



## Dissenters of the Institutional Church

Groups of Dissent Throughout the Middle Ages

1

### The Petrobrusians

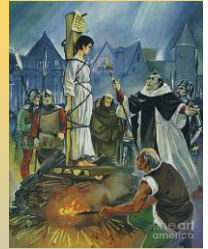
- At this point, we are moving to the dissenting movements that were not heretical.
  - They were persecuted simply because they rejected the claims of the papacy and extrabiblical doctrine held dear by the institutional church.
- The first of these groups is the Petrobrusians. They are named after their founder Peter de Bruys.
  - He was a Catholic priest in southern France that started a reform movement in 1105.
  - The Church eventually declared the movement as heretical, and authorities burned Peter at the stake in 1126.
  - Afterward, the movement was taken over by Henry of Lausanne, a Benedictine monk.
- A Catholic polemical apologist from Cluny wrote a refutation of the Petrobrusians. From it, we learn the following.
  - They denied infant baptism, and instead insisted on a believers baptism. They denied the holiness of church buildings and altars.
  - They refused to venerate the sign of the cross—Peter de Bruys actually showed great disrespect to crosses by destroying them.
  - They denied the doctrine of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass.
  - They also denied that prayers and good works done on earth can help those who have already died.
  - In addition to these things, they also denied the celibacy of the clergy.
  - Apparently, they also rejected the idea of singing as a form of true worship.



2

## The Petrobrusians

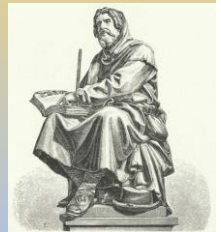
- Clearly, this group of dissenters had a lot in common with later Protestants, specifically Baptists.
  - However, they did not survive the execution of Peter and imprisonment of Henry.
  - Their followers dispersed among the other dissenting groups.
- Since Peter was burned at the stake, it is important to understand the motivation behind this form of execution.
  - Burning a person at the stake was declared to be an act of faith by the RCC.
  - Since heretics go to Hell, it is fitting to exit them from this life in the same manner that they enter the next life.
  - Only the secular state had the authority to burn at the stake, but the church had to recommend it.
  - If the state complied, it was an act of faith. The execution of a heretic was thought to be an act of worship that pleased God.



3

## The Waldensians

- The next group is the Waldensians. This dissenting group is important for a number of reasons. They truly were Protestants prior to the Reformation.
- Furthermore, they are still around today. They were founded by a wealthy French merchant named Valdes (or Waldes).
  - Later traditions claim his first name was Peter and his last name was Waldo. His birth year is uncertain, but he died in 1205.
  - Sometime between 1173 and 1176, Christ's command to the young rich ruler deeply convicted him. He gave all his wealth to the poor and began a new life as a lay preacher. He lived off donations of food, clothing, and money.
- Eventually, a band of followers from Lyons attached themselves to him. They were nicknamed the "poor men of Lyons."
- The archbishop of Lyons heavily opposed them. Church law limited preaching to the clergy, yet this layperson was preaching.
  - Valdes appealed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lateran Council in 1179, but Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) denied him and his followers the right to preach without the permission of the local bishop. The Pope did, however, commend the devotion to poverty.



4

## The Waldensians

- Valdes and his poor men refused to give up preaching. The archbishop excommunicated them in 1182 and expelled them from Lyons.
  - Most of them went to Languedoc (southeastern coastland of France) and Lombardy.
- In 1184, Pope Lucius III (1181-1185) excommunicated all Waldensians. They were forced out of the Catholic Church against their wishes.
  - This caused them to start thinking afresh about many matters of Christian doctrine. They had no obligation to take Roman teaching for granted. They could look to the Scriptures.
  - They determined that the Bible, especially the New Testament should be the supreme rule of Christian belief and practice. This was sola scriptura four-hundred years before the Reformation would declare the same.
- Leaning on the Bible as their authority, they quickly rejected both the authority and infallibility of the papacy.
  - They rejected transubstantiation, purgatory, prayers for the dead, and indulgences.
  - They did continue to venerate Mary, however.
  - The Waldensians also translated the Bible into their native languages.
  - They partook of the Lord's Supper on their own if Catholic priests would not give it to them.

