

04 JOHN WYCLIFFE
STEVEN J. LAWSON

16 GOING MEDIEVAL
ON RELIGION
MICHAEL REEVES

26 A NATION IN
DARKNESS
JOHN JAMES MURRAY

38 POWER, SCANDALS,
& CORRUPTION
ERWIN LUTZER

EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

JANUARY / FEBRUARY
No. 15 - 2017

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN THE PRE-REFORMATION



PREACHING • TEACHING • TRAINING



CELEBRATE

500

1517 - 2017

YEARS OF

REFORMATION

ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

500 YEARS

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

This year, 2017, will prove to be a signature year in which we, as expositors of the Word of God, will be reminded of the 500-year anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. It was on October 31, 1517, that an Augustinian monk who had become Professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther, posted his 95 Theses on the front door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This public posting was



an open invitation for community debate concerning the sale of indulgences that were being peddled in Saxony by an itinerate Dominican, John Tetzel. The nailing by Luther of his statements of protest proved to be “the shot heard around the world.”

Before Luther realized what was occurring, his theological students took down his 95 Theses and had them typeset and printed, and then spread them around Saxony. These protests against the false practices of the Roman Catholic Church spread like wildfire far and wide. Suddenly, the vital issues that would frame the Reformation became the topic of discussion for the hour. There would be no turning back now. The world would never be the same.

As we begin 2017, *Expositor* wants to draw attention to this history-altering event and the monumental movement that it produced. The reason that we do so is that this

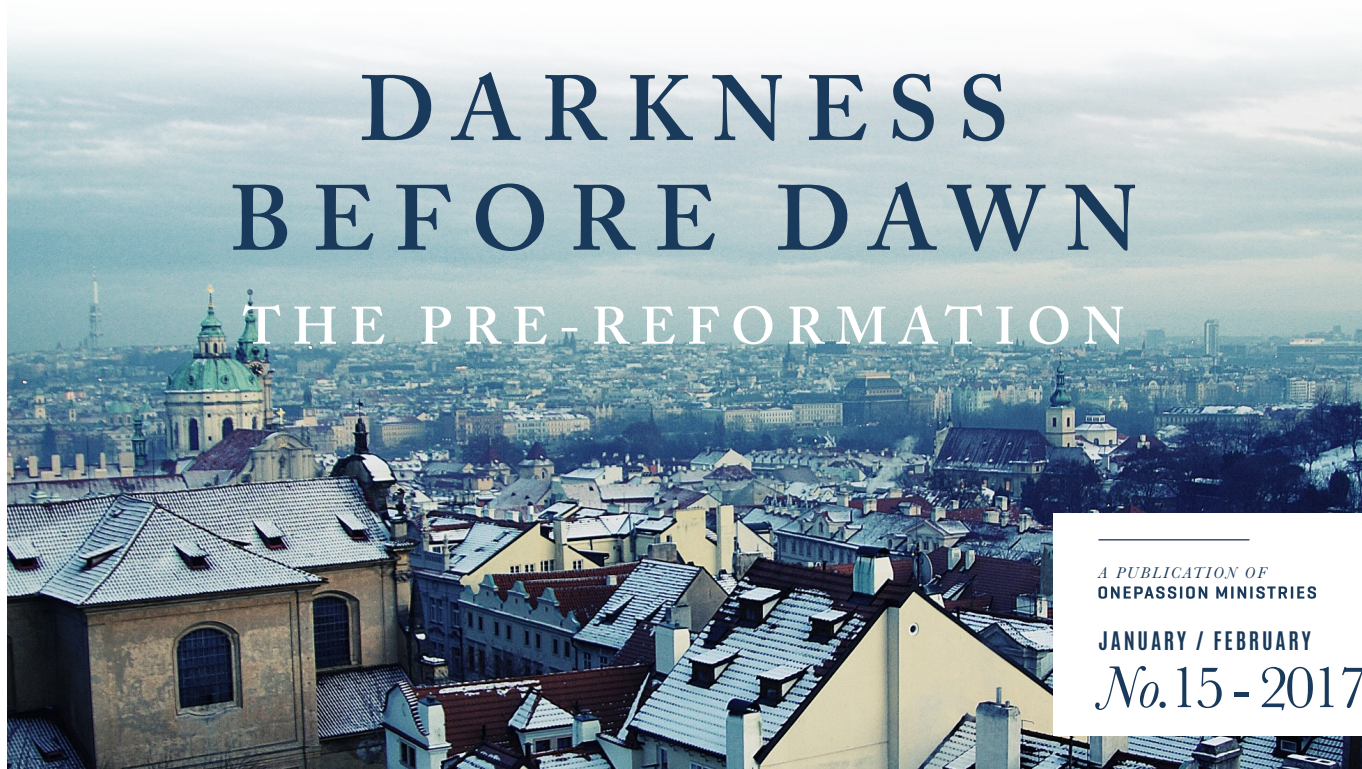
was, in the words of historian Philip Schaff, “the greatest event in Christianity since the birth of the church and the apostolic age.” This is no hyperbole, as it was a spiritual earthquake that shook Europe and remains worthy of our attention today.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century proved to be a recovery of the sole authority of Scripture and the recapturing of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, this movement ushered in the recovery of preaching such as

had not been seen since the first century. The Reformers were, first and foremost, preachers of the Word of God. They were involved in many other ministries, such as lecturing and writing. But these activities were secondary to what they believed was primary, namely, their expounding the Word of God.

With this in mind, each of the six issues of *Expositor* for this year will center upon different aspects of the Reformation and, specifically, its effect upon biblical preaching. In this first issue, we will consider the pre-Reformation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and those men who prepared the way for what would follow. We will study men such as John Wycliffe, the Lollards, and John Hus. Then, the next issue will survey the German Reformation, followed by the English, Swiss, and Scottish Reformations in subsequent issues. In our last issue of the year, we will examine the five *solas* upon which the Protestant movement stood so resolutely.

My prayer is that God will awaken within each one who is called by God to preach and teach His Word a deepening commitment to these same foundational truths that once captured the hearts of mighty men in centuries past. May God ignite a new Reformation in this day with a renewed commitment to the preaching of His inspired and infallible Word. ♦



DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN

THE PRE-REFORMATION

A PUBLICATION OF
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

JANUARY / FEBRUARY

No. 15 - 2017

FEATURES

04 JOHN WYCLIFFE: FATHER OF THE ENGLISH PULPIT STEVEN J. LAWSON

16 GOING MEDIEVAL: THE BACKGROUND OF THE REFORMATION MICHAEL REEVES

26 A NATION IN DARKNESS: SCOTLAND BEFORE 1650 JOHN JAMES MURRAY

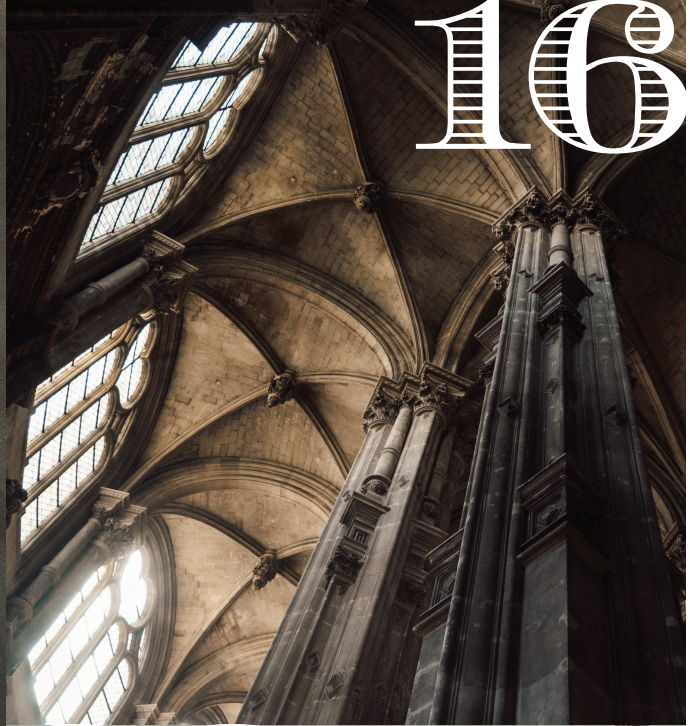
32 THE PULPIT: CONFLICT WITH THE WORLD JOHN MACARTHUR

38 POWER, SCANDALS, & CORRUPTION ERWIN LUTZER

43 JOHN WYCLIFFE: FORERUNNER OF REFORMED THEOLOGY STEVEN J. LAWSON



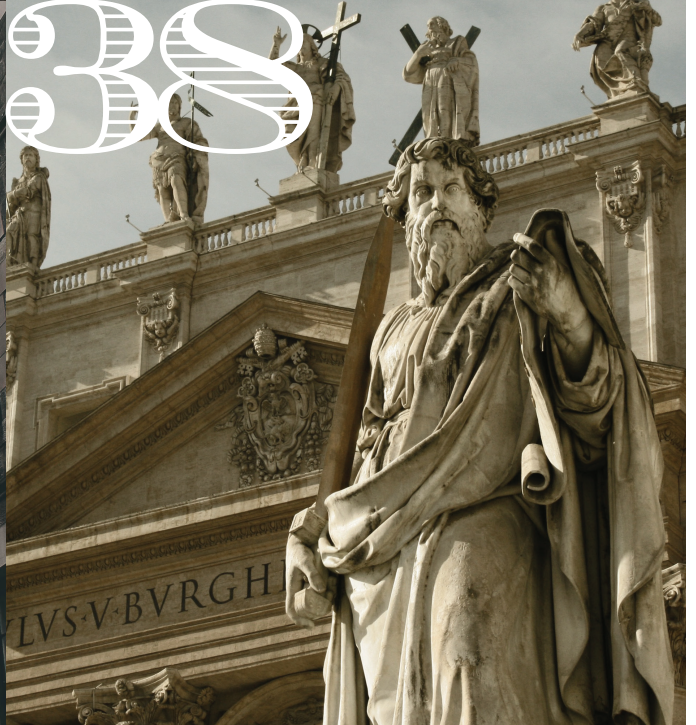
04



16



26



38

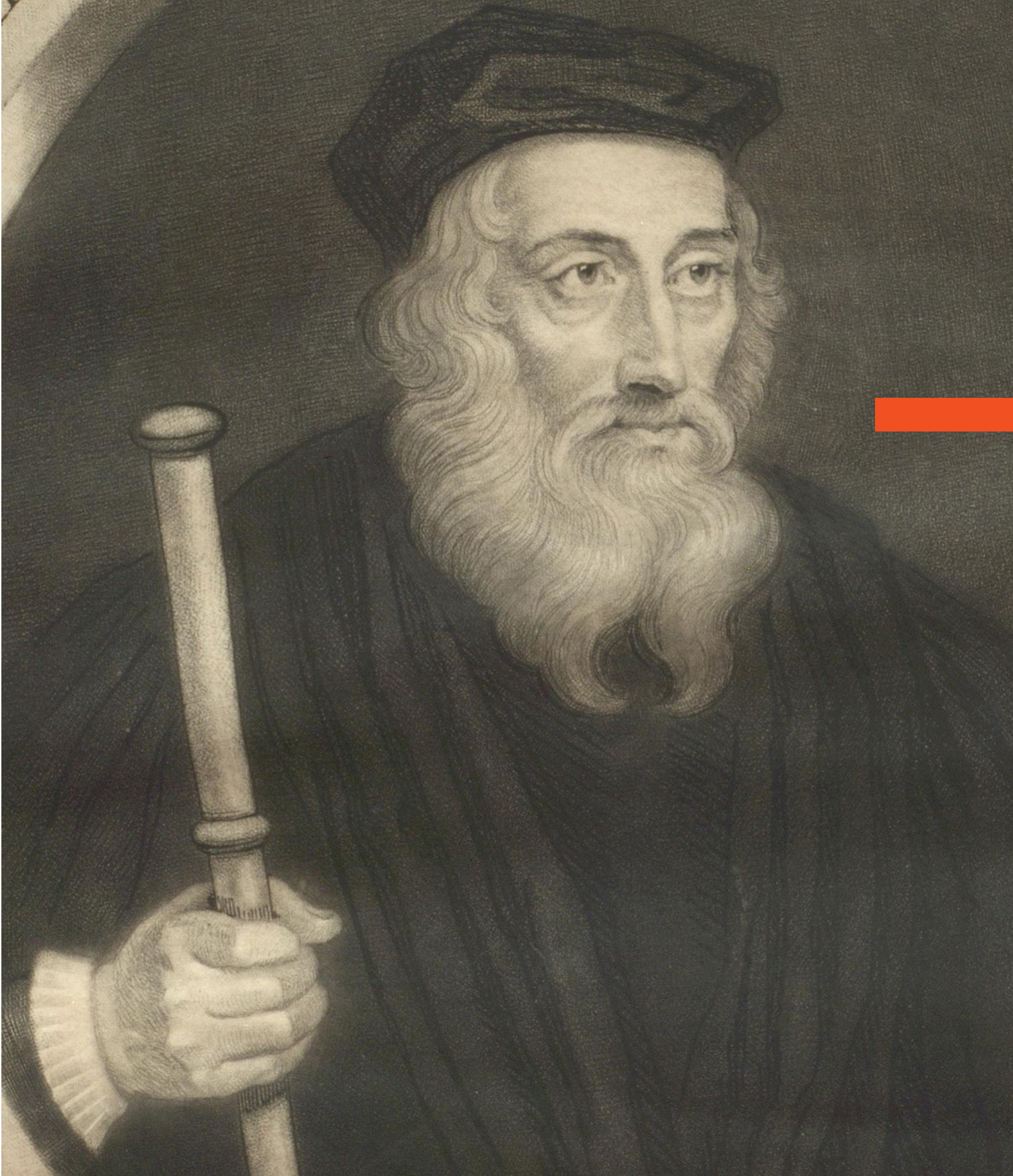
EXPOSITOR

ONEPASSION



JAN/FEB17 ISSUE 15 © 2017 ONEPASSION MINISTRIES **EXECUTIVE EDITOR** *Steven J. Lawson* **EDITOR** *Dustin W. Bengt*
DESIGN DIRECTOR *Dustin W. Bengt* **MARKETING DIRECTOR** *Grace Anne Lawson* **PROOFREADER** *C. Rebecca Rine*

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org). **SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Annual subscription price (6 issues): \$30.00. You can subscribe to *Expositor Magazine* by MAIL: *Expositor Magazine*, P.O. Box 461508, Escondido, CA 92046 ONLINE: www.expositormagazine.com EMAIL: expositormagazine@pcspublink.com PHONE: 855-492-1670. *Expositor* is published bi-monthly by OnePassion, Inc. P.O. Box 601649, Dallas, TX 75360. Postage Paid at Dallas, TX 75382 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Expositor Magazine*, P.O. Box 461508, Escondido, CA 92046.



JOHN WYCLIFFE

FATHER OF THE ENGLISH PULPIT



Steven J. Lawson is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, and author of over twenty books, including *Pillars of Grace* and *Foundations of Grace*.

One hundred and fifty years before an obscure German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, a prominent English theologian, John Wycliffe, had already recovered these same truths that would later ignite the Reformation. Living in the fourteenth century, a century and a half before the Protestant movement, Wycliffe was the most influential Englishman of his day, paving the way for the Reformation that would follow many years later. He was the first Englishman to loudly affirm the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. He was the first Englishman to translate the Bible into the English language. He was the first Englishman to attack the false gospel of Rome and restore the true gospel to the people. And Wycliffe was the first Englishman to resurrect the primacy of the preaching of the Word. In all these crucial matters, Wycliffe was first.

The Recovery of Biblical Preaching

Prior to the fourteenth century, there had been no preacher of any real note in England, certainly not a biblical preacher who had made any lasting effect in this nation. There was no shortage of preachers among the priests, monks, and friars, but these were not expository preachers.

