



Jan Hus (John Huss) was born in Husinec (which means "Goosetown") in the southern part of a country we know today as the Czech Republic. At the time, the area was part of Bohemia.

His parents were peasants. They called their son Jan (John) and gave him the same last name as their town (Husinec). Jan shortened his name to "Hus" - also sometimes spelled "Huss" - in his twenties.

After getting his doctorate, Jan took the pulpit of one of Prague's most-popular churches - Bethlehem Chapel. Seating around 3,000 people who listened to sermons in their own language - not Latin - Bethlehem Chapel did not follow the strict worship requirements imposed by the Catholic Church of that day.

When a Pope authorized the selling of indulgences, which people could buy to forgive their sins, Hus was stunned. Wherever did a Pope get the idea that indulgences could be sold for such purposes? (Perhaps the idea worked because the King of Bohemia received a cut of the indulgence proceeds.)

Hus continued to speak-out against such ideas. He did not care that both church and state officials supported indulgence sales. Hus believed it was wrong ... and said so.

To spare the people of Prague from the effects on an Interdiction, which the Pope placed on the city, Hus left town. He spent time in the countryside, thinking and writing. He wrote "The Church" (*De ecclesia*) which he sent to Prague for a public reading.

In it, he declared that Popes can make mistakes, especially "through ignorance and love of money." That, he argued, is why people have to follow the ways of Christ, not the ways of a Pope.

Promised a hearing on his views, by the Council of Constance - held in the town of Konstanz - Hus agreed to state his case in November of 1414. Instead of allowing Hus to speak, however, those in charge of the council had him arrested.

He was never allowed to make his case. He was only allowed the opportunity to recant his publicly stated views.

Hus refused.

Imprisoned, he still refused to recant when people pleaded with him to do so. On the 6th of July, 1415, Hus was taken to the cathedral in Konstanz where he once again refused to recant.

Layer by layer, his priestly clothes were removed. Still refusing to recant, he was taken to the stake where he would be burned (at Bruel, outside the city walls) if he continued to hold-on to his own views.

Hus refused to recant.

Praying and reciting Psalms, as the flames leaped upward, Hus never recanted. The words of Erasmus could apply to the life-ending moments of this unintimidated man:

John Hus, burned, not convicted.

After his body became ashes, Hus' remains were scooped-up by the men who had killed him and were tossed into a nearby lake. Those in charge wanted no relics to remain of this "heretic."

Many people in Bohemia were outraged by what had happened to Hus, and hundreds of noblemen signed a letter of protest. Never totally reconciling with the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor, for the role each had played in Hus' execution, a group of individuals broke-away and formed the *Unitas Fratrum* ("Union of

Brethren”).

Credits:

Image of Jan Hus; online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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