
The 'Law of God': Reform and Religious Practice in Late Medieval Bohemia

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Around 1380 Pavel of Janovic, Archdeacon of Prague, personally visited more than 300 parishes in the Archdiocese of Prague. His visitation record survives. The visitation protocol is, among other things, an extensive dossier of clerical abuses, immorality, and an absence of concern for spiritual matters. Archdeacon Pavel reports that married pastors took more delight in song and drunkenness than they did in divine service. Other priests lived openly with concubines. Priest Václav, in the deanery of Poděbrady, frequently drank himself senseless and behaved improperly in the town of Hostomice. In the town of Všeradice the priests were numbered among the town drunks. Priest Jan was a heavy drinker and Priest Jakob seldom made it through a day sober. Priests acquired property and engaged in business to the detriment of their religious vows. Carmelite monks evidently were duping gullible women into questionable pseudo-medical treatments, the nature of which can only be left to the imagination! More shocking was the case of a presbyter who operated a lucrative brothel in his home. Many of his regular customers and frequent patrons were fellow clerics!¹

The church in Bohemia in the second half of the fourteenth century was clearly in need of reform. Church ownership of parishes in the Archdiocese of Prague was about 29%, though in the general vicinity of Prague itself the figure was closer to 54%, while in the diocese of Litomyšl the figure was just under 50%.² At the same time St. Vitus' Cathedral was served by 200–300

1) Ivan Hlaváček and Zdeňka Hledíková, eds., *Protocollum visitationis archidiaconatus Pragensis annis 1379–1382 per Paulum de Janowicz archidiaconum Pragensem factae* (Prague 1973) 45–6, 48, 163, 142, 144, 146, 69, 63, 49 and 71. See also Ivan Hlaváček, "Beiträge zum Alltagsleben im vorhussitischen Böhmen. Zur Aussagekraft des Prager Visitationsprotokolls von 1379–1381 und der benachbarten Quellen", *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 34–35 (1975) 865–882.

2) The ownership of parishes should be understood in terms of patronage which included control of parish property and the incumbent priest. See John Klassen, "Ownership of Church Patronage and the Czech Nobility's Support for Hussitism", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 66 (1975) 42.

clerics. In Prague alone there were 330 secular priests, 400 monastic clergy and 1,200 clerics studying at the Charles University.³ The power of the church was exceptional. It has been estimated that the church owned between 25%–50% of the Bohemian land.⁴ The high degree of secular power on the part of the church and limited lay ownership of church patronage, coupled with the papal schism from 1378 onwards, exacerbated the climate of religious discontent.

The Bohemian Reformation was not, at least in its early stages, a doctrinal or theological reform. It was rather a moral reform, hence the efforts of Konrad Waldhauser, Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, Matěj of Janov, Vojtěch Rankův of Ježov, Jan of Jenštejn and others. The dawn of the Bohemian Reformation provided a context for addressing socio-religious problems. By the time the curtain closed on the careers of Jan Hus, Jan Želivský, Jan Žižka and the “Warriors of God”, Jakoubek of Stříbro and the Táboriges, the shape of religious practice in Bohemia had been altered dramatically. The 1,200 clerics in Prague in 1400 would scarcely total 200 in 1500.⁵ Possibly 80% of the pre-Hussite church holdings were lost in the maelstrom of the Bohemian Reformation.⁶ At the height of the Hussite movement clerical drunkenness, gambling, simony or sexual immorality were all severely punished. A reform of the church “in head and in members” was being carried out, and all offenders, including the clergy, were subjected to punishment: “... by flogging, banishment, clubbing, decapitation, hanging, drowning, burning, and by all other retributions which fit ... [the particular sin or crime].”⁷

Following the execution of Jan Hus at the Council of Constance in 1415 the nascent reform movement rapidly began to coalesce. The emerging Bohemian Reformation cut a wide swath across the landscape of late medieval religious practice in the Czech lands. The unity of the Hussite movement found itself predicated upon the tripartite myth of St. Jan Hus, the

3) František Šmahel, *La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique* (Paris 1985) 22.

4) Zdeněk Boháč tends toward the former estimate. See his “Struktura feudální pozemkové držby v Čechách na prahu husitské revoluce” [The Structure of Feudal Land Tenure in Bohemia on the Eve of the Hussite Revolution] *Folia historica bohemica* 7 (1984) 7–38 while František Šmahel tends toward the latter figure. *La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique* 25.

5) Šmahel, “À l’aube de l’idée oecuménique: la réforme hussite entre occident et orient” in *L’Église et la peuple chrétien les pays de l’Europe du centre-est et du nord (XIV^e–XV^e siècles)*, [Collection de l’Ecole Française de Rome, 128] (Rome 1990) 277.

6) Šmahel, *La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique* 106.

7) “The Military Ordinance of Jan Žižka” in Frederick G. Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* (New York 1969) 492–7. The citation appears on 496.

lay chalice and what was vaguely referred to as the “law of God”. The martyrdom of Jan Hus provided the impetus. The lay chalice became the catalyst and the social expression both of the reform movement in general and Hussite religious practice in particular. The “law of God” [*boží zákon*] functioned centrally in the dynamic expression of the radical Bohemian Reformation and ultimately became the trigger for ecclesiastical and social transformation.

