

## First Person Presentation: John Huss

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*Reformation Month 2004*

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Good evening. In the city of Worms, Germany, today erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a major statue to the Reformation. On an approximately 30 foot square platform of concrete, fenced on three sides, approached from one side with seven or eight steps, on a platform on top of that platform about 10 feet square in the very center raised on a granite pillar is a bronze statue of Martin Luther. Surrounding him at the four corners of that secondary platform are four statues that suggest symbolically preparation for the work of Martin Luther. Pre-Reformers, Reformers before the Reformation. One of them is a 13<sup>th</sup> century Frenchman, Peter Waldo, the Waldes, the Waldensians. One of them is John Wycliffe, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Englishman. A third is Savonarola, the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian preacher in Florence. And the fourth one is of me. My name is John Huss, Hus. One "s" or two, depending on which book you read. Czech was the nationality, C-z-e-c-h. Czech. The capital city was Prague, it still is. The Czech Republic today.

I was born in the second third of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. That's 100 years before Luther's time. You must understand that century, that 14<sup>th</sup> century. It began with a conflict between the king of France and the pope of Rome. That pope was on the throne at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that's the late 1200s, and continuing into the first decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Now, that century, that 13<sup>th</sup> century which that Pope Boniface VIII, Boniface, bonefacio, to do well. He was greatly misnamed. That century had opened with a pope who was the strongest pope perhaps in all history. Innocent III, named equally poorly, Innocent III, it was he at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the same date as your Magna Carta, made transubstantiation the official doctrine of the Church of Rome. That was to hold great significance. It does to your day. It had been the result of great controversy over many centuries in the Middle Ages. There was no unanimity of opinion concerning whether the actual essence of the bread and the wine were turned into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. That had been greatly opposed by many in the Church of Rome through the Middle Ages, but a conclusive determination was made, a dogma was determined. A dogma is a doctrine which must be believed. At the fourth Lateran Council, I say, in 1215.

Now, that was the most powerful pope in history. He told off kings and emperors with impunity, and by the end of this 13<sup>th</sup> century, kings and emperors were becoming weary of that subordinate position to the papacy and were taking steps to assert royal authority.

It was this which caused the conflict between the king of France, Philip IV, and this pope at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>, the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Boniface VIII. As a result of that conflict, at the death of Boniface VIII, the king of France exerted influence for the election of a French bishop to be pope. Now, there had been no law that an Italian had to be a pope always, but by far most of them had been. This began a period of approximately 70 years known with tongue-in-cheek as the Babylonian captivity of the church, and Italian humanist poet, Petrarch, the creator of the sonnet form in literature, coins that expression with tongue almost protruding through cheek.

The new Babylon was France, the king of France, and the church was the papacy. Yes, in the Middle Ages it was assumed that the church was composed of the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the archbishops, the priests. Everyone else who attended the ministrations of the Church of Rome were communicants of the church. You and I by the grace of God are members of the body of Christ. We are members of a local assembly. The church is not constituted by the pulpit, by the priests. Every believer is a priest unto God. We are a kingdom of priests unto God. This glorious truth that we have come to appreciate with the Scriptures in our hands, was unknown.

This period of papal exile for nearly 70 years with the papal headquarters not in Rome but in a French city given to the papacy, Avignon, became the embarrassing headquarters of the papacy. For the papacy not to be headquartered in Rome was an embarrassment, I say, and many efforts were being made to encourage the return of the pope to Rome.

During that period, there were some eight or nine popes, during that 70 year period. Finally they returned to Rome but Rome was a very unwelcome place, an unhealthy place, an ungoverned place in the absence of the papacy, and while the people of Rome were overjoyed that il Papa has come home, the College of Cardinals who were to elect a pope, now composed mainly of French bishops, were very uncomfortable there, and the Italian people literally physically stormed the room where the cardinals were meeting for the purpose of electing a new pope when the one who had returned to Rome died. The Italian people threatened these cardinals if they did not elect an Italian to be pope, the only way they could be sure that the papacy would remain in Rome.

