THOMAS NETTER OF WALDEN
Carmelite, Diplomat and Theologian
(c.1372-1430)

Carmel in Britain
studies in the early history of the Carmelite order
Volume 4

Edited by
Johan Bergström-Allen
& Richard Copsey

The most devout and learned father in Christ, Thomas Walden, a Carmelite of London, was not only a defender of the Catholic faith, but bequeathed innumerable works to posterity for the defeating of heresies … Because of his sublime preaching, he was appointed the confessor and councillor of the most Christian kings … Therefore the family of Carmel rejoices for such a great and renowned man who died with a reputation for holiness.

(Somatip on the tomb of Thomas Netter in Rouen)

Sometimes dubbed the last great medieval theologian, Thomas Netter was a Carmelite friar from Saffron Walden in England. By the time of his death in 1430, his writings on theology, philosophy, Canon Law and Scripture had travelled across the Christian world, and a cult of sanctity quickly developed at the tomb of 'blessed Thomas' in the French city of Rouen.

Netter’s life and writings give an insight into the political, intellectual, and ecclesiastical complexities of late medieval Europe. As a participant at the Councils of Pisa and Constance and as a diplomat and confessor for the house of Lancaster, Netter enjoyed great spiritual and political influence.

Thomas Netter played a prominent role in heresy debates and trials, refuting Wyclif, Hus, and their adherents by preaching against Lollardy and by writing the *Doctrinale antiquitatum fi dei eccleaisæ catholicæ*, a magisterial apologia of Catholic dogma which dominated Western Christian teaching for centuries. A scanned copy of the *Doctrinale* is appended to this, the fourth volume of the *Carmel in Britain* series, in which scholars from the Carmelite Order and the wider academic community interpret the impact of Thomas Netter on his contemporaries, and his enduring influence. Attracting interest and controversy today as he did in the fifteenth century, the contributors consider Netter’s role in shaping Catholic Christian thought in the face of growing calls for the Church’s reformation.
Early allegorical engraving of Thomas Netter preserved in the Carmelite priory at Mdina in Malta. This image probably served as the model for the early twentieth-century portrait at Saint Albert’s International Centre in Rome (reproduced opposite).

An early twentieth-century allegorical portrait of Thomas Netter at Saint Albert’s International Centre (CISA) in Rome.
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Thomas Netter of Walden (c.1372-1430), a Carmelite friar and priest, was one of the most influential Churchmen of late medieval England. His academic enquiries, political interests and pastoral activities stretched across the continent of Europe at a time of religious and social upheaval, and the Carmelite’s great theological text, the *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei ecclesiae catholicae*, held its place as a benchmark of Catholic orthodoxy for centuries after his death. Given Netter’s significance it is remarkable that the present volume is the first publication of its size exclusively (but far from exhaustively) dedicated to consideration of his life and thought.

One of the earliest surviving (albeit indirect) contemporary references to Thomas Netter is particularly revealing about his concerns and personality. In her *Book*, the pious East Anglian lay woman Margery Kempe refers to an incident that reveals the extent to which Thomas Netter exercised control over his confreres in the Carmelite Order, and ultimately, over the laity they ministered to, including Kempe herself. The incident took place in Kempe’s hometown of Lynn, perhaps in 1424 when Netter, as Prior Provincial (senior brother) of the Carmelites in England, was presiding there at a provincial chapter of the Order. This gathering would have been attended by various representatives of the thousand Whitefriars then living in some forty communities across England, as well as by all the Doctors of Theology within the province, among whose ranks was Master Alan of Lynn, longtime confidante of Margery Kempe:

> And than sum envyows personys compleynyd to the Provincyal of the White Frerys [Netter] that the sayd doctowr [Lynn] was to conversawnt with the sayd creatur, for-as-mech as he supportyd hir in hir wepyng and in hir crying, and also enformyd hir in wuestyons of scriptur, whan sche wolde any askyn hym. Than was he monishyd, be vertu of obediens, that he schulde no mor spekyn with hir, ne enformyn hir in to textys of scriptur, and that was to hym ful peynful, for, as he seyd to sum personys, he had lever a lost an hundryd pownd, yvf he had an had it, than hir communicacyon, it was so gostly and fruteful.¹

¹ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, (ed.) Barry Windeatt, Longman Annotated Texts, (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), Book I, Chapter 69, pp. 314-15. Windeatt translates the passage as follows: ‘And then some envious persons complained to the Provincial of the White Friars that the said doctor
According to Margery's own account, Netter's objection to Alan of Lynn's association with her was twofold: first, that his brother in Carmel should not associate with a notorious woman of such outlawish piety (shredding copious tears of compunction); and second, that Lynn should not discuss the Bible with her.

It is impossible for us to judge Thomas Netter's motivation in prohibiting the discourse between Margery Kempe and Alan of Lynn, but Kempe herself blames social pressure from 'sum envoyws personys'. Kempe's critics were numerous, the most serious allegations against her being that she was heretical, sympathising with the 'Lollard' followers of the reformer John Wyclif. Lollards were frequently accused by their detractors of engaging in eccentric and novel forms of piety, and of misreading the Bible.

Thomas Netter knew better than most the divisive impact that John Wyclif had had upon the English Church. In forbidding Alan of Lynn specifically to discuss the Bible with Margery Kempe, perhaps the Carmelite Provincial recalled rumours of the Wycliffites. Unimaginable in fourteenth-century Catholic Christendom until the innovations of the Wycliffites, had upon the English Church. In forbidding Alan of Lynn specifically to discuss the Bible with Margery Kempe, perhaps the Carmelite Provincial recalled rumours of the Wycliffites.

Netter was barely a teenager when Wyclif died in 1384, but upon entering the Carmelite novitiate the youth from Essex would have learned about his Order's preeminent role in opposing Wycliffite teaching. Netter became keenly aware of the heresiarchs' views when he undertook his advanced theological studies at Wyclif's own university of Oxford in the early 1400s. In 1401 scholars there debated the propriety of translating the Bible into the vernacular, a debate that led to the infamous **Constitutions** promulgated in 1409 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, which sought to prohibit such translation and the discussion of theological matters by untrained laity.

In the year the **Constitutions** were promulgated, Thomas Netter was engaged in other efforts to assert orthodoxy (but simultaneously a spirit of reform) within the Church. Netter was **regius orator** (king's spokesman) at the Council of Pisa in 1409, deliberating upon the legitimacy of deposing a Pope. The following year Netter attended the trial in London of the Lollard John Badby, and engaged in debates at Oxford with the Lollard Peter Payne. Having attended heresy trials and observed their outcomes, Netter was fully aware of the consequences of challenging the tradition and Magisterium of the Church. Margery Kempe was cognisant of the danger too; she records in her **Book** that she dined in Bristol with the Carmelite Thomas Peverel, who as 'bishop of Worcetyr' (1407-19) had been responsible for Badby's conviction and subsequent burning at Smithfield. Such a deliberate reference to receiving Peverel's hospitality and benediction – as well as the recording of a conversation with the saintly Carmelite William Southfield (d. 1414) – was surely a strategy on Kempe's part to align herself with the forces of orthodoxy.

Carmelites were in the vanguard of such forces in England, and Thomas Netter was their marshall. That is not to say that the Whitefriars were opposed to debate and argument per se, but rather alert to the risk of miscomprehension amongst the laity raised by vernacular discussion of the Bible, and the undermining of Church authority that might ensue. Netter, and various fellow Carmelites in England who wrote and preached in the vernacular both before and after Arundel's **Constitutions**, were in a genuine quandary: how to police the spiritual...
and intellectual life of God's people, whilst being compelled by the charism of the Carmelite Order to preach the Word of God to people who desired such knowledge and experience. The position Carmelites took up seems to have been one of pragmatic compromise and engagement; the caricature which endures within the Carmelite Order to this day is that whilst the Dominicans were leading heretics to the stake, Carmelites offered to hear the sinners' confessions. Netter certainly had several opportunities to administer the sacrament, attending the trials of Sir John Oldcastle (1413), William Taylor (1423), and William White (1428).

