



FOR MANY CENTURIES Roman Catholicism remained the dominant expression of the Christian faith, largely due to its ability to impose its will on the far reaches of the old Roman Empire through military might and spiritual intimidation. That intimidation took the form of threats of eternal damnation for anyone who questioned the teachings and practices of the papacy. The Roman Catholic priesthood, which developed along the lines of regional governance to assure compliance with papal authority, solidified itself as the spiritual hierarchy over virtually every aspect of life. Emperors and kings were bound to Romanism lest their subjects revolt out of loyalty to their church. Fear more than love was the motivation for most obedience.

Yet from the beginning, there were courageous individuals who sought to bring the light of God's love and freedom to those spiritually bound to Romanism. They were hounded, persecuted and martyred for daring to oppose the ungodly and unscriptural teachings of the papacy.

## England

### John Wycliffe

Although individuals opposed the might of the papacy from the beginning, the first real organized attempt to bring a semblance of reformation to the church is credited to John Wycliffe, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century theologian and lay preacher at Oxford in England. Wycliffe was opposed to the idea of a clergy and preached in favor of biblically-based reforms and against the possessiveness of the church. He also advocated for the translation of Scripture into the common languages of the people, and by 1382 was able to publish his own translation taken directly from the Latin Vulgate into his native English.

Under the protection of John of Gaunt, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Lancaster, Wycliffe published his *Summa Theologica*, in which he asserted that the church should give up its properties and allow secular authorities to rule in secular affairs. His other great work, *De*

*civili dominio*, further called for the renunciation of temporal power by the Church.

Wycliffe was among the first to express belief in predestination—the “invisible church of the elect” predestined to salvation—as opposed to the visible Catholic Church. Wycliffe’s teachings became popular among the uneducated, and there developed among them the derogatorily-named Lollard movement. (“Lollard” implied one was lazy and/or uneducated.)

In spite of other scriptural shortcomings, Wycliffe aroused the ire of the anti-Christ spirit behind Romanism. When in 1381 Wycliffe formulated his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper contrary to the Eucharistic doctrine of the Church, the English hierarchy was moved to act against him. Wycliffe’s declarations were pronounced heretical. Unwilling to recant, he appealed to the king. With the aid of the newly created printing press Wycliffe was able to publish his declarations and have them spread among the English masses, many of whom received them in earnest.

Wycliffe proposed 24 reformations for the Church, 10 of which addressed the doctrine of transubstantiation, 14 of which addressed church order and institutions.

When the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 broke out, anti-Christ used the papacy to place the blame on Wycliffe. William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury and an old foe of Wycliffe, called an ecclesiastical assembly of notables at London to censure him. During the assembly on May 21 an earthquake shook not only the city but the confidence of the attendees who took it as a sign from God that they should disband. But Courtenay convinced them that the quake was a sign from God that they should proceed to purify the earth from false doctrine. Called the “Earthquake Synod,” it resulted in 10 of Wycliffe’s 24 propositions being called “heretical,” and the remaining 14 “erroneous.”

Again anti-Christ used intimidation to dissuade Wycliffe’s followers from continuing with him. It was forbidden under

threat of prosecution for anyone to hold to Wycliffe's positions, or to promote them in sermons or academic dissertations. Although the English Commons rejected the ban, the king decreed the arrest of those who disobeyed. On November 17, 1382, Wycliffe was summoned to appear before a synod at Oxford. Because he still held favor with the court and Parliament he was allowed to keep his living and was not excommunicated from the Roman Church.

On Holy Innocents' Day, December 28, 1384, he suffered a stroke while at Mass. He died on December 31.

Under duress from further attempts at reformation in later years, the Roman Catholic Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic. The council decreed that his books be burned, and his remains exhumed and burned. His ashes were cast into the River Swift which flows through the Lutterworth in Leicestershire, England, where he had died.

