

The Incarnation, Reform and the Unity of the Church: a Sermon of Master Johannes Wifflet O.Praem. for the Feast of the Annunciation at the Council of Basel (1432)

Introduction

The early months of 1432 were a crucible in the history of the Council of Basel¹. The council had been opened in 1431 with papal approval according to the decree *Frequens* of the Council of Constance (1414-1417). This decree stated that a general council must be held five years from the end of Constance, seven years after the end of the council after that, and subsequently at ten year intervals. At its dissolution in 1424, the Council of Pavia-Siena had determined Basel as the site of the next general council to be summoned by the Pope in seven years. Under the leadership of its president Cardinal Julian Cesarini, the still sparsely-attended council had opened its first official session on 14 December 1431, with the stated goals of suppressing heresy, maintaining peace among Christian princes, and reforming the Church in head and members. The failure of forceful attempts to defeat the Hussite movement, and thus the need to undertake serious negotiations with the Bohemians, had come to the forefront of Cesarini's concerns, but events of late 1431 had made it clear that the cooperation of Pope Eugenius IV with the council would not be forthcoming. Already in November 1431 a secret consistory in Rome had produced two bulls, *Quoniam alto* and *Postquam divina*, terminating the council; after this papal opposition to the council only hardened. Papal ambassadors arrived in Basel 23 December, and soon after Cesarini wrote to Rome warning the pope about the grave scandals that would arise if Eugenius attempted to dissolve the council, including despair over reform,

¹ For an overview of the Council, see Johannes HELMRATH, *Das Basler Konzil 1431-1449: Forschungsstand und Probleme* (Köln: Böhlau, 1987). For the early period, see Gerald CHRISTIANSON, *Cesarini: The Conciliar Cardinal. The Basel Years, 1431-1438* (Sankt Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1979), pp. 10-69; Joachim STIEBER, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel, and the Secular Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 10-19; Loy BILDERBACK, "Eugene IV and the First Dissolution of the Council of Basel", *Church History* 36 (1967) pp. 243-253.

animosity toward the Roman Curia and potential schism, and encouragement of the Hussites².

In defiance of the Pope's attempt at dissolution, on 1 February 1432 the Council Fathers met to determine the form of an oath of personal incorporation and loyalty to the council. At this time the oath included the following four provisions: 1) to labor fully and diligently for the dignity and integrity of the council; 2) to give sound and suitable counsel according to God and one's conscience; 3) not to reveal the vote of another; and 4) not to depart from the environs of the council without the license of the council or its agent³. On 8 February Cesarini resigned the presidency, and on the same day wrote the pope a letter explaining in detail why the need to initiate negotiations with the Hussites at Basel was of the utmost importance. He also warned Eugenius that the Council Fathers were beginning to openly discuss the decree of Constance *Haec Sancta*, and its implications for the ultimate authority of the council over a pope who refused to cooperate with the council in its stated goals of reform⁴. A few days later on 15 February in public session the Council Fathers endorsed the decree *Haec Sancta* and adopted a new official seal, signifying the council's own authority independent of papal approbation. The next step was to reorganize the administrative nature of the council membership. The Council of Basel had inherited from Constance and Pavia-Siena the so-called "nations" system of representation, in which all of the members of the council were assigned to and voted as members of one of the five "nations": French, German, Italian, Spanish and English. On 18 February this system was abandoned, and in its place were instituted four deputations concerned with reform, peace, faith, and administration, respectively. The Council Fathers approved this new form of organization on 23 February, and members of the council were assigned to the various delegations the last day of the month⁵.

² CHRISTIANSON, *Cesarini: The Conciliar Cardinal*, pp. 30-42.

³ This translation of the original Latin preserved by JOHANNES DE SEGOVIA in his *Historia Gestorum Synodi Basiliensis* is from LOY BILDERBACK, "Proctorial Representation and Conciliar Support at the Council of Basel", *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum* 1 (1969) p. 141.

⁴ On the growing consciousness of the Council Fathers during early 1432 of the ecclesiological implications of *Haec Sancta*, see Michiel DECALUWE, "Le concile de Bâle face aux 'prétentions' souveraines d'Eugène IV", in: Véronique DEMARS-SION and Renée MARTINAGE (eds.), *Eglises et Justices. Actes des Journées internationales tenues à Saint-Ricquier* (Lille: 2005), pp. 17-25.

⁵ CHRISTIANSON, *Cesarini: The Conciliar Cardinal*, pp. 45-54; HELMRATH, *Das Basler Konzil 1431-1449*, pp. 18-70; LOY BILDERBACK, *The Membership of the Council of Basel* (PhD Dissertation. University of Washington, 1966) pp. 71-81.

Into this tumultuous atmosphere of growing tension between the council and Pope Eugenius, with the anxious anticipation of the possibility of debates and negotiations with a delegation of the Hussites still on the uncertain horizon, the Premonstratensian Johannes Wifflet, canon of Tongerlo abbey and master of theology at the University of Paris, arrived in Basel at the beginning of March. Within a few weeks of his arrival, Wifflet preached before the council on the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 1432. The purpose of this article is to analyze the context and content of this sermon, as well as to present an edition of the Latin text. By providing insights into Wifflet's interpretation of the problems facing the church, this sermon sheds light on the early participation of the Premonstratensians at the council⁶. As will become evident, for Wifflet, the question of church reform was inextricably linked to the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the implications of this doctrine for personal and institutional renewal. The divisions of Latin Christendom, he argues, especially the complacency of prelates and the endemic state of war existing between many Christian princes, conspire to make the attainment of any reform most difficult. Moreover, the immorality and divisions of the Latin Church have alienated both the Greek Orthodox and the Bohemian Hussites. Unless immediate reform is forthcoming, Wifflet concludes, these liabilities will undermine any attempts to win these two groups over to the Latin position.

The Career of Johannes Wifflet

As previously mentioned, Johannes Wifflet was a canon of Tongerlo abbey in the diocese of Cambrai⁷. Various alternate spellings of his name include Wijfliet (the typical Dutch spelling), Wijtfliet, Wiflet, Wisset, de Popper, de Puppel, Sufflet, and Hufflet⁸. It is known that Wifflet had

⁶ In his brief but useful article "De habitudine nonnullorum Praemonstratensium ad Concilium Basileense (a. 1431 ss.) notae quaedam", *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 55 (1979) pp. 116-122, J.B. VALVEKENS does not mention the presence of Wifflet at the Council. On the Religious Orders in general at the Council of Basel, see HELMRATH, *Das Basler Konzil 1431-1449*, pp. 121-132. I am currently preparing a book-length study on the participation of the Premonstratensians in the Council of Basel.

⁷ The most extensive treatment of Wifflet's career is found in James J. JOHN, *A Repertoire of Students at the College of Prémontré in Medieval Paris*, (M.Med.S. thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1951), pp. 58-59.

⁸ Léon GOOVAERTS in his *Ecrivains, Artistes et Savants de l'Ordre de Prémontré: Dictionnaire bio-bibliographique*, 4 Volumes (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1899-1920) has two distinct entries: 1) Vol. 1, p. 110, under the names *Hufflet* (or *Sufflet*) and

charge of Tongerlo's parish at Poppel, and was sent to study theology at the University of Paris. There he began his biblical studies in 1425 under the direction of Master Johannes Pulchripatris, and in September 1426 he was a bachelor of the Sentences. On 19 June 1430 he was accepted as a member of the faculty of theology, and by September of that year was listed among the regents of the university⁹. In October 1430 John of Marle, abbot-general of the Premonstratensian Order, named Wifflet as part of a commission to investigate charges of scandal in the abbey of Averbode, but Wifflet was not present for the subsequent investigation¹⁰.

The Protocol of the Council of Basel for 1432 as prepared by the professional notary Peter Bruneti represents an invaluable source for the day to day proceedings of the council's activities and membership. Bruneti records that Wifflet took the oath of incorporation as a member of the council on Thursday 6 March 1432. Taking the oath with him at the same time in the house of the Dominican friars was Master Johannes de Fonte, vicar of the bishop of Amiens. Although Wifflet was allowed to take the accustomed oath and was incorporated as a member of the council as the procurator of the abbot-general of the Premonstratensian Order, there was some controversy over this. The promoter of the general congregation admitting Wifflet stated that the lord abbot of Prémontré, as head of the order, should be present at the council in person, especially since accompanied by three other abbots of the order he was already at Louvain with the stated intention of coming to the council soon¹¹. On Monday 17 March

2) Vol. 2, p. 414, under the name *Wijffliet*. Although both entries contain overlapping material, Goovaerts makes no explicit identification of the two as one and the same man.

⁹ For the references to the career of Wifflet in the extant records of the University of Paris, see James J. JOHN, *A Repertoire of Students*, p. 58; Thomas SULLIVAN, O.S.B., *Parisian Licentiates in Theology, A.D. 1373-1500. A Biographical Register. Vol. I. The Religious Orders*, (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004) pp. 381-382.

¹⁰ James J. JOHN, *A Repertoire of Students*, p. 59. For the events at Averbode, see Vincent VAN GENECHTEN, "Daniel Laecman, 22ste Abt van Averbode, 1424-1441", *Analecta Praemonstrantia* 20 (1944) pp. 78-161.

¹¹ "Die iouis marcii fuit congregacio generalis in loco consueto domus fratrum Predicatorum, in qua fuerunt admissi magister Johannes de Fonte vicarius domini episcopi Ambianensis pro et nomine eiusdem episcopi et quidam Johannes de Hufflet doctor de ordine Premonstratensi, qui receptis suis mandatis solitum prestiterunt iuramentum, licet promotor recepcioni dicti Hufflet doctoris se opposuerit, dicens quod dominus abbas Premonstratensis, qui est pater abbas, deberet in concilio interesse et iam erat in Louuano cum tribus aliis abbatibus cum intencione veniendi. Super quo domini de deputacione pro communibus debent providere et scribere eisdem, quod veniant." *Die Protokolle des Concils 1431-1433 aus dem Manuale des Notars Bruneti und einer romisches Handschrift*, edited by Johannes HALLER in: *Concilium Basiliense*, Volume II (Basel, 1897) pp. 49-50

the council gave a letter to a *socius* of Wifflet to deliver to the abbot of Prémontré admonishing him to come to Basel and join the council within two months¹².