The noted historian of preaching John Broadus stated, "Before Wycliffe, we find little in English preaching that is particularly instructive." As in the days of Amos, there was a famine in the land for the hearing of the word of the Lord.

However, the appearance of Wycliffe marked a new day for preaching in English history. Wycliffe was the first English preacher of the Word with any great power and influence upon the people. Known as the "Morning Star of the Reformation," Wycliffe was the first and brightest light to appear in the dark days preceding the Protestant movement. The morning star is the celestial body that shines brightest during the darkest hour that is immediately before the dawn. Wycliffe brought the first glimmer of gospel truth that penetrated the spiritual darkness of the British Isle in the fourteenth century. He was the father of the English pulpit who resurrected preaching in England in his day for the centuries that followed.

A Day of Extreme Darkness

When Wycliffe appeared on the world stage, the religious scene in England was as pitch black as a starless midnight. The gospel was buried under an avalanche of ignorance, superstition, priest craft, and immorality. Sermons were filled with myths, fables, and empty traditions. Spiritual authority was determined not by Scripture, but by

the church fathers, church tradition, ecclesiastical councils, and the pope. From pulpits to pews, the church was filled with unconverted people who were unknowingly held captive in chains of unbelief. John Foxe, author of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, described this dark hour: "Christianity was in a sad state. Although everyone knew the name of Christ, few if any understood His doctrine." Foxe described its spiritual bankruptcy this way:

The Church was solely concerned with outward ceremony and human traditions. People spent their entire lives heaping up one ceremony after another in hopes of salvation, not knowing it was theirs for the asking. Simple, uneducated people, who had no knowledge of Scripture, were content to know only what their pastors told them, and these pastors took care to only teach what came from Rome.

Nineteenth-century author J. C. Ryle summarized this deplorable time in pre-Reformation England: "The likeness between the religion of this period and that of the apostolic age was so small, that if St. Paul had risen from the dead he would hardly have called it Christianity at all!" This accurate analysis describes the thick darkness that shrouded the English-speaking people. If the gospel was to be recaptured and the church reformed, many questions needed to be addressed: Who speaks for God? Does authority in the church lie with the pope and tradition? Or does it lie in the Scripture alone? How can sinful man be right with holy God? In the providence of God, who would be the influential figure to raise these critical issues? And what would be the means by which he would do it?

Stepping Out of the Shadows

To address these vital matters, John Wycliffe, the foremost learned English intellect in this hour of history, stepped out of the shadows to alter the course of English history. Wycliffe was the leading scholar of his day, a professor at Oxford when it was the premiere university of Europe, surpassing even Paris, Cambridge, and St. Andrews. There, in the esteemed halls of academia, he studied and taught at the highest level for almost forty years. But more than this,

Possessing a brilliant mind, silver tongue, and prolific pen, Wycliffe proved to be the premiere figure of his generation who would lead the way to recover the gospel and reform the church.

Wycliffe was a preacher—a powerful expositor of Scripture. Possessing a brilliant mind, silver tongue, and prolific pen, Wycliffe proved to be the premiere figure of his generation who would lead the way to recover the gospel and reform the church.

Born in Yorkshire, England

Born around 1330, John Wycliffe was the son of a propertied English family that owned land near Richmond in Yorkshire, located in northern England. He most likely would have received his early education from the village priest. At sixteen years old, Wycliffe left home for Oxford, where he enrolled in Balliol College, its oldest college. Three years into his studies, the Black Plague, one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, swept through Europe from 1349 until 1353, killing one-third of its population and leaving 175 million people dead. The Plague spread to England, leaving 100,000 dead in London alone and taking the lives of countless thousands more throughout its devastated land. This terrible plague suspended classes at Oxford, interrupting young Wycliffe's study, causing him to postpone his education until school resumed. This near encounter with death, though, would eventually help lead to his conversion.

Brilliance at Oxford

When Oxford reopened, Wycliffe transferred to Merton College in Oxford, where he graduated in 1356 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He returned to Balliol College, where he resumed further studies and became a teaching fellow and Master. In 1361, Wycliffe was ordained to the priesthood and began preaching as the Rector of the parish church in Fillingham. Immediately, his pulpit presence was marked by spiritual power, and he demonstrated an exceptional ability in expounding the Word. He later exchanged this pastorate for one in Ludgershall, in Buckinghamshire, because it was closer to Oxford. His pulpit gifts were clearly recognized as he preached in various places at Oxford. Continuing his education, Wycliffe received his Bachelor of Divinity (1369) and Doctorate of Theology (1366) at Oxford. He then began his career as a professor at Queen's College, Oxford, where he achieved a reputation for being its most popular and successful teacher in theology and philosophy. Other professors even attended his classes in order to be better taught. He would spend most of his remaining years lecturing at this prestigious institution, where he eventually became the leading theologian and philosopher in England. In this academic role, Wycliffe was respected as one of the greatest thinkers of his age. Many claimed he was second to none in Europe.

At this time, Wycliffe became a valiant champion of the truth of Scripture. In his lectures, he was emphasizing his deep conviction that the written Word of God was the highest authority and infallible guide in all matters. He refused to cite the teachings of the church fathers, the findings of councils, and the decisions of popes as carrying any authority. His appeal was to the Scripture. Further, he was denouncing the corruption in high places among the church leaders, stressing the importance of the preaching of the Word, and grieving the lack of biblical teaching in pulpits. For these reasons, most specifically for his strict adherence to Scripture, he became known as “The Evangelical Doctor.”

Stepping into National Prominence

Wycliffe now found himself propelled into national prominence as his growing reputation gained the attention of the King of England, Edward III. Wycliffe had developed a doctrine he called “dominion,” emphasizing that God is sovereign and the

highest authority over the earth. He taught that God has delegated His authority over earthly property and possessions to the secular government, namely, to the king and Parliament, while God has delegated His authority over spiritual things to the church. The exercise of this dominion was conditional, Wycliffe argued, depending upon the faithful service of men to God. If spiritual leaders, such as the pope or bishops, failed to humble themselves before God and failed to live pure and godly lives, they forfeited their right to preside over their church buildings and land. In such cases, Wycliffe maintained, the state held the right to take possession of the church's holdings. This teaching by Wycliffe was advantageous to the monarchy and nobility, who longed to take ownership of the vast properties of the immensely wealthy English church, or at least tax them, as the church owned a staggering amount of all the landmass in England—one-third to be exact.

This doctrine was much to the liking of the king, who was paying a heavy price to fund England's war with France. Moreover, Pope Gregory XI in Rome had issued a burdensome tax upon the English government and church. At that time, the real power behind the English throne due to the king's senility was his younger son, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, who solicited Wycliffe's help in persuading Parliament that the king could refuse payment to



KING EDWARD III

the pope, as well as garner much-needed resources from the church's properties in England. Wycliffe was successful in his argument and had risen to such high standing with the king that he was appointed a Royal Commissioner and sent to Bruges, France, to represent the crown in negotiating with a papal delegation concerning their refusal to pay tribute to the pope. This authorization to represent the king of England, the church in England, and the national interests of England testified to the respect Wycliffe has earned.

Preacher of Unusual Power

When Wycliffe returned to England in 1374, the king had appointed Wycliffe to be the Rector of the parish church at Lutterworth, a small town near Rugby. This appointment placed him closer to Oxford and his professor duties. He would serve this pastorate for the rest of his life. This opened up a new arena of ministry for Wycliffe, giving him a weekly pulpit in which to preach to a local congregation.

in a manner that was “singularly vigorous.” That is, he was energetic and dynamic when he stood with an open Bible. His preaching was “acute in argument,” John Broadus adds, marked by “bold antagonisms, hard hits, and unsparing sarcasms.” He was “the master of argumentation,” with much “popular power and skill” in his delivery. Never had England heard preaching like this.

Radical Views in Writing

Wycliffe was not only a vital force in his preaching and lecturing, but his writing ministry was also prolific. At this time, he took up pen and put his views on dominion into writing with two books, *On Divine Dominion* and *On Civil Dominion* (1376). If a spiritual or secular leader is found faithless toward God, Wycliffe maintained that he may be deprived of his office and privileges. He wrote, “Men hold whatever they have received from God as stewards, and if found faithless could justly be deprived of it.” Thus, nothing belongs to man, who is a mere steward of God's

Wycliffe was not only a vital force in his preaching and lecturing, but his writing ministry was also prolific.

After lecturing throughout the week at Oxford, he preached on Sunday at Lutterworth. He also preached in other places around England, including London, as his gifts in preaching were clearly recognized by all. So notable was his preaching that the king of England also made him a Royal Chaplain, and he preached before the royal court. Wycliffe was now distinguishing himself as a preacher as he had as a professor.

Church historian Philip Schaff wrote that Wycliffe was “by far the most notable of English preachers prior to the Reformation.” His pulpit delivery was described by Schaff as “simple and direct,” which gave him a wide appeal and popular acceptance with the common people. His sermons were always based on Scripture, which was entirely different from the practice of the day. Whenever he stood in the pulpit, he was relentlessly preaching the authority of Scripture. He gave “a new proclamation of the pure gospel”

possessions. Everything belongs to God. He explained, “If through transgression a man forfeited his divine privileges, then of necessity his temporal possessions were also lost.” Thus, Wycliffe maintained that ungodly rulers have no legitimate authority with which they rule. Thus, what they hold is unjustly kept.

At this time, Wycliffe rebuked the misuse of power by the pope, insisting that the Bible is the sole criterion for establishing any doctrine. No pope or ecclesiastical council, he argued, can add anything to biblical teaching. Further, Wycliffe asserted that the authority of the pope has no basis in Scripture, instead calling him the anti-Christ. This portion of Wycliffe's doctrine caused Pope Gregory XI to condemn Wycliffe, as he had directly challenged papal authority. The Pope issued five papal bulls against Wycliffe, citing nineteen errors from his writings. The English theologian was charged with being “the master of errors” and ordered to

come to Rome for a formal examination and certain indictment for heresy. But Wycliffe refused to appear in Rome, maintaining that the pope had no real authority to summon him. Instead, Wycliffe agreed to a temporary house arrest in Oxford, where he could continue his work.

Asserting Biblical Authority

In 1378, Wycliffe returned to Oxford and tried to reform the doctrine in the church. He wrote a book, *The Truth of Holy Scripture*, which asserted that the Bible is the ultimate standard for Christian doctrine. All that the church teaches must come from the Scripture and be tested by it. All must be subjected to the highest authority of Scripture. This includes the church fathers, ecclesiastical councils, church tradition, and even the pope himself. Wycliffe maintained that the Word of God rules over all matters in the church. In addition, he stated that the Scripture contains all that is necessary for salvation, without the addition of human inventions. He believed that all people should read the Scripture for themselves, not merely the priests. Thus, he urged a translation of the Bible in the English language, which was a radical departure from the ruling of the Council of Toulouse (1229), which strictly forbade the laity to read the Bible. Wycliffe openly opposed this church ruling, and for these convictions he was becoming the university's most controversial figure.

Identifying the True Church

Wycliffe furthered his assault upon the pope and the church in Rome when he wrote *On the Church* (1378). In this watershed work, he identified the true church not by its organizational structure, nor by its number of worshippers. Instead, Wycliffe wrote that the true church of God is the total number of the elect. He stood in agreement with the earlier theologian Augustine of Hippo, who made the same distinction between the visible and invisible church. Wycliffe stressed that one can be in the visible church and participate in its rituals, but not be in the true body of Christ and therefore be without a right standing before God. He stressed that salvation belongs exclusively to those who are predestined by God to eternal life and comes through grace alone, not through church membership or self-efforts.

Inciting further controversy, Wycliffe maintained that Jesus Christ is the only head of the church, not the pope in Rome. The pope is only the head of the visible church, with its hierarchal structure and vast properties. Wycliffe claimed that Jesus Christ is the only sovereign head over the true church, which is all of the elect. These are those chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world

and will be irresistibly called by the Spirit into communion with the risen Christ. These alone constitute the true body of Christ. These doctrinal convictions were nothing short of revolutionary and further exasperated the conflict between Wycliffe and the church in Rome.

Confronting Unfaithful Leaders

In another book, *The Pastoral Office* (1378), Wycliffe confronted the unfaithful clergy he saw defaming the church. He noted that all those in the ministry should live godly lives, something he perceived as missing in the church. They should model what the Word of God teaches with godly lives clearly seen by all.

Wycliffe wrote:

A priest should live holy, in prayer, in desires and thought, in godly conversation and honest teaching, having God's commandments and His Gospel ever on his lips. And let his deeds be so righteous that no man may be able with cause to find fault with them, and so open his acts that he may be a true book to all sinful and wicked men to serve God.

Wycliffe observed the deficiency of true preaching in the church. Wycliffe examined the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and noted that gospel preaching was His chief function. The minister's highest service, therefore, is found in the preaching of the Word, which he said is more important than administering the sacraments. When the Word is preached, sinners are converted and the church is strengthened.

Driving a wedge further between Rome and himself, Wycliffe wrote *The Power of the Pope* (1379). In this polemic work, he maintained that the papal office was purely man's invention and not an institution of God. He stressed that any pope who did not strictly follow a godly life and the gospel teaching of Christ was a devil. In fact, he claimed that a worldly pope is the anti-Christ himself. These accusations were unprecedented in the unbridled extent to which they were leveled. Wycliffe would later go further and maintain that all popes, regardless of their lifestyle, are the anti-Christ.

Denouncing the Mass

Wycliffe next published *On Apostasy* (1379) and *On the Eucharist* (1380), which struck a blow at the core doctrine of the church in Rome, which was its stance on transubstantiation. He completely refuted the Mass, stating that the bread and wine do not change into the body and blood of Christ in the hands of the priest, as was alleged. Wycliffe

firmly renounced the sacramental power of the priesthood and denied any efficacy in the Mass to remove sin. He argued that these doctrines were contrary to Scripture. He stated that transubstantiation was a recent novelty, never taught by the early church. This fabrication was not espoused until 1215 with the Fourth Lateran Council. Further, Wycliffe openly rejected all church rituals, ceremonies, and rites not specifically taught in the Bible. He believed these man-made external formalities do not help the worship of God, but actually hinder it.

So contentious was the heated controversy created by this polemic attack undertaken by Wycliffe that King Edward



III and John of Gaunt were forced to distance themselves from him. At this point, even the leadership of Oxford were forced to withdraw their support of their leading scholar. In the eyes of the monarchy and the university, Wycliffe had gone too far in his assault upon the teaching of Rome. This Word-driven reform-minded theologian nevertheless held his ground and refused to back down from his convictions in the Scripture.

Forced Withdrawal from Oxford

Adding to the heated controversy in which Wycliffe found himself was the Peasant's Revolt (1381). This was a time of civil unrest in England during which Wycliffe's teachings were blamed for causing the turmoil. Wycliffe was not involved in this rebellion against the government and, in fact, disapproved of it. But his opponents made strong accusations that this upheaval was the direct result of Wycliffe's

radical teaching. Consequentially, the leaders of the church called for an investigation, the Blackfriars Synod, to examine Wycliffe's writings. The Synod met and condemned him, bringing a further stigma upon his reputation. To be a Wycliffite was once a popular badge to wear. But now, it meant one was a threat to the peace of the nation.

Rather than backing down, Wycliffe responded strongly in the spring of 1381 by publishing twelve theses that condemned the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Mass. This was thirty-six years before Luther would post his ninety-five theses. John Laird Wilson wrote:

These theses were bold—bold beyond precedent. Nothing so daring had been done in the entire history of the medieval church. The boldness of the attack can only be understood and appreciated, when it is borne in mind that the real presence was...regarded as the cardinal doctrine of the Church. It was the very center and citadel of the faith. The blow fell like a thunderbolt....The Church was attacked at its very life center.

Such a direct attack upon the core doctrine of the Church by such a revered figure as Wycliffe demanded a response. Something had to be done. The Chancellor of Oxford, William de Berton, declared the theses to be not merely erroneous, but heretical. He pronounced that any public teaching of these statements was prohibited, and anyone who did teach this, including

its most prized professor, Wycliffe, would be suspended, excommunicated, and possibly imprisoned.

