

Revivals And Church History :: Jon Hus**Jon Hus - posted by jeremyhulsey (), on: 2003/9/20 1:20**

1369-1415

Jan Hus was born of a peasant family in the Czech region of Husinec. A brilliant scholar, he was ordained after eleven years of intense intellectual work, and two years later was appointed to a preaching ministry in the Bethlehem Chapel. The chapel stood adjacent to the University of Prague, foreshadowing the relationship between church and university that would occur in city after city of the Reformation. (The University of Prague is the oldest German university, political boundaries changing frequently in central Europe as territorial wars surged and abated.) Czech nobles had built and maintained the chapel as a venue for redressing the lack of preaching in parish churches and for promoting vernacular sermons. A scholar/preacher always occupied the chapel's pulpit -- and always attracted the hierarchy's suspicion on the grounds that such a priest couldn't be controlled. Supported and protected by the nobility, however, preacher after preacher managed to survive both the hierarchy's suspicion and its eagerness to dismantle the institution.

Hus distinguished himself through sermons that "notched up" a homiletical tradition already featuring gospel-suffusion and intellectual rigour. He preached twice each Sunday to a congregation of earnest, thoughtful Christians, virtually all of whom were nobles, the one group that would threaten, one hundred years later, both secular ruler and religious potentate in Germany. (Without the political support of the princes Luther's theological revolution would have gone nowhere.) Soon Hus was appointed chaplain to the royal court, confessor to the queen, and rector (president) of the University of Prague.

Having learned of the work of Wyclif, the English proto-reformer soon to be known as "the morning star of the Reformation", and having seen first-hand the corruption of the church, Hus announced relentlessly the need for a reform engendered by the substance and spirit of the gospel. The church's hierarchy dispatched spies to monitor his pulpit pronouncements. Seeing through the disguise of a dissolute monk "planted" in the service, and aware that the man was interested in him only in order to betray him, Hus pointed out the man and exclaimed, "Monk, be sure not to miss the next sentence!"

The king ("Good Wenceslas" of Christmas carol fame) supported Hus. The archbishop did not, and immediately co-opted the king of Hungary who, like any ambitious person, was malleable in that he wanted to be emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. From the hierarchy the archbishop secured a two-fold mandate: Wyclif's works were to be burned, and non-parish churches (e.g., Bethlehem Chapel) were to be shut down. Hus disregarded the order and continued to preach.

Hus catalysed the Czech nobles' protest against the order at the same time that civil courts insisted the archbishop would have to reimburse the University of Prague for the Wyclif works he had had destroyed. The courts confiscated the archbishop's property. Riots ensued.

Now Cardinal Colonna was appointed to handle the matter. He summoned Hus to Rome. When Hus refused to go, the cardinal excommunicated him and ordered his execution. Hus, supported by the people who had been commissioned to slay him, again continued to preach.

The church's hierarchy, meanwhile, having declared war on Naples, needed vast revenues to fund the war effort. Indulgences were declared sold. When the indulgence-peddlers arrived in Prague they were greeted in much the same way they would be in Luther's Wittenberg: a disputation was scheduled at the university. When the sale continued, riots broke out. Three pro-Hus students were beheaded, and then buried to public acclaim in the Bethlehem Chapel. The hierarchy countered by excommunicating Hus (for the second time.) The archbishop "interdicted" the city; that is, he deprived the people of all the spiritual resources of the church, a terrifying development in the middle ages. Hus was hidden for several years in the castles of noblemen (as Luther was to be after him.)

In October, 1414, the hierarchy convened a General Council in Constance, Switzerland, and guaranteed Hus a "safe conduct." Trustingly, Hus went to Constance eager to refute the charge of heresy. There, however, he was convicted for theological positions that in fact he had never held (e.g., that eucharistic bread wasn't the body of Christ.) Authorities arrested him, chained him in a dungeon, and interrogated him under torture for several months. Refusing to recant, Hus

appealed to his conscience under the norm of scripture. Taken to the stake in July, 1415, he again refused to recant, declaring instead, "In the truth of the gospel which I have written, taught and preached, I will die today with gladness."

Hus ought never to be forgotten. His preaching combined finely-wrought scholarship with zeal for the gospel. He reminds us that in the midst of pulpit shallowness and clergy fatuity lay people hunger for the Word of God. In an era when universities are prepared to sacrifice everything to "political correctness" Hus recalls a day when the university cherished intellectual rigour and theological profundity, even as the university recognized the cruciality of theology and provided the venue for debating what concerns the wellbeing of people above all else. His predicament highlights the unholy alliances between the church's hierarchy and the secular powers as each uses the other opportunistically. He cues us yet again to the fact that the gospel will always mobilize faithful hearers against a specifically religious or churchly betrayal of the gospel. He embodies a truth cherished by early-day Christians that the living Lord again and again will "once more...shake not only the earth but also the heaven...in order that what cannot be shaken may remain." (Hebrews 12: 26, 27) And for beleaguered people in mainline denominations today who feel helpless amidst the hierarchy's treachery, he fortifies our resistance as he stands forth, like his risen Lord, as living proof that God keeps the promises he makes. For indisputably God vindicates his servants; vindicates them, acclaims them, and appoints them to judge not only the world but even angels. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3)

Perhaps Luther said it best: "The truth is, we are all Hussites."

~Victor Shepherd~

Re: Jon Hus - posted by lwpray (), on: 2003/9/20 1:56

Dear Jeremy,
You are really bringing us back to Bible school by your articles on Knox and Hus.
More to come I hope.

When I sat down to listen to the old men at my Bible school some 30 years ago, these were the most stimulating subject brought up – the history of awakenings and missions and the art of intercession. Those years were formative years. I cannot and have no intention to break away from it.

Bless you heart,
Lars