The Protocol notes that on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation, Wifflet preached the sermon for the solemn Mass in the cathedral. In noting the various dignitaries who were present, the Protocol provides the additional detail that due to the late hour the Mass went on despite the fact that the appropriate liturgical vestments were not available¹³. About two weeks later on 11 April, Wifflet was among those members of the council added to the deputation *pro fide*. Along with Wifflet that day the Dominican friar Johannes de Ragusa, destined to play such an important role in the history of the council, was added to the same deputation¹⁴. Over the next few months Wifflet undoubtedly was involved in the deliberations of this deputation, as among other matters it prepared for the anticipated arrival of and debates with the Bohemians. Sadly, Wifflet's death in late July cut short his work with the council. His funeral services took place 30 July 1432¹⁵. A manuscript belonging to the University of Basel attributes a second sermon to Johannes Wifflet for the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (in 1432, November 9th), which may or may not have been delivered by another man posthumously¹⁶.

(henceforth Haller, CB). In the manuscript variant printed by Haller in a parallel column, the Premonstratensian is referred to as *Johannes Wyfflet*.

¹² HALLER, CB, p. 60.

¹³ "Die martis XXV^a marcii, que fuit dies Annunciacionis Dominice, fuit missa solennis in ecclesia maiori huius civitatis celebrata per dominum episcopum Rosensem ordinis Carmelitarum et processio generalis, in quibus interfuerunt domini dux protector et domini prelati et alii de concilio, et fecit sermonem magister Johannes Sufflet doctor in theologia ordinis Premonstratensis, sumpto pro themate 'virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi'. Et quamvis fuisset ordinatum, quod domini prelati in dicta processione interessent in pontificalibus, videlicet mitris simplicibus et pluvialibus, nichilominus quia hora iam tarda, non est factum." HALLER, CB II, p. 69. On ceremonial at the Council of Basel, see Bernhard SCHIMMELPFENNING, "Das Zeremoniell auf den Konzilien von Konstanz und Basel", *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 49 (1969) pp. 273-293.

¹⁴ HALLER, CB II, p. 86.

¹⁵ "Die mercurii penultima die mensis iulii fuerunt exequie quondam magistri Johannis Wifflet magistri in theologia ordinis Premonstratensis celebrate in ecclesia S. Petri." HALLER, CB II, p. 180. According to GOOVAERTS, *Ecrivains, Artistes et Savants de l'Ordre de Prémontré*, Vol. 2, p. 414, the necrology of Tongerlo abbey lists his death as July 29, 1431. It is difficult to see how the year 1431 in this entry can be reconciled with Wifflet's well-documented presence at Basel in 1432.

¹⁶ The sermon is found in Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, A. IV. 20, ff. 430-435. See also Johannes Baptist SCHNEYER, "Baseler Konzilspredigten aus dem Jahre 1432", in Remigius BAUMER (ed.), *Von Konstanz nach Trient: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kirche*

Content of the Sermon for the Annunciation

Wifflet's sermon for the Feast of the Annunciation is essentially a commentary on a scriptural verse taken from the gospel of the day: "the power of the Most High shall overshadow you" (Luke 1: 34). These words spoken by the angel to Mary signify the moment of the Incarnation, and the sermon is a reflection on the meaning and implications of this doctrine for personal and ecclesial reform. The sermon contains a prologue and two parts. Wifflet begins by protesting his own inadequacy for the task and the shortage of time to discuss the importance of this feast, and asks the Council Fathers to excuse his limitations. He expresses hope that the same God who on the day of the Annunciation filled the womb of the Virgin Mary with his divinity, will now emit his light and truth to lead the faithful into his holy mountain and tabernacle, and supply the grace of renewal to all Christians. Wifflet then engages in brief and typical scholastic word-play concerning the syllables of the *Ave* with which the angel first greeted Mary. He contrasts the greeting *Ave* with the name of the first woman *Eva*, and affirms how the Virgin Mary, being *sine ve* (without woe), is the new *Eva* (Eve). The prologue ends with the customary *Ave Maria* prayer.

Wifflet then proceeds to introduce his main thesis concerning how the power of God is demonstrated through the Incarnation, a miracle intended to empower human beings to be reborn as children of God. In general Wifflet will follow the teachings of St. Augustine¹⁷ and will on occasion quote sacred scripture. His only direct quotation of Augustine is from *On Holy Virginit*y, where he makes the point that the miraculous birth of Christ from a virgin signifies the Church about to be born from the action of the Holy Spirit. Wifflet states he has two points to make about how the power of God is manifested in the Incarnation. Firstly, the Incarnation itself is an act of divine power which points to the reformation of that deformity which had followed the Fall of Adam. Secondly, the divine power in the Incarnation allows the faithful to be born from the Church

von den Reformkonzilien bis zum Tridentium, (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1972), p. 144.

