

Maranatha Bible Church 2020

Equipping Hour: Church History II (1291 AD – 1500 AD)

Week 6: Portraits of the Pre-Reformation

Introduction

While the Lord certainly was not silent throughout the medieval period, there was not a lot that was happening to further the cause of the true Christian church. The RCC was busy trying to not only gain power and land but fighting for control of the Papacy. Their passion for wealth and influence had led them to completely forsake the gospel and use the church as a means of personal gain. The people throughout the known world were either subjugated by the RCC oppression or simply trying to survive the constant Muslim attacks.

Through this very dark period of time, there were glimpses of light. When men and women were able to read the Bible in their own language, they became free. They realized that they no longer had to submit to a very corrupt system of religion and immediately sought out their new life. This was a problem for the RCC. If people started to read the Bible for themselves, then the RCC would lose control. They would lose their influence and ultimately their position of power over the people.

In this final section we are looking at some of the people and movements who dared to go against the RCC. Those whom God used to spark the Reformation in 1517. These men and women were extinguished by the RCC, but not before they were able to leave their mark in church history. They dared to defy the RCC, stand firm in the face of persecution and many met their death by martyrdom because of it. It would do us well to not take for granted the Bible we hold in our hands today. It was translated and preserved through the blood of faithful men and women whose chief desire was for the common man to read the Word.

The Babylonian Captivity (Western Schism / Avignon Papacy) of the RCC (1305 AD – 1415 AD)

1. From 1305 to 1378, the papacy relocated to Avignon, France (about 425 miles southeast of Paris), and from 1378 to 1415, there were two and sometimes three popes, one of whom was in Avignon.
 - a. The Avignon Papacy was the time period in which the Roman Catholic pope resided in Avignon, France, instead of in Rome.
 - b. The Avignon Papacy is sometimes referred to as the Babylonian Captivity of the Church because it lasted nearly 70 years; the length of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews in the Bible.
2. Why did they move the HQ of the RCC?
 - a. **The RCC says** “In short, the influence of the French government resulted in the movement of the papal headquarters from Rome to Avignon. A clash between Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294 - 1303) and “Philip the Fair” of France (King Philip IV, r. 1295-1314) set in motion the events that would lead to the relocation, which took place during the pontificate of the French Pope Clement V (r. 1305-14). Clement V granted to Philip IV’s demand to move the papal residence to Avignon.”¹

¹ <https://www.catholic.com/qa/when-and-why-were-popes-in-avignon> 08/26/2020

- b. **History books record** “French-born Pope Clement V ordered the move in response to the increasingly fractious and political environment in Rome, which had seen his predecessors face off against Philip IV of France – the man who had ensured Clement’s election by the conclave and who was pressing for the papal residence to move to France.
- c. The influence of the French crown over the Roman Catholic Church was significant. Not only did Clement choose Lyon as the site of his coronation in 1305, but all six of his successors in the Avignon Papacy and 111 of the 134 cardinals installed at this time were French.
 - i. The idea that these popes were puppets for France, whether entirely true or not, hurt the Church’s reputation.”²
- d. As with all history, we have to know the source. Rome was so corrupt at this time that in order to rule the RCC well, they knew they would have to move. With the current Pope being French, and the French government growing in strength and power, it was an easy choice.
- 3. But things only got worse. When Gregory XI returned the papal court to Rome in 1377, many of the cardinals weren’t happy with that decision, or with his successor, Urban VI.
 - a. They chose an alternative pope to continue in Avignon. This was the start of the Great Schism, 40 turbulent years when the papacy in Rome was challenged by a line of rival claimants.
 - b. Suddenly, there were two popes; both duly elected, and both legitimate successors to the throne of Peter by ecclesiastical rules.
- 4. Europe was divided over which pope to back. Their decisions were almost purely partisan political ones. If you were for France, you supported Clement VII. If you were against France, you supported Urban VI.
- 5. No solution would be coming through politics or war. In 1394, theologians at the University of Paris suggested three solutions to the Western Great Schism:
 - a. Both popes resign and another be elected in his place
 - b. Conduct negotiations with a moderator
 - c. Call a general council, and let them decide the matter
- 6. Charles VI of France decided he liked option 1. Confident for some reason that he could get the pope in Rome to resign, he tried to persuade Pope Benedict XIII to resign as well.
- 7. Benedict wasn't interested, so Charles sent an army to lay siege to Avignon. Benedict, however, was able to hold out, and Charles never accomplished his goal.
- 8. The Western Great Schism went on 31 years—through four Roman popes and two in Avignon—before a general council was finally called in 1409.
 - a. The council chose to depose both popes and elect another, Pope Alexander V.
 - b. Both of the popes in 1409, Benedict XIII of Avignon and Gregory XII of Rome, refused to accept the council's decision.
 - c. **Now there were three popes.**
 - d. Worse, the situation did not end quickly. Alexander V died within a year, and the council elected Pope John XXIII in his place.