5

## The Waldensians

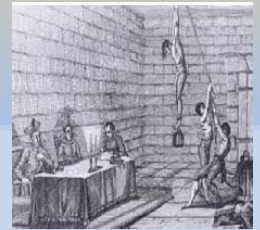
- They created schools to train preachers, and they trained both men and women to be evangelists.
- They rejected oaths and military service, though they would practice self-defense if they were attacked.
- They spread out from their original homelands of Languedoc and Lombardy into Spain, Austria, and Eastern Germany.
  - They were the second most widespread dissenting group in Western Europe (Cathars being the first).
- A large number of Catholics sympathized with them and would not harass them.
  - They even funded their schools and attended their preaching. But those Catholics still remained part of the Catholic Church.
- Clearly, in many ways, the Waldensians were Protestants before there were Protestants.
  - Sadly, many were killed as martyrs by Innocent's Crusade. The number of martyrs substantially increased after the Inquisition was established. They did survive in northern Italy since the Alps made it much easier to defend their communities from attack.
- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century they joined the Protestant Reformation. The Waldensian Church in Italy is the oldest Protestant body in the world. There are even some Waldensian churches in North Carolina.



6

## The Inquisition

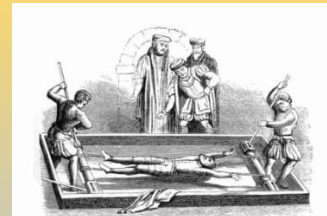
- The success of the Albigensian Crusade convinced Innocent III to increase papal power to search out heretics.
- He set up a system of special legates personally appointed by himself.
  - They had the duty of seeking out any surviving heretics in France.
  - Prior to this, investigation of heresy was left up to the local bishops, but Innocent desired it to be a centrally controlled systematic operation carried out by special papal agents.
- Innocent's system laid the foundation for what would become the Office of the Inquisition in 1227.
  - It was now a holy office that was a separate organization within the Catholic Church. It was free from bishop control and was only subject to the Pope.
- They were solely dedicated to uncovering and punishing heretics in Catholic Europe. It soon developed into the most feared organization of the later Middle Ages.



7

## The Inquisition

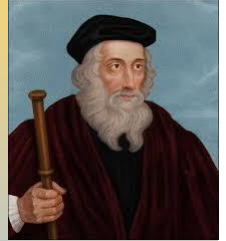
- If a person was formally accused of heresy, it was nearly impossible for him/her to prove innocence.
- If a person confessed the sin of heresy, a financial penalty was imposed upon them along with penance and sometimes forced pilgrimages.
- Those who refused to confess would receive varying levels of punishment, depending on the seriousness of the heresy.
  - Some would have all their property confiscated, some were imprisoned for life, and the worst offenders were handed over to the secular authorities to be burnt to death at the stake.
- The existence of the Inquisition forced dissenting groups like the Waldensians to meet in secret.
- The Holy Office of the Inquisition was also used to destroy Jews, and later on the Protestants.
  - It used methods of torture to secure confessions from the accused.



8

## The Lollards

- The two evangelical dissenting groups we know the most about are the Lollards and the Hussites.
  - Like the Waldensians, these groups were Protestants prior to the Reformation. The reason they have greater significance than the Waldensians is because they laid the groundwork for the Reformation to be accepted in their respective lands when it finally arrived.
- We will talk first of the Lollards. During the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy, a serious challenge to the papacy came from England in the person of John Wyclif (1330-1384).
- He was the most popular professor of theology at Oxford University. In the 1360s, he became a religious advisor to the King of England, Edward III (1327-1377).
  - Wyclif's anti-papal views were useful for the English king and nobles since they were opposed to France (Hundred Years War).
  - The popes were now puppets of the French monarchy, and thus a voice like Wyclif's was welcome to English opponents of the pope.
  - The difference is the English secular leaders did not oppose the pope due to doctrinal reasons, but political.



