

Church History
Lesson 26 - Forerunners to the Reformation

1. Introduction - Forerunner to the Reformation

- 1.1. As we have seen, many people recognized the need for reform in the church during the later middle ages. The papacy and priesthood had grown increasingly corrupt, the papacy was faced with schisms and rival claimants to the papal seat, the church hierarchy often seemed more interested in temporal affairs than heavenly ones, the church was consistently embroiled in power struggles with various rulers and kingdoms.
- 1.2. Throughout the history of the church there had been various reform movements, especially with monasticism. During the end of the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy, the conciliar movement had arisen to try and address these many problems through church councils. However, this movement broke down because there arose rival councils setting in rival popes!
- 1.3. Clearly the church needed major reform. The question was, how would this happen? Who would lead such reform - and what exactly would be changed?
- 1.4. Today we will look at a number of attempts at reform. Some of these actually overlapped with some of the movements mentioned above. None of these attempts achieved the success that would happen later under Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer and the other Reformers. But they did lay the groundwork that God later used to bring about the needed reform, and many of their themes were also major themes during the Reformation.

2. Peter Waldo (The Waldnses) - c. 1140-1205 s

- 2.1. Peter Waldo (better Valdes) was a rich merchant in Lyons. About 1173 he provided an income for his wife and separated from her, placed his daughters in a convent, and distributed his property among the poor in order to begin an itinerant life of preaching. - Ferguson, location 9720
- 2.2. His movement came to emphasize three principal points: a life of voluntary poverty, access to the Bible in the vernacular, and public preaching. He and his followers sought recognition at the Third Lateran Council (1179). Their way of life was approved, but they were forbidden to preach except by invitation of the clergy. Valdes and his "Poor Men of Lyons" disregarded this restriction and preached against the worldliness of the clergy. Hence, a council at Verona in 1184 included them with the Cathari in an excommunication. - Ferguson, location 9723
- 2.3. Some returned to the church as the "Catholic Poor," pursuing the same activities as before. Others, although doctrinally orthodox and even (especially in France) attending Mass and keeping a formal connection with the Roman Catholic church, organized themselves apart from the church and appointed their own ministers. Waldenses in Lombardy - Ferguson, location 9727
- 2.4. The Waldenses had the Gospels translated into the vernacular. Rejecting only the practices they saw as clearly against Scripture, they opposed especially prayers for the dead, purgatory, images, and veneration of saints and relics. Their concern to live by the Sermon on the Mount led them to refuse oaths and any form of killing. - Ferguson, location 9735

- 2.5. The Waldenses survived sometimes severe persecution in less accessible Alpine valleys and in 1532 began an accommodation with the Genevan reformers. They are the only Medieval sect to have a documented continuity to the present. - Ferguson, location 9739

3. John Wycliffe (c.1325-1384)

- 3.1. John Wycliffe lived during the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy when the office of the Pope was dominated by the French kingdom and was in reality simply a puppet of the French ruler. Wycliffe died just as the Great Schism (when there were two and then three Popes) was beginning. Wycliffe was an English scholastic philosopher, a theologian, a bible translator and a seminary professor at Oxford.
- 3.2. When Wycliffe was a student, one of his professors was a man named Richard FitzRalph began to ask why secular rulers were required to live in a state of grace, while even many Popes lived in open, unrepentant sin? Should not this mean that they had no right to spiritual power? Wycliffe was influenced by this line of thinking and he became very critical of the church hierarchy, and attacked the privileged role and the luxury the clergy enjoyed in England. He began to argue that the secular rulers had been given responsibility by God to correct the abuses of the church within its realm and to remove church leaders who would not repent of their sin. This was obviously very displeasing to the church hierarchy - especially as it was under the domination of the French rulers who wanted to exercise control via the church in other realms. However, it was warmly received by English rulers - until Wycliffe began to point out that they too had to renounce sin, and there were also limits to their power. At that point, they turned on Wycliffe as well.
- 3.2.1. One of Wyclif's professors, Richard FitzRalph, had argued, "Why should the state of grace be required only of temporal rulers? Do churchmen have the right to rule when they live in mortal sin?" - Shelley, location 4240
- 3.2.2. Undoubtedly influenced by his professor, Wyclif plunged into this debate and added an important idea. He argued that the English government had the divinely assigned responsibility to correct the abuses of the church within its realm and to relieve of office those churchmen who persisted in their sin. The state could even seize the property of corrupt church officials. - Shelley, location 4243
- 3.2.3. In 1371, he left the university to serve the crown, first as a diplomat, and then as a polemicist. It was the time of the papacy in Avignon, at the service of French interests. Therefore, the English authorities welcomed Wycliffe's arguments on the nature and limits of lordship or dominion. According to him, all legitimate dominion comes from God. But such dominion is characterized by the example of Christ, who came to serve, not to be served. Any lordship used for the profit of the ruler rather than for that of the governed is not true dominion, but usurpation. The same is true of any dominion, no matter how legitimate, which seeks to expand its power beyond the limits of its authority. Therefore, any supposed ecclesiastical authority that collects taxes for its own benefit, or seeks to extend its power beyond the sphere of spiritual matters, is illegitimate. - Gonzales, location 6898

