

LESSON THIRTY-THREE



# Church History

## The Catholic Church in Crisis: The Avignonese Captivity to the Hussites

### **The Avignonese Captivity of the Papacy 1309-1377**

- The papacy had reached the height of its political power in Western Europe under Innocent III. His death in 1216 was followed by a period of eclipse and finally disaster.
- The popes continued to struggle against the Holy Roman Emperors; their conflict with Frederick II (1210-1250), whom Innocent III himself had settled on the German throne, was especially bitter.
- However, the long warfare between the papacy and Empire had permanently weakened the power of the German monarchy, by undermining Germany's national unity.
- In contrast to the situation in Germany, the French monarchy was growing in strength. It reached dangerous levels, as far as the papacy was concerned, under King Philip the Fair (1285-1314).
- Philip was a ruthless tyrant who had the highest views of his own absolute authority over all French affairs. Conflict broke out between Philip and Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) over taxation. In 1295 Philip levied a tax on the French clergy to finance a war with England.
- The French clergy complained to Boniface, who decreed excommunication of all who imposed or paid such taxes without papal permission.
- Philip responded by forbidding the export of gold and silver from France; this crippled the economy of Rome. Boniface had to compromise and allow the French clergy to make "voluntary" contributions to Philip's war.
- Then in 1301, Boniface sent a special papal legate, Bernard of Saisset, to Philip's court to complain about various high-handed acts of Philip such as his seizure of Church property.
- Philip had Bernard arrested and charged with treason.

- Boniface ordered the release of Bernard and summoned Philip to Rome. Philip called a national assembly of French nobles, clergy and commoners, which supported him in his defiance of the papacy.
- Boniface reacted by issuing his famous papal edict in 1302, entitled *Unam Sanctum* which made the most awe-inspiring political and spiritual claims for the papacy. The edict asserted that all political authority is subject to the pope, and that submission to the pope is necessary for salvation:

**“We are forced by the faith to believe and hold, and we do indeed firmly believe and sincerely confess, that there is one holy Catholic and apostolic Church, and that outside this Church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins...There is one body and one head of this one and only Church – not two heads, like a monster – and that is Christ, and Christ’s vicar is Peter and the successor of Peter...Both the spiritual and the civil sword are in the power of the Church. The civil sword is to be used for the Church, the spiritual sword by the Church: the spiritual sword is to be used by the priest, the civil sword by kings and captains, but only at the will of the priest and by priestly permission...We declare, state, define and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman pope.”<sup>1</sup>**

- Philip’s response was to declare that Boniface was unfit to occupy the papal throne, and he summoned the pope to appear before an ecumenical Council of the whole church.
- The French parliament, clergy and Paris University all joined in this declaration. Boniface prepared to excommunicate Philip, but before he could do so, the French king resorted to violence and had Boniface kidnapped and imprisoned.
- Philip’s agents demanded that he resign from the papacy; Boniface refused. Allies rescued him from imprisonment, but Boniface died a month later.
- The papacy was now in serious trouble. Philip had appealed to French national opinion against the claims of Rome and had succeeded.
- Nationalism as a political and anti-papal force had arrived in Europe.
- When Boniface’s successor, Pope Benedict XI (1303-1304), died after a reign of only eight months, the French faction of cardinals succeeded in electing a French pope, Clement V (1305-1314).
- Clement was a weak man who simply became the puppet of King Philip. He never set foot in Rome and after four years of wandering around southern France, in 1309 Clement established the papal court in Avignon (Avvin-yon), a city on the river Rhone.
- Avignon was surrounded by French territory and under French political influence. The papacy remained in Avignon for nearly 70 years, a captive of the French monarchy and its policies.
- Those hostile to France referred to this period as the “Babylonian captivity” of the papacy. There were seven popes in this period, all Frenchmen and they made sure that most of the cardinals were French too.

