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The Persecuted Non-Conformists (Part 2)



Church History - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the movements of non-conformists who challenged the basic doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church during a period of intense persecution 400 years prior to the Reformation. These groups included the Paulicians, Caffars, Bogomils, and the Waldenzies or Waldenzians, who opposed the Church's teachings on poverty and believed that prayers would not help those who had died and gone to hell. Other non-conformists included John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, who believed in the "sola scriptura" doctrine and opposed the Church's use of Latin during worship. Despite their persecution by the inquisition, these non-conformists were precursors to the Reformation and had a profound impact on the direction of Christianity in the years to come.

Transcript

This evening we're going to look at four individuals and the movements that surrounded them that lived in the 400 years prior to the Reformation. Now when we think of the Reformation, we sometimes think of the time where true knowledge of God was recovered out of the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages were very dark and they were very long.

Well, depending on which portion of it you call the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages were approximately a thousand years long. That's about half of the current duration of the Church Age. It's been almost two thousand years since Jesus was here and about a thousand of those years was a pretty sad situation.

From the arising of the Papacy around 600 AD until the Reformation, about 1500 AD, it was pretty bleak. And we sometimes just think of that whole period as the Dark Ages, the time where the truth of the Gospel was simply lost or obscured, and that the Papacy and the Roman Catholic era reigned supreme and universal. And to a large extent this is the way things were because the institutional church throughout the entire period was the Roman Catholic Church and things were very, very ugly from the point of view of spirituality and morality in the Papacy during this period of time generally.

And we think of, of course, Martin Luther and his dramatic nailing of his 95 Theses to the church door in the Wittenberg Church as the beginning of the time where truth began to

be recovered and the church began to experience a little bit of recovery from, from its long slumber. Actually, the things that Martin Luther did had their predecessors in many courageous men before him, centuries before him. One of the principal differences is that Martin Luther did it at a time where his movement could really take hold and spread throughout Europe, partly due to the fact that the printing press was invented shortly before Luther sparked the Reformation.

With the invention of the printing press, Luther and others were capable of printing gazillions of tracts, spreading their, their message and their arguments so that Europe could be, to a large extent, won over. At least certain were won over to his ways and that, that put a stop to the monopoly that the Roman Catholic Church had over European religion, only because the movement was able to, to get so much publication, I think, and, and, and reach so many people so suddenly. Before Luther's time, there were men very much like Luther, who thought this largely some of the same things he did.

Now, they didn't, they didn't think all the same things he did. And in fact, the men we're talking about didn't even all agree with each other on all points. But one thing they had in common, they definitely challenged some of the basic Roman Catholic assumptions and doctrines, which contributed to the, to the downfall of the church.

And when Luther finally came along, the ideas he presented to a large extent were simply ideas that some of these people had promoted in their own times before him. And he was not unaware of them either. He had some influence from them.

In our next session, I plan to get into the Reformation. We've been working a long time in that direction. I'm eager to get into discussion with Martin Luther and Zwingli and, and Calvin and those people.

And we'll start talking about the Reformation next time. But in this session, I want to take the other half of the notes I gave you last time. We, I gave out some notes last time that were entitled, I think it was said the, the persecuted nonconformists in the middle ages.

And we talked about the Paulicians, I think, and we talked about the, the Cathars and the Bogomils and some of these groups that were really kind of heretical. But we had another half of that lecture that we're going to finish up here now. And that is those men who were really precursors and predecessors of the Reformation itself.

One of them, Peter Waldo, lived as much as 400 years before the Reformation. And men like Wycliffe and, and John Huss were maybe a couple hundred years before, a hundred years before. But these men lived at a time very dangerous.

Of course, it was even dangerous in Luther's time, but he managed to seize popular support throughout Europe to a degree that he managed to survive. Some of these men

did not live up to natural old age because of the unpopularity of their views with the institutional church. There are four that I want to consider in tonight's lecture, and that'll bring us right up to the point where we can afterwards study the Reformation.

Peter Waldo and the movement that is named after him, which is sometimes called the Waldensians. And then I want to talk about John Wycliffe, who was in England. Waldo was in France.

Wycliffe was in England. John Huss was in Bohemia or modern Czechoslovakia. And Hierolamo Savonarola, who was in Italy.

So each of these guys was really in a different country in Europe, but each of them in their own way challenged the monolithic authority of the Roman Catholic Church and did so to the hurt of the Roman Catholic Church, but to the benefit of the Church of Jesus Christ, in my opinion. Let's talk first about the Waldensians and Peter Waldo. I'm going to be fairly note-bound because as you can see, these notes have quite a lot of detail and I don't have it all memorized, but I have done a lot of study on these guys this week.

It's just they are so similar to each other in some respects that some of the details about one mixes with the details about another in my mind. So I'm going to bind myself to my notes pretty closely here. Peter Waldo, who lived in the late 12th century, that would be the 1100s, he was a wealthy merchant of Lyons.

And he's also known as Valdez as well as Waldo. Peter Waldo or Peter Valdez. He was converted from a life of wealth and luxury in either 1175 or 1176.

