

John Wycliffe (c. 1320-c. 1384)

Star of the Reformation

George M. Ella | Added: Oct 16, 2006 | Category: Biography

A thorough-going Reformer

John Wycliffe is rightly called the Morning Star of the Reformation. In God's Providence, he was the man who inherited the apostolic gospel of salvation in Christ as described in the doctrines of grace. He was elected by God to build on the work of Englishmen such as Greathead and Bradwardine and pass it on to Continental men of God such as John Hus, Jerome of Prague and Martin Luther. Besides this, he laid the exegetical and spiritual foundation for the British Reformation. Indeed, one can say that, in God's good plan for the sixteenth century Reformation of the Church, all roads lead to the life and works of John Wycliffe. As Wycliffe was more thorough-going than many of his reforming successors, it will benefit all Christians to familiarise themselves with Wycliffe's testimony and teaching.

Christ's words concerning a prophet not being honoured in his own country, are very true of the British attitude to their Reformers. European Continentals can trace the story of most of their great Church Reformers from birth to grave in minute detail. It is a sad and certain fact that the English-speaking world of today knows more about Luther than Englishman John Wycliffe although what we do know of Wycliffe suggests that he was the more practical and thorough-going Reformer. Little is known of the childhood and upbringing of most of Britain's mighty gospel-men. Wycliffe is no exception. He was born, no one knows exactly when, in Spreswell near Old Richmond in that part of Britain now called Teesdale in Co. Durham but then very much part of Yorkshire. Not far away there is the village of Wycliffe which is thought to be connected with the Reformer's family. Now this area is amongst the least populated in Europe and is still of immense beauty.

Thoughts on Wycliffe's early background

We know that by 1374, Wycliffe had gained his Doctor of Divinity and we find him at Oxford, engrossed in deep studies and writing books, without apparently having an official function. Again, however, we are reminded of the terrible neglect in Britain of this great Reformer. Wycliffe's major works were never printed and it is easier to find and consult handwritten copies of his works in the Continental libraries than in Britain. It is thus thanks to Continental scholars such as Buddensieg, Loserth and Lechler

and the work of the Imperial Library of Vienna that English-speaking Christians have any major access to the facts of Wycliffe's life and works.

If our Wycliffe was indeed the Warden of Canterbury Hall mentioned above, then we have an early reason why Wycliffe became so opposed to the monastic system. That college had been founded by the so-called secular Archbishop Islip ('secular' because he was not a monk) for the education of the general public but Langham, a former abbot, had 'de-secularised' the college and used it as a centre for training monks. Islip had been very active in his church work but Langham totally neglected his pastoral duties and lived as if the Church was only to be found amongst the friars.

Concrete historical facts

who strove to sell England to the pope. Wycliffe, following Bradwardine, wrote a tract to defend England against such claims and immediately became the spokesman of the anti-papal party. Wycliffe became either a Member of Parliament or a Parliamentary advisor on ecclesiastical matters and in 1374 Edward III sent him to Bruges to take part in a peace conference between England and France led by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Wycliffe's duties were to convince the Avignon pope's commissaries that the pope had no legal claim on either England or the Anglican Church. The pope's policy was to admit nothing and demand nothing so the conference ended, practically speaking with the pope still making claims on England and the English refuting them, both sides tacitly agreeing to a status quo. Two gains for the English were that the Curia promised not to challenge the rights of ministers appointed by the Anglican Church and not by themselves and that they agreed to the income of Cardinals who held sinecure posts in England being taxed to finance the restoration of the church buildings in England which they had allowed to fall into ruins through their absence. It must be remembered that at the beginning of Edward III's reign, the pope had an income from English churches which was five times greater than English taxes accrued by the king. This was chiefly because there was as yet no real legal separation between France and England and the French clergy owned much property in England. It was the combined work of Thomas Bradwardine, followed by John Wycliffe and the King, assisted by his son John, and the English Parliament to correct such a balance in the favour of the English people. It was chiefly because of Wycliffe's influence in persuading Parliament to prevent foreign church ownership in England that the 1376 parliament was called the Good Parliament. King Edward died in June, 1377, leaving behind him a country and church more reformed than that Henry VIII left. Shortly before Edward's death, the Avignon papacy was re-established in Rome and the Roman Court re-emphasised their claims on England. Wycliffe was earmarked as the great enemy of the papacy and the pope urged the English bishops to restrain him in preaching against Rome.