Out of fear of this assault by the people and assuming that discretion was the better part of spiritual valor in this case, the cardinals elected an Italian to be pope, an old man who couldn't last long, at best, couldn't do much harm, at worst, and he, however, turned out to be a reformer in the sense of wishing to cause the fellow cardinals and bishops to live an upright life of outward morality, to abandon the abuses with which the clergy were well described in that time. "Now what kind of monster have we created?" the cardinals observed and said, "We must have made an error. We were too overcome with the fear of men and did not listen to the voice of God. So we declare that election invalid. We declare that pope unpoped." But you can't unpop a pope without his acquiescence. They declared the papacy vacant and elected a Frenchman pope. He returns to Avignon. The Italian pope remained at Rome, appointed a whole new college of Italian cardinals, and now we have for a generation beginning in the 1370s, 1380s until that event which marked the end of my life, the Council at Constance, we have what is known as a Great

Schism, a schism in the church, two popes at once, each anathematizing the other with all his followers, consigning him and them to hell. The common man caught in the middle, taught to obey the pope but which one? Condemned to hell if I obey this one by this one, and condemned to hell if I obey this one by this one. A French pope and an Italian pope, several popes in each line in the course of a generation of time.

Now that's the situation at the time of my birth into this world. When I was a teenager, this schism began, or rather, let's see, yes, this schism began. I was born during the time of the papal exile at Avignon. Born in 1369, according to general consensus. There were no birth records then. Some say 1373. Very little is known about my early life or my family. My father died early in my life. I was orphaned. All we know is that his name was Michael, my father. The town of my birth was Husinec. Hus means goose. Husinec was goose town. Goose town, and can anything good come out of goose town, was a common expression in that time.

I had a brother who left in death two sons of whom I became guardian, but nothing else about my family. My mother had a great concern for her son, for me. I'm sure she did for my brother. She told us that fear of God and a good education is all one needs in this world and she labored to make it possible for me to have that good education, and by her example she instructed me in the fear of God.

On my first day of schooling, I was 13 and went to the Trivial School. Trivial. You use the word differently today. The Trivial School taught the trivium, which was 3/7 of the seven liberal arts. The other 4/7 were geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy. The trivium were grammar, rhetoric and logic, Latin grammar, as you understand, and speech and logical expression.

In the town of Husenic, this grammar school, and then to the city of Prague where was one of the four greatest continental universities, well, European universities at the time. The University of Prague, there I got my other four of the liberal arts, the gama, g-a-m-a: geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy, I repeat. The University of Prague with the Oxford University in England, the University of Paris, and Bologna in Italy, Bologna especially known for both medicine and law, Paris for theology, and Oxford was the standard institution for the training of the English clergy. There were between 2,000-4,000 students at the University of Prague. The university was administered in its relations with the students by a student elected graduate rector. A rector administered student/faculty relations for one semester and was replaced with a new election at the end of each semester. Completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1393, the first real certain date in my life, but had anticipated becoming a priest. That was my mother's intention. She was sure I could acquire a good living if I were ordained a priest.

At the time of my graduation and preparation for ordination, there were already 1,200 priests in the city of Prague besides nuns and monks. There was no position for me at that time, so when all else fails, go to graduate school. I was a charity scholar and part of my service in return for my tuition, was that I become a helper in the administration of the affairs of the residents' hall. I helped in the kitchen at times and I helped to straighten

rooms, and in return for this concession to me, it was my obligation to spend at least two years after the completion of my master's degree on the faculty of the University of Prague. This is not so unfamiliar to some of you as it might seem to others of you.

I was ordained a priest but before being ordained, I had a serious confrontation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is record of my serious change of life in the recognition that what I was about to enter upon was a calling from heaven and that there was from the word of God a testimony of the saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is remarked a significant change in my dress, in my habits, in my harvesting of time which I had idled on many occasions, and God was working in me in ways I did not yet understand.

I became a priest. I became a faculty member. I had friends at the university, particularly Stephen Palitz(ph). Stephen Palitz, a good and close friend. He was elected rector of the university. I later in the second of my graduate years was elected rector. I remember Stephen Palitz especially because he, my good friend, was later to turn against me and contribute to labor effectively toward my eventual condemnation and death.

Having completed my degree and being elected rector and being on the faculty and working toward a doctorate which was never completed, I was assigned as preacher of Bethlehem Chapel. Bethlehem, house of bread. Bethlehem Chapel in Prague had been founded by a wealthy merchant for the express purpose of guaranteeing that there be regular preaching in the Czech language from the Scriptures to the Czech people. This was the requirement. In the course of years that were to follow, I preached as many as a total of 3,000 sermons in Bethlehem Chapel.