And when he did, he gave away his earthly possessions. He was very much impressed with Jesus' statement to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, that if you would be perfect, sell what you have and give to the poor and come and follow me and you'll have treasure in heaven. So he sold his earthly goods and gave them to the poor with the exception of a little bit that he held back for his wife and his two daughters so that they would not be left without a living.

He didn't want them to become beggars, but he became a beggar and an itinerant preacher as well. And he wanted to imitate Jesus and to live in poverty and to itinerate and preach in his area. One thing that all the men we're talking about today, or at least the first three we're talking about today, had in common is they all were passionate about preaching the gospel and the scriptures in the language of the people.

Now this is commonplace to us. The New Testament has been translated into almost every language in the world with the exception of certain tribal languages that missionaries haven't penetrated yet, but over 2,000 languages today have the Gospels and the New Testament in their language. But in those days, that just wasn't the case.

You had the original Greek documents, actually not the original Greek documents, but

you had the New Testament in Greek available, which of course most common people couldn't read Greek. And then you had the Vulgate, which had been translated by Jerome into Latin, and most common people didn't read Latin either. But the Roman Catholic Church in its scripture readings always read the Latin without translation, because there is this superstitious notion that Latin was a sacred language, and you know, it was the language of the Roman Empire.

It was the language of Rome, which is where Peter had established the church and so forth, as the Catholic Church claimed. And so Latin just held a mystique to the Catholic Church. They felt they needed to stick with it.

And so the common people of France who spoke French, or of England who spoke English, or of Germany who spoke German or whatever, they would sit and they'd listen in the churches to the reading of scripture in Latin and wouldn't understand a word of it. I don't know whether it was calculated by the Roman Catholic officials to do this, but the effect it had was of course to prevent much reformation from ever happening, because reformation, when it did take hold, was spurred by people's concern to be more true to scripture than the Catholic Church was. But if people didn't know the scriptures, it wasn't available in their language, it wasn't even read in their language in the churches, in their land, they couldn't very well know whether the Catholic Church was being scriptural or not.

And so one thing that Peter Waldo did was he had, I'm not sure if he, I don't think he did the translating himself, I think perhaps he used some of his fortune to commission that the New Testament be translated into the language of his community in Lyon, France. And he went around preaching in the language of the people and teaching the scriptures in the language of the people. So he really kind of stood out from the clergy of his town, which were opulent, wealthy, somewhat corrupt, you know, bishops and cardinals and so forth.

And here he's walking around looking like St. Francis of Sicily or something. He's looking like Jesus in poverty, just going around preaching to people and living off of the contributions, free will contributions that people had to offer. And it really was an attractive alternative to the religiously minded people of his area.

And he attracted quite a following. And there were men who joined with him in his movement and they came to be called the Waldensians. Now, initially, these people were approved by the Pope, Pope Alexander III at the Third Lateran Council in 1179.

He approved generally of people living in poverty and, you know, traveling around preaching the gospel. But he said with this condition that they had to receive the permission of the local church authorities to do so. That is, if their local bishop or priest or whatever would permit them to preach, then they could.

Well, it happens that in Lyon, where they were, one of the church authorities actually didn't want them to. The Archbishop of Lyon forbade them to preach in 1181, but that didn't stop them. They had come to the conclusion from their study of Scripture that the Roman Catholic clergy had no authority and that Jesus was the head of the church.

And so, when the Archbishop told them to stop, they didn't stop. In fact, they preached the more, a little bit like the apostles did when the Sanhedrin told them to stop. They just went out and did it the more.

And so, the Waldensians got themselves very unpopular, although an earlier Pope had approved of them. A later Pope, Pope Lucius III, in 1184, excommunicated them from the church. That didn't stop them either, as we shall see.

Let me tell you a little bit of the distinctives of the Waldensian movement. They were organized a little bit like the Albigensians or the Cathars, in that you'll remember when we talked about them that all these movements of the Albigensians, the Bogomils, they had sort of a, you might even call it a caste system in their movement. They had the superiors and the ordinary believers.

The superiors, however, were not like the superiors of the Roman Catholic Church who lived wealthy and ordinary people were peasants. It was the other way around. The superiors in these movements had to live an ascetic life in poverty, whereas the ordinary believers didn't have such stringent requirements placed upon them.

They did support their superiors, but they didn't have to live in abstinence of meat and of marriage and things like that, like the superiors did. So, in some respects, the Waldensians resembled the Cathars, not so much in a doctrine, though, but just in their organization that they did have these superiors and these ordinary believers in their movement. The main thing that characterized the Waldensians was that they taught the New Testament in the vernacular language of the people.

They were not teaching so much against Catholic doctrine initially, and that's why the Pope originally said they were acceptable. But as they read the New Testament and as they taught the New Testament, of course, their eyes were opened to many of the flaws in the Roman Catholic Church. And so, they began to oppose, verbally and outright, oppose many things that the Church taught.

They rejected the legitimacy of the established Church and its sacraments. They came to think that the established Church was not of God and that they were the true Church. They rejected the intermediary role of the priests.

