

Novel Doctrine

The more [John] Wyclif read the Scriptures, the more his eyes were opened to the evils within the Church. The mendicant friars also came in for a good share of opposition; he exposed the vices of mendicant orders, and proved that such monastic life had not the least foundation in Scripture and that they were a great danger to the State. His conflict with the mendicant friars lasted until his death.

Wyclif served on a commission which England sent to Bruges in the Netherlands to deal with the papal delegates respecting the “doing away with ecclesiastical annoyances”. The negotiations arrived at no definite result. But Wyclif here had an opportunity to get a close view of the worldly character of the papal emissaries, which led him on his return to England to oppose Rome and the pope with so much greater zeal. The Church needs no two heads, he declared, there is but one head, Christ, as Scripture teaches.

With the sharpening of the conflict the mendicant friars began to search his writings for heresies. And when Wyclif openly attacked the favorite dogma of the Middle Ages, namely, that of transubstantiation, the opposition to him increased in vehemence.

Wyclif opposed the “novel” doctrine of transubstantiation as “heathenish”, according to which every priest was able to “create” the body of Christ, a thought which seemed horrible to him in that it ascribed to the priest the transcendent power by which a creature gave existence to his creator. Wyclif’s own views as to the Lord’s Supper were as follows: The elements remain bread and wine, but are concomitantly in a figurative and sacramental sense the body of Christ which believers receive spiritually.

(Sketches from the History of the Church by G. E. Hageman, St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, n.d., 113-114; Paragraph Structure Modified)