

**DE ECCLESIA. THE
CHURCH.
[NEW YORK-1915]**

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JOHN HUS & DAVID S. SCHAFF

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De Ecclesia

THE CHURCH

BY

JOHN HUSS

TRANSLATED, WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTION

BY

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*Nemo tenetur quisquam credere nisi ad quod movet eum deus
credere sed deus non movet hominem ad credendum falsum.*

No one is held to believe anything except what he is
moved by God to believe but God moves no man to
believe what is false.

—John Huss, this treatise, p. 49.

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1915

WYCLIF—

Vita et doctrina Christi sunt optimum speculum . . . cum manifestum sit quod omnis homo et solum talis qui est in vita et doctrina Christo contrarius est hereticus, et omnis christianus et solum talis qui est in vita et doctrina Christo conformis est ut sic ab heresi elongatus.
—*De Ecclesia*, p. 41.

The life and teaching of Christ are the best mirror . . . for it is evident that every man who in life and teaching is contrary to Christ and only such a man is a heretic: and every Christian who in life and teaching is conformed to Christ and only such a Christian is removed from heresy.

HUSS—

Spero, ex Dei gratia, quod sum christianus ex integro, a fide non devians, et quod potius vellem pati diræ mortis supplicium, quam aliquid vellem præter fidem asserere, vel transgredi mandata Domini Jesu Christi.
—*Ad Palecz, Mon.*, 1 : 325.

I hope, by God's grace, that I am truly a Christian, not deviating from the faith, and that I would rather suffer the penalty of a terrible death than wish to affirm anything outside of the faith or transgress the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

LUTHER—

Verum qui, in agone mortis, Jesum filium Dei passum pro nobis, invocat et ob talem causam tanta fiducia ac constantia in ignem conjicit sese, si is non magnanimum et fortem Christi martyrem sese præbet, hæud facile quisquam salvus erit.—Preface to some of Huss's writings, 1527.

Truly he—Huss—who in the agony of death invoked Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who suffered for us, and for such a cause and with such faith and steadfastness threw himself into the fire, if he did not show himself a noble and brave martyr of Christ, then will scarcely any one be saved.

INTRODUCTION

OF the writings of John Huss of Bohemia, the *Treatise on the Church* is the most important.¹ From its pages the charges were drawn upon which the author was pronounced a heretic by the council of Constance and the same day, July 6, 1415, burned at the stake. It was written in Latin and the translation, here offered, is the first that has appeared in English and seems to be the first to be issued in any language. It is offered as a help in the appreciation of a memorable man who deserves well of Western Christendom and as a contribution to the study of ecclesiology.

I. THE AUTHOR. John Huss is the chief religious character of Bohemia, as Luther is of Germany, and John Knox of Scotland; and he is the one contribution his country has made to the progress of religious thought and of culture in Western Christendom. His fame it has been possible for several centuries to obscure through the semi-mythical personality of the Roman Catholic saint, John Nepomuk, but recently Huss's eminence as a notable preacher and an unselfish patriot has come to recognition among his people, and in Southern Bohemia, though it is loyal to the Roman Catholic church, his memory is yearly celebrated.²

Born in 1373, Huss studied at the university of Prague—then in the golden period of its history. In 1403, he was made its rector, holding the position six months and later,

¹ Loserth, who pronounces the same judgment, says that the treatise has inspired friends and foes alike with deep respect, *Wiclif and Huss*, p. 182. Huss's main treatise attacking John XXIII's bulls of indulgences and his *Reply to the Eight Doctors*, *Monumenta*, 1: 215-237; 366-402, are more spirited and make the impression of being more direct, because they are less encumbered by quotations from the canon law and other sources.

² For details of Huss's life, see Schaff, *Life of John Huss*, N. Y., 1915.

in 1409, for the term of a year. In 1403, he was also appointed preacher at Bethlehem chapel which had been founded ten years before to afford preaching in the native Czech tongue. Under Huss the chapel became the most conspicuous religious centre of the city next to the cathedral of St. Vite and the centre of a national movement. His sermons at once attracted attention by their Scriptural fervor and by their attacks upon the abuses of the clergy. As Æneas Sylvius bears witness,¹ he was forcible in speech; and his purity of character was such that no charge was ever made against it in Bohemia or during his trial in Constance. The hostility of the clergy, which his attacks aroused, followed him till his death.

There were three specific movements, which involved Huss in trouble and brought on violent dissension in Prague.

The first was the spread of Wyclif's views. Soon after Wyclif's death, 1384, his writings were carried to Bohemia, where they made as deep an impression as in Wyclif's own country. His views had been pronounced heretical by Gregory XI and what was heresy in England was heresy in Bohemia. By some of the Prague clergy XLV Articles said to contain Wyclif's views were brought to the attention of the university, 1403, for its decision. In spite of Huss's protest and the protest of Palecz and Stanislaus of Znaim, Huss's intimate friends, and other members of the theological faculty, the writings were forbidden to be read or taught. Huss declined to accept the decision, and was charged with declaring for the remanence of the bread and wine after the words of institution and with publicly announcing the pious hope, that Wyclif's soul was among the saved. Vigilant for the interests of the orthodox faith, the clergy hostile to Huss appealed to Rome, and first Innocent VII and later the Pisan pontiff, Alexander V, instructed Zbynek, archbishop of Prague, to proceed against Wyclifite heresy, and Alexander ordered

¹ *Hist. of Bohemia*, chap. XXXV.

chapels, such as Huss preached in, to be closed. Against Huss's open protest the archbishop seized two hundred of Wyclif's writings and made a bonfire of them in the courtyard of his palace, 1410. After this event, Huss publicly defended one of Wyclif's writings, the tract on the Trinity.