- 3.2.4.** Naturally, these views were well received by civil authorities in England, involved as they were in a constant quarrel with the papacy precisely over the questions of taxation and of the temporal authority of popes. But Wycliffe meant every word he said, and soon his logic led him to point out that what he had affirmed regarding the limits of ecclesiastical dominion was also true of civil power.... In consequence, Wycliffe soon lost the support of those who had earlier rejoiced in his forthrightness. - Gonzales, location 6905-6908
- 3.3.** Wycliffe also began to teach that the true church is found not in the Pope and his visible hierarchy, but rather in the invisible body of those who have been predestined to salvation by God. (Towards the end of his life, he even began to declare that the Pope himself appeared to be reprobate and not among the elect.) For all of this, the Pope condemned Wycliffe in 1377 - though at that time influential friends in England prevented anything more than threats from happening.
- 3.3.1.** At this time, his position also grew more radical. The scandal of the Great Schism encouraged this, and he began teaching that the true church of Christ is not the pope and his visible hierarchy, but rather the invisible body of those who are predestined to salvation—a point he drew from Saint Augustine of Hippo. - Gonzales, location 6909
- 3.3.2.** But the church on earth he defines as the whole number of the elect, containing “only men that shall be saved.” - Shelley, location 4276
- 3.3.3.** Towards the end of his life, Wycliffe declared that the pope was among those who were probably reprobate. - Gonzales, location 6912
- 3.3.4.** Not surprisingly, the pope in 1377 condemned the Oxford reformer’s teaching. The church might have moved against Wyclif at that moment but influential friends in England saw to it that the condemnation never went beyond threats. - Shelley, location 4245
- 3.4.** Furthermore, Wycliffe began to teach that the true Pope ought to live, not in luxury but rather like Peter be able to say “Silver and gold have I none...” The Pope should be devoted, not to temporal power and riches, but to the care of the flock of God and of the poor. As the Great Schism continued, and people spoke against Wycliffe, he hardened and eventually declared that the Pope was the antichrist - and since there was more than one Pope, they were both such!
- 3.4.1.** The decisive year of his reforming career was 1378, the date of the Great Schism in the papacy. Faced with the comic-tragedy of one pope in Rome excommunicating another pope in Avignon, Wyclif became more radical in his assessment of the church and its need for reform. - Shelley, location 4254
- 3.4.2.** He insisted that those who sat in St. Peter’s chair should be, like the apostle, without silver or gold. According to Wyclif the “Bible papacy” consisted in a poor and humble life, spent in the service of the church, setting before God’s people an example of Christian goodness. The pope should be the shepherd of the flock and the preacher who brings men to Christ. - Shelley, location 4257
- 3.4.3.** Such a view leaves no room for the temporal power of the pope. The conception of the papacy as a political force constantly striving for the mastery of men by political means was anathema to Wyclif. He detested the trappings of power; he denounced the worldliness and luxury of the popes. - Shelley, location 4260