You know, you got to remember, in the Catholic Church, a priest isn't the same thing as a pastor or a minister in a Protestant congregation. A priest is one who offers sacrifices, and the priest in the Catholic Church is a man who's ordained to offer the sacrifice of the

Mass, without which the worshipers cannot have their sins forgiven. Now, there's no counterpart to that in Protestant, well, in Evangelicalism.

The Evangelical Church doesn't acknowledge the existence of priests, except that the whole Church is a kingdom of priests. But we don't acknowledge that there's some man who stands above all others to offer a sacrifice for our sins, and without which we just can't come to God. That's just not biblical teaching.

But it was the Roman Catholic teaching, but the Waldensians rejected it, and they did not believe in the intermediary role of the priests. They rejected the doctrine of purgatory and of prayers to the dead. They argued that if a person has died and has gone to hell, as the Bible teaches, one of two options, that prayers won't help them.

And if he's died and gone to heaven, which is the other option, then he doesn't need any prayers. And therefore, they rejected prayers to the dead and giving alms for the dead, which were Roman Catholic practices. They also rejected prayers to the images of the saints, which the Catholic Church regularly practiced.

And they rejected the whole physical paraphernalia of the Church. They rejected Church buildings, altars, holy water, the pilgrimages people made to Rome and other sacred sites, and also the sale of indulgences. You know, what later sparked Martin Luther's Reformation was the sale of indulgences.

When a guy named Titzel came to Luther's town in Wittenberg and started trying to sell indulgences, an indulgence was when the Catholic Church would say, you pay a certain amount of money, and we'll give you a certain amount of time out of purgatory. You see that in the Catholic doctrine, when you die, you go to purgatory, and you either go to heaven or hell from there. If you got a lot of friends paying for indulgences for you or praying for you or lighting candles for you, you might get out of purgatory and go to heaven.

And the more people who do that, the less time you have to spend in purgatory. And so the sale of indulgences was a means by which the Catholic Church would fill its coffers, usually for building projects or to sponsor wars they were involved in. And they do so by saying, you have less time in purgatory, your loved ones have less time in purgatory if you pay some money.

Now, that's what caused Martin Luther to nail up his 95 theses in the 16th century on the church door. That's what caused the Reformation. And some people think that the 95 theses were all the complaints Luther had against the Catholic Church.

The 95 theses were 95 complaints and arguments he had against the sale of indulgences. His other complaints about the Catholic Church were enunciated later, but the 95 theses were all about the sale of indulgences. And yet, 400 years before Luther,

we have Peter Waldo and his group denouncing the sale of indulgences, too.

So, I mean, Luther didn't come up with this himself, on his own. At least he wasn't the first to do so, if he did. Now, of course, as you know, if you have been studying with us, you know that the Catholic Church during this period violently persecuted movements that did not conform to them.

And so the Waldensians became one of the persecuted non-conformist sects. And sometimes the Inquisitions were directed against them, as well as against the Albigensians. Albigensians and Waldensians were often lumped together as heretics in the mind of the Roman Catholic Church, though they weren't really the same at all.

The Albigensians were more like Gnostics. They were more like Manicheans, which was truly a heresy. The Waldensians, well, they were considered a heresy by the Roman Catholic Church, just like you and I would be considered heretics by the Roman Catholic Church.

But by our understanding of the Scripture, the Waldensians would be more or less, you know, what we call evangelicals. And yet they were persecuted by Inquisition, just like the heretic Albigensians were. Now, the Waldensians, because of that persecution, fled out of Lyon to Lombardy and Provence, which is in France, another part of France, where the Cathars were also a strong movement.

And they, because the Cathars and the Waldensians were both being persecuted by the established Church, they coexisted reasonably peaceably. And in fact, in some cases, like in France, the Waldensians picked up a little bit, there's some evidence they picked up a little bit of the Cathar rejection of the material world. But that didn't happen until the Waldensians crossed the board throughout Europe.

But some of that mixing with the Cathars did influence Waldensians. And no doubt, I mean, we don't know how the figures, perhaps some of the Cathars got converted by contact with the Waldensians. They organized into a church with bishops, priests, and deacons.

Now, you got to realize how radical that is to do in the late 12th century, to have an alternative church with bishops and deacons and elders and priests. Now, I'm not in favor of a group having priests, and apparently they didn't understand as much as some later reformers did about some of those things. We can hardly blame them for that.

They lived in a very dark world, but they had more light than most. But you see, when you set up bishops and priests and deacons, and you're not in the established church, it means you're setting up a rival church. As long as they were, I mean, take Francis of Assisi, in contrast.

Francis of Assisi lived very similar to these people, and he had the approval of the Pope.

But he never really left the Catholic Church. He never set up a different system of hierarchy in conflict with the Catholic Church, and he never really, of course, was therefore persecuted.

But the Waldensians, they just rejected the established church and started their own movement and said they were the true church. They labeled the Catholic Church the Whore of Babylon, and they were harassed throughout the Middle Ages. A crusade was launched against them in 1488, and 4,000 Waldensians were massacred in France in the year 1545, which, of course, was even after the Reformation.

So you can see that they existed for hundreds of years. Despite the persecutions, their numbers increased, and their influence spread throughout Europe and even to England. They became the most widespread of the persecuted movements during that period.