A second movement which involved Huss in violent controversy and trouble was the change in the charter of the university, 1409. By this change the Czech element was given three votes, and the foreign nations reduced from three to one. Against Huss, the recognized leader of the movement, was aroused the bitter opposition of the German population which exercised an influence in the city out of all proportion to its numbers. In this issue the court party was on Huss's side, but the hostility of the Germans, so Huss felt, thenceforth threatened even his very life.

The third cause of trouble for Huss was his attack, in 1412, upon the sale of indulgences authorized by John XXIII to enable him to carry on a crusade against Ladislaus, king of Naples. Deserted over this issue by most of his intimate friends at the university, Huss nevertheless spoke out as boldly as Luther did a hundred years later against the unholy traffic. He had already refused to obey a citation to Rome and was now placed under the ban of excommunication by the curia. This proving ineffective, the city of Prague was put under the interdict. In the meantime, Huss had appealed from the apostolic see to Christ himself, as the just judge and the supreme ruler of the church.¹

The interdict meant moral and religious starvation. In part to avert the calamity of a cessation of divine ministries and heeding the friendly counsel of the king, Wenzel, Huss withdrew from Prague and spent the next two years, from the fall of 1412 to October, 1414, in the rural districts of Bohemia, protected by powerful members of the nobility,

¹ Palacky, *Documenta*, 192, 464-466, 726. See Schafl, *Life of Huss*, pp. 138, etc.

and preaching in the villages and on the fields and active with his pen.

The œcumenical council, which was appointed to meet at Constance in 1414, seemed to offer an opportunity for a fair hearing of Huss's case and the removal from Bohemia of the ill-fame of heresy which now attached to it. For Huss's name was spread all through Europe and was scarcely less notorious than Wyclif's. Provided with a safe-conduct by Sigismund, heir of his brother Wenzel and of the empire, Huss proceeded to the council but, soon after his arrival in Constance, was seized by the cardinals and consigned to prison, where he languished till death put an end to his trials.

Examined by one commission after another, including among its members such eminent men as d'Ailly and Cardinal Zabarella, he persistently refused to abjure, unwilling, as he professed, to offend against God and his conscience. On July 6, 1415, the council in full session charged him with thirty errors and turned him over to the civil authority to suffer the penalty appointed for heretics, death in the flames.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES under which the treatise was written. The immediate occasion of the writing of the Treatise on the Church was a document signed by eight doctors belonging to the theological faculty of the university, dated February 6, 1413. Its immediate occasion was the papal bulls calling for a crusade against that refractory Christian prince, Ladislaus of Naples, and the sale of indulgences on the streets of Prague. It asserted the duty of absolute submission to the commands of pope and other ecclesiastical superiors, condemned the XLV Wyclifite Articles as scandalous and heretical and demanded that the kingdom of Bohemia be cleared of heresy, if necessary by the severest ecclesiastical and also civil punishments.¹ The Bohemian clergy and nation, it affirmed, were in complete accord in all matters of belief and worship with the Roman

¹ For the text in Latin and Czech, *Doc.*, 475-485.

church—*tenet et credit fideliter sicut Romana ecclesia et non aliter*—the pope being the head of the Roman church and the college of cardinals its body. Of all names, so the doctors confessed, the name heretic is the most to be abhorred. As for the sentences pronounced by Rome upon Huss, it was not within the province of the clergy of Prague to sit in judgment upon them—*nec est cleri in Praga judicare si justa vel injusta est M. J. Hus excommunicatio et aggravatio a curia romana.*

These and other positions of the eight doctors the Treatise on the Church takes up one by one and discusses. Huss's work called forth replies from Palecz and Stanislaus of Znaïm, two of the signers of the document, and to each Huss made a rejoinder as he also wrote a more elaborate and very vigorous rejoinder addressed to the eight doctors as a body.¹ In the first two of these rejoinders Huss cites his Treatise on the Church by name at least eleven times, and in the Reply to the Eight Doctors at least five times.² The Treatise on the Church grows in interest as it is read in connection with these three cognate works, which further elucidate some of its principles and add items of personal interest.

Intended as a reply to the document issued by the eight theological doctors, this treatise became Huss's *apologia pro sua vita*, the defense of the views which he had drawn from Wyclif and advocated. With Cajetan before Luther at Augsburg, the eight doctors knew of only one word applicable to Huss, the word recant. His case was not arguable. Unquestioning submission was imperative. Rome had spoken: "Yield and obey," they wrote—*obediendum et pariendum est.*³ Huss's final reply was not recorded with pen or expressed by word of mouth. He sealed his convictions with his life at Constance.

¹ The text is given in *Mon.*, 1 : 318-331; 331-365; 365-468.

² *Mon.*, 1 : 320, 321, 323, 328, 329, 335, etc. In the rejoinder to the eight doctors the Reply to Stanislaus is quoted at least twice.

³ *Doc.*, 1 : 480.