



Martin Nodl

Prague, Jan Hus
and Prague University

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SOURCES OF CHAPTERS

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The Hussites and the Bohemian Reformation

“The Hussites and the Bohemian Reformation.” In *From Hus to Luther: Visual Culture in the Bohemian Reformation (1380–1620)*, edited by Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk, 17–46, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.

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Confessionalization and Religious (In)Tolerance in Prague of the Second Half of the 15th Century

“Konfessionalisierung und religiöse (In)Toleranz in Prag in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts, Bohemia.” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder* 58 (2018): 286–309. Partially revised.

Between Authority and Obedience: Ecclesiology Versus Practical Religion

“Mezi autoritou a poslušností: eklesiologie versus praktické náboženství.” In *Jan Hus: życie, myśl, dziedzictwo*, edited by Paweł Kras and Martin Nodl, 111–127, Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2017.

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Corporative Interests Versus Nationalism: Prague University at the Turn of the 15th Century

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Puri bohemi of Jerome of Prague. On the Faces of Czech National Consciousness and Nationalism

“Puri Bohemi Jeronýma Pražského: k podobám českého národního vědomí a nacionalismu.” In *Jeroným Pražský: středověký intelektuál, mučedník české reformace a hrdina národní tradice*, edited by Ota Pavlíček, 35–47, Prague: Filosofia, 2018.

Jan Hus and Prague University

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III. Prague

The Old Town Hall as the Site of Election of Czech Kings and the Symbol of the Land's Majesty

“Staroměstská radnice jako místo volby českých králů a symbol zemského majestátu.” In *Husitské re-formace: proměna kulturního kódu v 15. století*, edited by Pavlína Cermanová and Pavel Soukup, 276–304, Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2019. Partially revised.

**Ritual and Politics: Conflicts of Vladislav II Jagiello
and the Appointment of Councilors in the Old and New Towns
of Prague in the Early 16th Century**

“Rytuał i polityka. Konflikty Władysława Jagiellończyka oraz tryb mianowania rajców w Starym i Nowym Mieście praskim na początku XVI wieku.” In *Jagiellonowie i ich świat. Konflikty Jagiellonów*, edited by Bożena Czwojdrak, Jerzy Sperka, Piotr Węcowski, 203–219, Kraków 2023: Societas Vistulana. Partially revised.

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

Prague—University of Prague—Bohemian Reformation. These three concepts reflect the main topics of this book. The Bohemian Reformation, currently understood by a number of German Anglo-American researchers as the reformation before the Reformation, offered, at the end of the 14th century, a radical solution to the spiritual and institutional crisis of the late medieval church. Czech reformers, both radical and moderate, sensed an internal peril to the chance of salvation. They considered the world they lived in to be so corrupt that they saw no other solution than to reform the church and the entire Christian world through radical reform. That rectification was to be of a spiritual nature, it was to target the soul and heart of all believers—from the simplest peasants to the highest prelates. Yet the bearer of the reform was to be secular power—the monarch, his court and the nobility—who alone could use their authority to encourage or even force the church to change. Hence, the reform had to occur from above, as all attempts to reform the church from below had failed.

The most radical herald of the inevitability of reform was Jan Hus, Master of Liberal Arts and Bachelor of Theology. Hus, however, was not the only one in the first decade of the 15th century to have come up with new and often radical reform ideas, aimed at mending the world. In the Prague context, the beginnings of reform thought are distinctly connected with the University of Prague. Without a university, without dozens of educated people who came to Prague from Central, Central Eastern and Northern Europe, there would have been mere isolated individuals with reformist views in the Czech setting. Such a considerable reform current would have never arisen without the university. It was a current that at the time subverted the religious system and the church in a number of respects. That was no doubt an inadvertent consequence of the establishment of the University of

Prague by Charles IV. Through the first university in Central Europe, the king wished to enable students within the Roman–German Empire to acquire knowledge in law, theology and medicine outside the ancient university centers in Italy, France and England. In the first years of the University of Prague, the founding king acted quite like a wicked stepmother, for his reign did not require the Prague graduates, but educated lawyers and theologians from Padua, Bologna and Paris found employment in his court.

