

## CHAPTER 20 : FROM WYCKLIFFE AND HUSS TO LUTHER

The Protestant Reformation came not in one great stroke, but in progressive stages. Wyckliffe had begun it on the British Isles, and John Huss helped to trumpet it on continental Europe. Just as Papal error and dominion rose over time, so the Reformation rose over time. Although lacking such prominent figures as Wyckliffe, Huss, and Luther, the time in between these Reformers was in no wise wasted for Reformation. God was simply preparing the ground for greater Reformation.

In Bohemia, for example, God raised up many to carry on the work of Huss. In fact, Huss' death moved the hearts of his countrymen more powerfully than even his living voice had been able to do. The vindicator of his nation's wrongs – the reformer of his nation's religion – in short, the representative man of Bohemia, had been cruelly, treacherously immolated; and the nation took the humiliation and insult as done to itself. All ranks, from the highest to the lowest, were stirred by what had occurred. The University of Prague issued a manifesto addressed to all Christendom, vindicating the memory of the man who had fallen a victim to the hatred of the priesthood and the perfidy of the emperor. His death was declared to be murder, and the Fathers at Constance were styled "an assembly of the satraps of Antichrist." Every day the flame of the popular indignation was burning more fiercely. It was evident that a terrible outburst of pent-up wrath was about to be witnessed in Bohemia.

The barons assumed a bolder tone. When the tidings of Huss's martyrdom arrived, the magnates and great nobles held a full council, and, speaking in the name of the Bohemian nation, they addressed an energetic protest to Constance against the crime there enacted. They eulogized, in the highest terms, the man whom the Council had consigned to the flames as a heretic, calling him the "Apostle of Bohemia; a man innocent, pious, holy, and a faithful teacher of the truth." Holding the pen in one hand, while the other rested on their sword's hilt, they said, "Whoever shall affirm that heresy is spread abroad in Bohemia, lies in his throat, and is a traitor to our kingdom; and, while we leave vengeance to God, to Whom it belongs, we shall carry our complaints to the footstool of the indubitable apostolic Pontiff, when the Church shall again be ruled by such an one; declaring, at the same time, that no ordinance of man shall hinder our protecting the humble and faithful preachers of the words of our Lord Jesus, and our defending them fearlessly, even to the shedding of blood." In this remonstrance the nobles of Moravia concurred.

But deeper feelings were at work among the Bohemian people than those of anger. The faith which had produced so noble a martyr was compared with the faith which had immolated him, and the contrast was found to be in no wise to the advantage of the latter. The doctrines which Huss had taught were recalled to memory now that he was dead. The writings of Wyckliffe, which had escaped the flames, were read, and compared with such portions of Holy Writ as were accessible to the people, and the consequence was a very general reception of the evangelical doctrines. The new opinions struck their roots deeper every day, and their adherents, who now began to be called Hussites, multiplied one might almost say hourly.

The throne of Bohemia was at that time filled by Wenceslaus, the son of the magnanimous and patriotic Charles IV. In this grave position of affairs much would of necessity depend on the course the king might adopt. The inheritor of his father's dignities and honors, Wenceslaus did not inherit his father's talents and virtues. A tyrant and voluptuary, he had been dethroned first by his nobles, next by his own brother Sigismund, King of Hungary; but, regaining his throne, he discovered an altered but not improved disposition. Broken in spirit, he was now as supine and lethargic as formerly he had been overbearing and tyrannical. If his pride was stifled and his violence curbed, he avenged himself by giving the reins to his low propensities and vices. Shut up in his palace, and leading the life of a sensualist, the religious opinions of his subjects were to him matters of almost supreme indifference. He cared but little whether they kept the paths of orthodoxy or strayed into those of heresy. He secretly rejoiced in the progress of Hussism, because he hoped the end would be the spoiling of the wealthy ecclesiastical corporations and houses, and that the lion's share would fall to himself. Disliking the priests, whom he called "the most dangerous of all the comedians," he turned a deaf ear to the ecclesiastical authorities when they importuned him to forbid the preaching of the new opinions.

The movement continued to make progress. Within four years from the death of Huss, the bulk of the nation had embraced the faith for which he died. His disciples included not a few of the higher nobility, many of the wealthy burghers of the towns, some of the inferior clergy, and the great majority of the peasantry. The accession of the latter, whose single-heartedness makes them capable of a higher enthusiasm and a more entire devotion, brought great strength to the cause. It made it truly national. The Bohemians now resumed in their churches the practice of Communion in both kinds, and the celebration of their worship in the national language. Rome had signalized their subjugation by forbidding the cup, and permitting prayers only in Latin. The Bohemians, by challenging freedom in both points, threw off the marks of their Roman vassalage.

A slight divergence of sentiment was already traceable among the Hussites. One party entirely rejected the authority of the Church of Rome, and made the scriptures their only standard. These came to bear the name of Taborites, from the scene of one of their early encampments, which was a hill in the neighborhood of Prague bearing a resemblance, it was supposed, to the scriptural Tabor. The other party remained nominally in the communion of Rome, though they had abandoned it in heart. Their distinctive tenet was the cup or chalice, meaning thereby Communion in both kinds; hence their name, Calixtines. The cup became the national Protestant symbol. It was blazoned on their standards and carried in the van of their armies; it was sculptured on the portals of their churches, and set up over the gates of their cities. It was ever placed in studied contrast to the Roman symbol, which was the cross. The latter, the Hussites said, recalled scenes of suffering, and so was an emblem of gloom; the former, the cup, was the sign of an accomplished redemption, and so a symbol of gladness. This divergence of the two parties was meanwhile only incipient. It widened in process of time; but for years the great contest in which the Hussites were engaged with Rome, and which assembled Taborites and Calixtines on the same battle-field, where they joined their prayers as well

as their arms, kept them united in one body.

Bohemia thus became a preeminent concern of the newly anointed Pope Martin V. The great movement which had Wyckliffe for its preacher, and Huss and Jerome for its martyrs, was rapidly advancing. The Pope hurled excommunication against it, but he knew that he must employ other and more forcible weapons besides spiritual ones before he could hope to crush it. Pope Martin V, addressing himself to Sigismund, with all the kings, princes, dukes, barons, knights, states, and commonwealths of Christendom, adjured them, by "the wounds of Christ," to unite their arms and exterminate that "sacrilegious and accursed nation." A liberal distribution was promised of the customary rewards – crowns and high places in Paradise – to those who should display the most zeal against the obnoxious heresy by shedding the greatest amount of Bohemian blood. Thus exhorted, the Emperor Sigismund and several of the neighboring German states made ready to engage in the crusade. The Bohemians saw the terrible tempest gathering on their borders, but they were not dismayed by it.

At that crisis a remarkable man arose to organize the nation and lead its armies. His name was John Trocznowski, but he is better known by the sobriquet of Ziska – -that is, the one-eyed. The shock which the martyrdom of Huss gave the whole nation was not unfelt by Ziska in the palace. This palace courtier might be seen traversing, with pensive brow and folded arms, the long corridors of the palace, the windows of which look down on the broad stream of the Moldau, on the towers of Prague, and the plains beyond, which stretch out towards that quarter of the horizon where the pile of Huss had been kindled. One day the monarch surprised him in this thoughtful mood. "What is this?" said Wenceslaus, somewhat astonished to see one with a sad countenance in his palace. "I cannot brook the insult offered to Bohemia at Constance by the murder of John Huss," replied the chamberlain. "Where is the use," said the king, "of vexing one's self about it? Neither you nor I have the means of avenging it. But," continued the king, thinking doubtless that Ziska's fit would soon pass off, "if you are able to call the emperor and Council to account, you have my permission." "Very good, my gracious master," rejoined Ziska, "will you be pleased to give me your permission in writing?" Wenceslaus, who liked a joke, and deeming that such a document would be perfectly harmless in the hands of one who had neither friends, nor money, nor soldiers, gave Ziska what he asked under the royal seal.

Ziska, who had accepted the authorization not in jest but in earnest, watched his opportunity. It soon came. The Pope fulminated his bull of crusade against the Hussites. Ziska, armed with the royal authorization, suddenly appeared in the midst of them. The citizens were emboldened when they saw one who stood so high, as they believed, in the favor of the king, putting himself at their head; they concluded that Wenceslaus also was with them, and would further their enterprise. In this, however, they were mistaken. The liberty accorded their proceedings they owed, not to the approbation, but to the pusillanimity of the king. The factions became more embittered every day. Tumult and massacre broke out in Prague. The senators took refuge in the town-house; they were pursued thither, thrown out at the window, and received on the pikes of the insurgents.

The king, on receiving the news of the outrage, was so excited, whether from fear or anger is not known, that he had a fit of apoplexy, and died in a few days.

Wenceslaus being dead, and the queen espousing the side of the Catholics, the tumults burst out afresh. There was a whole week's fighting, night and day, between the Romanists and the Hussites, on the bridge of the Moldau, leading to the royal castle. No little blood was shed; the churches and convents were pillaged, the monks driven away, and in some instances massacred. But it was likely to have fared ill with the insurgent Bohemians. The Emperor Sigismund, brother of the deceased Wenceslaus, now claimed the crown of Bohemia. A bitter partisan of Rome, for whose sake he had incurred the eternal disgrace of burning the man to whom he had given his solemn promise of safety, was not likely to stand on scruples or fear to strike. He was marching on Prague to quell the insurrection and take possession of the crown. "Perish that crown," said the Bohemians, "rather than it shall sit on the head of one who has incurred the double odium of tyrant and traitor." The Bohemians resolved on resistance; and now it was that the tempest burst. But the party to strike the first blow was Sigismund.

The campaign, which lasted eighteen years, and which was signalized throughout by the passions of the combatants, the carnage of its fields, and the marvelous, we had almost said miraculous victories which crowned the arms of the Hussites, owed its commencement to the following incident: –

The Hussites had agreed to meet on Michaelmas Day, 1419, on a great plain not far from Prague, and celebrate the Eucharist. On the day appointed some 40,000, it is said, from all the towns and villages around, assembled at the place of rendezvous. Three tables were set, the sacred elements were brought forth and placed upon them, and a priest officiated at each, and gave the Communion in both kinds to the people. The affair was the simplest possible; neither were the tables covered, nor did the priests wear their habits, nor had the people arms; they came as pilgrims with their walking-staves. The affair over, they made a collection to indemnify the man on whose ground they had met; and agreeing to assemble again for a like purpose before Martinmas, they separated, the most part taking the road to Prague, where they arrived at night with lighted torches. Such is the account given by an eye-witness, Benesius Horzowicki, a disciple and friend of Huss.

The matter got wind; and the second meeting was not allowed to pass off so quietly as the first. Several hundreds were already on their way, bearing, as before, not arms but walking-staves, when they were met by the intelligence that the troops of the emperor, lying in ambuscade, were waiting their approach. They halted on the road, and sent messengers to the towns in their rear begging assistance. A small body of soldiers was dispatched to their aid, and in the conflict which followed, the imperial cavalry, though in superior force, were put to flight. After the battle, the pilgrims with their defenders pursued their way to Prague, which they entered amid acclamations of joy. The first battle had been fought with the troops of the emperor, and the victory remained with the Bohemians.

The Rubicon had been crossed. The Bohemians must now go forward into the heart of the conflict, which was destined to assume dimensions that were not dreamed of by either party. The Turk, without intending it, came to their help. He attacked the Empire of Sigismund on the side opposite to that of Bohemia. This divided the emperor's forces, and weakened his front against Ziska. But for this apparently fortuitous but in reality Providential occurrence, the Hussite movement might have been crushed before there was time to organize it. The prompt and patriotic Hussite leader saw his advantage, and made haste to rally the whole of Bohemia, before the emperor should have got the Moslem off his hands, and before the armed bands of Germany, now mustering in obedience to the Papal summons, should have had time to bear down upon his little country. He issued a manifesto, signed "Ziska of the Chalice," in which he invoked at once the religion and the patriotism of his countrymen. "Imitate," said he, "your ancestors the ancient Bohemians, who were always able to defend the cause of God and their own... We are collecting troops from all parts, in order to fight against the enemies of truth, and the destroyers of our nation, and I beseech you to inform your preacher that he should exhort, in his sermons, the people, to make war on the Antichrist, and that every one, old and young, should prepare himself for it. I also desire that when I shall be with you there should be no want of bread, beer, victuals, or provender, and that you should provide yourselves with good arms... Remember your first encounter, when you were few against many, unarmed against well-armed men. The hand of God has not been shortened. Have courage, and be ready. May God strengthen you! – Ziska of the Chalice: in the hope of God, Chief of the Taborites."