It would be a relatively easy task to collect the numerous instances of references to the “law of God” in the Hussite context and reconstruct from the proliferation of evidence the function and effectiveness of the idea. In relative terms there could be some usefulness to such an approach. However, the fact that the “law of God” appears in the slogans or songs of Hussite mobs in various parts of the country, in the writings and sermons of practically every major Hussite spokesperson, and throughout the length and breadth of the Hussite movement over the course of the Bohemian Reformation does not, in itself, prove that the notion was especially influential or particularly successful as a vehicle for promoting reform in religious practice. Indeed, the only reliable test is to analyze the effect and impact of the concept on behavior within its practiced context and, for our purposes here, on the content and configuration of religious practice within the framework of the fifteenth-century Bohemian Reformation.

I.

One of the bedevilling difficulties in dealing with the “law of God” has to do with definition. Far too frequently the concept is utilized without explanation. Nicholas of Dresden criticized the Roman Church for following modern innovations rather than the “law of God”.⁸ This seems consistent with his polemical juxtaposing of the old color (the primitive church) and the new color (the fifteenth-century Roman Church). Jakoubek of Stříbro, the ideologist of Hussitism, lambasted those components associated with religious practice which were not “founded on the law of God”.⁹ Practices not supported by Scripture could be maintained, Jakoubek contended in a sermon in the fall of 1420, if they did not violate the “law of God”.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Jakoubek equated the “evangelical law” with the “law of Christ” as the standard for religious practice.¹¹ Yet thus far the remains suspended in interesting rhetoric. On 25 January 1417 the Prague Hussite masters met in the parish house of Křišťan of Prachatice’s church, St. Michael’s in the Old Town. At this meeting they affirmed their position in the struggle *vis-à-vis* what was consistent with the “law of God”.¹² The St. Wenceslas’ Day Synod (28 September 1418), which met to respond to radical Hussite teachings, affirmed in article sixteen that whatever religious practice was beneficial to the “law of God” should be retained.¹³ Again the ambiguous phrase is left undefined. The radical Hussite separatist, Petr Chelčický, in his “Reply to Rokycana” (c. 1433) made the “law of God” normative to which nothing could either be added or subtracted.¹⁴ Much earlier the Hussite lawyer Jan of Jesenice, in what Howard Kaminsky has called “one of the most remarkable documents of Hussite political thought”,¹⁵ equated the “law of God” with civil

8) *Apologia pro communione plebis sub utraque specie* in Hermann von der Hardt, ed., *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, III, (Frankfurt/Leipzig 1698) col. 602.

9) *Epistola ad quendam plevanum de fumalibus, de ymaginibus, de censibus ecclesiae* MS Prague, NK III G 28 f. 225 “... quod non fundatur in lege dei ...”

10) František M. Bartoš, “Studie o Žižkovi a jeho době”, [Studies on Žižka and his Age] *Časopis českého musea* 48 (1924) 100–101.

11) *De quibusdam punctis* MS Prague, NK VIII E 7 f. 104.

12) The text of the declaration agreed upon by the masters appears in František Palacký, ed., *Documenta Mag. Joannis Hus vitam, doctrinam, causam in constantiensi concilio actam et controversias de religione in Bohemia annis 1403–1418 motas illustrantia* (Prague 1869) 654–56. Hereafter referred to as *Documenta*.

13) See the articles of the synod in *ibid.* 677–81.

14) “Replika proti Rokycanovi” ed., Karel Černý in *Listy filologické* 25 (1898) 268.

15) *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1967) 67.

law!¹⁶ Quite clearly this was not the predominate understanding in the Hussite ranks.

More in line with the main stream of the radical Bohemian Reformation was the conviction that the “law of God” was equivalent to Scripture. For example Jakoubek in his defence of the eucharist *sub utraque specie* insisted to Ondřej of Brod that the *revelatio* upon which the practice was founded had originated from “an evaluation of the law of the Lord”.¹⁷ There can be no doubt from the context that Jakoubek intended to equate the “law of God” and the Bible. Later, the Táborite bishop Mikuláš of Pelhřimov in the *Confessio Taboritarum* of 1431 insisted that the “law of God” was the sole, sufficient norm of conduct and truth and Scripture was that law. “Christ Jesus instituted one law and that is the old and new testaments”.¹⁸ John Wyclif clearly perceived the “law of God” in terms of Scripture and his influence on this transferred into the Bohemian milieu.¹⁹ But Wyclif’s understanding of the “law of God” went further.

... on the one hand, ‘there is no human law (*ius humanum*) except to the extent that it is founded in the divine law of God’, but on the other hand, ‘human justice (*iura humana*) is included in divine justice, indeed it is the law of God, insofar as it is helpful and serviceable to the law of God’. Human laws are to be sure imperfect, but so is everything else here on earth; in essence, what Wyclif is saying is that the laws of England are the law of God.²⁰

16) “Defensio mandati, quo rex Wenceslaus nationi Bohemicae in universitate studii Pragensis tres voces largitus est”, *Documenta* 355–63.

17) *Contra Andream Brodam pro communione plebis sub utraque specie* in Hardt III, col. 566.

18) Balthasar Lydius, ed., *Waldensia, id est conservatio verae ecclesiae*, (Rotterdam/Dordrecht 1616) I 94–5. The latter citation is from the speech of Mikuláš at the Council of Basel. See František M. Bartoš, ed., *Orationes, Quibus Nicolaus de Pelhřimov, Taboritarum Episcopus, et Ulricus de Znojmo, Orphanorum sacerdos, articulos de peccatis publicis puniendis et libertate verbi dei in Concilio Basiliensi anno 1433 ineunte defenderunt* (Tábor 1935) 40.

19) On this see Howard Kaminsky, “Wyclifism as Ideology of Revolution”, *Church History* 32 (1963) 57–74.

20) See Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, 33 for references to Wyclif’s *De officio regis* and his *De civili dominio*.

Only in a modified sense can this idea be found in the Bohemian Reformation.