The foundation of new universities in Vienna and Kraków, however, turned the interests of Charles IV also to Prague. That led to the founding of the first major master's college (called Karolinum or Charles College). From the 1360s onwards, the university administrative system ever more distinctly applied the principle of division of power and responsibilities among university nations: the Czech, Bavarian, Saxon, and Polish. The parity within university administration—until 1409 based on the principle of concord of nations (*concordia nationum*), to which all students took an oath upon admission to the university—had been unable to prevent philosophical and, by extension, religious controversies at the university caused by the reception of English theologian John Wyclif. It was primarily Wyclif who stirred the Prague reform ideas, the dawn of which the German and Czech scholars date to the 1380s, towards religious radicalism. At the beginning of the 15th century, the radicalism increasingly acquired a national character. It was markedly manifested in the conflicts over the Decree of Kutná Hora and over its implementation in everyday university life. With the aid of the Decree of Kutná Hora and the attitudes of the radical Bohemian masters, the Bohemian Reformation acquired a specific national shape, the reflection of which can be seen in the speeches of the philosopher Jerome of Prague and in the service of Jan Hus as the rector. In connection with the nationalisation of the religious reform, elements of Czech messianism emerged with the university. It remains an integral component of Czech political thought to this day (Bohemia as a bridge between the East and West, the quest for a third way, socialism with a human face, Czech Euroscepticism, etc.).

In this book, I describe the form of the nationalisation of the University of Prague, as well as the limits and restrictive consequences of

leaning towards nationalism for the Bohemian Reformation and Czech medieval society. Particular emphasis is placed on the distinctiveness and specificity of the Czech and, in many respects, Prague context. It makes Prague and the University of Prague a world outside Christian ecumenism of the time. In addition to nationalisation and the ensuing messianism, the uniqueness of the Bohemian Reformation was also in that it forced the Catholic Church of the early 1430s to a dialogue with heretics condemned by the Council of Constance and Pope Martin V. Unable to assert itself through power with the crusades, the Catholic Church had to conclude with the heretics (the Utraquists) the so-called Compacts of Basel which allowed the practice of a double religious rite within Catholicism. Yet the uniqueness of the Bohemian Reformation also lies in other aspects explored in this publication. In Jan Hus, the Bohemian Reformation gave rise to a new, radical ecclesiology. It challenged the hierarchical system of the church and gave much greater weight to the spiritual responsibility of all believers.

The Bohemian Reformation led to the creation of a kingdom of dual faith, where Catholics and Utraquists coexisted side-by-side throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. It also generated, *via facti*, the idea of religious tolerance out of necessity, a phenomenon quite alien to late medieval society. Tolerance, enforced as a land law by the Religious peace of Kutná Hora in 1485, had major limits. It applied only to Catholics and to compacts recognised by the Utraquists, but not to radical faith groups, particularly the Unity of the Brethren. From the middle of the 15th century, the Unity attempted to return the church and religious practices to the time of the early days of the revolution. Yet, similarly to the first reformers, the Czech Brethren also saw the religious ideal in the primordial, post-Christian church. The Unity of the Brethren became a persecuted sect. In practice, however, the persecution never reached the dimensions of the medieval inquisition: the majority of the Czech nobility, growing largely religiously indifferent as time progressed, promoted the principle of least possible interference with their sovereign rights, thus also with the religious conduct of their subjects.

The tolerant approach within the limits of the Compacts of Basel, which was practiced by the nobility and most of the royal and vassal

cities, led to the opposite in the Prague context: to intolerant thought. Prague, which was one of the most important power centers during the Hussite revolution, promoted the principle of religious unification. It grew its roots as early as before 1419, when the University of Prague approved the requirement of an oath on the chalice, which meant closing the university to Catholics (who were restored in the 1460s). In the revolutionary 1420s and 1430s, identification with the chalice became utter necessity in the Old and New Towns of Prague. Its refusal led to the confiscation of the property of Catholic townspeople. After the Battle of Lipany, or after the endorsement of the Compacts of Basel, the issue of the possible return of the former Catholic townspeople and the restitution of their property arose in the Prague context. Therefore, the Utraquist government in the city, in negotiations with Sigismund of Luxembourg, demanded a privilege that *de facto* prevented the return of Catholics and Catholic church institutions to the city. Throughout the 15th century, tendencies similar to those identified within imperial cities in the middle of the 16th century were discernible in Prague. They are known as confessionalisation. Confessional tendencies manifested themselves in Prague in the 15th century in only Utraquists being able to gain town privileges and enter into individual guilds, in exclusively placing Utraquist priests in parish churches, in supervision over the lives of believers (including marriages), in the spiritual office at the Old Town Hall (though its members were both clergy and laity, something utterly unthinkable in the Christian world until the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations). The demands of Prague power elites even went so far that they succeeded in avoiding the applicability of the Religious peace of Kutná Hora to the Old and New Towns of Prague.

The Old and New Towns of Prague, however, did not represent a specific entity merely in terms of religious intolerance. This book shows that, in the 15th century, the Old and New Towns of Prague acquired a very specific and, in many respects, privileged political power status on a national level. The origins of these tendencies go back to the first decade of the Hussite revolution. Military clashes, as well as the distribution of power, made Prague the mightiest force on the political chessboard of the Kingdom of Bohemia in the second half of the 1530s. It further grew in importance during the period of anarchy after the

passing of Albrecht Habsburg. In the 15th century, the Old Town Hall, as a symbol of city power, became a privileged place for the election of Czech kings. In this respect, the Old Town Hall was utterly distinctive among the town halls of Christian Europe at the time. Until George of Poděbrady took office at the Old Town Hall, Land Diet were also in session there. That enabled the Prague councilors to considerably influence political events throughout the kingdom. This significance was also reflected symbolically and in different manifestations of the power representation of the Old Town Councilors. The change in political circumstances in the country, brought about by the election of Vladislav Jagiello and the accession of the House of Jagiello to the Bohemian throne, somewhat led to a decline in the political power of the Old and New Towns of Prague. The struggle between the Bohemian towns and the Czech nobility over the form of the estates monarchy lead by no means to the suppression of the ambitions of the Prague power elites. Their ambitions most apparently manifested themselves in the implementation of a highly distinct method of appointing new councilors, without the influence of the monarch and his officials—a method that differed fundamentally from the appointment of new councilors in other cities.

Not only in this respect Prague acquired a distinctive status within the power and political system of the Kingdom of Bohemia in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The book therefore presents the distinctiveness of Prague. It highlights the aspects that manifest the interconnect-edness of the Prague context with the Bohemian Reformation, and the transformation of the originally universalistic Charles University into a nationally defined (and therefore limited) higher education institution as the determining factor of the form of the Bohemian Reformation. Prague, the University of Prague and the Bohemian Reformation thus form internally connected concepts, the content of which fundamentally influenced Czech history in the 15th and early 16th centuries. In some aspects it continues to influence Czech history even today.

I. BOHEMIAN REFORMATION

THE HUSSITES AND THE BOHEMIAN REFORMATION

In the initial days of June 1421, a Diet was held in Čáslav, where representatives of the Bohemian estates agreed on a basic religious-political program. It was to become the agenda of the—at the time victorious and forward-looking—Bohemian Reformation for many years to come.¹ The refusal of the Bohemians to recognize Sigismund of Luxembourg as their king and the first victory in the conflict with local Catholics allowed people to forget the humiliation of the Bohemian crown when Jan Hus was burned at the stake in Constance, and the subsequent crisis which threatened the politically and religiously divided kingdom upon the death of Wenceslas IV. Reformist zeal, as well as an awareness of their own power, led to the Bohemian estates formulating a program based around four key points: the open and free preaching of the Word of God, the giving of Holy Communion under both kinds, the fact that the clergy should hold neither material wealth nor secular power, and the equal punishment of mortal sins, regardless of social position.² These four points to which a fifth point was added—the rejection of Sigismund as king of Bohemia—arose from two decades of intellectual discussion concerning reform, firstly among Bohemian university masters, and later also amongst Reform

¹ František Šmahel, *Husitská revoluce*, vol. 3, *Kronika válečných let* [The Hussite Revolution, vol. 3.: A Chronicle of the War Years], Práce Historického ústavu Akademie věd České republiky = Opera Instituti historici Pragae, řada A, Monographia 9/3 (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR, 1993), 83–87.

² On the creation of the Four Articles of Prague during the revolution see Luboš Lancinger, “Čtyři artikuly pražské a podíl universitních mistrů na jejich vývoji” [The Part Played by the University Masters in the Development of the Four Articles of Prague], *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis* 3, no. 2 (1962): 3–61; František Šmahel, “Die vier Prager Artikel. Das Programm der hussitischen Reformation,” in *Kirchliche Reformimpulse des 14./15. Jahrhunderts in Ostmitteleuropa*, ed. Winfried Eberhard and Franz Machilek, *Forschungen und Quellen zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte Ostdeutschlands* 36 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), 329–339.

enthusiasts such as clerics working in towns and in the countryside, who, through their simplification of religious reform teaching, were able to bring the theological subtleties of the Prague scholars to life and into the understanding of the unlearned laity.

