John Wycliffe (About 1330-1384)

John Wycliffe was a scholar in England. Wycliffe challenged the church’s right to money that it demanded from England. When the Great Schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church began, he publicly questioned the pope’s authority. He also attacked indulgences and immoral behavior on the part of the clergy.

During the Middle Ages, church officials tried to control interpretations of the Bible. Wycliffe believed that the Bible, not the church, was the supreme source of religious authority. Against church tradition, he had the Bible translated from Latin into English so that common people could read it.

The pope accused Wycliffe of heresy, or opinions that contradict church doctrine (teachings). Wycliffe’s followers were persecuted, and some of them were burned to death. After his death, the church had his writings burned. Despite the church’s opposition, Wycliffe’s ideas had a wide influence.
Jan Hus (About 1370-1415)

Jan (Yaan whos) was a priest in Bohemia (today’s Czech Republic). He read Wycliffe’s writings and agreed with many of his ideas. Hus criticized the vast wealth of the church and spoke out against he pope’s authority. The true head of the church, he said, was Jesus Christ.

Hus wanted to purify the church and return it to the people. He called for an end to corruption among the clergy. He wanted both the Bible and the mass to be offered in the common language of the people instead of Latin.

In 1414, Hus was arrested and charged with heresy. In July 1415, he was burned at the stake.

Like Wycliff, Hus had a major influence on future reformers. Martin Luther would later say that he and his supporters were “all Hussites without knowing it.”
Catherine of Siena (1370-1415)

Catherine of Siena was an Italian mystic. She was extraordinarily devoted and felt that she had a direct experience of God. Even as a child, she had visions of Jesus and promised to be his “bride”.

Catherine spent long hours deep in prayer and wrote many letters about spiritual life. She also involved herself in church affairs. Her pleas helped convince Pope Gregory XI to move the papacy (pope) to Rome from Avignon (Av-eng-yon). Later she traveled to Rome to try to end the Great Schism.

Catherine was a faithful Catholic, and in 1461 the church declared her a saint. Yet her example showed that people could lead spiritual lives that went beyond the usual norms of the church. She and other mystics emphasized personal experience of God more than formal observance of church practices. This approach to faith helped prepare people for the ideas of the Reformation.
Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

Desiderius Erasmus was a humanist from Holland. A priest and devoted Catholic, he was one of the most outspoken figures in the call for reform.

In 1509, Erasmus published a book called *The Praise of Folly*. (Folly means “foolishness”.) The book was a sharply worded satire of society, including abuses by clergy and church leaders. Erasmus argued for a return to simple Christian goodness.

Erasmus wanted to reform the church from within. He angrily denied that he was really a Protestant. Yet perhaps more than any other individual, he helped to prepare Europe for the Reformation. His attacks on corruption in the church contributed to many people’s desires to leave Catholicism. For this reason it is often said that “Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it!”
Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)

Huldrych (Hull-dritch) Zwingli was a Catholic priest in Zurich, Switzerland. Zwingli was influenced by both Erasmus and Luther. After reading Luther’s work, he persuaded the local government to ban any form of worship that was not based on the Bible. In 1532, Zurich declared its independence from the authority of the local Catholic bishop.

Zwingli wanted Christians to focus solely on the Bible. He attacked the worship of relics, saints, and images. In Zwinglian churches, there were no religious statues or paintings. Services were very simple and without music or singing.

Zwingli took his ideas to other Swiss cities. In 1531, war broke out between his followers and Swiss Catholics. Zwingli died in the war, but the new church lived on.
John Calvin (1509-1564)

In the late 1530s, John Calvin, a French humanist, started another Protestant branch in Geneva, Switzerland. His book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, became one of the most influential works of the Reformation.

Calvin emphasized that salvation came only from God’s grace. He said that the “saved” whom God elected (chose) lived according to strict standards. He believed firmly in hard work and thrift (the careful use of money). Success in business, he taught, was a sign of God’s grace. Calvin tried to establish a Christian state in Geneva that would be ruled by God through the Calvinist Church.

Calvin influenced many other reformers. One of them was John Knox, a Scotsman who lived in Geneva for a time. Knox led the Protestant reform that established the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.
William Tyndale (1491-1536)

William Tyndale was an English priest, scholar, and writer. Tyndale traveled to Germany and met Martin Luther. His views became more and more Protestant. He attacked corruption in the Catholic Church and defended the English Reformation. After being arrested by Catholic authorities in the city of Antwerp (in present-day Belgium), he spent over a year in prison. In 1536, he was burned at the stake.

Tyndale was especially important for his translations of books from the Bible. To spread knowledge of the Bible, he translated the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into English. In the early 1600s, his work was used in the preparation of the King James, or Authorized, Version of the Bible. Famed for its beautiful language, the King James Bible had an enormous influence on English worship and literature.
England’s Protestant Reformation was led by King Henry VIII. In 1534, Henry formed the Church of England (also called the Anglican Church), with himself at its head.

Unlike Luther and Calvin, King Henry did not have major disagreements with Catholic teachings. His reasons for breaking with the church were personal and political. On a personal level, he wanted to end his marriage, but the pope had denied him a divorce. On a political level, he no longer wanted to share power and wealth with the church. In 1536, Henry closed down Catholic monasteries in England and took their riches.