John Hus (1369-1415)

John Hus (Jan Hus) lived and died a Roman Catholic, but he is considered the forerunner of the Moravian Church. Hus fought and was martyred for religious liberty and a Christianity based upon the New Testament. Shortly before his death, Hus insisted that all Christians, clergy and lay, partake of both the elements of Communion. He preached from the Bible in Czech and translated many hymns into his native language. Hus’ use of the Czech language opened the doors of religious leadership and reform to the laypersons of his time. Hus was burned at the stake for his beliefs, but forty-two years later, the followers of Hus formed the Unitas Fratrum (Sawyer, pp. 9, 10, 14).

Formation Influences from John Hus’ Early Life

John Hus’ real name was John of Husinec. Husinec was a little village in Czechoslovakia. John was probably born on July 6, 1369, to poor peasants (Sawyer, p. 9). Hus was intelligent, and he dreamed of becoming a priest as a way of leaving poverty behind and making his mark in the world. Hus was so determined to gain an education that he slept in the open air of the streets of Prague because he could not afford a room in the city. He used his voice to earn money by singing in church choirs. When choir work was not available, he begged to keep himself alive (Crews, Thesis, p. 22). Hus’ determination paid off. John later graduated from the University of Prague with a Master of Arts degree (Sawyer, p. 6).

Early in life, Hus set his sights on religion. His earliest education was in a monastery school. His talent for singing in church choirs may have taught Hus the value of music in shaping the soul. Certainly Hus’ early struggles with poverty left him committed to the poor (Crews, ibid). This devotion to the spiritual needs of the poor would later lead Hus to open Czech Christianity to the common people. Finally, the determination of will, which caused Hus to struggle through his poverty to acquire an education, carried him through the ordeal of an unfair imprisonment and a martyr’s death.

Formation Influences from John Hus’ Community

Hus was shaped by his early education in a monastic setting, by the poor of the streets of Prague, and by those professors who saw his promise as a teacher and invited him to join the teaching staff of Prague University. There, Hus found the time for the Bible study which shaped his career as a Church reformer (Sawyer, p. 10).
Formation Influence from Suffering Which Hus Endured

When Hus began to preach against the sale of indulgences, he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. When he was driven out of Prague, he traveled from town to town preaching in the fields to enormous crowds. Hus grew up in poverty, suffered religious persecution, and, finally, died in the flames for his beliefs, but all this suffering was used by God to make him a Father of the Unitas Fratrum (the Moravian Church) and forerunner of the later Protestant Reformation. The “Creeds and Confessions” section of The Ground of Unity best expresses Hus’ contribution to the Unitas Fratrum.

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes in the creeds of the Church the thankful acclaim of the Body of Christ. These creeds aid the Church in formulating a Scriptural confession, in marking the boundary of heresies, and in exhorting believers to an obedient and fearless testimony in every age. The Unitas Fratrum maintains that all creeds formulated by the Christian Church stand in need of constant testing in the light of the Holy Scriptures. It acknowledges as such true professions of faith the early Christian witness, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and especially the ancient Christian creeds and the fundamental creeds of the Reformation.

Sources Referenced:
