

## John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation

Bridgette Burbank

John Wycliffe was born in 1328 in Yorkshire, England. He was a philosophy and theology professor at Oxford and in 1361 was made a rector at Fillingham. He was known at Oxford for his outspoken criticism of the Catholic church and its attempts to usurp government authority in England.

The Catholic church at the time exercised as much if not more power than the government of England. They owned much of the land in the country as well as much of the wealth. The monasteries and convents had a virtual monopoly on education. The church restricted the access of lay members to the Bible by prohibiting the private ownership of the book. The only copies in existence were chained to the pulpits of the churches. The Bibles were also written in Latin, a language known only by the Catholic priests, and so would be worthless to anyone who was able to remove them. The only way for a person to receive spiritual knowledge was from a priest at the church. Anyone who opposed the absolute rule of the church was condemned as a heretic and threatened with excommunication, meaning that the person would have no hope of redemption after death. This threat was very effective in controlling the superstitious and naive common people of the day.

Wycliffe believed strongly that the Bible was the true source of doctrine rather than the Catholic church, and his followers were able to accomplish the first translation of the Bible from Latin into English. This enabled spiritual knowledge to be disseminated from a source other than the church and its priests.

Although the Catholic church continued to have much power and influence for another hundred years, Wycliffe is considered the morning star of the reformation. He was the first of many reformers that would help to break the control of the Catholic church in Europe.