

Spring 2013

# The Importance of Patronage during the Premature Reformation: Comparison of John Wyclif and Jan Hus

James E. O'Neil  
joneil10@mail.wou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/his>



Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [Medieval History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

O'Neil, James E. "The Importance of Patronage during the Premature Reformation: Comparison of John Wyclif and Jan Hus." Department of History senior seminar thesis paper, Western Oregon University, 2013.

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Theses, Papers and Projects (History) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@wou.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@wou.edu).

The importance of Patronage during the Premature Reformation:  
Comparison of John Wyclif and Jan Hus

By  
James O'Neil

History 499 Senior Seminar

June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013

Primary Reader: Dr. Alaric Trousdale

Secondary Reader: Dr. Patricia Goldsworthy-Bishop

John Wyclif and Jan Hus were two theologians that took a vested interest in the way that the Christian religion was practiced. They interpreted the Christian religion directly in relation to the scripture, and they believed that good Christians should emulate Christ in every aspect of their life. Although their theology caused them to be eventually labeled as heretics Wyclif and Hus saw themselves as reformers. A primary reason behind the Catholic Church labeling of Wyclif and Hus as heretical had to do with their willingness to question the status quo. In “Wycliff and Hus: a Doctrinal Comparison,” by Gordon Leff, he points out that Wyclif and Hus “diverged from orthodoxy by converting it into an outright challenge to the Church.”<sup>1</sup> Both Wyclif and Hus challenged the legitimacy of the papal office and other coveted positions within the church. Another point of view that Wyclif and Hus shared that had them labeled as heretics involved predestination. In his book, *John Wycliffe and His English Precursors*, Gotthard Victor Lechler refers to Wyclif’s definition of predestination as “there is included or implied in the idea of ‘the whole body of the elect’ an unexpressed antithesis which not only runs through all the present, but also reaches into the eternal future both of the blessed and the condemned.”<sup>2</sup> Hus had a very similar view of predestination, and much like Wyclif, Hus saw the theology of predestination as a way to discredit any ecclesiastical authority.

Wyclif is often considered to be the more radical of the two men; however, Hus was a student of Wyclif’s theology which allowed for them to share several similarities in regards to their processes of reform. One aspect that both reformers shared was their belief that the Church was becoming heretical and needed reform; they witnessed ecclesiastical abuses from the very top of the Church’s hierarchy to the very bottom. That said, the Church at the time of the late fourteenth century was in crisis and was suffering from a papal schism. Therefore, the church

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Leff, *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Gotthard Victor Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*, (London: Religious Tract Society, 1904), 317.

had become very defensive toward any critiques against it. The church also did nearly all it could to stifle the reformation of Wyclif and Hus. Wyclif and Hus were very gifted theologians who attempted to turn their religious interpretations into reforms for the overall betterment of the church and society; however Wyclif's patronage within England allowed for him to continue producing his reforms without being forced in defending himself in a public forum or dying as a heretic. Hus on the other hand did not have the same level patronage of inside of Bohemia and he was forced to defend his reforms on his own; he was in turn executed and burned as a heretic.

The reformers Wyclif and Hus were very influential in their respective localities. Wyclif was in England, Hus was in Bohemia. However, the abuses that both men reported were very much universal. Wyclif and Hus both witnessed immoral acts that would have been technically heretical; however the clergy seemed to be getting away with their immoral actions. For instance, both men saw the abuse of simony in England and Bohemia respectively. In his book, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, Matthew Spinka states:

Hus denounce[s] the priestly custom of demanding a special payment, particularly from the poor, for confession, the administration of sacraments, funerals, and other clerical functions. Hus was said to have asserted that any priest who made such charges was a 'heretic'... for Hus had called the practice of 'simony' and 'heresy of simony,' which it actually was [heresy].<sup>3</sup>

Simony concerned Hus because of his stance on what he considered appropriate behavior of the priest. In his book, *Advocates of Reform: from Wyclif to Erasmus*, Matthew Spinka translated a treatise, *On Simony*, he points out Hus' perspective regarding simony:

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1966), 29.

Since simony is heresy, I wish to explain, for the warning and strengthening of good men and for the improvement of evil men, first of all what heresy is, in order that men may learn whether those whom they call heretics are such, or whether they themselves have fallen into it.<sup>4</sup>

Hus believed simony to be one of the more major acts of heresy and those who participated in the action of heresy should be dealt with as heretics. He provides advice for men, most likely ecclesiastics, who are acting within the realm of heresy and may be unaware of their behavior. In the *Tracts and Treatises of John De Wycliffe*, translated by Robert Vaughan, Wyclif's concern of the simony was regarding the sale of masses: "Ah Lord! How much is our king and our realm helped by the masses and the prayers of simonists and heretics, full of pride, and envy, and who so much hate poor priests for teaching Christ's life and the Gospel."<sup>5</sup> In contrary to the actions of simony and other heresy, Wyclif and Hus both place the foundation of Christianity on the works of Christ and love.

