JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

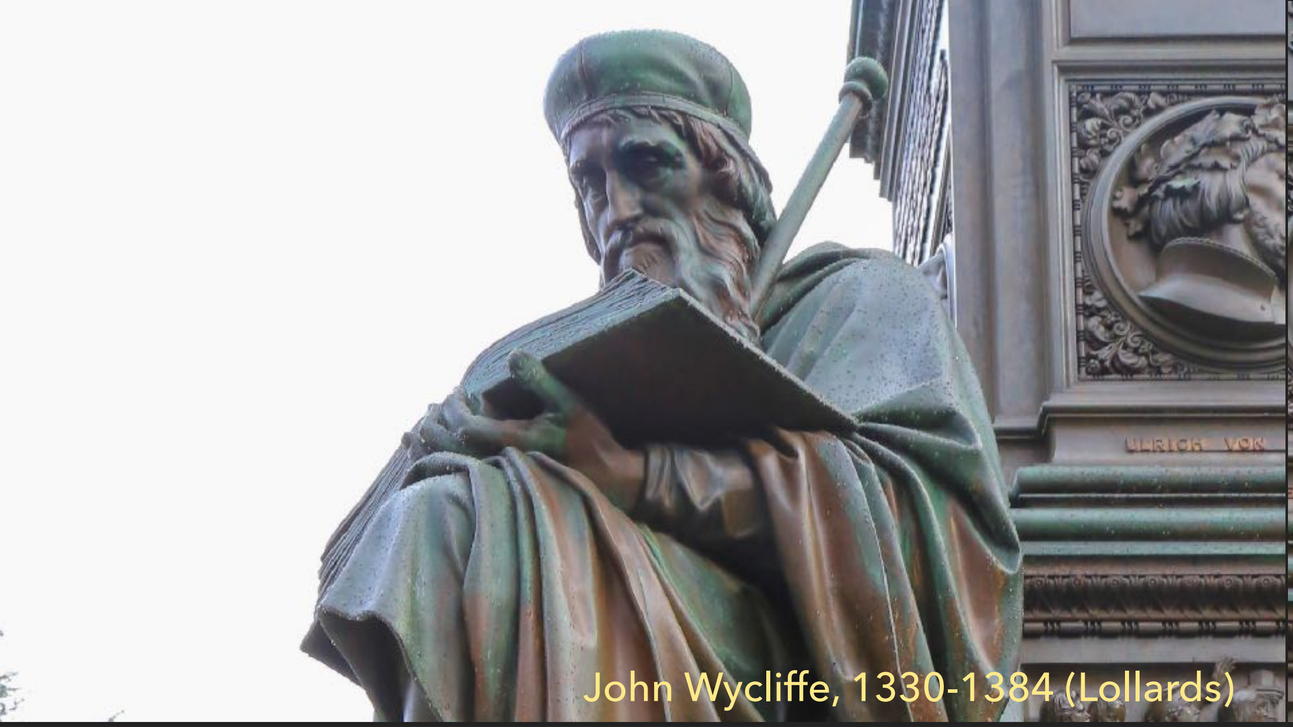
MORNINGSTAR OF THE REFORMATION

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

PREACH THE WORD; BE PREPARED IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON; CORRECT, REBUKE, AND ENCOURAGE–WITH GREAT PATIENCE AND CAREFUL INSTRUCTION.

II Timothy 4:2


Luther
Reuchlin
Savonarola
Hus
Melanchthon
Augsburg
Magdeburg
Friedrich III
Philip I


John Wycliffe, 1330-1384 (Lollards)


Peter Waldo, 1140-1205 (Waldensians)


Girolamo Savonarola, 1452-1498


Jan Huss, 1369-1415 (Hussites)

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

THE NATION STATES

- The 13th century saw the rise of Nation-States
  - No longer were you a member of a city, province or bishopric
- A middle class, bourgeoisie, made of merchants arose
  - They drove the rise of a central authority (a monarch) against the upper class Lords
- France, England, Italy, Switzerland and Spain all emerged as Nations during this time
  - Germany and the Netherlands would eventually unite later



RIPE FOR REFORMATION

THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR (1337-1475)

- Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was a prominent figure during this period
  - She helped free Charles VII, the Dauphin, from the siege of Orleans (a civil siege in France)
  - She was a symbol of unity and hope for France
  - She was eventually captured and sold to England
  - She was burned at the stake as a heretic, exonerated by the ‘Dauphin’ 20 years later