This appeal was responded to by a burst of enthusiasm. From all parts of Bohemia, from its towns and villages and rural plains, the inhabitants rallied to the standard of Ziska, now planted on Mount Tabor. These hastily assembled masses were but poorly disciplined, and still more poorly armed; but the latter defect was about to be supplied in a way they little dreamed of.

They had scarce begun their march towards the capital when they encountered a body of imperial cavalry. They routed, captured, and disarmed them. The spoils of the enemy furnished them with the weapons they so greatly needed, and they now saw themselves armed. Flushed with this second victory, Ziska, at the head of his now numerous host, a following rather than an army, entered Prague. Many of the Roman Catholics lost their lives, and the number of churches and convents taken possession of by the Hussites, according to both Protestant and Catholic historians, was about 500. The monks were specially obnoxious from their opposition to Huss. Their establishments in Prague and throughout Bohemia were pillaged. These were of great magnificence. A very short while saw them utterly wrecked, and their treasure, which was immense, and which consisted in gold and silver and precious stones, went a long way to defray the expenses of the war.

That the emperor could be worsted, supported as he was by the whole forces of the Empire and the whole influence of the Church, did not enter into any man's mind. Still it began to be apparent that the Hussites were not the contemptible opponents Sigismund had taken them for. He deemed it prudent to come to terms with the Turk, that he might be at liberty to deal with Ziska.

Assembling an army, contemporary historians say of 100,000 men, of various nationalities, he marched on Prague, now in possession of the Hussites, and laid siege to it. An idea may be formed of the strength of the besieging force from the rank and number of the commanders. Under the emperor, who held of course the supreme command, were five electors, two dukes, two landgraves, and more than fifty German princes. But this great host, so proudly officered, was destined to be ignominiously beaten. The citizens of Prague, under the brave Ziska, drove them with disgrace from before their walls. The imperialists avenged themselves for their defeat by the atrocities they inflicted in their retreat. Burning, rapine, and slaughter marked their track, for they fancied they saw in every Bohemian a Hussite and enemy.

A second attempt did the emperor make on Prague the same year (1420), only to subject himself and the arms of the Empire to the disgrace of a second repulse. Outrages again marked the retreating steps of the invaders. These repeated successes invested the name of Ziska with great renown, and raised the expectations and courage of his followers to the highest pitch.

At this stage of the affair the Bohemians held a Diet at Czaslau (1421) to deliberate on their course for the future. The first matter that occupied them was the disposal of their crown. They declared Sigismund unworthy to wear it, and resolved to offer it to the King of Poland or to a prince of his dynasty. The second question was, on what basis should they accept a Peace? The four following articles they declared indispensable in order to this, and they ever after adhered to them in all their negotiations, whether with the imperial or with the ecclesiastical authorities. These were as follow: –

- The free preaching of the gospel.
- The celebration of the Sacrament of the Supper in both kinds.
- The secularization of the ecclesiastical property, reserving only so much of it as might yield a comfortable subsistence to the clergy.
- The execution of the laws against all crimes, by whomsoever committed, whether laics or clerics.

Further, the Diet established a regency for the government of the kingdom, composed of magnates, nobles, and burghers, with Ziska as its president. The Emperor Sigismund sent proposals to the Diet, offering to confirm their liberties and redress all their just wrong, provided they would accept him as their king, and threatening them with war in case of refusal. The promises and the threats of the emperor, the Diet held in equal contempt. They returned for answer an indignant rejection of his propositions, reminding Sigismund that he had broken his word in the matter of the safe-conduct, that he had inculcated himself by participating in the murder of Huss and Jerome, and that he had assumed the attitude of an enemy of Bohemia by publishing the bull of excommunication which the Pope had fulminated against their native land, and by stirring up the German nationalities to invade it.

The war now resumed its course. It was marked by the usual concomitants of military

strife, rapine and siege, fields wasted, cities burned, and the arts and industries suspended. The conflict was interesting as terrible, the odds being so overwhelming. A little nation was seen contending single-handed against the numerous armies and various nationalities of the Empire. Such a conflict the Bohemians never could have sustained but for their faith in God, whose aid would not be wanting, they believed, to their righteous cause. Nor can any one who surveys the wonderful course of the campaign fail to see that this aid was indeed vouchsafed. Victory invariably declared on the side of the Hussites. Ziska won battle after battle, and apart from the character of the cause of which he was the champion, he may be said to have deserved the success that attended him, by the feats of valor which he performed in the field, and the consummate ability which he displayed as a general. He completely outmaneuvered the armies of the emperor; he overwhelmed them by surprises, and baffled them by new and masterly tactics. His name had now become a tower of strength to his friends, and a terror to his enemies. Every day his renown extended, and in the same proportion did the confidence of his soldiers in him and in themselves increase. They forgot the odds arrayed against them, and with every new day they went forth with redoubled courage to meet their enemies in the field, and to achieve new and more glorious victories.

The cause for which they fought had a hallowing effect upon their conduct in the camp, and raised them above the fear of death. In their marches they were commonly preceded by their pastors, who bore aloft the Cup, the symbol in which they conquered. Before joining battle the Sacrament was administered in both kinds to the soldiers, and, having partaken, they went into action singing hymns. The spirit with which the Hussites contended, combining that of confessors with soldiers, was wholly new in the armies of that age. In the rear of the army came the women, who tended the sick and wounded, and in cases of necessity worked upon the ramparts. They had no choice but to fight to defend their country and their faith.

Even after the death of their leader Ziska in 1424, the Bohemians continued to fight valiantly. When dying Ziska had named Procopius as his successor, and his choice, so amply justified by its results, attests that his knowledge of men was not inferior to his skill in the field. Procopius was the son of a nobleman of small fortune. Besides an excellent education, which his maternal uncle, who had adopted him as his heir, took care he should receive, he had traveled in many foreign countries, the Holy Land among others, and his taste had been refined, and his understanding enlarged, by what he had seen and learned abroad. On his return he entered the Church – in compliance with his uncle's solicitations, it is said, not from his own bent – and hence he was sometimes termed the Tonsured. But when the war broke out he entered with his whole heart into his country's quarrel, and, forsaking the Church, placed himself under the standard of Ziska. His devotion to the cause was not less than Ziska's. If his spirit was less fiery it was not because it was less brave, but because it was better regulated. Ziska was the soldier and general; Procopius was the statesman in addition.

