



The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

Vol. VIII, No. 4 – December 2006

The Persecution under Caiaphas, Pilate, and Paul

By

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Introduction

The book of revelation depicts two persecutions against the church: the persecution of the dragon and the persecution under the beast, harlot, and false prophet. In this article, we want to identify the time and circumstance of the first of these two great persecutions.

The Dragon, the Woman, and the Man-child

The persecution under the dragon is portrayed in Revelation twelve where it attempts to destroy the man-child at the time of its very birth:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her

*there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.
Rev. 12:1-6*

The basic imagery is taken from the garden where the dragon appears in the form of the serpent, which tempted the woman. The serpent was not a demonic being; it was a serpent, just as the text says. It was chosen as the medium by which the woman was tempted because of the symbolic value associated with the venom of its bite. Just as the bite of the serpent produces physical death, so sin produces moral, spiritual, and eternal death. From an actual serpent that was given man's voice to tempt the woman, the serpent is thence abstracted and made a symbol for sin and death and those that act in obedience to their command; the woman a symbol for the people of God. The scripture's then foretell the conflict between offspring of the woman and the serpent:

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. Gen. 3:14-16

The woman's Seed is Christ; the promised Kinsman Redeemer; the serpent would "bruise the heel" of the

promised Seed (strike a nonfatal blow) in the crucifixion, but the Seed would crush the serpent's head by the power of his cross and resurrection. (Cf. Col. 2:14, 15) The enmity between the woman and the serpent is manifested in the struggle between the people of God and their worldly oppressors. The symbol of the serpent was appropriated upon by the prophets, where it is merged into the symbol of Leviathan, the world civil power opposing God and oppressing his people:

In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. Isa. 27:1

In the Old Testament, Leviathan most often stood for Egypt, but similar imagery was also used for other world powers. (Cf. Isa. 14:29 – *Assyria and Babylon*) In Revelation, the dragon is Imperial Rome. The seven heads of the serpent symbolize to the seven Caesars that would rule unto the eschaton; the ten horns represent Rome's ten provinces. (Rev. 17:10-12) The woman is the mother church in Palestine to whom the promised Seed was given. Most will concede that Christ is symbolized by the "man child" brought forth by the woman. This is made certain by the reference in v. 5 that he would "rule the nations with a rod of iron" and was "caught up to God and to his throne." Jesus uses this language about himself in Rev. 3:27; however, the ultimate source of the language is the second Psalm, where it describes the risen and ascended Messiah:

Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. Ps. 2:8, 9

The dragon's attempt to devour the Christ-child at his birth refers to Herod's slaughter of the Innocents. (Matt. 2:16-18) Catching up of the man child to the God and his throne is prospective, and looks to the ascension of Christ following his death and resurrection. Christ's earthly ministry is depicted in the imagery of Michael and his angels (Christ and the apostles) doing battle with the dragon and his angels (Sin, Rome and the Jews). The victory over the dragon was obtained by the blood of Christ and the testimony of the gospel:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Rev. 12:11

When the dragon saw that he was defeated, he turned his wrath upon the woman, pouring out persecution from its mouth like a flood. (vv. 13-15) This persecution, following as it does fast upon the heels of the man-child's ascension, is readily identified with the persecution that arose over St. Stephen. Stephen was arraigned before the Sanhedrin on charges of blasphemy for teaching that Christ would come and destroy the city and temple and change the customs delivered by Moses. (Acts 6:14, 15) This had been the substance of Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt. 23:34-39; 24, 25); Christ had also foretold of his coming while on trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:64), and the destruction of Jerusalem when led to Calvary. (Lk. 23:37-41) The destruction of Jerusalem by Rome had also been prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27) and Isaiah (Isa. 66:1-1-6, 15), the latter whom Stephen quoted in his defense, exciting the counsel to murder him. (Acts 7:48, 49) With the death of Stephen, the persecution of the woman began.

The narrative relates that the woman was given wings for flight and a place to hide in the wilderness, where she was sustained for a time, times, and half a time, or one thousand two hundred three score days. (vv. 6, 14) This refers to the scattering of the church upon the persecution. Driven from Judea, the disciples carried the gospel to foreign cities among the Gentiles ("the wilderness").

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Acts 8:4; cf. 11:19

Not content to persecute the church in Judaea, Saul sought letters from the chief priests to go unto foreign cities and arrest those he found that professed the name of Christ. (Acts 9:1, 2, 14) Unlike today, when jurisdiction is based upon territory and the *place* where an act occurs, in ancient times, jurisdiction was also based upon *citizenship*. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of Paul. As we read Acts we encounter several instances where Paul's Roman citizenship protected him against the whim and caprice of local laws and officials, and entitled him to certain procedural and substantive rights, including the right to be tried before a Roman magistrate. It was Paul's Roman citizenship that enabled him to appeal to Caesar, and thus escape the wrath and power of the Sanhedrin.

I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have

committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Acts 25:10, 11

This facet of Roman law, which recognized jurisdiction based upon citizenship, lay behind Saul's ability to travel to foreign cities and there arrest Jews professing faith in Christ. For it had been a right granted the Jews from the time of Julius Caesar that they were allowed to keep their own laws, were exempt from military duty and certain taxes, recognition of the Sabbath day, the right of living according to the customs of their forefathers, and full jurisdiction over their own members. Josephus records numerous edicts by the Romans on behalf of the nation, securing them various privileges and immunities. One in particular testifies to the fact that Jews were allowed legislative bodies and courts in foreign cities with power to make decrees and adjudicate cases binding their members.