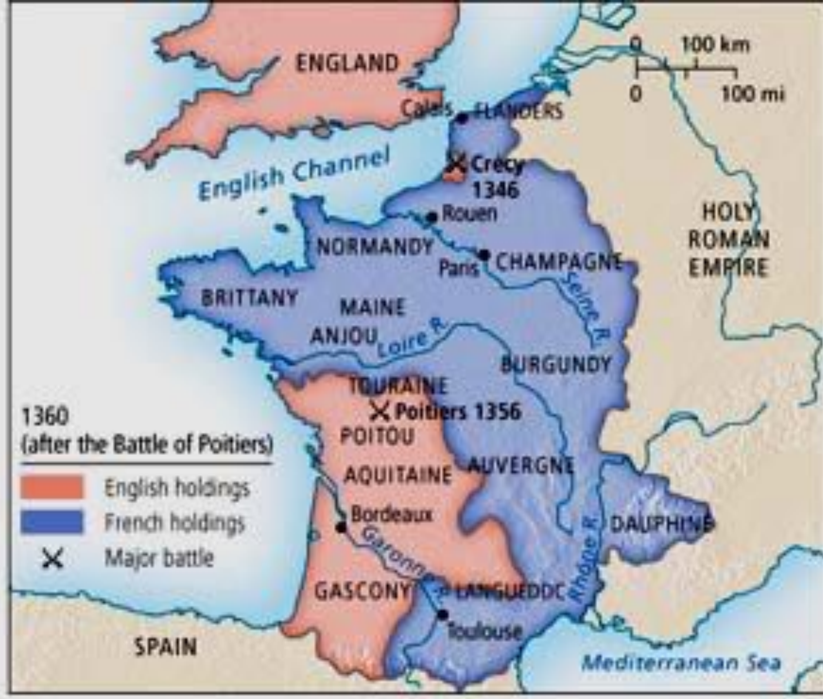
JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

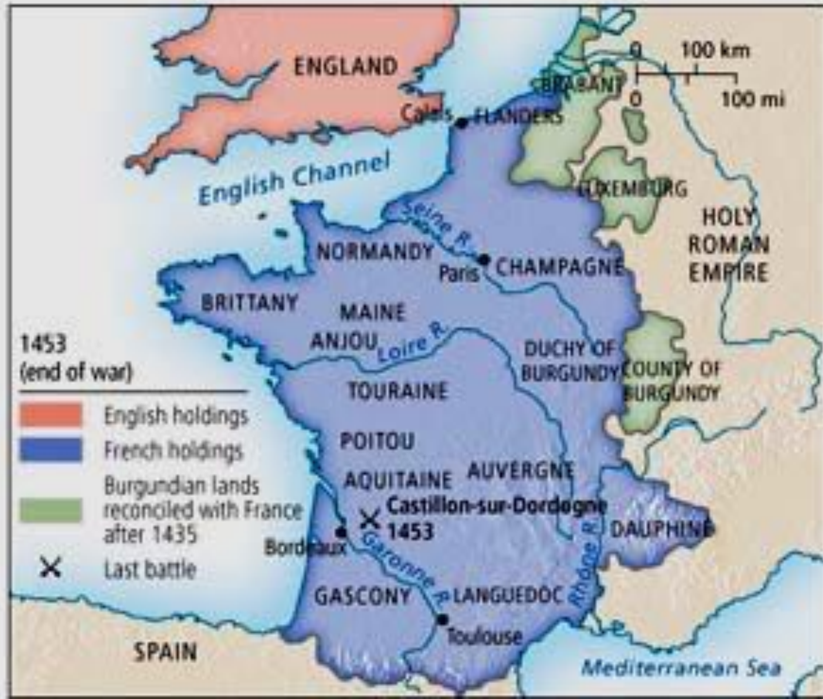
100 YEARS WAR

- England & France fought over numerous political appointments & conflicting political alliances (see map)
- The Hundred years war raged during Wycliffe's lifetime (He was English)
- The War was very costly, both civil and ecclesiastical leaders had to raise money to pay for armies