Wycliffe nevertheless continued to teach his convictions at Oxford, denouncing transubstantiation. He was in his professor's chair in class, lecturing on the Lord's Supper, when an officer of the university entered the classroom and, in front of his students, issued him his permanent dismissal from the university. He finished his lecture and dismissed himself from his students, never again to return to teaching duties at Oxford. Leaving this public platform, he withdrew to his quiet pastorate of Lutterworth, where his greatest work awaited him.

The Birth of a Movement

While many were opposed to Wycliffe, others were being attracted to him. Due to his highly visible position at Oxford and his immense popularity with the students, graduates,

and other professors, there was a significant group of like-minded men drawn to Wycliffe who also shared his doctrinal convictions. At this pivotal moment, Wycliffe launched the Lollard movement, which raised up an army of itinerant preachers to proclaim the Word throughout England. So strongly did Wycliffe believe in the necessity of biblical preaching that he personally trained and sent out the Lollards to travel about England to preach the Word. They were called “evangelical men” by Wycliffe because they proclaimed the “evangel,” or the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. However, they were called Lollards by his opponents, a derisive term meaning a “mumbler.” The word was a pejorative term derived from the Middle Dutch verb *lollen*, “to mumble.” To the established Roman church, these unlicensed heralds were nothing more than stutterers of nonsense. Nevertheless, these gospel preachers would have a strong effect in spreading the message of salvation in a day when its truth had been lost.

These traveling preachers were equipped by Wycliffe with his gospel tracts to distribute, his sermon outlines to follow, and his pre-written sermons to preach. This group of evangelistic expositors embraced Wycliffe’s strong convictions on the sole authority of Scripture. They held tenaciously to the gospel of the pure grace of God in salvation that this brilliant theologian taught. Initially, the Lollards were chiefly comprised of Oxford scholars, who diligently studied the Word, the lesser gentry, and many poor people from both rural and urban areas. This number constituted an authentic movement to reach England by preaching the message of salvation and giving out gospel tracts.

This grassroots movement of traveling preachers testifies to the commitment Wycliffe assigned to the ministry of preaching. Strong preachers attract other strong preachers around them. The fact that so many other men were drawn to stand with Wycliffe and be sent out by him to preach demonstrates how powerful he was as a preacher. This speaks volumes as to the priority he placed upon preaching the Word. Only a powerful preacher such as Wycliffe could have enlisted and empowered a legion of Bible preachers such as this.

The Reformation of Preaching

Wycliffe was deeply sobered concerning the state of preaching in England. He grieved over what passed for preaching in his day and saw it as a dramatic departure from God’s design found in Scripture. Biographer John Laird Wilson commented:

He lamented the degenerate condition of the pulpit; and he was grieved with the endowed clergy for their

habitual neglect of what he considered the principle part of the ministerial work. He denounced all sermons that did not expound the Scripture. Wycliffe maintained that the enduring precedent for true preaching was set by Jesus Christ Himself in His earthly ministry. The Lord Jesus prioritized the proclamation of the word and left many other good works undone. Wycliffe stated, “Jesus Christ left other works and occupied Himself mostly in preaching, and thus did His apostles, and for this, God loved them.”

As a result, Wycliffe believed that every minister should follow the pattern of the earthly ministry of Jesus and establish the priority of preaching. The proclamation of the Word was their chief matter of business. He emphasized that the main vocation of the minister was to preach the Word. Wycliffe maintained:

If our bishops preach not in their own persons, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sins of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ. A more serious indictment could hardly be brought against the pulpits of England than this charge.

The Chief Business of Preachers

Wycliffe taught that preaching the Word is the chief business of ministers in the church: “The highest service that men may attain to on earth is to preach the Word of God. This service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God more straightly demands it of them.” He stressed that the church is the strongest when the Word is preached: “The Church...is honored most by the preaching of God’s Word, and hence this is the best service that priests may render unto God.” By this primary emphasis upon biblical preaching, Wycliffe purposed to reform the church by reforming its preaching. More than anyone else, Wycliffe was used by God at this time to recover biblical preaching in England.

Translating the English Bible

In the obscurity of Lutterworth, there was more that Wycliffe had to undertake at this time. In this isolation, Wycliffe invested much of his time writing tracts that expounded and defended his doctrinal views. Likewise, Wycliffe realized all the more clearly that the English-speaking people must have the Bible available to them in their own language. In order for the gospel to reach to the nation, the laity must have the written Word of God in their own native tongue.

Wycliffe then initiated an enormous project. He began the work of translating the entire Bible into the English

language. This undertaking was driven by his deep conviction that the Bible must be in the hands of the people. The only Bible available at this time was the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus had not yet gathered together Greek manuscripts from around Europe and compiled them into a Greek New Testament. That collection would not be available until 1516. The Roman church refused to translate the Bible into the English tongue lest they lose control over the minds of the people. The average person could not even read Latin. A person could live his entire life without ever seeing a copy of holy Scripture. But Wycliffe was determined to change this. He launched this monumental task to give the English people a Bible they could read for themselves.

Wycliffe Takes the Lead

The part that Wycliffe played in the translation work is not known. It is estimated that he played a significant role in translating the New Testament. He certainly was the instigator and driving force of this extraordinary project. Wycliffe delegated to other scholars at Oxford who believed in Wycliffe's message and mission the translating work of the Old Testament. Nicholas [of] Hereford, a Fellow of the Queens College, Oxford, and Chancellor of The University of Oxford in 1382, is known to have been entrusted by Wycliffe with translating the Old Testament. Nicholas also received his Doctor of Theology in 1382. The major part of the translation was completed by this same year.

Under Wycliffe's leadership, this first English Bible was a literal rendering from the Latin Vulgate. The limitation of the work is that it was not based on the original Greek and Hebrew as William Tyndale would accomplish in the sixteenth century (Tyndale's work was first published in 1526). Once translated, the manuscript had to be meticulously hand-copied. It would be another sixty years before the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg appeared around 1440. One scribe using a quill, copying a manuscript full time, would require ten months to produce one English Bible. The production of hundreds of these Bibles required a large contingency of scribes at work. The number of copies of Wycliffe's Bible that presently remain indicates there must have been a large stable of copyists involved in this task.



Last Days in Isolation

With sad irony, England's most influential theologian would spend his last two years in seclusion. However, this final period of Wycliffe's life proved to be prolific for his writing ministry. In this same year, 1382, he suffered his first stroke. Though encountering this setback, he nevertheless persevered in his doctrinal writing, which helped to more carefully articulate matters of salvation.

The biblical teaching by Wycliffe put him in stark contrast with the dogma of Rome. On November 17, 1382, he was summoned before a synod at Oxford, which he addressed, and was excommunicated. He was also commanded to appear in Rome and give an account of his doctrine.

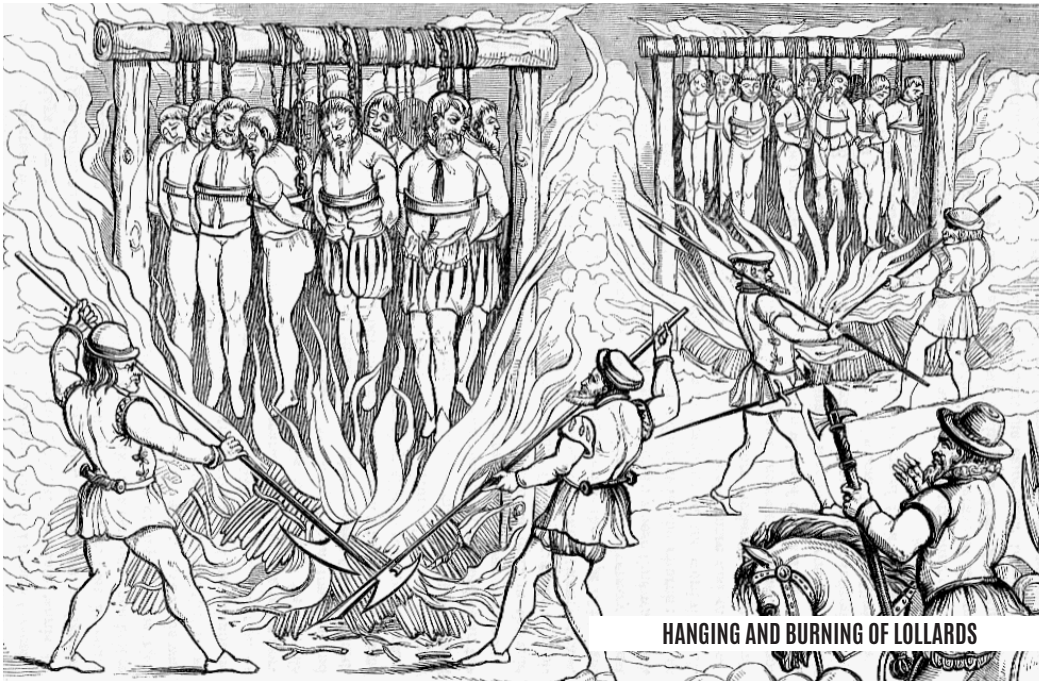
But a second stroke suffered on December 28, 1394, left him partially immobilized, making him unable to make the long journey to Italy. Wycliffe died three days later in Lutterworth on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1384, and was buried in the church graveyard in Lutterworth.

Carrying on the Mission

After Wycliffe's death, the many Lollards continued the work he had begun. These itinerate preachers carried on the mission of preaching the gospel throughout England. The leadership of the group was assumed by Nicholas [of] Hereford, the brilliant scholar who had been at Wycliffe's side at Oxford and in translating the Old Testament into English. The Lollards traveled on foot with a copy

of Wycliffe's Bible in hand, moving from village to village, from town to town, preaching the Word and extending the free offer of the gospel. They were evangelists-at-large, exhorting, pleading with, and warning their listeners. They went everywhere preaching, into churches, chapels, churchyards, public streets, marketplaces, and houses. They journeyed through countrysides and into cities, wherever they could gain a hearing for the Word of God. There were so many Lollards traveling the roads of England that it was said, "You could not meet two persons on the highway but one of them was a Wycliffe disciple."

Knowing the importance of sound theology, a group of Lollards who were members of Parliament published a synopsis of Wycliffe's doctrinal teaching in a work titled



Twelve Conclusions (1395). This small book was, in reality, a manifesto that contained twelve confessions of faith. They affirmed the core doctrines of salvation that they preached so boldly, as well as refuting the papal errors as well as strongly refuting transubstantiation, pilgrimages, and prayers for the dead. These confessions set forth the clear teaching of the Bible without any mixture of the false message of Rome.

For twenty years after Wycliffe's death, the Lollards enjoyed the support of many brilliant scholars at Oxford who shared his biblical convictions. They were joined by influential members of the aristocratic party and common laborers throughout England to form a marching army of highly motivated preachers. Many were enlisted through the efforts of William Swinderly, a lay preacher, and John Purvey, who had been Wycliffe's personal secretary. This legion of preachers, unleashed upon England, was a pre-Reformation movement, taking place more than a century before the Protestant movement launched by Martin Luther.

Wycliffe's Teaching to Europe

The message of Wycliffe spread across the English Channel to the European Continent. His reformed views traveled to Bohemia (Czech Republic) through a student exchange program between Oxford University and the University of Prague. Students from Bohemia, attending Oxford, read Wycliffe's theological works, which taught the biblical truth of salvation. These students were so influenced by Wycliffe's writings that they carried copies back to Prague,

where they were read by another young student named John Hus. Around 1390, Hus was first exposed to Wycliffe's writings by copying them in the University of Prague library to earn money. Five copies of the complete works of Wycliffe in Hus's own handwriting presently remain in the Stockholm Royal Library. Through this tedious practice, Hus absorbed Wycliffe's teaching and soon began to teach them.

A Bohemian theologian and follower of Hus, Jerome of Prague

(ca. 1379–1416), returned from a trip to Oxford in 1401 with more of Wycliffe's writings. These additional works further impacted Hus and other reform-minded individuals in Bohemia. They found Wycliffe's writings about the authentic spirituality of the true church especially insightful. These truths birthed a reform movement in Bohemia that would spread throughout eastern Europe for the next two centuries. What Wycliffe wrote about corruption in the clergy and the false hope in the sale of indulgences resonated with Hus. He agreed with Wycliffe that the true church is comprised of only the elect who are predestined to grace and glory. Hus also affirmed that the head of the church is Jesus Christ, not the pope.

Hus preached these Wycliffe-like truths at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague to a large congregation numbering 3,000 people. In Hus's sermons are found lengthy citations from Wycliffe's writings. Moreover, Hus preached in the vernacular, the language of the people, following Wycliffe's example of translating the Bible into the native tongue of his readers. Wycliffe's ministry truly lived in Hus's preaching and writings.

Burning of Lollards Legalized

Meanwhile, in England, King Henry IV sought to halt the preaching of the Lollards. With the support of the English Parliament, a new statute was passed called *De Heretico Comburendo* (1401), meaning "On the Burning of a Heretic." In its Preamble, this law stated its oppositions against a "new sect," a reference to the Lollards, "who thought damnably of the

sacraments and usurped the office of preaching.” This cruel statute empowered the bishops of England to initiate the arrest, imprison, and examination of all “heretics” who contradicted the teaching of Rome. Promulgating what Wycliffe had taught and what was preached by the Lollards was now condemned as a crime worthy of death. Those found guilty were to be turned over to the government authorities to be burned at the stake “in a high place,” in order for people to witness it. This unjust legislation was aimed at stopping the building momentum of the Lollard movement.

The Lollards were also perceived to be a threat to the nation because of their work in distributing copies of the Wycliffe Bible as they traveled and preached. Even owning a Wycliffe Bible or preaching from it was a capital crime worthy of death at the stake. But these Lollards would not be intimidated. Rather than stopping the movement, this resistance caused its members to grow stronger in their resolve to preach the truth of the gospel.

All English Bibles Banned

Further opposition was taken against the Wycliffite preachers in 1408 when Thomas Arundell, the archbishop of Canterbury, presided over a synod in Oxford that passed “The Constitutions of Oxford.” These declarations strictly forbade any translation of the Bible into English and prohibited any use of a Wycliffe Bible, whether for private reading or public preaching. This was another attempt to intimidate the Lollards and stop their preaching. In addition, the “Constitutions” legislated control over the theological education in the colleges at the University of Oxford. As it relates to Wycliffe’s Bible, the “Constitutions” read as follows:

It is a dangerous thing...to translate the text of the Holy Scripture out of one tongue into another, for in the translation the same sense is not always easily kept.... We therefore decree and ordain, that no man hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue....No man can read any such book...in part or in whole.

Despite the anti-Wycliffe verdicts of this synod at Oxford, the Lollards remained strong in their determination to spread the truths of the Word of God.

By the 1410s, the Oxford scholars who first stood with Wycliffe when the Lollard movement started began to pass away in death. In this transition period, the movement became more lay-oriented. The leadership of the Lollards was assumed by Sir John Oldcastle, an English soldier, member of Parliament, and prominent landowner. Oldcastle urged these itinerant evangelists to continue the mission by boldly

preaching the gospel. In 1413, Oldcastle was arrested, convicted of “Wycliffe heresy,” imprisoned, and condemned to death. He escaped, but unwisely conspired an attempt to capture King Henry IV. The plot was discovered and failed, and he was imprisoned again in 1414, only to escape yet again. This foiled coup cost the Lollards much-needed credibility with the political establishment and wealthy aristocrats. From this point forward, this dissenting movement would be comprised of common people outside the circles of power. This forced the Lollards underground, where they operated mainly in London and southern England.