- 3.4.4.** As the schism continued, however, Wyclif 's view hardened. He came to believe that the pope was Antichrist. If there were two of them railing at each other, they simply shared the unholy title. - Shelley, location 4264
- 3.4.5.** In a steady stream of charges Wyclif showed how far the papacy had departed from the simple faith and practice of Christ and his disciples. "Christ is truth," he wrote, "the pope is the principle of falsehood. Christ lived in poverty, the pope labors for worldly magnificence. Christ refused temporal dominion, the pope seeks it." The Oxford reformer poured scorn on the idea that because Peter died in Rome therefore every bishop of Rome is to be set above all of Christendom. By the same reasoning the Muslim might conclude that his "prelate of Jerusalem," where Christ died, is greater than the pope. Christ - Shelley, location 4265
- 3.5.** Over time, Wycliffe recognized a number of other doctrines based on these truths. If the church is an invisible body of the elect, then the Scripture sits over the church, not the church over Scripture. The final rule for faith was thus the Scripture - not the declarations of the church. And every believer has the right and responsibility to interpret Scripture. Therefore, the Scripture should be translated into the local language, rather than be kept only in Latin. Therefore, Wycliffe began to translate the Scripture from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English. It appears he personally translated parts of the New Testament (and possibly all of it), but other parts were done by associates. It was completed prior to his death in 1384, but revisions were done by compatriots after his death as well.
- 3.5.1.** The standard Wyclif used to judge the Roman Church was the teachings of Scripture. "Neither the testimony of Augustine nor Jerome," he said, "nor any other saint should be accepted except in so far as it was based upon Scripture." - Shelley, location 4295
- 3.5.2.** The Oxford Reformer went even further in his assertion of the right of every man to examine the Bible for himself: "The New Testament is of full authority, and open to the understanding of simple men, as to the points that be most needful to salvation. . . . He that keepeth meekness and charity hath the true understanding and perfection of all Holy Writ," - Shelley, location 4298
- 3.5.3.** But this church that owns Scripture is the body of all who are predestined, and therefore the Bible ought to be put back in their hands, and in their own language. It was because of this claim that Wycliffe's followers, after his death, saw to it that the Bible was translated into English. - Gonzales, location 6914
- 3.6.** Wycliffe also attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation (that the bread and wine are physically transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ during the consecration in the Mass.) This doctrine had been established as official church teaching at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Wycliffe rejected this doctrine as incompatible with the incarnation. In the incarnation humanity and Deity were joined in a manner that did not destroy either. Thus, while Christ is truly spiritually present in the Communion meal, the bread and wine are not transformed since this would require Christ's body to act in ways contrary to real human nature and properties. For this teaching, Wycliffe lost a good deal of support at Oxford, and was eventually censured and forced to stop teaching. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury called a council that condemned ten of Wycliffe's doctrines as heretical.

- 3.6.1.** However, the point at which Wycliffe's doctrines aroused most controversy was his understanding of the presence of Christ in communion. - Gonzales, location 6917
- 3.6.2.** The Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, had affirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation. Wycliffe rejected this because he saw in it a denial of the principle manifested in the incarnation. When God was joined to human nature, the presence of the divinity did not destroy the humanity. Likewise, what takes place in communion is that the body of Christ is indeed present in the bread, but without destroying it. In a "sacramental" and "mysterious" way, the body of Christ is present in communion. But so is the bread. - Gonzales, location 6918
- 3.6.3.** In all of his puritan outcry, Wyclif aroused no hostility like that sparked by his attack upon the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation. In the summer of 1380 he published twelve arguments against the idea that the bread and wine of Holy Communion were transformed into the physical body and blood of Christ. - Shelley, location 4302
- 3.6.4.** Hence, Christ is present in the elements sacramentally, not materially. The end of the sacrament is the presence of Christ in the soul. - Shelley, location 4305
- 3.6.5.** Wyclif's denial of transubstantiation gave his enemies their opportunity. His support dwindled to a small minority at Oxford. First, the chancellor and a small council condemned his doctrines and forbade him to lecture. Then, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtenay, followed with another council that condemned ten of Wyclif's doctrines as heretical. - Shelley, location 4306
- 3.7.** Wycliffe's original insights also led him to deny a host of other doctrines and practices of the medieval church, including the church hierarchy, the sects of monks, indulgences, pilgrimages, the worship of images, the treasury of merits, and the distinction between mortal and venial sins. In short, he denied most of the edifice of the church's practice and power at that time. (However, he continued to accept ideas such as purgatory and extreme unction.)
- 3.7.1.** From this doctrine of an invisible church of the elect, Wyclif drew some practical conclusions. The church is a unity that knows nothing of papal primacies and hierarchies, and of the "sects" of monks, friars, and priests; nor can the salvation of the elect be conditioned by masses, indulgences, penance, or other devices of priestcraft. - Shelley, location 4281
- 3.7.2.** In time, Wyclif challenged the whole range of medieval beliefs and practices: pardons, indulgences, absolutions, pilgrimages, the worship of images, the adoration of the saints, the treasury of their merits laid up at the reserve of the pope, and the distinction between venial and mortal sins. He retained belief in purgatory and extreme unction, though he admitted that he looked in vain in the Bible for the institution of extreme unction. Images, he said, if they increased devotion, need not be removed; and prayers to saints were not necessarily wrong. Confession he held to be useful, provided it was voluntary and made to a suitable person, best of all if it were made in public. Compulsory confession he considered "the bondage of Antichrist." - Shelley, location 4284

