

REFORMATION SUNDAY: OCTOBER 25, 2015

Remembering Jan Hus



More than a century before the start of the Protestant Reformation, Czech reformer Jan Hus paid for his beliefs with his life. He was born in Bohemia in 1369, during a time of schism in the Roman Catholic Church. After his ordination in 1400, Hus joined other Bohemian reformers who preached in Czech rather than Latin. Hus taught that the Bible was the source of all truth—not popes or other church leaders. His critiques were similar to those of English reformer John Wycliffe (1331-1384), and as a university professor and preacher at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, Hus helped spread Wycliffe's views.

In 1410, Pope Alexander V (one of three claimants to the papacy) moved to suppress dissent in Bohemia. He ordered all Wycliffe's writings burned, and he attempted to silence Jan Hus by declaring chapels unfit places for preaching. Hus appealed and continued to preach to huge crowds, even after his excommunication. When Alexander's successor, Pope John XXIII, banned all religious services in Prague, Hus took refuge in the Bohemian countryside where he continued to write and preach.

In 1414, King Sigismund, head of the Holy Roman Empire, offered Hus safe conduct to attend the Church's Council of Constance in Germany. Less than a month after his arrival, however, authorities arrested Hus on the Pope's order. Hus said he would recant if the Council could show him where he had erred according to the Bible, but he would not concede to any of the 39 articles as presented against him.

On July 6, 1415, the Council found Jan Hus guilty of heresy and sentenced him to death. Civil authorities then burned him at the stake. On his head was a tall, paper hat with an inscription labeling him the leader of a heretical movement. Hus died defending his belief that calls for reform could be God's will, even if they challenged powerful religious men.

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Above left: Portrait of Jan Hus, undated. Frontispiece from: *The Life & Times of Master John Hus*, by Count Lutzow, 1909.

Above right: Hus at the stake. From *John Huss*, by Julia McNair Wright, 1870.