

The Beginnings of Reformation

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – an overview of the early reform movements at the end of the medieval church age
2. aim – to cause us to see how the reformation began in the medieval church

b. outline

1. The Conciliar Movement
2. The Work of John Wycliffe
3. The Preaching of John Huss

c. overview

1. the “medieval” period comes to an end as we approach the 16th C.
 - a. the 13th C. is the “high” point of medieval civilization (**i.e.** the papacy at the zenith of power)
2. but, the Great Schism has split the W church into two factions: those under the pope in France (at Avignon) and those under the pope of Rome
 - a. the church has embraced *ecclesiastical* practices that are evil: simony (**i.e.** purchasing ecclesiastical positions), nepotism, absenteeism (**i.e.** paid without working), pluralism, etc.
 - b. the church has embraced *dogmatic* positions that are inconsistent with the gospel: transubstantiation, clerical celibacy, sacerdotalism, confession (**i.e.** Fourth Lateran Council)
3. so, it is into this world that some early reform movements begin
 - a. **e.g. (as before)** the Mendicant Orders, scholasticism, missionary endeavors, etc.
 - b. **(now)** in 14th-15th C. rises some *early* attempts at true *ecclesiastical* and *theological* reform
 1. sometimes referred to as the *early reformers* or the *pre-Reformation* period
 2. **LOW:** a period which *could be* described as the “true” beginning of the Reformation – men *before Luther* who began to teach and preach a return to orthodox Christian doctrine

I. The Conciliar Movement

Content

a. the background of the movement

1. during the Babylonian Captivity (**i.e.** the popes residing in Avignon), and the subsequent Great Schism (**i.e.** a rival pope arising in Rome), many hoped a *council* would be able to solve the problem
 - a. **i.e.** like the great *ecumenical* councils of the past – a gathering of *the whole church* to resolve a significant matter of dispute within (**e.g.** Nicea, Constantinople, etc.)
 - b. **LOW:** since the *popes themselves* couldn’t solve this issue, maybe a council *from the whole church* could gather to sort out the issue and bring the leadership back to stability and singleness
2. the **conciliar movement** was born = the rising belief within the church that it was time to “reconcile” the leadership (**i.e.** to use *conciliation*; a dispute resolution process using a *conciliator*, a council that could act to bring the parties together and resolve the dispute *once and for all*)
 - a. it was built around the belief that **the universal church held authority over the pope**, not the *other way around* – that the popes needed to “submit” themselves to a council that would settle the dispute and bring healing and restoration to the leadership
 - b. **note:** this becomes an important *reformation* tenet = a *singular* ecclesiastical leader cannot (by definition) be the “head” of the universal church of *Christ* – only Christ can be head of the church
3. obviously, the question becomes: who can *call* this council (**i.e.** if one side calls the council, the other side will reject its outcome)? **answer:** the cardinals of *both sides* issued a joint call to a great council

b. the Council of Pisa (1409)

1. the two rival popes each called *his own* council (in response) to Pisa, but both failed
2. the council immediately deposed *both* popes (**i.e.** instead of trying to “pick” one) and elected Alexander V to become the *singular* pope (**i.e.** replacing both rivals)
 - a. the council took some measures against simony and other evils; it adjourned shortly thereafter
3. **the result:** *three* (3) claimants to the papacy (surprise!!)
 - a. Alexander V was acknowledged by most of the nobility of Europe, but the other two still had enough support to continue their claim to the position