From my reading of Wyclif and Hus' writings the criticisms are apparently based on what they saw around them. Other abuses that both Wyclif and Hus also reported on included corruption, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity among the clergy and greed. Both men shared an opinion in regards to how priest should behave within society; leading by example in terms of living a pure and moralistic life. Wyclif states in his tract, *On the Pastoral Office*, that "the office of a Christian, to which the faithful should diligently attend, ought to be twofold: to purge the Church Militant of false shoots... and to dispose its branches that they may better bear

---

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Spinka, *Advocates for Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 196.

<sup>5</sup> John Wyclif and Robert Vaughan, *Tracts and treatises of John de Wycliffe: with selections and translations from his manuscripts, and Latin work*, (London: Printed for the Society of Blackburn and Pardon, 1845), 33.

fruit.”<sup>6</sup> Wyclif believes that it is the clergy’s responsibility to preach accurate sermons based on scripture, to live a diligent life imitating Christ, and to convert more people to Christianity.

Wyclif and Hus both believed that in order for the clergy to live a life that was Christ like, they should renounce all material possessions and live a life of poverty. Wyclif says “priest and any person of the Church ought not to aspire to the possession of a superfluous amount of temporal goods.”<sup>7</sup> Later on, Hus would preach about this same topic in Bohemia. Wyclif and Hus used their sermons to advocate for the betterment of Christian society. In comparison to what they were witnessing they could tell that the Christian church and society was in need of reform.

Wyclif began his reform movement shortly after becoming a member of the English parliament in 1374. Matthew Spinka points out that Wyclif’s early work “held theories about ‘lordship’ which logically and theologically justified, under certain conditions, the seizure of ecclesiastical goods by the State.”<sup>8</sup> It was this type of thinking by Wyclif that would later be desirable to the duke of Lancaster. That is, with Wyclif’s reform theology in effect would slowly strip the clergy of their land, and eventually the church would begin to lose their influence within England over time. In turn, if the clergy within England began to lose their political clout because of Wyclif’s reform and the eventual seizure of church land by the State, there would be a separation of the church and the State, which would allow for the English crown to come out ahead and gain more political influence in England.

One aspect that allowed John Wyclif to die a natural death rather than being burnt at the stake as a heretic compared to Jan Hus was the patronage around him. Early on in his career, Wyclif made close ties with the English parliament and later the Duke of Lancaster, John of

---

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Spinka, *Advocates for Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

Gaunt. John of Gaunt would later become the regent king of England following the death of Edward III in 1377. Gaunt acted as a personal protector for Wyclif. This allowed for Wyclif to have more liberties that Hus did not. One of the liberties that Wyclif had, in comparison to Hus, was that he did not have to publicly defend his theology, which allowed him to continue writing and preaching. Without the influence of Gaunt behind Wyclif it would have been likely that he would have been imprisoned and punished severely for his writings.

The motivations for the relationship between Gaunt and Wyclif are unclear. However, Joseph Dahmus points out that “since the sources suggest no reasons, the scholars have generally taken the position that the duke ordered Wyclif to come to London because he felt he could use a man of Wyclif’s anticlerical leanings.”<sup>9</sup> Many of Wyclif’s writing at the time were against clerics holding legitimate power within the government. Another interesting aspect in regards to Wyclif’s place within the English parliament can be attributed to an observation by Lechler. Lechler says that, “parliament emphatically assured the king that they brought them [clergy] forward solely from an honest zeal for the honor of the Holy Church; for all the troubles and disasters... allowing the Church to become so deformed and corrupt.”<sup>10</sup> Wyclif believed in a differentiation between God’s Law, which was reinforced by the bible and the Law of Men, which was reinforced by the king and government. Wyclif writes in his treatise, *On the Pastoral Office*, “From these considerations the faithful conclude that when a curated is notoriously negligent in his pastoral office, they as subjects should... withdraw offerings and tithes from him and whatever might offer the occasion for the fostering of such wickedness.”<sup>11</sup> The context behind this passage refers to the abuses of ecclesiastics such as providing subpar services and

---

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*, 161.

<sup>11</sup> Spinka, *Advocated for Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus*, 38.

neglecting his congregation. Wyclif believed that there was supremacy of the king over the priesthood.

Wyclif also changed his stance regarding the pope after the beginning of the Papal Schism in 1378. The papal schism occurred as a result of two men claiming legitimacy to the office of the supreme pontiff. In the eyes of Wyclif, the papal schism created a legitimate pope and an anti-pope. Matthew Spinka touches on this aspect in his book *Advocates of Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus*. Spinka states in his introduction that “this change... ultimately led him to denounce the pope as the Antichrist, to repudiate the whole papal system, and to advocate theological reforms that shocked and alienated the contemporaneous world.”<sup>12</sup> As Wyclif continued to further his philosophy regarding ecclesiastical positions within the Church; Wyclif dug deep into his bible to find the answers he was looking for. However, what Wyclif found was that the bible did not show any evidence to help legitimate the position of the pope or any other position within the church for that matter. Therefore, Wyclif denounced his loyalty to the pope and viewed the position as a man-made modern adaptation. This of course was “modern” in terms of the fourteenth century. Wyclif saw the papal schism as the only evidence he needed to solidify his theses. It was not long after writing and preaching on the subject of the pope’s illegitimacy, that Wyclif was targeted by his local bishops as a cause for concern. And he was thus summoned to appear before the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London to defend his philosophy.

