

## Hus and Christian Courage

### I. Hus in Husinec (Silly Goose in Husinec)

- A. **Name.** Hus means goose. Originally he would have been Jan of Husinec but he shortened it for convenience or perhaps for better pun purposes.
- B. **Family.** Born of peasant stock in 1369.<sup>1</sup> His father died when he was very young, so his early education was under the guidance of his mother. She was helped by a rich nobleman who took pity on Jan and paid the expenses of his schooling.<sup>2</sup>
- C. **What was his world like?** At this time the writings of John Wycliffe were beginning to reach Bohemia with the assistance of Anne of Bohemia who had married King Richard II of England in 1382. Otherwise, mainland Europe—particularly Germany—was thoroughly divided into small kingdoms and overseen by the Holy Roman Emperor in the political realm and the bishop of Rome, the pope, in the religious realm.

### II. Hus in Prague

- A. **Charles University.** “Such were his scholastic gifts that by the time he was 34 years old he had been appointed Rector of Prague University. The world seemed to be at his feet.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. **Learning and growing.** “But it was not God’s will that Huss should content himself with academic fame. As a faithful student of the Word of God his mind became troubled about many things. He continually humbled himself for sins known only to himself and the Lord. He even became troubled by the fact that when he played the game of chess he was liable to lose his temper when beaten.”<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. Cartoons: Christ in the crown of thorns; pope in a golden crown with silk robes. Christ saying to the woman, “your sins are forgiven.”; the pope selling indulgences.
- C. **Conviction about the Bible.** Was persuaded of the importance of the Scripture above all else and believed that people needed to hear it in a way that they understood.

### III. Hus in Bethlehem Chapel

- A. **Building built in 1391.** Bethlehem Chapel was built for the express purpose of giving the Czech people an opportunity to hear the Word of God in their own language.

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<sup>1</sup>S.M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Truth), 69.

<sup>2</sup>Houghton, 69.

<sup>3</sup>Houghton, 69.

<sup>4</sup>Houghton, 69.

**B. Powerful Czech preaching.** “With outspoken earnestness he exposed the superstitions of men and the sins of the clergy, and fed the hungry with the bread of life.”<sup>5</sup>

1. He also preached in German.<sup>6</sup>

**C. Mixed Reception.** “Many who saw this pale, thin man with serious countenance, and were acquainted with his pure, strict life, were persuaded that he was a true messenger of God.

1. But the Archbishop of Prague opposed him strongly and denounced both his and Wycliffe’s books. These books were collected and with his own hand the Archbishop set fire to them in the courtyard of his palace, while a loud Te Deum was sung by the clergy present on the occasion.”<sup>7</sup>
  - a) After this, Hus continued to defend Wycliffe’s writing on the Trinity.<sup>8</sup>
2. Huss, as rector of the university, was involved in a controversy concerning the charter of the university. At the time the university consisted of a Czech faction and a German faction. The change in the charter gave the Czechs more influence over the direction of the university with the result that the Germans left the school. Politically, this enraged the Germans and Hus feared for his life.
3. In 1412, Hus attacked the sale of indulgences which were being sold by pope John XXIII to enable him to carry on a crusade against the king of Naples. The result was that the whole city of Prague was placed under interdict. Heeding the friendly council of the King, Hus withdrew from Prague and spent the next two years, from the fall of 1412 to October of 1414 in the rural districts of Bohemia.
  - a) During this time he was protected by the nobility and went about preaching and writing.<sup>9</sup>

**D. Detractors.** “[Hus] was asked whether he was prepared to obey the Pope’s commands. ‘Yes’, he replied, ‘so far as they agree with the doctrine of Christ, but when I see the contrary I will not obey them, even though you burn my body’.”<sup>10</sup>

1. The pope was not a fan. He excommunicated Hus and placed the city of Prague under an interdict as long as it sheltered the heretic and his followers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Houghton, 69.

<sup>6</sup>John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013), 47.

<sup>7</sup>Houghton, 69.

<sup>8</sup>John Huss, *The Church*, trans. David S. Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), ix.

<sup>9</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, ix-x.

<sup>10</sup>Houghton, 69.