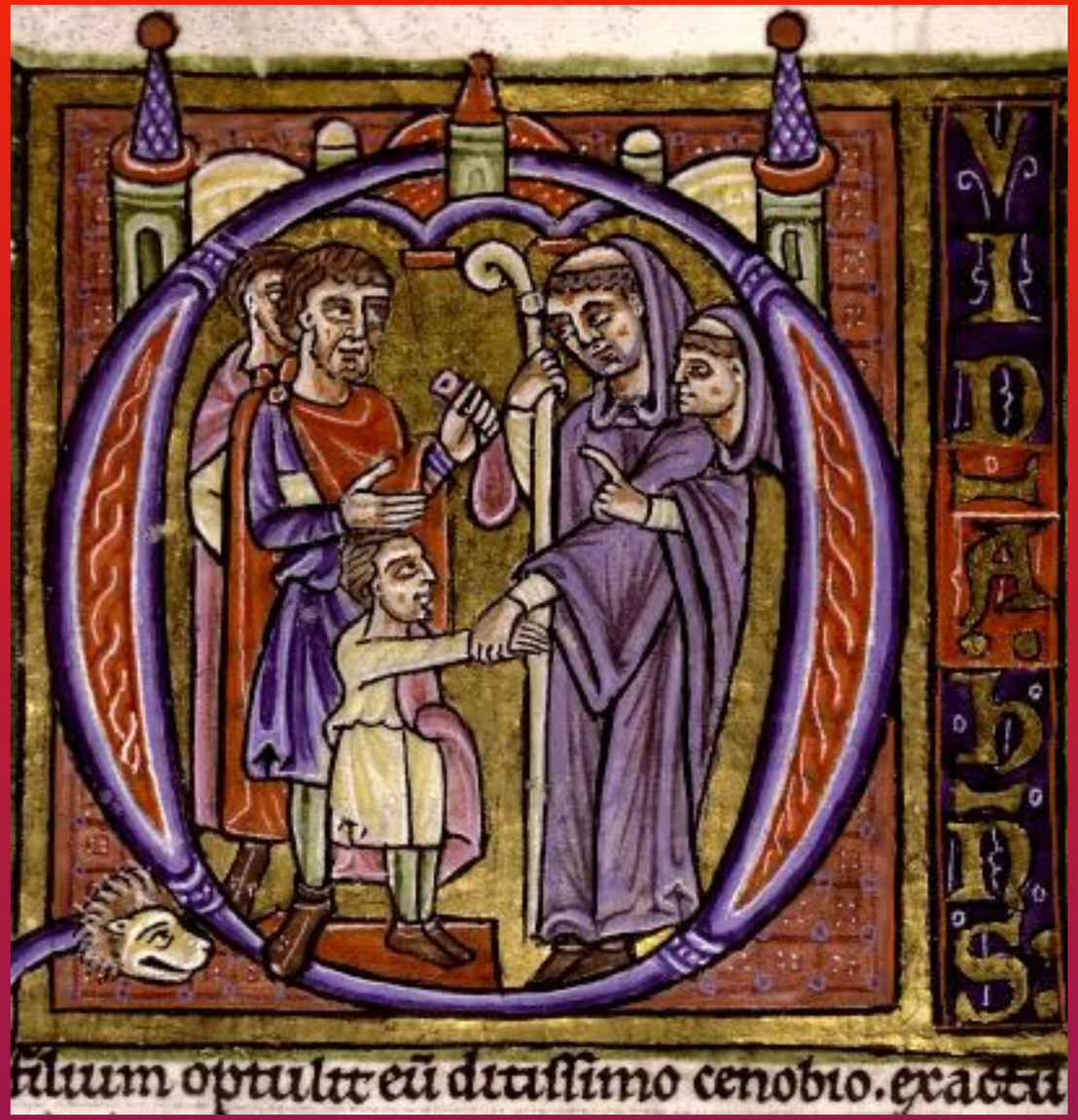


JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

MONEY & FINANCES

- Financing the war was a major source of moral and ethical conflicts within the church
  - Ecclesiastical appointments (bishops, priests, etc.) to certain parishes or towns was a lucrative career option
  - Taxes from these positions for the state and alternatively for the Roman Catholic church were frequent sources of condemnation and political action
- Simony, Nepotism, Absenteeism (multiple positions to one person)
- Frequent, unfilled vacancies
  - Empty churches, no pastors, ‘sheep without a shepherd’



JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

THE AVIGNON PAPACY

- 70+ years the Papacy was in Avignon, France rather than Rome, Italy
  - This enhanced the mistrust of the Papacy and the bishops by England and others
  - called the ‘Babylonian Captivity of the Church’
- A French pope had french interests instead of the interests of the church
- The Great Schism was the time when two popes were elected by the same council of cardinals
  - The whole Christian Church had to decide which pope to support



JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

DEGENERACY OF THE PRIESTS & MONKS

- Priests and Monks frequented taverns and brothels
- A 1215 church council ordered all clergy to wear distinctive dress
  - Not to elevate them, but to discourage them from frequenting these places
- The teaching of the church was a sacramental system with no clear message of grace
  - Sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance) were the means of salvation



JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

RIPE FOR REFORMATION

THE BUBONIC PLAGUE

- The Bubonic plague wiped out 1/3 of the population in the 14th century
  - Transmitted by fleas on rats
- The massive deaths caused
  - economic disruptions, riots, political turmoil, instability
- Fear of death led to a greater sense of life and mortality
  - younger healthier people were generally killed (they had not developed immunities)
- Pilgrimages, shrines, and veneration of relics increased



GOD FITS THE MAN FOR THE PLACE, AND THE PLACE FOR THE MAN; THERE IS AN HOUR FOR THE VOICE, AND A VOICE FOR THE HOUR.