- It had a devastating effect on the prestige and influence of the papacy.
- With the popes now in Avignon, torn loose from their ancient historic seat in Rome, it seemed to many that the papacy had lost its true identity and became nothing more than a mere political pawn in the hands of the French kings.
- The Avignonese captivity led to several remarkable attacks on the papacy by Christian thinkers. Most of them came from the Holy Roman Empire, which was even more hostile to the papacy now that it was in Avignon under French domination.
- The most radical critiques of papal claims were by the English schoolman William of Ockham and the Italian Marsilius of Padua (1280-1343).
- Marsilius was rector of Paris University from 1313. His attacks on the papacy forced him to flee for his safety to Germany in 1326, placing himself under the protection of the Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Bavarian (1314-1347), as William of Ockham did in 1328.
- Louis was a determined foe of the papacy who was excommunicated by Pope John XXII in 1324.
- Marsilius of Padua's great anti-papal treatise was his *Defensor Pacis* (Defender of Peace), written in 1324 when he was still in Paris.
- In *Defensor of Pacis* Marsilius argued that authority lay with "the people" – the whole body of citizens in the state, and the whole body of believers in the Church. Political and spiritual leaders, therefore, were appointed by the people and accountable to the people.
- The supreme legislative power in the Church was not the papacy, but the ecumenical council representing the entire body of believers. Scripture alone was the source of Christian teaching; if there was any dispute over what Scripture meant, an ecumenical council must settle it.
- Pursuing this line of thought, Marsilius distinguished between the Catholic Church and the Apostolic Church.
- The Catholic Church included the Western Church, the Eastern Church and all who believed in Christ; all members of the Catholic Church were within God's grace.
- The Apostolic Church was the Church of Rome, which was an embodiment and manifestation of the Catholic Church, but was not infallible – Rome could err.
- Marsilius argued that the Roman pope was not the leader of the Church by divine right; his leadership simply flowed from the political fact that he was bishop of Roman Empire's capital city. Furthermore, the pope had no authority to depose kings and emperors.
- The clergy, Marsilius insisted, were in all secular matters subject to the state, like all other people. The only power priests had was the power to teach, warn, persuade and rebuke.
- Since Marsilius accepted that Church and state were the spiritual and political aspects of a single Christian society, he also taught that a Christian state had the right to call Church councils, appoint clergy and control Church property.

- The Protestant Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century took up many of Marsilius's ideas. Roman Catholic historians have called Marsilius a forerunner of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

## The Great Schism 1378-1470

- The papacy finally returned to Rome in 1377 under Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378); the great Italian mystic, Catherine of Siena, inspired him to make the move. Gregory died the following year.
- The French Cardinals would gladly have gone back to Avignon, but the Roman population was determined to keep the papacy in Rome and demanded an Italian pope.
- Pressurized by mob, the cardinals elected Urban VI (1378-1389), an Italian who wanted to liberate the papacy from French control.
- However, a few months after Urban's election, 12 of the 16 cardinals declared that the election was null and void, because it had been carried out under threat of popular violence. They chose another Frenchman as pope- Clement VII (1378-1394). Clement and his cardinals returned to Avignon and set up court there. Urban VI stayed in Rome.
- There were now two rival popes. This had happened before, when an Emperor had set up a rival pope for political reasons, or when aristocratic factions in Rome had put up opposing candidates.
- However, this time the two popes had both been elected by the Church itself – by the same body of cardinals. The two rival popes, Urban VI and Clement VII, excommunicated each other.
- This rending asunder of the Catholic Church is known as the "Great Schism" (not to be confused with the other "Great Schism" of East and West in 1054).
- Catholic Europe was split down the middle. The Roman Pope, Urban VI, won the support of northern and central Italy, England, the Scandinavian countries and some parts of Germany.
- Urban VI died in 1389 and the Roman line of popes carried on with Boniface IX (1389-1404), Innocent VII (1404-1406) and Gregory XII (1406-1415).
- In Avignon, Clement VII was succeeded by Benedict XIII (1394-1417).
- The visible unity of the Catholic Church was broken. And the situation dragged on for nearly 40 years.



