

{ Lecture 19 }
FORERUNNERS TO THE REFORMATION

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Long before Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the Wittenberg Door, there were those who recognized the corruption within the Roman Catholic Church and the need for major reform. Generally speaking, these men attempted to stay within the Catholic system rather than attempting to leave the church (as the Protestant Reformers later would do).

The Waldensians (1184–1500s)

- Waldo (or **Peter Waldo**) lived from around 1140 to 1218. He was a merchant from Lyon. But after being influenced by the story of the fourth-century Alexius (a Christian who sold all of his belongings in devotion to Christ), Waldo sold his belongings and began a life of radical service to Christ.
- By 1170, Waldo had surrounded himself with a group of followers known as the *Poor Men of Lyon*, though they would later become known as Waldensians.
- The movement was denied official sanction by the Roman Catholic Church (and condemned at the Third Lateran Council in 1179). Waldo was excommunicated by Pope Lucius III in 1184, and the movement was again condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.
- Waldensians were, therefore, persecuted by the Roman Catholics as heretics. However, the movement survived (even down to the present) though the Waldensians were often forced into hiding in the Alps.
- The Waldensian movement was characterized by (1) voluntary poverty (though Waldo taught that salvation was not restricted to those who gave up their wealth), (2) lay preaching, and (3) the authority of the Bible (translated in the language of the people) over any other authority. They emphasized the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and placed great importance on Bible memorization.
- The Waldensians would eventually join the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation. In many ways, their movement was a precursor to the Reformation.



Arnold of Brescia (1100–1155)

- Studied in France under Pierre Abelard
- Taught reform and was ordered to silence by Pope Innocent III
- His written works were burned as heresy
- Espoused radical ideas about apostolic poverty
- Toward the end of his life, became not only a religious reformer but a political reformer as well
- He was hanged and then his body burned in Rome in 1155
- He is considered a rebel by Roman Catholics and an early hero in the Reformation effort by Protestants

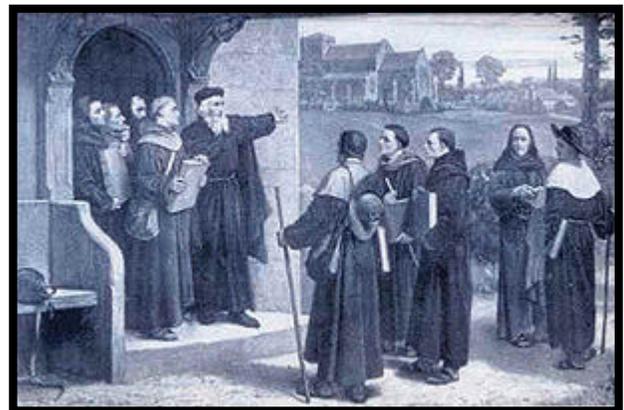
John Wycliffe (1324–1384)

- Known as “the Morning Star of the Reformation”

Christopher Catherwood: Since I have argued that the Reformation was a process, we can now start to look at some of its great precursors, men like John Wycliffe (or Wycliff), who lived in England from 1324–1384 and was for a brief while Vice-Master of Balliol College, Oxford.

Wycliffe never started a new church. But like many of his contemporaries, he realized that the medieval church was going seriously astray. In his case he saw the decadence and corruption of much of the clergy, some of whom were more politicians or major landowners than priests and had mistresses and illegitimate children.

In 1377 Wycliffe got into trouble with the church authorities. Here he was fortunate: he had a political protector in John of Gaunt, a younger son of King Edward III (and the ancestor of today’s British Royal Family). This was crucial since otherwise Wycliffe would have been executed, as Jan Hus would later be. John of Gaunt was no saint, but he did admire Wycliffe, and, as earlier in history, God used an unrighteous man to protect a godly one. (*A Crash Course in History*, 90–91)



- There are a number of different spellings of his last name
- Followers known as Lollards (Oxford scholars who embraced his views and supported him)
- Educated at Oxford University and received his doctorate from there in 1372
- Early advocate for the translation of the Bible into the native languages of laity
- Translated Bible (from Latin Vulgate) into English in 1382
- Also opposed the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation
- Died of a stroke in 1384
- Declared a heretic by the Council of Constance in 1415
- His body was exhumed and burned in 1428
- Taught several important Reformation principles:
 - Affirmed *Sola Scriptura*
 - Opposed the Papacy – Christ is the only Head of the Church
 - Taught that clergy can marry
 - Denied baptismal regeneration
 - Opposed transubstantiation and the mass
 - Opposed crusades, indulgences, and religious orders