² <https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/why-papacy-pope-residence-move-avignon-france-14th-century/#:~:text=French%2Dborn%20Pope%20Clement%20V,residence%20to%20move%20to%20France.> 08/26/2020

9. Both Alexander and John had attempted to reign in Pisa, Rome being occupied by Gregory, but John was unable to remain there. He was forced to flee to Germany.
10. Emperor Sigismund of Germany agreed to protect John XXIII only on condition that he agree to another general council. Sigismund managed to assemble the Council of Constance in 1414³. They, like the previous council, rejected all the current popes, and they elected Pope Martin V.
 - a. **Here's what happened to the other claimants.**
 - i. John XXIII went into hiding when he realized that he would not be allowed to keep his title. For several months he was able to claim to be pope before he was found, forced to resign and imprisoned for the rest of his life. Like the Avignon popes, he and Alexander V are considered "antipopes" by the Roman Catholic Church.
 - ii. Benedict XIII holed up in a fortress and lived until 1423 claiming to be pope. Fortunately, everyone ignored him and he had no successor.
 - iii. Gregory XII actually resigned like he said he would.
11. Needless to say, these events produced uncertainty that provoked severe doubts among honest, fair-minded Christians in the late medieval period. Concerns regarding the visible head of Christ's church and the conduct of post-Avignon popes combined to undermine the credibility of the papacy through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
 - a. Our Protestant forebears were deeply skeptical of the papacy as an institution—for good reason. The resignation of Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the papacy is a purely human institution without divine warrant, and that it has a complicated history. Claims to an unbroken succession crash on the rocks of history, especially those great rocks cropping up at Avignon, Pisa, and Rome for a century in the late medieval period.⁵
12. One of the movements which came from this debacle is known as the conciliar movement or conciliarism.⁶
 - a. The conciliar movement was a reform movement within the Catholic Church that promoted the idea that church councils have authority over popes.
 - b. It exists because Roman Catholics accept several streams of authority, the Bible, church tradition, church councils and the pope. While the Bible is accepted as an authority, the church tells its members what the proper interpretation of the Bible is.
 - i. So, who decides which interpretation of Scripture or which church tradition is authoritative? The answer is either the popes or the church councils or both.
 - ii. Although the official doctrine of the infallibility of the pope was not adopted until the First Vatican Council (1896–1870), the pope's authority had been recognized for a long time, and many popes claimed to have supreme authority in the church.
 - c. The most radical forms of the conciliar theory in the Middle Ages were found in the 14th-century writings of Marsilius of Padua, an Italian political philosopher who rejected the divine origin of the papacy.

³ This Council of Constance not only appointed an individual pope, it also examined two pre-reformers...Huss and Wycliffe

⁴ <https://www.christian-history.org/western-great-schism.html> 08/26/2020

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/babylonian-captivity-papacy/> 08/26/2020

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conciliarism> 08/26/2020

- d. Also William of Ockham, an English philosopher who taught that only the church as a whole—not an individual pope or even a council—is preserved from error in faith.
- e. It would not be until the first Vatican Council in 1870 that the RCC would explicitly condemn conciliarism.