- In France, during the reign of mad King Charles VI (1380-1422), the Schism provoked his nobles to issue in Charles name in 1398 a royal document called the *Subtraction of Obedience* in which the French monarchy took over all papal powers within the French Kingdom: the king of France would now appoint all French bishops and receive all taxes they had previously paid to the pope.
- France withdrew the *Subtraction* in 1403 but it had created quite a commotion while it lasted.
- Nor did the anti-papal agitation die down. In 1407 the French struck again, setting forth a document entitled *The Liberties of the Gallican Church* (Gallican is the Latin word for French), which rejected the pope's authority over all secular and political affairs, restricting it to purely spiritual things.
- Here were the foundations of "Gallicanism" – the belief that the French Church was independent of the papacy in matters of internal organization, although accepting the pope's right to define doctrinal and moral matters.
- Meanwhile, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was painfully obvious the Great Schism was stirring up feelings of autonomy in the Churches of the Catholic nations, thus threatening the universal authority of the papacy.
- In these circumstances, the minds of many loyal and sincere Churchmen began to feel that the answer to the scandal of the Great Schism must be found in an ecumenical council of the whole Catholic Church – and in making the papacy subject to the council.

## **The Conciliar Movement**

- Those who wanted to end the Great Schism and reform the Church by placing the papacy under the authority of an ecumenical council were called "conciliarists" (from the Latin Concilium meaning council), and their efforts at reform are known as the "conciliar movement."
- The movement began in Paris University and its two outstanding leaders were the French theologians Peter d'Ailly (1350-1420) and John Gerson (1363-1429).
- Peter, a celebrated preacher, was rector of the college of Navarre on the borderlands between France and Spain. In 1389 he became chancellor of Paris University.
- John Gerson, who studied under Peter d'Ailly in Navarre, succeeded him as chancellor of Paris University in 1395 and was famous both as a preacher and writer on the Christian life.
- Another great conciliarist writer was Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1465), who differed from the neo-Pelagian d'Ailly and Gerson in being a faithful disciple of Augustine.
- D'Ailly, Gerson and Cusa taught that the Catholic Church was superior to the Roman Church and that infallibility did not belong to the papacy, but to the Church as a whole, represented by an ecumenical council.
- Church authority, they argued, rested ultimately in the entire body of believers, to whom even the pope was accountable.