Wycliffe’s Remains Removed

Thirty years after Wycliffe’s death, he was still public enemy number one with the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Constance (1414–1418) convened in order to further resist the spread of his teaching. When the Council met to end the Western Schism of two popes, it also sought “the eradication of the said schism,” a clear reference to the Lollard movement. This assembly condemned Wycliffe on many counts of heresy, which reveals just how great was Wycliffe’s continuing influence with the people. This Council also summoned Jan Hus, the Prague preacher, to appear in order to defend his Wycliffe-like teaching. Hus had been promised safe conduct, but was nevertheless tried, found guilty, and turned over to the civil authorities in Bohemia to be burned at the stake. The charge read: “This holy synod of Constance, seeing that God’s church has nothing more that it can do, relinquishes Jan Hus to the judgment of the secular authority” (July 6, 1415).

The Council of Constance also ordered Wycliffe’s writings to be burned, his bones exhumed, and his remains removed from consecrated ground in the churchyard at Lutterworth. This was an attempt to utterly reject Wycliffe. Also, Jerome of Prague, who brought Wycliffe’s writings to Prague, was summoned to appear before the Council. He was also arrested, judged, condemned of heresy, and turned over to the same secular authorities in Prague to be burned at the stake, due to his association with Wycliffe’s teachings. The teachings of this English Reformer remained contentious long after he had died.

A Further Repudiation

The leader of the Lollards, Oldcastle, endeavored to keep the work alive that had been launched under Wycliffe. In 1417, he led the Lollards on an ill-advised march in London in an attempt to draw attention to its mission and message. But Henry IV had Oldcastle arrested, tried, and condemned for heresy and treason. He was then hanged and burned. This violent martyrdom was a yet further repudiation of Wycliffe

and his doctrinal reforms. Moreover, it was a devastating blow that forced the movement yet further underground.

Wycliffe's Remains Burned

The denunciation of Wycliffe by the Catholic Church was still not complete. In 1428, Pope Marvyn V ordered the remains of Wycliffe to be dug up a second time. This time, his bones were burned and his ashes scattered into the River Swift that flows through Lutterworth. This dispersing of Wycliffe's charred remains was a desperate attempt by the Catholic Church to prevent his future resurrection on the last day. Church historian Thomas Fuller noted the irony in this act when he wrote:

They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus the brook has conveyed his ashes into the Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed the world over.

Despite this final burning of Wycliffe's remains, the power of his influence continued to spread throughout England, the European continent, and the entire world. Through his theological writings and the Lollard movement, the legacy of Wycliffe helped set the stage for the Protestant Reformation that would follow. J. C. Ryle commented: "There were many Lollards, and followers of Wycliffe, scattered over the land, who held the truth, and were the salt of the nation. But the fierce persecution with which these good men were generally assailed prevented their making much progress. They barely maintained their own ground." The influence of Wycliffe, nevertheless, reached the day of Luther.

An Enduring Influence

In 1521, the German Reformer Martin Luther would be charged at the Diet of Worms for holding to "Wycliffite" heresies. It was the judgment of the Roman Catholic prosecution against Luther that he was nothing more than another Wycliffe who must be stopped. In 1522, the mantle of Wycliffe was taken up by William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into the English tongue from the original Greek and Hebrew languages. Tyndale was able to improve the work

of Wycliffe because Erasmus had compiled a Greek text of the New Testament in 1516. Tyndale would subsequently begin the Old Testament, which he partially completed, being stopped in his work only by his martyrdom in 1536. Tyndale's translation of an English Bible, published with movable type in larger numbers, would gain traction and ignite the English Reformation in the sixteenth century. But it was Wycliffe who first undertook the task. With a newly translated English Bible and an army of Bible preachers, Wycliffe initiated a history-altering movement in England that spread abroad and became the connecting link with the Protestant Reformation. John Laird Wilson captures the pioneering role played by Wycliffe, who merely began what others would complete:

His work was not completed. In its main features it was hardly a success. He had not broken the power of Rome in England. He had not fully inaugurated the Reformation. But the fault was not his. The times were not ripe; circumstances were not in his favor; and he suffered the fate which is common to pioneers. But he laid the foundation on which others were to build—he sowed what others were to reap; and whatever glory belongs to the great work, which brought about the religious revolution of the sixteenth century, a large portion of that glory justly attaches to the memory of John Wycliffe.

The Need of the Hour

In this present hour, the world is once again shrouded in the darkness of spiritual ignorance. Religious superstitions obscure the truth. The light of the Scripture is again hidden under a bushel. The truth of the gospel is still unknown by the vast majority of people around the world. The message of salvation is eclipsed by the secular ideologies of the age. We have dire need again for men like John Wycliffe and his Lollards to shine the light of Scripture into this world of darkness.

The need has never been greater for a new generation of preachers to appear on the world scene. The hour calls for strong men to proclaim the strong message of the saving gospel of God. May a new army of biblical expositors hold high the torch of truth in this dark night of history and usher in a new day for the church. ♦





GOING MEDIEVAL ON RELIGION

THE BACKGROUND OF THE REFORMATION



Michael Reeves is president and professor of theology at Union School of Theology in Oxford, England. He is the author of several books, including *Rejoicing in Christ* and *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation*.

As the fifteenth century died and the sixteenth was born, the old world seemed to die at the hands of a new one: the mighty Byzantine Empire, last remnant of Imperial Rome, had collapsed; then, Columbus discovered a new world in the Americas, Copernicus turned the universe on its head with his heliocentrism, and Luther literally re-formed Christianity. All the old foundations that once had seemed so solid and certain now crumbled in this storm of change, making way for a new era in which things would be very different.

Looking back today, it feels nigh on impossible even to get a sense of what it must have been like in that era. “Medieval”—the very word conjures up dark, gothic images of chanting cloister-crazed monks and superstitious, revolting peasants. All very strange. Especially to modern eyes: where we are out-and-out democratic egalitarians, they saw everything hierarchically; where our lives revolve around nurturing, nourishing, and pampering the self, they sought in everything to abolish and abase the self (or, at least, they admired those who did). The list of differences could go on. Yet this was the setting for the Reformation, the context in which people got so passionate about theology. The Reformation was a revolution, and revolutions not only fight *for* something, they also fight *against*

something, in this case, the old world of medieval Roman Catholicism. What, then, was it like to be a Christian in the couple of centuries before the Reformation?

Popes, Priests, and Purgatory

Unsurprisingly, all the roads of medieval Roman Catholicism led to Rome. The apostle Peter, to whom Jesus had said, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,” was thought to have been martyred and buried there, allowing the church to be built, quite literally, upon him. And so, as once the Roman Empire had looked to Rome as its mother and Caesar as its father,

now the Christian empire of the Church looked still to Rome as its mother, and to Peter’s successor as father, “papa” or “pope.” There was a slightly awkward exception to this: the Eastern Orthodox Church, severed from the Church of Rome since the eleventh century. But every family has a black sheep. Other than that, all Christians recognized Rome and the pope as their irreplaceable parents. Without Father Pope, there could be no Church; without Mother Church, there could be no salvation.

The pope was held to be Christ’s “vicar” (representative) on earth, and as such, he was the channel through whom all of God’s grace flowed. He had the power to ordain bishops, who in turn could ordain priests; and together, they, the clergy, were the ones with the authority to turn on the

taps of grace. Those taps were the seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Mass, penance, marriage, ordination, and last rites. Sometimes they were spoken of as the seven arteries of the Body of Christ, through which the lifeblood of God's grace was pumped. That this all looks rather mechanistic was precisely the point, for the unwashed masses, being uneducated and illiterate, were considered incapable of having an explicit faith. So, while an "explicit faith" was considered desirable, an "implicit faith," in which a person came along to church and received the sacraments, was considered perfectly acceptable. If they stood under the taps, they received the grace.

It was through baptism that people (generally as infants) were first admitted to the Church to taste God's grace. Yet it was the Mass that was really central to the whole system. That would be made obvious the moment you walked into your local church: all the architecture led toward the altar, on which the Mass would be celebrated. And it was called an altar with good reason, for in the Mass Christ's body would be sacrificed afresh to God. It was through this "unbloody" sacrifice offered day after day, repeating Christ's "bloody" sacrifice on the cross, that God's anger at sin would be appeased. Each day, Christ would be re-offered to God as an atoning sacrifice. Thus the sins of each day were dealt with.

Yet wasn't it obvious that something was missing from this sacrifice, that Christ's body wasn't actually on the altar, that the priest was only handling mere bread and wine? This was the genius of the doctrine of transubstantiation. According to Aristotle, each thing has its own "substance" (inner reality) as well as "accidents" (appearance). The "substance" of a chair, for instance, could be wood, while its "accidents" are brownness and dirtiness. Paint the chair and its "accidents" would change. Transubstantiation imagined the opposite: the "substance" of the bread and wine would, in the Mass, be transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ, whilst the original "accidents" of bread and wine remained. It may all have seemed a bit farfetched, but there were enough stories doing the rounds to persuade doubters, stories of people having visions of real blood in the chalice, real flesh on the plate, and so on.

The moment of transformation came when the priest spoke Christ's words in Latin: *Hoc est corpus meum* ("this is my body"). Then the church bells would peal and the priest would raise the bread. The people would normally only get to eat the bread once a year (and they never got to drink from the cup—after all, what if some ham-fisted peasant spilt the blood of Christ on the floor?), but grace came with just a look at the raised bread. It was understandable that the more devoted should run feverishly from church to

church to see more masses and thus receive more grace.

The service of the Mass was said in Latin. The people, of course, understood not a word. The trouble was, neither did many of the clergy, who found learning the service by rote quicker than learning a whole new language. Thus when parishioners heard "Hocus pocus" instead of *Hoc est corpus meum*, who knows whose mistake it was? Even priests were known to fluff their lines. And with little understanding of what was being said, it was hard for the average parishioner to distinguish Roman Catholic orthodoxy from magic and superstition. For them, the consecrated bread became a talisman of divine power that could be carried around to avert accidents, given to sick animals as a medicine, or planted to encourage a good harvest. Much of the time, the Church was lenient towards semi-pagan folk Christianity, but it is a testimony to how highly the Mass was revered that it decided to act against such abuses: in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council ordered that the transformed bread and wine "are to be kept locked away in a safe place in all churches, so that no audacious hand can reach them to do anything horrible or impious."

Underpinning the whole system and mentality of medieval Roman Catholicism was an understanding of salvation that went back to Augustine (AD 354–430): Augustine's theology of love, to be precise (how ironic that this theology of love would come to inspire great fear). Augustine taught that we exist in order to love God. However, we cannot naturally do so, but must pray for God to help us. This He does by "justifying" us, which, Augustine said, is the act in which God pours His love into our hearts (Rom 5:5). This is the effect of the grace that God was said to channel through the sacraments: by making us more and more loving, more and more just, God "justifies" us. God's grace, on this model, was the fuel needed to become a better, more just, righteous, and loving person. And this was the sort of person who finally merited salvation, according to Augustine. This was what Augustine had meant when he spoke of salvation by grace.

Talk of God pouring out His grace so that we become loving and so merit salvation might have sounded lovely on Augustine's lips; over the centuries, however, such thoughts took on a darker hue. Nobody intended it. Quite the opposite: how God's grace worked was still spoken of in attractive, optimistic ways. "God will not deny grace to those who do their best" was the cheery slogan on the lips of medieval theologians. But then, how could you be sure you really had done your best? How could you tell if you had become the sort of just person who merited salvation?

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council came up with what it hoped would be a useful aid for all those seeking to be

The Church's official teaching was quite clear that nobody would die righteous enough to have merited salvation fully.

“justified”: it required all Christians (on pain of eternal damnation) to confess their sins regularly to a priest. There the conscience could be probed for sins and evil thoughts so that wickedness could be rooted out and the Christian become more just. The effect of the exercise, however, was far from reassuring to those who took it seriously. Using a long, official list, the priest would ask questions such as: “Are your prayers, alms, and religious activities done more to hide your sins and impress others than to please God?” “Have you loved relatives, friends, or other creatures more than God?” “Have you muttered against God because of bad weather, illness, poverty, the death of a child or a friend?” By the end, it had been made very clear that one was not righteous and loving at all, but a mass of dark desires.

The effect was profoundly disturbing, as we can see in the fifteenth-century autobiography of Margery Kempe, a woman of Norfolk. She describes how she left one confession so terrified of the damnation that such a sinner as she surely deserved that she began to see devils surrounding her, pawing at her, making her bite and scratch herself. It is tempting for the modern mind quickly to ascribe this to some form of mental instability. Margery herself, however, is quite clear that her emotional meltdown was due simply to taking the theology of the day seriously. She knew from the confession that she was not righteous enough to have merited salvation.

Of course, the Church’s official teaching was quite clear that nobody would die righteous enough to have merited salvation fully. But that was no cause for great alarm, for there was always purgatory. Unless Christians died unrepentant of a mortal sin such as murder (in which case they would go to hell), they would have the chance after death to have all their sins slowly purged from them in purgatory before entering heaven, fully cleansed. Around the end of the fifteenth century, Catherine of Genoa wrote a

Treatise on Purgatory in which she described it in glowing terms. There, she explained, the souls relish and embrace their chastisements because of their desire to be purged and purified for God. More worldly souls than Catherine’s, however, tended to be less upbeat about the prospect of thousands or millions of years of punishment. Instead of enjoying the prospect, most people sought to fast-track the route through purgatory, both for themselves, and for those they loved. As well as prayers, masses could be said for souls in purgatory, in which the grace of that Mass could be applied directly to the departed and tormented soul. An entire purgatory industry evolved for exactly this reason: the wealthy founded chantries (chapels with priests dedicated to saying prayers and masses for the soul of their sponsor or his fortunate beneficiaries); the less wealthy clubbed together in fraternities to pay for the same.

Another aspect of medieval Roman Catholicism that was impossible to ignore was the cult of the saints. Europe was filled with shrines to various saints, and they were important not just spiritually, but economically. With enough decent relics of its patron saint, a shrine could ensure a steady stream of pilgrims, making everyone a winner, from the pilgrims to the publicans. As much as anything, what seemed to fuel the cult was the way in which Christ became an increasingly daunting figure in the public mind throughout the Middle Ages. More and more, the risen and ascended Christ was seen as the Doomsday Judge, all-terrible in His holiness. Who could approach Him? Surely He would listen to His mother. And so, as Christ receded into heaven, Mary became the mediator through whom people could approach Him. Yet, having been accorded such glory, Mary in turn became the inapproachable star-flaming Queen of Heaven. Using the same logic, people began to appeal to *her* mother, Anne, to intercede with her. And so the cult of St. Anne grew, attracting the fervent devotion of many, including an obscure German family called the Luthers.



It wasn't just St. Anne; heaven was crammed with saints, all very suitable mediators between the sinful and the Judge. And the earth seemed full of their relics, objects that could bestow some of their grace and merit. Of course, the authenticity of some of these relics was questionable; it was a standing joke that there were so many "pieces of the true cross" spread across Christendom that the original cross itself must have been far too huge for a man to lift. But then, Christ was omnipotent.

The official line was that Mary and the saints were to be venerated, not worshipped; but on the ground that was much too subtle a distinction for people who were not being taught. All too often, the army of saints was treated as a pantheon of gods, and their relics treated as magical talismans of power. Yet how could the illiterate be taught the complexities of this system of theology and so avoid the sin of idolatry? The stock answer was that, even in the poorest churches, they were surrounded by pictures and images of saints and the Virgin Mary, in stained glass, in statues, in frescoes: these were "the Bible of the poor," the "books of the illiterate." Lacking words, the people learned from pictures. It has to be said, however, that the argument is a bit hollow: a statue of the Virgin Mary was hardly capable of teaching the distinction between veneration and worship. The very fact that services were in Latin, a language the

people did not know, betrays the reality that teaching was not really a priority. Some theologians tried to get around this by arguing that Latin, as a holy language, was so powerful it could even affect those who did not understand it. It sounds rather unlikely. Rather, the fact was that people did not need to understand in order to receive God's grace. An unformed "implicit faith" would do. Indeed, given the absence of teaching, it would have to.