What is clear is that the “law of God” had a central function in Hussite thinking. However, it seems necessary, especially in light of later Hussite practice, to modify Frederick Heymann’s definition of *boží zákon* as “the basic teachings of the Bible”.²¹ There can be no dispute that the “law of God” was related in some sense directly to Scripture. It would be more accurate, however, to associate the with the teachings of the Hussites based upon or extracted from the Bible. Eventually, of course, the idea came to be directly synonymous with the Four Articles of Prague. It might be most accurate to assert that the Hussites understood *boží zákon* as free preaching and utraquism, the first two of the Four Articles. Winfried Eberhard has insisted that the Hussites did not regard the “law of God” as did Luther who, on the basis of Pauline principles, perceived the gospel as the Word of God which when simply preached would effect the salvation of humankind and ecclesiastical transformation. Instead, in the pattern of Wyclif, the Hussites interpreted the “law of God” in the context of the ethical mandates of the Sermon on the Mount which then led to a point of departure for a new ordering of church, state, and ultimately the world.²²

II.

In the dawn of the Bohemian Reformation the idea of “truth” functioned as the precursor to the “law of God”. Jan Milíč of Kroměříž once asserted that plain folk would preach the simple truth while philosophers would go to hell!²³ In his inaugural speech as Rector of the university, on 20 October 1409, Jan Hus again pointed the way via truth. “Let our path be guided by faith and reason. Let us look to that which is right; may we avoid that which would detract from salvation; let us never be ashamed to speak the truth May we never resist the truth of God.”²⁴ Jana Nechutová has shown that Wyclif, Hus, Matěj of Janov and Nicholas of Dresden all related various terms to the “law of God”: *vita apostolica, regula apostolorum, evangelium, regula*

21) John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution 11 n. 9.

22) “Bohemia, Moravia and Austria” in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed., Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge 1992) 31 n. 29.

23) Vlastimil Kybal, *M. Jan Hus, Život a učení* II.1 (Prague 1923) 120–21 n. 4.

24) Evžen Stein, *M. Jan Hus jako universitní rektor a profesor* (Master Jan Hus as University Rector and Professor] (Prague 1948) 22. Reference is made to the “law of God” five times in Hus’ speech. Cf. 18–26.

principalis, veritas Prima, etc.²⁵ Wyclif, working within the philosophical categories of Platonic realism, perceived the “law of God” as related to supernatural values. Indeed, the relation of secular power to the “law of God” was straightforward in Wyclifite thought: the former was a utility to defend and enhance the latter. Petr Chelčický clearly read Wyclif in this way and in his “On the Triple Division of Society” asserted: “the secular power ... has to defend the law of God ...”²⁶ By the same token those living in accordance with the “law of God” are adjudicated to be children of God’s kingdom.²⁷ If Wyclif were a primary external stimulus for the law of God then it seems consistent to agree with Nechutová that Nicholas of Dresden was a primary internal impetus for the same notion within the context of the early Bohemian Reformation. Indeed, the “law of God” is one of the most important categories for Nicholas.²⁸ It is possible that Nicholas was influenced by Wyclif and Hus though, as some scholars have pointed out, he may well have derived his understanding of *lex dei* from the sectarian ideology of the Waldensians.²⁹ In any event the thought of Nicholas should be viewed as an integral component in the burgeoning Hussite conception of the “law of God”.

In the collective Czech consciousness the “law of God” had been rediscovered by St. Jan Hus.³⁰ Consequently, it was Jan Hus who later affirmed that the “law of God” was the most important social norm.³¹ Of course it was not Hus who implemented the idea as a vehicle for social change and revolution. It was Jan Hus, however, who clearly made the “law of God” the centering and central rule for all other standards. “I honor all

25) “Místo Mikuláše z Drážďan v raném reformačním myšlení” [The Place of Nicholas of Dresden in Early Reformation Thought], *Rozpravy Československé akademie věd* 77, 16 (Prague 1967) 15.

26) See the treatise in Howard Kaminsky, “Peter Chelčický: Treatises on Christianity and the Social Order”, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 1 (1964) 137–167. The citation is on 150. See also Wyclif’s, *Dialogus*, ed., A. W. Pollard (London 1886) 2–3.

27) Wyclif, *De ecclesia*, ed., Johann Loserth (London 1886) 90.

28) Nechutová, *ibid.* 49.

29) *Ibid.* 49–50. Nechutová is correct when she states that the idea of the “law of God” was one of the key elements in the thought of Nicholas. For Jan Hus’ understanding of *boží zákon* see Robert Kalivoda, *Husitská ideologie* [Hussite Ideology] (Prague 1961) 106–108.

30) Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* 11.

31) Amedeo Molnár, “Chebský soudce” [The Cheb Judge] in Jindřich Jirka, ed., *Soudce Smluvený v Chebu* [The Agreement of the Judge in Cheb] (Cheb 1982) 24.

general and particular councils, decrees and decretals, as well as all laws, canons and constitutions, so long as they are in explicit and implicit agreement with the law of God.”³² Hence, when the papal bull of 20 December 1409, prohibited preaching in the Bethlehem Chapel, Hus challenged it and continued to preach. His defence, drawn up by the shrewd Jan of Jesenice, argued that since preaching was commanded by the “law of God” no injunction, either secular or ecclesiastical, could “lawfully” prohibit the execution of the command.³³ Hus’ stand on this issue was a clear crossing of the line from reform to revolt and the beginning of the transition from reformation to revolution.