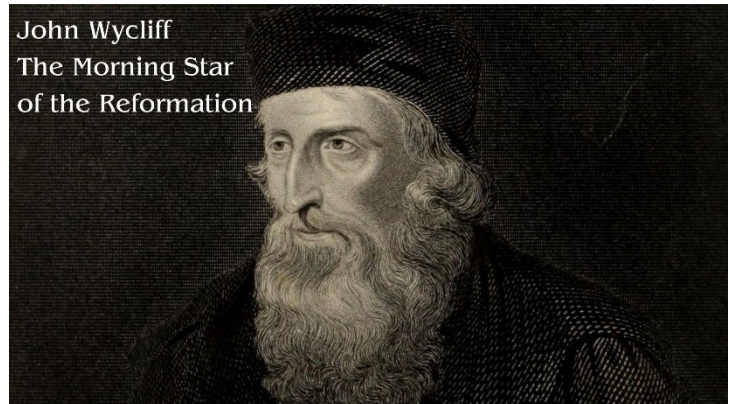
- The Catholic Church bestowed authority on the papacy, to be exercised for the Church's good; if a pope abused his authority, an ecumenical council could depose him.
- Even within the Roman Church, authority did not belong to the pope alone, but to the pope and the cardinals together; the cardinals had the power to restrain an erring pope and, in a crisis, they could summon an ecumenical council on their own authority.
- The first attempt to end the Great Schism by an ecumenical council took place in 1409 at the Council of Pisa (north-western Italy).
- The council was summoned by the cardinals acting on their own authority. It deposed both rival popes, Gregory XII (Rome) and Benedict XIII (Avignon), and asserted that ecumenical councils were superior to the papacy. The council then elected a new pope, Alexander V (1409-1410).
- Unfortunately, all this meant was that there were now three rival popes. England and France acknowledged new pope, Alexander but Italy and much of Germany continued to support Gregory, while Spain and Scotland stayed loyal to Benedict.
- In 1414-1418 the Council of Constance (north-eastern Switzerland) made another attempt to end the Schism.
- This time it was the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1410-1437) who summoned the Council. Sigismund acted in alliance with Pope John XXIII (1410-1415), the successor of Alexander V who had been elected by the Council of Pisa.
- However, once the Council of Constance met, it deposed John XXIII for scandalous misconduct, and persuaded Pope Gregory XII of Rome to resign.
- The Avignonese Pope Benedict XIII proved stubborn and refused to step down; but Sigismund persuaded Benedict's backers, Spain and Scotland, to disown him.
- The Council then officially deposed Benedict in 1417. Then the cardinals, together with representatives of the nations present, elected the Italian Cardinal, Colonna, as the new pope; he assumed the name Martin V (1417-1431).
- The Council of Constance was revolutionary. It had ended the Great Schism, but only by subjecting the papacy to the authority of an ecumenical Council.
- It seemed that the conciliarists had demolished the absolute papal monarchy of Hildebrand and Innocent III, and replaced it by a more limited, constitutional, democratic form of Church government.
- However, the new pope, Martin V, after ascending to the papal throne, abandoned whatever conciliarist convictions he may have held and there was much friction between him and the next two ecumenical councils at Pavia-Siena (1423-1424) and Basel (1431-1449). Martin died only months after the Council of Basel opened; Eugenius IV (1431-1447) succeeded him.
- Eugenius tried to adjourn the Council, but it refused to disband and declared its own superiority over him.
- The Council then began a great program of administrative and moral reforms. It appeared that Pope Eugenius was captive to the Council.



- However, Eugenius turned the tables completely in 1437 by removing the Council to the north-eastern Italian city of Ferrara, where he received the Byzantine Emperor John VIII and the delegates of the Orthodox Church.
- The Council at Basil reacted foolishly by deposing Eugenius and electing a new pope, Felix V (1439-1449). This act dealt a mortal blow to the influence of the conciliarists; they were seen as plunging the Church into Schism again.
- Nicholas of Cusa, the distinguished conciliar thinker, was so disgusted by the Council's antics that he went over to Pope Eugenius and spent the rest of his life as a committed servant of the papacy.
- Indeed, more and more members of the Council defected to Eugenius. Eventually, what was left of the Council dissolved itself in 1449.
- This marked the end of the conciliar movement. The papacy had triumphed. In fact, the Orthodox Churches of the East scorned the agreement its delegates had made with Eugenius, but it had served Eugenius's purposes well.
- He had re-established the papacy as the true leader of Western Catholicism. The conciliar theory lived on in the Church, but the incredible incompetence of the conciliarists at Basel ruined any hope of making the Catholic Church into a more democratic institution.

## John Wycliff & the Lollards

- During the Avignonese captivity and the Great Schism, a new and potentially deadly challenge to the papacy arose in England.
- It came from a theologian at Oxford University by the name of John Wycliff (1330-1384), a native of Yorkshire in northern England.
- When dealing with abuses in the Church, he possessed a painfully harsh way of speaking and writing, which even so, never sank into rudeness or crudeness.
- Wycliff's only obvious defects were his "pluralism" and "absenteeism" – that is, accepting appointment as parish priest in several churches at the same time and receiving payment for spiritual services which he mostly failed to perform.
- After studying theology at Oxford, where he achieved fame as a lecturer in theology and philosophy in the 1360s, Wycliff became a religious advisor to the court of the English king, Edward III (1327-1377).
- Wycliff had developed theological views which the English monarchy and nobility found useful in their conflict with the papacy; this conflict revolved around the papacy's claim to own England, based on the fact that King John had surrendered England to Pope Innocent III in 1213.