Bethlehem Chapel contained on its walls a series of pairs of paintings. One, for example, was of Constantine, the emperor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, granting a crown to the Bishop of Rome. Its companion was Christ receiving a crown of thorns. Another painting was of the pope on his throne with bishops kissing his toe. Its companion was Christ washing the feet of his disciples. Another was a picture of the pope riding on his steed in white array. The companion picture was of Christ bearing his cross up Calvary's hill. These were instructive to the people who came to hear the Gospel preached in Bethlehem Chapel. It was my joy to dispense the bread of life to the people who came. They were my parish and they were my people, cobblers and tailors and scribes of all character and they became my champions in the days that were to follow.

Some time before, the sister of our king, King Wenceslaus of Bohemia, Ann, her name, had been married to the king of England, Richard II. As a result, there was great welcome at the premier English university, Oxford, for Bohemian students. Great numbers of Bohemian students, therefore, went to Oxford and were trained there. One in particular was to be very significant to me. His name was Jerome, Jerome of Prague. Jerome went to Oxford and sat under, learned from John Wycliffe. John Wycliffe, inextricably associated with me in the trial that was to follow. Wycliffe had died a natural death. That was no little achievement considering the experience he had with the papal authorities. He was a tutor at the University of Oxford. Balliol College later, much later, 200 years

later, when a queen of England was setting about to burn Protestants, she chose the courtyard in front of Balliol College as the site of that burning, showing remarkable recognition of the real source of the Protestant Reformation that ultimately appeared in England. John Wycliffe, he raised questions about the teachings of his church, the Church of Rome. He challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation. He did not believe that the elements, the bread and the wine, were in fact transformed literally into the body and blood of Christ. He raised questions concerning the nature of the church, what constitutes the church, is it the pope and the cardinals and the bishops and the priests, or is the church a congregation of people?

Jerome of Prague returned to, well, I should say, John Wycliffe was protected in part by political authorities who would not permit him to be sent to Rome to be tried when a total of 45 articles were drawn from his writings and declared heretical or subject, at least, to examination. He died a natural death but that's not the end of his story, as we shall see. Can you imagine? John Wycliffe was posthumously excommunicated. His bones exhumed, burned, the ashes strewn into the brook Severn, and there to the River Swift, and from Swift to Avon, and from Avon to the narrow seas, and from the narrow seas to the larger oceans. The English historian Fuller says that, and he says in conclusion, "Thus Wycliffe's teachings, his ashes like his teachings, were spread the world over."

What presumptive power was it for the Church of Rome to presume power over the soul of one dead for a generation, buried in consecrated ground, now exhumed, posthumously excommunicated, and assigned by the Church to hell? I will merely insert a parenthesis here, the thoughtful among you will raise a question concerning the legitimacy of the principle of papal infallibility. At what time was the church correct? When Wycliffe was buried in consecrated ground or when he was posthumously 40 years later declared a heretic? It can't be right both times.

This John Wycliffe's teachings were brought back by Jerome of Prague to me, to the University of Prague. Copies of his writings from which these 45 articles had been extrapolated and declared heretical, or at least subject to examination. I say, a prince of England had forbidden Wycliffe to go to be tried, so he escaped condemnation while he lived. Now his teachings are brought to Prague. I find in them much profit. Wycliffe's books, hand copied I remind you, this is still a generation before movable type printing, and therefore the labor of hand copying these writings of Wycliffe, which were to be like angels dispersing truth on the continent. I gained much from Wycliffe's teachings and his teachings were eventually to be the core of the arguments of the Church of Rome against me.

There soon came to my town of Prague a carrier of special indulgences from Rome. A familiar story to you who know Luther. A similar set of circumstances, a similar situation occurred with Zwingli in Zurich as well, 100 years later. The pope of Rome, and I must tell you, by now a schism had been worsened for in 1409 while I am still at Bethlehem Chapel, a council was held to deal with the issue of two popes at once. This is obviously scandalous to Muslim, heathen, Jew and Christian. It was scandalous that there be two popes at once. This schism must be healed. The manner of healing it was to call a church

council following the example of the book of the Acts and the ancient ecumenical councils at Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, Ephesus and so forth. It seemed like a sensible way to proceed. Some cardinals from both of the Colleges of Cardinals, the French one and the Italian one, agreed to meet. They met in the Italian City of Pisa and there held council, declared both popes deposed and proceeded to elect a new one. The Italian pope, the French pope, both deposed and a new conciliar pope who was not conciliatory but of the council, elected to take their place. Fine. Sounds good, except that neither of the two popes acknowledged the authority of the council to depose him. Now there were three.