The enemies of the Hussites knowing that Ziska was dead, but not knowing that his place was filled by a greater, deemed the moment opportune for striking another blow. Victory they confidently hoped would now change sides. They did not reflect that the blood of

Huss and Jerome was weighing upon their swords. The terrible blind warrior, before whom they had so often fled, they would never again encounter in battle; but that righteous Power that had made Ziska its instrument in chastising the perfidy which had torn in pieces the safe-conduct of Huss, and then burned his body at the stake, they should assuredly meet on every battle-field on Bohemian soil on which they should draw sword. But this they had yet to learn, and so they resolved to resume the war, which from this hour, as they fondly believed, would run in a prosperous groove.

The new summons to arms came from Rome. The emperor, who was beginning to disrelish being continually beaten, was in no great haste to resume the campaign. To encourage and stimulate him, the Pope wrote to the princes of Germany and the King of Poland, exhorting them to unite their arms with those of Sigismund, and deal a blow which should make an end, once for all, of this troublesome affair. Than the Hussite heretics, the Turk himself, he said, was less the foe of Christianity; and it was a more urgent as well as a more meritorious work to endeavor to bring about the extirpation of the Bohemian adversary than the overthrow of the Moslem one.

This letter was speedily followed by a bull, ordaining a new crusade against the Hussites. In addition to the letter which the Pope caused to be forwarded to the King of Poland, exhorting him to extirpate the Bohemian heresy, he sent two legates to see after the execution of his wishes. He also ordered the Archbishop of Lemberg to levy in his diocese 20,000 golden ducats, to aid the king in prosecuting the war. The Pontiff wrote to the same effect to the Duke of Lithuania. There is also a bull of the same Pope, Martin V, addressed to the Archbishops of Mainz, of Treves, and of Cologne, confirming the decree of the Council of Constance against the Hussites, and the several parties into which they were divided.

At the first mutterings of the distant tempest, the various sections of the Hussites drew together. The Pontiff's summons had been but too generally responded to. The army now advancing against this devoted land numbered not less than 70,000 picked men; some historians say 100,000. They brought with them 3,000 wagons and 180 pieces of cannon. On Saturday, June 15th, 1426, they entered Bohemia in three columns, marching in the direction of Aussig, which the Hussites were besieging, and which lies on the great plain between Dresden and Toplitz, on the confines of the Slavonic and German worlds. On Sabbath morning, as they drew near the Hussite camp, Procopius sent a proposal to the invaders that quarter should be given on both sides. The Germans, who did not expect to need quarter for themselves, refused the promise of it to the Hussites, saying that they were under the curse of the Pope, and that to spare them would be to violate their duty to the Church. "Let it be so, then," replied Procopius, "and let no quarter be given on either side."

On Sabbath forenoon, the 16th of June, the battle began. The Bohemians were entrenched behind 500 wagons, fastened to one another by chains, and forming a somewhat formidable rampart. The Germans attacked with great impetuosity. They stormed the first line of defense, hewing in pieces with their battle-axes the iron fastenings of the wagons, and breaking through them. Pressing onward they threw down the second and weaker

line, which consisted of the wooden shields stuck into the ground. They arrived in the area within, weary with the labor it had cost them to break through into it. The Bohemians the while were resting on their arms, and discharging an occasional shot from their swivel guns on the foe as he struggled with the wagons. Now that they were face to face with the enemy they raised their war-cry, they swung their terrible flails, they plied their long hooks, and pulling the Germans from their horses, they enacted fearful slaughter upon them as they lay on the ground. Rank after rank of the invaders pressed forward, only to be blended in the terrible carnage which was going on, on this fatal spot. The battle raged till a late hour of the afternoon. The German knights contested the action with great valor and obstinacy, on a soil slippery with the blood and cumbered with the corpses of their comrades. But their bravery was in vain. The Bohemian ranks were almost untouched; the Germans were every moment going down in the fearful tempest of arrows and shot that beat upon them, and in the yet more terrible buffeting of the iron flails, which crushed the hapless warrior on whom they fell. The day closed with the total rout of the invaders, who fled from the field in confusion, and sought refuge in the mountains and woods around the scene of action.

The fugitives when overtaken implored quarter, but themselves had settled it, before going into battle, and, accordingly, no quarter was given. A rich booty was also reaped by the victors. All the wagons, artillery, and tents, and a large supply of provisions and coin fell into their hands. "The Pope," said the Hussites jeeringly, "owes the Germans his curse, for having enriched us heretics with such boundless store of treasure."

Scarce had this tempest passed over the Hussites when a more terrible one was seen rolling up against their devoted land. The very next year (1427) a yet greater crusade than that which had come to so inglorious an issue, was organized and set in motion. This invasion, like the former, was instigated by the Pope, who this time turned his eyes to a new quarter for a captain to lead it. He might well despair of finding a German prince willing to head such an expedition, after the woeful experience the nobles, of that land had had of Bohemian warfare. The English were at that time winning great renown in France, and why should they be unwilling, thought the Pope, to win equal fame, and at the same time to serve the Church, by turning their arms against the heretics of Bohemia? Who could tell but the warlike Norman might know how to break the spell which had hitherto chained victory to the Hussite banners, although the Teuton had not found out the important secret?

Pope Martin, following out his idea, selected Henry de Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, the son of the celebrated John of Gaunt, and brother of Henry IV, as a suitable person on whom to bestow this mark of confidence. He first created him a cardinal, he next made him his legate-a-latere, accompanying this distinguished dignity with a commission equally distinguished, and which, if difficult, would confer honor proportionately great if successfully accomplished. In short, the Pope put him at the head of a new Bohemian crusade, which he had called into existence by his bull given at Rome, February 16th, 1427. This bull the Pope sent to Henry of Winchester, and the bishop had forthwith to provide the important additions of money, soldiers, and success.