Through the use of his writings, Wyclif began to denounce the pope’s legitimacy within the Church. After the occurrence of the papal schism and evident abuses within the hierarchy of the church, Wyclif said, “as to this it is often said that the confirmation of the Roman pontiff is

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

not valid except to the degree that it is in conformity with the will and ordination of God, who is the highest Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Previously to the schism, Wyclif was under the impression that the pope was the Vicar of Christ and stood above every other position within the Church. As a result of the schism Wyclif began to continually question the validity of every position among ecclesiastics. Wyclif says, “In the case he [the pope] thus presumptuously continues in error, it would be good for the Church that there not be such a pope, who thus falls away from the narrower path of Christ and his vicar Peter.”<sup>14</sup> It was Wyclif’s belief that the actions of the pope were questionable.

Wyclif began to refer the position of the pope in his writing as the anti-Christ. The reason for this was, Wyclif had previously believed in the infallibility of the pope and romanticized the position of the pope as Christ on Earth. After the schism, Wyclif wrote a treatise titled, *De Papa*. In it he contrasts his image of Christ compared with his image of the pope. Wyclif states, “Christ was the [meekest] of men and bade us to learn this of Him; but men say that the pope is the most proud man on earth, and makes lords kiss his feet, whereas Christ washed His Apostles’ feet.”<sup>15</sup> This image is anecdotal to the papal abuses that would Wyclif as being heretical. The heretical abuses that Wyclif accuses the pope of include; the sale of indulgences, blasphemy, and simony, among others. In *Trialogus*, written by Wyclif as one of his last major works before his death he points out, “... the pope does not wish to be ruled through a higher church or some other person, but like the antichrist, he makes these new laws for himself, and wishes to threaten with the most grievous punishment...”<sup>16</sup> Wyclif displayed

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> John Wyclif and A.R. Myers, *English Historical Documents IV*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969), 838.

<sup>16</sup> John Wyclif and Stephen E. Lahey, *Wyclif: Trialogus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 285.

the abuses of the pope as a way to refute any legitimacy that the pope as a position within the church.

John of Gaunt's influence and protection of Wyclif as his patronage became most apparent after the first convocation which summoned Wyclif to come forward to defend his writings and teachings. The summons was made by the Archbishop Simon Sudbury of Canterbury and the Bishop of London William Courtenay. Wyclif was to appear at St. Paul's in London on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1377. Lechler points out that, "at Wyclif's side appeared the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Henry Percy, the Grand Marshal of England, followed by a band of armed men, and attended by several friends of the learned divine... by the duke's desire, were to stand forward in case of need as the advocates of Wyclif."<sup>17</sup> The atmosphere inside the chapel was tense at the time of the hearing. Dahmus alludes that, "no one need doubt, of course, that bishops like Courtenay must have entertained an unholy satisfaction in pressing the charge of heresy against Wyclif because of his association with Gaunt."<sup>18</sup> The reason behind this was Courtenay and Gaunt were members of the same parliament; and Gaunt constantly received request from Courtenay and he continually shot down the requests. On the other hand, Gaunt often requested funds for the purpose of the Hundred Years' War, which was met by protest from Courtenay. The result was a tumultuous relationship between Gaunt and Courtenay that carried over into the trials against Wyclif.

The tension between the bishops, Gaunt, and Percy quickly escalated into an exchange of harsh words which ended in an uproar from the crowd. The back and forth between Gaunt and Courtenay was a riot that spread all over London. Lechler points out that, "as the business,

---

<sup>17</sup> Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursor*, 172.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396*, 35.

before it was well commenced, had degenerated into a violent quarrel and tumult," he goes on to say that, "the Duke and the Lord Marshal withdrew with Wyclif, without the latter having spoken a single word."<sup>19</sup> However, the success of this first trial was short-lived and Wyclif was summoned once more to defend himself.

