

RECONSTRUCTION OR REFORMATION
THE CONCILIAR PAPACY AND JAN HUS OF BOHEMIA

Franky Garcia

HY 490
Dr. Andy Dunar
15 March 2012

The declining institution of the Church quashed the Hussite Heresy through a radical self-reconstruction led by the conciliar reformers. The Roman Church of the late Middle Ages was in a state of decline after years of dealing with heresy. While the Papacy had grown in power through the Middle Ages, after it fought the crusades it lost its authority over the temporal leaders in Europe. Once there was no papal banner for troops to march behind to faraway lands, European rulers began fighting among themselves. This led to the Great Schism of 1378, in which different rulers in Europe elected different popes. Before the schism ended in 1417, there were three popes holding support from various European monarchs. Thus, when a new reform movement led by Jan Hus of Bohemia arose at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the declining Church was at odds over how to deal with it. The Church had been able to deal ecumenically (or in a religiously unified way) with reforms in the past, but its weakened state after the crusades made ecumenism too great a risk. Instead, the Church took a repressive approach to the situation. Bohemia was a land stained with a history of heresy, and to let Hus's reform go unchecked might allow for a heretical movement on a scale that surpassed even the Cathars of southern France.

Therefore the Church, under guidance of Pope John XXIII and Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg, convened in the Council of Constance in 1414. Their goals were to end the Great Schism, to end the threat of heresy, and to reform the Church into being conciliar. The conciliar movement called for more authority to be given to Church councils so that the Church was not dependent upon the pope. The Church had seen with its own eyes the downward spirals of corruption that had accompanied the Papacy and that they resulted in the Great Schism. However, the Church's actions at the Council of Constance did not solve all the problems that it set out to fix. While it ended the Great Schism by deposing three popes, and dealt a deathblow to Jan Hus's particular Bohemian reform movement by burning Hus alive at the stake, the council did not accomplish its own reform. In the years following the Council of Constance, the Church saw that burning Jan Hus for heresy actually backfired. Various other heresies, such as the utraquist movement, sprang up in Bohemia, and the reconstructed Papacy was neither able to put an end to them nor willing to allow the conciliarists to take action. By 1370, the Papacy had completely removed the conciliar reforms, and the situation in Bohemia had grown increasingly dangerous for the Church. When the conciliarists reconstructed the Papacy, they doomed themselves. Nevertheless, the declining institution of the Church quashed the Hussite Heresy through a radical self-reconstruction led by the conciliar reformers.

DECLINE OF THE CHURCH

The Church has constructed itself since the Apostle Peter to Pope John XXIII. For the sake of the argument, it is best to define *construction* as the defining of doctrine in response to a form of *otherness*. Over the centuries, the institution of the Church has built itself up in relation to *others*. It designated these others as heretics, or people whose doctrine differed with that of the general body of believers. Naturally, heresy incites disunity. When someone came along preaching doctrine that did not seem to agree with earlier writers in the Church, such as St. Augustine or St. Jerome, the institution of the Church labeled them as *other*. When this happened, the Church had only two possible ways to end disunity: incorporate them officially into the fold, or label them as heretical and a danger to the faith. Whichever path the Church chose when involved with various

heresies, its actions served as precedents for how to handle similar situations as they arose. Thus, as ideas spread, grew, and changed, so did the institution. Through precedents and defined doctrine, the Church constructed itself.¹

The Church has always had opposing bodies of thought by which to define itself. As long as there has been a Church, there has been heresy.² The Apostle Paul had the Gnostics, Athanasius had the Arians, and Augustine had the Pelagians. The medieval age especially was abuzz with heresy. Some instances of heresy were small and historically insignificant, such as the peasant named Leutard who claimed to be possessed by a swarm of magical bees.³ Others were large and influential, such as the Cathars of southern France who played a major role in the growth of the French Monarchy.⁴ There were the Manichaeans, the Patarines, the Humiliati, the Passagians, the Waldensians, the Publicans, and the Amalricians just to name a few. Within these heresies were more heresies, such as with the Waldensians who were divided between the Poor Lombards and the Poor of Lyons.⁵ Church historian Steven Ozment writes, “Save for brief historical periods and within limited geographical areas, the medieval church was an institution very much on the defensive.”⁶ The Church was rarely without an *other* to define itself against.