Wycliffe summoned before Convocation

Wycliffe had been appointed Rector of Lutterworth in Leicestershire in 1374 and resigned all other posts, now believing that it was wrong for a minister to be a pluralist. In 1377 Wycliffe was summoned before Convocation. The charges brought against him were entirely political so the Duke of Lancaster decided to go with Wycliffe as his political advisor. The Bishop of London, William Courtenay, heir of a noble line in opposition to John of Gaunt and the instigator behind Wycliffe's summons, strove in vain to have John banned from attending the convention and before Wycliffe was asked a single question a great brawl ensued between Courtenay and his followers and John of Gaunt. The Convocation ended with Wycliffe not being asked a question and never speaking a word. Courtenay had merely summoned Wycliffe in order to anger John of Gaunt. Failing in his efforts to discredit Wycliffe at Convocation, Courtenay won the pope over to his side and was instrumental, along with the pro-Rome bishops, in having the pope write out no less than five papal bulls against Wycliffe.

Beside the three bulls sent to Sudbury and Courtenay, authorising them in the name of the pope to imprison Wycliffe, and make him answerable to the pope, one was sent to the king, now dying and one sent to Oxford University. England, however, was going through a most anti-papal time and Courtenay had to do seven months of much scheming and planning before he could publish the bulls. The king's death made the bull against him void, and Parliament was in no mood to tolerate papal criticism of their popular friend Wycliffe. The only problem the university had was whether to politely acknowledge the bull, yet take no notice of it, or reject it with total contempt. Finally, Sudbury and Courtenay dropped all mention of imprisonment and appearing before the pope and merely invited Wycliffe to Lambeth concerning nineteen articles allegedly culled from Wycliffe's sermons and works criticising the papacy and the pope's foreign intervention in the affairs of England. Wycliffe turned up well prepared, but the hearing was interrupted by members of the Court and the citizens of London who ridiculed the bishops for questioning the integrity of a man so loved and honoured.

Wycliffe easily dealt with the pope's accusation that he was revolutionary in his politics, as he was a chief advisor of both the Court and Parliament and obviously stood for King, fatherland and the Anglican Church. He also argued expertly that when a church such as Rome fell into open error, then no Christian person or state was bound to follow her in her error. Concerning the pope's alleged keys, Wycliffe argued that such keys, be they what they may, could only be used within the gospel and not to enrich the papal treasury. Also, Wycliffe added, any clergyman in England, whether foreign or English, must be accountable before the law in England and no man is above that law. Concerning the pope's pet whim of excommunicating rich people so that he could take over their goods, Wycliffe argued that excommunication had merely to do with God's

matters and not with people's temporal goods. As Wycliffe had Scripture, Anglican canonical law and the law of the land behind him and was obviously more than a match for his accusers, Sudbury and Courtenay were at a loss what to do. To save face, they merely told Wycliffe that he must not teach the nineteen articles in his sermons and lectures as they would offend the laity. This did not bother the Reformer at all as he had never set up the articles in the first place. They were mere exaggerations of his enemies.