This is important setting for the situation of the times. Popular disaffection is growing. A grave problem is spreading. The church is in trouble. The emperor of the German Empire is ceasing the opportunity to assert his authority. Now that's the situation. One of these three popes died very soon after being elected and was succeeded by an absolute reprobate who took the name John XXIII. I say, absolute reprobate. It was said he had no virtues but was described by every vice. That's a rather encompassing estimate. He was a sodomite. He was a fornicator. He was a murderer by popular conclusion. He was a simoniac, he sold and purchased ecclesiastical offices. The archbishop of Bohemia, Zibnic(ph), paid 2,800 golden for his archbishopric, which calculates to approximately \$14,000 in your contemporary money. Every vice was a friend to John XXIII.

I will remind you who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the fact that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, about the 1960s, late 60s, you had a Second Vatican Council in the Church of Rome. You had a pope then who had taken the name John XXIII. You see, he was John XXIIB. There was a John XXIII which Rome has erased from the list, but not so easily. John XXIII was a reprobate and that is not a Protestant estimate, it is a well-recognized one. He was so known in his time. He paid perhaps 30,000 ducats for being elected to the office. It was this pope who issued an indulgence to the Bohemian people to raise money for a crusade against an opponent of John XXIII, Gregory XII, one of those three popes who was supported by the king of Naples, Ladislaus. You don't need to know this but I'm trying to suggest the reason for this indulgence. The one in Luther's time was to raise money to build St. Peter's Basilica. The one in my time was to raise money to carry a war against a competitor in the papacy.

I was incensed at this. I said, "Indulgences in theory could empty purgatory," which is exactly what Luther was to say 100 years later, but of course, I did not know that. Money was being fleeced from my people. I opposed it. Three young men, young husbands, fathers of young sons, stood up in church when the indulgence was declared and opposed it. They were arrested, all three. I intervened trying to get lenient treatment for them, was promised that they would be justly tried, and then before the day was over, got word that the three young men had been publicly beheaded in the public square. I took their bodies and conducted their funerals and acknowledged their faithfulness and was attacked by the church for having done so.

The archbishop begins to make noises against this preacher of Bethlehem Chapel and announces the preparation for a trial, summons me to Rome. The king, Wenceslaus,

forbids me to go to Rome, arranges that the trial be held in absentia before the curia in Rome. I continued preaching, was soon informed that I was being placed under excommunication with threat that the excommunication would result in an interdict upon the whole city of Prague. Interdict, an ecclesiastical weapon suspending all normal ecclesiastical ministrations in a prescribed town until the one who is the creator of the problem has been reconciled with the church. This meant that people could not be christened. They could not be buried under the blessing of the church. They could not be married. The regular ministrations of the sacraments could not be performed. This was designed to cause a people to force the person involved to make his peace with the church. My people did not react thus. They encouraged me. My prince soon suggested my temporary exile from the city in the interest of good order. I went to the countryside and my absence from the city caused the lifting of the interdict.

I preached in the countryside in forest and woods and fields, in arbors. I was given refuge a castle, a small one by a nobleman. Then after a few weeks, a greater noble received me into a more commodious place from which I had opportunity to preach and to write. There are more of my letters extant than of many people of my generation. I wrote a treatise then on the church, "De ecclesia," concerning the church, in which I defined the church in very Wycliffian terms as the body of the predestinate of the past, the present, and the future, a body of people, and contrasted it to the concept that the church was the hierarchy, the church was the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the archbishops, the priests. This was to be used against me in the trial that was to come.

I wrote an exposition of each of the three basic articles of instruction: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and elaborated the meaning of each of the articles there. I wrote letters to friends. I wrote other things and wrote out sermons, and then returned to Prague at the invitation of the emperor to appear in the city of Constance where a new council was to be held to deal with the issues facing the church. The most important of those issues in their eyes was the schism, the three-headed monstrosity, the papacy, how to restore it to a single head. A second issue at this council to be held in the German town of Constance was the issue of reform. My preaching had raised many, as did Wycliffe's, many of the evils, the corruptions in the church of practice which the people understood far more easily than theological issues. The people saw the inappropriateness. Inappropriate is far too weak a word for the buying and selling of church offices, for the holding of more than one office at a time, for the absenteeism which naturally results from holding more than one office at a time, for the selling of pardons through indulgences. These were scandalous, not to mention the private lives which were far too public of many of the clergy who had taken vows of poverty and yet were rich beyond estimate. Chastity, and yet were promiscuous beyond respect. And obedience, obedience to their own perverse wills, not to the will of heaven, not to the will of the people. They were not servants, they were masters. They were not ministers, they were lords and this affected the people so widely. They saw. They understood. They lost respect for. This is part of the providence of a gracious God in preparing the way for the Reformation that was to come 100 years after my time.