¹⁷ For a classic treatment of Augustine on reform, see Gerhart B. LADNER, *The Idea of Reform, Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), especially pp. 153-283. See also the interesting remarks of Peter Iver KAUFMAN, *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1982), pp. 5-28.

through the Holy Spirit, and through this same Spirit's power the inherited spiritual deformity of human beings is repaired.

Wifflet proceeds to discuss the original prelapsarian state of Adam, his endowments and perfections in Paradise. In this state Adam's body was in perfect subjection to the higher powers of his soul. All this changed by Adam's disastrous withdrawal of his will from its principal good, and the result was the flow of infinite evils which have since plagued humanity. Only God's own son, the second Adam, could satisfy and repair the infinite punishment (*infinita pena*) owed for human sin. As from Adam all human beings are descended by a natural propagation, so now from Christ all are reborn from a spiritual regeneration. Wifflet concludes this part of the discussion by extolling the virtues of the Virgin Mary, particularly how she gave her consent to the spiritual matrimony between the Son of God and human nature.

After laying the groundwork for the theological foundations of reform, Wifflet turns his attention to the state of the Church, and parallels its development with that of humanity in general. Thus, after describing the Church's original state and how its members, particularly prelates, should ideally act, Wifflet proceeds to describe current problems. He believes that too many recent human laws and dispensations are compromising the integrity of the Church, and need to be reformed. The reign of sensuality in the Church has generated a long list of vices shared by both prelates and princes, namely negligence, ambition, greed and cruelty. These vices, so prevalent among those who bear the responsibility for the well-being of the members of the Church, corrupt the whole mystical body. Wifflet discusses the respective duties of bishops, priests and deacons, and laments how they are happy to receive tithes from the faithful while committing a host of abuses instead of discharging their responsibilities. These abuses have led to a deformity of the Church, and are, Wifflet believes, why both the Greek Orthodox and Bohemian Hussites criticize the Church and distance themselves from it. Interestingly, Wifflet does not criticize these two "dissident" groups nor their attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church.

The Premonstratensian canon does not spare those religious who neglect their vows and forsake the *vita apostolica* to which they are bound. In a statement which may indeed reflect some of the processions and entrances Wifflet himself witnessed in Basel, he criticizes those prelates who make use of ten or twelve horses in their retinue where three would do, and who in general misuse the alms of the faithful to support excessive staffs and households. The misbehavior of the clergy is

matched by that of the princes, whose horrible and irresponsible wars demoralize clergy and people and create conditions extremely conducive to reform. It is easier, Wifflet concludes, to create a whole world than to justify a sinner.

Wifflet ends the sermon with the assertion that the Council Fathers must first reform themselves if they hope to accomplish any of the tasks at hand. If the leaders of Christendom would make peace, and come together in unity to address their own personal reform, they would have nothing to fear from their opponents. The happy spectacle of a Latin Church reformed and at peace would be the best argument for the Bohemians and Greeks to return to unity. Wifflet stresses that now is the time for personal reform, to let the Incarnate Christ renew the whole Church before the Hussite delegates arrive. The Hussites, he argues, look forward to public disputation with the council and hope to triumph by merely pointing out the many and manifest vices of the Catholic clergy, rather than achieving victory through argumentation and theological debate. He concludes by asking the Council Fathers to trust in the promise of the Lord to St. Peter that prayers offered in sincerity will lead to perseverance. It is unclear whether this reference to St. Peter is an oblique allusion to the mounting tension between the council and Pope Eugenius IV, but Wifflet's plaintive plea for unity speaks eloquently to the gravity of the situation.

Manuscripts and Text

The following edition of this sermon is based upon the two extant manuscripts. The first is found in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Douai, Ms. 198, Tom. III, fols. 311r-314v. It is a sixteenth century manuscript originally belonging to the abbey of Anchin. The manuscript consists of four volumes, containing for the most part letters and documents relating to the Council of Basel. The third volume contains some 59 sermons from the council, with Wifflet's sermon being the fifty-third¹⁸. The sermon is

¹⁸ For a description of the Manuscript, see *Catalogue Général des Manuscrits des Bibliothèques Publiques des Départements, Tome VI, Douai* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878), pp. 89-97. I am grateful to Professor James J. John for making me aware of this copy of the sermon, and indebted to Mr. Pierre-Jacques Lamblin, Directeur de la Bibliothèque Municipale de Douai, for graciously providing me with a digital photograph copy of the sermon, and for pointing out that the sermon ends at fol. 314v, rather than on fol. 317v as indicated on page 94 of the above catalogue.

written in a cursive Gothic script with extensive use of abbreviations. The text extends across the whole page, and there are no columns. A typical full page contains between 31 to 35 lines of text. The second version of the sermon is found in Klosterneuburg, Stiftsbibliothek 82, fols. 18r-20v¹⁹. J.M. Vidal in an article in 1909 provided an analysis of this manuscript and its contents, and transcribed several lines from the prologue of Wifflet's sermon²⁰.