- b. Alexander dies less than a year later, and the cardinals elect John XXIII – but, political turmoil forced him to flee to Germany, under the protection of Emperor Sigismund
 - 1. **BTW:** another John XXIII was elected in 1958 (d. 1963; Second Vatican Council) – but, the Roman church *only* accepts the successors of Urban VI *in Rome* (this John is an *anti-pope!*)
 - 2. **i.e.** in *my* lifetime: John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis I
- c. **the Council of Constance (1414)**
 - 1. Sigismund insisted that John XXIII receive his protection *only* if a new council is convoked
 - a. probably because Sigismund *disliked* John, and disagreed with his politics and lifestyle
 - 2. the council *did not support* John (**i.e.** he assumed it would!!), and demanded his resignation
 - a. John fled, but was captured, taken back to Constance, forced to resign, and imprisoned for life
 - b. the council enacted a few “decrees” for reformation (**see below**) and elected Martin V
 - 3. the rival popes then realized that the days of a “split” papacy had come to an end
 - a. Gregory XII (**i.e.** the Roman pope) resigned; Benedict XIII (**i.e.** the last Avignon pope) fled
- d. **additional councils that followed (1423, 1430)**
 - 1. the Council of Pavia (Siena; 1423) was called by Martin V – it was unimpressive
 - 2. the Council of Basel (1430) was called by Martin V (he died as it began; Eugene IV continued it)
 - a. it now *seemed* as though a council had power over the pope (with Sigismund’s help!)
 - b. however, this council *itself* split (over reconciliation with the E; they had called for help)
 - c. the result being the council(s) eventually disbanded, with a singular pope now in place in Rome
- e. **the effects of the Conciliar Movement**
 - 1. although able to affect *ecclesiastical* reconciliation and end the Great Schism, the real “enemy” of the church remained: its *doctrinal error* flowing out of its *ecclesiastical structure* (**i.e.** a papacy)

II. The Work of John Wycliffe

Content

- a. **the biography of Wycliffe (1330-1384; before the Conciliar Movement)**
 - 1. little is known of his early years; he is “named” after the Yorkshire village from which he was born (**i.e.** Wycliffe-on-Tees) – he lived during the Avignon papacy
 - 2. Wycliffe studied at Oxford (fr. 1345 at 15); he was famous for his logic, but not a sense of humor
 - a. he left Oxford to serve the crown, first as a diplomat, later as a polemicist
 - 3. in 1362 (while at Oxford), English became the language of the courts (nee Norman French) – it eventually became the primary language of the universities (**i.e.** Latin, the language of instruction)
 - a. **LOW:** English was *already* the *vernacular* language of the people, now it was becoming the *official*
 - 4. Wycliffe penned two works on the limits of lordship: *On Divine Dominion* and *On Civil Dominion*
 - a. these works helped English authorities in their work to limit papal influence
 - b. specifically, these works argued that all legitimate dominion comes from God, but is pictured *primarily* in *servicing* others (**i.e.** not being served, as in the example of Christ himself)
 - c. **i.e.** any *supposed* ecclesiastical authority that *taxes* for its own benefit, or extends its power beyond the “spiritual” realm, is illegitimate; civil authorities that press too far are, also
 - d. he was given the reward, for his help of the civil authorities in dealing with Rome, the parish of Lutterworth, which he pastored until his death (which would haunt him; **see below**)
- b. **the views and teachings of Wycliffe**
 - 1. Wycliffe grew even more *radical* in his view of authority: he argued that the *true church* is not the pope and his hierarchy, but the *invisible body* of those predestined to salvation (**i.e.** Augustine)
 - a. **i.e.** the *fruits* of the elect demonstrate they are; many ecclesiastical leaders being *reprobate*
 - 2. Wycliffe also argued that Scripture is the possession of the *church*, and only the church can interpret the Bible correctly (**i.e.** not the *official* church, but the invisible body of Christ)
 - a. **note:** this is a *significant Baptist distinctive*: soul competency (liberty) re: interpretation of Scripture
 - b. thus, Wycliffe began translating the Vulgate into English (which his successors finished) – if the Bible belonged to the *true church*, then it needed to be *readable* by the *true church*
 - 3. Wycliffe was *most* controversial in his understanding of the Lord’s Supper
 - a. in his *On the Eucharist*, Wycliffe rejected transubstantiation as a denial of the incarnation
 - 1. **i.e.** when God joined with humanity, the humanity was not destroyed; *both were present*
 - 2. **i.e.** in a “mysterious” way, both the body of Christ *and the bread* are present
 - b. **note: (again)** the early nature of Baptist distinctives in the Supper