During all of this, there were men and movements which stood out and against the RCC. Last week we talked about Peter Waldo and the Waldenses movement in Lyons, France. They were severely persecuted by the RCC because of their strong stance on the gospel and their desire for people to read the Bible in their local language. The RCC hated this group so much that Pope Alexander II ordered the bishop of Lyons to “exterminate them from the face of the earth.”⁷

The Albigenes (Cathars) (1140 - 1350)

1. There is little known about this group because of the fiercely intense persecution which came upon them from the RCC. They not only eliminated all known Cathars (The Good Ones or The Pure Ones), but they almost successfully took all memories of them off the face of the earth.
2. Though the movement started in N. Europe, they found their strength in a S. France town called Albi (which is where the name Albigenes comes from).
 - a. Today there is a cathedral there, the Basilica of St. Cecilia, that the RCC built between 1282 and 1488. This cathedral first started as a fortress in the aftermath of the Albigensian Crusade (1209 – 1229) where the RCC sought to destroy all of those who practiced this faith.
 - b. It is said to be the largest brick building in all the world.
 - c. Pope Innocent III initiated a crusade to extinguish Catharism in southern France, with great loss of life. In the aftermath of the crusade, the cathedral's dominant presence and fortress-like exterior made of brick were intended to demonstrate the authority of the Catholic Church and to protect its sanctuary by thick walls.
 - d. The instigator of the cathedral's construction was Bernard de Castanet, Catholic Bishop of Albi and **Inquisitor** of Languedoc.
3. By 1200 AD, they received much support and protection from French nobles. It was said of them that they “aroused the greatest anxiety and hostility from the Catholic church.”⁸
 - a. The Albigensian Crusade is considered by many historians to be an act of genocide against the Cathars.
4. As stated before, there is little known about them but common history tends to teach they were dualists; believing that there was an evil god and a good god. However, this has yet to be proved even still today. Much of the heresy brought against them in the history books was written by RCC sympathizers.
 - a. Conservative historians liken their beliefs to that of Peter Waldo and his followers the Waldenses. In fact, all non-RCC historians would put these two groups as two branches from the same tree.

⁷ John Fox *Fox's Book of Martyrs* ch. 4

⁸ N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power – Part II: The Middle Ages* p. 311

5. The Dominican Bernard Gui, Inquisitor of Toulouse from 1308 to 1323, wrote a manual discussing the customs of non-Catholic sects and the methods to be employed by the Inquisitors in combating heresy.
 - a. A large portion of the manual describes the reputed customs of the Cathars, while contrasting them with those of Catholics. Gui also describes methods to be used for interrogating accused Cathars.
 - b. He ruled that any person found to have died without confessing his known heresy would have his remains exhumed and burned, while any person known to have been a heretic but not known whether to have confessed or not would have his body unearthed but not burned.
 - c. Under Gui, a final push against Catharism began. By 1350, all known remnants of the movement had been extinguished.⁹

John Wycliffe (1329 – 1384)¹⁰

1. John Wycliffe lived during the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy when the office of the Pope was dominated by the French kingdom and was in reality simply a puppet of the French ruler.
 - a. He died just as the Great Schism (when there were two and then three Popes) was beginning. He was an English scholastic philosopher, a theologian, a bible translator and a seminary professor at Oxford.
2. When Wycliffe was a student, one of his professors began to ask why secular rulers were required to live in a state of grace, while even many Popes lived in open, unrepentant sin? Should not this mean that they had no right to spiritual power?
 - a. Wycliffe was influenced by this line of thinking and he became very critical of the church hierarchy, and attacked the privileged role and the luxury the clergy enjoyed.
 - b. This was obviously very displeasing to the church hierarchy - especially as it was under the domination of the French rulers who wanted to exercise control via the church in other realms.
 - c. However, it was warmly received by English rulers – until Wycliffe began to point out that they too had to renounce sin, and there were also limits to their power. At that point, they turned on Wycliffe as well.
3. Wycliffe has been called the “Morning Star of the Reformation” because he boldly questioned papal authority, criticized the sale of indulgences, denied the reality of transubstantiation and spoke out against church hierarchies.
4. Wycliffe also began to teach that the true church is found not in the Pope and his visible hierarchy, but rather in the invisible body of those who have been predestined to salvation by God. (Towards the end of his life, he even began to declare that the Pope himself appeared to be reprobate and not among the elect.)
 - a. For all of this, the Pope condemned Wycliffe in 1377 for his heretical teachings and asked that Oxford University dismiss him. But Oxford and many government leaders stood with Wycliffe, so he was able to survive the pope’s attacks.