The basis of the edition provided here is the Douai manuscript, as it appears to be a more complete version of the sermon. Its folio numbers are provided in the text. I have, however, indicated significant alternate readings from the Klosterneuburg version in the notes, using the abbreviation "KL" to indicate these. On some occasions the reading from the Klosterneuburg manuscript was given precedence in the text, and the Douai variant indicated in the notes. I have provided a punctuation and paragraph structure, and regularized capitalization. Biblical quotations (with modern chapter and verse given in brackets) and several other words have been italicized for emphasis and clarification.

**Sermo de Annunciatione beatae Mariae virginis²¹
[fol. 311r] per magistrum Johannem de tongerlot ordinis
premonstratensis**

Virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Et originaliter Lucas primo capitulo [1:34] et transumptive in evangelio hodiernae festivitatis hec habentur. Reverendissimi Reverendique patres ac viri percelebres, locuturus de virtute altissimi prudentius ori meo silencium imposuissem quam in praesentia tanti cetus audirer cum michi illa dictandi et loquendi pericia desit quam res ipsa deposcit atque sensus ydoneus tractandi hanc materiam et tempus pro huius modi tractanda requisitum non michi affuere. Benignius

¹⁹ This version of the sermon, although not the Douai version, was noted by Johannes Baptist Schneyer, "Baseler Konzilspredigten aus dem Jahre 1432", p. 141. I would like to thank The Hill Monastic Manuscript Library of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, for their service in providing me with a photocopy of this version of the sermon, in particular Dr. Matthew Heintzelman for his invaluable help in using their reference facilities.

²⁰ J.M. VIDAL, "Un Recueil Manuscrit de Sermons prononcés aux conciles de Constance et de Bâle", *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 10 (1909), pp. 493-520. Vidal mentions the sermon on pages 495 and 507, and briefly discusses it on p. 519.

²¹ This title found only in KL.

enim²² vestre paternitates dignentur ignoscere si quicquam vicii minus accurate offerat, et potius ipsam rem quam hominem loquentem aut eius sermones animadvertere velint.

Dimissis hic materiis, instabo tractandum nunc ad propositum meum deveniendum; brevis similitudo cum aliqua introductione loco aliarum specierum doctrina est habenda, percelebres, ut non lateat vos illud Ecclesiastici xxxiiii [34:6] *cor tuum fantasias patietur nisi ab altissimo visa fuerit visitacio*. Altissimus, igitur, qui hodie ad Mariam non locali motu venit sed ineffabili sue potencie manifestacione, et implevit uterum virginis sua deitate, ut spiritu [311v] adveniente parcat altissimi filium que dedignatur admittere et virum hic velit²³ emittere lucem suam et veritatem suam ut nos deducant et adducant in montem sanctum suum et in tabernaculam suam.

Et sicut ipse de virgine nasci dignatus est ut omnia renovaret, ita nos per gratiam innovare et ad novitatem²⁴ reducere dignetur. Quod ut facilius impetrare valeamus devote dicere tenemus Archangelis Gabrielis salutacionem quam ipse hodie in nova legacione novo modo habuit ad Mariam mutando malediccione Eve in Marie Ave. [Et hec salutacio Ave]²⁵ idem est quod sine ve Marie soli competeat, nam ipsa sine ve culpe fuit et sine ve concupiscentie²⁶ quibus tum genus humanum subiacuit et sine ve pene cui mulieres in partu subiacent, et eciam sine illo ve, cui genus humanum subiacet quo ad incineracionem corporis. Maria ipsa²⁷ enim fuit gratia plena, ipsa principalia Dei filii perfecit et implevit. Sicut ergo hodie ab angelo fuit salutata, ita eandem salutacionem dicatis mecum *Ave Maria gratia plena dominus tecum*.

Virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Virtus²⁸, reverendi patres, que est ultimum potencie hec ut²⁹ manifestatur hodie in Christi incarnatione; non enim ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri sed³⁰ virtute altissimi assumpsit Christus carnem de virgine ut homines nascentur in filios Dei. Et hic modus complemento Dei actione³¹ congruebat ut hominem Christum faceret ex femina sine viro. Nam fecit hominem sine viro et

²² KL *verum*.

²³ KL *voluit*.

²⁴ KL *montem*.

²⁵ This phrase found only in KL.

²⁶ KL *concepisse*.

²⁷ *ipsa* found only in KL.

²⁸ KL inserts *christus* before *virtus*.

²⁹ KL inserts *altissimi* after *ut*.

³⁰ KL inserts *in* before *virtute*.

³¹ KL *actionis*.

femina, ut Adam, et hominem sine femina de viro sicut Evam, eciam non debuit nisi novo ordine de celo venire qui vetustatis destrueret imperium.

Et dicit sanctus Augustinus in libro de sancta³² virginitate *oportebat caput nostrum insigni miraculo secundum corpus nasci de virgine ut significaret membra sua de virgine ecclesia secundum spiritum sanctum*³³ *nascitura*³⁴. Genuit enim virgo Maria Christum supra communem legem nature altissimi virtute, et non lege communi videlicet seminali virtute viri et propagacione secundum quam omnes descendimus ab Adam. Iam verificatum illud Jeremias [31:22] *Novum fecit dominus super terram mulier circumdabit virum*. Iste modus ab angelo in evangelio hodierno explanatur dicente *spiritus sanctus superveniet in te et virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi*. Hec fuerunt verba vestris reverenciis proposita.