The bishop, now become legate-a-latere, published in England the bull sanctioning the crusade, not doubting that he should instantly see thousands of enthusiastic warriors pressing forward to fight under his banner. He was mortified, however, to find that few Englishmen were ambitious of taking part in the enterprise. Beaufort crossed the sea to Belgium, where better fortune awaited him. In the venerable and very ecclesiastical city of Mechlin he published the Pope's bull, and waited the effect. It was all that the warlike legate-a-latere could wish. No such response had been given to any similar summons since the day that the voice of Peter the Hermit had thrilled the Western nations, and precipitated them in fanatical masses upon the infidels of Palestine. The whole of that vast region which extends from the Rhine to the Elbe, and from the shores of the Baltic to the summits of the Alps, seemed to rise up at the voice of this new Peter. Around his standard there gathered a host of motley nationalities, composed of the shepherds of the mountains, and the artisans and traders of the towns, of the peasants who tilled the fields, and the lords and princes that owned them. Contemporary writers say that the army that now assembled consisted of ninety thousand infantry and an equal number of cavalry. This doubtless is so far a guess, for in those days neither armies nor nations were accurately told, but it is without doubt that the numbers that swelled this the fourth crusade very much exceeded those of the former one. Here were swords enough surely to convert all the heretics in Bohemia.

Led by three electors of the Empire, by many princes and counts, and headed by the legate-a-latere of the Pope, this great host marched forward to the scene, as it believed, of its predestined triumph.

The Bohemians marched to meet their invaders. They were now within sight of them, and the two armies were separated only by the river that flows past Meiss. The crusaders were in greatly superior force, but instead of dashing across the stream, and closing in battle with the Hussites whom they had come so far to meet, they stood gazing in silence at those warriors, whose features, hardened by constant exposure, and begrimed with the smoke and dust of battle, seemed to realize the pictures of terror which report had made familiar to their imaginations long before they came in contact with the reality. It was only for a few moments that the invaders contemplated the Hussite ranks. A sudden panic fell upon them. They turned and fled in the utmost confusion. The legate was as one who awakens from a dream. His labors and hopes at the very moment when, as he thought, they were to be crowned with victory, suddenly vanished in a shameful rout. The Hussites, plunging into the river, and climbing the opposite bank, hung upon the rear of the fugitives, slaughtering them mercilessly. The carnage was increased by the fury of the peasantry, who rose and avenged upon the foe, in his retreat, the ravages he had committed in his advance. The booty taken was so immense that there was scarcely an individual, of whatever station, in all Bohemia, who was not suddenly made rich.

The Pope comforted the humiliated Henry de Beaufort by sending him a letter of condolence in 1427, in which he hinted that a second attempt might have a better issue. But the legate, who had found that if the doctrines of the Hussites were false their swords were sharp, would meddle no further in their affairs. Not so the Emperor Sigismund. Still coveting the Bohemian crown, but despairing of gaining possession of it by arms, he now

resolved to try what diplomacy could effect. But the Bohemians, who felt that the gulf between the emperor and themselves, first opened by the stake of Huss, had been vastly widened by the blood since shed in the wars into which he had forced them, declined being ruled by him. Such, at least, was the feeling of the great majority of the nation. But Procopius was unwilling to forego the hopes of peace, so greatly needed by a stricken and bleeding country. He had combated for the Bohemian liberties and the Hussite faith on the battle-field. He was ready to die for them. But he hinged, if it were possible on anything like honorable and safe terms, to close these frightful wars. In this hope he assembled the Bohemian Diet at Prague, in 1429, and got its consent to go to Vienna and lay the terms of the Bohemian people before the emperor in person.

These were substantially the same as the four articles previously mentioned, and which the Hussites, when the struggle opened, had agreed on as the indispensable basis of all negotiations for peace that might at any time be entered upon – namely, the free preaching of the gospel, Communion in both kinds, a satisfactory arrangement of the ecclesiastical property, and the execution of the laws against all crimes by whomsoever committed. The likelihood was small that so bigoted a monarch as Sigismund would agree to these terms; but though the journey had been ten times longer, and the chance of success ten times smaller, Procopius would have done what he did if thereby he might bind up his country's wounds. It was as might have been anticipated. Sigismund would not listen to the voice of a suffering but magnanimous and pious people; and Procopius returned to Prague, his embassy unaccomplished, but with the satisfaction that he had held out the olive-branch, and that if the sword must again be unsheathed, the blood which would flow would lie at the door of those who had spurned the overtures of a just and reasonable peace.

The Hussites now assumed the offensive, and those nations which had so often carried war into Bohemia experienced its miseries on their own soil. This policy might appear to the Bohemians, on a large view of their affairs, the wisest that they could pursue. The whole of Western Germany felt the weight of his sword. Some hundred towns and castles he converted into ruins: he exacted a heavy ransom from the wealthy cities, and the barons and bishops he made to pay sums equally large as the price of their escape from captivity or death.

There was trembling through all Germany. Alarm was felt even at Rome, for the Hussites had made their arms the terror of all Europe. The Pope and the emperor took counsel how they might close a source of danger which threatened to devastate Christendom, and which they themselves in an evil hour had opened. They convoked a Diet at Nuremberg. There it was resolved to organize a new expedition against Bohemia. The Pope – not Martin V, who died of apoplexy on the 20th of February, 1431; but Eugenius IV, who succeeded him on the 16th of March – proclaimed through his legate, Cardinal Julian Cesarini, a fifth crusade. No ordinary advantages were held forth as inducements to embark in this most meritorious but most hazardous service. Persons under a vow of pilgrimage to Rome, or to St. James of Compostella in Spain, might have release on condition of giving the money they would have spent on their journey to aid in the war. Nor were rewards wanting to those who, though unable to fight, were yet willing to pray.

Intending crusaders might do shrift for half a Bohemian penny, nor need the penitent pay even this small sum unless he chose. Confessors were appointed to give absolution of even the most heinous crimes, such as burning churches, and murdering priests, that the crusader might go into battle with a clear conscience. And verily he had need of all these aids to fortify him, when he thought of those with whom he was about to join battle; for every Hussite was believed to have within him a legion of fiends, and it was no light matter to meet a foe like this. But whatever might happen, the safety of the crusader had been cared for. If he fell in battle, he went straight to Paradise; and if he survived, there awaited him a Paradise on earth in the booty he was sure to reap in the Bohemian land, which would make him rich for life.

**In 1431**, the crusaders crossed the Bohemian frontier, penetrating through the great forest which covered the country on the Bavarian side. The Bohemians marched to meet the foe. That foe now became aware of the stratagem which had been practiced upon him. The terrible Hussite soldiers, who were believed to be in flight, were advancing to offer battle.