In some regions, like France, they did seem to take on some of the doctrines of the Cathars. Despite the differences in doctrine, there was considerable exchange of ideas between the Waldensians and the later Hussites and Wycliffeites. Now, the Hussites and the Wycliffeites, of course, were followers of John Wycliffe and John Huss, and that was later in the 14th century, but because the Waldensians spread out and remained in Europe for centuries, eventually there was exchange of ideas with those who were following the later leaders, Huss and Wycliffe, and so the Waldensians really helped to influence the course of the Reformation by their input into the thinking of the Hussites and the Wycliffeites.

Well, Peter Waldo never actually died as a martyr. He just faded out of the picture because they did flee from the persecution out of the country, and his death was not spectacular, nothing to report, but other leaders rose up and continued the movement for hundreds of years and even into the modern era. Now, later on, we have the ministries of John Wycliffe and John Huss, Wycliffe in England and Huss in Bohemia.

Huss was influenced by Wycliffe, so Wycliffe was earlier. He lived from 13, maybe 29, no one knows exactly his birth date, because his early life is really obscure. Most of what's known about Wycliffe is through his writings, and they're mainly theological treatises, so there's very little known about his life.

It is assumed he was born about 1329 or 1330, and he lived about 54 or 55 years. The day of his death is known. He died in 1384.

He was a leading philosopher, a professor at Oxford University in England, and England in those days, like all of Europe, was Roman Catholic, and so Oxford was Roman Catholic, and Wycliffe was in that system as well, but England always had a bit of a rivalry with France. Probably still does, but throughout history, there was this rivalry and some bit of hostility between France and England. They fought wars against each other, and the Pope in these days was not in Rome.

The Pope was in Avignon, France, and the English presumed the Pope was somewhat under the influence of the French, and therefore, there were sometimes conflicts between the powers that be in England and the Pope that were somewhat nationalistic in nature, and that was one of the things that kept Wycliffe from probably getting killed, because he was in the good graces of the political leadership in France. In fact, he was, for a while, the chaplain to the king. Did I say France? England.

He was chaplain to the king of England, and he had access to Parliament, so that he was able actually to have some godly influence, as it turned out, on the ruling classes of England, as well as the peasants. He had a great interest in the common man, and in getting the gospel out to the common man. He offended the Roman Catholic Church, because the Church of, or the English government, sometimes would seize property from corrupt clergymen and church officials, and Wycliffe argued in favor of this, and he took a bold stand in favor of the government's right to confiscate the property of corrupt church officials, and this got him in the bad graces with the Pope, and he probably would have been in big trouble.

He was excommunicated for it, but he had the English royalty on his side, and so no harm came to him, and so he was able to stand against the Pope. Pope Gregory XI, who was one of the worst of them, actually Pope Gregory VI, I think, was worse still, but he was condemned by Pope Gregory XI in 1377, but he was protected by his influential friends in England. He began to attack some of the central doctrines of the Church.

I've listed a few of them. He taught that the successors of Saint Peter and the Apostles, now remember the Catholic doctrine. The Pope is the successor of the Apostle Peter.

The bishops, or the college bishops, are the successors of the Apostles, so that the Pope and the bishops taken together have the same authority as the Apostles had in the early Church, according to Catholic doctrine. Well, Wycliffe taught the doctrine of apostolic poverty. He said, well, the Apostles lived in poverty, and therefore anyone who, he did not necessarily deny apostolic succession, that Catholic, he didn't deny that the Pope was the successor of Peter, but he said that the successors of the Apostles should live in poverty and service, rather than pomp and opulence and affluence, like the Apostles did, and that didn't make him very popular with the clergy when he taught those things.

He also came to believe that the Pope was the Antichrist, and that Christ alone is the head of the Church. Now, that might not seem like a very radical thing to say that Christ is the head of the Church, since the Bible says that plainly enough, but most people didn't have access to the Bible and didn't read the Bible that much, and Wycliffe is one of the early guys who really went on record saying the Pope is not the head of the Church, Christ is. He opposed transubstantiation.

This is one of the things that made the Catholic Church the most angry at him. Transubstantiation, you recall, is the Catholic doctrine that when the Mass is being

offered, which is the Eucharist or the Communion, that the bread actually turns into the body of Jesus, and the contents of the cup, the wine, actually becomes the blood of Jesus. Now, this is partly based on the fact that when Jesus was at the Last Supper, he said, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, this bread, it is my body.

And not only the Pope and the Roman Catholics, even Luther, argued very strongly that this means something very, you know, mystical. The Roman Catholic Church taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation means the substance changes from ordinary bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus every time the Mass is presented.

Wycliffe resisted this and rejected this. He wrote against it, and he believed it was a false doctrine. However, the doctrine he believed that he put in place is one that I don't know that you or I would agree with.

Depends on your own orientation about these things. He actually put forward a view very much like that which Luther later put forward, which is usually called consubstantiation rather than transubstantiation. Trans means, of course, changing from one thing to another, but con is a prefix which means with.

