

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr., Rector

“**THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY**”

“*The Roots of Reformation*”

E. The Papacy’s Folly – the Beginning of the End

A Dark Time – Socially, Economically, and Spiritually

During the last two hundred years of the Middle Ages (1300–1500) feudalism declined. Cash began replacing land as a principal form of equity. Credit systems, trade and manufacturing created a growing class of merchants and bankers who viewed feudal lords as an impediment to business. This led to the strengthening of monarchies as it provided a more unifying and centralized system of order rather than the competing land barons of the nobility class. In addition, more people were viewing themselves as members of a nation – English, French, Spanish, etc.

It would be during these years that the bubonic plague broke out killing up to one-third of Europe’s population (1347-50). Caused by fleas that infested black rats, the disease was spread from the Black Sea to Italy to northern Europe. With the corruption of the papacy (see below) and the endless wars many believed the plague to be God’s judgment! In addition, this period has also been called by historians the “little ice age” as below normal temperatures caused poor harvests and led to increased famine.

Tensions between England and France would eventually lead to the **(the Hundred Year’s War – 1337-1475)** in which England and France fought over control of France and Scotland. However, this war eventually affected many other parts of Europe as different kingdoms took sides. Before this endless war even began in full, the King Edward I of England and Philip IV were in conflict. They both decided to tax the clergy and church lands to support their governments. Of course, this threatened the papacy’s coffers. So, **in 1296 Pope Boniface VIII** issued the papal bull ***Clericos laicos*** which forbade clergy from paying taxes to the secular authorities.

Kings Edward and Philip then threatened to cut off land and money from the pope. Boniface backed down but again this disagreement highlighted the division between secular and religious authority. After a French bishop was imprisoned by Philip for treason, Boniface again tried to reassert his authority by issuing another bull ***Unam Sanctam*** which said that **“every human being is subject to the Roman pontiff.”** He threatened to have Philip excommunicated. Before Boniface was able to issue the bull, Philip then moved to have Boniface deposed. Two of his advisors who were already in Italy where they put together a small armed group and kidnapped the pope. The pope was 86 and after being forcibly removed from his residence, roughed up, and imprisoned, he was expected to resign but he refused. A Roman Cardinal in the area formed another armed band of Roman Catholic laity and rescued him. But the damage had been already done. Pope Boniface died a few days later and then what developed was what has been called the **“Babylonian Captivity”** of the Church in which for nearly 70 years (1309-1376) the papacy was in Avignon, France. Eventually the Babylonian Captivity (French controlled papacy) gave way to what was called the **Great Western Schism** when **there were actually two popes– one in Avignon, France and the other once again in Rome.** During these years, the papacy was fought over by the French, Germans, and Italians. This dire situation lasted another forty years until 1417.

During these scandalous years, university scholars proposed the concept of **Conciliarism** (rule by council). Knowing that the Church had always called on church councils to decide major issues dividing the church, the idea was to develop a universal council that would represent the entire church. This council would have more authority and power than the pope. The proponents of the conciliarism hoped that the church could also be reformed of the practices of simony (selling of church offices for money), absenteeism (not filling clerical vacancies so the money the church spent on clergy would go directly to the Vatican), and nepotism (appointing family members to church offices) – all of which were norms at this time.

The idea of bringing church leaders together as a council was put into action when cardinals of both popes called a general council that sought to have both popes step down and new pope elected in 1409. But both popes refused and there were now three popes!

In 1414 the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Germany assembled a council in Constance, Germany. **There church representatives that were grouped for the first time according to nations – German, Italian, French, English and Spanish.** For the first time voting took place on a national basis – each “nation” getting one vote. New national alignment of power was beginning to take shape. **The council moved one pope to step aside and deposed the other two, electing Martin V as the new pope.**

*****Unsurprisingly, after Martin was elected, he turned on the conciliar movement and called it heretical.** Later councils were unable to assert control over the pope’s power. Sadly, political corruption and immorality by the papacy reached unbelievable heights during Roderigo Borgia’s pontificate. As Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) he was a fornicator who sought to provide and maintain wealth and power for his children!