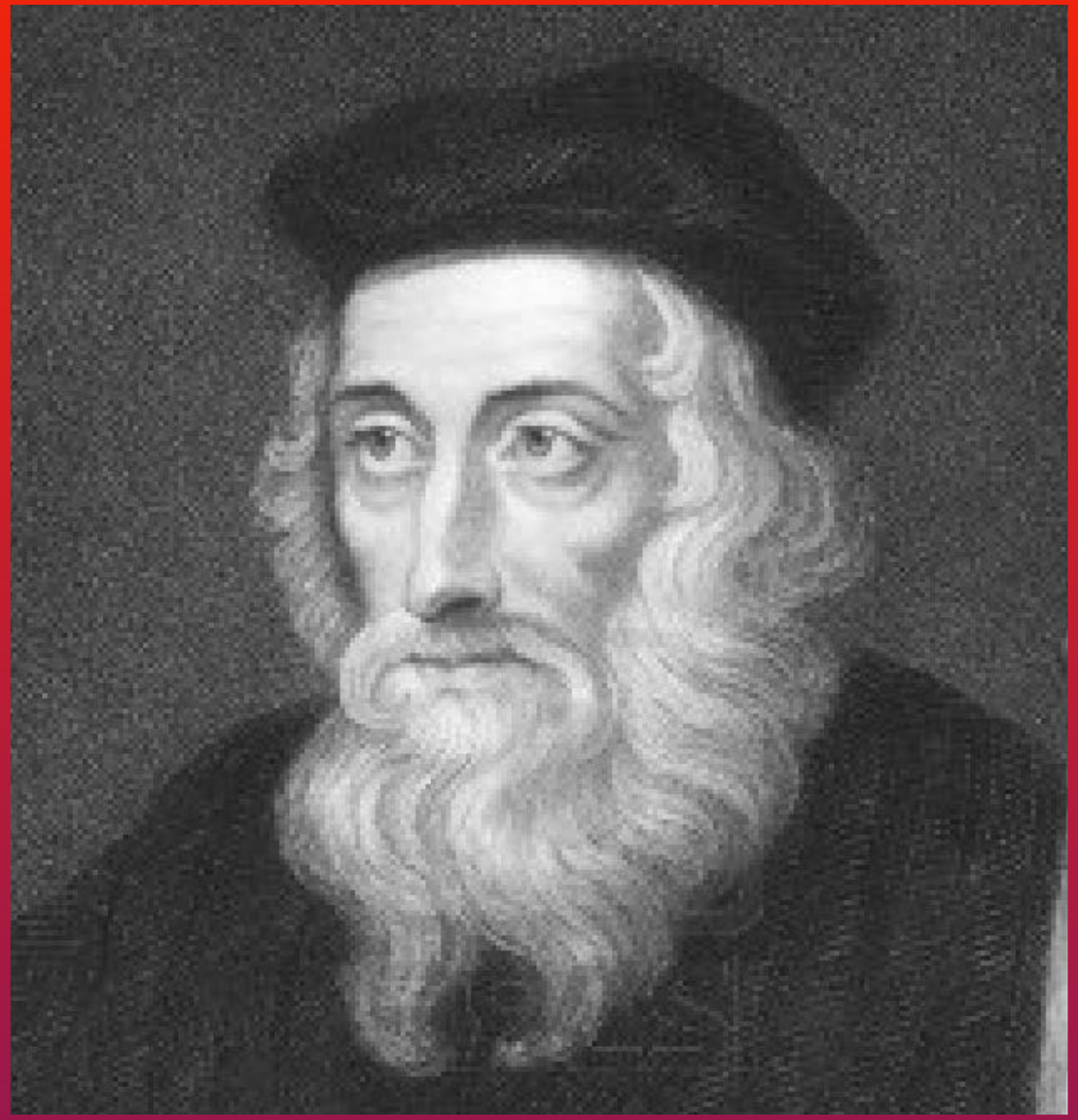
Charles Spurgeon on John Wycliffe

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

WYCLIFFE THE MAN

THE JEWEL OF OXFORD

- Little is known of his early years (pre-Oxford)
  - He was a professor and scholar at Oxford
    - He wrote in Latin (not English) and had many of his works translated
    - He was the ‘last of the scholastics’
      - Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, etc.
      - They married reason and faith
      - Logical syllogisms & deductive reasoning
- He was a deep philosophical thinker, and the leading scholar from the leading University of the day



WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

AUTHORITY & DOMINION

- In 1371 (41 years old) he became a diplomat and polemicist on the overreach of authority
  - All legitimate dominion comes from God
    - Christ is the example, he came to serve not to be served (i.e., civil servants, etc.)
  - This was true both of civil and ecclesiastical servants
- If you did not serve as Christ did, you had no authority to be obeyed or taxes & tithes paid to you
- Immoral leaders could be legitimately removed because they did not follow the example of Christ
- The State had a right to remove popes and unworthy councils of the church
  - He was not an advocate of violent overthrow or rebellion

Richard II (1367-1400)



THEREFORE, THE POPE IS NOT THE HEAD, NOR ARE THE CARDINALS THE WHOLE BODY OF THE HOLY, CATHOLIC AND UNIVERSAL CHURCH. ONLY CHRIST IS THE HEAD, AND HIS PREDESTINED ARE THE BODY, AND EACH IS A MEMBER OF THAT BODY.