The enemy were encamped near the town of Reisenberg. The Hussites were not yet in sight, but the sounds of their approach struck upon the ear of the Germans. The rumble of their wagons, and their war-hymn chanted by the whole army as it marched bravely forward to battle, were distinctly heard. Cardinal Cesarini- who led the Romish crusade- and a companion climbed a little hill to view the impending conflict. Beneath them was the host which they expected soon to see engaged in victorious fight. It was an imposing spectacle, this great army of many nationalities, with its waving banners, its mail-clad knights, its helmeted cavalry, its long lines of wagons, and its numerous artillery. The cardinal and his friend had gazed only a few minutes when they were startled by a strange and sudden movement in the host. As if smitten by some invisible power, it appeared all at once to break up and scatter. The soldiers threw away their armor and fled, one this way, another that; and the wagoners, emptying their vehicles of their load, set off across the plain at full gallop. Struck with consternation and amazement, the cardinal hurried down to the field, and soon learned the cause of the catastrophe. The army had been seized with a mysterious panic. That panic extended to the officers equally with the soldiers. The Duke of Bavaria was one of the first to flee. He left behind him his carriage, in the hope that its spoil might tempt the enemy and delay their pursuit. Behind him, also in inglorious flight, came the Elector of Brandenburg; and following close on the elector were others of less note, chased from the field by this unseen terror. The army followed, if that could be styled an army which so lately had been a marshaled and bannered host but was now only a rabble rout, fleeing when no man pursued.

The booty was immense. Wagon-loads of coin, destined for the payment of the troops, became now the property of the Bohemians, besides the multifarious spoil of the field – artillery, arms, banners, dresses, gold and silver plate, and utensils of all kinds; and, adds an old chronicler, with a touch of humor, "many wagons of excellent wine." This was now the second time the strange phenomenon of panic had been repeated in the Hussite wars.

Arms, which had served the cause of Rome so ill, were now laid aside, and in their room resort was had to wiles. It was now evident that those great armaments, raised and fitted out at an expense so enormous, and one after another launched against Bohemia – a little country, but peopled by heroes – were accomplishing no end at all, save that of fattening with corpses and enriching with booty the land they were meant to subdue. There were other considerations which recommended a change of policy on the part of the imperial and ecclesiastical powers. The victorious Hussites were carrying the war into the enemy's country. They had driven the Austrian soldiers out of Moravia. They had invaded Hungary and other provinces, burning towns and carrying off booty. These proceedings were not without their effect in opening the eyes of the Pope and the emperor to the virtue of conciliation, to which till now they had been blind. In the year 1432, they addressed letters to the Bohemians, couched in the most friendly terms, and evidently designed to open the way to peace, and to give the emperor quiet possession of the kingdom in which, as he said, he was born, and over which his father, brother, and uncle had reigned. Not otherwise than as they had reigned would he reign over them, should they permit him peaceably to enter. So he promised.

A General Council of the Church had been convoked, and was now in session at Basle. Letters from the emperor and the legate Julian invited the Bohemians to come to Basle and confer on their points of difference. The Hussites were not at all sanguine that the result of the conference would be such as would enable them to sheathe the sword over a satisfactory arrangement of their affairs. They had doubts, too, touching their personal safety. Still the matter was worth a good deal of both labor and risk; and after deliberating, they resolved to give proof of their desire for peace by attending the Council.

The deputies had received their instructions before leaving Prague. They were to insist on the four following points (which, as already mentioned, formed the pre-arranged basis on which alone the question of a satisfactory adjustment of affairs could be considered) as the indispensable conditions of peace: – I. The free preaching of the Word. II. The right of the laity to the Cup, and the use of the vernacular tongue in all parts of Divine worship. III. The ineligibility of the clergy to secular office and rule. IV. The execution of the laws in the case of all crimes, without respect of persons. Accordingly, when the deputies appeared before the Council, they made the Fathers aware that their deliberations must be confined to these four points; that these were the faith of the Bohemian nation; that that nation had not empowered them to entertain the question of a renunciation of that faith, but only to ascertain how far it might be possible, in conformity with the four articles specified, to arrange a basis of peace with the Church of Rome, and permit a Roman Catholic sovereign to wear the crown of Bohemia, and that they had appeared in the Council not to discuss with it generally the tenets of Huss and Jerome.

These four articles may be said to have formed the new constitution of the kingdom of Bohemia. They struck at the foundation of the Roman hierarchy, and implied a large measure of reformation. The eventual consolidation of the nation's civil and religious liberties would have been their inevitable result. The supreme authority of the scriptures, which the Hussites maintained, implied true emancipation. The preaching of the gospel

and the celebration of public worship in the language of the people, implied the purification of the nation's morals and the enlightenment of the national intellect. Communion in both kinds was a practical repudiation of the doctrine of the mass; for to insist on the Cup as essential to the Sacrament is tacitly to maintain that the bread is simply bread, and not the literal flesh of Christ. And the articles which disqualified priests from civil rule, displaced them from the state offices which they filled, and subjected them to the laws in common with others. This article struck at the idea that the priesthood forms a distinct and theocratic kingdom. The four articles as they stand, it will be observed, lie within the sphere of administration; they do not include any one principle fundamentally subversive of the whole scheme of Romanism. In this respect, they fall short of Wyckliffe's program, which preceded them, as well as of Luther's which came after. In Bohemia, the spiritual and intellectual forces are less powerfully developed; the patriotic and the military are in the ascendant. Still, it is to be borne in mind that the Bohemians had acknowledged the great principle that the Bible is the only infallible authority, and where this principle is maintained and practically carried out, there the fabric of Romanism is undermined. Put the priest out of court as an infallible oracle, and the Bible comes in his room; and the moment the Word of God enters, the shackles of human authority and tradition fall off.

After three months' fruitless debates, the Bohemian delegates left Basle and returned to their own country. The Council would come to no terms unless the Bohemians would engage to surrender the faith of Huss, and submit unconditionally to Rome.