9

## John Wyclif's Increasing Dissent

- The papacy claimed that it owned England since King John I ceded it to Pope Innocent III in the prior century.
  - Wyclif argued that God gave political dominion to the state and ecclesial dominion to the church. Thus, the pope has no claim of political dominion.
  - Furthermore, secular rulers only have the right to their political dominion if they serve God faithfully, since all dominion is delegated. The same is true of ecclesial dominion.
  - Therefore, if a bishop was not living faithfully, the state could strip him of his property and possessions. The English nobility had long had their eye on the massive land and wealth of the church in their lands.
- In 1337, Wyclif was summoned to London by its bishop in order to answer for his views. The church was trying to shut him down, but King Edward had Wyclif protected from harm.
- Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378) summoned Wyclif to appear in Rome within 30 days where he must answer for 19 deadly errors. Wyclif refused.
  - King Edward died that year and was succeeded by his grandson. In 1378, the Archbishop of Canterbury tried to put Wyclif on trial, but a supportive mob rescued him from their hands.
- At this juncture, Wyclif was a popular hero and supported by the nobility.
  - Additionally, lower clergy were fed up with the corruption and greed of the higher clergy, and they too supported Wyclif.
  - Keep in mind, Geoffrey Chaucer (*Canterbury Tales*) and other authors present the church of this time in an unappealing manner. Wyclif rode this popular wave.

10



## Wyclif's Increasing Dissent

- In 1378, Pope Gregory XI died, and the Great Schism began. Wyclif's position became more radical at this point.
  - He argued that the Bible is the sole source of Christian doctrine, and it must be used to test church teaching and even the teaching of the Church Fathers, papacy, and ecumenical councils.
  - He also argued that the Bible should be translated from Latin into the common language of the people. This was radical for the later Middle Ages.
  - The Bible was seen as the book of the clergy rather than the people, and only the church had the right to tell people what the Bible means.
- The Church looked with suspicion and intolerance on the idea that laypersons should read the Bible for themselves. Some councils declared it illegal in the prior century. Why?
  - When the dissenting groups read the Bible in their own languages, they began to reject much Roman Catholic doctrine.
- Wyclif argued that the Bible already existed in French, and so it should not be a problem to put it in English.
  - French was the language of the English court from 1066 to the 1360s, but in the 1370s, English came into its own right.
  - Even though most people could not read, Wyclif argued they should be able to hear the Word of God in English.

11

## Wyclif's Ecclesiology

- Wyclif soon started arguing that the church was not the institution of the papacy, bishops, and priests, but it is the assembly of all believers.
  - All believers were eternally predestined to salvation by God. They all are the true church, and Christ is the head rather than the pope.
  - He argued that the papacy was of human rather than divine origin. In fact, a pope that did not follow Christ was the Antichrist. Later, Wyclif would claim all popes, not just the bad ones, were the Antichrist.
- He then declared transubstantiation to be a heresy that denies biblical teaching. Wyclif said the inner substance does not change, but instead Christ's flesh and blood were present in only a spiritual way.
  - If an animal eats a human, it does not also eat his soul. Likewise, we eat the elements, but Christ's spiritual presence is not consumed.
  - He claimed that the Western church abandoned the true Eucharist in the 11th century, but he granted that the Eastern Orthodox still did it correctly (even if they emphasized Christ's presence more than Wyclif).
- He also pointed out that the Eastern Church resisted the Western error of celibacy as their priests were allowed to marry.
  - This began the trend of Western Reformers using the Eastern Church as an example to attack the corruptions of the Catholic Church.
  - When Rome claimed their church is ancient and thus their traditions must be accepted, opponents could say the Eastern Church is just as ancient but lacks those traditions.