John Huss, echoing the teaching of John Wycliffe

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST

- Wycliffe was a teacher and preacher of the doctrines of grace
  - The true church is not the pope and his heirarchy, but rather the predestined body of believers
    - You will know them by their fruits
    - Many church leaders are reprobates
      - The pope was probably reprobate
  - Predestinarian line from Augustine (4th century) to Gottschalk (9th century) to Wycliffe, Huss, then the reformers (14th, 15th centuries)

Augustine of Hippo (4th century)



WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

THE AUGUSTINIAN

- Wycliffe was an Augustinian
  - His teaching on salvation and grace was unique in his time period
    - The traditional method of 'being saved' was to keep the sacraments
  - baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, last rites, marriage, ordination
- Thomas Bradwardine (the archbishop of Canterbury) and 'Doctor Profundus' was his main influence
  - He was a high-ranking churchman teaching the doctrines of grace and sovereignty
  - He accepted the Semi-Pelagian views until he himself was visited by the grace of God

Thomas Bradwardine



AT THE END OF THE DAY, THINK ABOUT HOW YOU HAVE OFFENDED GOD…AND THINK…HOW GRACIOUSLY GOD HAS SAVED YOU; NOT FOR YOUR DESSERT, BUT FOR HIS OWN MERCY AND GOODNESS.

John Wycliffe, ‘Short Rule of Life’ excerpt

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

- The Scriptures, not tradition, not the church is the 'Pre-Eminent Authority' for every Christian
  - Only the church (not the official catholic church) can interpret the Bible correctly
- The Scriptures should be available to read and use for every Christian
  - This was the motivation for his translation into the English Language

Wycliffe Bible Translators logo



TO WYCLIF WE OWE MORE THAN TO ANY ONE PERSON. . . .OUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE, OUR ENGLISH BIBLE, AND OUR REFORMED RELIGION."

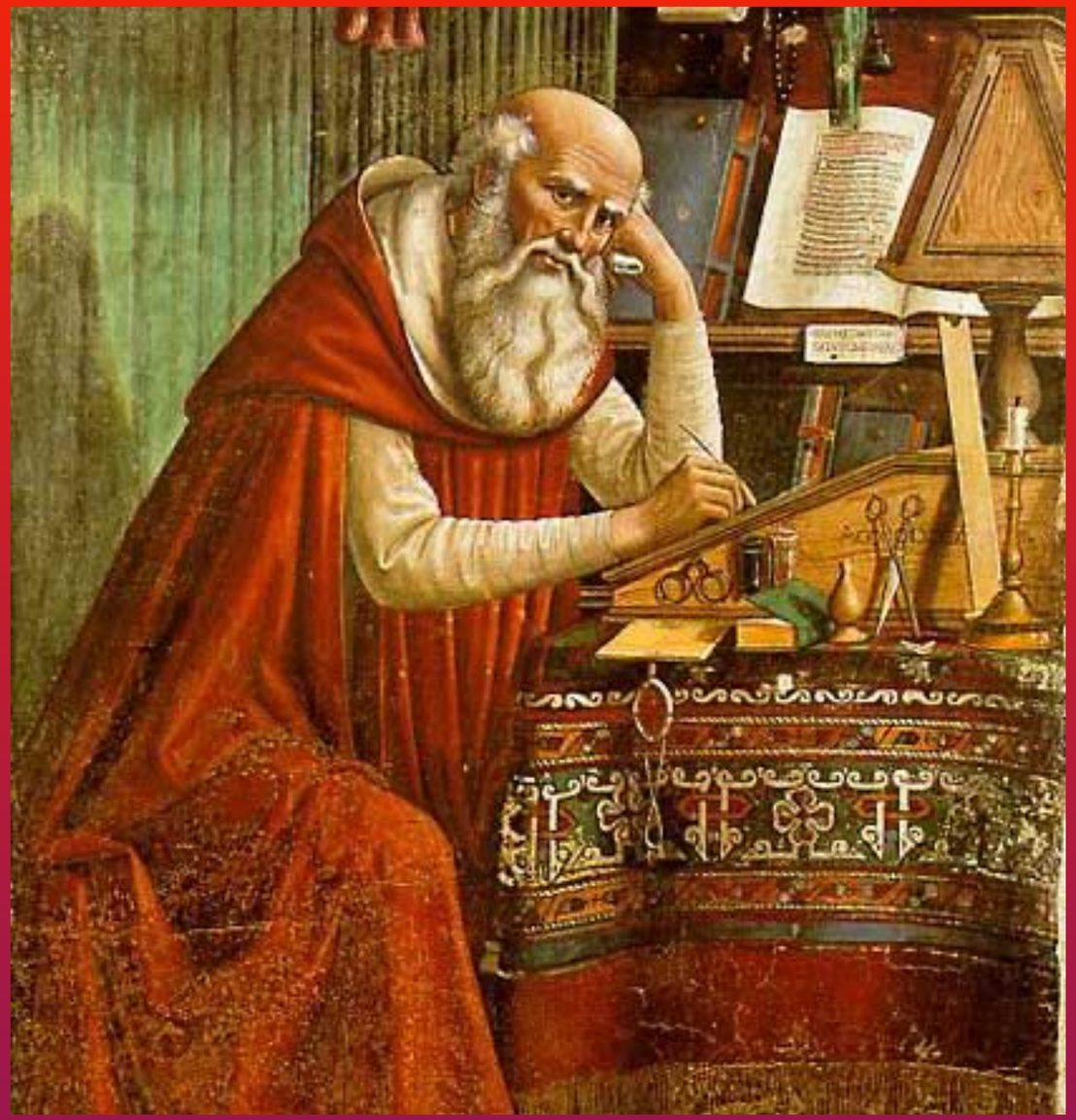
Montagu Burrows, 'Wyclif's Place in History'