- 3.8.** Near the end of his life, although he had been driven from Oxford, Wycliffe had gained a large following. He sent a number of poor preachers out into the various parishes, seeking the salvation of those often neglected by the church. Their enemies dubbed these followers of Wycliffe “Lollards”, meaning “mumblers”. They carried portions of the bible in English, along with other tracts and sermons. As they did this, they gained a sizable following. The group was persecuted before and after the death of Wycliffe, and eventually some of them became involved in political intrigues, but they continued down until the time of the English Reformation when they were absorbed in to the larger work of Reformation at that time.
- 3.8.1.** Before his defeat at the university, however, Wyclif had turned for support to the people in cottages and towns. His mission called for the Bible in the language of craftsmen and peasants so he led a handful of scholars at Oxford in the translation of the Latin Bible into the English language and copied the methods of St. Francis and the friars. - Shelley, location 4310
- 3.8.2.** From Oxford, as from Assisi two centuries before, Wyclif sent out “poor priests” into the byways and village greens, sometime even to churches, to win the souls of the neglected. - Shelley, location 4312
- 3.8.3.** Their enemies dubbed them Lollards, meaning “mumblers.” They carried a few pages of the reformer’s Bible and his tracts and sermons as they went throughout the countryside preaching the Word of God. One panic-stricken observer claimed that “every second man” he met was a Lollard. - Shelley, location 4315
- 3.8.4.** there was soon a substantial number of people who held beliefs similar to those of Wycliffe, and who set out to translate the Bible into English and to preach their understanding of the Christian faith. The name “Lollards” by which they were known was pejorative, and was derived from a word meaning “mumblers.” They were convinced that the Bible belonged to the people and should be returned to them; that pastors should not hold civil offices; and that images, clerical celibacy, pilgrimages, and other such uses were an abomination. They also rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, and prayers for the dead. In many of these tenets, they were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation. - Gonzales, location 6932
- 3.8.5.** At first, Lollardism had a significant number of adherents among the nobility, although it soon became a popular movement. At one point, they sought to have Parliament change the laws regarding heresy. But in this they failed, and their situation became precarious. Most of the Lollards among the nobility recanted and returned to the official church. - Gonzales, location 6937
- 3.8.6.** A few persisted, and in 1413 Sir John Oldcastle led an abortive rebellion that led to his capture and execution. The movement then lost most of its support among the gentry. But it continued spreading among the lower classes, where it became more radical. - Gonzales, location 6940
- 3.8.7.** Eventually, the Lollard remnant swelled the ranks of Protestants in England. But long before that time, Wycliffe’s teachings made an impact on distant Bohemia. - Gonzales, location 6943

3.9. Wycliffe died of a stroke suffered while leading the mass in 1384, and since he was technically still in communion with the church, he was allowed to be buried in sacred ground with a Christian burial. However, in 1415, over 30 years after his death, the council of Constance (part of the Conciliar movement) declared Wycliffe to be a heretic. His bones were eventually dug up, burned, and the ashes were dumped into the River Swift. However, the fire Wycliffe had started continued to burn, not only in England, but especially in Bohemia through the work of John Huss.

3.9.1. Wyclif gained enough support that church authorities had the good sense not to move against him. His followers were hunted down, were expelled from Oxford, or forced to renounce their views, but Wyclif, though driven from the university, was left to close his days in peace at his parish at Lutterworth. He died there in 1384. - Shelley, location 4318

3.9.2. Wycliffe died of a stroke in 1384. Since he died in the communion of the church, he was buried in consecrated ground. But the council of Constance later condemned him, and his remains were disinterred and burned. His ashes were then thrown into the river Swift. - Gonzales, location 6928

4. John Huss (or Jan Huss) - c. 1369-1415

4.1. John Huss was from Bohemia, part of the modern Czech republic. Bohemia and England had become connected in 1383 when King Richard II of England married Anne of Bohemia. This meant that students of both countries went back and forth between Oxford and Prague university. It also meant that ideas from one university became well known at the other. Of course, this meant that the ideas and writings of Wycliffe became quite well known at the University of Prague.

4.1.1. The movement Wyclif launched continued in England under restrictions but found an even greater opportunity for expansion in Bohemia. The two nations were linked in 1383 by the marriage of Anne of Bohemia and King Richard II of England, so students of both countries went back and forth between Oxford and Prague. - Shelley, location 4321

4.1.2. The writings of Wycliffe had been taken to Bohemia by a number of Czechs who had studied in England—where King Richard II was married to a Bohemian princess. - Gonzales, location 6951

4.2. Huss studied theology at the University of Prague, earning a BA in 1394 and and MA in 1396. He then became a teacher and eventually served as rector for the University in 1402-1403, and also as the preacher at the newly built Bethlehem Chapel in Prague. Huss became very familiar with many of Wycliffe's writings, and even translated one of his works into Czech and helped to distribute it.