⁹Joseph R. Strayer *The Albigensian Crusades* (1971)

¹⁰ <http://brcc.church/teachings/Church%20History/Lesson%2026%20-%20Forerunners%20to%20the%20Reformation.pdf>

08/27/2020

5. Wycliffe began to teach that the true Pope ought to live, not in luxury but rather like Peter be able to say “Silver and gold have I none...”
 - a. The Pope should be devoted, not to temporal power and riches, but to the care of the flock of God and of the poor.
 - b. As the Great Schism continued, and people spoke against Wycliffe, he hardened and eventually declared that the Pope was the antichrist - and since there was more than one Pope, they were both such.
6. Wycliffe believed that the way to prevail in his struggle with the RCC’s abusive authority was to make the Bible available to the people in their own language.
 - a. Then they could read for themselves how each one of them could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and apart from any ecclesiastical authority.
 - b. Therefore, Wycliffe began to translate the Scripture from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English. It appears he personally translated parts of the New Testament (and possibly all of it), but other parts were done by associates. It was completed prior to his death in 1384, but revisions were done by compatriots after his death as well.
7. After Wycliffe finished the translation work, he organized a group of poor parishioners, known as Lollards (mumblers), to go throughout England preaching Christian truths and reading the Scriptures in their mother tongue to all who would hear God’s word.
 - a. As a result the Word of God, through Wycliffe’s translation, became available to many Englishmen.
 - b. The group was persecuted before and after the death of Wycliffe, and eventually some of them became involved in political intrigues, but they continued down until the time of the English Reformation when they were absorbed in to the larger work of Reformation at that time.
8. Wycliffe died of a stroke suffered while leading the mass in 1384, and since he was technically still in communion with the church, he was allowed to be buried in sacred ground with a Christian burial.
 - a. However, in 1415, over 30 years after his death, the council of Constance (part of the Conciliar movement) declared Wycliffe to be a heretic.
 - b. His bones were eventually dug up, burned, and the ashes were dumped into the River Swift. However, the fire Wycliffe had started continued to burn, not only in England, but especially in Bohemia through the work of John Huss.

John Huss (1373 – 1415)¹¹

¹¹ *Who’s Who in Christian History* Huss, Jan

1. Huss was born in Hussinec (hence his name) into a well-to-do farming family. He received a good elementary education and then attended the University of Prague, where he received his master's degree in 1396. Two years later he began lecturing at the university.
2. After English king Richard II's marriage to Anne of Bohemia in 1382, Wycliffe's ideas were introduced to Bohemian theological and philosophical circles. Consequently, Huss began to read and study that English reformer's works.
3. In 1400 Huss was ordained to the priesthood and then made dean of the philosophy faculty (1401).
4. His reputation spread while he was a synodical preacher. He became even better known upon receiving the prestigious position of Bethlehem Chapel's rector. There he upheld the Czech tradition of preaching in the vernacular.
 - a. His preaching responsibilities forced him to study the Bible more seriously. He continued reading Wycliffe's works, although he did not abandon the Roman church.
5. Huss attacked forged miracles and urged the faithful not to seek Christ in miraculous signs but in Scripture. Huss simultaneously began translating Wycliffe's works into Bohemian.
6. The stance Huss took on Wycliffe soon brought reactions from his university colleagues who had condemned Wycliffe's teachings (1403).
 - a. At the same time, Huss's demands for clerical reforms incited complaints from offended clergy. Huss was also attacked for his criticism of the papacy. As a result, he was forbidden by the archbishop to perform any priestly functions (1408).
7. In 1412 a papal envoy sent to Prague announced a crusade against the Vatican's enemy, neighboring king Ladislaus of Naples.
 - a. Huss boldly protested the crusade and the indulgence offered to participants or sold to supporters. As a result, he was forced to leave Prague.
 - b. During his exile, he completed his work *On the Church* (1413), largely based on Wycliffe's similar book.
8. From 1414 to 1418, church leaders met at Constance (Germany) to resolve the recurrent conflict among various papal claimants. Because of his controversial teachings, Huss was summoned to appear.
 - a. Although promised safe-conduct by Bohemian emperor Sigismund, Huss set out with great misgivings. Soon after arrival, he was jailed.
 - b. During his seven-month trial, he received little opportunity to respond to the accusations. Throughout the proceedings Huss defended his teachings with Scripture. His connection with Wycliffism, however, harmed his position.
 - c. Consequently, the testimonies and arguments of powerful Catholic church leaders secured his condemnation for heresy. Sigismund refused to implement his safe-conduct.
 - d. On July 6, Huss was handed over to the secular authorities with an empty recommendation "for mercy." He was immediately led outside the city where he was defrocked and burned at the stake. He died singing *Kyrie eleēson* (a Greek liturgical prayer, "Lord, have mercy").