B. K. Kuiper: In 1376, he began to criticize the clergy. He said that wealth and political power had so corrupted the Church that a radical reform was necessary. The Church, he said, should return to the poverty and simplicity of apostolic times. The pope he called the antichrist. He declared that the Bible rather than the Church should be the only rule of faith. But the Bible in general use in the Catholic Church was written in Latin and could not be read by the people. . . . In order that Christians in England might be able to read the Bible to themselves, Wycliffe translated it into the

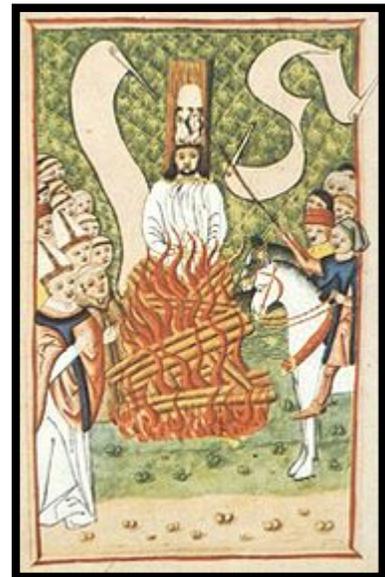
English language. (*The Church in History* [Grand Rapids: Christian Schools International, 1964], 143–144)

- Many in Bohemia also embraced Wycliffe’s views (including Jan Hus)

Samuel Parkes Cadman: An Englishman who heard the examination of Hus before the Council of Constance, which condemned and burned him, declared that he thought standing before him “the very Wycliffe.” It required little stretch of imagination to see, looming in the background, the majestic shade of that great Englishman “for whose doctrine Hus went to the stake.” Their memories, with Luther’s, are enshrined in three medallions at the University of Prague, which depict the evolution of Protestantism for a century and a half, from the Anglican Scholastic through the Bohemian martyr to the German Titan. The first shows Wycliffe gleaming sparks from a flint; the second, Hus kindling the coals with the sparks; the third, Luther bearing a blazing torch he has lit at their fires. (*The Three Religious Leaders of Oxford and Their Movements* [Macmillan, 1916], 169)

John Hus (1373–1415)

- Alternate spellings — “Jan Hus” or “John Huss”
- Bohemian reformer; educated at the University of Prague
- Highly respected preacher
- Adopted many of Wycliffe’s views
- Preached against corruption in the Roman Catholic Church and faced tremendous persecution as a result



B. K. Kuiper: When Huss became acquainted with the writings of Wycliffe, he began to preach against the corruption of the clergy. Long before the birth of Huss, strong opposition to the Roman Church had developed in Bohemia. The Waldensians were especially numerous in that country. So the preaching of Huss met with a hearty response among the common people and the nobility. Huss won almost the whole of Bohemia to his views.

Huss taught many ideas which later became the main teachings of the Reformers. He taught that the holy Catholic Church consists of the total number of the predestinated. He distinguished between being *in* the Church and being *of* the Church. He taught that one could be in the Church and yet not be a real

member of it. Of the universal Church Christ alone is head. Popes and cardinals are not necessary to the government of the Church. (pp. 144–145)

- Invited to Council of Constance in 1414 and promised safe passage
- While there he was arrested, tried for heresy, and ultimately burned at the stake
- Huss reportedly prophesied shortly before his death that, “in a hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed.” Other renditions report that he said, “Today you cook a goose [derived from his name, Huss], but in 100 years a swan will rise whom you will not be able to silence.” Luther would nail his *95 Theses* to the church door almost exactly a century later.
- Followers of Huss fall into two categories:
 - Hussites – reactionaries in Moravia and Bohemia who stood courageously against the papacy after Huss’s death (even engaging in armed conflict)
 - Bohemian Brethren – also known as Moravians – followed the principles of Huss; at the outset of the Lutheran Reformation, it is estimated that there were 200,000 Moravians in some 400 parishes
- Here is one of the last letters Huss wrote while in prison:

Letter 50 (to his friends): I have resolved, dear and faithful friends in our Lord, to make known to you in what manner the Council of Constance, swelled with so much pride and avarice, has condemned as heretical my books, written in the Bohemian tongue, without ever having seen or read them, and which it could not have understood, even when it had listened to the reading of them. For this Council is filled with Italians, French, Germans, Spaniards, and persons from all countries, and of every different language. They could not be understood but by Bishop John de Litomissel, by several Bohemians, my enemies, and by a few priests of Prague, who have first to calumniate the truth of God, and afterwards our Bohemia, which I hope is a country of a perfect faith, remarkable for its attachment to the Word of God, as well as for its good morals. And if you had been at Constance you would have witnessed the detestable abomination of this Council, which calls itself infallible and very holy; an abomination of which, many of the country of the Grisons have said, the city of Constance could not wash herself of in thirty years, and almost everybody, supporting with great difficulty the great corruption, which is to be seen in it, is irritated against the Council. . . . Having said, that, if I had erred, I should be glad to be instructed of my errors: " Since you desire to be instructed," replied the Grand Cardinal, " you must first of all abjure your doctrine, conformable to the sentence of the fifty doctors and interpreters of the Holy Scriptures." An excellent advice! Therefore, St Catherine should renounce the Word of God and faith in Jesus, because fifty

doctors opposed her! But this sublime virgin did not yield; she remained faithful unto death; she thus gained over her judges to Christ; but I cannot in the same manner persuade mine ; it is wherefore I have thought fit to write to you, in order you might be informed they have not vanquished me neither by the Scriptures nor by reason, but tried me by terror and by lies to extort an abjuration from me. The God of mercy, whose justice I have glorified, was with me. He is still with me now, and I am confident he will remain with me unto the end.

Written the fourth day after the Festival of John the Baptist, in prison, in chains, and in the expectation of death; and yet I dare not say, on account of the hidden judgment of God, that this letter may be my last; for, even now, the Almighty God may effect my deliverance. (*Letters of John Huss Written During His Exile and Imprisonment*, trans. by Campbell Mackenzie [Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co., 1846], 181–83)

Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498)

- Italian reformer; Dominican monk
- Follower of Thomas Aquinas; excellent preacher, settled in Florence
- Denounced worldly and corrupt papacy and was opposed by Pope Alexander VI
- Made major moral reforms in the city of Florence
- In 1498, he was convicted of heresy and hanged and burned

Williston Walker: He began in 1490 to attract huge crowds through his powerful sermons calling for repentance and conversion, and warning, in vague apocalyptic terms, of impending tribulations. The French invasion of 1494, which seemed to confirm the ascetic friar's status as a divinely inspired prophet, led to a popular revolution against the [ruling] Medici, and Savonarola became the de facto ruler of Florence, which he sought to turn into a penitential city. A semimonastic life was adopted by many of its inhabitants. The carnival seasons of 1496 and 1497 witnessed the "burning of vanities": cards, dice, jewelry, cosmetics, wigs, and lewd books and pictures were all consigned to the flames. . . . But he aroused formidable enemies. The adherents of the deposed Medici hated him, and Pope Alexander VI, whose evil character and misrule Savonarola denounced, was an implacable foe, owing not least to the friar's pro-French policy. Papal agents excommunicated him in 1497 and demanded his punishment. Friends sustained him for a while, but the fickle populace turned against him. In April 1498, he was arrested and cruelly tortured, and on May 23 he was hanged and his body burned by the city government. (*A History of the Christian Church*, Fourth Edition [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985], 398–99).

FIRST CENTURY (30–100)

1. **30** – The Church begins on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2
2. **49** – The Jerusalem Council settles the Judaizer debate, emphasizing the fact that Gentile Christians are not obligated to keep the Mosaic Law.
3. **64** – fire ravages Rome. Emperor Nero blames Christians and unleashes persecution.
4. **70** – Titus destroys Jerusalem and its temple. Separation deepens between Christianity and Judaism.
5. **~95** – Clement of Rome writes his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, urging them to avoid schism and underscoring justification by faith.
6. **~100** – The Apostle John, the last living Apostle, dies in Ephesus after having been exiled to Patmos.

SECOND CENTURY (101–200)

7. **~116** – Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writes seven letters to various churches before being killed as a martyr in the Coliseum in Rome.
8. **~130** – Papias dies; he was a disciple of the Apostle John and a Premillennialist. His writings, now lost, are partially recorded by Irenaeus and Eusebius of Caesarea.
9. **~130** – *The Epistle of Barnabas* written by “Barnabas” (not the biblical Barnabas) in Alexandria, Egypt. It is characterized by an allegorical hermeneutic. Other important second-century writings include *The Didache* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*.
10. **~150** – Justin Martyr writes his *First Apology*, advancing Christian efforts to address competing philosophies.
11. **~156** – Polycarp, an eighty-six-year-old bishop, inspires Christians to stand firm under opposition.
12. **~172** – Tatian dies. His most famous work, the *Diatessaron*, is the earliest known harmony of the four New Testament Gospels.
13. **177** – Irenaeus becomes bishop of Lyons and combats developing heresies within the Church.
14. **~196** – Colorful and cantankerous Tertullian begins writings that earn him the reputation of being the "Father of Latin Theology."