The anger and hatred of the anti-Christ spirit is strong, and was exhibited through the Roman Catholic Church's hatred for Wycliffe so that even 30 years after his death it had him burned posthumously as a heretic.

### **Jan Hus**

The next prominent attempt at reformation was made by Jan Hus (Eng., John Huss), a Czech priest/philosopher who, like Wycliffe, challenged the Church's doctrines on transubstantiation, clergy, order and other issues. Hus's teachings had a strong influence in Europe, and formed the basis for the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century.

Hus fell victim to the anti-Christ spirit of the Council of Constance held from 1414 to 1418. Hus was summoned to Constance under the impression that he would be able to state his ideas. Instead, he was condemned and subsequently burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

Dissension within the Roman Catholic Church was quelled for a time as the anti-Christ spirit worked to further impose the unscriptural teachings and practices of Rome upon virtually all of Christendom.

## **Germany**

### **Martin Luther**

Over one hundred years later, on October 31, 1517, a seemingly innocuous event took place that would light the fires of religious revolution and plunge Europe into centuries-long warfare. A German Augustinian monk, priest and theologian, Martin Luther, posted on the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany, *The Ninety-Five Theses* which he deigned to bring to the attention of the bishop and clergy there. It was customary among theologians to post such theses for discussion of religious matters, so Luther did not think he was doing anything particularly radical. However, his *95 Theses* attacked issues near and dear to the heart of the papacy, including clerical abuses, and particularly the selling of indulgences.

Exactly when the Roman Catholic Church began selling indulgences is uncertain, but the practice became an important part of the anti-Christ's methods of inducing servitude and fear among the Catholic faithful.

An indulgence is a Roman Catholic practice of granting full or partial remission of temporal punishment for sins already forgiven

through the Roman Catholic rite of confession. Prior to indulgences the Church imposed severe penalties for sins confessed to, and absolved through the blessings of, a priest. The penalties were said to take up the lack of Christ's sacrifice to fully atone for sins. It was necessary, according to Catholic teaching, that penitents submit themselves to additional punishment meted out through the Church. Such punishments might take the form of flagellation, either at the hand of another, or at one's own hand, making one's way on one's knees to Catholic churches and/or shrines, or other forms of self-immolation. In some areas even today such punishments are still engaged in by devout penitents.

Penitents were told that by purchasing indulgences for sums of money, they could avoid not only such temporal punishments on earth, but the alleged punishments to come in the afterlife. With enough paid, full or "plenary" indulgences could be granted which would keep one from suffering in Purgatory before being allowed into the presence of God. In some cases, indulgences could be paid for the dead by their loved ones in order to have them released from Purgatory earlier than would otherwise be required by God.

Luther's *95 Theses* posited that the selling of indulgences was contrary to the intention of the confession and penance (to which he still adhered), and that such indulgences were ineffectual.

One means of procuring indulgences in Wittenberg was to venerate relics—artifacts attached to the lives of Roman Catholic saints. Frederick III of Saxony had displayed at the Wittenberg Cathedral a vast collection of some 5,000 relics. As Pope Leo X began a fund-raising campaign to renovate St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican priest, began to sell indulgences throughout the German provinces. Albrecht, the Archbishop of Mainz, Germany, had purchased his church rank and was heavily in debt for having done so. He agreed to allow Tetzel to sell indulgences in his territory provided he received a portion for himself.

Although Frederick III and George, Duke of Saxony had forbidden the sale of indulgences in their respective lands, Luther's parishioners traveled outside those lands to purchase their indulgences. When they came to confession to Luther they insisted that they didn't have to repent of their sins because they had already paid good money for them. Luther became outraged that the Church was charging people for what was theirs by right as a free gift paid for through the blood of Christ. This formed part of Luther's reasoning for salvation by grace rather than by works.

It was never the Luther's intent to create a schism or to withdraw from the Roman Catholic Church, but rather to bring reformation to the Church through scholarly debate on scriptural matters. Thus he posted his *95 Theses* on the Wittenberg Cathedral door with that purpose in mind.