And consubstantiation means that the actual body of Jesus is with the bread, and the actual blood of Jesus is with the wine. And I think it was Luther who put it that the body of Jesus is above and below and beside and through the bread, and the blood of Jesus is above and below and beside and through the wine, but they don't change into those things. Now, to me, that's about as spooky and mystical and silly, frankly, as the transubstantiation doctrine is, but that's actually the Lutheran doctrine that taught that.

And so Luther, although he, it's a funny thing because when Luther debated these points, I think he debated with Zwingli about this very issue, and they were about, we're getting ahead of ourselves here by a hundred years or so, but the reform in Germany, of course, was had by Martin Luther. In Switzerland, it was headed by Ulrich Zwingli, and these men were contemporaries and had much in common in what they objected to in the Catholic Church, and they almost merged their movements, but they sat at a table together and they couldn't get along because Zwingli wanted to say that the cup and the bread were just a memorial. And Luther says, but it says this is my body and it says this is my blood.

And so he, he, they just couldn't get along over this issue. And so they split up and never, never merged their movements. They became kind of hostile to each other.

But old Luther, you know, he, he didn't move far enough, I think, away from the Catholic doctrine, because I can't, I don't think there's a dime's worth of difference between transubstantiation and consubstantiation. It's just a matter of how many letters are at the beginning of the word. But anyway, we have Wycliffe actually rejecting

transubstantiation in favor of something like Luther's idea later of consubstantiation, and that was probably the most controversial thing he taught that made the Catholic Church most angry at him.

He taught there's no need for a priest to mediate for God's people, which is also, that was taught earlier by Peter Waldo and his group. And he favored the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and began an English translation from the Vulgate. Now that also was like Peter Waldo, believing that the Bible should be preached and read in the churches and out of the churches from the language of the people so they could understand it.

Now Wycliffe began an English translation of the Bible, he died before it could be finished, and it was finished up later by some of his successors in the movement. Wycliffe is remembered or memorialized for being, you know, the first guy to really get the Bible into English, as Luther did it into German, and as Waldo did it probably, I don't know if it's French he spoke or what language it was, but English-speaking people remember Wycliffe fondly for this reason, because he's the first to really get the Bible into English for us. In fact, you've no doubt heard of the Wycliffe Bible translators, well they're so named after John Wycliffe because of their work, they were translating the Bible into the vernacular of the tribal groups that they go and live among.

Yeah, that was a following of Wycliffe's ideas, but he wasn't the first, because Waldo had those ideas earlier. Wycliffe wrote, for example, and here's where he would also clash with the Catholic Church, quoting Wycliffe, neither the testimony of Augustine nor Jerome nor any other saint should be accepted except insofar as it was based on Scripture. Christ's law is best and enough.

The New Testament is of full authority and open to the understanding of simple men as to the points that be most needful to salvation. Now, the reason I read that quote is because it's so exemplary of the later distinctives of the Reformation that happened over a hundred years after his time, maybe 150 years afterwards. Two of the cardinal doctrines of the Reformation that characterized it in Luther's time were the doctrine of sola scriptura, sola scriptura means scripture alone, and it means that there is no authority in the church equal to or above the scriptures.

The papal authority or the bishop's authority doesn't have, or no authority, tradition of the church doesn't have any authority above that of the scriptures. That's the sola scriptura doctrine. You can see that Wycliffe believed that too from this quote.

Another distinctive of the later Reformation was a doctrine called the perspicuity of scripture, which simply means the scripture can be understood by people, ordinary people, that it's written in plain language for ordinary people to understand. You see, the Catholic church taught for centuries, even up into my lifetime, it was essentially the Catholic position. I think they've changed it recently, but at least since I was a child, the

Catholic church taught that ordinary people probably shouldn't read the scriptures much because it's too confusing, and that only the trained theologians can really understand it without twisting it and making a mess of it.

And of course, this was their way of keeping people from noticing the errors they had, the scriptural errors, oh, you just can't understand it, you need the training of the theology to understand it. Well, the Reformers and these people before the Reformers didn't believe that was true. They didn't believe that the scriptures were written for the theologically trained and they were written for ordinary people to understand.

And so Wycliffe himself, long before Luther, said the New Testament is of full authority and open to the understanding of simple men as to the points that be most needful to salvation. Now, the followers of Wycliffe were called the Lawlords. Apparently they were called that by their enemies, although it's not entirely clear where the term arose.

It either means something like mumblers or something very similar like that, mutterers, mumblers. And they followed the practice of Francis of Assisi. That is sort of the practice of Peter Waldo, that they lived in poverty.

They were the poor priests of Wycliffe, and he sent them out to preach very much like Jesus had sent his disciples two by two. They traveled barefoot without sandals, without purse, without script, and they lived by faith, just teaching the scriptures, just like, you know, roving Franciscans or Waldensians or, for that matter, like Jesus and his disciples. Eventually Wycliffe's influential friends in the English government kind of withdrew from him.

He was getting more and more unpopular with the Pope, and the Pope was a powerful guy. And to side with Wycliffe was getting more and more unsavory and dangerous. And so without the exuberant support of the royalty of England, Wycliffe was much more vulnerable to whatever censures or punishments the Roman Catholic Church wanted to put on him.