THIRD CENTURY (201–300)

15. ~205 – The gifted North African Origen begins writing. He headed a noted catechetical school in Alexandria. [A school he inherited from Clement of Alexandria.]
16. 251 – Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, publishes his influential work *Unity of the Church*. He was martyred in 258.
17. 270 – Antony gives away his possessions and begins life as a hermit, a key event in the development of Christian monasticism. [He was one of the first ascetics to go out into the wilderness (in Egypt). His biography, written by Athanasius, helped to make monasticism popular among Christians, especially in the West.]

FOURTH CENTURY (301–400)

18. 303 – The tenth wave of anti-Christian persecution begins under Diocletian. Many Christians gave their lives as martyrs.
19. 312 – Constantine is converted after seeing a vision of the cross. He becomes a defender and advocate of the oppressed Christians.
20. 325 – The Council of Nicea addresses debates perplexing the Church and defines the doctrine of who Jesus really was. [--namely, that He is of the same substance as the Father]
21. 367 – Athanasius' *Easter Letter* recognizes the New Testament Canon, listing the same books we have now. [Athanasius defended the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity throughout his entire lifetime, enduring multiple exiles for the stand he took.]
22. 379 – Basil dies. He, along with Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, defended Nicene orthodoxy in Asia Minor at a time when such was unpopular. Together, these three are known as the Cappadocian Fathers.
23. 380 – Emperor Theodosius I (“the Great”) declares Nicene Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. The next year he would convene the first Council of Constantinople, which dealt a final blow to Arianism.
24. 385 – In Milan, Bishop Ambrose defies the Empress, helping establish the precedent of Church confrontation of the state when necessary to protect Christian teaching and oppose the state. [Ambrose was a major influence on Augustine through his preaching.]
25. 387 – Augustine of Hippo is converted. His writings became bedrock for the Middle Ages. The *Confessions* and *City of God* are still read by many.
26. 398 – John Chrysostom, the "golden tongued" preacher is made bishop of Constantinople and leads from there amidst continuing controversies.

FIFTH CENTURY (401–500)

27. **405** – Jerome completes the Latin "Vulgate" version of the Bible that becomes the standard for the next one thousand years.
28. **432** – Patrick goes as a missionary to Ireland—taken there as a teenager as a slave. He returns and leads multitudes of Irish people to the Christian faith.
29. **440** – Leo I (“the Great”) becomes bishop of Rome. Leo did much to consolidate Rome’s political and theological authority. His *Tome* was instrumental in resolving the Christological debate at Chalcedon.
30. **451** – The Council of Chalcedon confirms orthodox teaching that Jesus was truly God and truly man and existed in one person. [Nestorianism and Eutychianism are both denounced as heresies.]
31. **476** – This is the date that most historians ascribe to the fall of Rome (the western half of the Roman Empire), due to the invasion of barbarian tribes.

SIXTH CENTURY (501–600)

32. **529** – Benedict of Nursia establishes his monastic order. His “rule” becomes the most influential for centuries of monasticism in the West.
33. **553** – Emperor Justinian I (“the Great”) convenes the Second Council of Constantinople in order to resolve the monophysite/dyophysite controversy.
34. **563** – Columba goes as a missionary to Scotland. He establishes the legendary monastic mission center at Iona. [Columba had been trained in Ireland; he left there to become a missionary to the “Picts”—the natives of Scotland.]
35. **590** – Gregory becomes Pope Gregory I, known as "the Great." His leadership significantly advances the development of the papacy and has enormous influence on Europe.
36. **597** – Augustine of Canterbury brings Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons of England.

SEVENTH CENTURY (601–700)

37. **632** – Muhammad dies in Arabia after founding a new, heretical religion: Islam.

664 – Synod of Whitby determines that the English church will come under the authority of Rome.