The interaction between Alan of Lynn and Margery Kempe demonstrates that even – or perhaps especially – Carmelites who had achieved the very highest level of academic success maintained an interest (whether supportive or supervisory) in the spiritual experience of not only the royalty whom they served as chaplains but also the 'unlettered' general populace. In the case of Margery Kempe, it is not surprising that it was a 'Whyte Frer', most likely Lynn himself, who 'proferyd hir to wryten freely yf sche wold' her 'tribulacyons and hir felingys'.

Thomas Netter had shown a similar interest in the religious experiences of the laity, even citing them in the Doctrinale as authoritative examples to refute Wyclif's teachings. Netter's prolific correspondence with various ecclesiastical officials (recorded for posterity by fellow Carmelite John Bale before he embraced Wyclif's teachings) reveal the Provincial's interest in the vocations of consecrated lay persons, such as anchorites in East Anglia who received the veil from him.

A sincere pastoral concern for the spiritual needs of the laity seemingly compelled Thomas Netter to reent in his prohibition of dialogue between Alan of Lynn and Margery Kempe. As the latter records:

... the worthy clerk [Lynn] ... had leve of hys sovereyn [Netter] to spekyn wyth the sayd creatur ... Than the worschepful doctowr seyd to hir: 'Margety, ye ar welcom to me, for I have long be kep fro yow, and now hath owr Lord sent yow hedyr that I may spekyn wyth yow, blessed mote he be!' Ther was a dyner of gret joye and gladnes, meche mor gostly than bodily, for it was sawcyd and sawryd wyth talys of holy scriptur.


12 As Ian Levy points out in his contribution to this volume, Netter relates the case of Joanna Methles, a Norfolk woman, who lived solely on the Eucharist for fifteen years.

13 See the section on 'Religious women' in Richard Copsey's biography of Netter for references.

14 Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, (ed.) Barry Windeatt; Longman Annotated Texts, (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), Book 1, Chapter 70, p. 317. Windeatt translates the passage as follows: '... the worthy cleric ... had leave from his Provincial to speak with the said creature ... Then the worthy doctor Kempe’s ‘divinely-granted’ reunion with her Carmelite mentor demonstrates a certain flexibility in Thomas Netter that, intentionally or not, allowed the lay woman access to the scriptures (albeit mediated by Lynn). Avowing Lynn's fidelity to his 'sovereyn' Prior Provincial, Kempe's testimony suggests that Netter was a cautious and controlling authority figure, who was motivated perhaps by power but more by a genuine (if debatably misplaced on occasions) pastoral concern for the cure of souls.

This concern motivated Thomas Netter's activities as an academic, administrator, royal diplomat, and prelate. His wide-ranging preoccupations are the subject of this book, which has come about thanks to the enthusiasm and energies of my co-editor, Carmelite friar and historian Fr. Richard Copsey. Richard's biography of Thomas Netter helpfully collates the disparate elements of the subject's life, giving the reader not only an appreciation of Netter's considerable achievements but also an insight into the personality of a complex man. The bibliography which Richard has compiled at the end of the book will prove an invaluable resource to those wishing to reflect further upon Netter's impact and legacy.

Netter was a European; he travelled to councils and went on diplomatic embassies. The chapter by Jens Röhrkasten on Thomas Netter's royal mission to Poland sheds light on Netter's involvement in the work of international reconciliation and peace. Because of his opposition to Wyclif and Hus, Netter is now remembered largely as a combative figure, yet frank and direct (if not always entirely respectful) engagement with the views of his opponents was what drove Netter to undertake his masterwork, the Doctrinale. The manuscripts and printings of this six volume compilation are the subject of the chapter by Margaret Harvey, who in studying the copying and dissemination of the Doctrinale highlights the sense that Netter and his brothers shared of being members of an international network of preachers and teachers.

Such networks allow for the spread of dissent, as well as orthodox tenets, and by recording the views of Wyclif and his adherents Thomas Netter may inadvertently have perpetuated the Lollard heresy. As Anne Hudson points out in her article (along with many other insights), though English Lollards do not seem to have referred to the Doctrinale, Netter's efforts to render Wyclif's thought into Latin allowed at least one Polish dissenter to extrapolate his teachings.

Whilst Wyclif's reputation was tainted in large sections of Christianity, the wide dissemination of Thomas Netter's Doctrinale across the Church ensured said to her, ‘Margety, you are welcome to me, for I have long been kept from you, and now our Lord has sent ou here so that I may speak with you, blessed may he be.’ There was a dinner of great joy and gladness, much more spiritual than bodily, for it was sauced and savoured with tales from holy scripture: The Book of Margery Kempe, (trans.) B. A. Windeatt, (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 209-10.
his place as one of the last great medieval theologians and, according to the Benedictine Dom David Knowles, as ‘the most distinguished friar of any order between the age of Ockham and the Dissolution’.\textsuperscript{15} Netter’s legacy in the history of ecclesiology specifically is the subject of Jesuit scholar Santiago Madrigal’s contribution to this volume.

The method in which Netter engaged rhetorically with his theological opponents is considered by Mishtooni Bose, and Patrick Mullins – in his analysis of Netter’s defence of the sacrament of Extreme Unction – also shows how he engaged closely with Wyclif’s arguments. Considering Netter’s writings on two further sacraments, the Eucharist and Confirmation, Ian Levy and Chris O’Donnell further probe Netter’s style, his sources, and his theology.

Kevin Alban’s essay on the treatment of the Virgin Mary in the Doctrinale suggests that Netter’s theology has a real contribution to make to contemporary theological debates, including the ministry of women within the Church.

Netter’s significance has certainly never waned within his own Carmelite Order. Ever since the time of his burial in Rouen, Carmelites have been conscious of Netter’s reputation as a man of sincere (if somber) faith, with his cause for beatification open in Rome well into the twentieth century. His cult continues to this day in a lesser degree, with his name (variably given as Netter, Walden, or Waldensis) adorning Carmelite study houses and conference centres around the world. Imagined portraits of him look down at visitors and pilgrims as far apart as Aylesford Priory in Kent, and the Domus Carmelitana in Rome. We are pleased to publish some of those portraits in this volume, and grateful to the communities of the Order who have contributed them.

Indeed, it seems fitting that a book on Thomas Netter, whose own writings were systematically copied and disseminated around his Order, should have come about through the collaboration of Carmelites in different parts of the world. This book is being co-published by Saint Albert’s Press (the imprint of the British Province of Carmelites) and Edizioni Carmelitane (the Carmelite Curia’s publishing house in Rome). Given the links between Netter and the Christians of Bohemia, it seems appropriate that the typesetting and printing of the book has been undertaken by our Carmelite brethren in the Czech Republic; our sincere thanks to Fr. Jan Fatka, O.Carm., Director of Karmelitánské nakladatelství, and his staff, especially Pavel Kindermann and Jakub Kubů. Thanks to the generosity of the Carmelitana Collection at Whitefriars Hall, Washington D.C., the publication includes a DVD containing (in PDF format) the scanned Blanciotti 1757 edition of Netter’s Doctrinale. Fr. Richard and I would like to thank the Carmelitana Collection’s Director, Fr. Patrick Thomas McMahon, O.Carm., and its Librarian, Mrs. Patricia A. O’Callaghan, for making this superb resource available.

Regarding citation of the Doctrinale, we have decided not to impose one standard form across the various chapters but rather to respect the contributors’ choices of style and edition(s) cited.

This is the fourth volume published in the Carmel in Britain series. The first two volumes (subtitled People and Places and Theology and Writing) were produced in 1992 by the Institutum Carmelitanum, the Carmelite Order’s scholarly academy based in Rome, to mark the 750th anniversary of the Carmelites’ arrival in Britain. The third volume, a collection of essays by Richard Copsey subtitled The Hermits from Mount Carmel, was published in 2004. Whilst we have endeavoured, where appropriate, to maintain the style of the series in this fourth volume, cataloguers may wish to note that whereas the official title of each book in the ISBN register has been thus far Carmel in Britain followed by a number and sub-heading, with this volume we are reversing the arrangement. It seems appropriate that this, the first collection of articles devoted exclusively to Thomas Netter, should bear his name in the title. Those interested in Carmelite Studies will be pleased to note the forthcoming titles in the series, advertised at the back of the book.

As co-editor of this volume I would like to express my thanks to the many people who have played a part in its publication, most especially the contributors who have waited extremely patiently for its production. Most of the articles included were first presented at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds nearly a decade ago, and I am delighted that the book will formally be launched at that Congress in 2009 with a roundtable discussion of Netter’s legacy and areas for further research.

As Ian Levy points out in his essay, ‘Netter is no mere editor; he is a very competent theologian in his own right.’ This editor does not claim to be a theologian, and offers apologies in advance for instances where his editing or indexing may betray this.

Thanks are also due in a particular way to the Carmelite friars who have enabled this book’s production through their commitment to the Order’s scholarly endeavours and publishing. Of them Netter’s words to his Prior General – ‘Now you know that it is the custom of our brethren to criticise’ – need not be repeated! This book was first championed by Fr. Antony Lester when he was Prior Provincial, and then by his successor, Fr. Wilfrid McGreal. To both, and to their councils, my sincere thanks, as well as to Fr. Fernando Millán Romeral, now Prior General of the Carmelite Order, for his assistance in preparing the Spanish text submitted by Santiago Madrigal.

Gratitude is further due to the various libraries, galleries and Carmelite communities who have allowed us to include artwork from their collections (printed in the *Carmel in Britain* series for the first time). A particular thanks to Dr. Christopher de Hamel, Donnelley Fellow Librarian at the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and its Sub Librarian Dr. Suzanne Paul, for their generosity and support. Thanks also to Dominique Ruhlmann, Director of Library Services, Trinity Hall, Cambridge; Fiona Piddock, Librarian at Lincoln College, Oxford; Hilary Pattison, College Libraries and Archives, Magdalen College, Oxford; Dr. Julia Walworth, Fellow Librarian, and Mr. Julian Reid, Archivist, of Merton College, Oxford; Dr. Brian Callingham, Queens’ College, Cambridge; Dr. Joanna Parker, Librarian, and Owen Massey, Assistant Librarian, Worcester College, Oxford; Jacco Versteef, Acting College Librarian, University College, Oxford; Jennie Moloney of the National Gallery of Victoria; the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, especially the Keeper of Special Collections and Tricia Buckingham, Principal Library Assistant; Very Rev. Fr. Christian Körner, O.Carm., Vice Prior General of the Carmelite Order, and Fr. Rainer Fielenbach, O.Carm., of Straubing Carmelite community. Dr. Juliana Dresvina of Cambridge University kindly assisted in procuring some images.

I would also like to record my gratitude to colleagues and scholars who, in various ways, have encouraged the production of this book, including Naö Kukita Yoshikawa, Valerie Edden, Denis Renevey, Vincent Gillespie, Ralph Hanna, Jason Edwards, Joan Greatrex, Dee Dyas, Giovanni Grosso, Paul Chandler, James Boyce, Joachim Smet, Karl-Heinz Steinmetz, Frances Andrews, Ian Johnson, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Liz Herbert McAvoy, Susannah Mary Chewning, Jennifer N. Brown, Michelle M. Sauer, James Carley and Ann Hutchison.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Carmelites in the Third Order Secular for their prayerful support and encouragement in the compilation of this volume. I commend to them the study of Thomas Netter (who fostered the relationship between Carmelite friars and laity), and indeed the study of his opponents, from whose complex and intriguing lives there is much more to learn. Our age, as much as theirs, is characterised by competing values and ideas, and sadly there are still those on all sides who would reach resolution through fire and sword. We can learn from Netter’s example – both his mistakes and his achievements, as they might appear to us – how to strive in love for the ultimate goal.

*Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 16th July 2009*
There was in this man true genius as well as considerable practical ability. A man of zeal in all that he undertook, skilled in every branch of letters, and so noted for his graceful eloquence that no one of that time was his superior in the art of conciliation, or in prevailing on men to accept his judgement. In negotiating affairs he would take all sides into account, examine all aspects, missing no detail; this he would do not just thoughtlessly or casually but dispatching everything with wisdom and authority ... the worthiness of his actions and his pleasant conversation began to be so well-known that many of the most distinguished men held him in the highest esteem. Nor did people in the highest positions consider it beneath their dignity to seek his opinion, being well aware of his great wisdom. So much so that there was no question which arose nor any problem, however insoluble or difficult, that he did not resolve by his counsel, his application and his diligence. He was useful not only to the Order (over which he presided) but also to the chief men (who with the king were troubled and greatly disturbed by many concerns) and also many matters throughout England. During his life he was always giving gifts to the schools of the mendicant orders in England. He brought an end to rebellions and wars, and quelled heresies and schisms. When he was confessor, counsellor and secret envoy for Henry V and VI, kings of England and France, swearing, frauds, sins of the flesh and other human ills were miraculously almost eliminated from the kingdom.

[Description of Thomas Netter in John Bale's Anglorum Heliades, a history of the English Carmelites written in 1536].

1 The essential modern sources for any biography of Thomas Netter are the recent article in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [ODBN] by Professor Anne Hudson, an earlier B.Litt. thesis by Dominique Dubois, and Emden’s entry in his register of students at Oxford. See Anne Hudson, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 40, pp. 444-447; D. J. Dubois, Thomas Netter of Walden, OC (c.1372-1430), Oxford University B.Litt. thesis (1978); A. B. Emden, A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A. D. 1500, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957-59), 1343-44. For this article, extensive use has been made of the early notebooks of John Bale (1495-1563), containing historical notes made whilst he was still a Carmelite. Bale made use of these notebooks when preparing his Illustrium maioris Britanniae Scriptororum ... Summarium, (Wesel: D. van der Straten, 1548) [Summarium] and later his Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britanniae ... Catalogus (Basel: J. Oporinus, 1557-9) [Catalogus], but in doing so he edited his notes somewhat freely and consequently there are many inaccuracies and omissions.

2 John Bale, Anglorum Heliades, chapters 43 & 44 [British Library, MS. Harley 3838, fo. 35v, 36r-v]. An English translation of this work is being prepared for publication.
Netter’s early years

Thomas Netter was born around 1372 in the village of Saffron Walden in Essex, from where he gained his more common title of Thomas Waldensis (“Thomas of Walden”). The only reference Netter makes to his childhood occurs in his Doctrinale where he says about Wyclif:

“But”, said [Epiphanius], “Origen stole nothing from me”. Nor truly did Wyclif take anything from me, for he was not alive in my time, unless perhaps when I was an child. As God is my witness, no personal reason or any event in our time, nothing has come between us; the only reason is the attacks on the faith, deadly doctrines which lead the nation astray, deceiving and deluding innocent people, these call for some public response from us to him.3

As Wyclif died in Lutterworth in 1384, Netter would have been only twelve years of age at the time and unlikely to have been aware of this momentous event. Certainly he would have been too young to have encountered Wyclif in person.