So he exiled himself or went off to live at Lutterworth in the Midlands of England. He was already at that time a sick man. He died fairly young, and he was sick at that time.

It was 1384 when he died. But the Lawlord movement organized into a group with their own ministers by 1395 and continued and joined popular support until they were suppressed in the early 15th century, actually 1401. Enough on Mr. Wycliffe.

Let's go to John Huss. Now I've spelled his name J-A-N the way that it's most authentic. Sometimes books about Huss or writings about Huss will anglicize the spelling of his name and spell it J-O-H-N.

John, he was a Czech from what would be now Czechoslovakia. In those days it was Bohemia. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1401, and he spent much of his career

teaching at Charles University in Prague, Bohemia, and preaching at the Bethlehem Chapel near the university.

He was early on influenced by Wycliffe. Actually Wycliffe being first of all a philosophical writer and later a theological writer. John Huss had encountered Wycliffe's philosophical writings during his years of being educated when he was in college.

But when he became a minister, he became enamored with Wycliffe's theological writings, and he obviously picked up a lot of them. In fact, many church historians would just represent John Huss as sort of a Wycliffe clone, that he just kind of bought Wycliffe's ideas of whole cloth and just promoted them in Bohemia. To a certain extent he did that, but modern historians are saying Huss had his own thoughts and he was his own thinker.

He did agree with Wycliffe on many things, but he had his own direction he took also. One of the things that happened at this time was that, if I recall, the English prince married the Bohemian princess at this time. And that opened up relations between the two countries, friendly relations between the countries, and the Lawlords, the Wycliffites, were able to bring their ideas into Bohemia, where John Huss was able to encounter them at that time.

He emphasized personal piety, which is godliness, and purity of life. Everyone agrees he was heavily indebted to the writings of Wycliffe, and he stressed the authority of Scripture and raised the preaching of the Bible to an important part in the church service. And again, he believed in preaching in the vernacular of the people.

He wrote a very important book, usually considered to be his most important book, was called *On the Church*, or in other words, *About the Church*. And he defined the church as Christ's body having only Christ as its head. Of course, this is radically different than what the Roman Catholic Church would say, but very much like what the Waldensians had said, and what Wycliffe had said also.

He defended the role of the clergy, himself being a clergyman, but he did teach that only God could forgive sins, and that's different than what the Catholic Church taught about the clergy. They taught that the priest can absolve sins, and John Huss said, no, only God can do that. He taught that no church authority could establish doctrine contrary to Scripture, and that Christians should not obey orders that were unscriptural from the church.

So, in that respect, he was a sola scriptura kind of a guy, and very much would be at odds with the Catholic Church even today, if he were here now, for the same reasons that some of us would be. He criticized several things in the Catholic Church. He criticized the corruption of the clergy, which was widespread.

He criticized the worship of images, a widespread practice in the Catholic Church. He

criticized the making of superstitious pilgrimages. People thought that if they made pilgrimages to holy sites, this would give them brownie points with God, and that's not that silly.

He was against the sale of indulgences, and he was against the practice, very common in the Catholic Church, of withholding the cup from the people. Now, in the Catholic Mass, the worshippers there are permitted to take the wafer, but only the priest, I guess, drinks from the cup. I'm not that familiar with the Catholic liturgy, but the people were allowed to have the bread, but not the wine, and he opposed this.

He believed that they should take both. If they're going to take communion, they should get both, and that was one of his big complaints with the Catholic practice. The Archbishop of Prague, where Hus lived and taught, encouraged by the Pope to stamp out the spread of Wycliffe's teachings, excommunicated John Hus, but the excommunication of Hus did not meet with popular support.

John Hus had become something of a national hero. From what I've read from several sources, I'm not entirely clear what caused him to, except that his preaching was just well-received, and people really thought highly of him. And so, when the Pope excommunicated Hus, the Bohemian people in Prague just didn't accept him.

They were very furious against the Church. So, Hus was emboldened by this to keep coming out against the Pope and against the Catholic Church. He came out strongly against the Pope's sale of indulgences, a move that cost him the support of his King Wenceslaus.

You ever heard of a good King Wenceslaus? Well, that was the King of Bohemia, who supported Hus up to a point. But when Hus began to oppose the sale of indulgences, the reason this particular sale of indulgences at the time was to support the Pope's war against the King of Naples. And I don't know all the politics that were involved with that, but Wenceslaus didn't agree with Hus on that, and ceased to support Hus at that time on that point.

Now, the city came under a papal interdict. Now, do you remember a papal interdict means that the Pope just says that none of the sacraments will be ministered in a city, in a particular city. And in the Catholic Church, if you don't take the sacraments, you go to hell.

So, I mean, you need the Pope's approved men, the ordained clergy, to offer the sacraments. Because if they don't, and you don't, if you're to communicate, and you can't do that, then you go to hell. So, to put the whole city under interdict was to actually withdraw the sacraments from the whole city.

Of course, that would be a punishment of the whole city that would scare a lot of

superstitious people. And Catholics tended to be pretty superstitious people. I mean, the people can't be really blamed that much.

They were mostly probably illiterate. They didn't have Bibles. They didn't know anything except what the church told them.