EIGHTH CENTURY (701–800)

38. **716** – Boniface, the "Apostle of Germany," sets out as a missionary to bring the gospel to pagan lands. [He was influential in extending Christianity throughout the Frankish kingdom to other Germanic tribes.]
39. **731** – The "Venerable" Bede completes his careful and influential *Ecclesiastical History* of the English Nation. [For his work, he became known as "The Father of English History." Much of what we know about Augustine of Canterbury and other missionaries comes from Bede.]
40. **732** – At the Battle of Tours, Charles Martel turns back the Muslim invasion of Europe.
41. **781** – A stone stele dating back to 781 indicates the presence of a strong Christian contingency in China during the Tang dynasty.
42. **787** – Irene, the widow of Emperor Leo IV, organized the Second Council of Nicea which authorized the use of religious icons in both the Western and Eastern Church.
43. **800** – Charlemagne crowned emperor by the pope [Leo III] on Christmas. He advances the church, education, and culture.

NINTH CENTURY (801–900)

863 – Cyril and Methodius, Greek brothers, evangelize the Serbs. Cyril develops the Cyrillic alphabet which remains the basis for the Slavonic used in the liturgy of the Russian church.

TENTH CENTURY (901–1000)

909 – A monastery is established at Cluny and becomes a center for reform. By the mid-12th century, there were over 1,000 Cluniac houses.

988 – Conversion of Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, who, after examining several religions, chooses Orthodoxy to unify and guide the Russian people.

ELEVENTH CENTURY (1001–1100)

44. **1054** – The East-West Schism. Brewing for centuries, rupture finally comes to a head with the fissure that has lasted to this day.
45. **1093** – Anselm becomes Archbishop of Canterbury. A devoted monk and outstanding theologian, his *Cur Deus Homo? (Why Did God Become Man?)*, explored the atonement. [He articulated the "satisfaction theory" of the atonement, which is somewhat similar to the "penal substitution" theology of the Reformers.]

46. **1095** – Pope Urban II launches the First Crusade. The crowd wildly shouts "God wills it!" There would be several crusades over the next centuries with many tragic results.

TWELFTH CENTURY (1101–1200)

47. **1115** – Bernard founds the monastery at Clairvaux. He and the monastery become a major center of spiritual and political influence. [Bernard was a major supporter of the Second Crusade and of the Knights Templar.]
48. ~**1150** – Universities of Paris and Oxford are founded and become incubators for renaissance and reformation and precursors for modern educational patterns.
49. **1173** – Peter Waldo founds the Waldensians, a reform movement emphasizing poverty, preaching and the Bible. He and his followers are eventually condemned as heretics and the Waldensians suffer great persecution for centuries.

THIRTEENTH CENTURY (1201–1300)

50. **1206** – Francis of Assisi renounces wealth and goes on to lead a band of poor friars preaching the simple life.
51. **1215** – The Fourth Lateran Council deals with heresy, reaffirms Roman Catholic doctrines and strengthens the authority of the popes. [According to Norm Geisler, it was at this Council that Roman Catholic doctrine became officially apostate. Of course, the seeds of apostasy had been planted centuries before.]
52. **1273** – Thomas Aquinas completes work on *Summa Theologica*, the theological masterpiece of the Middle Ages.

FOURTEENTH CENTURY (1301–1400)

53. **1321** – Dante completes *The Divine Comedy*, the greatest work of Christian literature to emerge from the Middle Ages. [This epic poem gives a first-hand account of Dante's imaginative journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven.]
54. **1378** – Catherine of Siena goes to Rome to help heal the "Great Papal Schism" which had resulted in multiple popes. Partly through her influence, the papacy moves back to Rome from Avignon. [The "Babylonian Captivity" ended at this time when Gregory XI moved the papacy permanently back to Rome.]
55. ~**1380** – John Wycliffe is exiled from Oxford but oversees a translation of the Bible into English. He is later hailed as the "Morning star of the Reformation."

FIFTEENTH CENTURY (1401–1500)

56. **1415** – John Hus, who teaches Wycliffe's ideas in Bohemia, is condemned and burned at the stake by the Council of Constance. [The Council of Constance also put an end to the “Papal Schism” that had begun in 1378.]
57. **1453** – The fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks marks the end of the Middle Ages.
58. **1456** – Johann Gutenberg produces the first printed Bible, and his press becomes a means for dissemination new ideas, catalyzing changes in politics and theology.
59. **1478** – The Spanish Inquisition is established under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to oppose "heresy."
60. **1498** – Savonarola, the fiery Dominican reformer of Florence, in Italy, is executed.