4.2.1. The Czech reformer came from peasant parents in southern Bohemia, a small town called Husinetz. He studied theology at the University of Prague, earning both a bachelor of arts (1394) and the master of arts (1396) before beginning his teaching in the faculty of arts and plunging into the reform cause. - Shelley, location 4324

- 4.3.** The writings of Wycliffe caused a great debate at Prague, with an eventual split between Germans, who rejected Wycliffe's philosophy and the Czechs who generally accepted it. The debate was mainly about philosophical questions, but it eventually inevitably involved theology as well. Although Huss disagreed with Wycliffe on some points (such as transubstantiation) he agreed with him on others and in any event argued that scholars should be able to read and discuss the works of Wycliffe. Eventually the German scholars left and founded the University at Leipzig, declaring that Prague had become a hotbed of heresy - especially of the views of Wycliffe.
- 4.3.1.** These writings caused a great stir at the university, although at first the debate centered on technical points in Wycliffe's philosophical views. The university was divided between Germans and Czechs, and soon that division was reflected in the positions taken by various teachers vis-à-vis Wycliffe's philosophy, for the Czechs accepted it and the Germans rejected it, mostly claiming that it was outdated. Then some of the German scholars injected into the controversy the question of Wycliffe's orthodoxy, and thus put the Czechs in the difficult position of defending the writings of a man whose theology was questionable, and with whom in any case they did not completely agree. - Gonzales, location 6952
- 4.3.2.** Huss in particular, while defending scholars' rights to read and discuss the works of Wycliffe, disagreed with him on the question of the presence of Christ in communion, and held the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation. - Gonzales, location 6956
- 4.3.3.** Eventually, with the support of the king of Bohemia, the Czechs gained the upper hand, and the German teachers left Prague in order to found their own university at Leipzig. On leaving, they declared that they were doing so because Prague had become a hotbed of heresies, particularly those of Wycliffe. - Gonzales, location 6958
- 4.4.** Huss agreed with many of Wycliffe's views, especially regarding the nature of the church, Christ rather than the Pope as head, the abuses of power and wealth within the church hierarchy, etc. He began to preach fiery sermons on these topics in the Bethlehem church. In so doing, he angered the Archbishop of Prague. The Archbishop was a supporter of the Popes at Pisan (as opposed to Avignon, for this was the time of dual Papacy), and when he appealed to Alexander V and then John XXIII, they gave him a papal decree banning the works of Wycliffe, and declaring that preaching could only take place in cathedrals, parish churches, and monasteries. In effect, this made it illegal for Huss to preach. After a time of soul-searching, Huss decided the decree was invalid and began to preach again. He was ordered to come to Rome and refused, and so was excommunicated. However, he initially had powerful friends including King Wenceslaus, so this had little effect.
- 4.4.1.** Bohemia supported the Pisan popes—first Alexander V and then John XXIII. The archbishop of Prague, who had clashed with Huss, obtained a papal decree banning the works of Wycliffe, and also ordering that preaching should take place only in cathedrals, parish churches, and monasteries. Since the chapel of Bethlehem did not fall in any of these categories, the papal decree practically amounted to silencing Huss. After deep soul-searching, Huss decided that he could not obey, and continued preaching. - Gonzales, location 6962

- 4.4.2. In 1410, he was summoned to Rome to answer for that act of disobedience and for others that followed. He refused to go, and was excommunicated in 1411. But he had the support of the king and the people of Bohemia, and therefore the papal sentence had little effect. - Gonzales, location 6965
 - 4.4.3. He adopted at once the English reformer's view of the church as an elect company with Christ, not the pope, its true head. - Shelley, location 4328
 - 4.4.4. Bethlehem Chapel near the university gave Hus an unrivaled opportunity to circulate Wyclif's teachings, including his criticisms of the abuses of power in the papacy. On the walls were paintings contrasting the behavior of the popes and Christ. - Shelley, location 4330
 - 4.4.5. Hus's fiery sermons in the Bohemian language fanned widespread popular support. Soon there were student riots for and against Wyclif, much as today they might be for or against some revolutionary figure. - Shelley, location 4333
 - 4.4.6. The Archbishop of Prague grew restless and complained to the pope about the spread of Wyclif's doctrines. Root out the heresy, replied the pope. So Archbishop Zbynek excommunicated Hus. As a result a great popular tumult erupted. Hus made matters worse when he openly attacked the pope's sale of indulgences for support of his war against Naples. This move cost Hus the support of his king Wenceslas, and when Prague fell under a papal interdict because of Hus, the reformer left for exile in southern Bohemia. During this period of retirement Hus, drawing heavily upon Wyclif, wrote his major work, *On the Church*. - Shelley, location 4335
- 4.5. As the conflict continued, Huss' views became more radical (and more in line with those of Wycliffe). He came to the conclusion that an unworthy Pope is not to be obeyed. This led to the conclusion that the Bible was the final authority - not the Pope. When John XXIII called for the sale of indulgences to finance a crusade against Naples (who supported the rival Pope), Huss began to preach fiery sermons against this. He now believed that only God could grant forgiveness, and thus indulgences were unbiblical. Furthermore, this indulgence was being used for purely selfish reasons, to support a crusade against other Christians! However, King Wenceslaus needed the support of John XXIII, so he ordered Huss to be silent. However, Huss' views were so well known that this created public outcry. Huss was again excommunicated, and this time he left Prague rather than create more problems.
- 4.5.1. The conflict with the Pisan papacy led Huss to more radical views. First, he came to the conclusion that an unworthy pope is not to be obeyed. He did not question the Pisan popes' legitimacy. What he questioned was their authority when it was clear that they were acting for their own interests, and not for the welfare of the church. He thus came to the conclusion that the Bible is the final authority by which the pope as well as any Christian is to be judged. - Gonzales, location 6968