Just over one year later in 1378, Wyclif was summoned to appear at Lambeth to defend himself once more in front of Bishops Sudbury and Courtenay. However, the second time around, Wyclif was summoned because of five papal bulls that had been sent from Rome by Pope Gregory XI. Dahmus points out that fifth bull was addressed to the chancellor of Oxford. He stated that:

The pope directed the chancellor and Oxford, under threat of the loss of their privileges, to suppress the teaching of perverse doctrine at the university, however subtly its error might be concealed, to seize Wyclif and to turn him over to Sudbury and Courtenay, together with any other scholars in the university community who might be infected with similar errors and who would refuse to recant.<sup>20</sup>

Along with the bulls, Pope Gregory XI also sent with them a list of nineteen heretical propositions that were written by Wyclif. And compared to the previous trial, the trial at Lambeth was considerably low key. The chapel that the hearing was to be set in was private and shut off from on lookers; also John of Gaunt resisted from making an appearance. Gaunt's influence was felt at the trial nonetheless. Stephen E. Lahey points out that compared to St. Paul, the trial of Lambeth, "the prelates were rumored to be set on destroying him, whatever the shape

---

<sup>19</sup> Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*, 174.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396*, 47.

of his argument, ensuring a humiliating trip to Rome, imprisonment, and possibly torture and death.”<sup>21</sup> The reasoning behind this was due to the pressure from both Rome and the pope.

Another speculation that can be made is that the bishops had every intention that they would be met with a successful apprehension of Wyclif on the grounds that he was a heretic, because his theology was expected to be filled with heretical sentiment. This plan may have worked; however, in Gaunt's place to represent Wyclif was Sir Lewis Clifford. Clifford was a knight and a representative of the young king Richard II's mother, Joan; and he made an appearance on behalf of Gaunt. Dahmus points out that Clifford “‘pompously forbade’ the prelates to presume to pass judgment against Wyclif.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the intention that Sudbury and Courtenay had was stifled and Wyclif was able to skirt by without harsh judgment once more. This was a smart move by Gaunt and shows that he possibly learned a lesson from the previous trial. The simple intrusion by Clifford and several unwanted guests made it more difficult for the bishops to pass the hostile judgment that they had previously planned. The end result was a compromise in which the bishops had forbidden Wyclif to preach or teach on the issues in question, that were considered to be controversial and heretical. Wyclif ended up being relatively lucky at this point in time. Had it not have been for the intrusion of the Queen's man, Clifford, and the timing of the trial Wyclif might not have found himself to be so lucky.

After the trial of Lambeth, Gaunt was able to solidify the compromise with the bishops on behalf of Wyclif. Effectively, the compromise was that Wyclif would no longer preach or teach the viewpoints that were considered heretical. Dahmus points out that:

---

<sup>21</sup> Stephen E. Lahey, *John Wyclif*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396*, 54.

Had the duke died or had he lost his influence during those years [after the trial], Courtenay might have reopened the issue. But the duke and his influence outlived Wyclif and the Reformer died unmolested in 1384 in the relative obscurity of his parish at Lutterworth.<sup>23</sup>

With that said, in the year 1381, the peasant revolt had occurred and gave Wyclif a cause for concern. During the revolt the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury was murdered, and it was William Courtenay who stepped up to take his place. And it was during the first two trials against Wyclif that Courtenay had effectively become an opponent of Wyclif's. Wyclif may not have been directly involved with the peasant's revolt; although, it was one of his followers, John Ball, who was seen as the leader of the conflict. John Ball had admitted that he had gained all of his heretical ideas from the teachings of Wyclif. This caused concern with Courtenay but Wyclif was not seen as a threat after the compromise that was reached after the trial at Lambeth.

Dahmus also makes it clear that "Wyclif was no longer an issue, not at least so long as Gaunt retained a position of influence in the government."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, after Courtenay had become the archbishop and the peasant revolt was over; he had returned his focus to the Oxford University and Lollard doctrine. He had become very determined as the archbishop to destroy all Wycliffitism at Oxford. Courtenay's intention was to ruin Wyclif's reputation as a theologian and to stamp out heresy within England all together.

Another aspect that allowed for Wyclif to remain outside the flames of heresy was that he was an English citizen. England had rules set in place during this time that allowed Wyclif to remain a free man. After the first trial at St. Paul, Pope Gregory XI released his papal bull which

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

called for the immediate apprehension of Wyclif so that he may be tried for his heretical theology; he had attempted to gain the apprehension of Wyclif in secret. However, Dahmus points out that “English statute forbade the imprisonment of any subject at the direction of the pope, and this is precisely what Pope Gregory had ordered the university to do: to seize Wyclif and turn him over to the archbishop.”<sup>25</sup> The vice chancellor at Oxford who received the papal bull attempted to confine Wyclif while he was at Oxford. In return the vice chancellor was subsequently arrested for his attempt by order of the crown. Such a decree, in England, allowed for there to be separation between the authority of the pope/ church and the king of England. And it also gave the king the final say in regards to who would be tried in his country and for what reasons. It was this statute that allowed for Wyclif to remain under the protective wing of Gaunt; who kept him out of prison and away from being tortured and put to death as a heretic. A result of Wyclif’s patronage was that he was never officially declared a heretic or excommunicated until after the death of Hus at the Council of Constance.

