

John Milicz

A priest from Bohemia (d. 1374).

The more we learn about the Reformation, the more we are in awe of the Lord's amazing providences. For example, the torch passed from John Wycliffe via Oxford university students to Prague university students to John Huss in Bohemia, preparing the ground for Luther in Germany.

Indeed, God raised up VERY "BOLD CHAMPIONS for His Word." One of my favorites was John Milicz, a priest from Bohemia (d. 1374). In 1367 (**150 years before Luther's 95 Theses**), Milicz traveled to Rome with a sincere desire to reform Papacy. After waiting a month for Pope Urban V to return from Avignon, Milicz posted a placard on the doors of the original St. Peter's. "The Anti-Christ is come; he has his seat in the church," and an announcement of his public address on this subject at the same place. He was quickly imprisoned!

From his prison cell, Milicz wrote tracts on the Anti-Christ, which were printed and widely distributed (later influencing Huss). Milicz was released and returned to Prague where he set up a school for preachers and published books which spread the doctrines of Truth and "weaned away many people from the Catholic faith in Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and neighboring countries." [1] **It was not yet the Lord's time to light the match for the Reformation explosion, but the groundwork was being laid.**

[1] The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, Vol. 2, by LeRoy Edwin Froom, pp. 31-37.

[From The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers]

JOHN MILICZ (variants: Militz, Miliz, or Milic) of Kremsier (d. 1374), eminent precursor of the Bohemian reformation, was born of poor parents in Moravia. Little is known of his early years, nor are we sure where he received his higher education; some suggest, besides Prague, even Paris or Italy. The first time he enters the arena of history is when he became a priest in 1350. He soon attracted the attention of the emperor Charles IV, king of Bohemia, who made him his secretary. Then he became canon and archdeacon of the Cathedral of Prague, and therefore occupied a conspicuous ecclesiastical position. But his fervent desire to help his fellow men led him, in 1363, to resign his handsome income and high position, with its prospects of even greater promotion."

Withdrawing to Bischof-Teinitz, he served as a humble minister, his life tinged with ascetic severity and poverty; but he soon returned to Prague. He was a powerful preacher, his preaching being characterized by fiery enthusiasm and soaring eloquence. He often spoke four or five times a day—once in Latin to the students of the University of Prague, and the other times in the vernacular German and Bohemian tongues. Rieger says that Catholic and Protestant writers agree that Milicz favored the fundamental Waldensian truths. He inveighed against the use of an unknown tongue in worship. He reproved sin, and multitudes thronged his meetings. He was noted not only for his moral earnestness but for the spiritual force of his character. He had views concerning Antichrist, which probably connect him with the Spiritual Franciscans.

1. ANTICHRIST'S COMING THE" BURDEN OF HIS DISCOURSES.

— Milicz stressed the necessity of true conversion, attacked the mendicant system, and delved into the prophecies of the Apocalypse. In fact, his preaching was largely from the Apocalypse, the discourse of Jesus in Matthew 24, and the epistles of Paul. He saw the way preparing for divine judgments on the corrupt church, and foresaw a reformation by which the church would be prepared for the second advent of Christ. He seemed to see Antichrist embodied in the variety of errors and abuses that existed in the church, and his earnest words held-the throngs. Erelong, the coming of Antichrist became the burden of his pulpit discourses, as he exposed the iniquities that seemed to herald it. Priests, bishops, magistrates, and even the emperor were not spared. His mind became fired by the prophecies of Antichrist. Says Schaff:

"Milicz's mind became fired with the prophecies of antichrist and the last days, and he dwelt frequently, as later did Huss, on 'the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place—Matt. 24:15."

Such positive preaching soon brought Milicz into prison. But the pope freed him. Milicz is quoted as saying that he was—

"moved contrary to his own will by the Holy Spirit to search the Scriptures concerning the time when Antichrist would appear. While doing so, he found that this Antichrist had already appeared and is dominating the church of Christ. The Church by the negligence of her priests has become miserable and desolate. She has an abundance of worldly goods, but is lacking completely of spiritual values. The idols destroyed Jerusalem and made the temple desolate, but .the abomination is covered by hypocrisy. Many deny Christ, because they keep silent and dare not to confess Christ and His truth before those who keep back the truth by their unrighteousness. There is no truth in the pope, cardinals, bishops, prelates, priests, and monks, nor do they teach the way of truth."