12

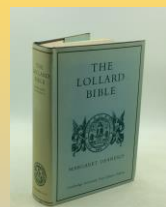
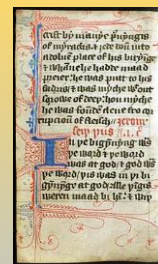
## Wyclif's Opposition

- More than anything, it was Wyclif's denial of transubstantiation that made him dangerous to the Catholic Church.
- Eventually, the English court of nobles broke off their support of him.
  - Oxford then expelled him and his followers.
- He served as a parish priest for the rest of his days (about three years).
  - He wrote his beliefs at popular level in English and a scholarly level in Latin. It spread his ideas of what the Bible teaches.
- He then organized a team to translate the Latin Vulgate into English, which was finished after he died.
  - This was the first English translation of the Bible, and it was finished in 1384. A smoother edition was released in 1396. It had a wide circulation between this time and the start of the Protestant Reformation.
  - There was no printing press yet, so his followers worked hard to produce thousands of handwritten copies.
- Wyclif then wrote sermons and tasked his followers to go throughout England as pairs and preach the sermons (which included the gospel) to the English people.
  - He argued that the duty of the clergy was the preaching of the Word rather than the celebration of sacraments.
  - Preaching converted lost sinners into Christians. Preaching also built believers up in the faith.
- Wyclif died in peace in 1384, but 34 years later, authorities dug up his body and burned it for heresy. They disposed of his ashes in the Swift River.
  - Protestants rightly see Wyclif as the morning star of the Reformation.

13

## Lollards

- His followers were called Lollards, which was a pejorative slur that meant mumblers.
- The Lollards became the English equivalent to Waldensians. They spread throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century and even held seats in Parliament.
- They denounced the papacy, clerical celibacy, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, pilgrimages, and bishops holding political offices.
- In 1399, however, a political revolution enthroned the Lancaster dynasty to the throne in the person of Henry IV (1399-1413).
- His goal was to gain the favor of the Church, and so he passed a law that made burning heretics legal in England. This law was aimed directly at the Lollards.



14

## The Lollards

- The persecution of the Lollards became fiercer under Henry V (1413-1422).
  - His chief parliamentary opponent was a Lollard (John Oldcastle), and he used the church courts to convict him of Wyclif's heresy and sentence him to death.
  - Oldcastle escaped and organized a Lollard conspiracy to kidnap Henry V in 1414. The king uncovered the plot and then crushed it.
  - Oldcastle escaped again, but was eventually caught in 1417 and was executed.
- This Lollard plot destroyed all support from the nobles that the Lollards once enjoyed. Now it would only be a movement among commonfolk outside of the levers of political power.
  - They were forced to become an underground sect.
  - Usually, the beliefs were passed on from parents to children under the nose of the wider society.
- They survived until the Protestant Reformation, and they were the English Reformation's first supporters.
  - Their English Bibles and tracts prepared the way. They merged into the mainstream of English Protestantism.



15

## The Hussites

- The final group of dissenters was the Hussites, named after John Huss of Bohemia (modern day Czech republic).
- While Wyclif was still alive, the king of England married the sister of the king of Bohemia, which created a close relationship between the two countries.
  - This was when Wyclif's teachings and Lollard writings were being spread throughout England.
  - Some Bohemian students studied at Oxford and took Wyclif's writings back to Bohemia.
  - These writings then made their way to the University of Prague.
- The soil for such writings was prepared since there had been a reform movement aimed at correcting church corruption and worldliness.
- And the papacy was in no position to discredit these ideas since its reputation was in the gutter of the Great Schism.
- In steps John Huss (1372-1415). He was first the preacher at Bethlehem chapel in Prague in 1402, and then he became the rector of Prague University from 1409.
- He studied and admired Wyclif's writings.
  - Some of Huss's own writings reproduced Wyclif's ideas nearly verbatim.