Out of an increasingly decadent environment, God was showing the people the very dregs of the cup before he was to pour into a clean cup the water of life. How good was our God in dealing with his people and gradually exposing them to and leading them toward an understanding of the difference between the simplicity of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ and his apostles and the description of the church of their times.

Constance was also to deal, incidentally, with the issue of the Wycliffe fight heresy as represented by John Huss. That was low on their list but it proved to be one of the most memorable issues for the history books. Schism, reform, and heresy. Reform, I say. The church recognized it must clean up its act but no change in doctrine, no change in dogma. That is true in your time no less than it was in mine. Rome will never reform its dogma. To do so is to acknowledge error and that Rome cannot do, will not do, for she is bound by her own dictum that she cannot err; that she has not erred from eternity and will never err. That's a decree of a pope in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it is irreformable by their own definition.

All reform, all improvement, all change in the history of Rome is practical as to practices, never doctrine, and that was to be shown by their reaction at the Council of Constance on the Rhine where the Rhine River begins in a corner of Germany, at the Lake Constance which borders Germany, Switzerland and Austria. A city of 5,000 inhabitants which was during the four years of the meeting of the Council from 1414 to 1418, the city was swollen to between 80,000-100,000 people. A city of 5,000 inhabitants. They brought in merchants, they brought in bakers, and each of those who came and those who came were priests and bishops and archdeacons and cardinals, came with retinues, each of them. The city was flooded with prostitutes openly. It was not possible to find lodging. The city was swollen. It is the most important event in the entire history of that medieval city which still stands today.

On October 11<sup>th</sup>, I left Prague en route to Constance in the year 1414. I rode on my horse, was accompanied by friends in wagons. It was almost a triumphal procession. From October 11 to November 3, going through towns and villages, being met by people, by the municipal authorities, welcomed, given encouragement to preach in their midst, hailed, encouraged. I was coming under the promise of Imperial Safe Conduct. The emperor agreed to provide a document guaranteeing my safety to and from that all-important inclusion, and from the destination prescribed in the document. Any harm anyone did to my person, my property, or if I had any, my family, during my absence from my home, was to be punished by the emperor. Under Imperial safe, but I did not put great confidence therein. I said, "I'm under the protection of the Almighty and if it is his will that I return, I shall." But I left behind my last will and testament and a letter to my parish, my parishioners, my people, if I should not return. The letters I wrote during my absence over those many months that were to follow, reflect constantly a realization that a martyr's death may be awaiting, but I was encouraging my people to receive it as I was intending by God's grace to receive it, as his will and for the glory of his Son.

I say we came to Constance by November 3<sup>rd</sup>. I took lodging in the rooms of a widow, Dame Faith was her name, fide, faith. She was a baker. She ran a little bakery on a urban



street in this small town. There is in your day a house standing which is believed to be very near, most recently I have learned very near the foundation of the house in which I stayed for what turned out to be just a little over three weeks. I was released from excommunication temporarily during my stay in the city. I was given free access to the city and was told only not to perform public service, not to preach in public.

Within three weeks or so, I was lured into a trap to a hearing with the archbishop, informal hearing, in his residence and I discovered that my permission to return to my lodging was denied. I was held there in the archbishop's rooms, apartment, for eight days while, I learned later, my cell was being prepared and strengthened in the tower dungeon of the Dominican monastery in the city of Constance. The Dominican monastery on an island just slightly distant from the mainland, a Dominican monastery which I have learned since, has become the premiere hotel in the city of Constance. It has been completely modernized by your definition in your century, of modernization, and made into an elite hotel, and the tower appended to the side facing the water, the lake comes right up to the hotel as it came up directly to the monastery, a tower was appended to the rear of the building in the base of which was a dungeon. That dungeon was right next to the sewer of the monastery which emptied into the lake in my time, and obviously the stench was profound, the dampness was regular. I had fits of vomiting and fever, attacks of gallstones, toothache, and darkness.