2. APPLIES YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE TO 1335 DAYS.

—Many in Bohemia who longed for a deeper understanding of spiritual truths leaned toward the views of the Joachimites. **Milicz likewise applied himself with great zeal to the study of time prophecy, and accepted the year-day principle** as had Joachim. Combining Daniel 12:12 with Matthew 24:15, he believed the 1335 year-days would end about 1363-1367—taking the crucifixion of Christ as the beginning—and that the already existent Anti-christ would be fully revealed at that time.

It is to be observed that, like Joachim, Milicz adopted a true symbolic time principle. But, lacking knowledge as to what it signified and when it should be applied, he naturally erred in its chronological placement. In the initial application the tendency has always been to have these great prophetic time periods end in one's own day. In fact, that seems to be the way in which they have usually been introduced. Fuller knowledge would correct their chronological setting. So Milicz, dating those days from the cross, ended them in his own time.

3. POSTS "ANTICHRIST" PLACARD ON ST. PETER'S AT ROME.

— Milicz' studies, based on the Apocalypse, did not create the desired effects among his fellow countrymen, so he felt himself called to go directly to Pope Urban V at Rome. He desired to place his scheme of prophetic interpretation directly before the pope, and to urge the calling of a general council for the reformation of the church. In 1367, acting on the report that the pope was about to return from Avignon to Rome, Milicz—resolved to confer with him in the chief city of Christendom, there to utter his admonitions. He hoped a plan of reformation could be devised by the bishops.



Rieger states that Milicz asked the Lord to free him from these convictions if they were not from God. "But finding no rest, he undertook a pilgrimage to Rome, meeting a number of cardinals in their own homes to whom he fearlessly proclaimed that 'the Antichrist has already appeared.'" Milicz took with him a few companions, and awaited the pope's arrival. But the pope was delayed. So Milicz gave himself to prayer, fasting, and the reading of the Scriptures for a full month, preparing for the work he felt called to do. Gillett and Neander describe the astonishing episode of posting an "Antichrist" placard on the doors of the original St. Peter's, at Rome:

"Still the pope did not arrive. Milicz could no longer restrain himself. He posted on the doors of St. Peter's that on a certain day he would appear and address the multitude. It is said, moreover, that he added, 'The Anti-christ is come; he has his seat in the church.' "

"Milicz could no longer keep silent. He caused a notification to be posted up at the entrance of St. Peter's church, that on a certain day he would there make his public appearance and address the assembled multitude; that he would announce the coming of Antichrist and exhort the people to pray for the pope and the emperor, that they might be enabled so to order the affairs of the church, in things spiritual and temporal, that the faithful might securely serve their Creator."

4. PREACHES TO ASSEMBLED CLERGY IN ST. PETER'S.

—The terse expression, "The Antichrist is come," epitomized the thought that had long occupied his mind, and he zealously warned both clergy and people to withdraw from iniquity. It was almost as dramatic an act as Luther's later posting of his Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, and was a century and a half earlier. This could not pass. The Inquisitor, spurred by reports of Milicz' course in Bohemia, ordered his arrest and imprisonment. He was turned over to the Franciscans to be kept in close confinement. From his prison he was summoned to address an assembly of the Roman clergy, but his full release did not occur until the pope's arrival in Rome in 1368. Neander describes the remarkable sermon, preached in St. Peter's itself:

"After having been long detained in close confinement [in Rome], he was asked, what it had been his intention to preach. He requested his examiners to give him the Bible, which had been taken from him at the time of his arrest, with paper, pen, and ink, and he would put his discourse in writing. This was granted, and his fetters were removed. Before a large assembly of prelates and learned men, in the church of St. Peter, he delivered a discourse in Latin, which produced a great impression. He was then conducted back to his prison, but treated with less severity."