16



## Huss's Increasing Dissent

- At first, Huss was not as radical in his Catholic criticisms as Wyclif.
  - He still accepted transubstantiation.
  - Like the ruling class of Bohemia, he was a nationalist. Bohemians were Slavic and did not wish to be drowned out by the Germanic character of the Holy Roman Empire, of which they were part.
- Huss's views gradually grew more oppositional to Catholic doctrine. In 1411, he attacked indulgences as useless. God forgives completely all who repent and believe on Christ.
  - Pope John XXIII (1410-1415) was selling indulgences to fund his war against a rival pope, Gregory XII (1406-1415).
  - John excommunicated Huss and threatened to place Prague under interdict.
  - Huss chose to save the city by relocating from Prague to southern Bohemia.
- He was protected by friendly nobles. There he continued to write his theological views.
- Those who once supported his calls for moral reform would no longer support him once he questioned Catholic doctrine.
  - This led to the emergence of two parties in Bohemia—the Catholics and the Hussites (though at first they were called Wycliffites).

17

## Huss's Doctrine Brings Trouble

- Huss argued that the Church was the entire body of the elect from all ages.
  - They were predestined by God out of His free grace. Of this Church, Christ was the head, not the Pope. Popes were fallible as Huss was quick to point out their errors throughout history.
  - Like Wyclif, he appealed the Eastern Church. They were Christians that existed since ancient times without the papacy.
- Huss also argued that Christians should not follow or obey unworthy clergy.
  - He demanded that the state step in and reform the church if it will not reform itself.
- Also like Wyclif, Huss believed preaching was the true heart of ordained ministry. Traditional Catholics viewed this all as grave heresy.
- The turmoil between Hussites and Catholics grew in severity.
- When the Council of Constance met in 1414 (the reform council of the conciliar movement), one of the issues they had to address was the Bohemian turmoil.
  - They summoned Huss to appear before them. Huss knew they would try to burn him as a heretic.
  - However, the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1410-1437) promised him safe conduct if he attended.



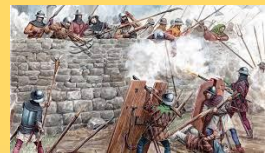
18

## Huss's Martyrdom

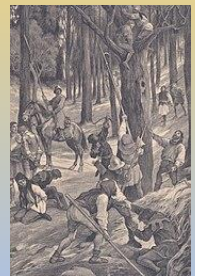
- Huss decided to appear as summoned due to this assurance of safety, but the Council determined that they would ignore the Emperor.
  - They threw him in prison as soon as he arrived. They held him in horrific conditions for six months which wrecked his health.
  - Meanwhile, the Hussites in Prague started giving the bread and wine of Communion to the laity in defiance of Catholic practice.
- In June of 1415, the Church authorities brought the very ill Huss before the Council.
  - They would not allow him to defend himself. Instead, they bullied him for three days in an attempt to get him to renounce his views.
  - After he refused, they condemned him and deposed him from the priesthood. In a humiliating ceremony, six bishops stripped off his priestly vestments and placed on his head a cap covered in pictures of red demons.
  - They claimed that they committed his soul to the devil. Huss replied, "I commit myself to my most gracious Lord Jesus."
- The Council handed him over to Sigismund, and his soldiers burned Huss at the stake on July 6, 1415.
- Huss refused a last-minute pardon if he would only abandon his beliefs. He responded to the offer by saying, "I shall die with joy today in the faith of the Gospel which I have preached."