Dynamic or Diseased?

If ever you should be so unfortunate as to find yourself in a roomful of Reformation historians, the thing to do to generate some excitement is to ask loudly: "Was Christianity on the eve of the Reformation vigorous or corrupt?" It is the question guaranteed to start a bun-fight. A few years ago, it would hardly have caused a murmur; everyone then seemed happily agreed that before the Reformation, the people of Europe were groaning for change, hating the oppressive yoke of the corrupt Roman Church. Now that view will not wash.

Historical research, especially from the 1980s and on, has shown beyond any doubt that in the generation before the Reformation, religion became more popular than ever. Certainly, people had their grumbles, but the vast majority clearly threw themselves into it with gusto. More masses for the dead were paid for, more churches were built, more statues of saints were erected, and more pilgrimages were made than ever before. Books of devotion and spirituality—as mixed in content as they are today—were extraordinarily popular among those who could read.

And, the religious zeal of the people meant that they were eager for reform. Throughout the fourteenth century, monastic orders were reforming themselves, and even the papacy underwent some piecemeal attempts at reform. Everyone agreed that there were a few dead branches and a few rotten apples on the tree of the Church. Everyone could laugh when the poet Dante placed Popes Nicholas III and Boniface VIII in the eighth circle of hell in his *Divine Comedy*. Of course there were corrupt old popes and priests who drank too much before Mass. But the very fact that people could laugh shows how solid and secure the Church appeared. It looked like it could take it. And the fact that they wanted to prune the dead wood only shows how they loved the tree.

Such desires for reform never came close to imagining that there might be fatal rot in the trunk of the tree. After all, wanting better popes is something very different from wanting no popes; wanting better priests and masses very different from wanting no separate priesthood and no masses. And this Dante also showed: not only did he

punish bad popes in his *Inferno*; he also meted out divine vengeance on those who opposed popes, for popes, good or bad, were, after all, the vicars of Christ. Such were most Christians on the eve of the Reformation: devoted, and devoted to the improvement, but not the overthrow, of their religion. This was not a society looking for radical change, only a clearing-up of acknowledged abuses.

So, vigorous or corrupt? It is a false antithesis. Christianity on the eve of the Reformation was undoubtedly popular and lively, but that does not mean it was healthy or biblical. In fact, if all the people had been hungering for the kind of change the Reformation would bring, it would suggest that the Reformation was little more than a natural social movement, a moral clean-up. This the Reformers always denied. It was not a popular moral reform; it was a challenge to the very heart of Christianity. They claimed that God's Word was breaking in to change the world; it was unexpected, and went right against the grain; it was not a human work but a divine bombshell.


Omens of Apocalypse

The Reformation might have been unlooked-for, the majority contenting themselves with small-scale reform, and yet in the sunny medieval sky dark clouds began to form. They were at first but the size of a man's hand. Nobody knew it, but they were portents that the heavens were about to fall on medieval Roman Catholicism.

The first formed right over Rome itself. In 1305, the Archbishop of Bordeaux was elected pope. However, for various reasons, he was not interested in relocating to Rome, as was expected of popes, but instead made Avignon in the south of France his new papal headquarters. The king of France was delighted: a French pope on French turf would be so much easier to do business with. And so, nobody was very surprised when the next pope to be elected was also French, and also chose to stay in Avignon. And thus things were with the next few popes. Outside of France, people were less thrilled. The "Babylonian Captivity of the Church" they called it. The pope was supposed to be the bishop of Rome, the mother church; but were these men in Avignon really bishops of Rome? And so Christendom began to lose confidence in the papacy.

After seventy years, the people of Rome were fed up; the papal court, after all, had been their city's greatest source of dignity (and revenue). Thus, in 1378, when the College of Cardinals sat in Rome to elect the next pope, a mob besieged them, demanding the election of a proper Italian, and preferably Roman, pope. The terrified cardinals understandably gave in to the mob's demands. They soon began to regret their decision, however, when they saw how domineering and aggressive the new pope was. Many started voicing the opinion that the election could not have been valid, given that it had been conducted under duress. And so they elected a new pope, a Frenchman. Unfortunately, the first appointee, still in perfect health, refused to stand down, meaning that there were now two popes, who naturally excommunicated each other. Effectively, with two Holy Fathers, this entailed that there were now two mother churches.

All Europe was divided in its allegiance. France, of course, supported the French pope, so instinctively England supported the other, and so on. The situation was unsustainable, and so a council was called to end the problem. Its solution was to depose both existing popes and elect a new one. Inevitably, though, neither existing pope would go so easily. And so, then there were three. The "Great Schism,"



Christianity on the eve of the Reformation was undoubtedly popular and lively, but that does not mean it was healthy or biblical.

as it was called, was only ended by a more robust council, the Council of Constance, which met from 1414 to 1418. This council managed to get two of the popes to agree to resign, and the third pope in Avignon, who refused, they declared deposed. In their place, they elected a new pope, and apart from a tiny remnant of supporters for the Avignon pope, everybody accepted this one.

The schism was over, but it had created a crisis of authority: where was the supreme authority in the Church? In Avignon or Rome? And since a council had established which pope was pope, was a council an authority superior to the pope? The crisis of authority was to linger long after the schism was over, for while the Council of Constance had declared that a council was superior in authority to the pope, the popes fought tooth and nail against the idea. With so many competing contenders, how could the ordinary Christian know God's will?

In the meantime, with the popes elsewhere, the city of Rome had fallen into decay. It was more than a shame, for if Rome was to be the glorious mother to which all Christendom looked, she could not be a ruin. Indeed, to recover her status, she needed to be made more glorious than ever. All Europe needed to be dazzled. Over the next century, then, the Renaissance popes pulled a galaxy of stars into their orbit: Fra Angelico, Gozzoli, and Pinturricchio were all employed; Raphael was commissioned to decorate the pope's personal apartments in the Vatican; Michelangelo to adorn the Sistine Chapel; Bramante to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica. Glorious it may have been; it was also hideously expensive. Funding was sought wherever it could be found, and people began to grumble at popes who seemed more interested in their money than their souls, and for art that looked to them more pagan than Christian. The rebuilding of St. Peter's, especially, would prove more costly to Rome than a pope's worst nightmare, for it would rouse the wrath of Martin Luther.

There also began to be an air of sleaze about the place, which, coupled with the glitz, made Rome the Las Vegas of its day. This was especially true under the Borgias. In 1492, Rodrigo Borgia took the simple but effective step of buying the necessary votes to get himself elected as Pope Alexander

VI. It was an appropriate start to a reign to make a cardinal blush. He had numerous children by his mistresses, he was rumored to have had another with his party-throwing, poison-ring wearing daughter Lucrezia, and he is best remembered for his habits of throwing orgies in the Vatican and poisoning his cardinals. This did not set a good precedent for the office of the Holy Father: his successor, the war-loving Julius II, was also "papa" in more senses than one, and Julius' successor, Leo X, was an agnostic (ordained at the age of seven, nobody had thought to ask). Of course, the papacy had had its low points before, but in the midst of the Church's crisis of authority, it was a bad time for it to lose its respectability.

Morning Stars of the Reformation

The second cloud in the otherwise clear medieval sky started gathering in northern England, over Yorkshire. It was caused by the birth there, sometime in the 1320s, of John Wycliffe. He was ordained as a priest and moved to Oxford, where his theological views made him the university's most controversial figure and his connections to the royal family made him influential. For almost all of Wycliffe's life, the popes resided in Avignon, and thus he grew up in an atmosphere in which religious authority was constantly being questioned. But with the inauguration of two popes in 1378, Wycliffe began publicly to identify the Bible, and not the pope, as the supreme source of spiritual authority. The papacy, he argued, was merely a human invention, whereas the Bible authoritatively determined the validity of all religious beliefs and practices. On this basis he rejected the highly philosophical doctrine of transubstantiation.

In a few short years such talk had got Oxford—and the whole country—seething. Wycliffe had to retire, which he did, to the obscure parish of Lutterworth in Leicestershire, where he lived out the last few years of his life as the parish priest. He was not idle in that time, however: he wrote popular tracts explaining his views, commissioned preachers, and organized a translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English. Fortunately for Wycliffe, he died in 1384, before the Council of Constance condemned him as a heretic (whereupon his remains were exhumed, burned, and scattered); yet his legacy was great. With a Bible in English in their hands, his followers in England dedicated themselves to the illegal practice of secret group Bible reading. It was most likely for this reason that they were known as "Lollards," a term that probably meant "mumbler," in reference to their habit of secretly reading out the Bible. They would be a highly receptive audience for the Reformation when it arrived a century later.

Perhaps more important than the Lollards for Wycliffe's



JOHN WYCLIFFE

legacy were those visiting students at Oxford who took his teachings back home with them to Bohemia (in the modern-day Czech Republic). There, Wycliffe's ideas were warmly received by many, including the rector of the University of Prague, Jan Hus. Hus did not quite have Wycliffe's penetrating intellect, but he came to be at least as significant by playing the role of Wycliffe's bulldog. When attempts were made to stamp out Wycliffe's teachings in Bohemia, Hus defended him, becoming increasingly outspoken in his critiques of the Church to the point where he publicly denied the power of popes to issue indulgences and expressed doubts about the existence of purgatory.

Hus was excommunicated and summoned to the Council of Constance to defend his views. Unsurprisingly, he was rather reluctant to risk being burnt as a heretic by walking so easily into the lions' den, but then he was given a guarantee of safe conduct, and so he went. The guarantee amounted to nothing, however; he was immediately imprisoned, and after six months in prison and a mock trial in which he refused to recant his views, he was summarily condemned to death for heresy in 1415.

His death sparked off an armed revolt by his followers in Bohemia, where he had become something of a national hero. And when, from 1420, a series of crusades were launched against what Catholic Europe saw as the heretical Hussites, amazingly, the Hussites won, allowing them to establish an independent Hussite church in the very heart of Catholic Europe. There, free from papal control, Hussite preachers were allowed to speak the Word of God freely, and the Hussites received both bread and wine in communion, rather than the Catholic Mass. As well as leaving this sizeable thorn in Rome's flesh, shortly before he died, Hus is said to have uttered the words, "You may roast this goose ["Hus" means "goose" in Czech], but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence." Almost exactly a hundred years later, Martin Luther unleashed the doctrine of justification by faith alone on the world. A great admirer of Hus, Luther was ardent in his belief that he was the promised swan; after his death, Lutheran churches would use swans as weather vanes, and the Reformer would often be portrayed with a swan. The base of the great statue of Hus in Prague reads, "Great is the truth, and it prevails"; certainly, Hus and his message had a future.

Books, Dangerous Books

The other main cloud in the sky formed over Avignon; perhaps unsurprising, but this was the most innocent-looking cloud of all, and it had little to do with the popes there. It gathered because of a young man growing up there by

the name of Petrarch. Petrarch grew up to be not only a poet, but also the greatest student of classical literature of his day. By the 1330s, Petrarch had come to believe that history consisted of two periods: the glorious classical age of civilization and culture, and what he dubbed "the Dark Age" of ignorance and barbarism, which had begun with the fall of Imperial Rome in the fifth century and continued up to his own day. But Petrarch also dreamed of a third and future age (which, presumably, would be brought about by people buying Petrarch's books) in which classical civilization would be reborn.

Excited by the prospect of the rebirth (or "renaissance") of classical culture, Petrarch's followers, who began to be known as "humanists," believed that they could end the "Dark" or "Middle" Age in their own day. "*Ad fontes!*" ("To the sources!") was their battle-cry as they laid siege to the ignorance of their day with the beautiful weapons of classical literature and culture. All of this was unfortunate for papal Rome, for it was in the darkness of that Middle Age that she had grown, and the light of the new learning would not be kind to her.

A main plank of her power was the "Donation of Constantine," which purported to be a fourth-century letter from the Roman Emperor Constantine to the pope, explaining that as he moved his capital from Rome to Constantinople (now Istanbul), he was giving the pope lordship over the western half of the Roman Empire. It was on this basis that medieval popes had asserted their political authority over Europe. Popes were superior to kings. However, when a humanist scholar named Lorenzo Valla examined the document, his humanist expertise in Latin enabled him to see that the letter was in fact written using eighth-century, not fourth-century, Latin and terminology. It was a forgery. When he published his findings in 1440, it not only pulled the rug out from under a key papal claim but also cast doubt on all papal claims. For, what other traditional beliefs might be forged?

Valla's greatest legacy, however, was his *Annotations on the New Testament*, a collection of notes never published in his own lifetime. In them, he used his knowledge of Greek to show that there were errors in the official Latin Vulgate translation that the Church used. With the notes unpublished, Valla never lived to see the effect his thoughts would have. However, the greatest humanist scholar of the next generation, Erasmus of Rotterdam, found Valla's *Annotations*, published them, and used them to produce the book that would be used as the greatest weapon against medieval Roman Catholicism.

In 1516, Erasmus went back to the sources and published a Greek edition of the New Testament, putting

alongside it, not the official Latin translation, but his own Latin one. In doing so, Erasmus was hoping that a closer attention to the Bible would produce some healthy moral reform in the Church. But he never thought it would do any harm to Rome. He even dedicated it to the pope, who gratefully sent him a letter of thanks and commended it. A little too soon, it would seem. For when Erasmus' New Testament differed from the official Vulgate, it could have theological implications: in Matthew 4:17, for example, where the Vulgate had Jesus say "do penance," Erasmus rendered it as "be penitent," and later "change your mind." If Erasmus was right, then Jesus was not instigating the external sacrament of penance, as Rome taught, but speaking of the internal need for sinners to change their minds and turn away from sin. And if Rome was not reading the Bible correctly on that verse, what else might she be getting wrong, and what sort of spiritual authority was she? Erasmus' New Testament was a ticking bomb.

At the same time as their learning was challenging the status quo, humanists, again following Petrarch, tended to be quite critical of the theologians of the day. To the humanists, the theologians only seemed to be interested in the most obscure and irrelevant questions, questions like "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" or "Could God have become a cucumber instead of a man?" The theologian who characterized such "subtle" thinking, Duns Scotus, became for the humanists the model of idiocy, and anyone who followed him was lampooned as a "Duns-man" or "Dunce," like him.

The theologians were not alone in finding themselves on the business end of humanist satire. The year after Pope Julius II died in 1513, a short sketch called *Julius Excluded from Heaven* started doing the rounds. Erasmus never admitted to writing it (that would have been a very foolish admission), but the fact that we have a copy of it in his own handwriting suggests what everyone suspected. In it, Julius arrives at the gates of heaven, fully clad, as usual, in his armor, and sporting his trademark beard, which he had grown as a pledge of vengeance against his many enemies. Knowing that he might encounter resistance, he had (again, as usual) brought a sizeable bodyguard who could



storm the gates if necessary. Julius is then made to look rather foolish and vain by Peter the Gatekeeper, after which the sketch reaches what its title had made a rather predictable conclusion. In the end, though, it wasn't so much that humanists could laugh at the expense of the Church and her theologians that mattered, it was what the jokes made clear, that with humanism a different approach to truth had come to challenge the Church's authority: could scholars know better than the pope? Might Rome and her army of theologians be wrong?

All the controversy stirred up by the humanists might not have mattered so much had their erudition been contained to a few ivory towers. Technology, however, conspired with them. Around 1450, Johannes Gutenberg developed the first printing press, and by the 1480s printing shops were springing up across Europe. Books could now be produced in greater numbers and faster than ever before. Knowledge could now spread rapidly. It was significant that the first book to be printed was Gutenberg's Latin Bible: it was time for the age of the Word. ♦



THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

WE PREACH CHRIST



TMS DISTINCTIVES



EXPOSITORY
PREACHING



LOCAL
CHURCH



GLOBAL
MISSIONS



PERSONAL
HOLINESS



800.CALL.TMS

TMS.EDU

A NATION IN DARKNESS

SCOTLAND BEFORE 1560



In surveying the history of the Christian church, some writers have spoken of three phases. There was the formation of the New Testament church during the time of the apostles. This was followed by the de-formation, which began gradually about the fourth century but proceeded apace from the thirteenth century onward. The third phase, which was the re-formation, had its origins in the early sixteenth century in Germany and Switzerland. By 1560, it had spread to Scotland. To appreciate the transformation brought about by the movement for reform in Scotland, we need to look at the spiritual and moral condition of the country before the change took place. Intertwined with the spiritual renewal, there were various political and social factors that influenced the progress of the Reformation.