The preacher and pastor

With nothing to fear from either Anglicanism or Rome, Wycliffe settled down to his pastoral duties, preaching industriously and fitting out others to assist him in this needy duty. Most biographers agree that from now on, we can truly liken Wycliffe with the very foremost of Reformers as he began to rid the French-Roman preaching traditions in England of all that was unbiblical. He thus urged against the use of books of pagan anecdotes and fables so often used by preachers unfamiliar with the Word of God. The preaching of the Schoolmen had become mere demonstrations of logic and Wycliffe was able to show that the syllogisms of the preachers were mere dogs running after their own tails and were no substitute for Biblical revelation. He also taught his followers to ignore the highfaluting language of the philosopher or the preaching in rhyme that was so common in his day and speak, as Luther argued a century and a half later, the plain language of the people.

Wycliffe compared with Luther

Indeed, we can draw many parallels between Wycliffe's time and Luther's. The German's initial protest was against the fund-raising perversions of Tetzl who, through vain promises of less time in purgatory, enriched the treasuries of Rome by charging for his services. Wycliffe had to deal with the wiles of Arnold Garnier, the papal Nuncio and Receiver who travelled throughout England, Tetzl-like, amassing huge sums which he transported to Rome. Wycliffe charged him with perjury as he had taken an oath before the king to respect the financial rights of crown and country, yet stole away to Rome with taxes, grants and donations which belonged to the English state, people and Church. Like Luther, Wycliffe gained the backing of influential noblemen and was able to influence the lawmakers. In this Wycliffe was more successful than his German successor as the entire people of England, represented by Court, Parliament, universities and the majority of the clergy took Wycliffe's side on the issue of redresses against Rome. Also Wycliffe witnessed a Peasants' Revolt just like Luther, and, as in the case of Luther, he was given the blame (or the honour) for being its author. Sadly, too, the English revolt became a most bloody affair, and the 100,000 man strong peasants' army removed the head of Archbishop Sudbury, then Chancellor, as well as those of many other English leaders. However, Luther entered very deeply and personally into the German revolt, now on one side, now on the other. Wycliffe always condemned the

English revolt, without losing his standing with the common people. Similar to Luther's case is the aftermath of Wycliffe's life. Luther's theology was watered down by Melancthon who put church order before doctrine. This is exactly what happened with Wycliffe's immediate successors. In many ways, however, Wycliffe's reforms were greater than those of Luther. The German never made even a start of reforming the ancient German church, founded by British missionaries but soon opted out and founded a new and rival denomination. Wycliffe stood his ground in the ancient Church, as the shepherd of the flock God had given him, and was used by God to throw out most Roman innovations.

The sending out of itinerant preachers

Wycliffe also revived the sending out of itinerant preachers according to the Biblical pattern of the Seventy. This had been taken over by the Franciscan and Dominican monks but their 'preaching with a view' had become story telling to titillate the fancy of their hearers and line their own pockets. Just as Greathead welcomed the friars because they preached where there were no established churches, Wycliffe detested them as, by his day, they had become fat, mean and worldly, begging in rags amongst the people but living like Lords in fine garments in their abbey-cum-palaces. Wycliffe's method of sending out preachers, was, however, not without due regard to their abilities, soundness and church calling. The modern criticism that Wycliffe sent out 'uneducated' tub-thumpers is quite untrue as he himself speaks of them in the highest praise and Wycliffe was an intellectual indeed, although he was a most simple man. We have the testimony of preachers such as William Thorpe who shows that the cradle of the preaching school was the university. The initial centre of this ministry was the University of Oxford. Like Wesley in his Holy Club, Wycliffe sent out students and masters to visit the sick, clothe the poor and preach the good tidings. Unlike Wesley, however, Wycliffe stressed gospel preaching and the doctrines of grace rather than the High Church, mystical do-goodism of Wesley's Holy Club days. In his tract *Of Academic Degrees*, however, Wycliffe argues that the sending out of suitable non-academic preachers is in keeping with the practice of the Anglican Church. Once the Reformation came under way again in Edward VI's time, the English Reformers renewed Wycliffe's itinerant preaching methods, sending out teams of preachers to pagan and papist districts in Britain.