Shall I pause to say, would you permit an ellipsis, is that the word? He who is talking to you visited that hotel and was accompanied at that time by his daughter whom you know, and she boldly insisted that we try to go and see that tower, the inside of that tower. I was somewhat reluctant. She was not and we discovered, I had learned that that tower was now part of the honeymoon suite of that hotel, the upper portion of it, obviously. And I had long wanted to see it but she was more bold than I. We discovered it was occupied but that did not stop Lisa. She said, "Let's go up to that floor and see if perhaps there is a maid around who can maybe let us in discreetly if it's not literally occupied at the moment." She did. We did. We found her. She agreed. We went in. We promised not to touch anything and we didn't, but we saw the upper portion of that tower, it was like a little bay off the room looking out over the lake. It was beautiful. I was so thrilled and grateful for her insistence.

Now, strike all that and come back with me. I'm in the base of that tower. I'm under the water level and the water is seeping in and I'm kept there for two months and they come to me with questions and insist that I write out answers to these theological questions. They present to me the teachings of the 45 articles of Wycliffe that had been condemned and I insist that I was not here to discuss them, I had come expecting a hearing and the presentation of my views, and to be shown where by Scripture I was in error. This was naive, as it turned out, my assumption.

I labored writing answers to those questions. They took statements out of my writings out of context, indeed, they abused my very words. I must tell you that at that same Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the then archbishop of Bohemia said to the Council that they have yet to correct the abuses that they heaped upon this Bohemian John Huss. In

the Church of Rome, modern realization of the abuse of the language and out of context statements, of course, it will not be.

Finally, I was given a hearing and the hearing was too confused to be heard. Shouting and disorder. The pope, John XXIII, theoretically in charge but only theoretically so. It was soon thought necessary to delay any further proceedings until the representatives had come from the various other countries, the bishops and the archbishops from France, from England. There were there then only those from Italy and Germany and no ability on the part of the pope to maintain order. When these other national groups arrived, the manner of voting was changed so that the number of representatives from each country was irrelevant to the vote, that is, the Italian delegation, largest, was to have only one vote. They would agree among themselves and then cast one. The English delegation with only 10 ecclesiastics present had one vote. Equal power so that it was not dominated by those who were champions of the Italian pope, the conciliar pope, John XXIII.

Well, I say too much and must present the denouement, I guess. Eventually, the emperor himself arrived in great pomp and circumstance. The pope had arrived with 600 retainers on nine white horses, eight of whom carried his changes of raiment, and he rode on one, and 600 men serving him. The emperor arrived and he insisted, finally, that a public hearing be given John Huss, though they were continuing to deal with me in absentia and by meeting me in my cell.

My physical declension caused fear that I would die before they could gain from me a recantation. Their concern was that I would destroy my following back in Bohemia by renouncing all I had preached and taught and they wanted that above all. My death was the last thing they wanted. They would much prefer my own repudiation which would silence the movement back home. I learned that in my absence back home in Prague, they were employing both elements in the communion service. They were taking, the people were taking the element of the wine as well as the bread that had been prohibited by ecclesiastical dictum, and they declared at Constance that this was to cease, this was unlawful, this was unecclesiastic, and I said, "What a thing it is that that institution which Christ has established now is declared unlawful by his church. What further evidence does man need that that church was not Christ's church?" This became an issue as well.

Well, I was transferred in fear of my dying before I could recant for them, to Gottlieben Castle, some few miles distant on the other side of the Rhine. It was the archbishop of Constance's personal castle. There the conditions were somewhat improved. I had an airy cell. It was May, the month of May. I had liberty in chains during the day and was chained with one arm to the wall at night. But of course, that distance made it difficult for me to appear in the Council in the city of Constance so they were, again at a distance, they were seeking to get from me written statements. Then, finally, I was brought back to the city when they held my trial in the refectory, which is the dining room, of the monastery attached to St. Stephen's church in the city of Constance where my final examination was to be held and kept there in the cell of the monastery so I could be accessible to them.