Lucius Antonius, the son of Marcus, vice-quaestor, and vice-praetor, to the magistrates, senate, and people of the Sardians, sendeth greeting. Those Jews that are our fellow-citizens of Rome, came to me, and demonstrated that they had an assembly of their own, according to the laws of their forefathers, and this from the beginning, as also a place of their own wherein they determined their suits and controversies with one another. Upon their petition therefore to me, that these might be lawful for them, I give order that these their privileges be preserved, and they be permitted to do accordingly.¹

The Sceptre of Judah and the *ius gladii*

Notwithstanding the ability to arrest Jewish citizens and bring them to Jerusalem for trial, the power to put men to death rested solely with the Roman governor. The authority to adjudicate and execute sentence over capital crimes, known in Roman law as the *ius gladii* ("right of the sword"), is an integral part of the sovereign power given to the ruling authority by God from the days of Noah, to repress lawlessness on earth:

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Rom. 13:3, 4; cf. Gen. 9:5, 6

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIV, x, 17; Whiston ed; cf. Schürer, *Hist. of the Jewish People in N.T. Times*, 2nd Div., vol. ii. pp. 234, 259, 264. See also Suet. *Caesar*, 42.

The *ius gladii* was part of the sceptre of Judah; the sovereign power reposed in the tribe of Judah. Jacob's prophecy to his sons indicated that the sovereign power would not cease from Judah until the Messiah had come:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Genesis 49:10

The sovereign power embodied in the sceptre, including the right to adjudicate and execute capital crimes, was made sure to Judah until the Messiah (Shiloh) had come. The Messiah would then hold the sceptre. But, as the seat of Christ's kingdom is in heaven, the sceptre of the Davidic throne would cease upon earth. And this is precisely what occurred. In the first quarter of the first century God took the *ius gladii* away from Judah and gave it to the Romans. First, in the person of Herod the Great and his heirs, then in the person of the Roman procurator, and, finally, by the destruction of the nation itself. In the absence of a king, the Sanhedrin was the sole repository of the *ius gladii*. Josephus records that Herod the Great, when he had the government of Galilee, was tried before the Sanhedrin for putting the arch-robber, Hezekias, and his followers to death, but made his escape to Sextus Caesar, where he obtained the government of all Syria. Later, he was made king of Judaea by the Roman senate at the instance of Mark Antony, and was able to put men to death as an incident of the monarchial power.² With the death of Herod, Archelaus reigned in his stead, but was banished to Vienna, a city of Gaul, in the ninth year of his reign.³ Augustus thus sent Coponius to be governor over Judaea, who held the sole authority to sit in judgment upon capital offenses.

And now Archelaus's part of Judea was reduced into a province, and Coponius, one of the equestrian order among the Romans, was sent as a procurator, having the power of life and death put into his hands by Caesar.⁴

The Persecution Collapses

At length, Pontius Pilate succeeded to the office of procurator by the appointment of Tiberius.⁵ The

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIV, ix, 3-5; XIV, xiv, 4.

³ Josephus, *Wars*, II, vii, 3.

⁴ *Ibid*, II, viii, 1; Whiston ed.

⁵ The succession of procurators until the revolt in AD 66: Coponius (6-9AD); Marcus Ambivius (9-12 AD); Antonius Rufus (12-15 AD); Valerius Gratus (15-26 AD); Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD); Marcellus (36-37 AD); Marullus (37-40 AD); Fadus (44-46 AD); Tiberius Alexander (46-48 AD); Ventidius Cumanus (48-52

book of Acts is silent about Pilate's role in the persecution that arose over Stephen, but, as no one might be put to death in Judea without his consent, it is almost certain that he yielded to Caiaphas in this matter, much as he had about the murder of Christ. However, the persecution's length had been determined at the outset. Revelation depicts the end of the persecution by the earth wondrously opening its mouth to swallow the flood. (Rev. 12:16) The imagery of the earth swallowing the flood is taken from the story of Dathan and Abriam who opposed Moses, and thus went down to the pit live and whole, when the earth opened its mouth as a sign against them. (Num. 16:29-32) This began to be fulfilled in A.D. 36, when the future emperor, Vitellius, then president of Syria, compelled Pilate to travel to Rome to answer charges about the death of some Samaritans that resulted in the suppression of an uprising.⁶ Since the Roman procurator held the *ius gladii*, the persecution depended upon his cooperation if the disciples were to be put death. Robbed of Pilate, the Jews could only beat, imprison, and excommunicate.⁷

At the same time he removed Pilate, Vitellius traveled to Jerusalem during the Passover, where he was magnificently received by the Jews. In return, Vitellius remitted certain taxes and restored custody of the high priest's garments to the Jews, which, until that time, had been kept in the fortress Antonia under Roman guard. Josephus records that as a further kindness to the Jews, Vitellius removed Caiaphas from the high priesthood.⁸ Caiaphas contrived the murder of Christ together with his father-in-law, Annas. (Jno. 18:13, 24) The house of the Annas (*viz.*, "Hanan," "Annas" is the Greek form of "Hanan") had long oppressed the Jews, together with the high priestly houses of Beothus, Kathros, and Ismael ben Phabi, as the Talmud records:

Woe is me because of the house of Beothus,
 Woe is me because of their staves.
 Woe is me because of the house of Hanan,
 Woe is me because of their whisperings.
 Woe is me because of the house of Kathros,
 Woe is me because of their pens.
 Woe is me because of the house of Ismael ben Phabi,
 Woe is me because of their fists.
 For they are high priests, and their sons are treasurers,
 and their sons-in-laws are temple overseers, and their
 servants beat the people with clubs.⁹

Restoring the care and custody of the high priestly garments to the Jews at the same time he removed Caiaphas indicates that issues concerning the high priesthood were of high priority to the Jews and that there was widespread dissatisfaction with Caiaphas. Upon the death of Festus, before Albinus arrived to replace him, Ananus, the son of Annas the father-in-law of Caiaphas, convened the Sanhedrin and put to death James, the Lord's brother, with several of his fellow disciples. Josephus records that many of the leading Jews complained to Albinus of Ananus' convening of the Sanhedrin and unlawful usurpation of the *ius gladii*:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus] assembled the Sanhedrim of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions;] and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa,] desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified: nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a Sanhedrim without his consent: whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.¹⁰

Given that the apostles and church were held in high esteem by the Jewish people at the time Caiaphas was removed (Acts 5:12-16) and that many of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7), it is quite possible that the persecution of the church contributed to the request Caiaphas be removed from

AD); Felix (52-60); Festus (60-62 AD); Albinus (62-64 AD); Gessius Florus (64-66 AD). Agrippa I was king from 40-44 AD.

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, vi, 2.

⁷ Paul's testimony that he was stoned of the Jews resulted from mob action, not lawful exercise of the *ius gladii*. (Acts 14:19) The instances in which he was beaten with rods or received 40 stripes save one, would have been under the authority of local synagogues. (II Cor. 11:24, 25)

⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, vi, 3.

⁹ B. Pesahim 57a; T. Menahoth 13:21. The house of Kathros has been unearthed by archaeologists and is known as the "burnt house."

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1; Whiston ed.

office, much as it did thirty years later when Ananias was removed by Agrippa II for having stoned James.

Undaunted by the loss of the *ius gladii* in the person of Pilate, Saul would go on to press the persecution to foreign cities, seeking letters from the high priests to imprison those calling upon Christ. However, Saul would never reach Damascus, but would instead himself become a disciple of the Lord. (Acts 9) The conversion of Saul marked the end of the first great persecution. Agrippa I would slay James, the brother of John, with the sword, but his persecution ended almost as abruptly as it started by Agrippa's untimely death. (Acts 12) Agrippa II was too young to manage his father's kingdom, so Claudius returned Judea to a province and sent thither Fadus as procurator. The church thus had the protection of law under Roman rule until the death of Claudius and Nero ascended the throne.

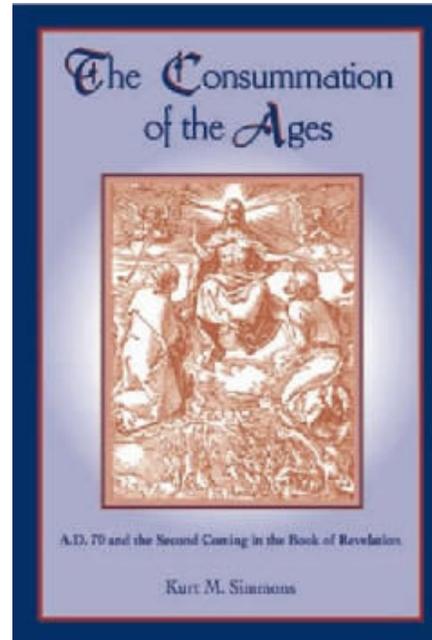
Revelation indicates the persecution under Caiaphas, Pilate, and Paul lasted three and a half years. Beginning with the death of Stephen until the conversion of Paul is three and a half years. Paul states that he went up to Jerusalem three years after his conversion; then, he went again fourteen years later to the Jerusalem Council to settle the question whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. (Gal. 2:1; Acts 15:2) Most authorities place this at A.D. 50. He returned two or three years later, while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia. (Acts 18:12, 22) From an inscription found at Delphi, we know that Gallio was proconsul in A.D. 52-53. Moreover, mention of Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome further fixes this date, for Claudius expelled the Jews in the eleventh year of reign, or A.D. 52. (Acts 18:2) Two years later, he went up again and was arrested. (Acts 19:10; 20:22; 24:17, 18) Paul remained in custody under Felix for two years. (Acts 24:27) We know that Festus replaced Felix in A.D. 59-60. Thus, A.D. 59-2-2-14-3 = A.D. 38. From the martyrdom of Stephen in A.D. 34 to Paul's conversion in A.D. 38 accords perfectly with the three and a half year persecution portrayed in Revelation twelve.

Conclusion

Revelation twelve depicts the birth of the Savior, his earthly ministry, and the persecution that erupted over the martyrdom of Stephen. The wisdom and foresight of God removed the *ius gladii* from the tribe of Judah and placed it in Roman officials for the protection of the church. Had God not so provided,

the church and gospel could not have survived and would have been extirpated at its very birth.