In another part of his Doctrinale Netter tells us that his parents were named John and Matilda, modelling his account on a quote from St. Augustine’s Confessions which he cites a few lines earlier:

With this encouragement, even though with less merit, I dare to make the same prayer to the Lord for my own, saying: “Inspire, Lord God, inspire your servants my brothers, and your sons, my masters, whom I serve with these meagre writings, that as many as read this may remember at your altar John and Matilda my parents, through whose bodies you brought me into this life, and afterwards you taught me through the heights of your law this form of always honouring one’s parents.4

Sadly Netter gives no further details about his early years although one would assume, in view of his later academic prowess, that he gained some basic education in the local school or possibly in the Benedictine priory in Saffron Walden.

3 Netter’s date of birth and entry into the Carmelites have been calculated by assuming that he entered the Order at the minimum age of 14 years and was ordained priest at the age of 24 years: Dubois dates his entry to 1389 but comes to the same date for his birth by assuming that he entered at 17 years of age, see Dubois, Thomas Netter, p. 3.

4 Netter, Doctrinale, ii, 28. Quotations from Thomas Netter’s Doctrinale are taken from the Blanciotti edition: Thomae Waldensis Carmelitae Anglici Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae, (ed.) fo. Bonaventura Blanciotti, O.Carm. (Venice, 1757), in 3 folio volumes. All the translations of excerpts from this work and from the other sources are by the present writer unless otherwise noted. The titles of all Netter’s works, etc. and their incipits are translated into English in this article: however, they are given in the original Latin in the bibliography at the end of this volume.

Young Carmelite

Around 1386, when he had reached the age of 14 years, Thomas Netter entered the Carmelite house in London where he fulfilled the statutory year in the novitiate before making his profession as a Carmelite.6 At this time the Carmelite prior provincial was Robert Ivory, who had also joined the Order in London. Ivory had been provincial for seven years and was around forty eight years of age. He would officially hold office until his death on 5th November 1392 but there is some evidence that he resigned his office in 1390, probably due to ill-health and increasing age, and that Robert Whiteved, another London Carmelite, was acting as provincial until 1392.7

After the novitiate Netter would have started his studies for the priesthood, commencing with grammar and Latin to make up for any deficiencies in his early education. This would have lead into two years’ study of philosophy followed by at least three years of theology. In view of Netter’s academic ability it is probable that he then completed the more advanced two-year theology course leading to the licentiate in theology – an internal award given by the Order – which would qualify him to teach theology and to preach, and would normally be required before commencing studies at university.

Netter is listed as a member of the London Carmelite community when he was ordained acolyte in St. Paul’s Cathedral on 19th September 1394 by John, Bishop of Glasgow, and ordained subdeacon on 5th June 1395, also in the cathedral. He was ordained priest on 23rd September 1396 in Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate. The last two ordinations were performed by the Bishop of London, Robert of Braybrooke.8

During the period when Netter was a student, the community in the London house would have numbered around 100 friars. Apart from the permanent community of priests and brothers, a sizeable proportion of this number would have been students from other houses and other provinces. At this period the English province totalled just under a thousand friars and was divided into four distinctions or regions, based on London, Norwich, Oxford and York. Out of the thirty nine houses in the province, ten were members of the London distinction, that is London, Aylesford, Calais, Cambridge, Hitchin, Ipswich, Losenham, Maldon, Sandwich and Shoreham.9 London acted as the senior house for this distinction and offered the opportunity for the brighter students from the other houses in the distinction to follow the advanced course in theology leading to the award of a licentiate. However, because London was a studium generale for philosophy for the whole Order, brighter students in the distinction and from the other houses in the province could be sent there to study philosophy as well as theology.

During Netter’s time there are records of students in the London house who had come from Aylesford, Cambridge, Hitchin, Maldon, Losenham and Sandwich, all of which were in the London distinction, as well as a few other students from houses in other distinctions such as Chester, Gloucester, King’s Lynn, Ludlow and Oxford. Among these talented students there were a number who would go on to further academic success and occupy senior positions in the Order and outside it. One of the most notable was Thomas Ashwell from Hitchin, ordained in the same year as Netter, who went on to study at Cambridge where, after gaining his doctorate, he is recorded as acting as vice-chancellor in 1413 and who served as secretary and confessor to Henry Beaufort, cardinal Bishop of Winchester. He would work alongside Netter on a number of occasions, including some of the important heresy trials.10 Another notable figure was Nicholas Swafham who also studied in Cambridge where he gained his doctorate. He lectured there for many years and acted as chancellor and vice-chancellor on a number of occasions between 1431-49 during the absence of these officials.11 Another fellow student was Richard Lemster who was ordained probably the year before Netter and who preached before the king at Windsor on 5th January 1403 and again on 10th June the same year, for which he received 2 marks (26s.8d.).12 Another was Richard Auger ordained in 1393 who later became the prior of Ludlow.13 One less successful fellow-student was John Lethinard, who petitioned for release from his vows in 1391 claiming that he had been placed in the convent at 12 years of age (the minimum age was 14 years) and then forced under duress to make profession.14

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6 Dubois suggests that Netter joined at the age of 17 years in 1389, but it is more likely that he joined at 14 years and completed his basic education in grammar and Latin with the Carmelites. [Dubois, Thomas Netter, p. 3.]
7 Robert Whiteved is addressed as provincial in three royal letters, in two of which – addressed to Rome – king Richard II is actively seeking a bishopric for him [Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1388-1392, (London: HMSO), 1902], p. 306; Cambridge University Library, MS. iii.53, p. 46.]
10 A. B. Emden, Biographical Register for the University of Cambridge [henceforth BRUC], (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 19.
11 Emden, BRUC, 569.
12 Kew, National Archives, E101/404/21.
As mentioned above, the Carmelite house in London was a *studium generale* for the Order offering a philosophy course to students from other provinces. Many foreign Carmelite students came to study there, most notably from the Lower German province although there were others from Ireland, Scotland, Poland, Tuscany and Lombardy. During Netter’s time as a student in London, that is 1386-96, among the overseas students who are known to have studied alongside him for one or more years there were twenty-eight students from the Lower German province, five from the Lombardy province, and one each from the provinces of Tuscany, Ireland and Gascony. Among these were some who, like Netter, were later elected to senior positions in the Order such as Philip Rayder, the future Irish provincial, who was ordained in London the same year as Netter, and William Costall, the future prior of Bordeaux, who was ordained acolyte in 1398. Both of these were in correspondence with Netter during his period as provincial. Such friendships formed during studies together in London must have proved very helpful in later life.

The names of the priors in the Carmelite house in London during Netter’s time cannot be determined definitively. It is likely that John Loneye was prior when Netter entered in 1386, Loneye joined the Order in London, was ordained in December 1363, and gained a doctorate at Oxford before 1380. John Bale notes that he was prior of London for many years so it is likely he was there when Netter entered. Loneye died sometime after 1393 but a John French had taken over as prior by 1391. Little is known about French except that, in a joint action with a local tailor and a jeweller, he sued someone for debt. He left office some time after 1393 and was probably succeeded by Richard Lavenham, a noted Carmelite scholar, who joined the Order in Ipswich and gained his doctorate at Oxford shortly before 1384. Certainly Lavenham was prior by 1399. Before that, he was prior in Bristol for some years before coming to London where he taught philosophy, especially logic. He is noted for having written a considerable number of short works on logic, doubtless intended for his students, as well as preparing a list of heresies taken from the preaching of the Lollard, John Purvey, who was active in the Bristol area. It is quite likely that Lavenham was one of Netter’s teachers whilst Netter was studying philosophy in London.

