

Wycliffe and the Lollards



John Wycliffe lived in England in the 1300s. He recognized that the wealthy and corrupt Church was far removed from the cause of the common man. In that day, the Bible was only published in Latin, and only the clergy were permitted to read it.

Translated Bible into English

Wycliffe took action, translating the New Testament from Latin into English, and establishing the Order of Poor Preachers. These men went throughout the countryside and villages reading and teaching from portions of Wycliffe's hand-copied Bible. For the first time, it was possible for the common man to know what the Bible actually said. The peasants flocked to the village greens to hear preachers read aloud from the new English translation.



The Lollards, as they were called by their opponents, grew quickly, and in the decade after Wycliffe's death in 1384 they were a sizeable movement, able to petition the King for parliamentary action to change the Church in England. But their charge that war was against the teaching of the New Testament and that priests should live in simple poverty among the poor did not find a favorable reception in England or in Rome.

Declared a heretic

The movement lost its momentum in 1417 with the burning of a prominent Lollard leader, Sir John Oldcastle. Despite the fact that Wycliffe had not been looking to overthrow the Church, but rather to bring correction from within, the Council of Constance (1414-1418) posthumously found Wycliffe to be a heretic. In 1428 his bones were exhumed, crushed, and scattered into the River Swift. His Bible and any Lollard books were burned.