19

## The Bohemian Sword



- His martyrdom did not work out the way the Catholics hoped. Bohemia declared Huss a national popular hero.
- They were enraged that the Germanic Holy Roman Emperor's treachery.
  - This grew when the Emperor ordered the burning of Huss's greatest disciple, Jerome of Prague in 1416.
  - He died in such a faithful and courageous way that the spectators wept. Bohemia was now ready to explode with rage.
- In 1419, their king died. He was the brother of Sigismund, and thus the Holy Roman Emperor was next in line for the Bohemian throne. Yet, he was the most hated man in Bohemia.
- Therefore, a civil war erupted. Pope Martin V declared a crusade against the heretical Bohemians assuming this would end the uprising.
  - Surprisingly, the Bohemians defeated the crusading armies multiple times.
  - Two of the greatest generals of the Middle Ages led the Bohemian armies to repeated victories.
  - They then invaded Germany itself. All of armed Catholic Europe seemed unable to stop them.



20

## Bohemian Unity Severed

- There were two parties of Hussites.
  - One party, centered in Prague, wanted to remain in the Catholic Church, but have communion given to the laity and to have the gospel preached in Bohemian.
  - The other party wanted to completely break with Rome, and they denounced transubstantiation, purgatory, indulgences, etc. The two generals belonged to the second party.
  - For 14 years, the two parties were united against Catholic crusading armies.
- For the first time in its history, the Catholic Church realized it could not defeat a dissenting group, and so it agreed to negotiate with them.
- The Catholics were willing to allow them to remain in the Church and live and operate according to what would later be Protestant doctrine.
  - The first party accepted the deal, but the second refused. They did not wish to be part of a church that held false doctrines.
- Open war broke out between the two parties. The Catholic armies helped the first party, and they crushed the second party in 1434.



21

## The Fate of the Hussites

- Thus, the Bohemians remained in the Catholic Church, though they were able to practice their distinct Hussite traditions.
- Some tried to link with the Eastern Church, but Constantinople was conquered in 1453.
- Others stayed committed to the ideas of the second party.
- Of those, many found and merged with Waldensians.
  - These Bohemians formed their own church (United Bohemian Brotherhood) with their own confession. By 1500, they had over 500 congregations in Bohemia and Moravia.
- Even though the majority of the Hussites remained in the Catholic Church, tensions were always present.
  - When the Protestant Reformation exploded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Hussites welcomed and joined the movement.
- Martin Luther and the Hussites.
  - Martin Luther's debate with Dr. John Eck showed just how Reformed the Hussites were in their doctrines.
  - He asked Luther if he agreed with the Hussites, but Luther did not know since he only lightly heard of them. He promised to spend the night in the library reading Huss' writings. The next day at the debate he concluded, "We're all Hussites!" For this reason, Luther was nicknamed the Saxon Huss, since by his own mouth he identified himself with John Huss.

22

## Conclusion

- There have always been dissenting movements to the ancient institutional church.
- Some have been heretical continuations of Gnosticism.
- Others were determined to be biblical.
- It is worth noting that Protestant doctrine is not unique to Protestantism.
  - In fact, whenever a group used sola scriptura as final rule and authority, and even applied it to the church's traditions, they usually ended up with Protestant doctrine.
  - This happened in a diverse set of lands among diverse languages: France, Italy, Bohemia, England, and Germany.
  - This is a powerful apologetic against certain claims of the Roman Catholic Church. It also undermines post-modern claims that Reformation doctrine was a product of their culture more than a recovery of Biblical doctrine.
- None of these movements could claim success like the Reformation, however.
  - Why did the Reformation succeed while these efforts did not? You have enough information from this course to figure it out.



23

## Course Conclusion

- We have discussed much in this course – history, theology, heresy, politics, etc.
  - In Matthew 16:18 Christ said that He would build His church, and hopefully we have seen Him in the process.
- We have come right up to 1500, which puts us at the eve of the Reformation.
- Of course, we have clearly seen what Philip Schaff wisely pointed out. Namely, that whenever God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel next door.
  - Much of what we talked about was that chapel.
- Yet in the midst of it, we also saw the beautiful bride of Christ (as small as she was at some points) moving along through history despite apostasy.
- Hopefully this study of church history was informative and will help you make sense out of heresies in our own day.
  - Nothing is new under the sun.
- May the Lord complete Church History by returning for her soon. Maranatha!

24