<sup>11</sup>Houghton, 69-70.

#### E. Protectors.

1. King Wenceslaus.<sup>12</sup> “Huss never appeared on the designed date, but King Wenceslaus of Bohemia sent ambassadors to assure Columba that any false doctrine being preached in his country would be taken care of by him, at his expense.”<sup>13</sup>
2. Bohemians in general. They liked Hus and his preaching.
  - a) He taught them the Word of God with fervor in the languages of the people and also attacked the abuses of the clergy.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. Hus in Exile

**A. Self-exile.** As mentioned before, Hus went about in the rural parts of Bohemia and was productive in preaching and writing. He hoped to defend his position before a church council and be cleared of the bulls of excommunication so that he could return to Prague.

**B. Writing.** In *The Church*, Hus elaborated upon three primary points:

1. First, he defined the church as “the predestinate in heaven, earth and purgatory... the pope, as he affirmed distinctly, is not the bond of Christian unity, and nowhere does he represent the sacraments as the bond of unity.”<sup>15</sup>
  - a) “The pope and the cardinals do not constitute the church... Wyclif, before Huss, had said that ‘the public understands by the Roman church the pope and the cardinals.’<sup>16</sup> The pope is not the head of the church. Christ is the head.
  - b) The rock is built on Christ, not Peter.
  - c) “Huss affirm[ed] that the doctors treated the Roman pontiff as a fourth person in divine things and place him on an equality with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup>
2. Second, he denied that the popes and his cardinals had legitimate authority over any but those in Rome. In other words, he denied the pope as being unique or of any greater authority than a local pastor.
3. Third, he affirmed that “the Scriptures are set forth as the sufficient standard of faith and conduct.”<sup>18</sup>
  - a) He often repeated this phrase: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

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<sup>12</sup>John Foxe, *Foxe’s Christian Martyrs: The Powerful Classic, Abridged and Updated* (Uhrichville, OH: Barbour Books, 2014).

<sup>13</sup>Foxe.

<sup>14</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, vii.

<sup>15</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, xii-xiii.

<sup>16</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, xiii.

<sup>17</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, xv.

<sup>18</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, xii.

**C. Hus's character.** Aeneas Sylvius (later pope Pius II): "he was forcible in speech; and his purity of character was such that no charge was ever made against it in Bohemia..."<sup>19</sup>

## V. Hus in Constance

**A. Church councils.** At this time, church councils were becoming more common in Roman Catholicism. The goal was to provide a counterbalance to the pope that would serve to reform the church. This council, the Council of Constance, convened in 1414 to deal with the problem of three popes and also to deal with the Bohemians and their persistent disobedience.<sup>20</sup>

**B. Safe passage.** Hus was guaranteed safe passage to the council by Emperor Sigismund and one of the three popes so that he could defend his views.<sup>21</sup> He began his journey on November 3, 1414 and it took him 26 days to arrive at Constance. His hope was that he would assist the church in returning to more biblical practices.

**C. Arrest.** Hus arrived in Constance and was swiftly arrested. The promise of safe passage and honest discourse were dashed.

**D. Trial.** Hus then appeared before the bishops who swiftly accused him of being a follower of John Wycliffe. Hus argued that it was incorrect to say that he agreed with all of Wycliffe's teachings. Rather, he only believed in those that were supported by Holy Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

1. *See quote from Hus's letter to his friend.*

2. "In violation of the promises made to him, he was imprisoned for 'safe keeping' and charged with eight articles of heresy."<sup>23</sup> Later he would be charged with many more. "In fact, thirty charges against Hus were based on the council's disputed understanding of this book [that is, *The Church*]."<sup>24</sup>

**E. Defense.** Hus defended himself and explained how in his writing and teaching he never departed from orthodoxy. He cited the Scripture often and cited Augustine and other church fathers to support his views. However, on July 5, 1415 the council ruled that Jan Hus was "not a disciple of Christ, but was actually a disciple of the arch-heretic and Wycliffe... because Hus remained 'obstinate and incorrigible' and unwilling 'to return into the bosom of the holy mother Church,' he

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<sup>19</sup>John Huss, trans. David S. Schaff, viii.