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

- Jerome (4th century) translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate) from the Greek and Hebrew for the sake of the people
  - The Vulgate was frozen as the only translation by the Catholic Church
- Hardly anyone today could read Latin (not even the priests)
- Wycliffe began the translation into English (though it was completed by his followers)
  - His enemies called him and his followers, 'Bible Men'
- Chaucer (Canterbury tales) writes of meeting one of these men

Jerome (4th century)



PREACHING THE GOSPEL EXCEEDS PRAYER AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS TO AN INFINITE DEGREE.

John Wycliffe, on preaching

SPREADING THE GOSPEL HAS FAR WIDER AND MORE EVIDENT BENEFIT. IT IS THUS THE MOST PRECIOUS ACTIVITY OF THE CHURCH.

John Wycliffe, on the importance of preaching

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

PRIMACY OF PREACHING

- Wycliffe believed in the primacy of preaching over the other activities of the church
  - Medieval preaching was almost non-existent
  - The liturgy, the mass, was the center of the church service (done in Latin)
- Wycliffe elevates preaching of the gospel and establishes a group called 'pore priests ' or 'pore preachers'
  - former Oxford graduates becoming itinerant evangelists
  - taught in churches, public squares, without the authority of the Roman Catholic church
- These men became the 'Lollards' or 'mumblers', followers of Wycliffe's teachings

Wycliffe reading his Bible to John of Gaunt



A MAN COULD SCARCELY MEET TWO PEOPLE ON THE ROAD, BUT ONE OF THEM WAS A DISCIPLE OF WYCLIFFE.

Contemporary report of the Lollards in the medieval era

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING

PRIMACY OF PREACHING

- Wycliffe was an able and notable preacher himself
  - We have 294 of his English and 224 of his Latin sermons preserved
  - He condemns the false teachings of the Catholic Church
- Wycliffe was the champion of layman's rights
  - He sometimes preaches a 'social justice' Robin Hood approach to solving economic problems by greedy friars and bishops
- When the gospel was preached, the church grew
  - Close attention must be paid to Christ's words, having more authority than popes and friars
- The ideal minister must be a good man as well as a good preacher

Wycliffe and his 'Lollards'



. . . FOR THE EXAMPLE OF A GOOD LIFE STIRRETH MEN MORE THAN TRUE PREACHING WITH ONLY THE NAKED WORD.

John Wycliffe, on the holiness of preachers

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1330-1384)

WYCLIFFE'S TEACHING ON TRANSUBSTANTIATION

- Wycliffe rejected the catholic view of the 'transformation of bread into body' in the Eucharist (The Lord's Supper)
- 'Hoc est corpus maum'
- He did this on the basis of the incarnation
  - When the divine is joined to the human, the human is not destroyed
  - Therefore, the bread is not destroyed or completely transformed by the body of Christ
    - The bread is something new, body and bread together
- This is different than the view we (and Zwingli) hold
  - We hold a memorial view (do this 'in memory of')

Giving of the 'wafer' in the Eucharist



WYCLIFFE'S CONDEMNATION

THE EARTHQUAKE COUNCIL

- in 1382, a council was called by Archbishop Courtenay to condemn Wycliffe's teachings
  - The jewel of Oxford left Oxford for his parish at Lutterworth (which he was ironically an absentee priest)
- A severe Earthquake shook southern England during the council meeting
  - Church steeples fell, buildings were destroyed
  - A sign of judgement on Wycliffe, or a sign of judgement on the council (depending on whose side you were on)
- Wycliffe was condemned, but the Anti-Papal England and the Great Schism deflected interest and attention away from him
  - He died of a stroke in 1384

