

John Knox

Scotland in the 1500s was a land of great ignorance – the nation was largely uneducated, ignorant of the Scriptures, very superstitious. It was a church dominated by ignorance amongst the clergy, immorality amongst the clergy, superstition amongst the clergy; there was very little preaching and people were generally dissatisfied with the church. It was a church that needed radical reformation.

John Knox was a fiery preacher in Scotland who spoke out against the Roman Catholic Church and was forced to flee to Geneva. While he was there he published very controversial articles including one that told England to attack leaders who allowed Catholicism back into England; and one that told the Nobels in Scotland that ordinary people had the right or duty to rebel against unjust rulers.

When he returned to Scotland one of his sermons caused a riot where images were smashed and religious houses were destroyed.

The Parliament ordered Knox and his colleagues to write books that helped to reform the church in Scotland.

Knox was clearly a man of great courage: one man standing before Knox's open grave said, "Here lies a man who neither flattered nor feared any flesh."

His legacy is large: there are more than 750,000 Presbyterians in Scotland, 3 million in the United States, and many millions more worldwide.

What revolutionary action did he take?

John Wycliffe

When John Wycliffe was a scholar at Oxford University in 1360, there was only one legal translation of the Bible around and it was in Latin. Because common folks couldn't read Latin they had to accept what their priests told them. They could not study the Bible for themselves or disagree with the Church's interpretations. Just imagine living in a time when you were not able to pick up a Bible and read it for yourself!

John Wycliffe decided to do something about this terrible situation and in 1370 he and his colleagues at Oxford translated the Bible into English. You would have thought that everybody would be happy with the new ability people had to read and study the Bible but the authorities were furious. They probably felt that their dodgy practices would be exposed when people read the truth of God's Word.

John Wycliffe was expelled from Oxford University because of his defiance and radical thinking and died of a stroke just two years later.

The church leaders also banned the Bible translation that John had written and also other books he wrote in English but thankfully they were smuggled out of the country to Prague where another reformer John Hus would make sure that they were copied and distributed.

What revolutionary action did he take?

John Hus

John Huss was a reformer who lived in Prague. He read the writings of another reformer, John Wycliffe, and also wrote that the corrupt church should not have that much authority over their daily lives. He convinced people that nothing in the Bible required them to buy Indulgences from the Church. An indulgence was like permission to sin that you could buy and know you would still get forgiveness from the Church when you committed the sin.

When people stopped buying Indulgences, the Pope was furious. He used money that was made from the sale of indulgences to finance a military campaign against the King of Naples. He kicked John Hus out of the church and put the entire city of Prague under an interdict, forbidding anyone from taking the sacraments – like communion or baptism.

Hus continued to speak his mind. He condemned the excessive lifestyles of the clergy, including the Pope. He told people not to listen to priests who didn't give Bible-based instruction. In response, the Church convened the Council of Constance to interrogate Hus. He was arrested and tried by the Council and condemned and handed over to the secular authorities to be burned at the stake.

On July 6, 1415, as John Hus (whose name means "goose") made his way to the place of execution, the authorities made him pass by a bonfire where his books were burned. Some of his last words were: *You are going to burn a goose but in a century you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil.* His words came true when a revolution that took place some years later.

But Hus' ideas lived on, and some of the people who adopted his thinking ultimately immigrated to America where they established the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth in Pennsylvania. Other scholars continued his work in Europe.

What revolutionary action did he take?

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was a Catholic monk who was against the idea that you could buy an indulgence from the church (a kind of financial transaction to absolve sins). He was especially upset with a monk told crowds they could get their deceased friends and family out of purgatory if they put money into his indulgence box. He believed that it was wrong for people to think they could "buy" their way to salvation.

In fact Luther, had many concerns with the way in which the church of his day was operating so he wrote up a list of "95 Theses" – 95 points concerning two main areas: that the Bible is the central religious authority and that humans may reach salvation only by their faith and not by their deeds. He nailed the document to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany for everyone to see.

His ideas then became public and others agreed that the Catholic Church had no business raising money through the selling of Indulgences. Pope Leo in Rome heard about what Luther had done and was furious and issued a document calling for the burning of Luther's writings and threatened to kick Luther out of the church if he didn't recant in 60 days. Luther's response was to burn the document that the Pope had sent out and other Church-issued materials that he disagreed with.

Luther was then summoned to a trial in Worms where a council was set up to judge Luther. At the trial, Luther refused to recant and uttered his famous words: "Here I stand; I can do no other." He was saved from the stake by a German ruler and went into hiding where he translated the entire Bible into German and it became the first book published for mass circulation on the Gutenberg press.

What revolutionary action did he take?