- 4.5.2.** John XXIII proclaimed a crusade against Naples, mostly for reasons of Italian politics, and determined that the crusade would be financed through the sale of indulgences. Huss, who had bought an indulgence twenty years earlier, by then had come to the conclusion that only God can grant forgiveness, and that to sell what comes only from God is a usurpation. In this particular case, he was also incensed by the notion of a war among Christians being sanctified simply because it suited the pope's ambitions. - Gonzales, location 6972
- 4.5.3.** The king, who needed Pope John's support, ordered Huss to silence his protest. But by then his views were known, and there were public demonstrations against the exploitation of the Czech people by the papacy. John XXIII excommunicated Huss once again, and this time the reformer, who did not wish to involve the entire nation in the controversy, left Prague and his pulpit, withdrew to the country, and continued writing on the needed reformation. - Gonzales, location 6976
- 4.6.** Huss was then offered safe conduct by the emperor to the Council of Constance to defend his views. He agreed to go, but when he arrived it became clear he was taken directly to the papal consistory and ordered to recant. To this he responded he would gladly recant - if someone could show him his heresy. He was then treated as a prisoner, being confined at first to his own quarters, and then locked in a cell in a monastery. The Emperor initially protested this violation of safe conduct, but eventually gave in for political reasons when he realized that Huss was doomed to be declared a heretic.
- 4.6.1.** Emperor Sigismund invited him to defend himself before the assembly, and granted him safe-conduct to attend the council. - Gonzales, location 6976
- 4.6.2.** Upon arriving at Constance, however, it was clear that John XXIII wished to try him directly, apart from the council. Huss was taken to the papal consistory and ordered to recant his heresy. To this he responded that he would gladly recant if someone could show him that he was a heretic. After that stormy interview, he was treated as a prisoner, first in his own residence, then in the bishop's palace, and finally in cells in various monasteries. - Gonzales, location 6982
- 4.6.3.** The emperor protested against this violation of his safe-conduct. But, when he realized that Huss' cause was not popular, and that he would appear as a supporter of heretics, he prudently washed his hands of the entire affair. - Gonzales, location 6985
- 4.7.** On June 5, 1415 Huss was taken before the council. There was some reason to hope, for John XXIII had been deposed as Pope, fled the city, and then was brought back as a prisoner. However, in order to bolster its claims for power over the Pope the council wanted to appear as staunch defenders of orthodoxy. Huss was brought in front of the council in chains and asked to recant. Huss pointed out that he had never even believed or taught the doctrines he was being asked to recant. The council told him to recant anyway, but he replied he could never do this because it would make him out to be a heretic and would endanger his friends and followers. At this point, Huss declared "I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In his hands I place my cause, since he will judge each, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but of truth and justice." He was then sent back to his cell.