He also sent hand-written copies to his superior, the bishop of Brandenburg, and to Albrecht of Mainz who was responsible for the sale of indulgences. Within two weeks copies of the *95 Theses* were spread throughout Germany, and within two months they found their way throughout all of Europe. As the Lord would have it, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of mechanical moving type had come on the scene in Mainz, Germa-

ny, around 1439, and had been perfected sufficiently to allow for Luther's 95 Theses to be mass produced as one of the first religious controversies aided by the printing press.

Anti-Christ would not stand for this. On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo X issued *Exsurge Domine* ("Arise, O Lord"), a papal bull (edict) rebutting Luther's 95 Theses, and threatening Luther with excommunication unless he recanted within 60 days, not only the 95 Theses, but other statements made in various writings.

Luther not only refused to recant, but burned a copy of the papal bull at Wittenberg on December 10, 1520. This sealed his excommunication.

Anti-Christ deigned to move beyond excommunication to execution. On April 18, 1521 Luther answered a summons to appear before the Diet of Worms—a general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V presided over the assembly at Worms, in the Rhineland, Germany. Johann Eck, assistant to the Archbishop of Trier, prosecuted Luther. Eck laid out copies of Luther's writings and asked if the books were his, and if he stood by what was written in them. Luther attested to the truth that they were his writings, but asked for one day to consider an answer as to whether or not he stood by them. After prayer and consultation with friends, Luther gave this answer:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.

After five days of deliberations Charles V presented the Edict of Worms on May 25, 1521, declaring Luther an outlaw and banning his writings. The decree went out: "We want him to be apprehended and punished as a notorious heretic." This was effectively a death sentence on Luther. The edict also made it a crime to protect Luther and allowed anyone to kill him without legal consequence.

According to plans, Luther was to disappear on his way back to Wittenberg. On the way he was apprehended by soldiers loyal to Prince Frederick III who had been Luther's protector during his trial. The men wore masks in order to appear to be highwaymen. Frederick had Luther escorted to the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach where he remained under the prince's protection. There he translated the New Testament from Greek into German and wrote numerous doctrinal theses. He also engaged in polemics against the pope and Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz. He broadened his discourse to include other practices essential to the Church other than indulgences and pilgrimages. These included condemnation as idolatry the concept of the Mass as a sacrifice, rejection of compulsory confession, and the taking of religious vows as an illegitimate and vain attempt to gain salvation through works.

Reaction to Luther's writings went beyond Luther's intent, resulting in violence against Catholic clergy and the destruction of icons. Alarmed by the violence attributed to his admonitions

against papal rule, Luther returned to Wittenberg. He attributed the violence to the Devil, and appealed to the peaceful intent of the Gospel. Said Luther:

Do you know what the Devil thinks when he sees men use violence to propagate the gospel? He sits with folded arms behind the fire of hell, and says with malignant looks and frightful grin: "Ah, how wise these madmen are to play my game! Let them go on; I shall reap the benefit. I delight in it." But when he sees the Word running and contending alone on the battlefield, then he shudders and shakes for fear.

His words were received with joy, and the violence was quelled. Luther proceeded to continue his battle against the Roman Church, but set out a moderate policy for reformation that eschewed the violence of religious zealots intent on using the fledgling Reformation to instill social unrest.

On June 13, 1525, Luther married Katharina von Bora, one of 12 nuns he helped escape from the Nimbschen Cistercian convent two years earlier, thus establishing the right of clergy to marry in his new-found departure from the Church. Eventually Luther found himself, for better or for worse, the leader in the move toward a new kind of church which, although departing from Romanism on many important issues, retained many other questionable beliefs and practices.

Luther's split from the Roman Catholic Church was arguably the most significant development within the growing Protestant Reformation. Other Reformers outside of Germany were having their voices heard and received not only by the common people, but by magistrates, kings and princes, many of whom were eager to find ways to break the papal yoke from off their domains.

