

John Hus

1369-July 6, 1415

Introduction:

1. Historical background –
 - a. 1215 – Magna Charta, Fourth Lateran Council and Innocent 3rd, Bull Unam Sanctum.
 - b. The papacy: 70 year papal captivity in Avignon, France – 1303-1373; 1373-1417 – bringing the pope back to Rome; Council of Pisa, 1409
 - c. Background of Bohemia and Prague:
 - i. Prince Borivoj Christianized under Eastern Christian influences, 873 – missionaries Methodius and Cyrillus laboring in Moravia
 - ii. Authority of Rome embraced a century later, 973, and bishopric of Prague established
 - iii. 1088 – Emperor Henry IV confers crown and royal title on Bohemian prince Wratislav
 - iv. 1344 – separate independent archbishopric, with continued Eastern influences
 - v. Reign of Charles IV, 1346-1378 – golden era; much building, architecture, literature; University of Prague becomes one of the four great Universities
 - d. 1382, the marriage between Anna of Luxembourg (sister of King Wenzel of Bohemia) and Richard II of England, brought an exchange of students who came to Bohemia (Czech Republic) with Wycliffe’s ideas: Jerome of Prague studied there and returned with writings
 - e. Change of the charter in University of Prague; Hus elected rector
2. John Hus, or Huss (which means, “goose”) was born to poor parents in Husinec, in southern Bohemia
 - a. Became a teacher at the Univ. of Prague (no openings for priesthood, 1200 priests in Prague); preacher in “Bethlehem Chapel of the Holy Innocents” – a church built by wealthy nobleman, insisting the the Czech people there would be preached the Word of God in the Czech language (upheld by Gregory 12)
 - b. 1402 – defends Wycliffe’s views; Hus had a conversion experience somewhere in this time period; a dramatic change in his life
 - c. 1403 – takes sides in a controversy over alleged miracles at a relic of Christ’s blood
3. Upheaval: 1405-1412
 - a. 1405 – Pope Innocent VII told the Archbishop of Prague to “stamp out Wycliffism”; Hus had early support from Zbynek, archbishop, in criticism of local priests and bishops, their evil lives, but when the hierarchy was included, drew back
 - b. 1408 – Hus is removed from his position as synodical preacher and told to desist preaching his views. He preaches to throngs outside
 - c. 1410 – Hus is excommunicated and Wycliffe’s writings are seized
 - d. 1411 – condemns indulgences; although he has strong popular support, all the leaders in the church and university are against him; an interdict is placed on Bohemia
 - e. 1412 – upheaval in Prague, the people siding with Hus
4. Hus voluntarily exiled: still preached and wrote
 - a. Wrote on the Apostles’ Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord’s Prayer;
 - b. Produces his famous, *De Ecclesia*, “The Church” in July, 1413
5. Hus’s views:
 - a. The holy catholic Church is the body of all the predestined – the dead and the living and those yet to be created (following Wycliffe here)

- b. The unity of the Church is in faith and love
- c. The pope and cardinals are not the Church
- d. Christ is the rock and Peter is founded on Him by virtue of predestination
- e. The Roman bishop is only equal to other bishops and may sin
- f. Forgiving sins is not man's prerogative

6. Hus's martyrdom:

- a. To German Constance, crossroad of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
- b. November 3, 1414, he reaches Constance (where the great schism was 'healed'), under safe conduct of the Emperor Sigismund
- c. Temporarily has excommunication lifted and given some freedom; but is invited to a house, where a makeshift hearing is held; he is apprehended, kept locked in the house as his prison is prepared; a dark, damp dungeon at the base of tower at the Dominican monastery, on an island where today stands a premier hotel; his cell under water level, and adjacent to the sewer
- d. He was tried and convicted, but not allowed to defend his views; questions were put to him in his cell, to be answered in writing. When ordered to condemn Wycliff's works, he responded he would yield to the church when instructed by Scripture. He refused to be the enemy of truth – "better to die well than to live badly." His hearing was a farce, with wild tumult, shouting, disorderliness before John 23; Hus tried in absentia
- e. 7/6/15 - grotesque sentencing
- f. Escorted by a guard of 600, in fear that people would seek his rescue; walks a ½ mile; passes bonfire burning the books of Wycliffe and Hus; tied to a prepared stake, with a chain about his neck to keep him upright; straw and kindling stacked to his neck; he died singing in the flames, according to a RC eyewitness – "Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me."; all throughout these weeks, he carried himself with great Christian humility and trust:

O most holy Christ, draw me, weak as I am, after Thyself, for if Thou dost not draw us we cannot follow Thee. Strengthen my spirit, that it may be willing. If the flesh is weak, let Thy grace precede us; come between and follow, for without Thee we cannot go for Thy sake to cruel death. Give me a fearless heart, a right faith, a firm hope, a perfect love, that for Thy sake I may lay down my life with patience and joy. Amen.

When the flames died down, they crushed his skull and bones to burn easier; they found his heart and pierced it through; then having burned him more thoroughly, like Wycliffe's ashes burned from his exhumed body, were dropped into the closest river, the Rhine.

- g. Likened by D'Aubigne to John the Baptist

7. Post-mortum:

- a. Hus seen a national hero; a martyr; would be followed by Jerome
- b. Followers of Hus were called Taborites, Calixtines, and Bohemian Brethren
- c. Luther's conclusion: probably apocryphal words later ascribed to Hus:

"Today, you are burning a goose; however a hundred years from now, you will be able to hear a swan sing; you will not burn it, you will have to listen to him."
- d. Brought proper questions to the front – the nature of the church, of church authority, of the authority of the Bible, of salvation enjoyed immediately by God's people and not doled out by the ministry, of the need for vigilance regarding discipline of church officers.
- e. His spirit lives on, as Spurgeon once observed – burnt Hus and Jerome, but in due time arose Luther and Calvin; is Luther dead? Is Calvin dead today? To this day they try to bury him in misrepresentation, but he lives and will live.