VIII. The Protestant Reformation

A. The Seeds of Reformation

1. John Wyclif – Englishman and Oxford professor who in the 1370’s questioned the authority of the pope. He believed corrupt religious leaders should be held accountable by state authorities and should be able to seize church property as punishment. The pope condemned Wyclif’s teaching in 1377. Wyclif sought to emphasize the spiritual freedom of that comes from the grace of Christ that makes all men, whether ordained or lay, equal before God. Therefore, one’s character is what is most important, even more so than the mediating priesthood and sacrificial masses of the Church. The Great Papal Schism of 1378 confirmed Wyclif’s concerns. He upheld a “Bible papacy” in which the pope would be a humble and poor shepherd, whose life would be in service of the church and who would bring the faithful flock to Christ, rather than the ostentatious pomp and arrogance of the popes in Avignon and Rome. He condemned the political nature of the papacy and came to believe that the pope was the Antichrist. Wyclif that Christ alone is the head of the Church!

Eventually Wyclif challenged the whole range of the Catholic Church’s beliefs and practices including pardons, indulgences, absolutions, pilgrimages, the worship of images, the adoration of saints, the treasure of merits laid up at the reserve of the pope, and the distinction

between venial and mortal sins. However, **he retained belief in purgatory and extreme unction** (the practice of anointing someone for the forgiveness of sins before they die). He believed confession was useful as long as it was only voluntary, and that preaching is of more value than the administration of any sacrament. Holy Scripture was to be the final standard for all teaching and doctrine not the laws of the Church.

Wyclif's passion for God's Word led him to gather a handful of scholars at Oxford to **translate the Latin Bible into the English language**. He then followed the example of St. Francis and his friars two centuries earlier and sent out "poor priests" to preach the word of God throughout the countryside with a few pages of the English Bible, and Wyclif's sermons and tracts. **Their enemies called them Lollards or "mumblers."** These poor priests became greatly influential throughout England, so much so that one poor chap said that it seems as "if every second man" he met was a Lollard!

In 1380, Wyclif's convictions led him to publish a tract of twelve arguments against the doctrine of transubstantiation. He argued that the elements of bread and wine do not literally turn into Christ's body and blood but that rather Christ is only spiritually present in the elements. One of his chief arguments against it was that if the bread and the wine are no longer bread and wine, it contradicts the miracle of the Incarnation which teaches us that Jesus took on flesh which by virtue of it being created by God is good. Therefore, the bread and wine still remain bread and wine even as they spiritually are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This last belief led to Wyclif being silenced by Oxford in 1382. However, Wyclif had gained enough support throughout England that church authorities left him alone and he died peacefully at his parish at Lutterworth in 1384. However, the righteous fire that Wyclif began did not die out in England but continued and spread to Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic). As a result of the marriage of Anne of Bohemia and King Richard II of England in 1383, students of both nations went back and forth between Oxford and Prague. **One student, John Hus came to find Wyclif's writings intriguing and insightful.**

2. John Hus – came from peasant parents in southern Bohemia. He attended the University of Prague where he received a bachelor's and master's in theology. He then went on to become a professor and eventually was ordained a priest becoming the preacher and rector at Bethlehem. It was during his studies that he came to embrace the Wyclif's views on the Church. **His sermons criticized the abuses of the papacy and called people into personal relationship with Christ.** Since the sermons were in the Bohemian language many were able to understand the gospel in their own language for the first time. Hus became a national hero to many and a threat to authority and order for others. Student riots ensued. Archbishop Zbynck (who had purchased his office – another example of simony) appealed to the pope who called on him to root out the heresy. So, the archbishop excommunicated Hus.

Hus was exiled to southern Bohemia where he wrote his major work, ***On the Church***. Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund called on Hus to defend himself at the Council of Constance, where he ended up being condemned for heresies he had never taught. He would not compromise those issues he firmly believed were supported by God's Word. Consequently, he stayed in a Constance prison for eight months writing powerful letters that reflected his great mind and faith. **He was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.** After rejecting the command to recant and save his life, Hus is said to have said before his death, ***"God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible,***

from their sins, In the truth of the gospel I have written, taught, and preached; today I will gladly die.”

His teachings and death lead to the Bohemian rebellion. In fact, he became a martyr for the cause of Bohemian independence. The Hussites, as they became known called for Four Articles or points of demand from Emperor Sigismund who they believed betrayed Hus” 1) that the Word of God be freely proclaimed throughout the kingdom 2) that communion in both kinds be given 3) clergy live in poverty and 4) gross sin especially simony be punished. In response, Sigismund asked the Pope to call for a crusade which he did. A decade of war followed, with moderate (called *Utraquists* – both) and militant factions (called *Taborites*) fighting to be independent of both the tyranny of the papacy and the German Empire. Under the leadership of John Zizka (who never lost a battle) they were able to beat back four crusades and then after his death to the plague beat back two more before the papacy and Sigismund agreed to a peaceful settlement. They were allowed to rejoin Western Christendom with the allowance of communion in both kinds and some freedom to worship.