5. WRITES TRACT ON ANTICHRIST FROM PRISON CELL.

—While in his cell at Rome, Milicz composed his remarkable tract *De Antichrist (On the Antichrist)*, which has been preserved by his disciple Matthias of Janow in the latter's writings, and which later influenced Huss, according to Neander.

"Antichrist, he supposes, is not still to come, but has come already. He says in his tract on the Antichrist: Where Christ speaks of the 'abomination' in the temple, he invites us to look round and observe how, through the negligence of her pastors, the church lies desolate; just as, by the negligence of its pastors, the synagogue lay desolate."

This treatise Milicz took back with him to Prague, upon his release from prison by Cardinal Albano, after the return of Urban V.

6. ESTABLISHES PREACHERS' TRAINING SCHOOL IN PRAGUE.

— Back in Prague, he was distressed because his influence was limited to his own personal preaching. He often said, "Would that all were prophets." After the death of Konrad of Waldhausen," in 1369, a large field of activity opened up before him. **So he set up a school for preachers, multiplying books through copying. These exerted a wide influence, disseminating his doctrines through Bohemia, Poland, and Silesia. In fact, Raynaud complains that he "weaned away many people from the Catholic faith in Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and neighboring countries."**

"He founded an association composed of two or three hundred young men, all of whom resided under the same roof with himself, were trained under his influence, and by his society. He copied the books which they were to study, and gave them devotional books to copy themselves, for the sake of multiplying them."

Prague was stirred by this powerful preaching of the gospel. Milicz' labors also transformed more than two hundred fallen women in "Little Venice," an evil district of Prague. For these women who abandoned their life of shame Milicz established a chapel dedicated to Mary Magdalene. More than that, the emperor helped him rebuild a large institution for the care of these reclaimed souls.

7. DIES AT AVIGNON UNDER PAPAL CENSURE.

—However, Milicz was not to escape the wrath of his enemies. Charges against him were lodged before Pope Gregory XI—that he disparaged the clergy, from the pope down. In 1372, Gregory XI dispatched bulls to the archbishop of Prague and bishops of Luturmysl, Breslau, Ollmutz, and Krakau, and to Charles IV, based on twelve serious accusations. He commanded them to excommunicate Milicz for asserting that Antichrist was already come. One article specifically asserted that "Antichrist was come." He expressed surprise that they should have so long waited until such heretical, schismatic doctrines had spread through so wide a circle.'

Milicz went fearlessly to Avignon for examination in 1374, appearing in person before the pope, under the protection of his friend Cardinal Albano. On May 21 he was permitted to preach before the cardinals, and his accusers were compelled to withdraw their charges. However, he died before judgment was passed on his case, to the sorrow and grief of many.

Wycliffe/Milicz to Huss to Luther

The torch passed from John Wycliffe via Oxford university students to Prague university students to John Huss in Bohemia, preparing the way for Luther in Germany. John Wycliffe in England and John Milicz in Bohemia set the stage for Huss in Bohemia and then Luther in Germany.

John Milicz	[1350 became priest - 1374]	Bohemia
John Wycliffe	[1320-1384]	England
John Huss	[1369-1415]	Bohemia
Martin Luther	[1483-1546]	Germany
William Tyndale	[1484-1536]	England

John Huss, was a Czech priest, philosopher, reformer, and master at Charles University in Prague. After John Wycliffe, the theorist of ecclesiastical Reformation, Hus is considered the first Church reformer.

He is famed for having been burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines of the Catholic Church, including those on ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and other theological topics. **Hus was a key predecessor to the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century, and his teachings had a strong influence on the states of Europe, most immediately in the approval for the existence of a reformist Bohemian religious denomination, and, more than a century later, on Martin Luther himself.**

Between 1420 and 1431, the Hussite forces defeated five consecutive papal crusades against followers of Hus. Their defence and rebellion against Roman Catholics became known as the Hussite Wars. **A century later, as many as 90% of inhabitants of the Czech lands were non-Catholic and followed the teachings of Hus and his successors.**

He was influenced by the writings of John Wycliffe. Although many works of Wycliffe were proscribed in 1403 by the church, Hus translated Trialogus into Czech and helped to distribute it.



