**WEEK 6: Lessons from the Pre-Reformation**

**John Wycliffe (1328 - 1384) – England**

* An important predecessor to the Protestant Reformation, John Wycliffe became a dissident within the Catholic priesthood. He was the leading scholar of his time and was respected throughout England.
* Arriving at Oxford around 1345, he was ordinated as a priest in 1351. Bold and outspoken in theology and scholarship, he was often caught up in the political battles of others.
* Wycliffe was influenced by the plague of Black Death which reached England in 1348. His small treatise, *The Last Age of the Church*, was critical of a generally unworthy and unreputable clergy.
* Wycliffe questioned much of what he observed in the Catholic church – the sale of indulgences, worship of saints and relics, the authority of the pope, and the official view of the Eucharist from the Fourth Lateran Council.
* Held up as a popular hero for a time, his followers were called Lollards (in a derogatory fashion), yet their movement anticipated the Reformation.
* In a hearing in 1377, he was forced to answer charges of heresy. This lead to brawl early in the proceeding, an abrupt break, then a ban on his writings. He was eventually stripped of his position at Oxford and forbidden to share his views.
* But God used this to fulfill a greater purpose. Wycliffe used the time to translate the Bible directly from the Vulgate into Middle English, a version now referred to as Wycliffe’s Bible, the vernacular of the day.
* The Lollards distributed this “Wycliffe’s Bible” illegally.
* Wycliffe suffered a stroke in church on December 31st of 1384 and died. Thirty-one years after his death, the Catholic church excommunicated him and in 1428 dug up his bones, burned them, and spread the ashes into the Swift River.
* Often referred to as the “Morning Star of the Reformation”, he stayed within the Roman church all his life, but in the hearts and minds of his hearers, the seeds of the Reformation were started.

**Jan Hus (1370 - 1415) – Husinec, Bohemia (Czech Republic)**

* In 1401 Jan was ordained as a priest, spending much of his career teaching at Charles University in Prague and preaching at the influential Bethlehem Chapel nearby.
* Wycliffe’s influence spread to Bohemia, modern day Czech Republic, and his reform-minded writings influenced Jan. Hus’s teachings became popular and likewise increased the popularity of Wycliffe’s writings.
* The archbishop of Prague objected to Hus’s teachings and instructed him to stop, then ordered Charles University to burn Hus’s writings. Hus refused to comply, was condemned by the archbishop, then Pope John XXIII placed Prague under interdict.
* Hus agreed to leave Prague but continued to teach and preach and draw crowds at open-air gatherings.

**Jan Hus (Continued)**

* In his book, *On the Church*, Hus asserted Christ was the head of the Church. While he acknowledged the authority of the clergy, he stated God alone can forgive sins and no man could establish doctrine contrary to Scripture.
* In 1414 Hus was summoned to the Council of Constance to defend his teachings, where he was arrested. Throughout extended imprisonment and illness during the ordeal, Hus refused to renounce his “errors”.
* On July 6th, 1415 the church formally condemned Hus and handed him over to the secular authorities to be burned at the stake.
* The execution of Jan Hus in 1415 sparked a revolt that led to the Hussite Wars of 1419-1434, where Bohemians fueled by a combination of religious and national fervor overthrew both the Catholic Church and their German-dominated empire.

**The Renaissance**

* The Renaissance was a reformation of culture in the realm of art, architecture, literature, politics, economics, exploration, and science.
* Renaissance Humanism sought a recovery of Classical Greek and Roman culture and moral philosophy (virtuous living) for the benefit of humanity.
* The motto of the Renaissance was: *Ad Fontes* (“to the sources”).
* Johannes Guttenberg invented the printing press in 1440.
* Nicolaus Copernicus published his heliocentric theory in 1543.

**Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)**

* Born out of wedlock in Rotterdam, Netherlands (Holland). His parents died of bubonic plague in 1483. He studied humanism and became one of the most important shapers of the modern world. He wanted to reform the church and Western society. He wrote 226 works of which 2.5 million copies were distributed in his lifetime.
* He rejected scholasticism and criticized the external trappings of the church (icons, relics, images, elaborate ceremonies, indulgences, etc.). He believed true religion was internal. He attacked the immoral corruption of the clergy and popes.
* He proposed modest reforms to the church. He wanted to give the house a thorough clean-up and renovation, whereas Luther wanted to tear it down and build a new house. It was said: “Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it.”
* In 1516, he accepted an invitation at court in Brussels from Charles V who made him a royal counselor. However, in 1521 he moved permanently to Basel to study and write. He was at this time the most well-known scholar in the Western world and in high demand in high places (Henry VIII of England, Francis I of France, Ferdinand II of Spain, and Pope Leo X).
* He was the greatest Greek scholar of the day, producing many translations of classical works as well as the church fathers which renewed the study of them. His translation of the Greek NT appeared in 1516. It went through several editions and became the basis for Luther’s translation of the Bible in German and Tyndale’s translation in English.
* In 1524 he entered the Reformation debate with Luther by publishing his *Freedom of the Will*. Luther responded by publishing *Bondage of the Will* in 1525.