Ad punctos duo virtutis Dei effectus eliciendi sunt. Et primus erit de infinita et ultimata³⁵ Dei virtute, qua incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine et homo factus est; de qua dicit [312r] psalmista [144:6] *virtutem terribilium tuorum dicent et magnitudinem tuam narrabunt*. Et hic punctus respicit reformationem illius deformitatis quam prius Adam fecit. Secundus punctus de effectu virtutis Dei quo fideles nascuntur de matre ecclesia per spiritum, per quem eciam spiritum deformitas que per homines committitur reformatur. Et de illo effectu eciam psalmista loquitur [103:30] *Emitte spiritum tuum et creabuntur et renovabis faciem terre*. Sic in scriptura reperitur Adam, in quo omnes eramus tamquam in principio seculi actione rectus a Deo fuit formatus tam in scientiis quam in virtutibus habens enim perfectam cognicionem illorum que competeabant statui suo in ordine ad finem ad quem erat ordinatus. Quo namque ad lumen naturale perfecte adeptus fuit intellectum suum et cum hoc multas revelaciones a Deo et angelis recipiebat; fuit insuper in lumine gratie non solum dotatus naturalibus virtutibus et donis sed supernaturalibus³⁶, ut puta gratia et iusticia originali que condicionem humane nature non sequebantur.

De latere Ade formata fuit Eva sic ecclesia de latere Christi effluxa est perfectius preterea ordo corporis ad animam et anime ad suum creatorem

³² KL omits *sancta*.

³³ Douai omits *sanctum*.

³⁴ St. AUGUSTINE, *De Sancta Virginitate*. Liber I, cap. VI. Migne, PL 40, col. 399 reads: "oportebat enim caput nostrum propter insigne miraculum secundum carnem nasci de virgine, quo significaret membra sua de virgine Ecclesia secundum spiritum nascitura."

³⁵ KL *ultima*.

³⁶ KL omits *et donis sed supernaturalibus*.

in ipso fuit, quia in perfecta subiectione³⁷ corpus fuit quo ad animam et vires inferiores anime quo ad superiores ut puta sensibilitas, que est appetitus sequens cognitionem sensitivam nominata inferior vis anime, que extendit in corporis sensus, fuit subiecta rationi, ita quod ratio pro illo statu habuit dominionem in regno anime; et quamdiu ratio dominabatur que prout³⁸ superior³⁹ dicitur innititur principiis et legibus eternis et divinis consulendum et prout⁴⁰ inferior humanis et temporalibus bene regnum anime regebatur et formatum fuit. Sed voluntate se retrahente a principio bono et a regulis datis sibi et Deum derelinquente, tunc sensualitas incipiebat dominari et ex illa longa diuturnitate eius domini creaverunt multiplices abhominaciones ut mors, pene corporalis dampnacio, eterna obli-vio Dei, heresies pestifera et cetera infinita mala.

Ipsi enim infideles filii provocaverunt Deum in eo qui non erat Deus teste psalmista, propter quod semel eos devoravit per diluvium, sepe per fames, per bestiarum dentes et per gladium vastavit. Verum ab hiis malis nulli pure creature poterat dari de condigna potentia reformationis generis humani quia hoc infinitam penam requirebat. Quando igitur venit plenitudo temporis et tempus a Deo ordinatum, misit filium suum sanctum ex muliere, virtute Spiritus Sancti. Hic autem secundus Adam [312v] est a quo nascimur spirituali regeneratione, sicut ab Adam nati sumus naturali propagacione de cuius latere ecclesia mater natura formata est; propter quod teste Apostolo ad Ephesios [see 4:4ff] Omnes unum corpus sumus quia ex uno⁴¹ patre creati et redempti, creante et redimente nos, et ex una matre ecclesia et eisdem sacramentis regenerati sumus; et hoc est quod dicit Genesis secundo capitulo [2:23] hoc nunc *os ex ossibus meis et caro de carne mea*.

Hodie ergo, percelebres viri, est ille dies adoptatus in quo noster redemptor est incarnatus. Et modus illius incarnationis ab angelo in evangelio explanatur: non supra dixi naturali propagacione et communi lege nature activa Christus descendit ab Adam, sed supernaturali, propter quod Maria dubitavit de modo licet per certitudinem nuncii et immutabilem prophetie nuncciacionem certitudinaliter scivit quod virgo conciperet et pareret filium. Sed modus huius misterii a seculo in Deo fuit absconditus et non plene enuncciatius a Deo prophetis, sed hoc qualiter futurum

³⁷ KL *in perfectam subiectionem*.

³⁸ KL *pro tunc*.

³⁹ Douai reads *inferior* here.

⁴⁰ KL *pro tunc*.