However, the Church changed the nature of its responses to these heresies over time from ecumenical to repressive. Church historian Gordon Leff argues this in his article “Heresy and the Decline of the Medieval Church.”⁷ According to Leff, as the medieval Church grew powerful through the crusades, it was stable enough to be able to handle the issue of heresy in an ecumenical nature. It incorporated many movements into itself as an institution. When the institution was threatened by the outbreak of mysticism

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- 1 This is part of Gordon Leff's thesis in "Heresy and the Decline of the Medieval Church." Gordon Leff, "Heresy and the Decline of the Medieval Church," *Past & Present* (1961), 36-51.
 - 2 “Now the first thing to be observed about heresy and opposition to the church in later Middle Ages is that in themselves they were not new. From the later eleventh century onwards, in particular, there had been a steady stream of religious movements which, in varying degrees, represented a challenge to the authority of the church by acting outside its communion.” The communion Leff refers to needs to be taken as *residing together*, from the Latin *cum* (together) + *moenia* (within the walls). The walls here refer to the institution of the Church, thus heresy was anything that did not exist within the Church as an Institution. Leff, 40.
 - 3 Leutard claims that he fell asleep in a field and “a great swarm of bees entered his body through his privates. These same bees, as they made their way out through his mouth with a loud noise, tormented him by their stings; and after he had been greatly vexed in this fashion for some time, they seemed to speak to him, bidding him to do things impossible to men.” Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 72.
 - 4 The Albigensian Crusades against the Cathars in southern France by Pope Innocent III empowered the Parisian Monarchy of the North. The Parisians became hegemonic through their empowerment, and eventually the great culture differences between the North and South were blurred to form one kingdom. This was an impressive feat, however, because the southern regions along the Mediterranean were generally more consular than those of the North, more Latin than French, and had already begun the use of a cash-based economy. Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusades* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1992), 3-7. Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 1-3.
 - 5 This dispute between the Italian Lombards and the French of Lyons was over issues of baptism, the separation of two married persons, and a debate which continued to plague the Church for centuries, the Eucharist. Wakefield and Evans, 278-279.
 - 6 Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 180.
 - 7 Leff, 1.

(circa 12th century) the Church was able to incorporate it. Mysticism's appearance in Christianity took the form of a person having a direct connection to God. This was seen as dangerous by the Church, which, for the most part, was neo-platonistic in nature. A direct connection with God meant that one did not need the institution to get to heaven, it simply brushed aside the neo-platonistic divine hierarchy of creation, known as the *scala naturae*. The most famous mystic was Francis of Assisi, whose Spiritual Franciscans were deemed heretics by the Church over their dogma of Poverty, which clashed with the overtly rich institution of the Church.⁸ The Church eventually adopted these mystics, along with the Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians, into its institution.⁹ Ecumenism soon ended, and repression took its place.

The high point of papal power in Europe historically rests with Pope Innocent III, who waged a twenty-year war, called the Albigensian Crusades, against the adherents of the heresy Catharism. The Cathars are perhaps the most well known of the medieval heresies, made more famous by what happened to them than by anything striking about their doctrine.¹⁰ Innocent III quashed this heresy by killing many of those who adhered to it. The phrase “*Caedite eos, Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius* (slaughter them all, truly the Lord knows who are his)” is a perfect example of the brutal resolve of Innocent III.¹¹ One of Innocent III's inquisitors is reported to have said this during the siege of Beziers in 1210 in response to one of his soldiers who asked how to treat the Catholics who were in the city with the Cathars. The army agreed, and killed them all, trusting that God would sort them out.

The power of the pope diminished greatly in the centuries following Innocent III. Indeed, the papacy itself split in what is called the Great Western Schism of 1378. What led to this decline in power is not easily defined, but can be understood best through the device of self vs other. The Middle Ages were ripe with otherness in more than just heresy, for this was the age of the great Crusades against Islam. All of Christendom empowered the Papacy when faced with a religious threat. The kings of Europe fell into ranks before the pope, ever ready to march for him against the forces of evil. After the Crusades ended, however, this elevation of the pope over the temporal rulers of Europe changed.¹² For when there was no looming threat coming from the East, or from Africa, the only threatening power left was seated in Rome – that is, until the Papacy moved to Avignon, France in 1309 with Clement V. The Papacy remained at Avignon with seven French popes until Gregory XI moved the Papacy back to Rome in 1376.¹³ This is when the schism started, for after Gregory XI died, a governing body of cardinals elected Urban VI, and within the same year they came to regret their decision. Thus they then elected Clement VII to the Papacy as well. With this the Papacy was humiliated and cut in two, leaving the rest of Europe to decide which pope they thought to be the *verus papa*.

Baldassara Cossa was elected as Pope John XXIII after the death of Alexander V

8 Leff, 43.

9 Leff, 50.

10 Cathar doctrine centered mostly on care of the laity. It found community with several other heretic groups such as the Waldensians. It is a representative of the early strife between clergy and laity as the Cathars were very concerned with preaching to the laity and their spiritual well being.

11 Hence the English phrase “Kill them all and let God sort them out.” Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum* (Oberdollendorf, Germany: H. Lempertz & Comp, 1851), 302.

12 Leff, 49.

13 The Popes at Avignon were Urban V, John XXII, Benedict XII, Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V, and Gregory XI.

in 1410. It is easy to say that Cossa was fit better to be a “king or emperor than as pope.”¹⁴ He was rumored to have been a pirate in his youth.¹⁵ He cared little to nothing about Church reform.¹⁶ Worst of all was that he was not even a part of the clergy until after he was elected pope.¹⁷ In actuality he was an *antipope*, or a pope elected by a group of bishops in defiance of an already existing pope. In this respect he followed in the footsteps of his predecessor Alexander V. Baldassare Cossa, from here on referred to as John XXIII, was elected in defiance of Avignon's Benedict XIII and Rome's Gregory XII. His support came from several bishops and, most importantly, the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund of Luxemburg. His reign as a pope only lasted five years.