- Wycliff put forward the doctrine of “dominion” or “lordship,” according to which God was the only source of true authority. God had delegated a position of His authority over secular things to the state and over spiritual things to the Church. However, human rulers could exercise this delegated authority only on condition that they served God faithfully. If they did not, they lost their right to lordship.
- Therefore, Wycliff taught, if bishops failed to live pure and blameless lives, the state (which had dominion over secular things) was entitled to strip them of their property and possessions.
- Bishop Courtney of London summoned Wycliff to appear before his tribunal in London in February 1377 to answer for his views, but the protection of King Edward’s youngest son, John of Gaunt, prevented Courtney from harming Wycliff who then ordered him to appear in Rome within 30 days, charged with no fewer than 19 deadly errors; Wycliff refused to go.
- When Archbishop Sudbury of Canterbury tried to put Wycliff on trial in January 1378, a mob of London citizens who supported Wycliff broke up the meeting. At this point Wycliff was in favor with the court and nobility and a popular hero.
- When the Great Schism broke out on the death of Pope Gregory XI in March 1378, Wycliff’s theology began to become more radical.
- He published a book called *The Truth of Holy Scripture*, in which he argued that the Bible was the only source of Christian doctrine, by which believers must test all teachings of the Church, including the early Church fathers, the papacy and ecumenical councils.
- All Christians should read the Bible, so it must be translated from the Latin of the Vulgate into the native languages of the various nations.
- Wycliff’s views here were quite revolutionary. In the Middle Ages in Western Europe, people had come to regard the Bible as the clergy’s book; priests and theologians alone could interpret it correctly and teach laypeople what it meant.
- The Catholic Church looked with great suspicion, even outright hostility, on the idea that a layperson should study the Bible for themselves. The French council of Toulouse in 1229 had actually forbidden the laity to read the Bible, either in the Latin Vulgate or in a translation into their native language.
- Despite this official hostility to lay Bible reading, however, some scholars had made a number of translations of the Bible or parts of it into the native languages of Western Europe.
- One of Wycliff’s arguments for translating the Bible into English was that it had already been translated into French.
- Later in 1378, Wycliff wrote another important book entitled *On the Church*. This revealed him as a student and interpreter of Augustine of Hippo.
- Wycliff defined the Church, not in terms of an outward organization controlled by papacy and priesthood, but as the whole body of the elect, those eternally predestined to salvation by the pure grace of God. And if from the viewpoint of



eternity, the Church was the elect, on earth at any given point in time it was the entire company of true believers in every land.

- The Church was thus a spiritual and invisible body, rooted in God's eternal predestination, infallibly known to God alone, and its head was not the pope but Christ Himself. The pope, Wycliff said, could be the head only of the outward, visible church that existed in the city of Rome which was made up of both the elect and the non-elect.
- In 1379, Wycliff wrote *The Power of the Pope*. Here he argued that the papacy was of human not divine origin and denied that the pope had any authority over any secular government.
- If a particular pope imitated the apostle Peter by living a holy and humble life, he could then claim to exercise Peter's authority; but a pope that did not follow Christ was an antichrist.
- Later, Wycliff declared that all popes, not just the bad ones were antichrist. In 1380 came his boldest stroke: he attacked the Catholic doctrine of holy communion in his *On the Eucharist*.
- Wycliff rejected transubstantiation and went back to the earlier views of Ratramnus and Augustine. The bread and wine of communion, he argued, remained bread and wine in their own inner nature – their "substance" was not miraculously changed. However, Christ's flesh and blood were truly present in the bread and wine in a spiritual manner.
- The true view of the Eucharist, Wycliff argued, had vanished from the Western Church since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but was still preserved in the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- This was not the only appeal Wycliff made to the Eastern Church; he also held it up as an example in other matters such as allowing the clergy to marry.
- Thus, John Wycliff began the great tradition of Western reformers using the Eastern Church as a weapon with which to attack the corruption of Rome.
- By Catholic standards, Wycliff's denial of transubstantiation had made him into a dangerous heretic, and the English court and nobility (including John of Gaunt) broke off their support for him.
- Oxford University also turned against him, expelling his followers. Wycliff retired to Lutterworth in the English midlands, where he was the parish priest.
- He spent the last three years of his life writing popular pamphlets, in which he set out his views vigorously and effectively in the English language and several academic works in Latin in which he explained his views in a more scholarly way.
- He organized a team of his disciples to translate the Latin Vulgate Bible into English, a task not finished until after his death.
- The first of these translations appeared in 1384; it was a very stiff and literal translation of the Vulgate.