- 4.7.1.** On June 5, 1415, Huss was taken before the council. A few days earlier John XXIII, who had fled the city, had been brought back as a prisoner. There was reason to hope that the council would see Huss as an enemy of John, and dismiss the charges against him. But the council, like the emperor, wished to appear as a stern defender of orthodoxy. Therefore, Huss was in chains when he appeared before the assembly. Its leaders wished to have him submit to the council, and declared that all he had to do was recant his heresies. He insisted that he had never held the doctrines of which they accused him. They retorted that all he had to do was recant. This Huss could not do, for then he would be admitting that he had been a heretic, and that his Czech friends and followers were heretics. - Gonzales, location 6987
- 4.7.2.** Finally, convinced that he could not obtain a fair hearing from those present, he declared: "I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In his hands I place my cause, since he will judge each, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but of truth and justice." - Gonzales, location 6993
- 4.7.3.** The rule of the Inquisition was simple. If sufficient witnesses testified to the guilt of the accused, then he had to confess and renounce the errors or be burned. The reward for confession was life imprisonment, instead of the stake. In accordance with this rule, the panel of judges appointed by the council believed the witnesses against Hus and condemned him for heresies he had never taught. - Shelley, location 4342
- 4.7.4.** Hus was willing to yield himself to the teaching of the church, when instructed by Scripture in what way his teaching was wrong. But he could not acknowledge that he recanted heresies that he had always stoutly disclaimed. For Hus truth was supreme: "I have said that I would not, for a chapel full of gold, recede from the truth." "I know," he wrote in 1412, "that the truth stands and is mighty for ever, and abides eternally, with whom there is no respect of persons." - Shelley, location 4345
- 4.7.5.** Few scenes in church history are more touching than Hus's fidelity and refusal to swerve from absolute truth, even to save his life. - Shelley, location 4350
- 4.8.** The council sent people to Huss' cell to try and convince him to recant, since all they really wanted was to affirmation of the authority of the council. Huss steadfastly refused to do this. On July 6, Huss was taken to the cathedral, dressed in priestly garments. The garments were torn from his body, his head was shaved (to remove his tonsure), a paper crown decorated with demons was placed on his head and he was led to the stake to be burned. On his way to the stake, he passed a pile of his books being burned. As he was tied to the stake he was given a final chance to recant, but refused saying "God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. In the truth of the gospel I have written, taught, and preached; today I will gladly die." As the fires were lit he was heard praying aloud "Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies." He was heard reciting the Psalms as he died.

- 4.8.1.** He was then sent back to prison, where many went to plead with him; for what the leaders of the council sought was a recantation that would affirm the assembly's authority, not a condemnation that would cause many to question its wisdom. - Gonzales, location 6995
- 4.8.2.** Finally, on July 6, Huss was taken to the cathedral. There he was dressed in his priestly garments, which were then torn from him. His tonsure was erased by shaving his head, which was then covered with a paper crown decorated with demons. On his way to the stake, they led him past a pyre where his books were being burnt. When he was tied to the stake, they gave him a last chance to recant, and once again he refused. He then prayed aloud: "Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies." He was heard reciting the Psalms as he died. - Gonzales, location 6997
- 4.8.3.** Finally, 6 July 1415, the day for his burning came. On the way to the place of execution he passed through a churchyard and saw a bonfire of his books. He laughed, and told the bystanders not to believe the lies circulated about him. On arriving at the execution-ground, familiarly known as "the Devil's Place," Hus knelt and prayed. For the last time the marshal of the empire asked him if he would recant and save his life. Said Hus: "God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. In the truth of the gospel I have written, taught, and preached; today I will gladly die." - Shelley, location 4357
- 4.9.** A few days later his associate Jerome of Prague was also condemned and burned. The ashes of both men were thrown into the lake so nothing could remain of them. However, some Bohemians present scraped the dirt where Huss had died to take it back to Bohemia to protest the council of Constance and its actions. In Bohemia, a group of nobles declared Huss was correct and repudiated the council. The council ordered the University of Prague be dissolved, the nobles be sent to the council, and said the king was abetting heresy. This led to further growth of the Hussites.
- 4.9.1.** A few days later his colleague Jerome of Prague, who had been the main proponent of Wycliffe's views in Bohemia and had decided to join Huss at Constance, was also burned. Their executioners gathered the ashes and threw them into the lake, so that nothing would remain of the heresiarchs. But some Czechs took back with them bits of the soil where Huss had died, to serve as a memorial of the crime committed at Constance. - Gonzales, location 7001
- 4.9.2.** The Bohemians were indignant, and almost unanimously repudiated the council. Four hundred and fifty-two noblemen gathered in solemn assembly and announced their agreement with Huss, that an unworthy pope ought not to be obeyed. The council countered by ordering that the University of Prague be dissolved, summoning the rebellious nobles to Constance, and declaring that the King of Bohemia was abetting heresy. - Gonzales, location 7007