<sup>20</sup>Foxe.

<sup>21</sup>Foxe.

<sup>22</sup>Woodbridge and James, 48.

<sup>23</sup>Foxe.

<sup>24</sup>Woodbridge and James, 49.

would be deposed from his priestly office and turned over to the civil authorities.”<sup>25</sup>

1. In his appeals to his innocence, “Hus attempted to prove that the council had in reality misread what he wrote. He repeatedly appealed to the authority of Christ and to Holy Scripture as final arbiters of right doctrine. By these appeals Hus made it clear that he rejected the council’s own assessment that what it stipulated as orthodoxy reflects true Catholic teachings based in Holy Scripture and the church fathers.”<sup>26</sup>

**F. Execution.** On July 6, 1415, Hus had the pieces of his priestly garments removed piece by piece and in its place an “eighteen-inch-high crown adorned with three devils and the words, ‘This is a heresiarch,’ was pushed onto his head.”<sup>27</sup>

1. Hus was led to a meadow outside the city of Constance with his hands tied. Then, his hands and neck were chained to a stake, straw and sticks were piled around his feet, and the flame was lit.
2. An eye-witness described the scene as follows: “When the executioners at once lit [the fire], the Master immediately began to sing in a loud voice, at first, ‘Christ, Thou son of the living God, have mercy upon us,’ and secondly, ‘Christ, Thou son of the living God, have mercy upon me,’ and in the third place, ‘Thou Who art born of Mary the Virgin...’ And when he began to sin the third time, the wind blew the flame into his face.”<sup>28</sup>
3. When the fire burned to its last, the executioners further desecrated Hus’s body by incinerating what was left of it and then threw the ashes into the Rhine River. They even removed the soil on which he had died and cast it into the river.

## **VI. Aftermath**

**A. Hussite Wars.** The Bohemians were outraged. “The argument of Hus’s accusers that his free-conduct pass had become void because he was deemed a heretic appeared less than persuasive to the Bohemians. The council had stolen from the Bohemians the life of their spiritual leader, but it returned to them memories of one who they esteemed as a martyr whose example of resistance could only inspire fresh resolve.”<sup>29</sup>

1. Prague broke out in rebellion.

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<sup>25</sup>Woodbridge and James, 49.

<sup>26</sup>Woodbridge and James, 49.

<sup>27</sup>Woodbridge and James, 50.

<sup>28</sup>Woodbridge and James, 50.

<sup>29</sup>Woodbridge and James, 50.

**B. Comparison to Polycarp.**

1. Both men were ministers of the gospel.
2. Both were apprehended for their faith in Jesus Christ alone to save from sin.
3. Both were accused of having heretical views of God.
4. Both were condemned to be burned at the stake.
5. Both died victoriously in the faith, singing praises to God.
6. Both had the earth scooped up from beneath them.
7. ***Both died at the hands of Roman authorities.***

**C. Application.** Both Polycarp and Jan Hus had tremendous courage. They faced the sternest opposition from authorities who wielded the power of capital punishment and did not budge. Why? Because they had courage in Christ. Specifically, they let the courage rest upon the immovable foundation of the Holy Scripture. They believed that the Word of God was perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and worth more than all the gold in the world.

1. *Read Psalm 19.*
2. Because they were firmly convinced of the Word of God, they sought to obey the God who breathed it out—even unto death.
3. What does our confidence in the Word of God look like?
  - a) Are we fair weather Christians? Holding to the Word of God when it's convenient and then abandoning it and our God when we're put to it?
  - b) Or are we people like Polycarp, Hus, Perceptua, Patrick, Augustine, John of Damascus, Anselm, Bernard, and Wycliffe who held to the Word of God above all others—and above life itself?
  - c) Let us not be ashamed of God's perfect Word. Let it be to us a guide, a light to our path, in all that we are and all that we do.

**D. (Prophetic) Last Words.** Prior to his execution Hus was heard to say, “You are now roasting a goose, but God will awaken a swan by whom you will not burn or roast—a statement cited years later by the minister officiating at Martin Luther’s funeral.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Woodbridge and James, 50.