JAN HUS AND THE HUSSITES

Jan Hus of Bohemia was not much more than an educated man with unorthodox doctrine. In fact, he can be easily compared to his successor, Martin Luther. Both were men from modest upbringings. Both entered into the priesthood. Both became lead professors of a university. The Church deemed the theological ideas of both men as heretical. One of their similar ideas was the weighty *sola scriptura*, which claimed that spiritual authority was derived from holy scripture alone, not other writings or decisions of the institution of the Church. Both Hus and Luther, as tradition holds, plastered their views on the door of their parish churches.¹⁸ The Papacy called both men to council under charge of Heresy, and likewise excommunicated them as heretics. However, the Church burned Jan Hus, and his reform movement did not overtly turn into the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, Hus did lead a very popular reform movement. Ozment writes “Prior to the Protestant Reformation, no religious movement had advanced more successfully against the late medieval church than the Hussites of Bohemia.”¹⁹

Historically, Bohemia has seen many reformers (or heretics, depending upon one's relationship to the Church). Rumors of Waldensian reformers have fluttered about for ages. One sixteenth century writer, Flacius Illyricus, claims that “In Boemiam ... doctrina Valdensium est.” Illyricus goes even farther and claims that Bohemia was the main missionary base for the Waldensian Heresy in Europe.²⁰ Another Cathar-like group in Bohemia was the Luciferans. However, they tended to ally themselves with the Papacy and give way to the will of the Roman See when confronted about questionable doctrine.²¹

The Czech reform movement had been active since before the Great Schism. Most scholars place its beginning with Conrad Waldhauser, whom Emperor Charles IV called to Prague for a council in 1363 over heretical accusations. Waldhauser was succeeded by

14 This was spoken by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Eustace J. Kitts, *Pope John the Twenty-Third and Master John Hus of Bohemia* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1910), 4.

15 Kitts, 1.

16 Kitts, 5,24.

17 Kitts, 8-9.

18 Kitts, 122.

19 Ozment, 165.

20 “*Habeo Libros inquisitionum ante annos 300 conscriptos, qui testantur in Boemia, Saxonia, Slesia et Polonia multos Valdensium dogmatis sectatores fuisse eamque doctrinam a Lombardia seu Gallia cisalpina (ut eam Romani vocant) propagatam fuisse. Eo reperio solitos esse Bohemos tum collectas pecunias, tum et discipulos ut praeceptoribus et ad scholas theologicae mittere. De qua re in Catalogo testium veritatis prolixius disserui, propositis etiam plenius eorum dogmatibus.*” S.H. Thomson, “Pre-Hussite Heresy in Bohemia.” *The English Historical Review* 48, no. 189 (1933): 28.

21 “In Prage plures accepta cruce agere penitentiam promiserunt” than the Cathars. Thomson, 34.

Jan Milic of Kromeriz, the “father of the Czech Reformation.” Milic preached in the native dialects and eventually German and Latin. His teachings were “thoroughly biblical rather than scholastic” and he even “held that the true Church is the congregation of the elect, predestined to salvation before all ages.” Milic preached against the corrupt and licentious lifestyle of the clergy, advocating something more akin to the Franciscans than that of the Romans.²² The popularity of Milic encouraged others in the region. Matthew of Janov (c.1355-93) followed in Milic's footsteps, but went much farther than Milic. After the Great Schism in 1378, Matthew's sentiment was that the “Church had continued in its pristine purity until about 1200; thereafter it degenerated, a state which culminated in the Great Schism,” not exactly Gordon Leff's argument, but it worked well at the time. Matthew also claimed that the “supreme see has been occupied by Antichrist” since Clement VII in 1378. Antipapal sentiment like this will not emerge again until Martin Luther in the sixteenth century. Like Luther, Matthew depended heavily upon the temporal powers “since the spiritual arm has been wielded by Antichrist.” Some scholars even claim that Matthew wrote a Czech version of the Bible.²³ Bohemia was truly a hotbed for reform.