The following years, which were filled with conflict and the rise of religious radicals who tried to remove all human inventions from religious life as well as from ritual practices, were also distinguished by the gradual realization of university masters that the reformist ideals they initially espoused were getting out of hand,³ with the result that ideas of reform were largely reduced to the question of the lay chalice. Sigismund of Luxembourg, after making all sorts of promises, was finally accepted as king of Bohemia in 1436; the reign of secular priests, together with their ownership of land and material goods, was quietly tolerated (although the restitution of the pre-revolutionary property status never took place—this, however, was less of an achievement of a reform and more an indicator of pure power on the part of the peers, who had appropriated clerical property);⁴ and the public display and punishment of sins was no longer spoken of. The sole centerpiece of reform thinking was reduced to the chalice, namely that according to the second article of the Čáslav Diet, “for the sublime Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to be served under both kinds through bread and wine to all faithful Christians, old and young, given freely, as He hath ordained and commanded.”⁵ Unlike the theological concepts or steadfast beliefs of the first generation of revolutionary reformers, this ideology was quite crucial. Indeed, during the negotiations with the Council of Basel, which represented a breakthrough in the contemporary practice of dealing with heretics and which—in the form of the Compacts of Basel—led to the (albeit temporary) ecclesiastical

³ For a general discussion of university masters during the revolution see Jiří Kejř, *Mistři pražské univerzity a kněží táborští* [The Masters of Prague University and the Taborite Priests] (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1981).

⁴ The genesis of agreements formed with the Emperor Sigismund can be found in Šmahel, *Husitská revoluce*, 3: 296–319.

⁵ František Palacký, ed., *Archiv český, čili, Staré písemné památky české i moravské, sebrané z archivů domácích i cizích*, 3 [Czech Archive: Old Czech and Moravian Written Records, Collected from Domestic and Foreign Archives, vol. 3] (Prague: Stawy Králowstwj Českého, 1844), 226–230.

legalization of Utraquism by the Roman Catholic Church,⁶ the Hussite priests stepped back from their belief in the necessity of receiving communion under both kinds as the means to salvation, and instead settled for the implementation of this belief only in the Bohemian environment, without making it a requirement for the whole Christian community. Even so, the chalice remained central to the thinking of both the Hussite priests and the Hussite nobility and their subjects, and it was a belief to which they devoted their souls and that outwardly characterized their faith. With the exception of the chalice, however, most people's beliefs began to gradually return to the ritual practices of the Catholic Church from which the reformers never truly managed to break away, and they continued to perceive the Catholic Church as the only possible bearer of apostolic succession. The return to the ritual practices of the Catholic Church, as well as classical expressions of Catholic piety, was also reflected in Hussite liturgy and images, which by this time were fully accepted,⁷ and which began to take on a decidedly Utraquist appearance throughout the 15th century, even though they still continued to draw on general (and therefore non-denominational) Christian symbolism.⁸

From the mid-15th century onwards, it became increasingly apparent that most of the Bohemian population was losing its zeal for reform. A focus on the chalice, together with attempts to find common ground

⁶ For the most up-to-date discussion of the Compacts of Basel see František Šmahel, "Basilejská kompaktáta, jejich zpisemnění a ratifikace" [The Compacts of Basel: Their Drafting and Ratification], *Studia Mediaevalia Bohemica* 1, no. 2 (2009): 187–229.

⁷ Today, there is plenty of scholarship focusing on the question of Hussite iconoclasm: see in particular Horst Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution*, Edition Suhrkamp 763 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 231–328; Karel Stejskal, "Funkce obrazu v husitství" [The Function of Images in Hussitism], *Husitský Tábor* 8 (1985): 19–28; Karel Stejskal, "Ikonoklasmus českého středověku a jeho limity" [Iconoclasm of the Bohemian Middle Ages and Its Limits], *Umění: Časopis Ústavu dějin umění Akademie věd České republiky* 48, no. 4 (2000): 206–217; Milena Bartlová, "Understanding Hussite Iconoclasm," in *Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*, vol. 7, ed. Zdeněk V. David and David R. Holeton, *Filosofický časopis, Supplementum* 1 (Prague: Filosofia, 2009), 115–126.

⁸ For a concise overview of this issue see Kateřina Horníčková, "Mezi tradicí a inovací. Náboženský obraz v českém utrakvismu" [Between Tradition and Innovation: Religious Image in the Bohemian Utraquism], in *Umění české reformace (1380–1620)*, ed. Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk (Prague: Academia, 2010), 87–90.