As much light and truth that Luther brought to the Church and to the Reformation, he held to a sin that was easily exploited by anti-Christ. Luther's attitude toward Jews was as anti-Christ as his theology was biblical—mostly strong, partly weak.

Luther believed unconverted Jews to be blasphemers and liars because of their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. He advocated kindness toward Jews because Jesus was born as a Jew, but only as a means of converting them to Christ. His prolific writings on the Jews included *Von den Juden und Ihren Lugen* (*On the Jews and Their Lies*), in which he posited that the Jews were no longer God's chosen people, but were people of the Devil. He advocated the seizing of Jews' money and property, the burning of synagogues and Jewish prayer books, the destruction of their homes, and forbidding rabbis from preaching. He called the Jews "poisonous envenomed worms."

Luther's polemic against Jews would form the basis for the mid-twentieth-century Holocaust as Adolf Hitler appealed to the Germans' Lutheran background as justification for his persecution of the Jews.

## Switzerland

### *Huldrych Zwingli*

In Switzerland, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) posited a simple yet important consideration for his attempts at reformation within the Catholic Church: whatever is in the Bible is

truth; whatever is not in the Bible is not truth. By this he meant spiritual truth; he did not deny the reality of empirical fact.

Educated at the University of Vienna and the University of Basel, Zwingli became adept at poetry, philosophy, astronomy, physics and music, as well as the ancient classics. His tutelage under well-known humanists of his day led Zwingli to begin questioning his Roman Catholic beliefs. Yet even as anti-Christ sought to draw him away from Christ through the humanistic influences in his life, those influences surprisingly led him toward reformation thinking in the long run.

Zwingli was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1506, but he began studying the teachings of Erasmus, which turned him toward the Reformation. Moving to Einsiedeln in 1515, Zwingli witnessed first-hand many of the evils of Romanism, including the selling of indulgences. Several years before Luther began teaching against this practice, Zwingli was condemning it. He was also distressed at the militaristic nature of Romanism which he saw contributing to the moral decay and death of Swiss youth. Yet Zwingli remained in the Church even while preaching against the evils of the papacy. Like Luther, it was not Zwingli's intention to create a schism, but rather to reform the Church from within.

It wasn't until the plague struck Zurich in 1520 and Zwingli was infected, that Zwingli's dedication to the Lord was fully realized. Recovering from the plague, Zwingli realized that he had been spared for a reason, and his teachings on the necessity for strict obedience to the Scriptures intensified.

Among Zwingli's challenges to the Church were the requirements for celibacy among the priests, infant baptism, and required fasting, particularly throughout the season of Lent.

At the time, Switzerland was not a unified nation, but consisted of thirteen states (cantons) as well as affiliated states and lordships. The independence of the states contributed to division over the Reformation and its several confessions. It was in this climate that Zwingli attempted to spread his ideas. Encouraged by other Swiss clergymen, he was emboldened to publish his first major statement of faith, *Apolgeticus Archeteles* ("The First and Last Word"), in which he defended himself against charges of heresy and stirring unrest, and denied the right of any ecclesiastical hierarchy to judge him in church matters because of the Church's corrupted condition.

Eventually the cantons of Switzerland were so inundated with Zwingli's concepts of the Reformation that resolutions to the disputes were sought.

There was especially unrest within the city of Zurich, where the Swiss Diet sought to prohibit Zwingli's teachings. The city council decided to seek a solution by inviting the clergy of the city and outlying regions to a meeting where the disputes could be aired. The First Disputation took place on January 3, 1523. The bishop of Zurich sent a delegation led by his vicar general, Johannes Fabri. Zwingli presented his theses in the *Schlussreden* (Sixty-seven Articles). But Fabri was instructed not to discuss theology before laymen; he was to appeal only to the need for ecclesiastical authority. The city council decided in favor of Zwingli being allowed to continue his preaching, and that all other preachers teach only from the Scriptures.