- 4.10.** The threat of armed intervention led these various groups to agree to Four Articles that would become the basis of Bohemian resistance. The first was that the Word of God was to be preached freely throughout the kingdom. The second, that communion would be given “in both kinds”—that is, that the cup, and not only the bread, was to be given to the laity. This was a conclusion that Huss had reached toward the end of his life, and which soon became one of the main demands of all Hussites. Third, all agreed that the clergy should be deprived of its wealth, and live in “apostolic poverty.” Finally, the fourth article stated that gross and public sin, especially simony, would be properly punished. - Gonzales, location 7016
- 4.11.** Then King Wenceslas died, and his legitimate successor was Sigismund, the German emperor who had failed Huss at Constance. The Bohemians demanded that he agree to the Four Articles, that he grant freedom of worship, and that he promise not to name Germans to public posts. These conditions Sigismund would not accept, and at his request the pope called a crusade against the Hussites. Sigismund and his troops marched to the vicinity of Prague, but there they were crushed by a Bohemian army - Gonzales, location 7021
- 4.12.** The Bohemians defeated several other crusades sent by the Catholics. Eventually the Catholics negotiated and many of the Bohemians rejoined the Catholic church, being allowed to retain communion with both bread and cup, as well as certain other elements of the four articles.
- 4.12.1.** In a second battle, the remnants of Sigismund’s crusade were utterly destroyed. A year later, in 1421, an army of a hundred thousand “crusaders” fled before Zizka’s carts. A third crusade, a year later, dissolved before it even met the enemy. - Gonzales, location 7027
- 4.12.2.** the Bohemians continued the struggle, and defeated two other crusades in 1427 and 1431. - Gonzales, location 7030
- 4.12.3.** By then, the Council of Basel had come to the conclusion that the Council of Constance had dealt unwisely with the Bohemian question, and invited the Hussites to attend this new council, in order to settle their differences with the Catholics. But the Hussites feared a repetition of the events surrounding the trial and death of Huss, and demanded guarantees that the council considered offensive. Once more, the Catholics organized a crusade against Bohemia. And once more they were defeated. - Gonzales, location 7031
- 4.12.4.** This last defeat finally convinced the Catholics that negotiation was necessary. As a result of that negotiation, the church in Bohemia rejoined the rest of western Christendom, but was allowed to retain communion in both kinds as well as certain other elements of the Four Articles. Many Hussites, particularly among the nobility, agreed to this, and finally Sigismund was able to become King of Bohemia—although he died sixteen months later. - Gonzales, location 7034
- 4.13.** The remaining Hussites who refused to rejoin the Catholic church and eventually formed the Union of Brethren. This group grew rapidly in Bohemia and Moravia. During the Reformation they were about to join the Lutherans but were brutally persecuted by the Roman Catholic Habsburg Emperors. They almost disappeared, but the group who survived, known simply as Moravians, eventually became an important movement within Protestantism. Another group eventually joined the Swiss Calvinist Reformation.

- 4.13.1.** But not all Bohemians accepted this agreement. Many left the established church, and eventually formed the Unitas Fratrum—or Union of Brethren. Their numbers grew rapidly, not only in Bohemia, but also in nearby Moravia. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, they established close ties with Protestantism, and for some time it seemed likely that they would become Lutherans. Shortly thereafter, the Hapsburg emperors, staunch supporters of Roman Catholicism, persecuted them. They were dispersed, and the Unitas Fratrum almost disappeared. - Gonzales, location 7038
- 4.13.2.** From exile, their bishop John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) encouraged them and interceded on their behalf, hoping that some day the plant that had been so brutally cut would bloom again. These hopes were fulfilled long after his death, for later in our story we shall see the impact of a remnant of the Unitas Fratrum, by then called simply “Moravians.” Another remnant became one of many churches following Calvinist theology. - Gonzales, location 7042

5. The Coming of the Reformation

- 5.1.** There were other reform movements such as those under Savonarola and the mystics, but the most lasting Reform movements with direct ties to the Reformation are the ones discussed above.
- 5.2.** In themselves Waldo, Wycliffe and Huss did not go as far as Luther would a century after Huss, nor did their reform movements sweep across Europe the way that the Reformation of the 16th century did. But they certainly laid the groundwork, and many of the themes they sounded were later successfully argued by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer and the other Reformers, and many of their followers survived to join the Protestant Reformation.
- 5.3.** For this reason, the title given to Wycliffe as the evening star of scholasticism and the morning star of the Reformation seems fitting for all of these groups. After a long night of decline and corruption, a new light was dawning which would not be covered until it spread throughout the globe. The Reformation was about to dawn.

Next Class: The Beginning of the Reformation

Reading: Chapter 1 (The Call for Reformation - especially section on Erasmus); Chapter 2 - Martin Luther: Pilgrimage to Reformation; Luther’s 95 Theses

Optional Reading: Roland Bainton “Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther”

Date: March 25

This session will cover Erasmus and his contributions that laid the path for Reformation, and then Luther’s early years through the Diet of Worms in 1521.