In 1406, a document was brought by two Bohemian students to Prague bearing the seal of the University of Oxford and eulogizing Wycliffe. King Wenceslaus felt Pope Gregory XII might interfere with his plans to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor; thus, he renounced Gregory and ordered his prelates to observe a strict neutrality toward both popes, and said he expected the same of the university. Archbishop Zajíc remained faithful to Gregory. At the university, only the "Bohemian nation" (one of four voting blocs), with Hus as its leader and spokesman, avowed neutrality.

As a consequence, somewhere between five thousand and twenty thousand foreign doctors, masters, and students left the university in 1409. This exodus resulted in the founding of the University of Leipzig, among others. Thus, Prague university lost its international importance and became only a Czech school. **The emigrants also spread news of the Bohemian "heresies" throughout the rest of Europe.** Archbishop Zajíc became isolated and Hus was at the height of his fame. He became a rector of the Czech university, and enjoyed the favor of the court. **At around this time, the doctrinal views of the English theologian, John Wycliffe were becoming increasingly influential.**

Excommunication of Hus

Alexander V issued his papal bull of 20 December 1409, which empowered the Archbishop to proceed against Wycliffism. All books of Wycliffe were to be given up, his doctrines revoked, and free preaching discontinued. After the publication of the bull in 1410, Hus appealed before Alexander V, but in vain. All books and valuable manuscripts of Wycliffe were burned, and Hus and his adherents were excommunicated by Alexander V. Riots ensued in parts of Bohemia. **The government took the side of Hus, and the power of his adherents increased from day to day.** Hus continued to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel. The churches of the city were put under the ban, and the interdict was pronounced against Prague, but without result.

Condemnation of indulgences and Crusade

Hus spoke out against indulgences, but he could not carry with him the men of the university. In 1412, a dispute took place, on which occasion Hus delivered his address Quaestio magistri Johannis Hus de indulgentiis. **It was taken literally from the last chapter of Wycliffe's book, De ecclesia, and his treatise, De absolutione a pena et culpa. The pamphlet stated that no pope or bishop had the right to take up the sword in the name of the Church; he should pray for his enemies and bless those that curse him; man obtains forgiveness of sins by true repentance, not money.** The doctors of the theological faculty replied, but without success. A few days afterward, some of Hus's followers, led by Vok Voksa z Valdštejna, burnt the Papal bulls. Hus, they said, should be obeyed rather than the Church, which they considered a fraudulent mob of adulterers and Simonists.

Response

In response, three men from the lower classes who openly called the indulgences a fraud were beheaded. They were later considered the first martyrs of the Hussite Church. In the meantime, the faculty had condemned the forty-five articles and added several other theses, deemed heretical, which had originated with Hus. The king forbade the teaching of these articles, but neither Hus nor the university complied with the ruling, requesting that the articles should be first proven to be un-scriptural. The tumults at Prague had stirred up a sensation; papal legates and Archbishop Albik tried to persuade Hus to give up his opposition to the papal bulls, and the king made an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the two parties.

"Even if I should stand before the stake which has been prepared for me," Hus wrote at the time, "I would never accept the recommendation of the theological faculty."

Writings of Hus and Wycliffe

Of the writings occasioned by these controversies, those of Hus on the Church, entitled *De Ecclesia*, were written in 1413 and have been most frequently quoted and admired or criticized, and yet their first ten chapters are but an epitome of Wycliffe's work of the same title, and the following chapters are but an abstract of another of Wycliffe's works (*De potentate papae*) on the power of the pope. Wycliffe had written his book to oppose the common position that the Church consisted only of the clergy, and Hus now found himself making the same point.

Bohemian Wyclifism was carried into Poland, Hungary, Croatia, and Austria. In January 1413, a general council assembled in Rome which condemned the writings of Wycliffe and ordered them to be burned.

Hus had been the captive of John XXIII and in constant communication with his friends, but now he was delivered to the Archbishop of Constance and brought to his castle, Gottlieben on the Rhine. **Here he remained for 73 days, separated from his friends, chained day and night, poorly fed, and ill.**

Trial

On 5 June 1415, he was tried for the first time, and for that purpose was transferred to a Franciscan monastery, where he spent the last weeks of his life. He declared himself willing to recant if his errors should be proven to him from the Bible. Hus conceded his veneration of Wycliffe, and said that he could only wish his soul might some time attain unto that place where Wycliffe's was.