In this light, it would seem, did the matter appear to the members when the deputies were gone, for they sent after them a proposal to renew at Prague the negotiations which had been broken off at Basle. Shrinking from the dire necessity of again unsheathing the sword, and anxious to spare their country the calamities that attend even victorious warfare, the Bohemian chiefs returned answer to the Council bidding them send forward their delegates to Prague. Many an armed embassy had come to Prague, or as near to it as the valor of its heroic sons would permit; now messengers of peace were traveling toward the land of John Huss. Let us, said the Bohemians, display as great courtesy and respect on this occasion as we have shown bravery and defiance on former ones. The citizens put on their best clothes, the bells were tolled, flags were suspended from the steeples and ramparts and gates, and every expression of public welcome greeted the arrival of the delegates of the Council.

The Diet of Bohemia was convoked (1434) with reference to the question which was about to be reopened. The negotiations proceeded more smoothly on the banks of the Moldau than they had done on those of the Rhine. The negotiations ended in a compromise. It was agreed that the four articles of the Hussites should be accepted, but that the right of explaining them, that is of determining their precise import, should belong to the Council – in other words, to the Pope and the emperor. Such was the treaty now formed between the Roman Catholics and the Hussites; its basis was the four articles, explained by the Council – obviously an arrangement which promised a plentiful crop of misunderstandings and quarrels in the future. To this agreement was given the name of the *Compactata*. As with the Bible so with the four Hussite articles – Rome

accepted them, but reserved to herself the right of determining their true sense. It might have been foreseen that the Interpretation and not the Articles would henceforth be the rule.

The Compactata, then, was but a feeble guarantee of the Bohemian faith and liberties; in fact, it was a surrender of both; and thus the Pope and the emperor, defeated on so many bloody fields, triumphed at last on that of diplomacy. Many of the Bohemians, and more especially the party termed the Calixtines, now returned to their obedience to the Roman See, the cup being guaranteed to them, and the Emperor Sigismund was now acknowledged as legitimate sovereign of Bohemia.

The Bohemians were now divided into two strongly marked and widely separated parties, the Taborites and the Calixtines. This division had existed from the first; but it widened in proportion as the strain of their great struggle was relaxed. The party that retained most of the spirit of John Huss were the Taborites. With them the defense of their religion was the first concern, that of their civil rights and privileges the second. The latter they deemed perfectly safe under the aegis of the former. The Calixtines, on the other hand, had become lukewarm so far as the struggle was one for religion. They thought that the rent between their country and Rome was unnecessarily wide, and their policy was now one of approximation. They had secured the cup, as they believed, not reflecting that they had got transubstantiation along with it; and now the conflict, they thought, should cease.

The Bohemians in accepting this settlement stepped down from a position of unexampled grandeur. Their campaigns are amongst the most heroic and brilliant of the wars of the world. A little country and a little army, they nevertheless were at this hour triumphant over all the resources of Rome and all the armies of the Empire. They had but to keep their ground and remain united, and take care that their patriotism, kindled at the altar, did not decline, and there was no power in Europe that would have dared attack them. From the day that the Bohemian nation sat down on the Compactata, their prestige waned, they gained no more victories; and the tone of public feeling, and the tide of national prosperity, began to go back. The Calixtines accepted, the Taborites rejected this arrangement. The consequence was the deplorable one of an appeal to arms by the two parties. Formerly, they had never unsheathed the sword except against a common enemy, and to add new glory to the glory already acquired; but now, alas! divided by that power whose wiles have ever been a hundred times more formidable than her arms, Bohemian unsheathed the sword against Bohemian.

Bloody skirmishes marked the opening of the conflict. At last, the two armies met on the plain of Lipan, twelve English miles from Prague, the 29th of May, 1434, and a great battle was fought. The day, fiercely contested on both sides, was going in favor of Procopius and his Taborites, when the general of his cavalry rode off the field with all under his command. This decided the action. Procopius, gathering round him the bravest of his soldiers, rushed into the thick of the foe, where he contended for awhile against fearful odds, but at last sank overpowered by numbers. With the fall of Procopius came the end of the Hussite wars. A consummate general, a skillful theologian, an

accomplished scholar, and an incorruptible patriot, Procopius had upheld the cause of Bohemia so long as Bohemia was true to itself.

The death of Procopius, as we have already mentioned, considerably altered the position of affairs. With him died a large part of that energy and vitality which had invariably sustained the Bohemians in their resolute struggles with their military and ecclesiastical enemies; and, this being so, the cause gradually pined away. The Emperor Sigismund was now permitted to mount the throne of Bohemia, but not till he had sworn to observe the Compactata, and maintain the liberties of the nation (July 12th, 1436). A feeble guarantee! The Bohemians could hardly expect that the man who had broken his pledge to Huss would fulfill his stipulations to them. And so it turned out, for no sooner did the emperor feel himself firm in his seat than, forgetful of the Compactata, and his oath to observe it, he proceeded to restore the dominancy of the Church of Rome in Bohemia. This open treachery provoked a storm of indignation; the country was on the brink of war, and this calamity was averted only by the death of the emperor in 1437, within little more than a year after being acknowledged as king by the Bohemians.

There followed some chequered years. The first rent in Bohemian unity, the result of declension from the first rigor of the Bohemian faith, was never healed. The Calixtines soon began to discover that the Compactata was a delusion, and that it existed only on paper. Their monarchs refused to govern according to its provisions. To plead it as the charter of their rights was only to expose themselves to contempt. The Council of Basle no doubt had appended its seal to it, but the Pope refused to look at it, and ultimately annulled it. At length, during the minority of King Vladislav, George Podiebrad, a Bohemian nobleman, and head of the Calixtines, became regent of the kingdom, and by his great talents and upright administration gave a breathing-space to his distracted nation. On the death of the young monarch, Podiebrad was elected king. He now strove to make the Compactata a reality, and revive the extinct rights and bring back the vanished prestige of Bohemia; but he found that the hour of opportunity had passed, and that the difficulties of the situation were greater than his strength could overcome. He fondly hoped that Aeneas Sylvius, who had now assumed the tiara under the title of Pius II, would be more compliant in the matter of the Compactata than his predecessor had been. As secretary to the Council of Basle, Aeneas Sylvius had drafted this document; and Podiebrad believed that, as a matter of course, he would ratify as Pope what he had composed as secretary. He was doomed to disappointment. Pius II repudiated his own handiwork, and launched excommunication against Podiebrad (1463) for attempting to govern on its principles. Aeneas' successor in the Papal chair, Paul II, walked in his steps. He denounced the Compactata anew; anathematized Podiebrad as an excommunicated heretic, whose reign could only be destructive to mankind, and published a crusade against him. In pursuance of the Papal bull a foreign army entered Bohemia, and it became again the theater of battles, sieges, and great bloodshed.

