

Perspective on the teachings of jan hus

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Jan Hus was a Czech Roman Catholic preacher and writer in Prague. His teachings were influenced by the English theologian Wyclif. Wyclif was one of the earliest opponents of papal authority influencing political power; he started anticlerical and biblically centered reforms known as the Lollard Movement. The Lollard Movement was a precursor to the protestant reformation. Likewise, Hus called for radical reforms in the church. Of primary concern to Hus was the designation of the Pontiff, or Pope, within the church.

Based on his radical views and strong opposition to the church's foundational belief that the pope is the head of the church, Jan Hus was accused of heresy and was condemned. Hus recorded his perspective and teachings in monographs which were used by his accusers to build a case against him. Of the thirty-nine sentences read to him at his trial, twenty-six of them were based on his work "The Church." Because Hus refused to renounce his beliefs he was burned at the stake, becoming a national martyr against the Catholic Church.

The excerpts from his work "The Church" express Hus's opinions on the papacy. He begins by characterizing the role of Christ within the church. Hus uses scriptures from Matthew, I Peter, Hebrews, Luke, John, Philippians, and revelations to support his argument, that Jesus is the only true roman pontiff, or bishop, of the Roman Catholic Church. Hus interprets these scriptures as describing three major themes of Christ:

1. Jesus is at the right hand of god, and no one can be saved without him,
2. Jesus is omnipresent and all knowing, and that
3. Jesus is god.

Jon Hus uses these scriptures to contend that Jesus is the only true bishop because he baptizes and takes away the sins of the world, holds supreme guardianship over man, and that he is the pope, or father of the future age. Hus concludes that everyone is subject to the pontiff, Jesus, for salvation, and that there is no other pontiff except for Jesus. Hus's major contention with the church centers his beliefs that there is an abuse of the term pope within the church since anyone, ordained or not, can be elected as a pope, and that expressed belief in one individual, the pope, is needed for salvation. To support the first belief, Hus provides examples of popes who were unlettered, female, and/or heretics. He concludes that under current conditions within the church, even an antichrist could be elected as pope. Hus uses these examples and the potential for an antichrist religious leader to drive home the point that no pope is the most exalted person of the Roman Catholic Church besides Christ. Therefore, no pope is the head of the Catholic Church except for Christ.

To support the latter belief, Hus suggests that it is not a necessity for salvation that people should believe expressly that any one is head of any church whatsoever; unless the works of the individual plainly moved others into believing it. He claims that if the body of Christ, the people, follows a bad head, the pope, then both body and head will end up in the precipice. Therefore, people should choose who they wish to follow as a head, and that their decisions should be based on the works of the individual. Hus's beliefs posed an immediate threat to the Roman Catholic Church and, more importantly, to its leaders.

By stating that popes are not ordained of god, and that popes have historically assumed contradictory roles to their appointed position, Hus questions the legitimacy of the elite position within the church. The pope Alexander V excommunicated Hus and his followers in 1409 and outlawed public preaching. The government however, took the side of Hus, and the power of his movement increased daily. Despite the ban on free preaching, Hus continued to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel. It appeared as though the ban itself caused little result. Tensions between the church and Hus's movement continued until a council was called in 1414.

The council of Constance was an attempt to put an end to the division of people due to the papacy and to take up the long desired reform of the Church. Hus agreed to go to the council on the premise that he would be given safe passage. However, it has been proposed that he suspected that he would be killed at Constance; this is evidenced by the will he wrote prior to going. Within a few weeks after his arrival, Hus was imprisoned, put to trial, and burned at the stake. His execution was an attempt by the church to squander the reform that he had started in Bohemia. However, the people of Bohemia responded to his death by moving even more rapidly away from Papal teachings, and by announcing a crusade against them. A Papal bull was then issued by the pope which stated that all supporters of reformers like Hus and Wycliffe be slaughtered. The crusaders lost, as did the second and third crusades that followed. A century later, as much as ninety percent of the Czech Crown lands still followed Hussite teachings. Although some revolutionary movements do not end in a revolution, these accounts can provide powerful insights into the views held among the people.

It is too often that only the perspective of the rich and noble are recorded in history; revolutionary movements offer some of the few accounts of the opposing ideals held among the commoners. Jan Hus's reform resulted in his death, and the death of many of his followers, but its impact upon the church was far reaching. Hus was a key contributor to the creation of Protestantism which strongly influenced European States, as well as Martin Luther. The reform started by Jan Hus resulted in the Basel Compacts which allowed for a reformed church within Bohemia.