⁴¹ Douai reads *viro* for *uno*.

esset ad explanandum angelo fuit reservatum qui totum mundum ad eam refert dicens *Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te et virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi*, quasi diceret divina maiestate relucente in puritate tua⁴² virgo Maria sicut in speculo et in ea relictas atque in uterum tuum⁴³ immissa divinum perficiet conceptum. Et vere hic fuit altissimi virtus et ultimum Dei potentie que enim maior poterat cogitari illa virtute qua verbum ante luciferis genitum caro factum est et homo Deus factura enim de mundi respectu huiusmodi persona reputatur.

Gaudeant omnes hodie cum Maria in qua tanta facta sunt miracula et altissima, intra cuius carnem splendor omnium sanctorum continebatur. Hec mater nostrae redemptionis et reformationis de ea verificatur Proverbiorum ultimo [31:10ff] *mulierem fortem infinitam*⁴⁴ *quis inveniet* et sequitur *de multis finibus pretium eius* quia ipsa Deum et hominem infinitum distantes in se complexa est. Hec fuit et est⁴⁵ oliva super quam columba ab archa requievit emissa; hec fuit que loco totius nature humane quo ad spirituale matrimonium inter filium Dei et humanam naturam contrahendum dabat consensum dicens *Ecce ancilla Domini fiat michi secundum verbum tuum* [Luke 1: 38]. Et hoc de primo puncto.

Percelebres viri quo ad secundum punctum advertendum est. Sicut in Adam regnum anime erat formatum in statu innocentiae ita videtur regnum ecclesiae fuisse ordinatum ut esse⁴⁶ [313r] a Christo et suis sequatibus, qui mox renati ex sacramentis ecclesiae habent gratias et⁴⁷ virtutes et perfeccionem⁴⁸ atque statui ipsorum competentes in ordine ad finem ad quem ordinati sunt et cum hoc ad regimen ipsorum et aliorum leges pure divinas et theologias partim divinas et humanas et civiles et canonicas et pure humanas et civiles habent, in quibus tamquam eternis et divinis humanis et temporalibus veroque⁴⁹ est superior pars anime qui⁵⁰ habet consulem et illi qui per modum capitis se habet in re publica, ut prelati et principes ex eisdem iudicare et subditos regere in regno ecclesiae; et

⁴² KL omits *tua*.

⁴³ KL omits *tuum*.

⁴⁴ Douai omits *infinitam*.

⁴⁵ Douai omits *est*.

⁴⁶ KL omits *esse*.

⁴⁷ KL *atque*.

⁴⁸ Douai omits *perfeccionem*.

⁴⁹ KL *ideoque*.

⁵⁰ Douai omits *qui*.

quamdiu hoc regimen in ecclesia⁵¹ stetit quod erat secundum dictas leges que immediate et mediate procedunt ex principiis fidei in lumine supernaturali notis bene formatum et rectum fuit regimen ecclesiae, et si interim reduceretur ad illud regimen et bene esset reformatum. Et quae nove additiones de divinis et humanis a Christo et patribus nostris constitutis dimitterentur, ⁵²et sancte leges execusandam darentur et dispensaciones non admitterentur.

Sed pro dolor, condicio hominum non patitur quamdiu eisdem legibus gubernetur sicut nec condicio Ade quam diu in statu innocentie stetit; ymmo scriptis legibus universi filii hominum abierunt in vias pravas et laqueis viciorum, sic sunt irretiti quod nichil acceptum peragunt in conspectu Domini. Iam regnat iterum sensualitas ubique. O quam detestande sunt nunc prelatorum et principum negligentia, ambicio, cupiditas et crudelitas! Hec vicia totum corrumpunt corpus mysticum. Iam directio queri videtur quam egressa est iniquitas a senioribus iudicibus qui videntur regere populum iam est⁵³ dicere sicut populus ita et sacerdos; peccata aut munere aut potestate aut favore aut timore manent impunita. Summus pontifex qui est vicarius Christi, et episcopi qui sunt successores apostolorum, et presbiteri septuaginta duorum discipulorum sunt vicarii, quorum officium est orationes dicere, corpus dominicum conficere, sacramenta dispensare, verbum Dei predicare; propter quod a populo decimas obligationes⁵⁴ et piorum hominum donaciones⁵⁵ iure divino percipiunt. Nec in quiete et tranquillitate hec peragere valeant se ad ambitionem et pluralitatem beneficiorum ad exactionem subditorum se applicant, et ad cetera vitia spiritualia et carnalia que magne infamie sunt valde deforme esset et formidandum. Et quis diceret⁵⁶ causam⁵⁷ aliam esse fuisse et fuit quare Graeci recesserunt ab ecclesia quam istam. Et credo quod fuit causa quare Bohemi ecclesie ordinationes et statim destruere conantur.

Et presertim quid turpius potest in ecclesia quam quod qui religiosi deberent esse pauperes in abdicatione temporalium rerum et casti in libidinum interiorum et exteriorum refrenacione quia voverunt [313v] vitam

⁵¹ KL *ecclesiae*.

⁵² KL omits the rest of this paragraph.