And their ancestors have been Catholic for many generations. I mean, they just, the only religious ideas they had were those that the church allowed them to have. So, being superstitious is just part of being a Roman Catholic about some of these things, even still.

So, when the Pope put the whole town, the city of Prague under the interdict, that really kind of cost us the support that he had enjoyed in the city. They didn't all want to be under the interdict. So, he went off and was exiled to southern Bohemia.

Now, when the Council of Constance was coming up, he actually hoped, he actually was reluctant to go to it, but he had some friends who thought he should go to this church council, this ecumenical council, and to present his views there, because they thought he had good views. And he was reluctant because he knew that if he went to, you know, a council where the Pope was, he'd just probably fall victim to the Inquisition, because he'd been criticizing the Pope so much. However, the Emperor gave him a promise of safe conduct.

So, he traveled there, hoping to present his views to the assembled authorities of the church. But once he got there, the safe conduct was revoked, and he found himself tried in the Inquisition. All you needed was enough witnesses to say that you have taught certain things, and then you have two choices.

If there's witnesses that say you've taught bad things, you can either confess it and repent, and you'll go to life imprisonment, or you can deny it or admit it and not repent and go to the stake and be burned. And those are the two options open to somebody who was condemned by the Inquisition. Well, he was condemned.

Actually, he was condemned of doctrines he never taught, because the witnesses that witnessed against him lied. But he was imprisoned in Constance for eight months before he was put to death. When he protested that he'd been traveling under safe conduct from the Emperor, they were told that promises made to heretics don't count.

And so, they had deceived him into thinking he'd be safe if he came, and said they'd lured him to his death. He was burned at the stake July 6, 1415, but the Hussite movement continued in Bohemia. Eventually, those who were influenced by Huss were called the Bohemian Brethren, and at a later date still, they're called the Moravian Brethren.

After the time of the Reformation, the Moravians, during the Thirty Year War, had to flee

from Moravia, and they fled to Germany, and they found refuge with men named... Their story is an exciting one, because they had a Christian community of several hundred people at this man's estate, and there was a revival. The Holy Spirit came down on them. We'll talk about this later when we get to that period.

It was in the 1700s. The Holy Spirit came down on this whole community. It started a prayer meeting that lasted non-stop for a hundred years, and they ended up starting the modern missions movement.

Sometimes, William Carey is considered to be the father of the modern missions movement. Before he did it, the Moravians were sending missionaries all over the world. The Moravian church still exists, but they were basically the heirs of the Hussite movement in Bohemia.

In Bohemia, where Huss had lived, the movement was still strong for a long time after his death, but the Habsburgs conquered the area in 1620, and they reestablished Catholicism in that area. The Hussites were numerous. They were then suppressed at that time in Bohemia.

There's one other person I want to talk about tonight, and that is Girolamo Savonarola. In some ways, he's the most interesting of the bunch, although in many respects, we'd have less in common with him than with the others. He would not in any sense be called a Protestant, although he opposed and denounced the Pope.

He never really did what these other men did, in terms of refuting official Catholic doctrine. Girolamo Savonarola was Archbishop, I believe it was, in Florence. No, he wasn't an Archbishop.

He was just a preacher there, or a prior. He was called a prior. Some of these offices, I forget what they are in the Catholic Church.

He remained in the Catholic Church, although he did get excommunicated and burned. He never really, like these other men, took it upon himself to challenge Catholic doctrine. He was more into challenging corruption and sin.

He was a preacher against sin, and a powerful one, and a prophet, it would appear. He lived from about 1452 to 1498, so he was a little later than John Huss, and he was in another country. He was in Italy.

He was born in Ferrara, Italy, where in his younger years he studied humanism and medicine, but he renounced those pursuits to become a Dominican monk in 1474, when he was about 22 years old. By 1491, he had become the prior of San Marco, and he was a popular preacher in Florence, Italy. In fact, too popular.

All the people loved his preaching, and the other church and state officials in Florence

often were threatened by him. For one thing, he preached against sin. He preached against all sin.

The whole city came under conviction, including the rulers, and the priests, and the bishops, and so forth. He made himself very unpopular with the powers that be, because he plainly denounced their sins by name. One of the major rulers of the city was a man named Lorenzo di Medici, and Savannah Rowland denounced this man's sins.

And Medici actually sent word to Savannah Rowland to stop denouncing his sins, but he didn't stop. And Medici actually brought in another famous orator, priest, to come in and try to, I think it was Father Mariana was the guy's name, and he came in to denounce Savannah Rowland, and to debate him. But he gave one sermon against Savannah Rowland, and all the people rejected this priest, although he was a famous orator, and he stopped opposing Savannah Rowland after that.

Lorenzo vigorously tried to stop Savannah Rowland from preaching, but failed, because of the popular support he had. Savannah Rowland actually prophesied that Lorenzo, and the Pope, and the King of Naples would all die within one year. And they all did.

Jeremiah did that with someone too. He prophesied that someone would die within a year, and they did. But Savannah Rowland actually prophesied that all three of those men would die within that year, and they all died within a year.