Evangelism and the Word of God

Wycliffe taught that all evangelism should start with the Word of God. He thus strove with a great measure of success to provide his people with the Scriptures in English and sound commentaries. Though a considerable part of the Bible had been translated into Old Anglo-Saxon and was used by the common people until well into the twelfth century, by 1375, that language was only understood by specialised scholars. Anglo-Norman versions had replaced Anglo-Saxon, but again, this was now a tongue only understood by the nobility and learned of the nation. Middle English, still preserved in

the Yorkshire Morality Plays such as Pask Eggers (Easter Eggs) became the common language until well into the fifteenth century. The fact that the English of Wycliffe's day had no Bible in their mother tongue is only thus partly due to the (enforced) popularity of the Vulgate. There was quite simply no English to put the Bible into until Anglo-Saxon, or Old English, disappeared slowly from the English scene. Here again, we can compare Wycliffe to Luther. The latter put the Bible into his local Meissen dialect and thus created modern High German. Wycliffe, and his school, put the Bible into the dialect of his area and day and thus, to a great extent, created modern Standard English. It is not known how much of the Bible is the work of Wycliffe's pen but scholars are mostly of the opinion that Wycliffe was the first Englishman to think and propagate the idea of a Bible in English. He also most certainly translated the bulk of the New Testament and supervised the rest of the Bible which was translated by people in sympathy with him. We know also that much of the Old Testament was translated by Wycliffian Nicholas of Hereford who was thrown into the papal prison in Rome for his pains. It is obvious from Wycliffe's own testimony that he knew neither Greek nor Hebrew and so the first Bible in Middle English was translated from the Latin. The whole Bible was finished around 1382 and Wycliffe called together a large band of scribes to mass-produce the translation for general distribution. Two years later, Wycliffe was called home. In 1388, his friend John Purvey completed the revision that Wycliffe had started, unifying the language and eliminating earlier errors.

Wycliffe's doctrines

Wycliffe's doctrinal contribution to the evangelical cause is so vast and comprehensive that it can only be touched on here in a most unsatisfactory, selective way, briefly recording his teaching on the Scriptures, the Deity, Salvation and the Church.

The authority of Scripture

Scripture is intrinsically related to Divine authority in Wycliffe's theology. As such it is the sole unconditional and binding authority of the Church and the individual's walk with God. The Scriptures are the will, testament and testimony of God and cannot be broken as God and His Word are inseparably one. Thus, when God's Word speaks, God speaks. The modern debate in Reformed theology concerning the Word having a separate testimony from the Spirit was a superfluous discussion for Wycliffe as he viewed the Word as the Spirit-filled, Christ-authored action of the Father in salvation and condemnation. It is a Word that never returns to God void. We thus find that Wycliffe is far more Reformed in this doctrine than Luther who placed one passage of Scripture above another in degree of inspiration. The whole Bible, for Wycliffe, is Christ's Law, i.e. the standard by which Christ exists, which reveals Christ's own Nature. So to be ignorant of God's Word is to be ignorant of Christ in whom alone there is salvation. Wycliffe concludes from this that the Scriptures are all-

sufficient in matters of faith and order and universal in their application in that God governs His world in accordance with His Word. Lechler believes that here, Wycliffe does not distinguish between Law and Gospel radically enough, but this is to misunderstand the Reformer. The Mosaic Law gives us the standard but the Evangelical Law (Wycliffe's expression), is the rule by which Christ fulfils the Law on our behalf – which is the Gospel.

Nowadays, we hear much of duty-faith, the duty to believe in Christ savingly. This idea does not occur in Wycliffe but he does maintain that, "Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of all men to learn to know, to defend, and to observe, inasmuch as they are bound to serve the Lord in accordance with it, under the promise of an eternal reward." Thus all people should have immediate access to the Word of God and those who deny that Word to all men serve Antichrist.