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John Wycliffe

The English Church and the English Bible

By C. P. Hallihan

"...in the end the truth will conquer."

Introduction

In 1324 Marco Polo, European visitor to Beijing and guest of Kublai Khan, died at home in Venice. The same year is one of the conventional estimates for the birth of John Wycliffe, though as much as four years either way can also be found. There is also a score of spellings of his name, and of suggestions for the location of his birthplace not a few! Wycliffe was wholly a child of the 14th century, probably born in Yorkshire, possibly on Teesside, and in all likelihood went to Oxford aged about 16. There is an obscurity about these beginnings, as with William Tyndale 170 years later, which brings Melchisedek to mind.

It is difficult to enter into the mind, manners, mores and motivation of 14th century Western civilization, but the effort is well worth it. Here, in the sovereign providence of God, is the taproot of Protestantism formed, even though the shoot might not begin to show for another 200 years. The wondrous loop from England to Bohemia to Germany and again to England can be traced over those 200 years, from Lollardy at Oxford to Lutheranism at Cambridge.

At the heart of this travel and travail lies the Bible in the common tongue: English, Czech, German, and English again. Between the Lollard Bible of the late 14th century and Tyndale's work of the early 16th, the change from hand-written copies to printed copies has occurred, and the renewal of competence in the Biblical languages of inscripturation, Hebrew and Greek, has loosed the text of the bible from the grave-clothes of the Latin Vulgate. It is a delicious historical cameo that both Anne of Bohemia (wife of Richard II, d. 1394) and Anne Boleyn (wife of Henry VIII, d. 1536, same year as Tyndale!) are known to have possessed personal copies of the Wycliffe New Testament.

Papal Europe

Fourteenth century England can only be seen in the setting of Papal Europe. The dominant and, to contemporaries, the only cohesive power in Europe was the Papacy. This was the bulwark against the encroaching Moors, raiser of Crusades; this was the defense against the strange soul-threatening heresies of the Eastern church; this was a peculiar kind of "united Nations" forum, where warring European powers could meet and negotiate, under the wily and acquisitive watchfulness of Vatican politics. Anything but disinterested! If salvation was only to be had in open and unquestioning adherence to the institutional Roman church, then the power of that institution over the politics, finances and morals of "Christian" Europe was absolute.

The dissolute, cruel and ignorant nature of the medieval papacy and priesthood, their greed for wealth, especially the wealth of real estate, whether an entire nation or a tiny manor, are things of record. Pope Gregory IX established the Papal inquisition in 1232, and in 1302 Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the universal jurisdiction of the Papacy. In medieval Europe the significance and value of the individual was zero; you were fodder producer, cannot fodder or canon-law fodder, bound to the church as much as to the land.

It was indeed a "world lit only by fire", scarcely changed technologically since the fall of Imperial Rome. Regression rather than progression was the situation, and more so in the north than in the south. No printing; no light beyond that of a flame; no power beyond that of muscle, wind or water. The mechanical clock was first constructed in 1280, spectacles assembled in 1290, but very few would know of these things, let alone see, use or own them. Learning, such as there was, was the prerogative of the church. True, Paris University was begun in 1155, Oxford in 1167, and Cambridge, by a body of Oxford dissidents, in 1329, but most scholars were, or became, churchmen of some level or other. Such total absorption of all of life within what can only be called an ideological monster is almost beyond our comprehension.

Plantagenet England

England had come to terms with the Conquest of 1066. Distinctions between Norman and Saxon, victors and vanquished, were being eroded, so that the "language curtain" was coming down. The distinctive use of French as the polite language continued for a very long time, but the writings of William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer established

English, or that Saxon dialect called “Middle English”, as a respectable, workable and robust medium of communication.

The Norman royal line had become the House of Anjou, supposedly nicknamed Plantagenets because of the sprig of broom (*planta genista*) affected as ornament by their great men. Struggles for territory in France rumbles on. Castles in Wales, a Spider in Scotland, Crusades in Outremer, Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, these were the exciting bits of history in schoolboy recollection, not always strictly accurate in fact or chronology!

This insistent dirge permeating all of this was the need to resist the territorial and financial grasping of the Bishop of Rome. In this, England suffered much, but the grotesque humiliation of the nation in King John’s time was to become a mine under the edifice of the papacy. In 1213 King John resigned the power, claims and dominion of the English Crown to the Pope. In 1215 the English barons gathered at Runnymede and obliged John to sign the Magna Carta. This was a first small step towards redefining royal power, which in simplest terms said, “The nation, land and people, isn’t your to give, nor the pope’s to take.” However, the annual payment of 1,000 marks to the papal coffers as a result of John’s pusillanimity continued. Resisting the political and territorial claims of the papacy led through the next three centuries to resisting the ecclesiastical and spiritual claims - led in effect to the English Reformation. Not without cost; and not without reason was it said that the chief enemy of all countries in medieval Europe was always the current Pope.