When Jan Hus was burned at the stake on 6 July 1415 the Bohemian and Moravian nobility drew up a formal protest to the conciliar fathers at Constance. Pledging to appeal to a future pope the nobles meanwhile stoutly declared their intention to defend to the point of bloodshed and death the “law of God”. As for future ecclesiastical decisions they stated their eagerness to obey, but qualified their intended adherence by declaring submission only insofar as the decisions were not contrary to the “law of God”! All detractors of this principle would be resisted.³⁴ When the eight copies of the protest arrived in Constance bedecked with a total of 452 seals of the Bohemian nobility, the conciliar fathers were taken aback with consternation at the “*stupenda et ridiculosa [documenta]*”, a most ... “*horrendum ... et ridiculosum spectaculum*”.³⁵ Though the nobles were all summarily summoned to Constance to answer for their rebellion, a summons incidently, that none of the 452 obeyed, from this point on the “law of God” became a cornerstone in the foundation of Hussite thought and practice. Within five years, under the leadership of the radical Prague priest, Jan Želivský the “law of God” became a vehicle both for ecclesiastical renewal

32) “Veneror etiam omnia concilia generalia et specialia, decreta et decretales, et omnes leges, canones et constitutiones, de quanto consonant explicite vel implicite legi dei.” cited in Kybal, *M. Jan Hus Učení*, II, i, 71.

33) See Václav Novotný, *M. Jan Hus. Život a učení* (Prague 1919), I, 409–410. See also the splendid work by Jiří Kejř, *Husitský právník M. Jan z Jesenice* [The Hussite Lawyer Master Jan of Jesenice] (Prague 1965) 33–4.

34) *Documenta* 580–84 for the text of the protest and 584–90 for a list of the attached names.

35) *Ibid.* 616. Only one of the original eight documents is extant and is now kept in Scotland under the signature Edinburgh, University Library MS. P. C. 73. How and when the document actually got to Edinburgh is a matter of speculation. Cf. David Cuthbertson, “The Protest Against the Burning of John Huss The Story of an Edinburgh University Parchment”, *The Library* 4 third series (1913) 146–156.

and social reform. In the hands of Priest Želivský the “law of God” became radically more socially constituted than it had been in the time of either Jan Hus or Jakoubek of Stříbro.³⁶ In short, the stage was set for a popular appropriation and implementation of the “law of God”. The Bohemian Reformation was about to open a completely new and innovative chapter in its development.

The centrality of the “law of God” within the Hussite *Sitz im Leben* was revealed dramatically in 1419 when Sigismund, heir to the Bohemian throne and Holy Roman Emperor-elect, marched into Brno to meet the Hussites and called for representatives of those who “adhere to the law of God”.³⁷ Without doubt Sigismund’s reference to the “law of God” is facetious. As one who perceived himself to be a devout adherent of the Roman Church, Sigismund certainly was convinced that it was he, and not those “rascal Husses and Heretics”, who represented the “law of God”.³⁸ Notwithstanding, the Hussites insisted upon presenting Sigismund with a demand that utraquism be recognized as part of the “law of God”.³⁹ Obviously, Sigismund could in no wise acquiesce in the Hussite ultimatum. In one sense, royal permission had little relevance for the matter because by that year the idea of the “law of God” had already gained a wide hearing and following in Bohemia. By August 1420 the Tábórites demanded that “pagan and German laws” should govern society no longer, but rather should be replaced with the “law of God”.⁴⁰ In short, all existing legal codes not in line with the “law of God” should be abandoned. Inherent also in a declaration such as this are the elements of nationalism and an anti-German stance.⁴¹ During this same time

36) Miloslav Ransdorf, *Kapitoly z geneze husitské ideologie* [A Chapter from Early Hussite Ideology] (Prague 1986) 197.

37) So reads an early chronicle. *Kronika velmi pěkná o Janovi Žižkovi, čeledína krále Václava* [The Very Pretty Chronicle of Jan Žižka, the Servant of King Václav], ed., Jaroslav Šůla (Hradec Králové 1979) xii.

38) “... schelk Hussen ... und Ketzer.” Eberhard Windecke, *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigmunds*, ed., Wilhelm Altmann (Berlin 1893) 172.

39) Palacký, ed., *Archiv český. Čili staré písemné památky české i Moravské* [Bohemian Records. Or the Old Written Bohemian and Moravian Monuments], (Prague 1844) III, 206–208.

40) “Item quod iura paganica et theutonica, que non concordant cum lege dei, tollantur et iure divino ut regatur, iudicetur et totum disponatur.” Vavřinec of Březová, *Historia Hussitica* in *Fontes rerum bohemicarum*, ed., Jaroslav Goll (Prague 1893) V, 398.

41) On this see František Šmahel, “The Idea of the ‘Nation’ in Hussite Bohemia”, trans. R. F. Samsour *Historica* 16 (1968) 143–247 and *Historica* 17 (1969) 93–197. These essays were revised and published in book form with an extensive bibliography. *Idea národa v husitských Čechách* (České Budějovice 1971). See also Roman Heck, “Národní a slovanska

the Tábórites gave concrete expression to their demand for the implementation of divine law by expressly calling for the Prague Town Council to follow only the “law of God”.⁴² This push to remove legal codes and to replace them with the “law of God” both called for theological and social restructuring. If the Four Articles were heretical⁴³, then the resulting heresy had religious, social and political implications. At least the radical side of the early Bohemian Reformation made the “law of God” a central issue. In November 1424 the Tábórite Synod in the southwestern Bohemian town of Klatovy convened and produced a series of decrees which were widely circulated and ratified.⁴⁴ Among their statements the Klatovy Synod made the following declarations about the “law of God”: 1) the “law of God” must be obeyed, 2) human laws not in accord with the “law of God” are to be rejected, 3) legitimate power may be seized by ordinary people in instances of abuse and when necessary for the implementation of the “law of God”, 4) the “dens of thieves and simoniacs” [*i. e.* churches] wherein the “law of God” is transgressed may be destroyed, and 5) the liberty of the “law of God” is paramount.

