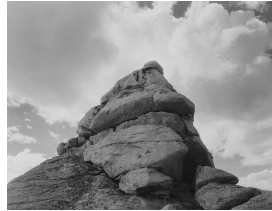


Reformation Reflections

THE CHURCH

What is the Church? God's Word gives illustrations: "the Body of Christ", "the Bride of Christ", "living stones built up a Spiritual House – built on Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone"; and there are many more. In every case, however, it is always and only in, on, and through our Lord Jesus Christ that the Church exists.

Jesus once asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," was Peter's reply, to which Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:15-16, 18). The "rock", of course, was not Peter's person, but his confession of Christ.



This is essential for the life of the Church – namely, the confession of Christ. Indeed, our salvation depends on it.

God's Word reveals that the Church, in its most basic sense, is that body of believers - that fellowship, *koinonia*, communion - that shares faith in, and the confession of, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Across the centuries, God in His mercy sent forth men –apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4) – to call His people back to Himself, back to the truth, and to build them up in faithful confession and lives. In other words, to be the Church.

One such man, a century before Luther, was Jan Huss. Born in Husinec ("Goosetown") in 1369, in what is today the Czech Republic, Jan shortened his name to "Hus" – goose – and apparently enjoyed the puns that followed him throughout his life.

Despite his peasant origin, he rose to become priest, scholar, and preacher at one of the largest churches in Prague. It was the philosophical, political and theological debates of the times, however, that led Jan Hus to his re-discovery of the Bible and the true nature of the Church.



Like Luther a century later, **Jan Hus** publicly rejected the notion of indulgences, the corruption and worldliness of the church leadership, and focus on the "traditions of men" as opposed to the Word of God. Hus argued that Christ alone is head of the Church, that even a pope "through ignorance and love of money" can make mistakes, and that "to rebel against an erring pope is to obey Christ."

Hus wrote, he spoke out, and in 1409, he was excommunicated. In November of 1414, Jan Hus was called to give an account of his doctrine before the Council of Constance. He was even promised safe conduct. Immediately upon arrival, however, it was revoked and he was arrested. Brought before the council in chains, he was ordered to recant.

When he realized there would be no fair hearing, Hus said 'I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In his hands I plead my cause, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but on truth and justice.'

On July 6, 1415, Hus was publicly defrocked, condemned and taken to be burned at the stake. He prayed, "Lord Jesus, it is for Thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray Thee to have mercy on my enemies." He died in the flames. His ashes were scattered into the Rhine so that nothing would remain of him. Something vitally important did remain, however: Jan Hus' confession of the faith and the example to the Church of his faithfulness even unto death.

The 2nd century Christian apologist Tertullian once wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Earlier still, Jesus Christ promised, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 210).

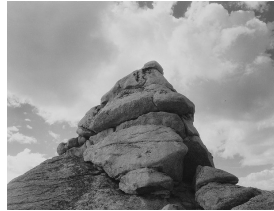


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