Podiebrad drove out the invaders, but he was not able to restore the internal peace of his nation. The monks had returned, and priestly machinations were continually fomenting party animosities. He retained possession of the throne; but his efforts were crippled, his life was threatened, and his reign continued to be full of distractions till its very close, in

1471. The remaining years of the century were passed in similar troubles, and after this the history of Bohemia merges in the general stream of the Reformation.

We turn for a few moments to the other branch of the Bohemian nation, the Taborites. They received from Sigismund, when he ascended the throne, that lenient treatment which a conqueror rarely denies to an enemy whom he despises. He gave them the city of Tabor, with certain lands around, permitting them the free exercise of their worship within their allotted territory, exacting in return only a small tribute. Here they practiced the arts and displayed the virtues of citizens. About the year 1455, the Taborites formed themselves into a distinct Church under the name of the "United Brethren." This step exposed them to the bitter enmity of both Calixtines and Roman Catholics. They now became the object of a murderous persecution, in which they suffered far more than they had done in common with their countrymen in the Hussite wars. Rochezana, who till now had befriended them, suffered himself to be alienated from and even incensed against them; and Podiebrad, their king, tarnished his fame as a patriotic and upright ruler by the cruel persecution which he directed against them. They were dispersed in the woods and mountains; they inhabited dens and caves; and in these abodes they were ever careful to prepare their meals by night, lest the ascending smoke should betray their lurking-places. Gathering round the fires which they kindled in these subterranean retreats in the cold of winter, they read the Word of God, and united in social worship. At times, when the snow lay deep, and it was necessary to go abroad for provisions, they dragged a branch behind them on their return, to obliterate their footsteps and make it impossible for their enemies to track them to their hiding-places.

The death of Podiebrad and the accession of the Polish prince, Vladislav, in 1471 brought them deliverance from persecution. The quiet they now enjoyed was followed by an increase in the number of their congregations. Their lot was cast in evil days, but they knew that the appointed years of darkness must be fulfilled.

And these Bohemian Christians were not alone in striving for the faith once delivered to the saints. Amid the mountains of the Alps was the ancient church of the Waldenses, resting on the foundations of scripture, and protesting against the idolatrous corruptions of Rome. The Taborites established ecclesiastical relations with the Waldenses. They were delighted to find that this Alpine Church agreed with their own in the articles of its creed, the form of its ordination, and the ceremonies of its worship. Indeed, the elders of the Taborites came to be ordained by Waldensian pastors.

There were still on the British Isles advocates for Reformation. Lollardy- based upon the teachings of Wyckliffe- persisted as a movement on the British Isles. Lollards believed that Christianity should be closely based on the Bible and that everyone should have access to a vernacular Bible. The Lollard use of the Bible as the foundational authority of Christian faith also gave them justification for criticizing some of the practices of the Romish Church. The Lollards sought to have superstitious practices removed because they had no scriptural justification. Another important part of Lollardy was the idea of predestination and the doctrines of grace. This, again, was an implicit attack on the function of the Church. A central tenet of Roman Catholicism had become the belief that

salvation could be achieved through good behavior and charitable works. A chief function of the clergy was to help the laity achieve this grace, via the sacraments such as the Eucharist, and confession, whereby repentant sinners might be forgiven. And the Lollards' denial of transubstantiation, the miraculous transformation of the Eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ brought Lollardy into the realms of heresy according to the Romish Church. Thus, the Lollards upheld the central tenets of the Protestant Reformation.

Within ten years of the death of Wyckliffe (1395) they petitioned Parliament for such reformation, accompanying their petition with twelve "conclusions"; of which the second was as follows:—"That our usual priesthood, which took its original at Rome, and is feigned to be a power higher than angels, is not that priesthood which Christ ordained unto His disciples. This conclusion is thus proved: forasmuch as this priesthood is done with signs, and Pontifical rites, and ceremonies, and benedictions of no force and effect, neither having any ground in Scripture, forasmuch as the bishops ordinal and the New Testament do nothing at all agree: neither do we see that the Holy Ghost doth give any good gift through any such signs or ceremonies, because that He, together with noble and good gifts, cannot consist and be in any person with deadly sin. The corollary or effect of this conclusion is that it is a lamentable and dolorous mockery unto wise men to see the bishops mock and play with the Holy Ghost in the giving of their orders, because they give (shaven) crowns for their characters, and marks instead of white hearts, and this character is the mark of Antichrist, brought into the holy Church, to cloke and cover their idleness." These conclusions they also posted up on the walls of Westminster, and suspended on the gates of St. Paul's.

As a consequence of such protests, the Lollards faced severe repression by the Romish Church. In 1377, the Pope issued a bull listing nineteen errors which Wyckliffe had made and, in 1382, the Council of Blackfriars rejected fourteen of his beliefs and declared ten of them heretical. By 1384, the ecclesiastical authorities had issued injunctions against Wyckliffe's followers over a wide area of the country. In 1401, the heresy act was passed decreeing that all those found guilty of heresy, or the possession of heretical writings, and who refused to recant, were to be handed over to the lay powers and burned. From this point onwards, Lollards had to operate underground. In 1423, Archbishop Arundel's 'Constitutions' restricted the free discussion of the central issues of theology, in a vain effort to stop the mouths of the Lollards. But the movement persisted, until joined by the larger Reformation movement of the sixteenth century.

Even closer to the Papal home, reformers sought to correct and amend what was amiss in Christendom under the Papacy. Among the reformers was Girolamo Savonarola. He especially opposed the humanist underpinnings of the Renaissance Papacy. But he was ultimately rewarded by death from Papists opposed to his agenda.

Although not a reformer himself, Johann Gutenberg served a most remarkable use in this era of Protestant Reformation. His printing press made possible the wider distribution of the Bible and other religious literature, as well as books in general. The Gutenberg

Bible was printed in Mainz, Germany around 1454-1455. And Gutenberg's second project was also noteworthy: the Psalter.

So Papal forces simply could not squash the on-going Reformation. And Christendom itself was expanding its borders, following Columbus' journey to the Americas in 1492. God was progressively bringing to pass what He had long promised.

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### **CHAPTER 20 : FROM WYCKLIFFE AND HUSS TO LUTHER**

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.