Along with these earlier reformers, John Wyclif of England (1328-1384) also greatly influenced Jan Hus. Some historians go as far as to refer to Hussites simply as “Prague Wyclifites,” so heavy was the influence of the English reformer.²⁴ Wyclif, considered “the last of the great schoolmen,” left impacts on both the philosophical and theological realms (if one would dare to separate them).²⁵ He supported realism at a time when nominalism formed the basis of orthodox Christian philosophical thought. Nominalism can be crudely likened to Plato's concept of forms. Reality to a nominalist existed in a pristine abstract form, from which material things may (or may not) be derived.²⁶ These abstract forms could only be conceived by means of their names, hence nominalism (from the Latin *nomen* and Greek *ὄνομα* meaning “name”). Reality to realists, such as Wyclif and Hus, was what was ontologically provable, the actual, the material, hence realism (from the Latin *realis* meaning “actual” and its stem *res* meaning “matter”). Wyclif's realism, however, was not so rare that no one knew of it, for professors at Oxford itself, where Wyclif taught, were hotly divided over the nominalism versus realism debates. Indeed, it was through Wyclif's scholarly fame that his works, such as his antinomial *Dialogus* and *Trialogus*, came to Prague, and fell into the hands of Jan Hus.²⁷

22 Petr z Mladenovic, *John Hus at the Council of Constance*, trans. Matthew Spinka (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 23.

23 Mladenovic, 26.

24 Ozment, 166.

25 The schoolmen were the scholastics of the late medieval age, this title for Wyclif may seem strange since despite his studies of William of Ockham, he was a great proponent of the Humanist movement. Kitts, 35.

26 There are various divisions among nominalists, mostly centered over the problem of universals – a debate over the existence of objects that do not exist in our reality, or space time. Men such as William of Ockham and Duns Scotus throughout the Middle Ages wrestled with the fastidious issue of “universals *ante rem*, universals *in re*, and universals *post rem*.” Kitts, 137.

27 Academic and doctrinal soundness were of utmost importance in Prague, and all teachings were to have come from the most famous and tried professors in Europe, “*dummodo sint ab aliquo famoso de universitate Pragensi, Parisiensi vel Oxoniensi magistro compilata*.” Kitts, 35,142. “In philosophy John Huss was a follower of Wyclif; he was, like his master, a determined Realist, an enemy of Nominalism, which he regarded as the root of all philosophical error.” Kitts, 141.

Hus studied not only Wyclif's philosophy, but also his Church reform. While Hus did not agree with all of Wyclif's doctrine, such as Wyclif's radical view of the Eucharist, Hus was indeed a Lollard lover.²⁸ The Lollards, as they were called by Roman Catholics, followed Wyclif's teachings in England. They agreed with Wyclif's rejection of five of the seven sacraments held by the Church, only keeping the Eucharist and Baptism. They also rejected the Church's selling of indulgences and the its rights of excommunication.²⁹ The Lollards themselves remained an active force in England even through the English Reformation of King Henry VIII. Their spiritual brothers in Bohemia did not claim to be Lollards, but their love of Wyclif was anything but private.³⁰ In fact, Zbynek Zajic, Archbishop of Prague, excommunicated Hus in 1409 because Hus spread Wyclif's teachings.³¹ This anti-Wyclif sentiment, however, was miniscule in Bohemian culture.³²

Nevertheless, Bohemians desired a means to rid their patria of any heretical stains it bore. The older history of the Waldensians in Bohemia, and the stories of Conrad Waldhauser, Jan Milic, and Matthew of Janov, along with the recent scandal of Wyclifism had brought patriotism in Bohemia in a peculiar way: the Bohemians desired to prove themselves to the rest of Europe and the Papacy. After the Church excommunicated Jan Hus, Prague was in uproar. Since one of the Hussite's main efforts was reforming the corrupt clergy, the clerical claims that Hus was a heretic hardly had any negative effect on the Hussite movement nor Bohemian patriotism.³³ King Wenzel of Bohemia grew attached to Hus, and used Hus to promote a sense of patriotism spiritually through putting Hus into theological combat with other men.³⁴ Wenzel also promoted the teaching and preaching in the vulgar tongue, such as Jan Milic once had done.³⁵ These efforts, along with a questionable disdain held against their Teuton neighbors, brought the Bohemians considerable attention when the Papacy summoned Jan Hus to attend the Council of Constance in 1414.³⁶ The Council of Constance was Bohemia's opportunity to seek legitimacy as a Christian country – gaining the approval of the both Church and the other monarchs of Europe was important to the Bohemians.³⁷

28 The Eucharist is another name for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Wyclif held the notion that the bread and wine did not actually change substance during the sacrament, for to him it was more symbolic than literal, whereas Hus defended the orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation in which the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus, but the physical form, or accident, remains the same, the bread looks and tastes like bread, and the wine looks and tastes like wine. Kitts, 39.

29 Indulgences were official Church documents that, once sold to a person, absolved them from certain penances which the person would have to work off in Purgatory. To the Lollards, it was already enough that the Church claimed to have power over a soul destined for heaven. So when the Church commenced the selling of indulgences in order for a sinner to get out of punishment that the Church itself had imposed, the Lollards saw it as a burning pyre of corruption. Mladenovic, 29.

30 Kitts, 30,37.

31 Kitts, 46.

32 Archbishop Zbynek earned for himself a negative reputation among even the children of Bohemia through his excommunication of Hus and the burning of the books containing Wyclif's teachings. Even children ridiculed him, sometimes in song:

"Zbynek, Bishop A.B.C.