The year before Klatovy Jan Žižka had drafted his famous military rule at the Castle of the Chalice in northern Bohemia. The opening sentence declared “... we believe in and have received the enlightening of the certain, enduring, revealed and proven Truth and law of God”.⁴⁵ Žižka then went on to enumerate the “law of God” in the terms of the Four Articles of Prague. The entire program and thrust of Žižka’s agenda was related in terms of “the liberation of the truth of God’s law”.⁴⁶ The extant correspondence of Jan Žižka indicates clearly that the old soldier perceived his function within the

ideologie táboritů” [National and Slavonic Ideology of the Tábórites] *Jihočeský sborník historický* 40 (Supplement 1971) 22–30 and Stanislaw Bylina, “Le mouvement Hussite devant les problèmes nationaux” in *Studies in Church History Subsidia* 6, eds., David Loades and Katherine Walsh (Oxford 1990) 57–67.

42) Bohdan Zilynskyj, “Pobyty táboorského vojska v Praze roku 1420” [The Story of the Tábórite Troops in Prague in 1420] *Táborský archiv* 3 (1991) 16.

43) In some quarters they were certainly regarded as such. See Štěpán Páleč, *Tractatus contra quatuor articulos hussitarum* MS Vienna ÖNB. 4131 ff. 122–180’.

44) On Klatovy cf. Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* 500–516. More recently see Blanka Zilynská, “‘Epilogatio’ sporu pražských mistrů a táboorských kněží” [An ‘Epilogue’ to the Dispute of the Prague Masters and the Priests of Tábó] *Acta universitatis carolinae – historia universitatis carolinae pragensis* 28, 1 (1988) 31–39.

45) Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* 493.

46) *Ibid.* 496.

Bohemian Reformation as a spokesman for the “law of God”. “To the People of Třeboň” (1422) Žižka identified himself as “director of all communities of the Land of Bohemia which adhere to and fulfill the law of God”. “To the people of Domažlice” (1421) Žižka affirmed that the “law of God” was being sought. “To the people of Skalice and Náchod” (1423) Žižka claimed guidance by the “law of God”. “To the Brothers of Valečov” (1423) Žižka stated that the law of God was the unifying factor. “To the Plzeň Landfríd” (1421) Žižka issued this warning: “Do not oppose the law of God.”⁴⁷ As late as 1432 the “law of God” still remained central in the Hussite program and functioned most prominently in the formation of the so-called “Cheb Judge”. “In the dispute about the Four Articles which the Bohemians advocate, the law of God and the practice of Christ, the apostles and the primitive church, together with the Councils and doctors truly founded upon this practice, shall be accepted at the Council of Basel as the truest and indisputable judge.”⁴⁸ Thus, the “law of God” became the determining criteria for judgment at Basel in the case of the Hussites versus the Roman Church. It is not without significance that the definition of the “Cheb Judge” corresponds to the Tábórite confessional statement put forth by Mikuláš of Pelhřimov “Biskupec” the year before.⁴⁹

III.

The interpretation and implementation of the “law of God” fell into distinct categories, both in the learned and popular conceptions. Since the Bohemian Reformation was, initially, a moral reform, the “law of God” functioned as the impetus for enforcing morality. The fourth of the Four Articles of Prague called for the following: “all mortal sins committed against

47) *Ibid.* 489, 488, 492, 491, 487.

48) “In causa quatuor articulorum, quam, ut praefertur, prosequuntur, lex divina, praxis Christi, apostolica et primitivae, una cum conciliis doctoribusque, fundantibus se veraciter in eodem pro veracissimo et indifferenti iudice, in hoc Basileensi concilio admittentur.” See Johannes D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima Collectio ...* (Venice, 1792) 30, cols. 145–6 for the full text. The cited excerpt appears in col. 146. I have also consulted MS Prague, Bib. Cap. C 114 ff. 75–76 which contains the *Concordia in Egra de iudice*.

49) “... zákon boží, kristův způsob života i způsob apoštolský a prvotní čirkvé, koncily a učitele na něm pravdivě se zakladající.” Cited in Amedeo Molnár, ed., *Slovem obnovená* [Renewed by the Word] (Prague 1977) 79.

the law of God shall be prohibited and punished.”⁵⁰ Even before this formal declaration, the “law of God” had been used to enforce morality. Prior to the death of Jan Hus, Jakoubek of Stříbro, had called for the priests to destroy with the words of their preaching, in respect to the “law of God”, “all inconsistencies and sins, fornication, adultery, usury, avarice” and other practices contrary to God’s law. What the word of preaching could not destroy, the magistrates should complete by the power bestowed upon them by God.⁵¹ Article thirty-eight of the *Tractatus contra articulos errores picardorum* of 1420⁵² identified the Tábórites as eagles sweeping in to a feast. They are the “angels of God” [boží andělové]⁵³ who have come preaching the “law of God”, declaring righteousness and destroying sin. Only the five cities of refuge adhering to the “law of God” would be spared: Plzeň, Klatovy, Žatec, Louny, and Slany.⁵⁴