William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury



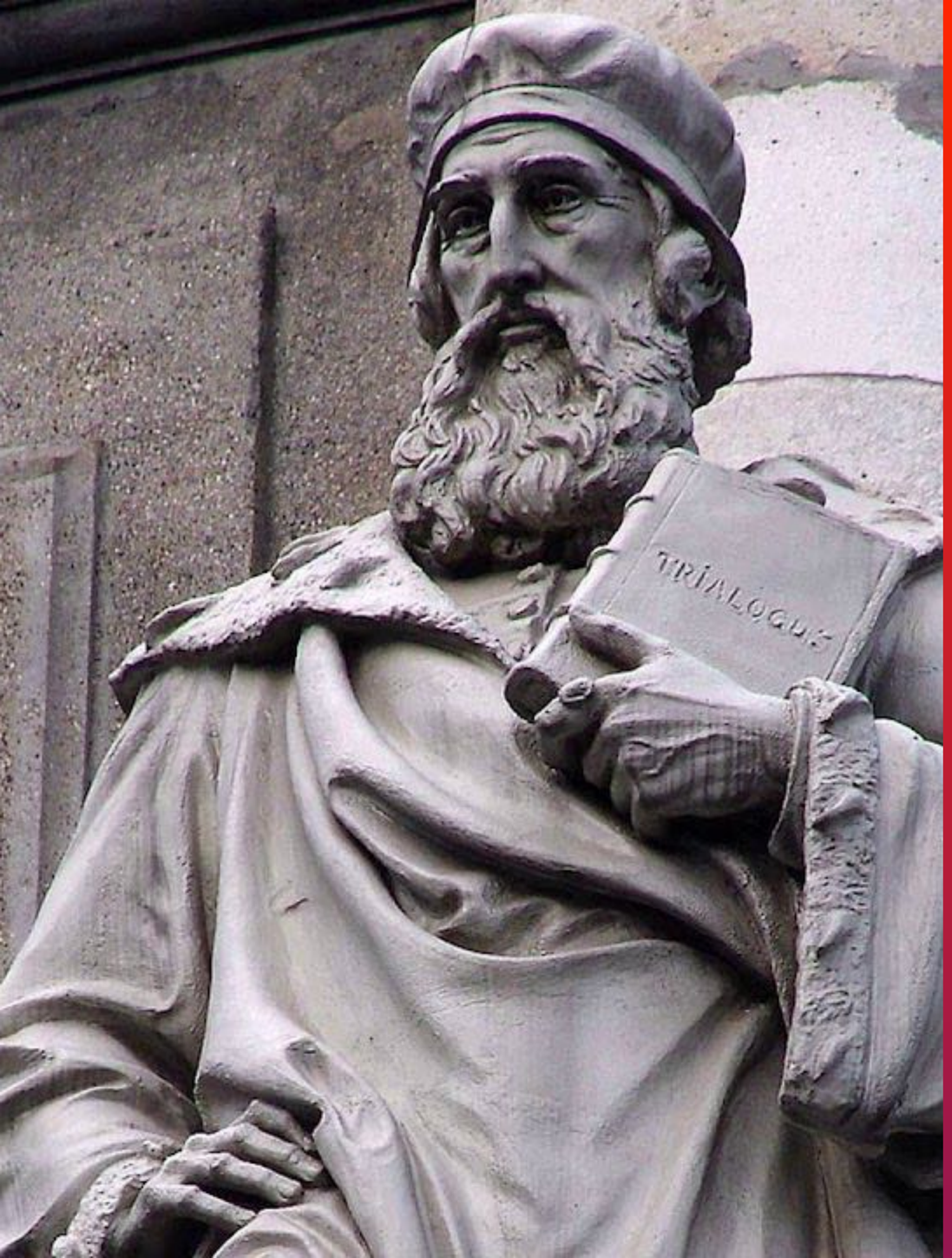
WYCLIFFE DISINTERRED

THE SCATTERED BONES

- in 1428, his bones were dug up and burned by the Catholic church
- They were scattered into the Severn so they could properly label him as a heretic

The burning of Wycliffe's bones





THEY BURNED HIS BONES TO ASHES AND CAST THEM INTO THE SWIFT, A NEIGHBORING BROOK. . . .THE SWIFT CONVEYED THEM INTO THE AVON; THE AVON INTO SEVERN; SEVERN INTO THE NARROW SEAS; AND THEY INTO THE MAIN OCEAN. AND THUS THE ASHES OF WYCLIFFE ARE THE EMBLEM OF HIS DOCTRINE WHICH IS NOW DISPERSED THE WORLD OVER.