In the dedicatory letter to Pope Martin V which Netter wrote in 1423 and which prefaces the first volume of his *Doctrinale*, Netter describes how, at first, when he was a young student, Wyclif’s ideas seemed so attractive:

Now at first I pondered all this in silence but then, afterwards, in my early years, I listened openly to his arguments. I was astounded beyond measure by his bold claims, and by the convincing quotations from authority, together with his passionate reasoning. But my faith remained intact, even though I struggled with his opinions. At length, after some time, I transferred my attention to the sacred books and before long, I discovered that he was publicly falsifying the scriptures, twisting the scriptures into meanings that were contrary to all the holy commentators, that he confused the scriptures which were clearly understandable, concealing simple truths, and with deceitful comments, he modified and removed the sense of the holy words. Holy writers and sacred canons, if he could not align them with his lies, he rejected them, claiming, at times when they did not agree with him, that they were apocryphal.

Clearly a number of Wyclif’s works were in the library of the Carmelite house in London, and Netter as a bright young student was taking advantage of their availability to study Wyclif’s ideas.

In a number of places in his *Doctrinale*, Netter refers to a “brother William” who seems to have been his teacher and a significant figure in his studies. An example occurs in volume 2 of his *Doctrinale, De Sacramentis*:

For, as my father and devoted *magister* brother William rightly claimed, you are one of the Anthropomorphite heretics, who believe that God is composed of human parts in his Godhead.

There are other references in the same volume:

Again, the remarkable doctor, brother William, who wrote a brilliant book *Contra ter damnatum Trialogum* against this Wyclif... And:

Here, the devout brother and *magister* William, in his book written against the *Trialogus*, says that [Wyclif] has plagiarised this error, like many others, from Richard of Armagh’s work *De questionibus Armenorum*, Book 11, Chapter 4...

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16 Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, 1159.
19 Netter, *Doctrinale*, i, 1 (3).
20 Netter, *Doctrinale*, ii, 310D.
21 Netter, *Doctrinale*, ii, 344D.
22 Netter, *Doctrinale*, ii, 664C.
In one of Bale’s notebooks, which contains observations made whilst he was travelling in the Low Countries in 1523-24, there is a note made, probably whilst he was at the Carmelite house in Tiernen, where Bale records the phrase about William’s “brilliant book” (see above) and in parentheses shows that he has also read the first quotation as well:


The identification (enclosed between [...]!), however, was added by Bale later, and written above the line. Bale does not indicate where he got this identification but he would have been aware that William Woodford had written a book entitled De Causis Condemnacionis Articulorum xviii damnatorum Johannis Wyclif. Dubois points out in her thesis on Netter that this identification is confirmed by the reference to the “Anthropomorphite heretics” which is an unusual epithet to be applied to the Lollards and is used by William Woodford in his book De sacramento altaris.

However, William Woodford died shortly after Easter 1397 and so he could not have taught Netter in Oxford as some have suggested, unless Netter’s dates at Oxford are radically altered. However, Woodford was probably in London for most of the time between 1390-96 and he is known to have had private quarters in the London Franciscan house by 1395. Hence one possibility is that either Woodford was invited to give lectures in the Carmelite house or, alternatively, selected Carmelite students attended his lectures in the Franciscan house. A more convincing hypothesis, though, which would explain the close relationship indicated by the quotes in the Doctrinale, is that Netter – as an outstanding young Carmelite student who was showing an interest in Wyclif’s writings – was sent or asked himself if he could go and consult Woodford who was the recognised authority on Wyclif. One can imagine Woodford being impressed by Netter’s intellectual ability, helping him to see the flaws in Wyclif’s arguments and subsequently taking a personal interest in his academic progress. It is even possible that Woodford might have had some influence on the Order’s decision to send Netter to Oxford for higher studies.

24 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 72v.
would affect their academic standing in the universities and also these “doctors” were doubtless claiming all the privileges enjoyed by the genuine doctors of theology. One of the possible culprits in this matter was the previous provincial, Robert Ivory, who was the subject of a special mandate from Pope Gregory XI on 15th June 1374 addressed to William Romani, O.P., at Avignon, granting Romani permission, after a suitable examination, to promote Ivory to the doctorate.27

With all the confusion and competing jurisdictions caused by the papal schism, a number of friars sought to benefit from the more-readily granted permissions which were being granted by the rival papal claimants.

Cardinal Landulph reported his recommendations to the pope in May 1396, and his recommendations were approved and enshrined in a papal letter dated 20th February 1397:

Confirmation of certain statutes and ordinances made on the late petition of the Carmelites of the English province by Landulph, cardinal deacon of St. Nicholas’s in Carcere, and protector of the Order.

The said petition contained that some friars of the province obtained the degree of Master of Theology without being fit and without completing the due course, to the shame and contempt of the Order. Exemplification is given of the cardinal’s letters – Nuper coram prefato – dated at Rome at St. James de Suttingnan, in his lodging, 1396, indiction 4, 5th May, the 7th year of Pope Boniface, and addressed to the Carmelites of the English province. They state that the pope – being petitioned to order that no Carmelite of the province should take the said degree unless he should first lecture on philosophy for a year, and afterwards continuously for seven years, unless dispensed by the prior provincial and the definitors of the chapter provincial, work (insudaret) as a scholar at theology in an university or universities, making the due acts in the same faculty, then lecture on the Sentences, subsequently become a completed (formatus) bachelor in an approved university, being finally promoted by his provincial and his distinctio to the said degree – gave the cardinal verbal commission, on the day on which his letters are dated (above), to issue mandate to the Carmelites of the English province to preserve, in regard to the aforesaid, the order which has hitherto been observed in the Roman court.

The cardinal, having informed himself, orders that in future, for taking the said degree, the manner and form of the said court are to be observed by the Carmelites of England, namely, that a candidate: (1) be a scholar in arts for seven years; (2) become scholar of theology for seven years; (3) lecture on the Sentences for a year in an approved university (in universitate approbata in studio generali), and become principal lecturer; (4) for two years on the Sentences in an approved university, two books in the first year, and in the second, the other two books; (5) in the year next

26 Netter is listed as from the London community when he received all his holy orders, so it appears that he did not go up to Oxford until after his ordination as a priest. It is conceivable that he was up at Oxford slightly earlier and returned to London to receive orders but this is unlikely.


Studies at Oxford University

During his studies in London Netter clearly had impressed his Carmelite teachers with his outstanding academic ability, because soon after his ordination in 1396 the decision was made to send him to pursue higher theological studies at Oxford University.26

Around the same time that Netter was finishing his theology in London, a petition was made to the cardinal protector of the Order, Cardinal Landulph, about certain English friars who were gaining doctorates without following the full course of studies. These were probably doctorates awarded by the Order itself or in some other fashion and, as such, would not have been recognised by Oxford or Cambridge. The English Carmelites would be afraid that such pretensions
after lecturing on the *Sentences* lecture on the Bible; (6 and last) respond to the doctors according to the wonted manner, and afterwards proceed to the degree of master as is customary.