Jan Hus on the other hand was not as lucky to have patronage to protect him compared to Wyclif. The long road of Hus’s reform movement ended with him being burnt at the stake as a heretic at the Council of Constance. Some of the reasons for this were that Hus had refused to recant his theology when he was given the chance, he spoke out openly against his opponents both in public and private forums, he was openly supportive of heretically labeled theology and people, and he also sealed his fate once he became the leader of the Wyclifite group in Bohemia. Another reason for why Hus was less lucky compared to Wyclif was that he did not have the same support system as Wyclif. Wyclif’s support group consisted of his country and the regent king, John of Gaunt. Hus had the support of the archbishop of Prague and the king of Bohemia

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

for a time; but overtime his allies quickly became his enemies. And after Hus was eventually labeled as a heretic and excommunicated, he was forced to defend his own reformist theology. In doing so, Hus also showed a much different tone once he was forced to defend himself against heresy. Wyclif on the other hand relied on his doctrines to speak for themselves and was sheltered from inevitable harm.

Before Hus had become a Wyclifite, Hus was already a product of reform. Prior to the introduction of Wyclif's reform theologies; Bohemia had a culture of reformist thought. Spinka points out in *Advocates of Reform*, that "chief leaders of the native movement... were Milic of Kromeriz, Matthew of Janov, and Peter of Chelcice."<sup>26</sup> These men were theological reformers in Bohemia, who influenced Hus before his first encounter of Wyclif's writing. However compared to the reform of Wyclif, the reformists within bohemia were more concerned with moral and ethical conduct more so than doctrinal reformation. That said, the early reformers in Bohemia were less concerned with stimulating reform based on theology. Matthew Spinka points out that "the preacher [Hus] consistently aims at [the] reformation of morals."<sup>27</sup> Hus was also very keen in regards to the abuses that were going on around him as far as the church was concerned. Shortly after being ordained in 1402, Hus began to speak out against what he saw as the ecclesiastical abuses. Very similar to Wyclif, Hus believed that ecclesiastical community should live a pure life that was absent of immorality and consisted of humble poverty, much like Christ himself. Spinka also mentions that Hus spoke out against "all carnality, such as the sexual irregularities of the clergy and monks, avarice, money-grubbing, gluttony, drunkenness, rich apparel, pride, dice-playing, dancing, hunting, and simony."<sup>28</sup> One of the issues that Wyclif

---

<sup>26</sup> Spinka, *Advocates of Reform*, 188.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1966), 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

touched on and Hus also spoke out against, that got him in trouble first was, on priest that would charge sums of money to perform religious services. He saw this as heretical and believed that any priest that was practicing this behavior should be labeled as such.

During the same year that Hus was ordained, there was a new archbishop appointed to Prague, Zbynek Zajic. Archbishop Zbynek was sympathetic to the reform movement at the beginning of his career in Prague because he was aware of the immoralities of the Bohemian church. Spinka points out that Zbynek acted as an authority on the side of Hus at the beginning of his career; “this official favor which the Archbishop bestowed upon the preacher of the Bethlehem Chapel protected the latter from the attacks of the enemies of reform, who otherwise would certainly have found means of silencing him.”<sup>29</sup> Early on, Hus had opponents that were other ecclesiastics; they were essentially the type of clerics that practiced the same immorality that Hus preached against.

At first the way that Hus presented himself and his preaching was very attractive to Zbynek; because he was very aware of the lifestyle Hus had chosen to live. Hus was attracted to the ideas that Wyclif instilled in his early works in regards to living one's own life in the image of Christ. Hus had even been appointed to preach for Zbynek's synod. Francis Lutzow mentions in his book, *The Life and Times of Master John Hus*, “honestly striving to improve the moral conduct of the clergy of his archbishopric, Zbynek determined on instituting frequent meetings or synods in which all matters of discipline could be discussed.”<sup>30</sup> And it was during these synods that Hus openly attacked the clerical abuses that he was witnessing in Prague. It was his

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Lutzow, *The Life and Times of Master John Hus*, (New York: AMS Press, 1978), 82.

open complaints against the other clergy that would be the cause of negative turn regarding his luck and his relationship with the archbishop.

Some of the first complaints that surfaced to the archbishop were around the year 1405 after the first synodical sermons that were given by Hus. The complaints were submitted by the anti-reformists who were attempting to quiet Hus. Spinka states in his book, *John Hus' Concept of the Church*, that "the great prelates, who felt personally attacked by his uncompromising condemnation of their profligate living and exorbitant exactions, now determined to muzzle the irritating criticisms of Hus and of his reforming party."<sup>31</sup> At first, the archbishop was reluctant to hear the complaints and often sided with the reformist. Spinka states that, "Accordingly, the reformist sentiments, and even radical Wyclifite views, were freely disseminated under what appeared to be the Archbishop's own auspices and protection."<sup>32</sup> However, as the complaints continued the relationship between Hus and Zbynek began to suffer. Part of the reason for this was the archbishop was not fond of theological controversy. And as the debates between Hus and the anti-reformist continued; it was theology that was often being debated and at times with hostility. Also, as Hus began to become more aggressive with his accusation against the clerical abuses, because of this he began to lose some of the support that he had gained from his public congregation and he lost even more support from the archbishop.