This was a blow to anti-Christ's ambitions to snuff out the Reformation in Switzerland. After his defeat there, anti-Christ spurred the Church to further disputation against Zwingli's scriptural mandate.

This led to the Second Disputation in October, 1523. In September of that year, Leo Jud, Zwingli's friend, and pastor of St. Peterskirche, called for the removal of religious icons from the churches, including statues of saints. The Zurich city council decided to work out the disputation that resulted from Jud's actions. In addition to the issue of icons for veneration, the concept of the Mass as a sacrificial rite was included in the debate. Facing the canon Konrad Hofmann, Zwingli led the disputation on the part of the Reformation. Others on his side were demanding a faster move toward reformation, and called for replacing infant baptism with adult baptism, which call was, sadly, opposed by Zwingli.

Arguments arose as to whether the city council for ecclesiastical government had the authority to make such decisions. The council decided for a compromise offered by Konrad Schmid, a priest from Aargau and follower of Zwingli, who suggested that pastors continue to preach Reformation ideas even under threat of punishment from the Church, believing that eventually the people would come to accept those ideas. It was particularly the dispute over icons that Schmid addressed, thus showing support for Zwingli while quelling the iconoclasts who were destroying images and causing outrage among the people. Schmid argued that the people would eventually come to voluntarily have the images removed, which did come to pass as the Reformation eventually took over.

In 1525 another dispute grew between Zwingli and the emerging Anabaptist movement under Conrad Grebel, which argued against civil authority and for governance by the faithful. On February 2, 1542, the Anabaptists' first adult baptisms were performed by Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock and Felix Manz at the home of Manz's mother.

Zwingli won out with the city council, and it was decreed that anyone who refused to have their children baptized must leave Zurich. It was also decreed that adults who had previously been baptized should not be rebaptized. Those who disobeyed were arrested and fined.

The dispute over baptism did not die out, and ultimately, in March, 1526, the council issued a mandate that no one shall rebaptize another under penalty of death. Although Zwingli had nothing to do with the mandate—at least technically—he did not disapprove of it. Felix Manz was the first victim of anti-Christ under the Zurich council for continuing to practice adult baptism.

On April 8, 1524, five cantons, Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Zug, formed an alliance loyal to the Catholic Church and acted to withstand the Reformation under Zwingli's leadership. The alliance took their disputes to the Swiss Diet which ruled in its favor, banning Zwingli's writings. The thirteen-member Confederation was divided 9 to 4 against Zwingli.

The disputations throughout Switzerland resulted in more war and bloodshed as Christians fought against Christians for their causes for or against the Reformation. On October 9,

1531, the Five States loyal to the papacy declared war on Zurich. Outnumbered two-to-one, the Zurich army, of which Zwingli was a part, encountered the superior forces of the Five States near Kappel on October 11. In less than an hour the Zurich army was defeated and Zwingli was numbered among the fatalities. His successor, Heinrich Bullinger recounted Zwingli's death when he was found by his enemies wounded but alive:

“They turned him round, and asked him to confess. He repeatedly shook his head, by way of denial. 'Die, then, stiff-necked heretic!' cried Captain Vokinger of Unterwalden, giving him his death-blow.”

Zwingli's body was quartered and burned, his ashes scattered to the winds.

It seems as if Satan possesses a perverse desire to destroy the bodies of the saints in any way he can. If he cannot destroy a saint's body in life he'll try to destroy it in death. This may not apply to all saints, but perhaps especially to those whose lives are dedicated wholly to the work of the Lord. Witness how Satan sought the body of Moses and contended with the archangel Michael for it. To what purpose other than to defile it in some manner? Considering the anti-Christ nature of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in its contentions against true believers in Christ, it is understandable how it would seek to destroy the bodies of those who opposed it.