The Being of God

Here, again, Wycliffe helps us in the modern debate concerning God's infinite acts. It belongs to God's infinity that He is omniscient, omnipotent and immutable. God's will and power are thus evident in all He does. All that pertains to creation and the New Creation is the product of His acts from eternity. Wycliffe thus argues that all that ever was and will be is in God's omniscience. God never makes a beginning or end of willing or knowing. Thus all the blessings of salvation are activated from eternity. Lechler argues that Wycliffe is weak on the timing of justification but for Wycliffe all the blessings of salvation are part of God's immutable will and are beyond timing. What God knows and wills, is. Thus eternity, is not a characteristic parallel with God. It is the measure of the Godhead – the nature of the very Being of God. Eternity is because God is.

Creation and New Creation

Wycliffe combated the Roman (and later Arminian and Fullerite view) that creation and the New Creation were arbitrary, i.e. God could have organised everything differently. God's acts are necessitated by God's nature. God made the world as it is because that fulfilled God's perfect will. This will also necessitates making, giving and loving and this is how the world and man came to be created. This is where many later Calvinists departed from the strong predestinarianism of Wycliffe. Even Toplady, a strong predestinarian himself, could not go as far as Wycliffe and maintained that neither did Luther and Calvin. The stumbling block for Toplady was that he could not accept that God, of necessity, must act as He does. In the section on Wycliffe in his *The Judgment of several eminent Persons, who flourished in England, antecedently to the Reformation*, he says:

I can only meet the excellent man half-way. I agree with him, as to the necessity of events: but I cannot, as he evidently did, suppose God himself

to be a necessary agent, in the utmost sense of the term. That God acts in the most exact conformity to his own decrees, is a truth which scripture asserts again and again: but that God was absolutely free in decreeing, is no less asserted by the inspired writers; who, with one voice, declare the Father's predestination, and subsequent disposal, of all things, to be entirely founded, not on any antecedent necessity, but on the single sovereign pleasure of his own will.

Such thoughts led Arthur Pink to use far stronger language in protest at the kind of predestination advocated by our early Reformers and wrote:³

With all due respects to these two fine contenders for the truth, Wycliffe would tell them that they are guilty of compartmental and not comprehensive thinking. They are separating the inseparable. Because God is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Immutable, He acts as He is. It would be a denial of His own nature to draw a distinction between His own necessity and His own sovereign pleasure. There was none other good enough to pay the price of sin but the Son, so there was no other way to pay it but the way God chose as THE way. God never denies Himself and has never alternative plans for a goal to be reached. What He wills IS and could be no other as it is in accordance with His sovereign pleasure and His holiness and justice. This is surely the teaching of Ephesians, chapter one. To argue that God might have chosen, for instance, the Old Testament sacrifices to save us and not His Son, would be to say that God does not hold to the best of ways which is thus the only way. Indeed, it suggests that God could have denied His Son. It would be to argue that the message of John 3:16 is just an unnecessary alternative. It would be to submit God to our method of idle speculation and alternative thinking produced by the fallibility of our nature. It would be to expect God to work along Wesleyan arbitrary lines of chance. God's plan for His elect must take its necessary course because what God decrees in eternity exists as an eternal fact. In eternity there is no distinction between God's determination and the event He determines. The one of necessity accompanies the other.

Accomplished salvation

Some time ago, I was shocked to find an article published in an open internet symposium stating that I did not believe in a personal response of the sinner to the saving gospel. To drive the alleged 'truth' of this statement home, it was published with several letters from men who did not know me, but who had accepted the totally unfounded remark hook, line and sinker and thus jumped on the bandwagon complaining that my religion was all head with no heart. The internet author was apparently moved to write such a 'howler' through reading an article I had written in New Focus, declaring that what God decreed in eternity was fulfilled in the fullness of time at Calvary, so that when Christ cried 'It is finished', salvation was accomplished. My opponent thus concluded quite wrongly and illogically, that I believed salvation did not need to be applied and received. This is exactly the argument that Wycliffe's Romanist enemies levelled at him and

