

### Church History, Lesson 16

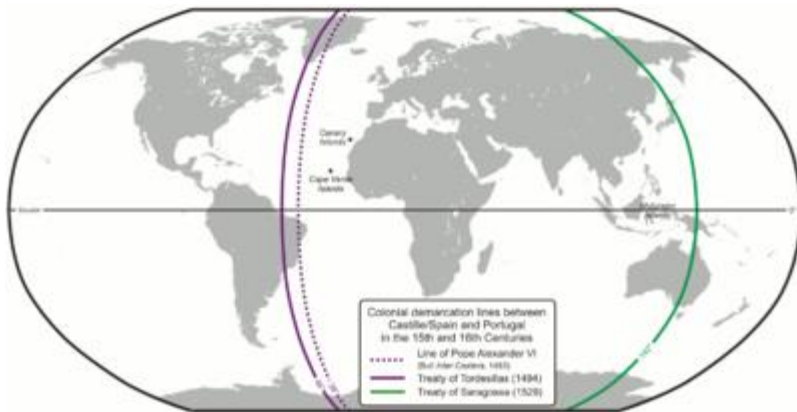
(This lesson is based on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez.)

#### Over the last few lessons...

- We have been tracing the long steady decline of Medieval Roman Catholicism...
- Now, we want to turn our attention to the “proto-reformation” before we turn the page of history to consider the Protestant Reformation itself.
- However, before we do... we need to just say a few of things about the colonial period.

#### Colonial Expansion of the Catholic Church...

- After Columbus returned from discovering the Americas he stopped in Portugal, and the king of Portugal claimed all the lands that Columbus had discovered, even though Columbus had sailed on behalf of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain!
- The Spanish appealed to Pope Alexander VI who was a Spaniard. In 1493 he issued a Papal Bull granting all “non-Christian” lands west of a certain line to Spain. This effectively cut Portugal out of the Americas except for a small portion of Brazil.
- The Portuguese appealed to the pope and began negotiations with Ferdinand and Isabella. Eventually, the lines of demarcation seen on the map below were established by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494.



#### Colonialism and the Catholic Church...

- It would be easy to forget that during the time when the Reformation was taking place in Europe, the Catholic Church was expanding more rapidly than ever before in history because of colonialization. As the Spanish and Portuguese colonized South America, Africa, and Asia they brought Catholic missionaries with them. Most of these missionaries were Franciscan or Dominican monks or Jesuit priests.
- However, these missionaries were often complicit in the primary atrocities of the colonial period:
  - the decimation of and enslavement of indigenous people groups
  - the African slave trade
  - the invasion of native lands and exploitation of natural resources
- Of course, this made indigenous people suspicious of missionaries. There were notable exceptions to the complicity of missionaries with colonizing exploiters. I want to just talk about one as an example:
- **Pedro Claver...**
  - \*Born in 1580, decided to join the Jesuits and become a missionary fairly early in life...
  - \*Once he arrived in Columbia he was very distressed by the suffering of the constantly arriving African slaves and he set out to minister to them. He would give them water and fresh fruit when they first arrived. He organized a system of providing them with ongoing food and clothing.

\*He started a leprosarium and cared for those who succumbed to smallpox.

\*He would preach to them through interpreters. He even convinced his monastery to purchase some slaves to act as interpreters.

\*He never openly criticized the whites because he knew they could crush his ministry. But on the street he would only greet blacks and those few whites who supported his ministry. He also would only hear confession from slaves, the poor, and children.

\*At the end of his life, he was struck with a paralyzing disease and his fellow Jesuits entrusted his care to a slave, who treated him cruelly.