Interestingly enough, when Lorenzo was on his deathbed, he didn't call in any of his corrupt priests, or even Father Mariana to come in and absolve him of his sins on his death, but he called for Savannah Rowland. Originally, Savannah Rowland refused to come, because he said, you won't do what I say, so why should I bother to come to you? And Lorenzo said, no, I promise, I'll do whatever you say. And so Savannah Rowland came to him on his deathbed, and said, there's three things I want you to do.

First of all, you need to repent and renounce all your sins. And so, he said, okay, I'll do that. And then he said, you need to take all the wealth that you've cheated the people out of, and redisperse it among the poor.

And Lorenzo was shaken a little by that, but because he cared for his soul a little bit, he said, okay, I will do that. And Savannah Rowland said, and you also have to decree that all the people are free citizens, and establish a free republic in Florence. And Lorenzo wouldn't do that.

And so Savannah Rowland left him, and he died without receiving absolution from the priest, Savannah Rowland. But another thing that Savannah Rowland predicted in his preaching quite a bit, he told the people of Florence that they were on the verge of a judgment on the city, that God was going to bring severe judgment on the city, and it would be followed by a golden age of revival, really, in the city, where Florence would

actually lead Italy into a time of justice and revival. And this seemingly happened according to his words.

In 1494, King Charles the 8th of France invaded Italy, and he drove out the Medici rulers of Florence, and he was going to wipe out Florence, but Savannah Rowland went out and met him as he was coming, and pleaded with him to spare Florence, and said, he told King Charles, if you don't spare Florence, you'll go to hell. And so King Charles reluctantly did spare the city for Savannah Rowland's sake. And this gave Savannah Rowland much more influence over the people, much more respect, and everyone came to his preaching, and just revival broke out.

I mean, all the sin in the city just basically disappeared. It's sort of like when you read about some of the things that happened when D.L. Moody or Finney preached, you know, whole cities, the bars would close and everything. That happened in Florence, Italy, in the 1400s, under the preaching of Savannah Rowland.

I've written down some of the things I've read about this. He initiated tax reforms, and aid to the poor, government aid to the poor, reform in the courts. He established a court of appeals, so that if someone was condemned in some kangaroo court, as was common today, they could appeal to a higher court and have another chance.

He caused the city to change from its lax carnality to a spiritual haven. Everybody went to church. The rich gave freely to the poor.

Merchants restored ill-gotten gains to those that they'd cheated. Even in the street, the hoodlums stopped singing the lewd songs that they usually sang and sang hymns. The people of Florence forsook the carnivals and the vanities.

They actually had big bonfires in the middle of the city, burning all their masks and wigs and worldly books and their pornographic pictures and anything that they considered vanity. They actually had the children going door-to-door, collecting from the houses all the things that were called vanity, that didn't seem godly, and they'd drag them out to these bonfires and burn them. Not people, but things.

The Catholic Church would have burned the people, but this was just burning the, this was called the bonfires of the vanity. You may have heard that expression before. It had to do with Savonarola's reforms in Florence.

Savonarola had predicted that he would only preach for eight years in Florence, which is what happened, and he prophesied his own martyrdom, which actually occurred as he prophesied it. In 1498, Savonarola denounced Pope Alexander VI, one of the vilest of all the Popes, and his corrupt court. And in return for that, of course, the Pope excommunicated Savonarola.

The Pope threatened to place Florence under the interdict, and this of course changed

the whole tenor of Savonarola's popularity in the city. When the Pope's going to put the city under interdict, the whole city, you know, listens and does what the Pope wants. And this is basically what brought about the change in affairs for Savonarola and led to his execution.

He was tried for sedition and heresy. He was cruelly tortured and finally hanged, and his body was burned while he was hanging. His last words were, The Lord hath suffered so much for me.

Now, because he held to Roman Catholic theology, a lot of people don't think of Savonarola as a precursor to the Reformation. He never really got into the doctrines of justification by faith alone or sola scriptura, and all the things that were hallmarks of the Reformation. But because of his withstanding the Pope and his decrying the evils of the Church, the early Protestant reformers really had a lot of respect for him.

I have a lot of respect for him, too. It seems to me like he was a real prophet. He really prophesied specific things, and they happened.

He prophesied his own death, and he prophesied that he'd live and preach eight years in Florence, which is how long he did before he died. He prophesied the death of those three men in one year, and that happened. He prophesied that Florence would come under judgment and followed by a golden age, which did happen under his preaching.

So it seems like here, what is it, not quite a hundred years before Luther, when was this more like, well, he died only a few years before Luther, but in another country. Savonarola was really a man of God, and was, of course, martyred for it as so many men of God were in those days. That brings us to an end of our consideration of the pre-reformation non-conformist types.

Next time when we gather, we will have a consideration of Martin Luther himself. We will need several weeks to talk about Martin Luther because his life overlaps with that of Zwingli and of the Anabaptist movement rising and things like that. These are a lot of issues that are all happening in the early days of the Reformation we need to talk about.

Luther will be, his lifespan will overlap quite a bit of this. It gets very interesting. Frankly, I think all of church history is fairly interesting, but I think it gets very interesting when you get to the Reformation and beyond, and we start to talk about what really is modern.

All right, so we'll close it there.