Early Christianity

Christianity came to Britain in the fifth century AD. Among missionaries who brought the gospel were Ninian in the Whithorn area of southwest Scotland and Patrick, who had a great influence in Ireland. Columba came from Ireland in 563 and set up his base in the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. The Celtic church, to which he belonged, was Bible-centered and missionary-minded. It spread its influence into England, and it is said that the mission stemming from Iona extended itself in a generation or so “from the shores of the Forth to the banks of the Thames.”

The Roman mission came through Augustine. He was sent by Gregory the Great in 596 to convert the pagan English. There were differences between the church founded by Augustine and the Celtic church. At the Synod of Whitby in 664, judgment was given in favor of the Roman church. As the influence of the Celtic church waned, so the Roman church increased. In this time of change, the gospel was largely lost. The further Romanizing of the church was carried forward by Queen Margaret, wife of Malcolm III, who influenced the Scottish court in an English direction and the church in a Roman one.

The Dominance of the Roman Church

In the centuries before the Reformation, the church of Rome dominated the nations of Europe, in the realms of both church and state. This was because the pope claimed not only to be head over the church, but also the supreme governor of the nations. In the



John James Murray has served congregations of the Free Church of Scotland in Oban, Argyll, and in Edinburgh. He is the author of *Behind a Frowning Providence* published by The Banner of Truth Trust.

fourteenth century, the Bishop of Rome was called “Our Lord God, the Pope”; princes and kings were careful not to offend the pontiff, lest their temporal power be endangered.

In Scotland, amid a population of relatively poor people, the medieval church owned the finest buildings in the land. It has been estimated that, owning more than half the real estate in the country, it received an annual income of some £300,000, in contrast to the meager £17,000 of the crown. These revenues were partially derived from lands gifted to nobles and wealthy merchants and partially from tithes and other ecclesiastical dues. The pope, the king, the nobles, and, in certain cases within their dioceses, the bishops all claimed the right to make appointments to benefices. The pope claimed the lion’s share, and this caused intense discontent.

In the early sixteenth century, there were more than 1,000 churches in Scotland, but of those, over 900 were appropriated to monasteries, cathedrals, and collegiate churches, which either drew the revenues or farmed them out, while leaving the care of souls to some starving, poorly educated vicar who acted as chaplain.

Ignorance of Clergy and People

In a country where the population was only around 800,000, priests numbered perhaps as many as 3,000. Some priests could scarcely say the alphabet, and there were those who could not read their own language without stammering. It is not surprising

The Catholic reformation focused on practical moral abuses—it did not seek to reform the theology of the church.

that at that time the clergy were held in derision. According to George Buchanan, many of them were so ignorant of the Scriptures that they believed the New Testament was a recent book written by Martin Luther, and declared they would adhere to the Old and have nothing to do with the New.

It is not surprising, therefore, to discover the ignorance of the laity. The Scriptures were hidden to them in a dead language, and the gospel was obscured under superstitious ceremonies. Few could read anyway. In 1552, a catechism was prepared by order of Archbishop John Hamilton with the object of instructing the people in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer. It was a high code of morality, but the Archbishop himself was a dissolute scoundrel. The Catholic reformation focused on practical moral abuses—it did not seek to reform the theology of the church.

No Access to Scripture

The Latin Vulgate was the Bible of the church for over a millennium, and no interpretation of it was to be given contrary to the teaching of the church. The church services were conducted in Latin. The possession or study of the Scriptures in the common tongue frequently invoked a charge of heresy. Among those condemned under an Act of 1536, banning the English Bible, was Thomas Forret, vicar of Dollar. His regular preaching on the Epistle and the Gospel had provoked George Crichton, the Bishop of Dunkeld, to declare: "I thank God that I never knew what the Old and New Testament was." During his trial in 1539, Forret took the New Testament in English from his sleeve, to which the response was: "Know thou not, heretic, that it is contrary to our acts and express commands, to have a New Testament or Bible in English, which is enough to burn thee for?" The council of the clergy gave sentence on him to be burned before the castle in Edinburgh. The late

medieval church raised the "tradition" of the church to a place of authority equal to that of Scripture.

Corruption of Doctrine

If there had been access to the Scripture in a language that was understood by the people, the fallacy of the Roman errors would have been sooner exposed. At the center of the false teaching was the medieval church's view of the means of a sinner's approach to God. Misled by the Latin Vulgate and reaffirmed by Thomas Aquinas, the church believed that justifying grace was a supernatural quality infused into the human soul, with faith its preliminary rather than its channel. Justification was no longer the acquirement of a status but the production of a state, dependent especially on loyal observance of the sacraments.

The Mass, in which the priest professed to offer up anew in sacrifice the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus, was at the center of religious rites. The altar thus became an object of great veneration, and the man who ministered there and claimed to have the power of turning the bread and wine into the very body and blood of our Lord became of indescribable importance. People became conditioned to rely on priests, on penance, and on papal pardon for their entrance into heaven. The Virgin Mary and the departed saints were mediators between sinners and God, in addition to the Lord Jesus. In this way, preaching almost completely vanished from the medieval church. The rites performed by the officiating priests were all that mattered.

The Low State of Morals

In spite of a profession of chastity on the part of each clergyman, there was rampant immorality in the church. Cardinal Beaton, Archbishop of St. Andrews, had about eleven illegitimate children. Sons of such liaisons were given lucrative positions in the church, and daughters married into the nobility. Of the seventeen bishops at the time of the

Reformation, twelve had illegitimate children, while many of the abbots, who themselves seem to have been the illegitimate offspring of the king or the nobles, also had plenty of their own. It is not surprising to discover the low state of morals in the country at large, for it was “like priest, like people.” As one observer has put it: “During the whole period of Roman ascendancy in Scotland, scarcely a ripple of religious enthusiasm is visible; no moving religious revival relieves the pervading gloom, and no sheen of holy purity is anywhere discernible on this vast expanse of a dead sea of sin.”

Political Background

To understand the other factors that influenced the progress of the Reformation, we need to know something of the political background. The relations of Scotland and England during the Middle Ages were normally hostile. English kings attempted to reduce Scotland to vassalage, while the Scottish rulers contended for full national autonomy. France was the natural ally of England’s northern enemy, and the alliance was maintained even after it became burdensome to the Scots. Henry VII (1485–1509) planned an end of the feud with Scotland by marrying his daughter to the enemy. Margaret Tudor became the Queen of James IV of Scotland. The marriage resulted in a quarrel over the dowry of the princess, and the Scots met their worst ever disaster in the Battle of Flodden (1513), where James IV fell along with “the flower of Scottish chivalry.” His successor, James V, distrusted his uncle Henry VIII and disappointed him by first marrying a daughter of Francis I of France and then, upon her death, renewing the French bond in a marriage with Mary, sister of the Duke of Guise. James V’s engagement with the old enemy led to another humiliating defeat by the English army at Solway Moss (1542). The king died shortly after the battle. His heir was

a baby girl, a week old, who became Mary Queen of Scots.

The Scots sought to use the crisis for a change of allies and promoted the infant in marriage to Henry VIII’s son, Edward. This was nullified by Mary’s mother, who contrived to take her to France, where she remained for thirteen years, receiving education in the dissolute French court. Henry was so angry that he sent an army to ravage Scotland. The fact that the Scots should have desired such a marriage marked a rising dissatisfaction with the long-standing French alliance. The names of Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots were to feature frequently in the Reformation struggle. Those who spirited the infant princess to France were the enemies not only of England but of Protestantism. England had already severed her tie with the papacy; France had retained it. The Reformation in Scotland was to be associated with the reversal of the old alignment with France against England, yet without the subjection of the country to the rule of the Tudors.

Changes in Society

Revolutionary changes were taking place in society in the sixteenth century. Old medieval patterns of thought were being discarded. Advances and developments in trade, industry, and social organization went forward at an ever-accelerating pace. There was the development of the middle class and the growth of urban life. The center of life moved from the castle and the court to the more important urban areas. City and town dwellers were exercising a much greater influence upon thought and action than heretofore. The death of medieval Scotland was accelerated, and a new nation began to emerge. In time, the actions and policies of the Reformers were to transform virtually all aspects of Scottish life, religious practice and authority, culture and education, and the national mindset and identity. ♦



MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

A TIME FOR

CONFIDENCE

TRUSTING **GOD** IN A
POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS



HIS KINGDOM IS UNSHAKABLE

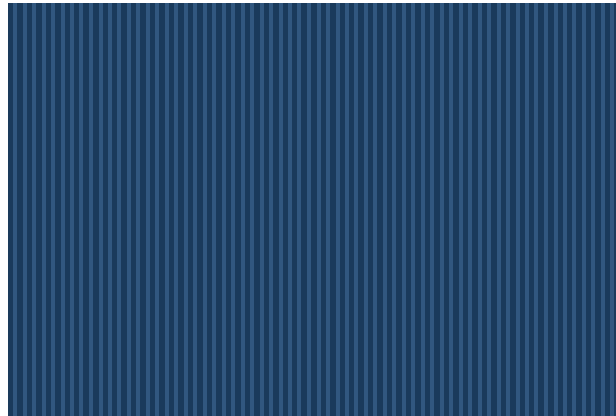


As members of a society that is quickly abandoning its Christian past, followers of Christ often feel disoriented or even frightened. When human leaders and political advocates fail us, doubts arise and the road to compromise beckons. In *A Time for Confidence: Trusting God in a Post-Christian Society*, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols points to the almighty God as the source and ground of our confidence. Though the whole world may shake around us, His kingdom is unshakable. This is a time for confidence. **Bulk quantity discounts available for churches and bookstores.**

DIGITAL EDITIONS ALSO AVAILABLE



ReformationTrust.com | 800.435.4343



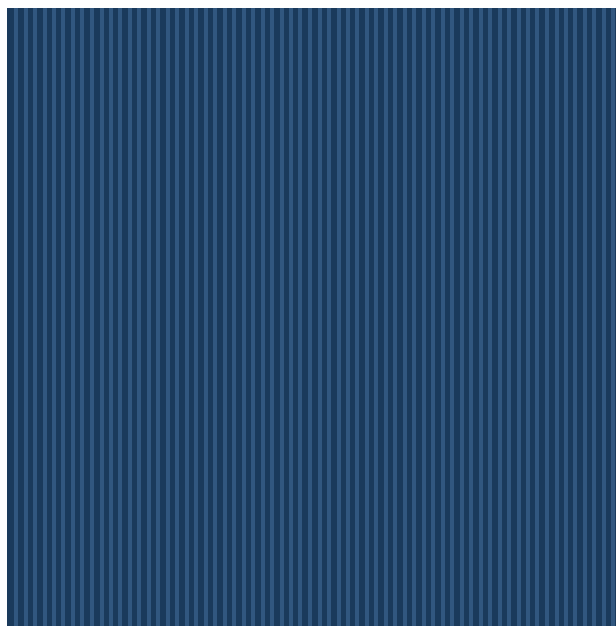
t h e

PULPIT

w i t h

JOHN MACARTHUR

CONFLICT WITH THE WORLD



“These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.” (John 16:1–4)

The followers of Jesus Christ have always faced the world’s hostility. From the inception of the church, the apostles and those closely associated with them endured intense persecution. They were ridiculed, scorned, denounced, hunted, arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Many even paid the ultimate price, giving their lives as martyrs for the sake of their Savior. A brief survey of ancient Christian tradition reveals that Peter, Andrew, and James the son of Alphaeus were all crucified; Bartholomew was whipped to death and then crucified; James the son of Zebedee was beheaded, as was Paul; Thomas was stabbed with spears; Mark was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria; and James the half brother of Jesus was stoned by order of the Sanhedrin. Philip was also stoned to death. Others, including Matthew, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus, Timothy, and Stephen, were also killed for their unwavering commitment to the Lord. In the generations that followed, persecution continued. Under the Roman emperors of the first three centuries, thousands of faithful believers were arrested, tortured, and killed.

The persecution of the true church again reached a fever pitch during the Protestant Reformation. Appalled by the moral and doctrinal corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and emboldened by the clear teachings of Scripture, the Reformers denounced the Catholic system of indulgences and the false gospel of works righteousness. The response from Rome was vitriolic and violent. Godly leaders like John Hus (c. 1369–1415), Hugh Latimer (c. 1485–1555), William Tyndale (1495–1536), Patrick Hamilton (1504–1528), and George Wishart (1513–1546) were among those martyred for the faith. When the chain was put around John Hus, securing him to the stake where he would be burned, he said with a smile, “My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake, and why then should I be ashamed of this rusty one?” When asked to recant, Hus declined, saying, “What I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood.” He died singing a hymn as the flames engulfed his body.

In many places around the world today, believers continue to face intense persecution. Muslim-controlled countries are especially hostile toward Christianity, though other nations



such as Communist states also remain antagonistic. While exact numbers are difficult to reconstruct, historians estimate the number of Christian martyrs in the last century to be in the tens of millions.

In addition, an incalculable number of faithful believers have been arrested, beaten, or otherwise persecuted short of death—all on account of their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The theme of persecution is found in the opening section



John MacArthur is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's University and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.

of John 16. But the Lord was quick to remind His disciples that they would not face the world's hostility alone. Their witness to the world would be accompanied and empowered by the witness of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would confront the world, not only by testifying to Jesus, but also by convicting sinners of their true heart condition. Because the Helper was coming to them, the disciples could remain confident, knowing that though the

world system would always oppose them, many within that system would be delivered from its darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light.

It is the mission of both the Holy Spirit and believers to bear witness to Jesus. The Spirit testifies to believers that the gospel is true, and then empowers them as they proclaim it to the world (Acts 1:8). Though God uses Christians to proclaim the gospel, only the Holy Spirit is able to redeem lost sinners. He alone can convict unbelievers of their sin and need for a Savior.

In these verses, Jesus warned the disciples that they would face conflict with the world. But He comforted them with the promised coming of the Holy Spirit, and explained to them that the Spirit would not only help them, but would also work in unbelievers to convict them of sin. Thus, the passage can be outlined around three distinct but related sections: the conflict with the world, the comforting of the disciples, and the convicting by the Spirit.

The Conflict with the World

The phrase "these things" in verse one refers back to the Lord's warning about the world's hostility (15:18–25). He had spoken those words to the disciples so that they might be kept from stumbling.

The term "stumbling" here refers figuratively to the disciples'

The folly of attempting to serve a false god by murdering God's people reveals the depths to which sinful darkness blankets the minds of the unconverted.

being caught off guard like an animal ensnared in a trap. Had Jesus not warned them of the persecution they would inevitably face, the disciples might have become shocked and disillusioned so that their faith might have faltered.

The events that transpired later that evening showed the timeliness of the Lord's warning. Despite being told by Jesus to expect persecution, the disciples wilted at the first sign of it—even though it was aimed not at them, but at Him.

Some might question why the Lord warned the disciples against stumbling when He knew they would shortly do just that. It is true that Jesus, in His omniscience, knew what was going to happen. But the point is that the disciples were responsible for their actions. They had been given the resources they needed to stand firm and not stumble, including a warning that persecution was imminent. Yet they failed to utilize those resources, and when the moment of truth came, they capitulated under the pressure and fled. Their failure in face of the truth they were told was inexcusable. But it is easy to see how hard the transition was—how hard it was for them to shift their minds from the expectation of the promised kingdom and glory to a promise of rejection and hostility.