Hus showed a great amount of concern when it came to his fellow reformers who he was closely affiliated with. Hus had shown a great amount of concern in 1408 when two men who were close to him were accused of heresy: Stanislav of Znojmo and Stephen Palec. Stanislav was a teacher and mentor to Hus during his time in school, and Palec was a pupil who shared

---

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Spinka, *John Hus's Concept of the Church*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 79.

<sup>32</sup> Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, 27.

several views in common with Hus. The two were made to make the trip to Rome where they were imprisoned. They were eventually freed by Pope Alexander V; however, the two men were forced to recant their Wycliffitism. Upon their release Spinka states that, “Stanislav returned from Rome a changed man: from an advanced reformer he became a timorous conservative, and gradually both he and Palec passed into the camp of the most vehement opponents of the reform movement.”<sup>33</sup> Compared to the reformist movement in Bohemia, Wyclif did not have cohorts to share his theology with. Wyclif was more familiar with writing his theses and allowing them to be a part of the academic community at Oxford.

Another reformer who was close to Hus and was also charged with heresy in 1408 was Matthew of Knin. Matthew was a subordinate of both Hus and Stanislav. Spinka makes the point that, “since he [Knin] was a member of the University of Prague, the Czech masters... took action at the request of the Archbishop, once again agreeing that no one of their number might hold Wyclif’s forty-five articles ‘in their heretical, erroneous, and scandalous’ sense.”<sup>34</sup> Zbynek had also taken a personal interest in regards to the trial of Knin, because of his close ties to the University of Prague and Hus. It was after this instance that Zbynek requested that all and any of Wyclif’s printed works were to be brought to his palace. The reason that was given for the seizure of Wyclif’s works was so that they could be checked for errors and corrected. Hus was reported to have handed his collection over to Zbynek personally; while supplying the comment “that the Archbishop [should] mark the errors that he should find.”<sup>35</sup> Hus was convinced that Wyclif’s theology was very much orthodox when they were compared to the abuses that were present in the church.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

This was one of the first instances of a visible rift in the relationship of Hus and the archbishop. In a letter written by Hus to Zbynek in July of 1408 in protest of these occurrences, the charges of heresy, and the confiscation of Wyclif's works Hus made his discontent very obvious. Hus begins the letter with a reference to his time as part of Zbynek's synod. He says, "... long ago after your enthronement Your Paternity had set up the rule that whenever I should observe some defect in the administration, that I should instantly report such defect [to you] in person..."<sup>36</sup> The defect that Hus was referring to was his three colleagues that were charged with heresy for their involvement with Wycliffitism and being forced to recant. Hus goes on to say:

This rule now compels me to express myself: how is it that fornicating and otherwise criminal priests walk about freely and without rigorous correction like unbroken bulls and lusty stallions, with outstretched necks, while humble priests, who uproot the thorns of sin, who fulfill the duties of your administration with proper devotion, are not avaricious, but offer themselves freely for God's sake to labor of proclaiming the gospel---- these are jailed as heretics and suffer exile for the very proclamation of the gospel?<sup>37</sup>

Hus goes on to reinforce arguments regarding the treatment of his pupils, compared to the actions of the anti-reformists, by quoting from the bible. He uses quotes within his passage from Matthew, Timothy, and Philippians. The passage that Hus uses that solidifies his argument in regards to the actions of the anti-reformists most is a combination of Matthew 24:12 and Philippians 2:21; "‘love grew cold’ among the clergy and ‘iniquity increased among the people’

---

<sup>36</sup> Jan Hus and Matthew Spinka, *the Letters of Jan Hus*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

for the lack of love among the clergy, who desist from devout preaching of the gospel and from the true following of Christ,” Hus goes on to say that, “they all seek their own things but not the things of Jesus Christ.”<sup>38</sup> Hus uses this passage to differentiate between how the reformist were preaching a more pure gospel for the greater good of society; while on the other hand many anti-reformist priest were involved in the ecclesiastical lifestyle for their own personal benefit.

The event that challenged Hus and Zbynek’s relationship and brought it to the breaking point was when they were made to choose a papal allegiance. Zbynek had chosen to follow the existing pope, Gregory XII; on the other hand, Hus had chosen to remain loyal to King Wenceslas who believed that he would have a better chance of obtaining the Holy Roman Empire with and allegiance to Pope Alexander V. Spinka points out that “thus Zbynek drifted into opposition not only with the King, but also to the reform party. It was this unfortunate circumstance of ecclesiastical politics which caused a rift between Zbynek and Hus.”<sup>39</sup> It was not long after the breakup of Zbynek and Hus, and also Zbynek and the reform party that he had sided with the anti-reformist party. With the archbishop now on the side of the anti-reformist Hus had become officially alienated. Spinka points out in his biography of Hus that:

The synod again adopted Zbynek’s previous prohibition of remanence... with the addition that any transgressors of the prohibition be reported to the archiepiscopal court as heretics. All criticism of prelates in Czech sermons was likewise forbidden; this was obviously aimed at Hus.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 84-85.