Burnt the books, but ne'er knew he

What was in them written." Kitts, 47.

33 Kitts, 46.

34 Kitts, 33.

35 Kitts, 28.

36 Kitts, 25,29,30,34.

37 This is unabashedly a Burkhardtian statement, but it seems to hold true when one views the efforts of

THE CONCILIARIST MOVEMENT

The conciliar movement was a reform effort that sought to uplift the authority of Church councils in relation to the Papacy. It was somewhat of a humanist movement, as it aimed to bring the Church back to an earlier state.³⁸ The Church throughout its history has called councils to make decisions. The apostles called the Jerusalem Council to quell the circumcision party.³⁹ The emperor Constantine rallied bishops together for the Council of Nicea to quell the Arian heresy.⁴⁰ Pope Callistus II called together Lateran Council in 1123 to put an end to the Investiture Contest.⁴¹ In 1414, Emperor Sigismund called together the Council of Constance to end the Great Schism. Whereas the Czech reforms were mostly moral reforms, the conciliar reforms were mostly bureaucratic.⁴²

The conciliar movement found much of its footing in the philosophy of William of Ockham. Ockham held the view that “Christ alone is the head,” of the Church, not the pope.⁴³ He also states that the *universitas fidelium*, or full body of the faithful, can err at times, but Jesus still remains faithful to the Church as a corporate body.⁴⁴ To the conciliarists, the safety of the institution was dependent upon a governing body, not one individual. This same train of thought led many of the later protestants to utilize the Presbyterian, or council of elders, style of church government.⁴⁵ However, Ockham did not go far enough in his reforms as to claim *sola scriptura*, or any of the other major theological claims of the protestants.⁴⁶ Ockham's reforms were bureaucratic. He found error in how the Papacy held power. This was heresy to Ockham.⁴⁷ Concerning the involvement of Ockham and others, such as Marsilius of Padua, historian Matthew Spinka wrote “Conciliarism was, however, but the cumulative effect of the long-drawn-out concern of the earlier canonists and reformers with the concept of the Church.”⁴⁸

King Wenzel and King Rupert to legitimize their own rules, along with the standing of country through religious, political, and cultural distinctions. Recognition from the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire meant that Bohemia's shady past was truly behind them. Jacob Burkhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004).

- 38 Humanist in the sense of *ad fontes*, or going back “to the fount.” Church reformers almost always try to base their reforms on an interpretation of what the Church was like in an earlier
- 39 The circumcision party claimed that gentiles who had converted to Christianity were required to be circumcised. The Jerusalem Council is mentioned in Acts chapter fifteen and hinted at in Galatians chapter two.
- 40 In 325a.d. the Council of Nicea convened to settle the theological question of whether Jesus Christ was *created* by God after the Fall of man in the garden, or if he was simply *begotten* by Mary. Hence the Nicene Creed states “begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things are made.” This question over what is the reason for Christ's existence is played out in subtler tones throughout Church history, but never as blatantly as it does at Nicea and the First Council of Constantinople, which was convened in 381a.d. by Emperor Theodosius after the Nicene Council failed to end the controversy.
- 41 The Investiture Contest (or Investiture Controversy) was a struggle between the Papacy and monarchs of Europe for the power to appoint and nominate bishops.
- 42 Mladenovic, 22.
- 43 Mladenovic, 9.
- 44 The fallibility of Councils is an issue which divides Ockham from other conciliarists such as Marsilius of Padua. Mladenovic, 10.
- 45 Presbyterian here does not refer to the Protestant denomination, but to its root meaning of elder-based councils, from the Greek word for elder, *πρεσβύτερος*, from which the denomination derives.
- 46 Mladenovic, 9.
- 47 “Since Okham regarded John XXII as actually heretical, this matter of the pope's deposition was no mere theory for him but a real issue.” Mladenovic, 10.
- 48 Mladenovic, 3.

Ozment summarizes their concerns best with, “Beyond papal heresy and notorious crimes, papal persistence in a schism that endangered the welfare of the church became itself a circumstance that justified action by the body of the faithful apart from and against its head(s).”⁴⁹ Thus the conciliarists deemed the Great Schism to be a sign that the Papacy(ies) was in violation of God's law, and it was up to the bishops of the realms to come together to form a council to fix the problem.