John Wycliffe lived almost entirely under the reigns of Edward III and Richard II. The unrelenting burden of these monarchs was to fend off papal attempts to maintain and reassert dominion in England. Money was being siphoned away in large amounts through strange “cover” taxes imposed by and collected by the Roman church, a scam further helped by the appointment of nonresident foreign clergy to church posts in England under the labyrinthine rule of papal provisors. These were the issues addressed in England by the Statutes of Provisors (clergy posts) 1350 and Praemunire (money matters) 1353. The trouble was, at any time the papacy could excommunicate you: nonpayment of taxes is a religious matter, endangering the soul! At any time the whole nation could be put under an Interdict, and enforced “withdrawal of cooperation” on the part of the clergy: no proper

marriages, baptisms, burials or confessions. How can we possibly enter into the paralyzing fear, erosion of courage and suppression of dissent that such things induced in the superstitious minds and hearts of so many in that time? That was a time of monolithic European ecclesiastical power which pretended to have dominion over you, your family, your master, your monarch, your nation, for life, for death and for hell. What was needed was someone to say not just that the church is wrong about this and that particular, but simply, starkly, “This church is wrong!” Wrong because it is comprehensively, demonstrably un-Biblical – is in fact no church. There was need for God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, to give again by the mirror of His word the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

John Wycliffe – Scholar

In the 1340s Wycliffe was at Oxford University, just towards the close of the career of Tomas Bradwardine (1290-1349). Bradwardine, then Chancellor of St. Paul’s, London, “confessor” (personal chaplain) to Edward III, and briefly Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349, had been an outstanding alumnus of Oxford. More renowned as a mathematician than as a theologian, Bradwardine nonetheless wrote against the Pelagian teachings in the style of Athanasius and Augustine, insisting that God’s Grace is the ultimate necessity and cause in Salvation. This certainly found a ready place in the thinking of the young Wycliffe, and appeared in his own later tracts and theses as “The Dominion of Grace.” Bradwardine’s solemn insistence that dependence upon outward forms should not be confused with true religious of the heart also grew from seed to fruit in Wycliffe.

The writings of Occam occupied Wycliffe much; his interest in natural science and mathematics was considerable. He won outstanding recognition in philosophy, but applied himself most diligently to the study of theology and of ecclesiastical law. In his approach to this John Wycliffe was a real “conformist.” At that time – as in some more recent times – it was not really considered necessary to master the Scriptures as a preparation for a church career! Indeed, it was deemed such an elementary book to the proud Latinists of the day that it was almost beneath their dignity to hand it in exposition or teaching. Wycliffe though, became enamoured of the Scriptures, and in his growing practice of reading the Bible in public, and growing confidence in

referring to the Scriptures as a sole authority, he earned the name “Gospel Doctor.”

By 1361 John Wycliffe was Master of Balliol College, and when that post had to be relinquished because of parish obligations elsewhere, he was appointed as warden of Canterbury Hall in 1365. Around this same time his writings really begin to have the feel of “Reformation” about them – opposing indulgences, both in principle and specially in the peddling of them, and opposing masses for the dead, again available more easily to the rich than to the poor. Alongside this, the determination that the truth of the Scripture should be widely and soundly preached as well as read becomes apparent in Wycliffe’s practice. A little later Wycliffe distributed tracts denouncing the secularization of the church. All of his, inevitably, provoked the Pope.

John Wycliffe – Clerk, Commissioner and Rector of Lutterworth

Towards the middle of the 14th century, at the prime of Edward III’s reign, England was in a relatively strong, secure and confident position. The naval victory at Sluys in 1340 had secured the Channel as English, and victories at Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) had made her a power to be reckoned with on the Continent. From the fifth year of Edward III the annual papal levy incurred by King John had not been paid. Then, 33 years on, Pope Urban V demanded, with menaces, the resumption of this transaction. Edward, and Edward’s England, were insulted. Parliament assembled in May 1366, and resolutely denounced and rejected the demand. In the ensuing paperwork, John Wycliffe appears as “the King’s Peculiar Clerk,” refuting the claims of the papacy to temporal jurisdiction, and summarizing the parliamentary debates accepting Edward of England and rejecting Urban of Rome.

Soon after this, in 1372, Wycliffe became DD. In those days this was a true academic attainment and quite rare, which strengthened his influence and reputation. Both the learned and the common people heard him gladly as he settled more and more confidently on the Bible and its authority, denouncing the ecclesiastical world for effectively banishing the Scriptures and for making the church of Christ a world power.

The problem of the papal use of nonresident foreigners to pre-empt English clergy livings, benefices and appointments, was addressed by a

Royal Commission in 1374. A hearing with the Roman authorities was to be held in Bruges, and second on the list of the English Commissioners was John Wycliffe. As a man of outstanding learning and obvious disenchantment towards the papacy, his political stock was high. Perhaps not many had yet seen the ecclesiastical and spiritual aspects and implications of Wycliffe’s course. From August 1374 to July 1376 Commissioner John Wycliffe was in Bruges, where he concluded that the faults and failings of the papacy, temporal and spiritual, were more abysmal than he had ever learned in England. He also made there a firm friendship with John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster, 3rd son of the King), and on his return to England was looked on with sufficient favour as to be given the living of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire.