- Wycliff's secretary John Purvey (1353-1428) produced a second version in 1396, with a preface by Purvey in which he defended the right of lay Christians to have God's Word in their native language.
- Purvey's translation was much more popular than the 1384 version. It had wide circulation in the period between its appearance and the Protestant Reformation.
- Wycliff also sent out preachers to proclaim the gospel and provided sermons for them. For Wycliff, the essence of the ordained ministry was preaching the Word, rather than celebrating the sacraments; it was preaching that made unbelievers into true Christians and it was preaching above all that built Christians up in the faith by helping them to understand what it meant.
- Wycliff died in 1384 and was buried in the Lutterworth church graveyard but 34 years later the Church authorities dug up his body, burnt it for heresy and threw its ashes into the river Swift.
- Protestants have hailed Wycliff as "the morning star of the Reformation." Wycliff's followers were called Wycliffites or "Lollards" (a derogatory term which probably means "mumblers").
- The Lollards became the English equivalent of the Waldensians. They grew throughout the closing years of the 14th century during the reign of King Richard II (1377-1399).
- In 1395, a group of Lollard members of parliament published a manifesto called *The Twelve Conclusions*, which denounced the English Church's bondage to the papacy, advocated marriage of the clergy and condemned transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, pilgrimages, and the holding of political office by bishops.
- However, in 1399, a political revolution brought a new dynasty to the English throne, the family of Lancaster; and in an attempt to win the Church's favor, the first Lancastrian king, Henry IV (1399-1413), passed a new law which, for the first time, made the burning of heretics legal in England.
- This savage law was aimed at the Lollards. Persecution became fierce under King Henry V (1413-1422), owing to Henry's conflict with a leading Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle, a soldier, member of parliament and important landowner, otherwise known by his title of "Lord Cobham." The Church courts convicted Oldcastle of Wycliffite heresy in 1413 and sentenced him to death, but he escaped from prison and organized a Lollard conspiracy to kidnap Henry in 1414.
- The king discovered and crushed the plot. Oldcastle escaped again, but Henry finally caught and executed him in 1417.
- Oldcastle's rebellion destroyed whatever support for Lollardy that may have been left among the English ruling class.
- Despite persecutions, the Lollards survived until the Protestant Reformation and in many ways helped to prepare the way for it by circulating Lollard tracts and the Bible in English.
- When the Reformation came to England, the Lollards were its earliest supporters and they soon merged into the mainstream of English Protestantism.