Girolamo Savonarola (1452 – 1498)¹²

¹² Ibid Savonarola, Girolamo

1. Savonarola was a forceful preacher against the worldliness and corruption of church and society in northern Italy.
2. His studies in the Old Testament prophets and the book of Revelation helped to make him a powerful preacher against the evils and corruption of society, with a prophetic tinge to his utterances.
 - a. He believed that God had given him the mission of calling people to repentance before the impending day of judgment. The populace was greatly moved—in fact struck with terror—by his utterances, especially after some of his predictions came true.
3. Savonarola preached against the worldliness of the clergy and the corruption of secular life and was especially opposed to the ruling class.
4. He tried to reform both the state and church in Italy, specifically changing the city (Ferrara) into an ascetic type of community.
 - a. He brought about tax reform and court reform and instituted programs to aid the poor. The new constitution of 1495 was similar to that of the Republic of Venice. With the passage of time, opposition to Savonarola heightened, and his power began to slip.
5. He found that he could no longer depend on Charles VIII of France, and Venice opposed him for his pro-French stance.
 - a. Alexander excommunicated him in 1497, and in April 1498 he was arrested, tried for treason and heresy and cruelly tortured.
 - b. Finally, on May 23 he was hanged and his body burned.
6. While Savonarola demanded reform in the church, he never took the more advanced position of Wycliffe and Huss. He had no quarrel with the teaching or the organization of the church, but seems to have believed in justification by faith. He was characterized by religious zeal and personal piety.

Erasmus (1467 – 1536)¹³¹⁴

1. Born in A.D. 1467, about 20 years before Luther, Erasmus grew up in the Netherlands. The world of his youth, like that of Martin Luther's, was almost entirely defined by medieval Christianity. Educated by monks, Erasmus joined the religious life. He studied Christian theology at the University of Paris and followed this interest even after he left the university.
 - a. About 1493 Erasmus was ordained and became Latin secretary to the bishop of Cambrai (France). The bishop's continuing interest allowed Erasmus in 1495 to pursue theological studies at Paris. Erasmus took a lasting dislike to the dogmatic theologians there, with their partisanship, intolerance, and hostility to new ways of thinking.
2. In a wave of optimism that accompanied the accession of Henry VIII to the English throne, Erasmus went back to England in 1509 for five years.
 - a. He stayed for a time with Thomas More, and that year wrote the *Encomium moriae*, later translated into English as *The Praise of Folly*. The book was a biting satire on monastic and ecclesiastical corruption, on the many supposed miracles wrought by images, on the scandal of

¹³ <https://theconversation.com/before-martin-luther-there-was-erasmus-a-dutch-theologian-who-paved-the-way-for-the-protestant-reformation-124861> 08/28/2020

¹⁴ *Who's Who in Christian history* Erasmus, Desiderius

indulgences, on useless rites, and on the papal hierarchy. **That work significantly helped to prepare the way for the Reformation.**