At the last trial, on 8 June 1415, there were read to him thirty-nine sentences, twenty-six of which had been excerpted from his book on the Church, seven from his treatise against Páleč, and six from that against Stanislav ze Znojma. The danger of some of these doctrines to worldly power was explained to the emperor to incite him against Hus. Hus again declared himself willing to submit if he could be convinced of errors. He desired only a fair trial and more time to explain the reasons for his views. If his reasons and Bible texts did not suffice, he would be glad to be instructed. This declaration was considered an unconditional surrender, and he was asked to confess:

1. that he had erred in the theses which he had hitherto maintained;
2. that he renounced them for the future;
3. that he recanted them; and
4. that he declared the opposite of these sentences.

He asked to be exempted from recanting doctrines which he had never taught; others, which the assembly considered erroneous, he was not willing to revoke; to act differently would be against his conscience. These words found no favourable reception. After the trial on 8 June, several other attempts were purportedly made to induce him to recant, which he resisted.

Refusals to Recant

An Italian prelate pronounced the sentence of condemnation upon Hus and his writings. Hus protested, saying that even at this hour he did not wish anything, but to be convinced from Holy Scripture. He fell upon his knees and asked God with a low voice to forgive all his enemies. Then followed his degradation — he was enrobed in priestly vestments and again asked to recant; again he refused. With curses his ornaments were taken from him, his priestly tonsure was destroyed, and the sentence was pronounced that the Church had deprived him of all rights and delivered him to the secular powers. Then a high paper hat was put upon his head, with the inscription "Haeresiarcha" (meaning the leader of a heretical movement). Hus was led away to the stake under a strong guard of armed men. At the place of execution he knelt down, spread out his hands, and prayed aloud. Some of the people asked that a confessor should be given to him, but one priest exclaimed that a heretic should neither be heard nor given a confessor.

Execution

The executioners undressed Hus and tied his hands behind his back with ropes, and bound his neck with a chain to a stake around which wood and straw had been piled up so that it covered him to the neck. At the last moment, the imperial marshal, Von Pappenheim, in the presence of the Count Palatine, asked him to recant and thus save his own life, but Hus declined with the words "God is my witness that the things charged against me I never preached. In the same truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached, drawing upon the sayings and positions of the holy doctors, I am ready to die today." He was then burned at the stake, and his ashes thrown into the Rhine River.



BURNING OF HUSS

There are reasons to suppose that Wycliffe's doctrine of the Lord's Supper had spread to Prague as early as 1399, with strong evidence that students returning from England had brought the work back with them. It gained an even wider circulation after it had been prohibited in 1403, and Hus preached and taught it, although it is possible that he simply repeated it without advocating it. But the doctrine was seized eagerly by the radical party, the Taborites, who made it the central point of their system. According to their book, the Church is not that hierarchy which is generally designated as Church; the Church is the entire body of those who from eternity have been predestined for salvation. Christ, not the pope, is its head. It is no article of faith that one must obey the pope to be saved. Neither internal membership in the Church nor churchly offices and dignities are a surety that the persons in question are members of the true Church.

To some, Huss' efforts were predominantly designed to rid the Church of its ethical abuses, rather than a campaign of sweeping theological change. To others, the seeds of the reformation are clear in Hus's and Wycliffe's writings. In explaining the plight of the average Christian in Bohemia, Hus wrote, "One pays for confession, for mass, for the sacrament, for indulgences, for churching a woman, for a blessing, for burials, for funeral services and prayers. The very last penny which an old woman has hidden in her bundle for fear of thieves or robbery will not be saved. The villainous priest will grab it." (Macek, 16) After Hus's death, his followers, then known as Hussites, split off into several groups including the Utraquists, Taborites and Orphans. Nearly six centuries later in 1999, Pope John Paul II expressed "deep regret for the cruel death inflicted" on Hus.

Legacy

Hus was a key contributor to Protestantism, whose teachings had a strong influence on the states of Europe and on Martin Luther himself.

