult by the ruses of the Antichrist who will, by his cunning and by the great miracles he performs, deceive many and thus causes their perdition. Love names these two methods of deception: "by clergy & euidence of worlds konnyng acordyng to naturele reson & by merueiles & miracles worching fals deception."⁵⁴ The identification of Wyclif with the Antichrist is easily made considering the first element as both appear as deforming the right sacramental doctrine by human speculation and reasoning. Nevertheless, the second tag of the description of the Great Illusionist does not coincide with the reality of Lollard practice. Lollards were ill-famed for not producing any miracles, which would have validated their teachings. Love was conscious of this, as well as his contemporaries. The testimony of an anonymous macaronic sermon attests to it, as it says that those who die in this Lollardy never come back; no miracle is shown by them: "Words alone without

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 237.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 236.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The identification of the appearance of Lollardy with the coming of the Last Days is not new to Love, it also appears in Henry Knighton's *Chronicon*. Ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Rolls Series, 1889–1895); and other contemporary polemical works.

⁵⁴ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 238.

works are not to be believed. Where are the miracles? Where are the dead they have raised? Where are the lepers they have healed?"⁵⁵

The enigma of the non-existent miracles wrought by Lollards did not stop Love from persevering in his identification. Love states that the power of Antichrist is so effective in Lollards that the greatness of their knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy and theologizing is in itself the miracle, destined to cause deception and destruction: "Antecrist hade in hem hadde so grete powere, þat þei hade with hir rezones, also wrought merueiles & miracles."⁵⁶ Love seems truly amazed by the expertise of Lollards and warns that even if an angel came to teach doctrine which would contradict that of the Church about the Eucharist, his words should not be given credence, as "is þe Angele of Sathanas & not of God, as bene alle þe false lollardes."⁵⁷ Love uses the harshest terms to denote Lollards, thus aligning the tradition of the polemic which, from both sides, reciprocally "honoured" the other party with such denunciations. Wycliffite sermons and tracts also abound with such identifications of their opponents.

However, Love utters the last word on Lollards, repeating his main accusation: "þe false lollardes þe which hauen neiþer trewe drede nor parfite loue of oure lorde Jesu, & þefore þei fele not þe gostly swetenesse of þis heuenly mete of his precious body, ne þe lyking mynde of hees meruiles shewede in þat blessed sacrament."⁵⁸ Thus Love formulates 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 all the faithful.

Consequently, Love suggests in several ways that laity, or at least some chosen ones, may have some part in contemplation. The experience recounted by Love proves one of classical contemplative ecstasy. However, Love presents in the *Mirroure* a new model of reaching contemplative experiences. Firstly, his version is different from the ancient model as it is not always the fruit of a long-exercised technique of contemplation as in the monastic practice. According to Love's presentation, a mystical encounter may happen at different moments: during meditation (as in his main experience with the Eucharist), during a devotion to the Eucharist (as recounted in the hagiographical examples), or at other moments of normal ecclesiastical or liturgical life (as recorded in the section on Pentecost). Thus Love, who began by offering cautious hints towards a possible access to the phase of contemplation for those readers whom he hoped to possess a more advanced spiritual affinity, in the course of his translation became progressively bolder. By the recounting

⁵⁵ "Sed nuda verba sine operibus non sunt credenda. Ubi sunt miracula facta per virtutem annuli eorum? Ubi sunt mortui quos suscitaverunt? Ubi sunt leprosi quos mundaverunt?" Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 649, f. 19v. Quoted from Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons. Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 374.

⁵⁶ Sargent, *Mirror*, p. 237.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of his own contemplative experience Love brings such a spiritual state in close proximity to his readers. Finally, in the *Treatise* Love reformulates his concept about who is eligible to experience the heights of mystical understanding and "jouissance": those who by "wipstondyng of temptaciones" of the Lollard heresy continue to "zeue more credence to þe trewe doctrine of holi chirch."⁵⁹ Thus, investigating the way Love encoded a more inclusive, richer spiritual programme into his *Mirroure*, which also targets contemplation besides meditation, leads me to conclude that Love pursued his assisting of spiritual advancement also in the light of his programme of combatting Wycliffism. Although the *Mirroure* is primarily a work on meditation meant for common 'symple soules', Love also encourages those of his readers who remained faithful adepts of orthodox teaching, or who return to it, to aspire to 'sweteness and a ioye ...that passip with oute comparisoun the hyzeste likynge.'

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.