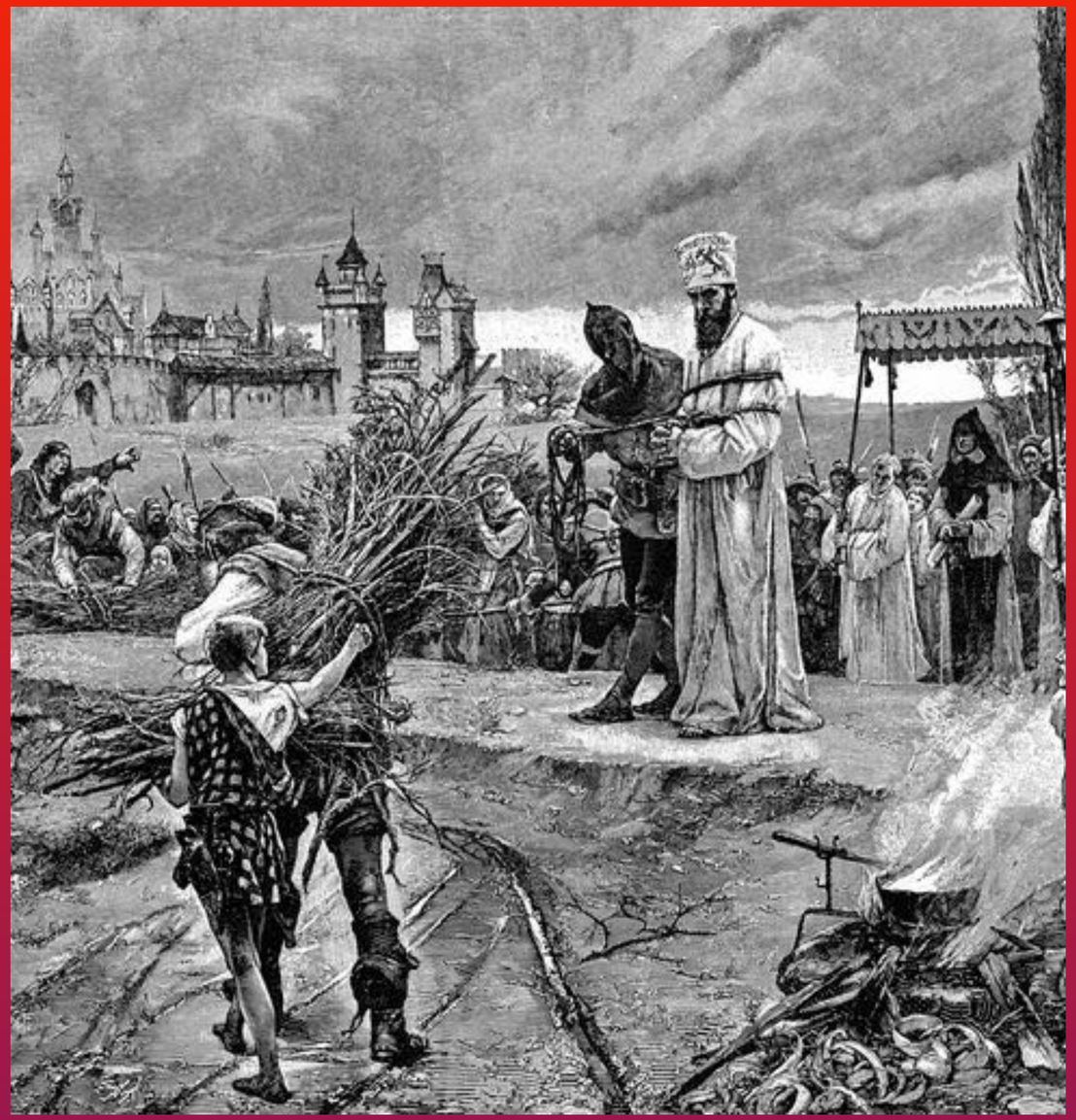
–Fuller

WYCLIFFE'S INFLUENCE

JOHN HUSS, THE BOHEMIAN

- in 1415, the Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe's teaching
  - They burned John Huss, a follower of Wycliffe, at the stake (he had the false pretense of safe passage)
- John Huss read and studied the books of Wycliffe at the university of Prague
  - He became a teacher, and preacher with an emphasis on the word of God (not the traditions and teachings of the church)
- He stressed the Bible alone, grace alone was essential for salvation

The martyrdom of John Huss





LET WHO WILL PROCLAIM THE CONTRARY. LET THE POPE, OR A BISHOP, OR A PRIEST SAY, 'I FORGIVE THY SINS; I ABSOLVE THEE FROM THEIR PENALTY. I FREE THEE FROM THE PAINS OF HELL.' IT IS ALL VAIN. IT HELPS THEE NOTHING. GOD ALONE, I REPEAT, GOD ALONE CAN FORGIVE SINS THROUGH CHRIST. HE PARDONS THOSE WHO TRULY REPENT.

–John Huss


Vom Ab
lass
Schweinitz



I HAVE HITHERTO TAUGHT AND HELD ALL THE OPINIONS OF HUS WITHOUT KNOWING IT. WE ARE, ALL OF US, HUSSITES WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

–Martin Luther, 1529 (14 years after the nailing of the 95 theses)