Two incidents serve to illuminate enforced morality under the banner of the “law of God”. At the Council of Basel, after Ulrich of Znojmo, the Orphan priest from Čáslav, had articulated the Hussite position on punishing serious sins, a hypothetical situation was put forth. Heinrich Kalteisen, the German Dominican inquisitor from the University of Cologne, remarked that if the Emperor Constantine had inadvertently caught a priest in the act of sexual intercourse, he would have covered up the cleric’s nakedness out of respect for his office. Without hesitation, Ulrich retorted that if that had occurred in Bohemia, the good vicar would have lost his penis!⁵⁵ The other event was more sobering. Prior to the battle of Neměcký Brod in January 1422, the Hussites found the body of a young girl in a shack at Nebovidy. She had been sexually assaulted by Sigismund’s men. The Hussites swore to avenge

50) “Quarto, quod omnia peccata mortalia et specialiter publica alieque deordinaciones legi dei contrarie in quolibet statu rite racionabiliter per eos, ad quos spectat, prohibeantur et destruantur.” Vavřinec of Březová, *Historia Hussitica* 394.

51) *De quisbusdam punctis* MS Prague, NK VIII E 7 f. 105.

52) There are a number of printed editions of these articles with varying titles. I refer to Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters* (Munich 1890) II, 691–700.

53) The term appears in Article fourteen of the long list of ninety Tábórite articles in Josef Macek, *Ktož jsou boží bojovníci, Čtení o Táboře v husitském revolučním hnutí* [Ye Warriors of God, Readings About Tábor in the Hussite Revolutionary Movement] (Prague 1951) 58.

54) *Historia Hussitica* 356.

55) “*Replica Ulrici de Znojma de parte Orphanorum contra doctorem Henricum Kalteisen, pronunciata in concilio Basiliensi 28. et 30. Martii 1433*” in Bartoš, ed. *Orationes ... Nicolaus de Pelhřimov ... et Ulricus de Znojmo* 132.

her death even at the risk of their own lives. The “law of God” clearly would be upheld and enforced.⁵⁶

Part of the radical side of the Bohemian Reformation was the implementation of the “law of God” by force. Early on, under Žižka, this was a purely defensive strategy. Later, under the leadership of Prokop Holý, offensive strategies were introduced. Jakoubek had asserted in his sermon for 15 March 1416 that it was the duty of secular lords to defend the “law of God”.⁵⁷ The enthusiasm for defending the “law of God” can be detected easily in popular songs, for example those written by the priest, Jan Čapek, which encouraged everyone to be ready to fight, to defend, and to follow the “law of God”.⁵⁸ “The Hussite Manifesto to the World” declared that the defenders of God’s law took up weapons against the enemies of the “law of God” and drove them out of the country.⁵⁹ Vavřinec of Březová referred to Jan Žižka as “the great and zealous defender of the law of Christ” [*legis Christi zelatore precipuo*].⁶⁰ If Žižka were indeed the defender of God’s law then Sigismund that “*inhumani regis*”⁶¹ was the great enemy of the “law of God” personified. Whenever the call went up for the Samson of God to go out against the “great red dragon” Žižka was ever prepared.⁶² Such a summons came in the late fall of 1421. A message from the Prague Hussites was delivered to Žižka asking for his help against the heretical king for the sake of their “... *fidem et honorem ac legis dei libertatem*”.⁶³ Žižka acted immediately. The illumination in the Jena Codex which portrays Žižka at the head of his

56) Palacký, ed., *Staří letopisové čeští od r. 1378 do 1527* [Old Czech Annalists from 1378 to 1527], in *Scriptores rerum bohemicarum* (Prague 1829) III, 48.

57) Karel Sita, ed., *Mistr Jakoubek ze Stříbra Betlémská kázání z roku 1416* [Master Jakoubek of Stříbro Bethlehem Sermons from the Year 1416] (Prague 1951) 54.

58) See for example František M. Bartoš, “Z politické literatury doby husitské” [Political Literature from the Hussite Age] *Československý časopis historický* 5 (1957) 31–2.

59) Amedeo Molnár, *Husitské manifesty* [Hussite Manifestos] (Prague 1986) 123.

60) *Historia Hussitica* 362.

61) *Ibid.* 529.

62) The “great red dragon” was Želivský’s term for Sigismund. It refers both to the beast of the Apocalypse, “... behold a great red dragon” [Rev. 12:3 RSV], as well as to the king’s reputed red beard. It could also be an allusion to the *Sárkanyrend* [Order of the Dragon]. This was founded by Sigismund in 1408 for the purpose of attending to the interests of the royal house. For a description of the Order of the Dragon and its functions, see Windecke, *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigmunds* 130. The term appears in *Historia Hussitica* 360.

63) *Historica Hussitica* 529.

troops depicts the preferred stance of the Hussite warrior. According to the accompanying text, the Hussites were obliged to defend the “law of God”. “In the year of the Lord 1419 the people arose against the clergy in the Kingdom of Bohemia on account of their evil deeds” They were led by “our faithful brother Žižka” [*Žižka, bratr náš věrný*].⁶⁴

The popular response to this aspect of the Bohemian Reformation likewise produced changes in religious practice. Sermons promising a new and better world on the basis of the rule of the “law of God” were beginning to garner attention and reap a harvest of plenty. Preaching in the monastery church of Our Lady of the Snows in Prague, the radical priest Jan Želivský inflamed his hearers with his forceful delivery of the Hussite gospel.⁶⁵ Želivský’s sermons placed religious orders together with kings, priests, and magistrates as those who afflicted the poor and opposed the “law of God”.⁶⁶ David Holeton has noted that “the texts and margins [of the sermons] are peppered with vitriolic comments on those in authority who Želivský sees as opposing the ‘law of God’”.⁶⁷ The great dragon, Želivský declared, is seeking to destroy the church⁶⁸ by means of the “faith of antichrist” [*fide Anticristi*] and “human traditions” [*tradicionibus humanis*].⁶⁹ “O good Christ, what immense idols the authorities have erected in Prague, endowed priests; what great idols are in the church, images, vestments!”⁷⁰ According to Priest Želivský evil clerics were increasing the kingdom of Antichrist [*regnum Anticristi*], refusing to speak out against the Devil and showing equal disregard for the truth.⁷¹ Given this scenario the Hussites, then, appealed

64) MS Prague, NK IV B 24 f. 76. There is a similar drawing in MS Göttingen, Universitätsbibliothek., Theol. 182 p. 75.