was the subject matter of several bulls from a succession of popes against Wycliffe and his followers. Again, Wycliffe showed that these critics were separating the inseparable. Christ is everywhere in the midst of His Church and sticks closer than a brother. He is the Bishop of our souls and Eternal Priest and He it is who empowers us by His Spirit to move in Him and in Him own their Being. Christ thus draws all His elect to Himself and gives them the wherewithal to repent of their sins and own Christ as Saviour. Application and reception are thus essential parts of the all-embracing salvation of the elect. However, Wycliffe insisted that this does not mean that there is any source of salvation in man's own will but that even his reception of Christ is derived from Christ's saving prompting. Even the personal consciousness of a sinner that Christ has saved him is given him by his Saviour.

The comprehensiveness of Wycliffe's doctrines

The consequence of Wycliffe's insistence that salvation is all of Christ and fallen human agency plays no part, led him to a further debatable point in Reformed theology. He believed that repentance itself was a product of Christ's application of salvation and that this was the initialising of the work of sanctification in the sinner's life. This work of sanctification in man, according to Wycliffe is also part and parcel of his walk in faith. He thus argued that faith is not merely head knowledge of Christ but a state of feeling or moral activity in which the believer is prompted by his love for Christ to forsake his old selfish, sinful ways and serve Him. Thus Wycliffe sees no systematic distinction between repentance, conversion, sanctification, faith and good works. Never was a Reformer more comprehensive in his insistence on the wholeness of salvation. Lechler, however, believes that Wycliffe thus denied salvation by faith alone. But Wycliffe would answer that there is no such thing as faith alone in the sense that it contrasts with other aspects of salvation. Faith comprises the whole of being in Christ and all that this produces in the elect. Thus a sinner is justified by the entire salvation which is given to the sinner which incorporates his faith.

The Church

In his insistence that man cannot make satisfaction for sin, nor merit saving grace, nor earn eternal blessedness, thus denying the 'lying fiction' (Wycliffe's expression) of works of supererogation, Wycliffe was pointing to the foundation of the doctrines of grace built by Christ which will always be the foundation of true church reformation. Wycliffe could argue this way because he sincerely believed that the church built on this foundation of Grace was nothing else but the whole number of the elect. Here Wycliffe would find opposition in most of the denominational thinking of today which looks on church order, hierarchy and discipline as true marks of the Church. The Church's centre for Wycliffe is the incorporation in the Body of Christ as Christ's Bride. The Church's seat is in eternity. Thus the Church as seen in the world is only a temporary

manifestation of the permanent inheritance of the saints which is reserved in heaven for them. Church membership is therefore election to grace. The idea of the Roman Catholic church that salvation came by being part of the organisation and hierarchy of the visible, institutionalised church, was anathema to Wycliffe. There is a priesthood in the true Church, Wycliffe argued, but this is the priesthood of all believers with Christ as the Church's great High Priest.

Further intrigues against Wycliffe

Wycliffe had been protected most of his active life by the hands of a strong King and Parliament against a weak papacy. The year 1378, however, found the Roman Catholic Church split down the middle because of opposing claims to the papacy by Urban VI and Clement VII and Wycliffe came to the conclusion that true Christians had no grounds to support either of them and that the two halves of Antichrist should be left to destroy each other. Sadly, now Wycliffe, who was busy organising itinerant preachers, came under criticism from both sides, each side suspecting that Wycliffe was using his preachers to discredit their side, whereas Wycliffe's one aim was to bring credit to Christ's saving work. Obviously acting more out of fear than conviction, Oxford, now in the hands of the monks, condemned Wycliffe, especially his teaching against transubstantiation but limited the condemnation to the inside of the university, Wycliffe remained free to speak his mind elsewhere.