Conciliarists held four different views on how the Pope and Council should interact. 1) The council is fully subordinate to the Pope. This went against all the base claims of the conciliarists so it can be ignored in this argument. 2) Both share authority but the Pope has the upper hand. This seems to be the most common form of the interactions between the Papacy and bishops in a general sense. The Papacy lost that upper hand during the schism. 3) Both share authority but the Council has the upper hand. This is the interaction that dominates the beginning sessions of the Council of Constance. 4) The Pope is completely subject to the Council. This also happened, first with the creation of the schism in the first place, then also with the reconstruction of the papacy when the Council of Constance removed all the popes and replaced them with pope Martin V.⁵⁰

The most influential conciliarist during the Great Schism was Pierre d'Ailly, a French theologian and cardinal of the Church. Before his rise in power during the Council of Constance in 1414, d'Ailly was known for his conciliar writings. He wrote *Espistola Diaboli Leviathan* in 1381. This work, written twenty-three years before the Council of Constance, was a satire of the Church in the form of a letter written by the Devil to “all the prelates of the Church of his kingdom.”⁵¹ In it, the Devil urges his minions to prevent the Church from calling together a council to end the Great Schism. D'Ailly fights to end disunity in more than just the papal schism. He did not believe that the Papacy in and of itself was capable to end bigger problems, such as the disunity between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. To d'Ailly, “It would be exceedingly dangerous to entrust our faith to the will of one man,” especially when the Church was divided four ways over, between the French pope, the Roman pope, the anti-pope, and the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church.⁵²

Jean Charlier de Gerson was another French theologian, and an avid student of d'Ailly. Although a nominalist, Gerson was an advocate for mysticism. He viewed the arid intellectual realm of scholasticism as inferior to mystical theology, for the tenants of mysticism touched the heart of a believer, not just the mind.⁵³ This perception of theology alludes to Jesus's famous sermon on the mount, in which Jesus points out that the issues of the heart are just as important as the issues of the flesh.⁵⁴ Thus Gerson's teachings are similar to the Bohemian moral reforms. Some historians therefore hold that it is surprising that Gerson and other conciliarists do not align themselves with the Bohemians. Indeed, “their own reforms were in many aspects not very different from his [Hus's] and in some cases even exceeded those of Hus.”⁵⁵

49 Ozment, 162.

50 Ozment, 179.

51 Mladenovic, 13.

52 Mladenovic, 16.

53 Mladenovic, 17.

54 The sermon on the mount is most readily found in the gospel of Matthew starting in chapter five.

55 Mladenovic, 22.

THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE

The events that happen at the Swiss town of Konstanz between 1414 and 1418 sealed the fate of the Church for the next few centuries. The Council of Constance first met in 1414 with the purposes of stopping heresy, ending the Great Schism, and reforming the Church.⁵⁶ However, it did not accomplish all that it set out to. While it was able to definitively end the Great Schism, and deal a mortal blow to the Hussite heresy, it was not able to successfully reform the Church as many had hoped it would. The events of the council and its aftermath show only this: the council reconstructed the weakened Papacy and the Hussite movement was successfully repressed. The Church did not ecumenically incorporate Hussite reforms, nor did the Hussites become a movement anywhere near the magnitude of Hus's successors, Martin Luther and Jean Calvin.

The Council of Constance was not the first council called to end the Great Schism. Several bishops had tried to end it at the Council of Pisa in 1409. However, all that the bishops accomplished was the election of the antipope Alexander V, and the council itself was later discredited by the Church. Next was the Council of Rome in February of 1413. It had convened to make a judgment on the Wyclif heresy which had originated in England and had traveled into Bohemia. However, attendance was so low at the council that Alexander V decided that the council lacked authority.⁵⁷

By 1414, both the spiritual and temporal leaders of Europe were eager to do whatever was necessary to fix their problems. First on the docket was putting an end to the Great Schism. Some particular groups had deposed popes, such as the University of Prague's disposition of Pope Gregory XII.⁵⁸ However, never had the main body of Europe's magistrates and bishops convened to make the decision. Thus it did not take long after the Council of Constance was convened in 1414 for them to decide. On January 6, 1415 the council voted to make Pope John XXIII the only valid pope.⁵⁹

The validation of John XXIII as verus papa, however, is neither the end of the Great Schism, nor the end of anything else. Indeed it is simply the first step taken by the conciliarists to legislate their reform. For as soon as John XXIII was within the city walls, he was trapped. Armed guards from nearly every attending nation were posted on the city walls and at the gates. There was no way in or out of Constance that did not involve permission from Emperor Sigismund.⁶⁰ The conciliarists now had all the popes in one place along with the support of Sigismund, the most powerful temporal authority at the time. To quote Church historian Eustace Kitts, "The early days in the Council must have been very depressing. Every one knew that there were great schemes in the air, but no one dared to put his hand to them."⁶¹

The conciliarists exacted the same measures against Jan Hus. From his own perspective, Hus was lured into Constance under false pretenses. To Hus, Constance was his one chance to stand up for his country. This was Bohemia's greatest opportunity to clear their name of Heresy, and they knew it. Hus thought that the Council at Constance would provide him with an academic debate.⁶² Emperor Sigismund had even offered Hus the opportunity of traveling with his noble train on the way to Constance, convinced that