## John Huss & the Hussites

- Wycliff's ideas had a far greater success in the Holy Roman Empire than they did in England. King Richard II of England married Anne of Luxemburg, the sister of the king of Bohemia in the east of the Empire (today Bohemia is known as the Czech Republic).
- This brought about close relations between England and Bohemia, at the very time when Wycliff and the early Lollards were active and flourishing.
- A number of Bohemian students studied theology at Oxford University and took Wycliff's views and writings back to Bohemia, especially to the University of Prague, Bohemia's capital city.
- There was already a religious reform movement in Bohemia, aimed at purifying the Church from worldliness and returning to the Bible. Wycliff's ideas spread rapidly in such a setting.
- The most outstanding of the Bohemian reformers was John Huss (1372-1415), preacher at the Bethlehem chapel in Prague from 1402 and rector of Prague University from 1409.
- Huss studied and greatly admired Wycliff's writings – some of his writings closely resemble Wycliff's.
- The campaign for reform which Huss championed took on the features of a Bohemian nationalist movement, with the support of the Bohemian King Wenceslas (1373-1419), the Bohemian nobility, Prague University and ordinary Bohemians.
- This nationalism sprang from the fact that Bohemians belonged to the Slavic race, and wanted to assert their Slavic identity against the overwhelmingly German character of the Holy Roman Empire.
- Dark clouds began gathering around Huss in 1411 when he launched an attack on indulgences, declaring them useless since God Himself bestowed His forgiveness freely on all who truly repented.
- Pope John XXIII, the claimant to the papal throne supported by Bohemia during the Great Schism, was stung into taking action; he was himself selling indulgences on a massive scale to finance a war against his rival, Pope Gregory XII (1406-1415).
- John excommunicated Huss and threatened to place Prague under an interdict. To save the city, Huss retired from Prague into southern Bohemia, protected by friendly Bohemian nobles. He continued to propagate his views, notably in two important books, *Concerning the Church* and *Exposition of Faith, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer*.
- Huss's assault on the theology of indulgences made enemies for him in Bohemia, especially Prague University. Many who had supported his demands for moral and spiritual reform drew back when he started attacking basic doctrines of the Catholic Church.



- Two religious parties now came into being in Bohemia, a traditionalist Catholic group and the Hussites.
- Huss argued that the Church was the entire body of the elect in all ages, known to God only, who had predestined them to belong to Himself by His free grace; and of this Church, Christ alone was the head, not the pope. Popes were not infallible said Huss; they had erred many times.
- One of Huss's arguments for denying the pope's supremacy over the Church was that the Eastern Church were true Christians who managed to exist perfectly well without the papacy.
- Huss further taught that Christians should not follow or obey immoral unworthy clergy. The Christian secular rulers of the state should step in and reform the Church, if the Church was not willing to reform itself.
- Finally, Huss also accepted Wycliff's view that preaching, not celebrating the sacraments, was the true heart of the ordained ministry.
- To traditional Catholics, of course, these Hussite views were diabolical heresy. When the reforming Council of Constance met in 1414, the religious turmoil in Bohemia was one of the issues it had to settle.
- The Council summoned Huss to appear before it. Huss knew he was in danger of being condemned and burnt at the stake as a heretic; his theology was unacceptable even to the conciliarist reformers John Gerson who controlled the Council.
- However, Huss was given a promise of safe-conduct by the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1410-1437), brother of Bohemian King Wenceslas.
- Huss therefore went to Constance. But the Council ignored the safe-conduct and threw Huss in prison almost immediately on his arrival.
- He was kept captive 6 months in the most horrific conditions which destroyed his health. While Huss languished in prison, his disciples in Prague started giving the wine as well as the bread to the laity in holy communion: an act of open defiance of Catholic practice.
- Finally, in June 1415, the Church authorities brought the sick Bohemian reformer before the Council, which refused to allow him to defend himself, bullied him mercilessly for three days in an attempt to force him to renounce his heresies and finally condemned him and deposed him from the priesthood. In a humiliating ceremony, six bishops stripped off Huss's priestly vestments, put on his head a cap covered in pictures of red demons and solemnly committed Huss's soul to the devil.