After the beheading of Archbishop Sudbury by the peasant mobs in 1381, Wycliffe's old adversary William Courtenay became his successor both as Archbishop and Chancellor. John of Gaunt made it clear to him that he would not be allowed to perform his popish intrigues and Courtenay immediately resigned the Chancellorship. The enraged Archbishop now made it his major task to condemn Wycliffe and curb his influence in Church and country. Ignoring Parliament and Oxford, he schemed to win over the young, weak and rather paranoid Richard II for his plans. Anne of Bohemia, the King's wife was, however, an ardent supporter of Wycliffe, and though Richard humoured the Archbishop in bringing out patents and statutes against Wycliffe, he found no support in the Commons and little at Oxford, though now Courtenay was busy organising opposition there. As Wycliffe was still one of the most respected and protected men in the country, Courtenay developed a long-term strategy. He would have Wycliffe's doctrines condemned by the Anglican Church, then curb the activities of his itinerants and then strike at the hopefully isolated Wycliffe. This proved difficult as the real distinction between the papacy and the Anglican Church was political and the pope had become a kind of political emperor, viewing the Kingdom of England as his vassal. Doctrinal distinctions did not play the same part as they did in the days of Bloody Mary when the papist system had developed basic Christian doctrines to a travesty of their Biblical origins. Thus, most of Wycliffe's supporters are said to have recanted. This is hardly true as, so far as doctrines were concerned, neither they nor their opponents recognised the fine doctrinal

line which was now rapidly widening between Rome and the Anglican Church. This is plain to see as, when Courtenay thought he had found proof that Wycliffe himself had recanted, he produced a document from Wycliffe's pen that was thoroughly orthodox but would have been judged heresy by Mary's bishops. With all his faults, Courtenay was no Bonner or Gardiner, he had merely chosen the wrong side in his efforts to govern England and the Anglican Church in the name of a much divided papacy. Nicholas Hereford, who had translated the bulk of the Old Testament in conjunction with Wycliffe, realised which way the doctrinal winds were blowing and bravely decided to nip the cancerous growth in the bud and visit Urban VI to explain to him about Wycliffe's doctrines and methods of training preachers. Two hundred years later, the pope would have sentenced Hereford to death on the spot but Urban merely imprisoned the English Reformer. This act angered the populace and Hereford was released by an angry mob who stormed the papal prison in 1385. He was then able to return to England in safety.

No famous last words

Meanwhile, Wycliffe not only continued almost unmolested as Vicar of his Lutterworth parish, but published a vast number of tracts and sermons outlining the evangelical faith and had free access to Oxford. Though his writings were condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities, nothing whatsoever had been undertaken to officially attack, let alone punish his person. He, however, suffered a paralytic stroke in 1382 which, of course, his enemies interpreted as a sign that God was on the side of the pope. Two years or so later, Wycliffe suffered another stroke whilst attending a church service and died peacefully a few days afterwards. The exact date of his death, like that of his birth, is the subject of speculation. We have no famous 'last words' of the saint who was so badly paralysed that he could not even move his tongue.

Sadly, Wycliffe's death stirred up a counter-reformation in the Anglican clergy similar to the one following after Luther's reforming work. Courtenay and his papist colleagues stamped down on doctrinal discussion, emphasising need for unity with Rome based on 'universal' politics, tradition and ceremonies which were as unscriptural as they were novel. Just as the European Counter-Reformation caused Rome to introduce what was virtually a novel system, so the English Counter-Reformation introduced new powers to the restored papacy, new definitions of the Church and new views of salvation. The British Nation must look back on the fourteenth century with a laughing and a crying eye. The joy is engendered by knowing that there was perhaps never a man of God who was able to reform the visible Church as did Wycliffe. The crying eye indicates the sorrow and shame Britain must feel to know that her country of today is, in many respects, more under the power of an apostate Rome

than ever she was in Wycliffe's days. Once again, Rome is one of England's greatest landowners and millions of pounds leave the islands yearly to finance the pope, his private armies and his political stranglehold on the nations.

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