56 Kitts, 422.

57 Kitts, 135,183.

58 Kitts, 42.

59 Kitts, 277.

60 Kitts, 292.

61 Kitts, 258.

62 Kitts, 230.

the Bohemian reformer had no heresy in him.⁶³ However, Hus was sorely mistaken about having an academic discussion over theology at Constance. In the past, Hus had debated theology with various professors in the lavish court of King Wenzel.⁶⁴ In Constance, Hus was afforded no court in which to debate theology. Indeed, before long Hus found himself in a damp dungeon, debating with rats over scraps of food.⁶⁵

Shortly after Pierre d'Ailly arrived in Constance, conciliarists arrested Hus. On November 28, 1414, armed guards came to the house of a widow named Fida. Hus had been staying with the widow since his arrival in Constance, and had spent all his time there when he was not preaching or teaching in the city.⁶⁶ Upon hearing of Hus's arrest, Sigismund was outraged. The emperor, however, was able to move the council to give Hus an opportunity to defend himself in regard to the heretical charges that the conciliarists held against him.⁶⁷ On June 5, 1415, Hus was put on trial by the council.⁶⁸ Hus's conciliarist enemies brought to the table more than just some anti-papal quotes of Hus.⁶⁹ They bore several extractions from his works which they had unfairly edited to use against him.⁷⁰ The council afforded Hus some time to speak, but it had made up its mind before it had ever heard him. Emperor Sigismund even turned his back upon Hus, joining in with the growing conciliarist party.⁷¹ Exactly one month later Hus was burned at the stake as a Heretic.⁷² The Goose was cooked.⁷³

Sigismund turned his back also against Pope John XXIII. After being the pope's ally in calling the council into being, and even diligently seeking spiritual affirmation by John XXIII as a legitimate ruler, Sigismund denounced him.⁷⁴ Their relationship ruined, they began calling each other names. The pope called Sigismund an "illiterate Teuton" and Sigismund had labeled the pope as a gout-ridden heretic who desperately needed to "amend his evil livelihood."⁷⁵ In light of the impending doom that the pope was facing, he attempted to flee Constance, twice.⁷⁶ Both times, however, Sigismund's troops apprehended him and brought him back to Constance.

On June 1, 1415, the Council announced that it had decided that John XXIII was no longer pope.⁷⁷ The other two popes having already been deposed, the conciliarists had succeeded in ending the Great Schism.⁷⁸ They had been able to replicate the conciliar and

63 Kitts, 231.

64 Kitts, 33.

65 Kitts, 298.

66 Kitts, 255,258.

67 Kitts, 271.

68 Kitts, 365.

69 Kitts, 123.

70 Kitts, 297.

71 Kitts, 397.

72 Much akin to Obi Wan Kenobi's last words in George Lucas's film *Star Wars* (1977) Kitts writes "John Hus was dead, burned as a heretic, but his work lived after him. His life was consistent, but his death was greater and more powerful than his life." Kitts, 401.

73 The phrase *your goose is cooked* comes from the burning of Jan Hus. Hus is credited with coining this as a spin of of his name, for *husa* in Czech means "goose." His famed last words were "To-day you are burning the Goose, but from my ashes will rise a white swan whom you will not burn." Kitts, 401.

74 Kitts, 93,279.

75 Kitts, 284,292,344,189.

76 Kitts, 301,328.

77 Kitts, 359.

78 Some scholars claim the schism ended the following year after the flight of Pope Benedict XIII, but since he had already been formally deposed his staying in Constance meant nothing. Kitts, 407.

temporal partnerships like what happened at Nicea in 325 with the bishops and emperor Constantine. To the council, Sigismund was a tool from God to help them attain unity.⁷⁹ Sigismund and the conciliarists used this pope-free environment to pass their reforms, but the desire for reform amongst them was overruled by their desire to put in place a new pope. After they burned Hus, who symbolized patriotism more than reform, the council members realized their need for a strong spiritual head for Christendom to rally behind. A revolt in Bohemia over Hus's treatment and death could very well divide Europe. On November 11, 1417, the council elected Pope Martin V.⁸⁰ The election of a new pope, however, did not solidify the conciliar reforms into the Church. Thus, what was accomplished by the conciliarists at Constance was less of a reform than it was a reconstruction. They deposed three popes, burned a heretic, and put another pope in power before they had a chance to indelibly alter the bureaucracy as d'Ailly and others had planned. Stephen Ozment comments that “whereas he [Hus] had criticized the pope, the council fathers had actually *revolted* against him.”⁸¹ Their reconstruction of the Papacy came back to harm the conciliar movement in the aftermath of the Council of Constance, which ended on April 22, 1418.⁸²

THE AFTERMATH

The new papacy of Martin V, and all the way through the papacy of Pope Paul II in the 1470s, suffered from the decisions made at Constance. The biggest problem was how the council had handled the Hussite heresy. Instead of taking an ecumenical approach, as the Church had done so many times before, it took a repressive approach, labeling Hus's doctrines as heretical as John Wyclif's. By denouncing Hus, the council had denounced the entire country of Bohemia. Hus was Bohemia's chance to clear itself of its heretical name, but this hope was strapped to the stake and burnt with Jan Hus.

