



JOHN HUS 1374 - 1415

John Hus was born in 1374 to a humble family and was ordained as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in 1401. Much of his career was spent teaching at the Charles University in Prague and he was also the preacher at the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague. (This "chapel" had 3,000 people packed in to hear his sermons.)

The reform-centered writings of John Wycliffe found their way to Bohemia and, since this was before the printing press, Hus painstakingly copied Wycliffe's books for his own use. Like Wycliffe, he stressed the role of the Bible as authority in the church and consequently lifted biblical preaching to an important status in church services. As you might expect, the hierarchy was opposed to Hus. He not only preached against indulgences, but made the bold claim that Christ alone is the head of the church. In his book titled *On the Church* he defended the authority of the clergy but claimed that God alone can forgive sins. He also claimed that no pope or bishop could establish doctrine contrary to the Bible.

In 1415 he was summoned to the Council of Constance with a promise of safety but was promptly arrested and placed in a cell next to the sewer system. The Council had already made up their mind about this rebel Hus. The Council condemned the writings of Wycliffe and Hus for supporting those teachings.

Sick and physically wasted by long imprisonment, illness and lack of sleep, Hus protested his innocence but refused to repent his alleged errors unless he could be shown otherwise from Scripture. Formally condemned, he was handed over to the secular authorities to be burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. On the way to the place of execution, he passed by a churchyard and saw a bonfire of his books. He laughed and told the bystanders not to believe the lies circulated about him. Arriving at the place of execution, he was asked if he would retract his views. Hus replied, "God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought or preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. Today I will gladly die." And the fire was lit.

Hus had long been popular with the laypeople and his heroic death only increased his prestige. His followers came out in open rebellion, both against the Catholic Church and against the German-dominated empire with which they wanted no part. Despite efforts to stamp out the movement, it survived as an independent church known as the Unity of the Brethren.