Opposition Grows

Hostility towards Wycliffe was inevitable, eagerly fomented by the ranking churchmen in England and encouraged in every way by the papal authorities in Europe. In February 1377 he was cited by the Bishop of London to appear at St. Paul’s to answer charges against his teachings. Wycliffe duly appeared before Bishop Courtenay, accompanied in close friendship and support by John of Gaunt and Lord Percy, the Earl of Marshall of England. These two were not inclined to allow Wycliffe to be bullied by a court which had the ground of its authority not in England, but in Rome. Only Wycliffe remained calm in the uproar and violence that developed and lasted over into the next day. Although he was dismissed with warnings, no formal procedures were accomplished, and Wycliffe went about his business. His enemies made a selection of points from his lectures and letters plainly stating his opposition both to the Pope’s temporal powers and to the abuse of Spiritual power. In May 1377 five separate Bulls were dispatched to England, demanding that Bishops, University and King should apprehend John Wycliffe and detain him at the Pope’s pleasure.

For a little while nothing happened, because King Edward III died in June. His first son, Edward, the “Black Prince,” had died in 1376. The crown passed to the eleven-year-old Richard II, son of the Black Prince, grandson of Edward III. Richard’s mother was sympathetic to Wycliffe, along with John of Gaunt, affording a continuance of protection. When eventually Archbishop Sudbury summoned Wycliffe again to appear, this time at Lambeth in April 1378, the dowager Queen forbade the bishops to pass censure on him. Again the defendant alone remained

calm, and 150 years in anticipation of Luther's justly famed confession ("Here I stand - I can do no other"), John Wycliffe declared that he only followed the Scriptures, and if shown to be wrong by the Scriptures he would retract his teachings.

All of this directed attention towards Wycliffe's teaching in its wider implications – Scripture alone the fountain of truth and foundation of authority, and anything not framed by such a measure was not to be imposed nor obeyed, whether in things temporal or in things spiritual. Wycliffe's career in the political limelight was over. John of Gaunt's influence was temporarily diminished, and he (Gaunt) was also becoming a little wary of the more religious aspects of Wycliffe's teaching. Preaching, teaching, and translation work would occupy Wycliffe, living at Lutterworth, for the last seven years of his life.

"Ex Cathedra," or,

How many Popes can sit on one Chair?

In 1378 an event came to pass which stunned and horrified the Western World. When Gregory XI died, Clement VII was elected Pope. Rome's inhabitants demanded an Italian as the Bishop of Rome, and thus Pope, and the unthinkable was accomplished. French Clement was obliged to set up his "court" as Pope in Avignon, whilst Italian Urban VI ruled as Pope in Rome. The infamous "Papal Schism" had occurred. This beginning the Great Schism came when Wycliffe was coming to maturity in his realization of the wrongs of the Papacy, and when he had more time away from the political arena.

In 1378 Wycliffe issued a tract On the schism of the Popes; in 1381 he issued Twelve these against transubstantiation and in 1382 Objections to Friars. In addressing these issues – the papacy, the mass and the monks – in their corruptions and in their lack of Biblical warrant or foundation, Wycliffe laid the axe to the roots of the tree. It was an axe which many subsequently would wield mightily, even at the hazard of their lives, and turn the world upside down once again, in the footsteps of the Apostles. To John Wycliffe, scholar, these doctrines, parading in the garb of Christian Truth, were relative novelties. Transubstantiation as the grossly externalized means of Communion with Christ, was proclaimed by Pope Innocent III in 1215, as was the procedure of confession of sins to a priest. The universal supremacy of the papacy was promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302. As for the monks –

the vileness and violence of so much involved with them was such that some respectable families declined to have their children educated formally, because it would expose them to the predatory appetites of their monk-teachers.

Having crossed his Rubicon, Wycliffe never let up in his march on Rome, and most of all opposed that grotesque view, according to which any priest was in a position to "create" the body of Christ. He resolutely denounced, as contrary to Scripture, the teaching that after the consecration the bread and the wine are changed into Christ's body and blood.

Wycliffe's perception of the church was implicitly revolutionary and anticipatory of the sixteenth century Reformation. Driven by the calamitous failure of the medieval church in the political arena, he began to see the church as a spiritual institution and not a political one. He left as a magnificent heritage the principle that the visible church, in all its parts, powers and person, is ever subject to evaluation in the light of Scripture only. Even if there should be a hundred popes, let alone two, they must come to the court of Scripture to be adjudged as to their right and worth.

The Truth of Scripture and the Lollard Bible

The mainspring of Wycliffe's mature work was that the Scripture are the foundation of all doctrine. This was the crux of the matter, and cardinal hinge. His 1378 work *De veritate Sacrae Scripturae* (On the Truth of Sacred Scripture) describes the Bible as being directly from God Himself, timeless, unchanging, free from error and contradictions, containing only truth, accepting no addition, suffering no subtraction. All must be taken equally, absolutely, without qualification. Scripture is the law of Christ, the Truth, and must be placed above all human writings. Men ought to learn the law of Christ, because the faith rests in it alone. Without knowledge of the Bible there can be no peace, no real and abiding good; it contains all that is necessary for the salvation of men. It alone is infallible, and therefore is the one authority for the faith. As a true Christian will be one who finds his faith in the light of Scripture, so a true Shepherd of Christians will be one who feeds his flock on the Word of God. A hundred years before Luther or Tyndale was born, Wycliffe was comprehensively persuaded of the importance of Scripture.

For Wycliffe, as later for Luther and Tyndale, the next step was inevitable. The Bible must be available

for the people in their mother tongue. Roman apologists are quick to point out that there were portions of Scripture in many of the European languages; but they were not generally accessible. Whilst the Council of Nicea in 325 had been of the opinion that no Christian should be without the Scriptures, the council of Toulouse in 1229 was of different mind. Trying to deal with the “problem” of the Albigenes, canon 14 of their deliberations reads: -

We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.

