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Question 68 - Who were John Huss and John Purvey?

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

68. Who were John Huss and John Purvey?

A. John Huss – (c. 1369-1415), Bohemian Reformer, born of peasant parentage in Husinetz, Bohemia, received bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Prague, and by 1398 was lecturing on theology at the university. In 1401 ordained to the priesthood and the next year became rector of the University of Prague. A powerful preacher and occupied the most influential pulpit in Prague. A loyal member of the Roman Catholic Church, but had the same desire for church reform and doctrinal purity as Wycliffe of England. Translated the *Dialogues* of Wycliffe from English into the common language of the people of Bohemia, preached to them the same doctrine Wycliffe had preached in England. This movement in Bohemia was at first known as Wycliffism, but as Huss gained the confidence and respect of the people, his movement became popularly known as Hussitism. By 1409 Huss came to be the leader of the national Bohemian party at the university. Became outspoken for church reform, and for political and religious rights of people. Clergy branded him and his teaching as heretic and heresy. The whole nation rallied around him. All Bohemia was astir. Pope and archbishop sought to suppress the books of Wycliffe, Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and to stop his preaching. Huss was excommunicated, yet continued to write and preach. Wrote two memorable books, *On the Six Errors* and *On the Church*, in which he attacked transubstantiation, subservience to the pope, the popular belief in saints, the efficacy of the absolution of a so-called vicarious priest, unconditional obedience to earthly rulers, and simony, all of which were extremely prevalent. He made the Holy Scriptures the only rule in matters of religion and faith. In 1414, summoned before the Council of Constance. Though promised safe conduct and fair treatment by King Wenceslaus and Emperor Sigismund and also by the pope, he was hastily prosecuted, condemned, and imprisoned. Year 1415, he was burned at the stake. When the news reached Bohemia it incited great indignation throughout the country. Huss became not only a national hero, but a martyr as well.

(*Who Was Who In Church History*. Elgin Moyer. Keats Publishing. New Canaan, Conn. 1974. p. 207)

B. John Purvey – (c. 1354-1428), English Biblical translator, born probably at Lathbury, Buckinghamshire, England, and likely educated at Oxford. Associated with John Wycliffe at Lutterworth for sometime before 1384; after Wycliffe's death became a leader of the Lollard party. Preached at Bristol, silenced by the Bishop of Worcester in 1387 and imprisoned in 1390. While in prison compiled from Wycliffe's translation a commentary on Revelation. In 1400 in fear of martyrdom recanted his Lollardy, and was given the vicarage of West Hythe, Kent. Resigned

this charge in 1403, returned to preaching for the next eighteen years. In prison in 1421, but perhaps again recanted. Died about 1428. Chiefly noted for revision of Wycliffe's and Hereford's translation of the Bible into a literal and unidiomatic style, which he completed in 1388. Wrote against the corruption of the Church.

(*Who Was Who In Church History*. Elgin Moyer. Keats Publishing. New Canaan, Conn. 1974. p. 342)

1. John Purvey, who had served as Wycliffe's secretary, is credited with a revision of the earlier Wycliffite translation at about 1395. This work replaced many of the Latinate constructions by the native English idiom, as well as removing the prefaces of Jerome in favor of an extensive prologue. The result of this revision was a weakening of papal influence over the English people, as this revision tended to drift away from the liturgical Latin of the church. This work, known as the Later Wycliffite version, was published prior to the invention of Johann Gutenberg, which had a dampening effect on the spread of these particular vernacular versions. Nevertheless, the first complete English Bible was published, revised, and in circulation prior to the work of John Huss (c. 1369-1415) in Bohemia. It was the close identity with the work of Huss that resulted in the exhumation of Wycliffe's body; it was burned and the ashes were scattered on the River Swift in 1428, still a generation before Gutenberg's invention.

(*A General Introduction to the Bible*. Norm Geisler and William Nix. Moody Press, Chicago. 1991. p. 551)

2. Wycliffe died in 1384, but he left ardent disciples behind, and it is to these that the credit for the second edition must go. Outstanding among them was John Purvy, who undertook the revision of Wycliffe's earlier version, and who (c. 1388), replaced the earlier word-for-word rendering of the Vulgate with native English idiom.

In order to produce a good English Bible, Purvey had to find a good Latin text. The Vulgate was still being copied by hand and so one manuscript might differ from another in innumerable details. First of all, then, by comparing Latin manuscripts, Purvey and his helpers established the best text possible. Then they rendered it into good English. Purvey had come to see that a word-for-word translation failed to transfer the sense of the original properly. Besides, Jerome's Vulgate was itself a free rendering of the Hebrew and Greek, and that was the principle of translation espoused by Purvey.

(*A General Introduction to the Bible*. David Ewert. Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1983. p. 185)