

Moravian Moment #76

John Hus, a Reformer...burned at the stake.

John Hus did not start the Moravian Church, but it was out of what he stood for and believed that the Moravian Church was founded. He died a Martyr's death on July 6, 1415. Hus was born of peasant parents in the Bohemian village of Husinec, from which his name is derived. From an early age he was singled out as having great intellectual ability. It was surely the exercise of divine sovereignty to raise up such a vessel in an obscure village in Bohemia, for the maintenance and spread of the truth. Hus was a gift given by Christ to His Church to be a witness and "to bear, in his turn, 'the torch of truth, and to transmit it with a martyr's hand to a long succession of witnesses. Like Paul, he was set apart from his mother's womb for a particular purpose. Because he was a promising young man, some hoped that his intellectual abilities would be put to use for the Catholic Church. Ultimately, he attended the University of Prague, where he received his master's degree in 1396.

In 1400 Hus was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. The following year he became Dean of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Prague. In 1402 he became head of the whole university. The sphere of his influence increased as he won the respect of those around him. In Hus's day discontent with the Catholic Church was widespread and growing. There was a general longing for a return to the simplicity of the early churches, but someone was needed to give direction and focus to this stirring, someone able to think clearly, speak forcefully, and, above all, stand by conviction. Such a man God provided in John Hus. Thus, when he declared in the Bethlehem Chapel, "**The Bible says...**" **the heart of the congregation was with him.** He gave clear expression to what they had only vaguely felt. **He rediscovered the Bible. Discovered or uncovered its simple yet profound truths, which custom and tradition had obscured.** The Bible became the standard and norm by which John Hus tested everything, whether in men or institutions.

A very important work of Hus was his treatise of "The Six Errors" of the Roman Catholic Church. **The first of these errors was the boast of what he called the "insane priests" who claimed to "create the body of God."** Hus argued that since creating means making something out of nothing, only God can be called Creator. **Another error Hus addressed in this treatise was the abuse of the term "to believe."** He noted that the priests command men to believe in Mary, the saints, and the pope. Hus asserted that we should believe in none but God. **Another error cited by Hus dealt with obedience to superiors within the hierarchy of the Roman Church.** Hus insisted that a Christian must obey a superior's command only if it is in accordance with God's will as revealed in Scripture. Hus himself demonstrated this principle when he continued to preach at the Bethlehem Chapel after receiving a papal order forbidding him to do so.

Following the Papal order, a ceremony of degradation was enacted to strip Hus of all ecclesiastical rights. It was performed by the Archbishop of Milan and six assisting bishops. Hus was clothed in the full garb of a Catholic priest, the sacramental cup was put into his hands, and he was led to the high altar, as if he were about to celebrate mass. The bishops then stripped Hus of the vestments, one by one, and took the cup from his hand. They had fashioned a paper crown

bearing the image of three demons and the title “Heresiarch,” i.e., arch heretic. They placed the crown on Hus's head, saying, **“We commit your soul to the devil.”** Hus responded by lifting his eyes to heaven and saying, **“And I commit it to the most merciful Lord Jesus Christ.”** He also made this observation: My Lord Jesus Christ on account of me, a miserable wretch, bore a much heavier and harsher crown of thorns. Being innocent, he was deemed deserving of the most shameful death. Therefore I, a miserable wretch and sinner, will humbly bear this much lighter, even though vilifying crown for His name and truth.

Even after Hus had been tied to the stake, and the wood piled around him, the Elector asked him if he would not now recant and save his life. He nobly replied, **“What I have written and taught was in order to rescue souls from the power of the devil, and to deliver them from the tyranny of sin, and I do gladly seal what I have written and taught with my blood.”**

It was in this manner that John Hus died a martyr. He stood firm for the truth even unto death. Throughout his life he had preached the truth of God's Word. He would not accept anything of tradition without having tested it with the Word of God directly. Hus was truly one who was faithful unto death. As we celebrate the Martyrdom of John Hus, may the fire and passion for God that ignited his heart for righteousness, be lit in our hearts.

July 6, 2008