65) Želivský’s sermons preserved in manuscripts are in a difficult personal hand. There are two important edited and published collections. Amedeo Molnár, *Výzva Jana Želivského Výbor z kázání* [The Challenge of Jan Želivský A Selection of Sermons] (Prague 1954) and Molnár, ed., *Jan Želivský Dochovaná kázání z roku 1419* [Jan Želivský Sermons Preserved from the Year 1419] (Prague 1953). Molnár, before his death, had transcribed, but not edited, the second volume of Želivský’s sermons.

66) See his sermon for Monday of Easter Week [17 April 1419] in Molnár, *Jan Želivský* 29.

67) “Revelation and Revolution in Late Medieval Bohemia”, CV 36,1 (1994) 29–45.

68) Molnár, *Jan Želivský* 191.

69) *Ibid.* 117.

70) “O pie Criste, quanta ydola statuerunt principes in Praga, sacerdotes dotatos, vel quanta ydola sunt in ecclesiis, ut ymagines, pepla!” *Ibid.* 79.

71) “Non est ista confusio, quod sapientes huius mundi, magistri, prelati, nobilitati patrimonio crucifixi vel domino Constantini vel spolio pauperum vel symoniaca heresi,

directly to God to provide them aid in the conflict: “Let us ask the Lord God to help us fight bravely against the antichrist” who stands “against the law of God” [*proti božímu zákonu*].⁷²

Set in the night of antichrist⁷³ the struggle now turned into an all out battle for the establishment of the “law of God” in Bohemia. This law was considered to be the guiding principle for Tábor, Oreb, and all other communities of true believers. Popular sermons enjoined the true believers to fight for the “law of God”. After the violent insurrection of 30 July 1419, in which the civil government in Prague was removed by defenestration and the “law of God” imposed, the floodgates were opened for a popular interpretation and implementation of the radical agenda under the banner of the “law of God”.⁷⁴ Conviction of the law of God produced both passive and active responses to religious practice. In the former, certain Hussites, “having recognized the law of God” simply abandoned their former lives and went off to the hills to learn “truth”.⁷⁵ Others responded by correcting perceived abuses whenever and wherever they encountered them. Táborites in Prague cut the decorative mustaches off the burghers and stripped their wives of superfluous ornaments.⁷⁶ Iconoclastic tirades frequently were part of the implementation of the “law of God”. Churches of non-utraqvist leanings and the houses of their priests were attacked and often destroyed. Organs, statues, and religious art were laid waste. Incited by preachers such as Jan Želivský and Václav Koranda of Plzeň, Hussite mobs destroyed numerous religious houses: the Carthusian monastery was burned to the ground, Břevnov, Strahov, Plasy, St. Thomas in the Lesser Town, Mother of God at the End of the Bridge, St. Clement in the Old Town, St. Benedict, St. Mary

erubescunt populo predicare regnum Dei, sed regnum Anticristi magnificent, quia non audent os contra dyabolum aperire, quia tamquam nidum dyabolo congregant, neque gemere tamquam vulpes, veritatem propalare ...” *Ibid.* 181.

72) *Řeč o přítomnéu antikrist* [A Speech Concerning the Presence of Antichrist] MS Prague, Strahov DF IV 52 ff. 6, 1’.

73) “Nox signat vicia, et specialiter in nocte tempore Anticristi, sicut nunc est.” The term is Želivský’s used in his sermon for 19 April 1419. Molnár, ed., *Jan Zelivsky* 37. I have explored the Antichrist theme in an unpublished paper “The Night of Antichrist: Popular Culture, Judgment and Revolution in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia” CV 37,1 (1995) 33–45.

74) For the events of this transition see Howard Kaminsky, “The Prague Insurrection of 30 July 1419”, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 17 (1966) 106–26.

75) See the text of one of their songs in Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* [History of the Hussite Songs], (Prague 1956) VI, 186–87.

76) *Historia Hussitica* 371–3.

Magdalene, St. Ambrose, St. Katherine, St. Francis, and the Mother of God at Botiči, were all either damaged significantly or destroyed.⁷⁷

Even before the rise of the revolution, traditional religious practice had been challenged and contravened in Bohemia. Popular preachers around the castle of Kozí Hrádek and in the town of Ústí-nad-Lužnicí in south Bohemia had decried the use of priestly vestments and liturgical objects, celebrated the mass outside ecclesiastical sanction, deliberately, and without authorization, altered the liturgy, conducted worship in barns and in the open air, baptized in fish ponds, and generally derided common religious practice.⁷⁸ This sort of behavior naturally incurred the wrath of those not so inclined to obey the Hussite “law of God”. A long poem, “*Slyšte všickni, staří i vy, děti*” [Everyone Take Heed, Both Young and Old], accused the radicals of preaching with swords, of robbing and encouraging others to take up weapons. The Hussites were further censured for allegedly ordering the people to drink blood from the chalice and then engage in hostilities on behalf of the “law of God”, and if necessary, liquidate those who opposed them.⁷⁹ The “law of God” may have spelled righteousness, godliness and order for the Hussites, but for their detractors the Bohemian Reformation was a sordid practice of vice: “How you are noisy like bulls, cows, mice, Moors; thievery, murder, unchristian tricks, in reality this is your religion. Woe to you, Hus!”⁸⁰ The Hussites dismissed their opponents as students of “false learning”, blind leaders of the blind, ungodly, “Judas priests”, and mockers of the “law of God”.⁸¹ As far as the Hussites – the practitioners of the “law of God” – were concerned, the “Romanists” and “Germans” had committed blasphemy by opposing the chalice, Jan Hus, and the “law of God”.⁸²