English friars of the said Order and province who have presumed to assume the degree of master outside the province are hereby *ipso facto* deprived of every rank and degree of the said Order.28

However, it was normal in the universities at this time for the friars, in view of their initial studies, to be excused from the requirement to complete a Master of Arts programme. So Netter would have been free to start studying immediately for his baccalaureate in theology. As stated in the papal letter, this course would last for seven years, during the final one of which the student would give lectures on theology as a student lecturer. After the baccalaureate, the student would proceed towards the doctorate, lecturing for at least one year on the Bible and at least two years on the standard theology textbook, Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*. Finally, there would be a formal examination before the assembled doctors of theology. From an analysis of 134 Carmelites who gained a doctorate between 1350-1450, the median time from ordination to the award of the doctorate was twelve years. Many students would take considerably longer, often because they were delayed by other commitments. However, no one seems to have achieved a doctorate in less than eleven years.29

Being selected to go to university was a great honour because the Carmelite Order was only allowed to present one candidate each year for the award of the doctorate at Oxford and one at Cambridge. Candidates for these places were chosen from each distinction in turn.30 Hence competition for places was very high. The research cited above reveals that out of 1,638 friars who were known to have been ordained between 1350-1450, only 208 (12.7%) actually attended university and of these just 134 (8.2% or 1 in 12) actually gained a doctorate.

A second aspect, which is not usually mentioned, was the need for university students to procure some financial support as the expenses incurred in following a doctorate programme were high. It is normally assumed that the Order bore all the costs involved but this seems not to have always been the case. The first Carmelite to gain a doctorate at Cambridge, Humphrey Necton, seems to have been sponsored by William Louth, the Bishop of Ely, and Bertram Fitzalan from the Carmelite house in Lincoln, who gained his doctorate at Oxford shortly after 1392, just before Netter’s arrival, was sponsored by another Carmelite, William Quaplod. Fitzalan also was the beneficiary of a generous bequest in the will of Elizabeth la Warre, wife of Lord la Warre, dated 12th October 1393, ‘To Fr. Bertham fitzAleyn, xls,’ which was possibly given in order to defray the expenses of his doctorate.31 In the *Life* of Saint Peter Thomas (d. 1366), written by his friend, Philippe de Mézières, there is an interesting account of how Peter Thomas suffered from poverty during his studies and how Our Lady brought him help:

Some time later, he came into such poverty that he could hardly afford clothes, candles and oil for his studies and the other small necessities. Nevertheless he had such devotion to the glorious Virgin from his youth and he served her so devotedly, that she did something so that he would not be deprived of his desires. Later, remaining alone after matins in the dormitory, and thinking of his poverty, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin for help lest because of his poverty, he should fail in his studies. At that moment, the Blessed Virgin appeared before him, walking in the dormitory. Taking hold of his cloak, she led him through the dormitory, and said to him: “My son, do not worry about your poverty for I shall not desert you. Study hard and you shall serve my Son and me.” Thus said, the Blessed Virgin vanished from before his eyes. Early next morning, he celebrated the Mass of the Blessed Virgin, giving thanks to her for her promise. Once the Mass was said, an old knight from that region, whose name I have forgotten, arrived and said to brother Peter: “I wish you to hear my confession”. Once the confession was done, the knight gave him 16 golden royals, and from that day forward, he never suffered again from poverty.32

What is significant about this story is the assumption that Peter Thomas was responsible for covering the expenses of his studies. As for Thomas Netter, there is no mention of him having a patron or sponsor but it is quite likely that he had some outside support during his course of studies at Oxford.

**Netter and the Council of Pisa**

Netter probably completed his baccalaureate course around 1403, that is, seven years after arriving at Oxford. He would then have begun to give the prescribed courses of lectures on the *Sentences* and the Bible, and to give a number of sermons. In seems that these sermons and lectures which he gave whilst a *baccalaureus* made an impression in political circles, because in 1409 he was listed as the *regius*...
orator (king’s spokesman) when he was sent by King Henry IV as one of the royal
degregation to attend the Council of Pisa.33

Netter’s part in the Council seems to have been small but not insignificant. He
was one of 100 theologians attending the Council who were invited by the
Franciscan cardinal Peter Philargi of Candia to give their opinion on whether
there were grounds for the cardinals to depose a reigning pope. The situation at
that moment was acute because of the papal schism and the existence of two rival
popes. Cardinal Philargi had supported the Roman pope, Gregory XII, as did the
English, but he lost faith in Gregory when he refused to attend the Council at
Pisa which was being organised by the cardinals. Philargi wrote to Henry IV and
the Archbishop of Canterbury urging them to withdraw their obedience from
Gregory XII, the Roman pontiff. Gregory, in retaliation for Philargi’s support for
the Council, deprived him of his cardinalate.

At Pisa, Philargi convened this gathering of theologians in the sacristy of the
Franciscan church on 28th May 1409 and Netter’s name is found in a list
of university graduates who were present. He was described as a baccalaureus
of Oxford.34 The name of another English Carmelite, William Ufford, a fellow
student with Netter at Oxford, is also included in this list.

John Bale preserves the title and incipit of the tract which Netter wrote in
response to Philargi’s request:

At the evening session in the Franciscan church during the general council held in
Pisa at the discussion convened by Peter of Candia (then a cardinal with the title of
the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles but afterwards Pope Alexander V), which begins:
“Reverend doctor, as the wise heart knows the time and the way to respond to all
matters, it is the right moment and opportune ...”35

The responses of the theologians were unanimously in favour of the two existing
popes being deposed, and on 26th June the cardinals met, declared the two popes
deposed, and unanimously elected Peter Philargi as pope. He took the name of
Alexander V when he was crowned in Pisa cathedral in July 1409.36

Bale records two other addresses which he claims Netter delivered before the
clergy at the Council of Pisa:37

33 G. D. Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collection... (Florence et al., 1759-1962) xxvii, 401.
34 Vatican Library, MS. Vat. Lat. 4171, fo. 119: ibid., MS. Vat. Lat. 4172, fo. 241v.
35 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 20v: Bale confuses the issue in his later published
works by enlarging this note into three separate works [Catalogus i, l. 570].
36 Sadly Philargi did not live long after being declared pope and died on 3rd May 1410.
37 Bale, Catalogus, i, 570: these two latter titles are only found in the Catalogus and it seems likely that the
three titles from Pisa were parts of a single composite work which Bale later expanded.

It is difficult to assess the value of Bale’s notes here as these works with their
incipits are not found in his earliest notebooks. The earliest reference to the
address before Sigismund occurs in Bale’s history of the English Carmelites,
Anglorum Heliades, composed in 1536, where he states:

Earlier, [Netter] had played a similar part at the Council of Pisa, in the presence of
the emperor Sigismund, where he replied to the problem posed by Peter of Candia.40

However, the two separate works with their own incipits are not found in any
of Bale’s early notebooks and only emerge fully in his printed Catalogus. It is
possible that Bale had this information somewhere, in a now lost notebook, but
it is more likely that he expanded the note on the first address into three separate
works, a practice which he did for several of the Carmelite entries in his later
printed works.

Exactly when Netter and his companions returned from Pisa is not known, but
they seem to have been there for some time because as he mentioned afterwards
in a letter to the prior general Jean Grossi:

At Pisa, the English province had procurators for a considerable time, as you
yourself know.41

Magister Thomas Netter

The exact year when Netter gained his doctorate is not recorded and it is
possible that he incepted as a doctor in the autumn of 1409, after his return from
the Council of Pisa. However, it is more likely that he incepted in 1411, the year
after his fellow student, William Ufford. In March 1411 Ufford is being addressed
as the magister ... regens in claustrum Carmelitarum (that is, principal lecturer in
theology in the Carmelite cloister), indicating that he had incepted the previous
year.42 As only one Carmelite could incept each year, it seems likely that Netter
followed Ufford and incepted in 1411.

39 Acts 1:6
40 British Library, MS. Harley 3838, fo. 36.
41 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 99.
42 Emden, Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, 603.
Following his inception as a doctor, Netter would then himself have become the magister regens in the Carmelite studium for the following academic year, that is 1412, during which period he would give the major theology lectures and preach on any important occasions.