## **Back to Europe... The Quest for Reformation in the Medieval Catholic Church...**

### **The Waldensians –**

- The Waldensians, also known Waldenses, are a Christian group started by Peter Waldo around 1173.
- It is sometimes hard to separate legend from fact regarding Peter Waldo and the beginnings of the Waldensian movement. However, here are the broad themes:
  - Peter Waldo was a citizen of Lyons who renounced his wealth because he saw it as a hindrance to his preaching ministry. Consequently, the Waldensians were first known as “the poor of Lyons”.
  - Waldo was committed to lay preaching, poverty, and strict adherence to the Bible.
  - Sometime between 1175 and 1185 Waldo either commissioned a cleric from Lyons to translate the Bible into the local language or he was involved in the translation himself.
  - Waldo and an associate were called to Rome to defend their beliefs before a council. Their teachings were eventually condemned by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lateran Council. They were excommunicated and condemned as heretics a short time later.
  - After the excommunication, Waldo had to leave Lyons. He was never captured and we do not know the circumstances of his death. His followers took refuge in the high valleys of the Alps.
- Because of their strict adherence to the Bible they held a number of “reformation like” beliefs:
  - preachers should not hold civil office
  - relics were just rotten old bones
  - going on pilgrimages served no purpose but to empty one’s purse
  - people should eat meat on whatever day of the week they wanted to
  - “holy water” was no more holy than rain water
  - praying in a barn was just as effective as praying in a church
  - they were accused of denying the doctrine of transubstantiation
  - they were also accused of referring to the Roman Catholic Church as the harlot of Revelation
  - they rejected the idolatry of Roman Catholic worship
  - they considered the pope to be the antichrist
- The Waldensians were excommunicated in 1184.
- They were condemned as heretics in 1210.
- And in 1211 80 Waldensians were burned at the stake. This began several centuries of persecution that almost wiped out the movement.
- Once the Reformation began, the Waldensians met with reformation leaders and decided to join the reformation movement and began to worship openly. They paid for part of the publication of a newly translated French Bible.
- The persecution of the Waldensians by French rulers continued. In January 1655 the Waldensians were given the choice to either attend mass or move back up into the high valleys of the Alps. They were expected to choose mass because it was winter. But most moved back into the Alps. Then they were forced to quarter soldiers in their homes. On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1655 at 4 am a horrible massacre began. More than 1500 were killed in the most brutal of ways.
- The massacre sparked outrage among protestant rulers all over Europe. Some Waldensian refugees were brought to America. Oliver Cromwell called for a fast in England over their plight; he wrote letters, raised funds, and threatened to send military forces to rescue them.

- Because France remained Catholic after the Reformation the Waldensians experienced persecution well into the 1800's. They didn't receive full religious freedom until after the French Revolution. Prior to that, they had defended themselves valiantly in battle, and used gorilla warfare to defend or retake their villages.

#### **John Wycliffe –**

- Born 1320
- Wycliffe spent most of his career teaching at Oxford. He also served the English crown as a diplomat and polemicist.
- He challenged the power of the church by teaching that there are limits on lordship and dominion. He taught that all true authority comes from God, but this authority must be used in a Christ-like manner. Since Christ came to serve, not to be served, any ruler that did not serve the people but instead enriched himself was usurping authority from God.
- Initially these arguments were used to challenge the power of the papacy, but eventually the logic led Wycliffe to question the authority of the English royalty and nobility.
- Wycliffe also “rediscovered” Augustine of Hippo’s teaching on predestination. This led him to teach that the church is not made up of the pope and the visible hierarchy of the church. Instead, Christ is the only head of the church and His body is “invisible” and made up of all the elect.  
He went on to teach that although it is impossible to know for sure who the elect are, there is evidence in the fruit of one’s life. And based on the fruit demonstrated by the pope and the other leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, it was a reprobate church!
- Wycliffe also believed that the Scriptures belonged to the church. But by this he meant the people of the church and therefore the Bible should be translated into the language of the people. His followers, the Lollards, translated the Bible into English after his death.
- Wycliffe also challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation.
- Wycliffe died of a stroke in 1384. Although he had been a thorn in the side of the Catholic Church, he died before they could condemn him as a heretic. At the Council of Constance (1414 – 1418) he was condemned, his bones dug up and burned, and the ashes thrown into the River Swift.
- The term for his followers was originally a term of scorn; “Lollards” means “mumblers”. They were characterized by the following beliefs:
  - They believed that the Bible belongs to the people and should be returned to them by translating the Bible into the language of the people.
  - Pastors should not hold civil office (this would reduce corruption in the church).
  - Pastors should be allowed to marry.
  - They considered the images used in Catholic worship and pilgrimages made to “holy” sites an abomination.
  - They rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and making prayers for the dead.