This was another in a list of things hard for them to believe. The Lord continued by describing some of the specific persecution the disciples would face in the coming hour. To be made outcasts from the synagogue meant far more than merely being forbidden to attend religious services. Those who were excommunicated from the synagogue were cut off from all religious, social, and economic aspects of Jewish society. They were branded as traitors to their people and their God, and faced the likely consequence of losing both their families and their jobs. Not surprisingly, being unsynagogued was greatly feared. But even worse than such excommunication, some of Christ's followers would pay with their lives. In a bitter irony, the enemies

of Christ sometimes think that by killing Christians they are offering "service to God." This is true even today in nations where, in the name of Allah, militant Islam stands violently opposed to Christianity. The folly of attempting to serve a false god by murdering God's people reveals the depths to which sinful darkness blankets the minds of the unconverted. How could seemingly religious people commit such atrocities in the guise of worshiping God?

"These things," Jesus explained, "they will do because they have not known the Father or Me." Far from serving God, such people do not in any sense know the true God; no one who hates Jesus Christ or His followers knows the Father. Failing to know God is willful, inexcusable ignorance, and those who manifest it do not have eternal life.

In verse four, Jesus gave another reason for His warning to the disciples. "These things I have spoken to you," He told them, "so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them." Jesus had not needed to say these words of warning to the disciples at the beginning, because He was with them. During His ministry, the Lord not only protected His disciples, but also bore the brunt of the world's attacks—something He would shortly do again for the last time. Because Jesus had been there to receive the assaults Himself and to shield them, the disciples had not experienced the full force of the opposition they would now face in His absence. In such passages as Matthew 5:10–12 and 10:24–25, Jesus had referred to persecution in general terms. But now that His death was only hours away, the disciples would be left to face the full fury of the world's hatred. That reality is what prompted this explicit warning.

Jesus never glossed over the truth when it came to counting the cost of being His disciple. In Luke 9:23–24, He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life

for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” Later, He told a parable illustrating that truth:

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the

other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.” (Luke 14:28–33)

Christ does not offer His followers the way of comfort and ease, but a hard and difficult path. Though the gate is small and the road is narrow, it is certainly well worth the strenuous journey, for it alone “leads to life” and to eternal glory (Matt 7:13–14). Thus Paul could write, in the midst of his multitudinous trials, “for momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17). ♦



SLJ INSTITUTE

DOWNLOAD & LISTEN TO

THE EXPOSITORY PREACHING OF
S. LEWIS JOHNSON

SLJINSTITUTE.NET

NONE OTHER



DISCOVERING THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

**JOHN
MACARTHUR**



GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF

The Bible's teaching on God's love, holiness, and sovereignty is often met with questions about human responsibility, suffering, and evil. If God is in control of everything, can we make free choices? If God is good and all-powerful, how can we account for natural disasters and moral atrocities? In *None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible*, Dr. John MacArthur shows that the best way to discover the one true God is not through philosophical discourse but a careful study of Scripture. **Bulk quantity discounts available for churches and bookstores.**

DIGITAL EDITIONS ALSO AVAILABLE



ReformationTrust.com | 800.435.4343





POWER, SCANDALS, & CORRUPTION



Erwin Lutzer is senior pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago, IL. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, he is the author of numerous books, including *Rescuing the Gospel: The Story and Significance of the Reformation*.



Christianity can survive without the gospel.

Let me clarify. There is a form of Christianity that developed in medieval times that has survived to this day without the gospel. It is, of course, a powerless Christianity that cannot give people the assurance of salvation, nor does it lead to lives of holiness—but it is still called *Christianity*.

Yes, whether Catholic or Protestant, every generation, including ours, has to fight for the purity of the gospel. It's our nature to reject the gospel's verdict on us and resist the profound simplicity of its transforming message of grace. The gospel must always be defended, and sometimes it must be *rescued*.

By any estimation, at the close of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, the Catholic Church was in desperate need of reformation.

Many of the church leaders were living in shameless decadence that bred cynicism among the common worshipers. Queen Isabella of Castile (1451–1504) wrote that the “majority of the clergy are living in open concubinage, and if our justice intervenes in order to punish them, they revolt and create a scandal, and they despise our justice to the point that they arm themselves against it.”

Or, consider this assessment of medieval Christianity by Andrea di Strumi: “At that time, however, the ecclesiastical order was corrupted by so many errors that hardly anyone could be found who was truly in his proper place. Some served the pleasures of the hunt, wandering about with hounds and hawks, others were tavern-keepers and wicked overseers . . . almost all led shameful lives either with wives who had been acknowledged publicly or with concubines.”

By this time, the gospel had been buried under

As the power of the Catholic Church grew, so did the exaggerated claims of spiritual authority.

centuries of traditions and superstitions. As one writer put it, “We had too many churches, too many relics (true and fake), too many untruthful miracles. Instead of worshiping the only living Lord, we worshiped dead bones; in the place of immortal Christ, we worshiped moral bread [the consecrated bread of the Mass].”

As the power of the Catholic Church grew, so did the exaggerated claims of spiritual authority. Priests, who were taught that they had the power to turn ordinary bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ, believed that they could also withhold or grant salvation to whomever they wished. And certainly the pope could open heaven for his friends or send his enemies to hell. Clearly, the gospel needed to be rescued from the misleading traditions of medieval Christianity.

Even ardent Catholics will admit that the church needed reform—and needed it badly. They might wish that the reforms hadn’t gone as far as they did under Luther, but they have to acknowledge that the church had been sliding into corruption for centuries and that the abuses need to be halted.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

Let’s review a bit of history. Consider this scandal. Beginning in 1305 and lasting until 1377 (a total of seventy-two years), there were seven successive popes, all of French origin, ruling from Avignon in southern France. Can you imagine the reaction of the citizens of Rome to the humiliation that their city—believed for centuries to be the burial site of St. Peter’s remains—no longer housed the papacy? This usurpation of authority was deeply resented not only in Italy but also in Germany. Since Rome refused to support the “rebel” papacy, the French popes raised money in any way they could, whether through taxes, wars, or bribery.

This period in church history is known as “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” because the papacy was absent

from Rome or held captive in France for seventy years (actually, seventy-two years), just as Israel was held captive in Babylon for seventy years.

The Italians were ecstatic when at last, in 1377, an Italian pope was elected and the papacy moved back to Rome. But now an even more embarrassing scandal erupted. The pope who had been ruling in Avignon refused to resign. Now there were *two* popes ruling, simultaneously. And when both of them were deposed by the cardinals and a new pope elected, they both refused to accept the decision and step down. This resulted in *three* popes ruling at the same time. All three claimed to be the legitimate successor to Peter, calling the others “antichrist” and selling indulgences to make enough money to fight against the other two.

It wasn’t until the Council of Constance in 1414 that all three popes were forced to make room for only one successor. The thirty-six-year period in which there were multiple rival popes (who weren’t exactly role models of credibility and humility) is known as “The Papal Schism.”

These scandals, of course, made the common people doubt that the papacy represented Christ, the head of the church. What’s more, various countries in Europe sided with one pope or another; thus, the confusion and corruption of the church was clear for all to see. Loyalty to the papacy was at the very least questioned, if not altogether abandoned.

Yes, obviously, some people did understand and believe the gospel during these centuries of spiritual darkness and confusion. Monks who had access to the Scriptures often experienced personal devotion to Christ. The gospel, though buried under centuries of conflicting traditions, could be found by those who sought it out. God did not leave Himself without a witness.

Abuses Tolerated

Other abuses of power also haunted the church. Clergy

who were brought to trial for one reason or another were tried by a tribunal of the church, not in civil courts. Today in the United States, priests are subject to our constitutional civil laws, but in those days, they were tried by canon law as interpreted by their own peers. We can imagine the abuses that were tolerated by appointed churchmen who were more interested in protecting their colleagues and grasping for power than in acting for what was best for the people, or more important, what was honoring to God. The attempts by the church to cover its sins were obvious.

Simony (the selling of spiritual positions for money) was rampant. “Bishop bricks” were sold to the highest bidder. The legal recognition of Christianity under Constantine in the fourth century and the church’s rise to wealth and power increased the temptation of church leaders to accept “gifts” in exchange for spiritual or sacred positions. Thus, the church became wealthy by acquiring lands and money, and, as we might expect, the spiritual rulers who paid for their own promotions were often immoral and corrupt.

Parishioners were grateful that centuries earlier the church had decreed that the lifestyle of the priest did not affect the validity of the sacraments. Indeed, none other

than the great theologian Augustine said that the sacraments had value *ex opere operato* (“out of the working of the works,” or “in and of themselves”), even if the rituals were performed by “thieves and robbers.” Therefore, people need not fear that the sacraments they received were invalid. The common people were denied the privilege of hearing a gospel that would give them the assurance of eternal life. Doubt—often fearful doubt—about one’s personal salvation was common and actually encouraged by the church. To be certain of one’s personal salvation was considered to be the sin of presumption.

Long before Martin Luther arrived on the scene, ripples of reform weakened the monopoly the church had on people’s souls. Thousands of people, both in England and continental Europe, knew that reform was long overdue and were ready to support it when it came. Luther stood on the shoulders of others who had affirmed the same doctrinal convictions that he would come to believe. Although the official church was able to squelch previous reform movements, it wasn’t able to stem the tide started by Luther. The eventual break from Rome ignited under Luther was both final and irreversible. ♦



THE
NEW TESTAMENT

WITH THE

LESSEDS

Taken out of the

OLD LAW,

Read in CHURCHES according to the Use of *SARUM*;

Translated

Into *ENGLISH* from the *Vulgar Latin*.

By *John Wiclif*, D.D. Rector of *Lutterworth*, 1380.

JOHN WYCLIFFE

FORERUNNER OF REFORMED THEOLOGY



Steven J. Lawson is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, and author of over twenty books, including *Pillars of Grace* and *Foundations of Grace*.

What any preacher believes is vitally important to his pulpit ministry. Next to his own personal holiness, the theological foundation that undergirds his preaching is the most critical aspect of his expositional ministry. The substance of his doctrine is always of greater importance than the style of his delivery. What he says carries greater weight than how he says it. Simply put, theology matters.

Any understanding of the pivotal role that John Wycliffe played in the history of the church preceding the Reformation must take into account his doctoral distinctives. A survey of Wycliffe's works reveals he was thoroughly Reformed in his theology long before the Reformation even came to the European Continent centuries later. The core doctrines that he taught in the fourteenth century would be further developed and clarified by the magisterial Reformers in the sixteenth century. But it was Wycliffe who first brought these truths to the frontlines of battle as he contended for the faith.

The noted theologian Loraine Boettner comments about the doctrinal teaching of Wycliffe: "Wycliffe was a reformer of the Calvinistic type, proclaiming the absolute sovereignty of God and the Foreordination of all things. His system

of belief was very similar to that which was later taught by Luther and Calvin." This is to say, Wycliffe was Reformed before the Reformers ever appeared on the world stage. He was a Calvinist before John Calvin came onto the scene. If Martin Luther and Calvin were the fathers of the Reformation, Wycliffe was its grandfather.

Specifically, Wycliffe affirmed the core biblical doctrines of the sovereignty of God in creation, providence, and salvation. He proclaimed the purity of the true gospel and defended it from the attack of error. The following are some of the basic doctrines that he taught in a day when these truths were not widely believed.

Divine Inspiration

Any understanding of Wycliffe's theology must begin with his fundamental commitment to the Bible itself. He believed in what the Reformers would later establish as *sola Scriptura*, meaning Scripture alone. He affirmed the divine inspiration of Scripture. He asserted that it proceeds "from the mouth of God." He understood that God's Word is living and contains the life of God: "God's Word is the life of the world, and every word of God is the life of the human soul." Thus, Wycliffe was convinced that when one receives the written Word of God by faith, that person receives the very life of God into his soul. Every other book is dead, but the Bible alone is alive and gives life.

Wycliffe believed that the Scripture is absolutely sovereign over the pope. The Word of God is the highest arbitrator in all matters to be decided in the church.

Biblical Inerrancy

Because the Bible is divinely inspired, Wycliffe believed it is flawlessly inerrant in all it teaches. He wrote: “The Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of all men to learn, to know, to defend, and to observe.” He was persuaded that the Bible speaks with the veracity of God Himself. God cannot lie, and neither can His Word. He affirmed that the Scripture was without any mixture of error: “It is impossible for any part of the Holy Scripture to be wrong. In Holy Scripture is all the truth.” This commitment to the purity of the Bible was the cornerstone of his ministry.

Internal Unity

Wycliffe stressed the perfect internal unity of Scripture. He affirmed: “The whole Scripture is one Word of God; also the whole Law of Christ is one perfect Word proceeding from the mouth of God.” He believed that the entire Bible speaks with one voice, never contradicting itself. The Word of God gives one diagnosis of the human problem and gives only one remedy in Christ. Wycliffe stressed that the Scripture is perfectly consistent in itself: “One part of Scripture explains another.” In other words, the Bible best interprets itself with another part of Scripture. Where one part seems unclear, another part of Scripture makes it clear.

Scriptural Authority

Wycliffe attested to the supreme authority of the Bible over the opinions of men, church leaders, and even the pope himself. He stated: “It alone is the supreme law that is to rule Church, State, and Christian life, without traditions and statutes.” Wycliffe contended that Scripture is superior in its authority in all that it teaches: “It is a doctrine of the faith that Christ is infinitely superior to every other man, and therefore His book, or Holy Scripture, which is

His law, stands in a similar relation to every other writing which can be named.” That is, as Christ is Lord over all, His Word in Scripture is supreme over all. Christ is “infinitely superior” to every opinion of man. Therefore, Wycliffe maintained that the written Word of God commands our obedience. “They are bound to serve the Lord in accordance with it, under the promise of an eternal reward.” The Word of God is final.

Highest Arbitrator

Wycliffe believed that the Scripture is absolutely sovereign over the pope. The Word of God is the highest arbitrator in all matters to be decided in the church. He wrote:

As they ought to be, the Papal Bulls will be superseded by the Holy Scriptures. The veneration of men for the laws of the Papacy, as well as for the opinions of our modern doctors, which since the loosing of Satan they have been at liberty freely to preach to the people, will be restrained within due limits. What concern have the faithful with writings of this sort, except that they are honestly deduced from the fountain of Scripture? By pursuing such a course it is not only in our power to reduce the mandates of Prelates and Popes to their just place, but the errors of these new religious orders also might be corrected and the worship of Christ well purified and elevated.

Wycliffe took a bold stand by insisting that everything and everyone in the church must yield to the greater authority of the Bible. He maintained that every doctrine and practice in the church must find its origin in and be in alignment with the Word of God. Christians should rely exclusively on the Bible rather than on the teachings of popes or counsels.

Plain Interpretation

Wycliffe believed in ascertaining the literal meaning of any text in the Bible. He stressed that the message of Scripture must be taken at face value and not be strained in an attempt to find a hidden meaning. He was convinced there is only one sense of Scripture, which includes its authorial intent: "It is, therefore, not permitted to sever the Holy Scripture, but to allege it in its integrity according to the sense of the author." For hundreds of years before Wycliffe, the Bible had been regarded as a book exclusively for the clergy. The proper interpretation of its meaning was assumed to rest largely with the pope and his elite hierarchy. In 1229, the Council of Toulouse forbade the use of the Bible by laymen, claiming that the laity could not make sense of it. However, Wycliffe stood in direct opposition to this. He was an outspoken advocate of an open Bible. The Word of God is a book to be read, studied, and understood by all Christians. He stressed that as Jesus Christ is offered to all, so should Scripture be offered to all. To withhold the Bible from the laity, Wycliffe taught, is a grave sin.