It became clearly evident that the anti-reformist party was highly influential in regards to the choices that Zbynek began making. And in 1410, Zbynek had appealed to the pope in reference to clearing out all heresy within Bohemia; the end result of the communication between the archbishop and the pope was Zbynek's decision to burn all the books containing Wyclif's theology already in his procession. Upon hearing this news Hus was distraught and promptly acted out against the archbishop and his restriction against the preaching of Wyclif doctrine. Spinka states that after hearing about Zbynek's actions, "Hus was now driven into an overt act of revolt: he defied the authority of the Archbishop regarding the prohibition of preaching in 'private' chapels, and boldly continued to occupy the pulpit of the Bethlehem Chapel."<sup>41</sup> Hus had also chosen to defy Zbynek by appealing to Pope John XXIII, the successor of Alexander V. The end result, however, was that Hus would be excommunicated for his disobedience of the archbishop.

After Hus was first excommunicated by Zbynek for his disobedient behavior in 1410; everything from that point on had begun to go downhill for him. Once Hus lost his affiliation with Zbynek, who had acted as a guardian of his reforms, he quickly began to lose his other affiliations both political and ecclesiastical. Archbishop Zbynek retired from Bohemia in 1411; he did so in an attempt to escape controversy that he feared he would likely have him condemned. He was traveling to Hungary, although, he would die en route, in September 1411. Matthew Spinka states in his book, *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, that "the archbishop's death put an end to his three-year-old struggle with Hus and with the reform party."<sup>42</sup> The anti-reformist party, on the other hand was still determined to ruin Hus and have him

---

<sup>41</sup> Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Petr Mladenovic and Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 40.

excommunicated indefinitely. According to Spinka, “they [anti-reformist party] needed Wenceslas’ consent to the sale of indulgences which Pope John XXIII had just proclaimed in order to secure resources for his war against King Ladislas of Naples...”<sup>43</sup> The reason for this was, the anti-reformist party believed the reactions of Hus would seal his fate.

Wenceslas allowed for the sale of Pope John XIII’s indulgence to be sold in Bohemia. Hus condemned the pope’s actions and spoke out against the pope publically and in treatises. Spinka says that, “Hus knew that his defiance of papal authority, coupled with an opposition to the royal policy, spelled inevitable doom.”<sup>44</sup> Wenceslas had previously had forbade all opposition against the pope’s sale of indulgences. Hus, however, continued to speak out against the papal bull. Spinka states that, “he [Hus] particularly protested against the Pope’s waging a war against Christians, and against the irregular and inadmissible abuse of the system of indulgences, the levying of a tax for the forgiveness of sins, and the total omission of all necessary spiritual presuppositions.”<sup>45</sup> Hus’ actions were costly. By speaking out against the pope, Hus had ended the remaining patronage that he had left with the king; effectively Hus no longer had any remaining defenses left to protect him from attacks.

Hus left Bohemia in the fall of 1412, going exile voluntarily. Hus remained in exile for approximately two years. The motivations behind his choice could possibly entail the prolonging of the inevitable, his trial at the Council of Constance. Prior to his exile, Spinka points out that “Hus was confronted with the excruciatingly painful decision of whether to remain at his post, in accordance with his recently defended thesis that whoever ceased to preach

---

<sup>43</sup> Spinka, *Advocates of Reform*, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, 44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

on account of an unjust excommunication.”<sup>46</sup> Although Hus was excommunicated by the church and in exile, he remained a diligent reformer. During the two years of exile, Hus wrote two of his more influential works, *De Ecclesia* and *On Simony*. Hus also wrote several letters to a number of various recipients and regarding several topics.

Francis Lutzow points out in *The Life and Times of Master John Hus*, that “Hus from his place of exile addressed a petition to the assembly, in which he complained of the persecution which he had suffered on the part of the parish priest in Prague and begged that the freedom of preaching should be maintained in the city.”<sup>47</sup> The end result of Hus’ petition was the he was able to find likeminded people, who were both sympathetic to Hus’ reform and among the nobility class. The nobility was beneficial to have behind Hus because they had the ability to influence the king and other nobles. This was not the same patronage that Wyclif had with the English crown, but they helped to create stability for Hus while he was in exile.