Such Scripture as did exist in the vernacular tongues were rather a “private” resource for the “religious” or “spiritual” than the “Word of God among all nations.” Wycliffe did not simply want circulation to the learned or spiritually experienced; he was of the mind as Tyndale 150 years later, that the Scriptures should widely be published abroad, accessible, that men might know not only the Truth of the Gospel, but also the errors of the supposed guides to God. He set himself to the task.

Whilst scholars still struggle to define the exact part which he had in the translation, there is no doubt that it was the result of his initiative and leadership.

The first Wycliffe Bible, c. 1382, comprises a translation of the New Testament done by a friend, Nicholas of Hereford, who was to be the Lollard leader after Wycliffe’s death (but who later recanted and ended his days as a Carthusian monk). This Old Testament is sometime held up to ridicule because of an unfortunate adherence to the word order of the Latin Bible from which it was translated. It makes clumsy and sometimes contradictory reading in English. Wycliffe’s New Testament is more boldly and readably English, though still translated from Latin.

This work was revised in 1388 by a younger contemporary, John Purvey, after Wycliffe’s own style. It is this smoother, truer version which is the Lollard Bible, widely diffused through the 15th century. Every copy was hand-written, and although the number of copies made was relatively large and continued over the next 150 years, it was never a “mass-produced” book. Once again we are constrained to marvel at the unfolding, working

together of the purposes of Almighty God, in that English as a language of literacy was coming into its own in the 14th century, just as the Lollard Bible began to circulate.

Books had always been a luxury in the Middle Ages, but the production of cheaper books on the new material, paper, meant that they became an “affordable” luxury for poorer people, people with a hunger for “the holy scriptures, which are able to make...wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15). Bear in mind, though, that the opposition was fierce and merciless. Possession of such a Bible, let alone reading it or revealing a sympathy with its teaching, was potentially a matter of death, and many died. Nevertheless, in England now the sure Word was heard in a familiar tongue, and men began to give heed as to a light that shineth in a dark place.

Lollard Preachers

It was not to be expected that someone of John Wycliffe’s conviction would neglect the due companion to the distribution of Scripture, which is the public reading and preaching of the same. In Lutterworth he gave himself to the care of souls, toiling as preacher and teacher to the people. He wished to be done with the existing church hierarchy, for it had no warrant in Scripture, and to put in its place the send of “poor priests” who lived in poverty and preached the Gospel to the people.

These itinerant preachers published abroad the people the teachings of Wycliffe, even “Christe’s Lore.” Like Jesus’ disciples before them they went two by two. They went barefoot, wearing long red robes, and carrying a staff in symbolic reference to their shepherd calling. They passed from place to place opening the Scriptures, preaching Christ’s Law, and the Scripture as the all sufficient source of it: and they suffered and they were killed. Well might we be tempted to say “of whom the world was not worthy.”

Even up to 1520 followers of Wycliffe were being martyred as “Lollards.” Soon after that the charge changed to “Lutheran” or “Protestant.” These dear souls carried the torch of the English Bible from the 14th to the 16th century, and when the printing presses were about to serve the Protestant Reformation, handed that torch on to Tyndale, Coverdale, the Geneva scholars, and so to the Translators of the Authorised Version. All to these later workers were aware of the Wycliffe Bible; they were reaping where he had sown.

The failure of Hereford and Purvey to provide leadership into the 15th century meant that Lollardy was always a “grass roots” movement. It was diffuse, diverse, never an organization or institution, reflecting, unconsciously perhaps, Wycliffe’s perception of the Spiritual rather than political nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus there was a savour of salt through England, a taste for a readable Bible to be a guide to Christ and rule of conscience, and some who had ears to hear. Alongside that there was a suspicion of all that smacked of priestcraft. Wycliffe, his Bible, his “poor priests” and the Lollards, spread tinder through the land. (The trail also crossed to the Continent through Huss.) It was well dried by the heat of persecution. Then, after a brief “might watch” of 100 years, the Lord was pleased to kindle that which he had so long prepared, and the Reformation was begun.

John Wycliffe

Death, and Disinterment

During the last week of December 1384 Wycliffe was stricken with a paralysis whilst conducting the service of the Lord’s Supper in Lutterworth Church. Carried by his friends to his own bed he died peacefully there on December 31st. Baulked of their desire to destroy Wycliffe in person, the church powers ensured that the opposition to the English Bible and Wycliffe’s teachings did not diminish. An Oxford Convocation of 1408, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, declared thus:

We therefore decree and ordain, that from henceforward no unauthorized person shall translate any part of the holy Scripture into English or any other language, under the form of book or treatise, neither shall any such book or treatise, or version, made either in Wycliffe’s time or since, be read, whether in whole or part, publicly or privately, under the penalty of the greater excommunication.

A Papal Council of 1415, the one which deceitfully lured John Huss to a martyr’s death, declared Wycliffe a heretic and demanded that his remains be exhumed and destroyed. In 1428 this was done, and Wycliffe’s bones were burned, the ashes cast into the River Swift which joins the Avon at Rugby, then on into the Severn at Tweekesbury and on to the open sea. Symbolically, unintentionally, the church authorities had enacted exactly what God has done with the ministry of Wycliffe and the English Bible, giving rise to a popular jingle, found in many forms

and variations of wording – “ Avon into Severn flows, and Severn to the sea, and wheresoe’er the ocean rolls, there Wycliffe’s ashes be.”