### **John Calvin**

Born Jehan Cauvin, John Calvin was educated as a humanist lawyer who found dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic Church. With the Reformation spreading, violent reactions among the Catholic French impelled Calvin to flee to Switzerland in 1530. As he immersed himself in the teachings of the Reformation he came to prominence when, in 1536, he published the first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He was approached by William Farel to help the cause of the Reformation in Geneva. Both were expelled when the Geneva city council rejected their ideas.

Calvin went to Strasbourg to pastor a church composed of French refugees. In time he returned to Geneva where he implemented his ideas on church government and liturgy. Although opposed by several powerful Catholic families, he was able to establish roots in the city. As more refugees from Catholic countries flooded Geneva the Roman Catholic Church's influence waned. A new city council was elected, and Calvin's opponents were pushed aside.

Soon, the tide turned, and the persecuted became the persecutor. Calvin was a stern enforcer of his reforms in Geneva, and his influence resulted in the deaths of several detractors. Although he never personally pronounced sentence on those who opposed him, he did consent to their deaths.

The most famous detractor was another Reformer, Michael Servetus, who, as a Spanish physician and Protestant theologian, denied the doctrine of the Trinity and opposed infant baptism. Servetus and Calvin exchanged many letters, engaging in disputes over these and other teachings. Servetus made a fatal error when he sent to Calvin a copy of Calvin's *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* annotated with arguments against what Serve-

tus considered errors. This enraged Calvin, but Servetus went into hiding in Vienne, in southeastern France. When the Catholic authorities in France learned of his whereabouts Servetus was arrested. He managed to escape from prison and determined to make his way to Italy. On his way there, he went through Geneva where he was recognized and subsequently arrested. Calvin's secretary, Nicholas de la Fontaine, submitted to the court a list of accusations against Servetus. Servetus was given the choice to be tried either in Vienne or Geneva. Begging to stay in Geneva, Servetus wrongly assumed that he had a better chance of survival with the Reformers than with the Catholic Church. The judgment went against Servetus and he was sentenced to burning at the stake—the same sentence he had received in Vienne. Calvin requested that he be beheaded rather than burned (an attempt at mercy), but he was refused. On October 27, 1553, Servetus was burned alive atop a pyre of his own books.

Upon Servetus' death, Calvin was acclaimed as a defender of Christianity, and his authority in Geneva became nearly absolute.

For some time, Luther and Calvin enjoyed mutual respect, but conflict arose between Luther and Zwingli over the nature of the Eucharist. Calvin's position coincided with Zwingli's and a schism developed between the Reformed churches under Calvin's and Zwingli's leadership, and the Lutheran churches which were beginning to spread from Germany to the rest of Europe.

Calvin sought for Christian unity among the Reformers, but nothing came of his appeals.

Calvin's passion was for his Reformation to spread to his native France. His church funded literature and ministers, both of which were sent to France. France's Henry II proclaimed the Edict of Chateaubriand in 1551, which called for severe persecution of Protestants. When the Edict of Chateaubriand failed to quell the Protestant uprising in France, a second decree, the Edict of Compiègne (1557) applied the death penalty to all convictions for heresy.

Calvin expanded his *Institutes* from 21 chapters to 80, which included extensions of his previous material. He died on May 27, 1564 at the age of 54. He was buried in an unmarked grave in the Cimetière des Rois (The Royal Cemetery).

The history of the Reformation demonstrates that, while the Lord infused much light on biblical truth through that movement, anti-Christ also managed to use it to his advantage, pitting Christians against Christians, not only Protestants against Catholics, but Protestants against Protestants and against other non-Catholics.

There is nothing more fierce than religious zealotry, even in the name of Christ. Many of the leading Reformers were as much anti-Christ in their treatment of those who challenged their authority as were the popes. The Reformers were, after all, theologians within Roman Catholicism, and learned their harsh methods of propagating even the truths they saw in God's Word. And just as the papacy was anti-Semitic, so, too, were many of the Reformers.