In 1414, Hus had entered into a negotiation that would effectively change the outcome of the rest of his life. Hus began to consider taking up an offer to defend his theology, which had been viewed as heretical since after his excommunication in 1412. Hus had agreed to appear at the Council of Constance. Spinka points out that “in the spring of 1414, Hus decided to accept the assurances of Emperor Sigismund, granting him free passage to and from the Council.”<sup>48</sup> Safe passage to and from the Council seems to be what had enticed Hus to agree on attending the Council. In *The Letters of John Hus*, translated by Matthew Spinka, Hus had written letters up until he had left for the Council and after. In a letter written by Hus to the kingdom of Bohemia in August 1414, Hus provides the Bohemian people with an update of his intentions. Hus goes

---

<sup>46</sup> Spinka, *John Hus: a Biography*, 163.

<sup>47</sup> Lutzow, *the Life and Times of Master John Hus*, 168.

<sup>48</sup> Spinka, *John Hus and the Czech Reform*, 51.

on by saying, “I, Master John of Husinec, announce to the entire kingdom of Bohemia that I am ready to take my stand in the court of the priest archbishop at the forthcoming assembly of the clergy in regard to all those accusations by which I am falsely accused and charged.”<sup>49</sup> From the time Hus was first accused of heresy, his excommunication, and his exile; Hus was never made to defend his theology in this type of forum. Hus also stepped up to provide his own defense; unlike Wyclif, who was accompanied to trials by the duke of Lancaster and other members affiliated with the English crown, acting as his patron. Hus goes on in his letter by saying:

... In many corners they call me a heretic, contrary to justice and right, let such of you stand forth openly before the priest archbishop and denounce me fearlessly as to which heresies you have heard from me; and if I shall be found in any error or any heresy, I will not refuse to suffer as being erroneous and a heretic. But if no one who wishes to accuse me in his own name will stand up, then I again announce to the entire kingdom of Bohemia that I intend to take my stand... in order to establish truth... before the pope and before the clergy of the Council... I will not hesitate to reply properly in defense of my truth...<sup>50</sup>

Hus' confidence in regards to his expectations of the Council is evident. However, Hus did not take into consideration the possible malicious intent of his judges/ enemies. Spinka states that, “actually, Hus has no chance of receiving a fair trial, because, he stood from beginning to end before a biased tribunal, determined in advance to condemn him no matter what he adduced in his defense.”<sup>51</sup> This is reminiscent of the trial at Lambeth, where the bishops Sudbury and Courtenay were determined on destroying and humiliating Wyclif, before the trial even began

---

<sup>49</sup> Hus, *Letters of John Hus*, 116.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 116-117.

<sup>51</sup> Petr Mladenovic and Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, 76.

and regardless of his attempt at a defense. The outcome of the Council of Constance was the denouncement of Hus as a heretic. The result of the proclamation of Hus' heresy ended with his execution, burning at the stake. Wyclif's reputation as dying without being formally declared a heretic was over as well. The Council closed with the denouncement of Wyclif's entire collection of works as heresy. Wyclif's body effectively exhumed and the remains were burned.

Wyclif and Hus struggled to produce theological reforms in order to produce a better Christian religion. The result of their efforts was being labeled heretical by the Church. Wyclif for the most part ended his life on the brighter side of being labeled a heretic by the Church. He died in Lutterworth in 1384, the very same church that he had retired to after leaving Oxford. Wyclif owes a great deal of gratitude to his patronage that stepped up when he needed it. The reasons that the duke of Lancaster chose to protect to protect Wyclif are unclear. However, with his protection, Wyclif was able to survive and continue advancing his theological thought. On the other hand, Hus was very much a victim of the Catholic Church. Hus attempted to continue his reform after he had lost the support of the Archbishop of Prague. However, it turned out that his enemies were very influential and were spread all across Europe. To no avail, Hus attempted with all of his bravado to defend himself against the accusation of heresy. Hus was unsuccessful in his attempt and was used by the Catholic Church as an example to all future heretics.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Hus, Jan, and Matthew Spinka. 1972. *The Letters of John Hus*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mladenovic, Petr, and Matthew Spinka. 1965. *John Hus at the Council of Constance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wyclif, John and A.R. Myers. *English Historical Documents IV*. 1969. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Wyclif, John, and Robert Vaughan. 1845. *Tracts and treatises of John de Wycliffe: with selections and translations from his manuscripts, and Latin works*. London: Printed for the Society by Blackburn and Pardon.

Wyclif, John, and Stephen E. Lahey. 2012. *Wyclif: Trialogus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### Secondary Sources

Dahmus, Joseph. 1966. *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury 1381-1396*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Lahey, Stephen E. 2009. *John Wyclif*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lechler, Gotthard Victor. *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*. 1904. London: Religious Tract Society.

Leff, Gordon. *Wyclif in His Times*, ed. Anthony Kenny. 1986. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Lutzow, Francis. 1978. *The Life & Times of Master John Hus*. New York: AMS Press.

Spinka, Matthew. 1953. *Advocates of Reform: from Wyclif to Erasmus*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Spinka, Matthew. 1968. *John Hus: A Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Spinka, Matthew, 1966. *John Hus and the Czech Reform*. Hamden: Archon Books.

Spinka, Matthew. 1966. *John Hus' Concept of the Church*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.