It was probably during his year as magister regens that there occurred the episode which Netter records in his Doctrinale when he and a fellow Carmelite named William were challenged to a public debate by the Lollard, Peter Clerk, or Peter Payne as he was more commonly known:

I felt these provocations: then, all at once, through a certain nobleman I was chosen – together with my brother in religion at the University of Oxford William – and challenged to a battle by one of the boldest of them, called Peter Clerk, to dispute over pilgrimages, the Eucharist, religious life and the voluntary mendicancy. We came, we were ready, but as those who were present know and still declare, before we could come to blows Peter Clerk took himself off, rendered speechless by his own silliness.

Peter Payne, M.A., was appointed vice principal of St. Edmund’s Hall, Oxford, in 1410 but fled abroad in 1414 and joined the Hussite movement in Bohemia. He was one of the leading disputants for the Bohemians at the Council of Basel in 1433. The debate recorded here must have taken place before 1414, the year Payne left England. Professor Anne Hudson dates the encounter to c.1406-1409, whereas Dominique Dubois suggests a slightly earlier date around 1404-1405. However, although Netter could have taken part in such a debate as a baccalaureus, it seems more likely that it occurred during his time as magister regens when he would have been regarded as the official theologian for the Carmelites in Oxford. So, this would date the aborted debate to 1410-1411 when Payne was vice principal of St. Edmund’s Hall. It is conceivable that Payne’s debacle on this occasion was one of the factors which contributed to his abrupt departure from Oxford in 1414.

The identity of Netter’s companion in this debate has aroused a number of hypotheses. John Bale identifies him as William Coxford, who joined the Order around 1366 or shortly after. However, when he died is uncertain and Bale confuses the issue because in his earliest notes he records that Beufeu “floruit” (flourished) in 1390, whereas in his later notes this has changed to become the date of his death. Whichever is right, Beufeu would have been in his seventies at the time of the debate and so too old. There are, however, two more possible candidates.

The first is William Hesham who joined the Carmelites in York and was ordained there in 1395, one year before Netter. Hesham studied at Oxford and Netter is known to have preached the sermon at his vespers, that is the disputation which preceded his inception as a doctor of theology (see below). It would appear that Netter had overtaken him in his studies and gained his doctorate the year before. As Netter most likely gained his doctorate in 1411, this would date Hesham’s doctorate to 1412. During this year, Netter would have been the magister regens and hence his appointment to preach the sermon at Hesham’s vespers.

The other possible candidate, and the more likely identification, is William Ufford who had accompanied Netter to the Council of Pisa in 1409 (as noted above) when the two of them were recorded together in the list of university graduates present in the sacristy of the Franciscan church there. Ufford joined the Order in Stamford and studied at Oxford alongside Netter. He inherited in 1410, the year before Netter, and is listed as magister regens on 17th March 1411 when he was named as one of the twelve members of the university committee appointed to examine the works of John Wyclif. As the magister regens for the previous year, he would seem the most logical person to have been Netter’s companion at the debate.

Whilst at Oxford, Netter was also a friend of John Luke, a senior proctor there and a fellow of Merton College. It is claimed that Netter succeeded in detaching him from the Wycliffite influence of Peter Payne. Certainly, Luke was present at the Council of Pisa alongside Netter, so the two of them must have been in regular contact.

43 Dubois notes that a similar debate was sponsored by the duke of Gloucester, Thomas Woodstock, but she is unable to identify the nobleman referred to by Netter. [Dubois, Thomas Netter, p. 14 n. 6];
44 Netter, Doctrinale, i, prologue, 7-8;
45 Hudson, Oxford Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, 1441;
46 Dubois, Thomas Netter, p. 14;
47 For a similar example, see the debate at Cambridge University between the Carmelite John Hornby and the Dominican John Stokes which arose as a result of some criticisms made by Stokes against the Carmelite Order. John Hornby was magister regens at the time and so acted as the spokesman and defender for the Order [cf. J. P. H. Clark, A Defense of the Carmelite Order by John Hornby A.D. 1374, Carmelus, (Rome, 1982), XXXII, pp. 73-106, reprinted in Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard, (ed.), Carmel in Britain 2: Theology and Writing, pp. 1-34; Richard Copshey, ‘John Hornby’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 28, p. 127].
48 British Library, MS. Harley 3838, fo. 79.
49 Emden, Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, 1928;
50 D. Wilkins, Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae 446-1717, (London, 1737. repr. Brussels, 1964) iii, 172:
have known each other well and Bale records a lost work *Dialogi* which Luke addressed to Netter.52

Blanciotti claims that Netter preached before King Henry IV many times:

And now this man of marvellous holiness and widespread learning had already become well known by everyone, and he was thought worthy to be listened to often and praised by the English clergy: in fact, he was selected as a preacher by the King of England, Henry IV, and gave many sermons before the king himself and the nobles of the realm. These were afterwards gathered together and distributed.53

If Blanciotti is to be believed, then these sermons must have been given before 24th March 1413, the date when Henry IV died. There is no record of Netter having preached before Henry IV although it is quite possible that he did so. The claim that he did so many times and that his sermons were collected together in a book is probably a confusion. The volume of forty-six sermons which Bale records were given before King Henry V.54

**Early academic writings**

In one of his early notebooks John Bale records a series of titles and *incipits* of what appear to be short theological works written by Thomas Netter during his time at Oxford and which Bale had probably uncovered in the Carmelite house in London.55 One, an index to Peter of Waltham’s *Remediarium conversorum*, seems to have been an early student exercise:

Index to *A Handbook for Saving Souls*, which begins “Of abstinence which is a remedy against the glutony of the stomach and contrary to it.”56

Another work is a *collatio* (sermon or presentation), which was probably given by Netter whilst he was *baccalaureus* as part of the university requirements, or alternatively later on when he was lecturing on the *Sentences* as a doctor:

*Presentation for his lecture on the Sentences*, which begins: “He covers the lightning with his hands. Job 37.57 Reverend fathers58 that the miraculous sacrament is something to be kept safe from harm is clear to everyone.”

Some of the other titles listed by Bale preserve the names of the doctors of theology before whom they were delivered. One is addressed to the Cistercian monk, William Sulbury, from Woburn Abbey, Worcester. Sulbury had gained his doctorate at Oxford by 1410, just before Netter, and he would later attend the Council of Constance as the proctor for the English Cistercian houses. This *collatio* or sermon/presentation was probably written by Netter as one of the requirements for his doctorate and it is called “excusatoria” because it was given to satisfy some academic requirement which Netter had missed, possibly lectures which he should have given whilst he was away at the Council of Pisa. If so, the work should be dated to 1410-1411, just after Netter’s return. It was read before Sulbury who would have been the presiding doctor.59

*On the adoration of images before magister William Sulbury, O.Cist., winter, excusatory sermon, which begins: “Reverend doctor and father, since ‘all things are full of weariness’ as Solomon says.”60

Other works in Bale’s list were probably given on similar occasions as part of the academic requirements for the doctorate. One work was delivered before the Dominican, Thomas Claxton, who was up at Oxford by 1404 and had incepted in 1410. He was *magister regens* in the Dominican *studium* in 1411 and so this work can be confidently dated to sometime during 1411 whilst he was in office and whilst Netter was completing his academic exercises before incepting as a doctor:

*Before Thomas Claxton, O.P., which begins: “Reverend doctor, as our pure mother theology...”*

Another work was delivered before a Franciscan doctor of theology, John Maule:61

52 Bale, *Catalogus*, i, 555-556; Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, 1175-76.

53 Netter, *Doctrinale*, i, xiii.

54 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 40, 204.

55 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 204r-v: These works disappear from Bale’s printed books and only Tanner notices them, but he lists them in a note under the title *Orationum ad principes*, (“Sermons to Princes”) which is clearly not true for many of them. [T. Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica*, (London, 1748), 748].