with Rome—despite the abolition of the Compacts by Pope Pius II⁹ and the rejection of humanism from lands beyond the Alps, which, together with the renewed studies of the Bible, were to become the pillars of contemporary criticism of the church in Western Europe—meant that the initiation role of the Hussites was completely forgotten by those involved in the emerging European Reformation by the end of the second decade of the 16th century. The question of the lay chalice was of no significance to the reform-minded German theologians and clerics, since in their opinion it had no impact on the essence of religion. When Luther formulated his new articles of faith, he regarded the Hussites as sectarians and heretics, second only to the struggling Waldensians and Cathars. He had nothing but words of contempt for Hus and his followers.¹⁰ The cause of his negative attitude towards them was not, however, a detailed examination of the Hussite doctrine, but rather ignorance of the Bohemian Reformation, which was treated as if it had never existed. When Luther (in relation to the Hussites) later ceased to think of these reformers only in terms of their false depiction as violent heretics, he began to find more and more common ground between theories of the Bohemian Reformation and his own. Nonetheless, mutual wariness and persistence of nationalist stereotypes amongst both the Bohemian Utraquists and German reformers, which were

⁹ On Pope Pius II and his relationship with the Bohemian environment see František Šmahel, "Enea Silvio Piccolomini a jeho Historie česká" [Enea Silvio Piccolomini and his *Historia Bohemica*], in *Aeneae Silvii Historia Bohemica – Enea Silvio Historie česká*, ed. Dana Martínková, Alena Hadravová and Jiří Matl, *Clavis monumentorum litterarum (Regnum Bohemiae)* 4, *Fontes rerum Regni Bohemiae* 1 (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press, 1998), XIII–LII. For the most recent discussion of the abolition of the Compacts see Janusz Smolucha, *Polityka Kurii Rzymskiej za pontyfikatu Piusa II (1458–1464) wobec Czech i krajów sąsiednich. Z dziejów dyplomacji papieskiej w XV wieku* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008), 217–289.

¹⁰ Sources have already been compiled by Jaroslav Goll, "Jak soudil Luther o Husovi" [As Luther Understood Hus], *Časopis Musea Království českého* 54, no. 1 (1880): 60–80. See also Heiko A. Oberman, "Hus a Luther. Antikrist a druhý reformační objev" [Hus and Luther: The Antichrist and the Second Reform Discovery], in *Jan Hus mezi epochami, národy a konfesemi: sborník z mezinárodního sympozia, konaného 22.–26. září v Bayreuthu*, *SRN*, ed. Jan Blahoslav Lášek (Prague: Česká křesťanská akademie, 1995), 265–276.

underpinned by notions of messianism¹¹ and the belief of given parties that they were the “chosen one,” ultimately meant that the old Bohemian Reformation world never established any close connection with the world of the German and Swiss Reformation, despite the fact that the doctrines put forward by these latter movements were attractive for a growing proportion of the faithful among the Utraquists and the Unity of the Brethren in the years before 1600. Such issues, together with the development of the Bohemian Reformation itself, which was forcibly terminated by the defeat of the Estates Uprising at the Battle of White Mountain and the subsequent Peace of Westphalia that led to the permanent integration of Bohemian lands into the sphere of Habsburg Catholicism and ruined all chances for religious tolerance, were reflected in the marginalization of Bohemian Reformation as an independent reform movement of the 16th century.¹² Were the Utraquist Church assigned its true importance within the history of the Reformation, there might easily be questions raised concerning the exclusivity of the German and Swiss Reformation, not to mention challenging the notion, long-prevalent in German historiography, of the exclusive path of German history. In general scholarly awareness, the Bohemian Reformation thus often remains outside of the main Reformation stream. And were it not for comparatively minded historians, who have gradually relativized the notions of modernity and genuine innovation in the early modern world and begun to realize the mental dependency of 16th-century people on the socio-cultural co-ordinates

¹¹ See Rudolf Urbánek, “Počátky českého mesianismu” [Beginnings of Czech Messianism], in *Českou minulostí. Práce věnované profesoru Karlovy university Václavu Novotnému jeho žáky k šedesátým narozeninám*, ed. Otokar Odložilík, Jaroslav Prokeš and Rudolf Urbánek (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1929), 124–145; Rudolf Urbánek, “Český mesianismus ve své době hrdinské” [Czech Messianism in Its Heroic Time], in *Od pravěku k dnešku: sborník prací z dějin československých: k šedesátým narozeninám Josefa Pekaře*, vol. 1 (Prague: Historický klub, 1930), 262–284; František Šmahel, *Idea národa v husitských Čechách* [The Idea of the Nation in Hussite Bohemia], 2nd ed. Historické myšlení 11 (Prague: Argo, 2000).

¹² On conceptions of the Reformation see a summary of a range of literature in František Šmahel, “Zur Einführung: Häresie und vorzeitige Reformation – causa ad disputandum,” in *Häresie und vorzeitige Reformation im Spätmittelalter*, ed. František Šmahel and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien 39 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998), VII–XIV.