They declared among the other charges against me that I had said I was, in fact, the fourth person of the Trinity. Such absurdity I received with absurdity and said, "Who has made such a charge?" They replied, "It is not necessary now to say." Other such indefensible charges. I continually agreed that I would renounce anything that was shown to me to be contrary to the Scriptures in what I had written or said. They proceeded to use sugar rather than vinegar and moved more sweetly toward me by saying that all I needed to do was recant and if what I was recanting was not valid, that means, if anything I'm recanting is not in fact what I had taught, that it would be the responsibility of the Council, not mine, because I was surrendering to the authority of the Council and that's all they wanted. Such casuistry, such sophistry, was just that and I could not, I would not.

And finally, it was the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1415, brought to the cathedral where the final condemnation was to be declared. Arrived at their arrangement at 6 o'clock in the morning. Had to wait outside the cathedral for the completion of a Mass before they would let me in. When finally almost mid-morning, I was brought into the cathedral. A table had been placed in the nave in the center aisle on which were the various garments of the priesthood. I was given one last opportunity to recant, reminded the Council that I had come of my own free will, and that I had come under Imperial Safe Conduct. I looked in the face of the emperor who, history records, turned crimson in embarrassment at what was clearly the violation of his own word. He had been overheard by my friends saying to other ecclesiastics earlier that whatever happens, Huss must be burned because we must extirpate Hussitism from Bohemia. He was in line to succeed to the throne of Bohemia after his brother, the king of Bohemia, King Wenceslaus, my king, died. That remark was over heard by the Bohemian nobility. They went back home with that news and they refused to accept Sigismund as their king when his brother died. He had made it clear that he would light the fire himself if they did not condemn John Huss.

Well, the condemnation. I was required to stand up on the table while various churchmen, one at a time, placed the various articles of the priestly garments on my person: the alb, the surplice and all. They placed in my hands the chalice, the cup. I proceeded to sermonize. They told me this is no time for that. I fell to my knees and prayed to God. They snatched from me the cup symbolic of the Lord's table, and I said, "I hope this day to drink of this cup in the kingdom of God." They snatched from my person one article at a time of different priest for each article, snatched from me, this is literally defrocking the priest. I stood in my under-gown and they placed upon my head a conical cap on which were three painted devils fighting one another for my soul, and the word "Heresiarch," arch heretic, was written on the hat. As they placed it upon me, I said, "My Lord Jesus wore a crown of thorns for me. I am happy this day to wear this crown of derision for his sake."

They declared me excommunicated and in the obsequious way which the Church of Rome washes its hands like Pilate of the blood of the saints, they handed me over to the secular arm for judgment. The Church sheds no blood and Sigismund, the emperor, decreed, "Take him away and burn him."

They took me with a guard of 600 men, not because I was likely to escape them but to make sure that the people did not rescue me. And from the cathedral, down the narrow winding street, through the gate of the city at the end of that street, and then out in the wilderness in the countryside nearly half a mile away. As we passed a cemetery, we saw that already they had a bonfire burning all the copies of my writings and Wycliffe's writings that they found in the city of Constance.

We arrived at the site. A single stake had been erected. I was clasped with ropes behind me to the stake. A slender chain from the top of the stake around my neck to hold the body upright. Straw and tinder were placed around me up to my chin. I was facing the east and some in the crowd said, "Turn his face to the west." They gave me one last opportunity to recant which I refused and a zealous papist who observed this recorded that I was singing and emitted no cry of pain as the flames were lighted and I prayed over and over, "Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, receive my soul." I repeated that until the wind blew flame in my face and I said no more.

When all that remained was the body chained upright and the pyre had declined, they pulled down the body and the stake, crushed the skull and bones so they would burn more quickly, added more wood to the flame, discovered my heart, impaled it with a sharp stick and burned it. Then when all had ended, took up all the soil around the stake and the ashes, put them in carts, drove them to the river to be dumped. They had thrown in my clothes and my shoes as well, lest any relic be retained. And like Wycliffe's ashes, mine were disbursed the world over.

A life had been lived. I knew nothing of a coming Reformation. There is a legend, it is not based in history, that I once said, "Today you burn the goose, but 100 years from now, there shall come a swan you shall not be able to burn." That seems to have emerged at the time of Martin Luther, that legend, but it was in fact true, and God used the work of these four pre-Reformers to help prepare the way for an age that was to come. No less faithful, no more faithful. He who was permitted to go through the fires of martyrdom or he who was preserved in the will of a sovereign God.

Remember John Huss, the Bohemian heretic, one of the four fathers of the Reformation whom God graciously used in his sovereign will. Amen.