There can scarcely be a better summary of all this than the inscription on Wycliffe’s Memorial in Lutterworth:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN WYCLIFFE

EARLIEST CHAMPION OF ECCLESIASTICAL
REFORMATION IN ENGLAND.

HE WAS BORN IN YORKSHIRE IN THE YEAR 1324.

IN THE YEAR 1375 HE WAS PRESENTED TO THE
RECTORY OF LUTTERWORTH: WHERE HE DIED ON THE
31ST OF DECEMBER 1384.

AT OXFORD HE ACQUIRED NOT ONLY THE RENOWN OF
A CONSUMMATE SCHOOLMAN,

BUT THE FAR MORE GLORIOUS TITLE OF THE
EVANGELIC DOCTOR.

HIS WHOLE LIFE WAS ONE PERPETUAL STRUGGLE
AGAINST THE CORRUPTIONS

AND ENCROACHMENTS OF THE PAPAL COURT, AND
THE IMPOSTURES OF

ITS DEVOTED AUXILIARIES, THE MENDICANT
FRATERNITIES.

HIS LABOURS IN THE CAUSE OF SCRIPTURE TRUTH
WERE CROWNED BY ONE IMMORTAL

ACHIEVEMENT, THE TRANSLATION OF THE

BIBLE INTO THE ENGLISH TONGUE.

THIS MIGHTY WORK DREW ON HIM,

INDEED, THE BITTER HATRED OF ALL WHO

WERE MAKING MERCHANDISE OF THE

POPULAR CREDULITY AND IGNORANCE:

BUT HE FOUND AN ABUNDANT REWARD IN

THE BLESSINGS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN OF

EVERY RANK AND AGE, TO WHOM HE

UNFOLDED THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.
HIS MORTAL REMAINS WERE INTERRED
NEAR THIS SPOT; BUT WERE NOT
ALLOWED TO REST IN PEACE.
AFTER THE LAPSSE OF MANY YEARS, HIS
BONES WERE DRAGGED FROM THE GRAVE, AND
CONSIGNED TO THE FLAMES:
AND HIS ASHES WERE CAST INTO THE WATERS OF THE
ADJOINING STREAM.

Exiles in Our Own Land

Here is something that should make red-blooded American men and women sit up and take notice. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., the first Muslim elected to the United States Congress, has announced that he will not take his oath of office on the Bible, but on the book of Islam, the Koran. What can be said when a country so far drifts from its beginnings that a Muslim is elected to Congress and will use the Koran to be sworn in? Was 9/11 so long ago that we have forgotten already the lessons of that dark day? Muslim countries are not free; the Koran cannot liberate its people. Muslim countries are backward, third world dictatorships, marked by corruption, oppression and violence. What possible motive could persuade us to allow official recognition of the Koran here?

The Bible is the very foundation of western civilization; our forebears grew up from uncivilized and barbarous tribes with the gospel and Bible. Every institution of western civilization is touched by the Bible's influence, from government and family, to our jurisprudence and customs and manners of every day life. Indeed, our very calendar is marked by the birth of the Savior and our holidays commemorate the day when God became flesh and was born a babe in Bethlehem. In Muslim countries this is not the case.

What does it say for the future of America when people no longer care? It seems as if the men of this country have been neutered by affluence and worldly cares. Nothing, no matter how egregious, seems to move us. It might interfere with our retirement plans

or cost us something. One wonders what it will take to stir us up to action or even to arms (is it permissible to say that? Is the notion we should be willing to suffer and die for what we believe permitted to Christian men today, or must we simply sit passively by and while our country and civilization are lost to Christ and our children?). It seems as if every religious persuasion in the world has a country where it is the official religion of the land, except Christianity. Christianity alone must accommodate every other minority faith in the world, even to the insult and denial of its own institutions. Let one atheist complain, and a whole community must abandon prayers in its school graduation ceremonies; let one antichrist complain and away with the manger scene on the court house lawn! We are told this is a democracy where the majority rules; why then can a tiny minority of atheists control a whole community or nation? Stupid Christians we! When will we awake to realize the nation our pilgrim forebears crossed the Atlantic to found has slipped from between our fingers, wrested from our grasp by a tiny minority of those opposed to everything our nation was founded upon?

More is at stake than our political institutions. Souls are in the balance. Tens of millions of school children are growing up in a country that is becoming increasingly secular and anti-Christian. The testimony of ruined lives is everywhere about us: broken marriages, single parent homes, unwed mothers, families with children from multiple fathers who don't even look alike, drug and alcohol abuse, immodest apparel, homosexuality, child-abuse, youth gangs and violence. These are problems we hardly knew a few short decades ago. How did it change so fast? What must we do to turn it back? It is said that 70% of children in church attending families grow up and are lost to Christ. Little wonder when the faith of their fathers makes so little difference in their lives and country. If Christ mattered to us, he would matter to our children. And maybe that is where the problem is. It should make us sit up and take stock of what we really stand for and believe.

What can be said when a Muslim is elected to Congress and the Koran will be used to swear him in?