c. the reaction and importance of Wycliffe

1. because of these positions, Wycliffe was *strongly opposed* by the papacy
 - a. Gregory XI issued five (5) bulls against him, and he was declared a “heretic” by many
 - b. when he supported the peasant revolt in 1381, he was accused of instigating it, and was summoned to appear before Archbishop Courteney
 - c. ten of his tenets were declared heretical, his writings were placed under “ban” (not to be read), and the archbishop pressured his followers to recant (which many did!)
 - d. when he died in 1384, he was buried in consecrated ground, but the Council of Constance (1414; see above) condemned him, disinterred his remains, burned them and threw them into the Swift
 1. i.e. in their zeal to “reconcile” the true church, they (wrongly!) defended their dogmatic positions
 - e. but, the Lollards continued to teach Wycliffe’s doctrines, translate Scripture, and preach a more “reformed” view of the Christian faith (i.e. the Bible is for the people, pastors should not hold civil office, the worship of images and pilgrimages is evil, clerical celibacy is unbiblical, etc.)
2. **IOW:** Wycliffe’s work *underpinned* a new movement that would arise *within the church*, which would flower into the full Protestant Reformation under similar reasonings – so, was Wycliffe actually *the Father of the Reformation* (over Luther)?

II. The Preaching of John Huss

Content

a. the biography of Huss (1362-1415)

1. Huss was from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), a student at the University of Prague
 - a. while there, he used most of his funds to purchase a *plenary indulgence*
 - b. he eventually rose to the position of dean of faculty and philosophy
 - c. he was appointed preacher at the Chapel of Bethlehem, a center for preaching in the vernacular
2. Huss agreed with much of Wycliffe’s teachings, but disagreed with him on transubstantiation
 - a. Wycliffe’s teachings had come to Bohemia through a *political* connection to England – Richard II was married to a Bohemian princess
 - b. this forced a great debate in Bohemia regarding the *heretical* nature some considered Wycliffe
 - c. however, the Czechs (in general) *embraced* Wycliffe’s ideas
3. Huss’ early preaching was simply to continue what the conciliarists were advocating
 - a. not to alter the traditional teachings of the church, but to restore its *ecclesiastical* order
 - b. his primary charge was against the corruption of the clergy (“the Lord’s fat ones”)
4. Alexander V, the result of the Council of Pisa (see above), ordered an investigation into Wycliffe’s teachings in Bohemia, and ordered preaching only done in cathedrals, parish churches, monasteries
 - a. the Chapel of Bethlehem did not qualify, but Huss continued to preach there anyway
 - b. and, his preaching became more radical: an unworthy pope is not to be obeyed, and the Bible is the final authority by which the pope is to rule and the people are to be judged
 - c. and, he realized (in the face of his own act) that the selling of indulgences was evil; that only God could grant forgiveness; using indulgences as a “fund-raiser” for a crusade was utterly wrong
 - d. so, John XXII excommunicated him – he left Prague and began writing on the need for reformation
5. the Council of Constance invited him to help reform the church, however John XXIII used the invitation as a *pretext* to try him *separately* as a heretic
 - a. rumor has it that when John fled, he gave the keys to Huss’ cell to Sigismund, but he kept him in
 - b. Huss was brought in chains before the council, and ordered to recant his heresies; he declared:
“I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In his hands I place my cause, since he will judge each, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but on truth and justice.”
6. on July 6, 1415, Huss was taken to the cathedral, dressed in and then stripped of his priestly garments, his head was shaved, and he was adorned with a paper “crown”
 - a. they walked him past a pyre where his books were being burned, and then burned him at the stake
 - b. his executioners threw his ashes into the lake, so that nothing would remain of him
7. the death of Huss inspired a great rebellion in Bohemia against the pope and the council
 - a. the Hussites (in various forms) developed the *Four Articles*, the basis of their resistance
 - b. i.e. the Word of God was to be preached freely, communion was to be given in “both kinds,” the clergy should be deprived of all wealth, public sin (like simony) was to be properly punished