⁵³ KL inserts *populus* here.

⁵⁴ KL *obligaciones*.

⁵⁵ KL *devociones*.

⁵⁶ Douai has *dicent* for *diceret*.

⁵⁷ KL *totam*.

quam apostoli post ascensionem Christi⁵⁸ duxerunt, ubi nullus dicebat aliquid esse suum sed erant illis omnia communia Actus primo capitulo. Dent se viciis⁵⁹ votis suis contrariis. Tria deberent esse genera hominum ceteris meliora, ut {dicit}⁶⁰ Petrus Bothorii⁶¹: prelati respectu subditorum propter excelsam auctoritatem; clerici respectu laicorum propter communem ecclesie utilitatem; et senes respectu juniorum propter presumptam stabilitatem. Sed nunc prelati alii⁶² qui secundum ipsorum statuta deberent equitare cum tribus equis nunc cum decem vel duodecim equitant, et superfluum elemosynarum et⁶³ bonorum crucifixi quod pauperum necessitatibus applicari deberent aut in alios pios usus converti, in superfluum pompam equorum, vestium, et familie expendunt; de istis vereficatur ista parabola Lucas xiii [13:6] *arborem fici quidam habebat in vinea sua et venit querens fructum suum et non invenit*. Et quis potest principes excusare, qui deberent intendere ut subditos legibus civilibus⁶⁴ gubernarent, et ad virtutes atque anime salutem inducerent, qui ipsi se tam in abominabilibus guerris implicant ex quibus crescunt confusiones totius cleri et pullulant obprobria populi Christiani: latrocinia, furta, tradiciones.

Reverendi patres, satis iam auditum est istud ut arbitror, iam satisque cognitum habent vestrae paternitates; neque gratia recitationis istorum malorum michi hic sermo susceptus est, sed potius humili et devota exhortatione adversus clades presentes et futuras vos admonere curavi. Credo si essemus reformati in ecclesia, et pax inter principes esset, quod hoc esset fortissimum argumentum quod posset ad reductionem Bohemorum et Grecorum fieri. Si enim viderint nos virtutibus compositos et ornatos, et per pacem unitos ut castrorum aciem ordinatum, nos timerent.

Sed reverendi patres, quomodo fiet istud difficilius est impium iustificare quam totum mundum creare; videmus quod membra aliqua et maxime principaliora obicem spiritui sancto proponunt. Lex nobis communis est quam spiritus sancti operatione fiat mediante congregacione⁶⁵

⁵⁸ KL *domini*.

⁵⁹ Douai omits *viciis*.

⁶⁰ Both manuscripts are unclear on this word.

⁶¹ This refers to the fourteenth century Franciscan then Benedictine Pierre Bersuire (Petrus Berchorius, Borthorius, Bothorius, etc), known, *inter alia*, for his encyclopedic works on morals prepared for preachers. See A. GIER, "Bersuire, Pierre" in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, I (München & Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1980), col. 2020.

⁶² KL *aliter sunt*.

⁶³ Douai omits *et*.

⁶⁴ Douai has *quibuslibet* for *civilibus*.

⁶⁵ KL omits *congregacione*.

corporis integri mistici Christi quod papa et ecclesie membra reputant et isto modo bene fieri potest. Faciamus ergo omnia nova. Iam enim tempus in quo omnia secundum naturam renovantur; nos docet Christus hodie qui incarnatus est ut renovaret omnia nos instruit. Non est opus expectare adventum Hussitarum pro isto quia oportet nos incipere⁶⁶ cum reformatione. Ipsi volunt in publico nobiscum disputare ut possint ex viciis nostris non vincere, cum per auctoritates et rationes varias non possint. Habeamus enim hanc fiduciam in domino cum primo ecclesie {pastore Petro, qui dixit quidcumque petievitis secundum voluntatem eius audiet vos.}⁶⁷ Sitis constantes et perseverantes, qui enim perseveravit usque⁶⁸ in finem salvus erit, et verbum presumptum vereficabitur de nobis *virtus altissimi spiritus sancti superveniet in te et virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi*, ad honorem sue sponse et salutem animarum vestrarum, hic per gratiam et in futuro etiam per gloriam. Amen.

Summary

Johannes Wifflet O.Praem., canon of Tongerlo abbey and Master of Theology at the University of Paris, delivered a sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation at the Council of Basel in 1432. The purpose of this article is to analyze the context and content of this previously-unedited sermon, as well as to present an edition of the Latin text. For Wifflet, Church reform was inextricably linked to the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the implications of this doctrine for personal and institutional renewal. The divisions of Latin Christendom, he argues, especially the complacency of prelates and the endemic state of war existing between Christian princes, conspire to make the attainment of any reform most difficult. Moreover, the immorality and divisions of the Latin Church have alienated both the Greek Orthodox and the Bohemian Hussites. Unless immediate reform is forthcoming, Wifflet concludes, these liabilities will undermine any attempts to win these two groups over to the Latin position.

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⁶⁶ Douai has *incipere*.

⁶⁷ KL omits words in brackets.

⁶⁸ Douai omits *usque*.