#### **John Huss –**

- Born in Bohemia in 1369
- Huss was a popular preaching who became the rector of the University of Prague in 1402. He pushed for reforms in the practice of the church, especially in the lives of the clergy, but he did not intend to challenge the doctrines of established Catholic tradition.
- Huss continued to believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation, however, toward the end of his life, he came to challenge the practice of the laity only receiving the bread at communion. (Receiving both the bread and the cup was called receiving communion “in both kinds”.)
- The archbishop of Prague requested and received a papal decree that banned the works of Wycliffe and required that preaching take place only at cathedrals, parish churches, or monasteries. This effectively banned Huss from

preaching. However, he continued preaching anyway and was summoned to Rome for disobedience in 1410. He refused to go and was excommunicated in 1411.

- This conflict with the hierarchy of the church “radicalized” Huss’ views. He came to the conclusion that the final authority for all Christians, including the pope, is the Bible. If a pope doesn’t obey the Bible, then the people should not obey him.
- By this time, the pope proclaimed a crusade against Naples for reasons based primarily on internal Italian politics. The crusade was to be financed by the sale of indulgences. Huss had bought an indulgence about 20 years prior to this, but by this time had had enough! He came to the conclusion that only God could grant forgiveness and that SELLING what only God can grant was a usurpation of God’s prerogative. He also objected strongly to starting a war among Christians just to suit the ambitions of the pope!
- The pope excommunicated Huss once again, and this time, to avoid drawing Bohemia into a war he left Prague and his pulpit and withdrew to the countryside to continue his work through writing.
- The Council of Constance gathered beginning in 1414. Huss was brought before the council on June 5, 1415. His choices were basically recant or be condemned. The council very much preferred him to recant because that would affirm their authority, but if they had to condemn him to death, many would question their wisdom. Huss refused to recant with these words:  
*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 of truth and justice.”*
- Huss was condemned on July 6, 1415. He was taken to the cathedral, dressed in his priestly robes. These were stripped from him, then a paper hat decorated with demons was placed on his head. On the way to the stake he was taken past a pile of his books being burned. Before he was burned at the stake he prayed “*Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death, I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies.*” He was reciting the Psalms as he died!
- A few days later Huss’ colleague Jerome of Prague was also burned at the stake for supporting Wycliffe’s teachings.
- The Bohemians were furious and 452 noblemen gathered and announced their agreement with Huss that an unworthy pope should not be obeyed. The council, which was still in session, ordered the University of Prague to be dissolved and summoned the rebellious nobles to appear for be it.
- Eventually the pope called for a crusade against the Hussites. This motivated the various reform minded groups to unite around “The Four Articles”:
  - The Word of God should be preached freely throughout the kingdom.
  - Communion should be given to the laity “in both kinds”.
  - Clergy members should be deprived of wealth and should live in poverty.
  - Gross and public sins, especially simony, should be properly punished.
- The Hussites turned out to be very good warriors and they won almost every battle they engaged against the crusaders. Eventually there was a negotiated peace which allowed the Bohemians to rejoin the rest of western Christendom, but also to retain communion in both kinds as well as other concessions to the Four Articles.
- Finally, some of the Hussites refused to accept this negotiated peace. They left the established church and started the “Union of Brethren”. During the Protestant Reformation they built strong ties with the reformers. However, they were also persecuted by the Hapsburg emperors and were dispersed and almost disappeared. One small remnant group of the Union of Brethren will reenter the story of Christianity in the west much later as the Moravians.