While the conciliarists gave a mortal blow to the Hussite reform movements, a few smaller movements inspired by Hus grew. The *utraquists*, led by John Rokycana, were the most moderate of these groups. They were in keeping with most orthodox doctrine, and mainly differed from Catholics concerning the Eucharist and on Hus's moral reforms. As we have seen before with Hus and Wyclif, interpretations of what exactly the Eucharist accomplishes has been hotly debated.⁸³ The debate over the nature of the Eucharist was not important to the *utraquists*, however, for their argument was that the Eucharist should be given to both the clergy and the laity, hence *utraquism* (from the Latin *utrum* meaning “both”). Ironically, several years after the Church labeled the *utraquists* as heretics, the Church officially adopted *utraquism* into orthodox doctrine.

Rokycana desired the Church to deal with the *utraquists* ecumenically. He considered a permanent split with the Church of Rome to be unacceptable.⁸⁴ However, as

79 This was by no means a sure bet on the part of the conciliarists, for a war between England and France and their respective allies had considerably weakened the authority of the emperor at Constance.

Thomas E. Morrissey, "The Call for Unity at the Council of Constance: Sermons and Addresses of Cardinal Zabarella, 1415-1417." *Church History* 53, no. 3 (1984): 312,316-317.

80 Kitts, 425.

81 Ozment, 168.

82 Kitts, 428.

83 There are sundry interpretations of the Eucharist such as transubstantiation, consubstantiation, supersubstantiation, and memorialization just to name a few.

84 Frederick G. Heymann, "John Rokycana: Church Reformer between Hus and Luther." *Church History* 28, no. 3 (1959): 245.

tensions rose between the utraquists and the Catholics in the 1430s, and Rockyana was forced to lead the utraquists while in hiding, his hope for reconciliation with Rome dissipated.⁸⁵ After the Catholic church had officially rejected Rockyana and his movement, he began looking elsewhere for legitimacy. In 1452, Rockyana sought ties with the Greek Church at Byzantium.⁸⁶ While ties with Byzantium might have greatly aided Rockyana, fate would not allow it. Indeed, the very next year the Turks conquered Constantinople, crippling the power of the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church.⁸⁷ In response to the repressive nature of the Catholic Church, Rockyana's utraquist Church grew in militancy. At the time of Rockyana's death in 1471, both the pope and the emperor were begging to negotiate a peace treaty, so powerful had this moderate reform become.⁸⁸

The conciliarists of the post-Constance era gave themselves a death blow similar to the one they gave to the Hussite reformation. Truly Gerson was right in thinking that “once the schism was terminated, the Papacy was likely to repudiate the conciliar theory.”⁸⁹ Twenty years after the Council of Constance, the council of bishops itself was in disunity. On the twenty-fifth of June, 1439, a party of bishops and temporal leaders gathered at the Council of Basel. Their goal at Basel was to depose Pope Eugenius IV and elect Antipope Felix V. Steven Ozment phrases it perfectly: “A few decades earlier there had been schismatic popes; now there were schismatic councils.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, by the year 1460, the institution of the Church and its reconstructed Papacy had eliminated these “schismatic councils” along with the entire conciliar reform movement. Pope Pius II wrote in his papal bull *Execrabilis* that any appeals which bypassed the pope's authority and pleaded directly to a Church council were “erroneous and abominable.”⁹¹ The conciliarists made the mistake of reconstructing instead of reforming, for they wound up fighting among themselves over the Papacy, then the Papacy putting an end to their power.

In conclusion, the only way that the weakened Church could keep the Hussite heresy from becoming a full blown reformation, like Martin Luther's, was through a radical reconstruction of the Papacy. The Great Schism caused many to doubt the Papacy and begin to find hope in a conciliar reform movement. These conciliar reformers, such as Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Charlier de Gerson, reconstructed the Church to a pre-schism state. They deposed all three popes at the Council of Constance, and put in Martin V as their desired figurehead. Once the schism ended, and Jan Hus was burned, the Church effectively ended the Hussite reformation, for the remaining Hussites faded and join the host of other heretical groups springing up in Bohemia. The new Papacy of Martin V grew solid in power and it kept the Hussites from reforming Europe. Our story ends here, at the end of the fifteenth century, with a newly reconstructed Papacy staring northward with blood-soaked hands, the scent of growing unrest slowly drifting southward over the Alps.

85 “In July 1437, when the antagonism between him [Rockyana] and the last of the Luxemburgs reached its climax, he was, very much like Luther, 'kidnapped' by some friendly knights who took him to an earlier Wartburg, the castle called Kuneticka Hora near Pardubice.” Heymann, 248.

86 Seeking ties and reconciliation with Rome was no new idea, for Pope Eugenius IV attempted some deliberation with them in 1431. Ozment, 173.

87 Heymann, 252.

88 Heymann, 256.

89 Mladenovic, 19.

90 Ozment, 175.

91 Ozment, 176.

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