

## Lesson 10: The Morning Stars of the Reformation

Source: Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 1:342-53.

**Introduction** – *In debates over Catholicism, inevitably the argument comes down to the question of authority.*  
Near the close of the Middle Ages, two prominent voices gave thoughtful critique to Rome and its claims.

### Background: The Conciliar Movement

Babylonian Captivity – the papacy in Avignon, France

Great Schism – rival pope in Rome

Council of Pisa (1409) – cardinals from both sides dismissed both popes and elected Alexander V

*Now there were three popes!*

Alexander dies in less than a year, and John XXIII did not fit the cardinals' desires for reform.

Council of Constance (1414) – elected Martin V and declared that councils should meet regularly—*did they?*

Council of Pavia (1423) – moved to Siena due to a plague, poorly attended, pope (gladly) adjourned it

Council of Basel (1430) – reluctant Martin V died, but Eugene IV succeeded and declared it dissolved

Emperor intervened, pope rescinded – looks like councils are over pope and might never end!

Then Constantinople threatened and East willing to join the West—pope moved the council!

With the council split (and electing a new pope!), its power dissipated and the papacy won.

### John Wycliffe (d. 1384) – an Oxford don (England)

The Question of Authority – *What is the nature and limits of legitimate authority?*

Wycliffe: Legitimate authority comes from God and is characterized by Christ—not to be served, but to serve.

Lordship – any lordship used to profit the ruler rather than the governed is a usurpation

Dominion – any dominion seeking to expand its power beyond the limits of authority is a usurpation

Applied to the church, true authority could not tax for its own benefit or go beyond spiritual matters.

The English crown liked this message in France (diplomat and polemicist), but not against itself!

*Do you recognize the English emphases on liberty?*

Wycliffe: The church is not the pope and its hierarchy, but the invisible body of the predestined (Augustine).

*Do you remember how Augustine's view of the church faced his view of salvation in the Reformation?*

If the Bible belongs to the church and only the church can interpret it, then it should be given to the people.

Wycliffe's followers translated the Bible from Latin into English (cf. Tyndale, Wycliffe Translators).

Wycliffe: Transubstantiation does not represent the incarnation, which preserves *both* divinity and humanity.

Thought to be a heretic and arrested for a time, he retired to his parish and died of a stroke in peace:

Council of Constance (1414) – condemned, his remains were burned and thrown into the river Swift

Lollards (“mumblers”) – a movement with some nobility (even a conspiracy)

### John Huss (1369-1415) – Czech leader behind the Unity of Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) in central Europe (Prague)

Born John Husinec (“Goosetown”)—in his 20s, he shortened it to Huss (lit. “Goose,” lots of puns! cf. Luther).

He questioned the *sine qua non* of Roman Catholicism: the papacy.

“Therefore, the pope is not the head, nor are the cardinals the whole body of the holy, catholic and universal church. Only Christ is the head, and his predestined are the body, and each is a member of that body.”
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*This sounds like Wycliffe!*

As head of the University of Prague, Huss defended academic freedom, read Wycliffe, and loved the Bible.

Alexander V, bribed by the Bohemian church, forbid Huss to preach at Bethlehem Chapel (seats 3000).

John XXIII has an indulgence to fund against a rival—Huss railed!—interdict at Prague, excommunicated.

Outside Prague, Huss wrote lots—then invited by emperor to the Council of Constance on safe conduct:

Arrested, asked to recant, dressed in robes and stripped, shaved and crowned in decoration of demons.

Burned while reciting psalms—no need to keep word with a heretic?!—and ashes thrown in a lake.

### Legacy of the Morning Stars

The Authority of the Bible – ultimately an expression of divine authority over human authority

The Definition of the Church – the people under Christ vs. the usurpers in Rome

*Reformation Principles – sola scriptura vs. sola ecclesia*

Ongoing Movements – English Lollards and the Czech Unity of Brethren (1457) with their *Four Articles*

A gathered church unique from the Anabaptists and having its legacy in the exiled Moravian Brethren.