3. Though he agreed with Luther about the corruption in the RCC, he did not defend all of Luther's teachings. Some, he felt, were too divisive.
 - a. For example, Luther preached that people are saved only by faith in God and not by good deeds. Erasmus did not agree, and he did not want the church to split over these debates.
4. Throughout his life, Erasmus forged his own approach to Christianity: knowing Christ by reading the Bible. He called his approach the "Philosophia Christi," or the philosophy of Christ.
 - a. He thought that learning about Jesus' life and teachings would strengthen people's Christian faith and teach them how to be good.
5. In 1517 he finished what became known as the Textus Receptus (TR) (Received Text), a translation of the Greek New Testament.
 - a. This work was done hastily (6 months in total) as he was racing a Spanish monk to get a full translation of the GNT out so as to make profit.
 - i. The manuscripts that he used were "available on the spur of the moment and required a certain amount of correcting before they could be used as a printer's copy."¹⁵
 - ii. This first printed volume contained hundreds and hundreds of errors and even led other scholars to say they had never seen a more faulty book.
 - iii. This was because he utilized 6-8 incomplete copies of the NT, heavily relying on two rather inferior texts which were from the 12th century.
 - iv. For the book of Revelation, he did not know the final 6 verses. He had to use the Latin Vulgate to translate back into Biblical Greek.
 - v. There are also several verses in the TR which are not found anywhere else in any of the known 5500 + GNT fragments. This leads all scholars to believe that he simply made them up to the best of his knowledge or did not understand how to translate the Latin back into Biblical Greek.
 - b. Ironically, the work was dedicated to Pope Leo X (who gladly accepted the honor), and also was hailed with delight by Martin Luther. That was only one year before Luther defied the pope by posting his Ninety-five Theses on the church door in Wittenberg.
 - c. At last, however, in 1524 Erasmus yielded to pressure and attacked Luther in Diatribe on Free Will, to which Luther replied with Bondage of the Will (1526). Erasmus came back with Hyperaspistes Diatribes. Thus for the last twelve years of his life he was associated with the conservative faction, remaining firmly if sometimes uneasily in the old church.

¹⁵ *The Text of the New Testament* Metzger, Bruce p. 99

William Tyndale (1494-1536)¹⁶

1. By the time he was thirty, Tyndale had committed his life to translating the Bible from the original languages into English.
 - a. His heart's desire is exemplified in a statement he made to a clergyman when refuting the view that only the clergy were qualified to read and correctly interpret the Scriptures. Tyndale said, "If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost."
2. In 1523 Tyndale went to London seeking a place to work on his translation. When the bishop of London would not give him hospitality, he was provided a place by Humphrey Munmouth, a cloth merchant.
 - a. Then, in 1524, Tyndale left England for Germany because the English church, which was still under the papal authority of Rome, strongly opposed putting the Bible into the hands of the laity.
 - b. Tyndale first settled in Hamburg, Germany. Quite possibly, he met Luther in Wittenberg soon thereafter. Even if he didn't meet Luther, he was well acquainted with Luther's writings and Luther's German translation of the New Testament (published in 1522).
 - c. Both Luther and Tyndale used the same Greek text (one compiled by Erasmus in 1516) in making their translations.
 - d. Tyndale completed his translation of the New Testament in 1525. Fifteen thousand copies, in six editions, were smuggled into England between the years 1525 and 1530.
 - i. Church authorities did their best to confiscate copies of Tyndale's translation and burn them, but they couldn't stop the flow of Bibles from Germany into England. Tyndale himself could not return to England because he was considered an outlaw at the same time his translation had been banned.
 - ii. However, he continued to work abroad—correcting, revising, and reissuing his translation until his final revision appeared in 1535.
 - iii. After finishing the New Testament, Tyndale had begun work on a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, but he did not live long enough to complete his task.
 - iv. He had, however, translated the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), Jonah, and some historical books.
3. In May 1535, Tyndale was arrested and carried off to a castle near Brussels, where he was imprisoned. While he was in prison, an associate of his named Miles Coverdale (1488–1569) brought to completion an entire Bible in English—based largely on Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and other Old Testament books.
4. After being in prison for over a year, Tyndale was tried and condemned to death. He was strangled and burnt at the stake on October 6, 1536. His final words were so very poignant: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

¹⁶ Ibid Tyndale, William

English Bible Overview

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Word-for-Word



Thought-for-Thought