Powerful Creator

Wycliffe affirmed that God is the supreme Lord of heaven and earth. By His sovereign will, God brought all things into being by His spoken word. Wycliffe wrote, "We should believe that God the Father, being almighty, without beginning and ending, made heaven, and earth, and all creatures, of naught, through His word." This statement affirmed many truths that Wycliffe held about God. Here he

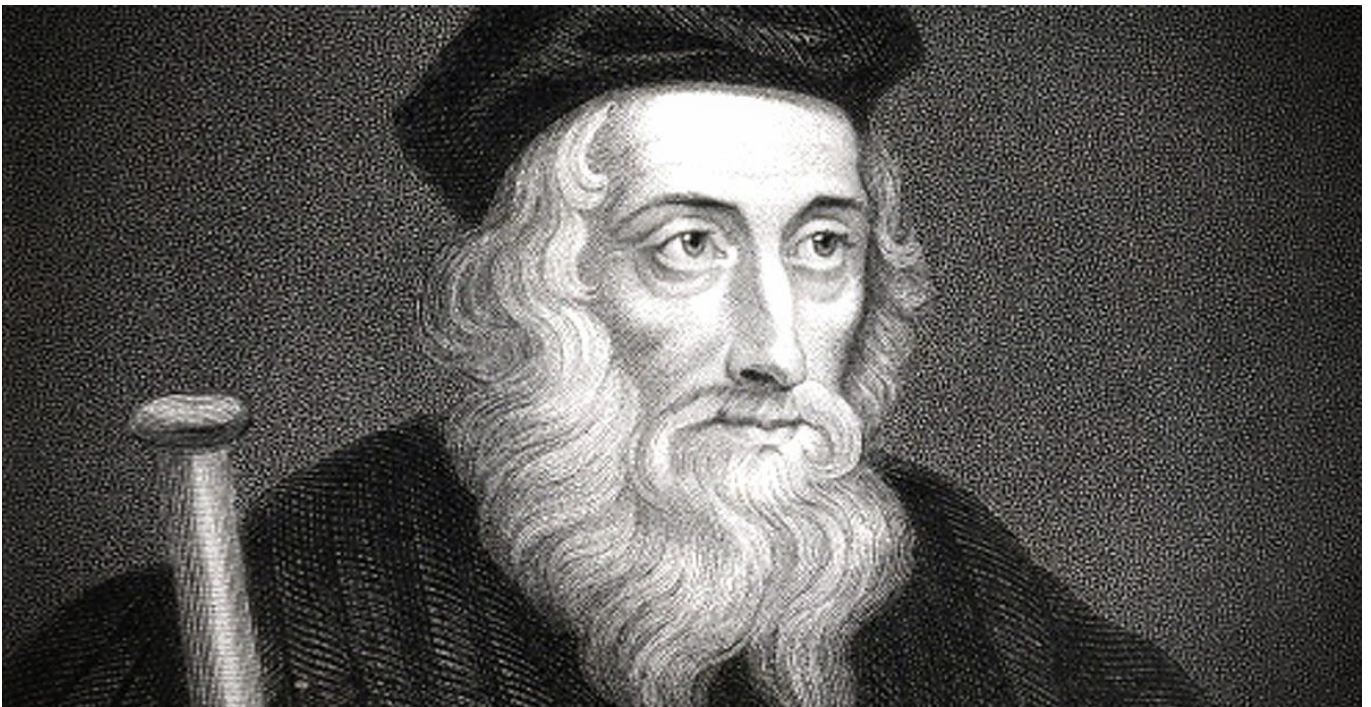
taught on the omnipotence, eternity, and sovereignty of God, who made everything out of nothing.

Divine Providence

Moreover, Wycliffe asserted that God, who created all, also rules over all. Wycliffe taught that nothing can hinder the fulfillment of the predetermined plan of God that extends over events and people. He wrote: "Let it be certain, that God has predetermined an event, and the result is beyond all accident, it must follow. Now what could hinder this preordination of events on the part of God? His knowledge is perfect. His will unvarying. And all creature-impediments opposed to Him are futile. From these facts, it follows that whatsoever is future, must necessarily come." Here, Wycliffe declared his belief in the divine predestination of what comes to pass. An apparent accident is, in reality, a part of a larger plan of God. He believed that nothing can thwart or alter the eternal purpose of God. Whatever He has predestined will come to pass.

Predetermined Necessity

Wycliffe affirmed that all that has been prophesied by Jesus Christ and recorded in the Scripture must come to pass. He said: "If Christ prophesied of certain events, certainly to come, such events have been or will be. The antecedent, namely that Christ has thus prophesied, is necessary, and the consequence is also necessary." He asserted that there is divine necessity in the fulfillment of what Christ has prophesied. He wrote: "The consequence is not in the



power of any man, or of any creature; nor are the sayings of Christ, or the elections of His mind to be affected by accident. And therefore as it is necessary that Christ has foretold certain things, so it is necessary they should come to pass." Wycliffe believed that God has foreordained the future and thus it must come to pass.

Eternal Counsel

Wycliffe believed that all that God has foreordained in His secret counsel must come to pass: "By arguments of this kind also, we shew other events to be necessary, the coming of which has been determined by God." Wycliffe understood that the decretive will of God is secret and is only partially revealed. He explained: "Nor will it matter, after what manner God may choose to inform us, that He had actually so determined before the foundation of the world." He points out here that God has revealed only certain things that He has purposed to accomplish. Nevertheless, whatever He has determined to do before the world began will come to pass.

Original Sin

Wycliffe taught that the sin of the first man brought a devastating effect upon his life. Concerning Adam's original sin, he wrote, "Adam indulged pride so as to bring death upon himself voluntarily." He affirmed that the entrance of death into the world was the immediate result of Adam's sin. This defiant rebellion, he taught, must be punished by God: "By the righteousness of God, this sin must always be punished." The due penalty for Adam's sin was death in its every form, resulting in spiritual, physical, and eternal death.

Total Depravity

Because of the solidarity of the human race with Adam, Wycliffe taught that Adam's sin was immediately imputed to all men. He maintained that when the first man sinned, all mankind sinned. He wrote: "We are all originally sinners, as Adam, and in Adam; his leprosy cleaves to us faster than Naaman's did to Gehazi." Adam's one act of disobedience, he avowed, ruined the entire human race. He stated: "Man was ruined by the forbidden fruit of a tree." All people have been defiled by the sin of this one man, Adam. The result was the curse of death for all people, whether this meant spiritual, physical, or eternal death. He affirmed, "By Adam all die." Death has spread to all people through this one sin.

Inherited Corruption

Wycliffe insisted that every person's mind has been blinded

by the inherited sin nature that has been transmitted from parent to child at the moment of conception. He taught, "We are all sinners, not only from our birth, but before, so that we cannot so much as think a good thought." He indicated by this that the pollution of sin was in every person even before his or her birth. The poison of sin was injected into the human nature at the moment of conception. The result is that no person can think rightly about God, themselves, or life. The effects of this inherited corruption have disabled every human faculty of every person.

Enslaved Will

Likewise, Wycliffe maintained that the will of every unbeliever is enslaved by sin and held captive by the devil: "Wicked men are called the kingdom of the devil, for he reigns in them, and they do his will." No one possesses free will to do good, Wycliffe concluded. Satan reigns in every unbeliever and holds that person's will captive to his reign. Wycliffe affirmed that all men are utterly fallen in sin and are naturally self-absorbed: "Man is the most fallen of creatures, and the unkindest of all creatures that ever God made!" He concluded that sin has left the will of man utterly depraved and spiritually dead.

Unconditional Election

Wycliffe firmly held to the doctrine of God's unconditional election of many sinners out of the world for salvation. These who were predestined to life before time began comprise the true church. He wrote: "For no one except for the predestined and the sanctified... is a member of the Church." The best way to identify the true church, Wycliffe believed, is by recognizing those sovereignly chosen by God. He wrote: "Although the Church is spoken of in many ways throughout Scripture, I think that we can conceive of it in its best known sense, namely the congregation of all the predestined." All those predestined to salvation are the true believers and thus the true church.

Initial Cause

Wycliffe taught that the sovereign will of God is the initial cause in salvation. This begins with His choice of individual sinners before the foundation of the world. He succinctly stated, "God is the first cause" in matters of salvation. In other words, the first cause is not man's choice of God, whereby God foresees which people will choose Christ and in response, then chooses them. That would turn salvation on its head and make man the first cause of his salvation. Instead, Wycliffe stated that God is the first cause in man's salvation. God exercises His will first, and man's will responds to the execution of the divine will.

Wycliffe was firm in teaching that Jesus is the only way for sinful people to come to the Father and find acceptance with Him.

Sovereign Grace

Wycliffe held that the doctrine of election is based entirely upon the sovereign grace of God, apart from any foreseen human works or merit: “Predestination is God’s chief gift most freely given, since no one can merit his own predestination.” He taught that God does not choose individuals because of some good that might be in them. They are chosen in spite of themselves. The reason for their election lies entirely in God Himself, not in the one chosen. This firm belief in sovereign election was a cornerstone doctrine for Wycliffe that bolstered his thinking about God, salvation, and the church. As he thought rightly about unconditional election, he was aligned to think correctly about many other doctrines.

Substitutionary Atonement

Wycliffe taught that Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, died a substitutionary death in the place of guilty sinners. He wrote: “All this He did and suffered of His own kindness, without any sin of Himself, that He might deliver us from sin and pain, and bring us to everlasting bliss.” In other words, Jesus Christ, being absolutely sinless, became sin for sinners in order to deliver them from its painful consequences. He asserted that Jesus did not die for His own transgressions, but for the sins of others: “Christ died not for His own sins as thieves do for theirs, but as our brother, who Himself might not sin, He died for the sins that others had done.” By this, he affirmed the vicarious death of Jesus in the place of sinners.

Exclusive Mediator

Wycliffe was firm in teaching that Jesus is the only way for sinful people to come to the Father and find acceptance with Him. He stated: “For as the Scripture assures us, Christ is the only mediator between God and man.”

He taught the exclusivity of salvation in *solus Christus*, or Christ alone. There is no other way to the Father except through the mediation of Him who is the Son of God and the Son of Man, truly God and truly man, who alone can perfectly represent God to man and man to God.

Vicarious Death

Wycliffe did not directly address the extent of the atonement. He wrote with only veiled references concerning for whom He died, without defining this aspect of the cross. He affirmed: “Christ, God and man, suffered this hard death to save us.” Here, “us” can only refer to believers, but it cannot be determined that it was intended for only believers. Wycliffe also wrote: “He was lifted up on the Cross, and died for sinners, to deliver us from the tormenting of the devil. He suffered pain to deliver us from everlasting pain. He suffered death to deliver us from death. He again rose from death, that we should again rise in body and soul on the last day of the great doom.” In this statement, each reference to “us” and “we” can only refer to elect believers, though the exact identity of those for whom Christ died is not conclusive.

Irresistible Grace

Wycliffe taught that the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit consisted in applying salvation to the elect. When anyone believes, he maintained, God overcomes that person’s stubborn resistance to the gospel so that the truth is received. He wrote: “Lord Jesus, turn us to You, and we shall be turned! Heal us and then we shall be verily holy; for without grace and help from You, may no man be truly turned or healed.” In other words, no man can turn *to* Christ until he is turned *by* Him. He reiterated this truth when he wrote: “The prophet speaks . . . of souls perfectly turning to God, saying . . . He shall draw my feet, that is my soul and my affections, out of the snare, and the net of the love

of this world.” He attested that God must draw sinners to faith in Christ and enable them to come to Him, or they will never escape the snares of the world.

Saving Faith

Wycliffe taught that saving faith is the gift of God. He stated: “Faith is a gift of God; and so God gives it not to man, unless He gives it graciously.” This means that no man can believe in Jesus Christ until God grants saving faith to the spiritually dead sinner. He explained the absolute necessity of the exercise of faith: “As a right-looking at the adder of brass saved the people from the venom of the adder: so a right-looking by full belief on Christ saves His people.” He affirmed that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Such faith included love for God that can only come directly from Him. He maintained: “No man can...love God, or be chaste, unless God give it to him.” Thus, Wycliffe stressed that man left to himself will not love God. Only when the Holy Spirit grants this new affection do we truly love Him.

Divine Acceptance

Wycliffe believed in justification by faith as any Bible-believing preacher would. He wrote: “We are predestined, that we may obtain divine acceptance.” He understood that those predestined by the Father are brought to Christ and find full acceptance with God. Concerning justification by faith, John Laird Wilson explains, “It has been said of Wycliffe that he did not fully grasp the famous Reformation doctrine—Justification by Faith. It is a perfectly true that he did not emphasize this doctrine, as Luther emphasized it; but it seems to us to be too much to insinuate that he had not laid hold of this cardinal truth.” Here, Wilson affirmed that Wycliffe stood “in perfect harmony with the teaching of the later Reformation.”

Preserving Grace

Wycliffe taught that all those chosen and predestined by God for salvation are also kept eternally secure by Him. He wrote: “This grace, which is called the grace of predestination, with the charity of final perseverance, cannot by any means fail.” By this, Wycliffe affirmed that no believer will ever fail to persevere into all the ages of eternity future in their union with Jesus Christ. Unequivocally, he asserted: “Predestination . . . cannot be lost, since it is the foundation of glorification.” By these strong words, Wycliffe affirmed that saving grace is immutable and irrevocable throughout time and eternity.

Catholic Church

Wycliffe believed that the visible church is comprised of both the elect and the non-elect. It is a mixed congregation of both believers and unbelievers. He believed this was certainly the case with the Roman Catholic Church, which was filled with wheat and tares. Regarding the Church of Rome, he saw nothing taught in Scripture to support the papacy. Practically speaking, Wycliffe saw no true need for the papacy. He viewed all popes as the anti-Christ because of their blatant betrayal of Scripture. He called the monastic orders false “sects” and monks “the pests of society,” “the enemies of religion,” and “the promoters of every crime.” He believed that the preaching of the friars was devoid of Scripture and entirely hypocritical.

True Church

Wycliffe taught that the true church is the invisible church that is made up of all who were predestined by God unto eternal life. To this Reformer, the invisible church was the total number of the elect. Further, he maintained that Jesus Christ alone is the head of the true church. No man can assume for himself what belongs solely to Christ. Jesus rules over all things as Lord. By the Father’s appointment, this supreme authority includes the church, which Christ bought with His blood to be His own possession: “Christ is the supreme Lord, while the pope is a man, and liable to mortal sin, and who while in mortal sin, according to divines, is unfitted for dominion.” There is one true universal church, and outside of it there is no salvation.

From eternity past to eternity future, Wycliffe stressed that salvation is entirely of the Lord. He taught that every aspect of salvation is based exclusively upon the teaching of Scripture, not upon the traditions or thoughts of man. He rejected any additional self-proclaimed ideas from any person that would require anything from man to achieve a right standing before God. This was a dramatic departure from the teaching of the church in Rome with its endless emphasis upon what man must do in addition to the work of God to earn salvation. Rome put salvation in the hands of the priest, presiding over Mass, and in the pope in the sale of indulgences. Rome also required including pilgrimages to the shrines, the worship of their images, and the veneration of the saints. It is easy to see just how radical Wycliffe’s message and preaching truly were.

This Reformed theology was the real power in the preaching of Wycliffe. It was this sound doctrine that proved to be so dynamic as it was proclaimed from the pulpit. Let us learn how explosive the truth is when preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. ♦

24-Hour Internet Radio



Experience in-depth training and instruction from trusted evangelical preachers and teachers

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, James Montgomery Boice, S. Lewis Johnson, John MacArthur, Steven J. Lawson, and more.

Be instructed 24 hours a day in verse-by-verse exposition for the renewal of your mind and transformation of your life.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE EXPOSITOR.FM OR
DOWNLOAD THE APP AT EXPOSITOR.FM



EXPOSITOR · *fm*

EXPOSITOR

ONEPASSION

P.O. Box 601649
Dallas, TX 75360

ELECTRONIC CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

 **ONEPASSION**
MINISTRY CIRCLE

*Training men.
Strengthening believers.
Spreading the gospel
around the world.*

Help us fulfill this mission by joining our
Ministry Circle. For more information,
visit our website, onepassionministries.org

