

**Review: John Broome, *The Reformers: Wycliffe and Huss*,
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Morning Stars of the Reformation

The author covers the lives of two important figures which preceded Martin Luther by a hundred years. This counters the standard lie from Rome he was the first 'Protestant'.

Roman Catholics John Wycliffe and Jan Huss carried a flickering torch of Christian faith that had been part of Europe, and separate to Rome, since the Apostles. Alive in periods of great ignorance and corruption, they sought out the Bible as the final authority, rejecting hollow Roman tradition they had been taught.

A link between the two was Queen Anne of Bohemia, a believer in Wycliffe's teachings who was married to King Richard II of England. After her death in England, 1394, Wycliffe's writings were brought to Prague.

Both Wycliffe and Huss' efforts were aided by God through divisions in the 'infallible' Papacy. In Wycliffe's time there were two living Popes and in Huss' three!

Wycliffe died in old age of a stroke but had his bones dug up, burnt and dumped in the river. Huss was condemned by a Romish council and died a martyr at the stake (after a broken oath of safe passage from the Emperor). In both cases the persecutor was Rome; furious her priests were exposing her false doctrines to the common people, like indulgences and transubstantiation. What else could she do but kill?

Although a short book a little more space is given to Wycliffe. The author did a good job including relevant details.

John Wycliffe

Wycliffe in England was first. Born 1324 in Yorkshire he went to Oxford age sixteen, learning under a Professor Thomas Bradwardine. He lived through a great plague that plagued the land in 1348, with about 100,000 dead in London alone.

In 1361 he became Master of Baliol College. In 1366 he attended a Parliamentary meeting on whether the Papal tribute and feudal claims to England were valid.

Since 1330, over a hundred years after the Baron's forced King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215, England had ceased paying 1,000 marks p.a. tribute to the Pope. Now he was demanding payment plus arrears. Parliament rejected the Pope as King of Kings, also John who had violated his coronation oath in giving away the country.

Wycliffe also turned his attention to the largesse of friars and abbots. As a reaction to abuses, Rome set up the Franciscans in 1215 and Dominicans in 1218, however, by Wycliffe's day they had become corrupted. Wycliffe published 'Objections to Friars', charging them with fifty heresies and said indulgences of the Pope were a 'manifest blasphemy'.

Wycliffe then moved to translating scripture, from Latin into English with the assistance of Nicholas of Hereford. It was completed in 1382, after which Nicholas was summoned to Rome, excommunicated and thrown into prison. A manuscript on the Bodleian at Oxford has a note of his authorship of the Old Testament and an incomplete Apocrypha. The whole work was completed in 1388, after Wycliffe's death, by curate John Purvey.

Wycliffe was able to carry out these works due to conflict within the papacy. In 1378 it was divided between two Popes after Italians in Rome rioted in lobbying for an Italian Cardinal to be elected. A French Pope was elected in southern Italy.

In 1408 an English Church Council banned Wycliffe's version, also any further translation attempts, under pain of excommunication.

In September 1381 Wycliffe attacked transubstantiation with his 'Twelve Propositions'; the first being that the consecrated host upon the altar is neither Christ nor any part of Him, but an efficacious sign.

The Peasant's Revolt led by Wat Tyler broke out at this time, and the Archbishop of Canterbury was beheaded at the Tower of London. The new Archbishop convened a Synod to try Wycliffe. During the trial a great earthquake struck London and was interpreted by both sides as a favourable sign. After three days Council condemned him an heretic and he was abandoned by supporters, most notably John of Gaunt.

An appeal before Parliament was made November 1382 where he said, "you are the heretics". He was also summoned to Rome but was too ill to travel, and died Sunday, December 31st, 1384 at Lutterworth. Forty-four years later the Pope ordered his body exhumed, bones burnt and ashes dumped into the river Avon.

Jan Huss

Huss was born 1370 in Bohemia (modern day Czechoslovakia) and was murdered 1415 in Switzerland. Wycliffe's writings were conveyed from England by Jerome of Prague in 1400, also in 1394 with Queen Anne of Bohemia's death in England. Jerome is said to have been a great debater and much more impulsive than Huss.

Bohemia was one haven for the persecuted Waldensians of Lyon (-c1170) who affirmed the scriptures as infallible and sought a life of poverty and preaching. Before Huss in Prague was John Milic (d. 1374), also Conrad Stickna, and Matthew of Janow (d. 1394).

He obtained a B.A. from the university there in 1393, B. Th. in 1394 and M.A. in 1396. He then began lecturing and also became a priest. In 1402 he began preaching the truth. The New Testament was translated into Czech and preaching was also in that language. The only difference Huss had with Rome was the supremacy of Scripture.

In 1409 he was made rector of Prague and soon the city was placed under interdict by the Pope. Many of Wycliffe's works were burnt in Prague by Rome.

Huss was helped with the division in the Papacy; John XXIII in Italy, Gregory XII in France and Benedict XIII in Spain! He taught in 'On the Church' that the Church was not the visible organisation, but the assembly of the elect.

In 'The Six Errors' he listed: transubstantiation; confession of belief in the Pope and the saints; priests forgiving sin; implicit obedience; excommunication standards; and simony. Foreshadowing Luther, the list was put on the door of Bethel Chapel in Prague, also circulated in tract form.

The two Papal swords were rejected as a consequence of the Papal wars over the office. Venerating relics, abstinence, bowing to images worshipping the dead and friars were attacked.

In 1413 the divided papacy was to be settled by order of Emperor Sigismund. On 1/11/1414 the Council of Constance was convened (by John XXIII, who had murdered his predecessor Alexander V). Despite being granted safe passage, Huss was arrested after 26 days. The Council justified its

betrayal with a decree 'no faith should be kept with heretics to the prejudice of the Church'.

Trial began on 5/6/1415 and Huss was condemned for believing: the Bible was supreme; Christ was the Rock, not Peter; the Church was the Assembly; no visible head was needed. On 6/7/1415 he was condemned, defrocked, chained then burnt at the stake:

“A hundred years hence there will arise a swan whose singing
you shall not be able to silence.”

After Huss' death came the Hussite wars and the hero Jan Ziska.