57 recte Job 36:31.

58 The Latin address for a monk or priest of *dominus* (literally ‘lord’ or ‘master’) has been translated as the more modern ‘father’ in the *incipits* here.

59 Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, 1815.

60 *Ecclesiastes* 1:8. Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 204 (where Wytténam – see below – is named as Waltham).

61 Not yet traced. There is possibly some mistake in Bale’s copying here as there is no record of a Franciscan ‘John Maule’ in Emden’s *Biographical Registers* of either Oxford or Cambridge Universities.
Before John Maule, O.F.M., which begins: “Reverend doctor, however much playful talkativeness, the simple word...”

Another work is addressed to William Ufford, Netter’s companion at the Council of Pisa. If this work is an academic exercise, as argued here, then the fact that Netter presents it in front of Ufford would confirm that Ufford had gained his doctorate before Netter and was presiding at this exercise as magister regens. If this assumption is correct, then the work can be also be confidently dated to 1411:

Before William Ufford, Carmelite, which begins: “Reverend doctor, the incarnate inheritance of divine wisdom...”

The last work was delivered before an Augustinian, Henry Colchester, who had incepted as a doctor of theology at Cambridge. He was appointed by the prior general to study there in 1388 and incepted as a doctor sometime before 1419. If most of these works by Netter can be dated to 1408-11, then Colchester must have gained his doctorate by then and have been sent to lecture for a period in the Augustinian studium in Oxford:

Before Henry Colchester, O.E.S.A., which begins: “Reverend fathers, as Augustine has at the beginning of Against Felicianus...”

One work is addressed to John Wytttenam, who was admitted as a scholar at New College in 1388. He was a fellow by 1390 and had gained his doctorate by 1408. His name occurs as one of the committee of twelve which was set up by the University to examine the writings of John Wyclif for heresy and which reported in March 1411. He would later be one of the commissaries appointed by the Bishop of London for the trial of Sir John Oldcastle for heresy in September 1413. This work is addressed directly to Wytttenam and seems, from the incipit, to be another academic exercise like the previous papers and so should be dated before 1411:

To magister John Wytttenam, fellow of New College, Oxford, which begins: “Reverend doctor and father, since in the heart of the question proposed...”

The presentation of these papers before members of each of the mendicant orders in Oxford and some secular doctors of theology in turn would seem to further confirm that they are derived from a series of academic exercises at which the magistri regentes took it in turns to preside at the event.

In Bale’s list there are some further titles which appear to have been delivered on other academic occasions. Two linked titles are probably from Netter’s lectures on the Bible whilst a baccalaureus (although they may be from lectures given after his doctorate):

Presentation for lecture on the first fifteen texts in [the Epistle to] the Romans, which begins: “We have received grace’ Epistle to the Romans, first chapter. 62 Reverend doctors, now as the germ of infected nature that in the beginning brought forth a full harvest of graces...”

Lecture on the first fifteen texts in the Epistle to the Romans. fifteen readings, which begin: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, etc.’ According to the Ciceronian Principles of the New Rhetoric, first book, with whose learning the apostle Paul had a long and deep acquaintance from his earliest years, ...63

Another two titles refer to sermons (collationes), one given at the blessing before the vesperies of two fellow Carmelites, William Hesham and John Upton, and the second at the commendation after the vesperies. As mentioned previously, the vesperies were one of the final academic exercises or examinations before candidates incepted as a doctor, and probably took place in 1412 or 1413:


Sermon of commendation at the vespers of the same, which begins: “Give glory to his fame’. Psalm 66:1. Take note, my fathers, of a certain innocent custom of our mother university...”

Making a reputation

Netter’s reputation as a theologian was growing and he was involved in a series of important heresy trials in subsequent years. On 5th March 1410 he was present at the trial of the Lollard, John Badby, in St. Paul’s, London.67 He is not mentioned

62 Romans 1:5.
63 Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 73, fo. 204v.
64 Numbers 23:20.
66 Psalm 66:1.
in the official record and would seem to have attended only as an observer.\textsuperscript{68} Badby had been brought before the Bishop of Worcester on 2nd January 1409 for claiming, amongst other beliefs, that the words of consecration said by a priest could not change the altar bread into the body of Christ and that Christ did not take his own body into his hands at the Last Supper. Badby was allowed the customary one year’s grace to reconsider his views before being brought before Convocation at Blackfriars, London, on 1st March 1410. He remained adamant and so was confined in Blackfriars until the following Wednesday, 5th March, when he was brought to St. Paul’s Cathedral before Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, Alexander Totynton, O.S.B., Bishop of Norwich, and other members of Convocation. The Chancellor, Thomas Beaufort, was present with a number of other nobles.\textsuperscript{69} In his \textit{Doctrinale}, Netter relates what happened there:

I will recount the episode which I saw with my own eyes, being present in person in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, when the venerable Bishop of Canterbury of happy memory, Thomas Arundel, son and brother of the duke, sat in judgement, assisted by the Bishop of Norwich, Alexander, and other diocesan bishops. Arundel interrogated a certain tailor from the Worcestershire area who had fallen into heresy and questioned him on his belief in the Eucharist. However, he was completely unable to persuade the tailor of the true faith for he was not willing to call or believe that the most blessed sacrament was anything but “blessed bread”. At length, when ordered to do reverence to the host, the tailor replied, blaspheming: “truly, it would be more just to do reverence to a spider”. And immediately there descended from the highest point of the roof an apparition of a huge and horrible spider which followed its thread straight down to the mouth of the blasphemer and, while he was still speaking, it made great efforts to enter through his soiled lips. Despite the intervention of many hands, it could only just be prevented. That illustrious prince Thomas, Duke of Exeter, at that time Chancellor of the kingdom, was present and saw the monster. Then the archbishop rose up quickly with the other [bishops] and explained to all the people gathered there what the avenging hand of the Lord had done to the blasphemer.

Not to delay: he who prefers a spider to the most precious body of the Lamb, has consigned his sinful flesh to be devoured by the flames, as were the remains of the more detestable spider. Witness the foul and distasteful belief of those who go astray, who reduce the most holy sacrament to such a comparison, and worse, they bring their idol from the roof in the coming of a spider.\textsuperscript{70}

Stefano di Giovanni Sassetta (1392-1450), \textit{Miracle of the Eucharist} (1423-25), Tempera on panel, 24.1 x 38.2 cm.
The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham (Founders/B.M.52).

This \textit{predella} (narrative) panel from the altarpiece of the \textit{Arte della Lana} (Woolworkers’ Guild) in Siena depicts heresy being exposed by supernatural events, not dissimilar to the story of John Badby and the spider narrated by Thomas Netter. In this scene Carmelites (who organised the \textit{Corpus Christi} festivities in Siena) are depicted centrally attending a celebration of the Eucharist. To the right a figure in dark robes (a Carmelite lay brother?) has been struck dead, and just above him a devil is carrying away his soul. The consecrated host which appears to burst from his chest is bleeding, perhaps indicating that the lay brother had doubted the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Other panels from the Siena altarpiece exist in Rome, Budapest, Siena, and Melbourne (shown overleaf, where a Carmelite can clearly be seen at the celebration of the Eucharist). On the altarpiece see Machtelt Israëls, ‘Sassetta’s Arte della Lana altar-piece and the cult of Corpus Domini in Siena’, \textit{The Burlington Magazine}, Volume 143, Number 1182 (September 2001), pp. 532-43.

\textsuperscript{69} cf. Dubois, \textit{Thomas Netter}, pp. 16-18.
\textsuperscript{70} Netter, \textit{Doctrinale}, ii, 386-387.