**“And I” said Huss, “commit myself to my most gracious Lord Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>**

- The Council then handed Huss over to Emperor Sigismund, the man who had promised him safe-conduct; Sigismund's soldiers burnt Huss at the stake on July 6<sup>th</sup> 1415. Huss died with serene courage, refusing a last-minute offer of pardon if he would recant his beliefs:

**“I shall die with joy today in the faith of the Gospel which I have preached.”<sup>3</sup>**

- Huss's martyrdom created an uproar in Bohemia. He became a popular national hero. The Bohemians were further enraged when, at Emperor Sigismund's insistence, the Council also burnt Huss's foremost disciple, the noble and learned layman Jerome of Prague (1371-1416), in 1416.
  - Jerome's martyrdom made a greater impression than Huss's. Many onlookers wept, overcome by the martyr's peaceful boldness. Bohemia was now smoldering with rage, ready to blaze up against any further provocation.
  - The spark which ignited the blaze came in 1419, when King Wenceslas died, his brother, the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund should by rights have succeeded him to the Bohemian throne, but he was the most hated man in Bohemia, stained with the holy blood of Huss and Jerome.
  - Passions boiled over and civil war erupted between the nation and its monarch. Pope Martin V came to Sigismund's aid, declaring a Crusade against the heretical Bohemians, but to the astonishment of their foes, the Bohemians defeated the crusading armies again and again. Two of the greatest generals of the Middle Ages, the one-eyed John Ziska (1360-1424) and the priest Procopius the Great (1380-1434), led the Bohemian armies to one stunning victory after another, carrying the war from Bohemia to Germany.
  - Meanwhile the Hussites themselves had divided into two parties.
1. **The Utraquists (from the Latin *utraque*, meaning both) demanded that the laity receive both the bread and wine in communion, and insisted that they be allowed to use a Bohemian translation of the Bible in Hussite worship and that their priests be allowed to preach the Hussite Gospel freely in Bohemia. However, they wanted to remain within the Catholic Church. The Utraquist center of influence was Prague.**
  2. **The Taborites (after the Biblical mount Tabor were much more radical in their rejection of Catholic doctrines and practices. They denied transubstantiation, the invocation of the saints and prayers for the dead and wanted to break away from the Catholic Church entirely.**
    - Despite their differences, the Utraquists and Taborites united against the Catholic crusading armies.
    - By 1433, after 14 years of fierce warfare, it had become clear that the Catholics could not defeat the Hussites on the field of battle.
    - So, for the first time in its history, the Catholic Church was forced to sit down and negotiate with a dissenting group. The Council of Basal managed to reach a compromise agreement with the Hussites, called the Four Articles of Prague. These articles stated that the Hussites would remain within the Catholic Church, on condition that four principles be recognized:
1. **Hussites must be allowed to receive both bread and wine in communion; 2. Hussite priests could preach the Word of God freely without interference; 3. All clergy were under obligation to live simple, humble lives, devoted to the**

**Gospel and not be rich political figures; 4. Mortal sins should be punished by secular courts.**

- This compromise caused open warfare between the two Hussite groups, the Utraquists accepted the articles and the Taborists did not. An Utraquist and Catholic Army decisively crushed the Taborites at the battle of Lipany in 1434.
- There were further struggles, but the end result of the Hussite wars was that most Bohemians remained within the Catholic Church, although as a distinct body with their own Hussite traditions and practices.
- Some, led by Constantine Anglicus, who described himself as “a humble priest of Christ,” entered into negotiations with Constantinople to be admitted into the Orthodox Church, but the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 brought an end to that intriguing episode.
- A significant minority of Hussites stayed loyal to the defeated Taborite cause and linked up with some Waldensians and remained outside the national Bohemian Church.
- From about 1458, they formed a separate body called the “United Bohemian Brotherhood.” By 1500, the Brotherhood had three or four hundred congregations in Bohemia and Moravia, with their own confession of faith and their own Hussite hymns.
- Relations were always uneasy between Hussite Bohemia and the papacy. With the advent of the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most Bohemians welcomed it and the Hussite movement flowed into the mightier ocean of Protestantism.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 404

<sup>2</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 423

<sup>3</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 423