The intoxicating spell of the fervor for God’s law led female Hussites in Prague to refer to the Tábórite preachers as “the angels of God”.⁸³ Traditions

77) Božena Kopiczková, *Jan Želivský* (Prague 1990) 59–60.

78) The account is anonymous and appears in *Documenta* 636–38.

79) The text is printed in František Svejkský, *Veršované skladby doby husitské* [Verse Compositions in the Hussite Age] (Prague 1963) 102–15.

80) So runs the song “Jiz se raduj, cierkev svatá” [Rejoice now, Holy Church]. *Výbor z české literatury doby husitské* [A Selection of Czech Literature From the Hussite Age], eds., Bohuslav Havránek, *et al.*, (Prague 1963) I, 290–92. The citation is on 291.

81) See the text in Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* VI, 181–83.

82) See the “Song About the Battle at Ústí” in Jiří Daňhelka, *Husitské písně* [Hussite Songs] (Prague 1952) 161.

83) See the reference in Anna Kolářová–Císařová, *Žena v hnutí husitském* [Women in the Hussite Movement] (Prague 1915) 127.

began to be built around the Hussite myth and fathers told their sons how the truth of God's chalice had arisen in Bohemia and how the Czechs had listened to the "law of God".⁸⁴ The radical tenets of the Bohemian Reformation, including that of the "law of God", can be found elsewhere in Europe. In Poland there were those who referred to themselves as "*duces thaboritorum*" and Ewa Maleczyńska claims it is no exaggeration to refer to them as Taborites.⁸⁵ Indeed, the radical tendencies of the Hussite movement can be detected in southern Hungary where Taborite ideas made some progress and inroads into Hungarian religious practice.⁸⁶ James Marchia, the papal legate to Hungary, reported in 1435 that "Hungarian Hussites" affirmed "that neither the pope nor the emperor has the power to make laws, but it is sufficient to observe the law of God". Furthermore, "that the law of Christ is sufficient for salvation without the laws invented by humans".⁸⁷ Such audacity naturally brought with it the perennial charge associated with practically all medieval deviance, heresy. Nevertheless, the Hussite "Declaration to Fight for the Defense of the Truth" stoutly affirmed "we will follow the law of God".⁸⁸ This Hussite insistence upon absolute fidelity to their understanding of the "law of God" not only affected religious practice but brought the claim that "throughout all the world resounded the rumor: The Bohemians are the sons of heretical depravity".⁸⁹ But even charges of heresy could not deter the Hussites. The "law of God" could never be denied and compromise was entirely out of the question. After the conquest of Vyšehrad in Prague in 1420 when subsequent negotiations caused the fortress to be given back to the enemies of the Hussites, Jan Žižka left Prague in anger, unwilling to be part of any concessional settlement with people he considered outside the boundaries of the "law of God".⁹⁰

84) Bartoš, "Z politické literatury doby husitské", 60.

85) Ewa Maleczyńska, "Vliv husitského hnutí na polsko" [The Influence of the Hussite Movement in Poland] in Josef Macek, ed., *Mezinárodní ohlas husitství* [The International Response to Hussitism] (Prague 1958) 73.

86) György Székely, "Husitství a maďarský lid" [Hussitism and the Hungarian People] in Macek, ed., *ibid.* 143.

87) "Quod neque papa neque imperator potest facere legem. Sed suffici[t] observare legem divinam." Article 20 of the *Articuli Hussitarum Hungariorum* MS Rome, Bib. Ap. Vat. lat. 7307, f. 23'. "Quod lex Christi sufficit ad salutem sine legibus inventis ab homine." Article 61, *ibid.* f. 24'.

88) Molnár, *Husitské manifesty* 231.

89) Ludolf of Sagan, "De longo schismate", ed., Johann Loserth in *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 60 (1880) 433.

90) *Historia Hussitica* 356.

In the popular Hussite mind the medieval church had missed the mark and was no longer following Christ. Petr Chelčický asserted that the Council of Basel in refusing to recognize Hussitism without qualification had rejected the “law of God” and had shown itself to be not of Christ, but of antichrist.⁹¹ With the convergence of folk heretics and learned heresies, under the “law of God”, the Hussites resisted unity with Rome. Instead, the radical stream of the Bohemian Reformation chose the freedom of the “law of God” over unity with Rome.⁹² The Hussites were convinced that since “Christ rules, antichrist will be destroyed!”⁹³ The Jena Codex shows a cardinal holding scales weighing the law of the pope, represented by the papal tiara, and the “law of God”, represented by the Hussite chalice. The chalice wins the test despite the efforts of a small devil who has latched onto the tiara side of the scales.⁹⁴ Quite clearly the proliferation of the slogan “Truth triumphs” within the Bohemian Reformation is a witness to the conviction that the “law of God” has prevailed. A drollery of a monk beneath a capital letter in a Hussite graduále bears this inscription: “*Ha ha, Monachus, Veritas Vincit*”.⁹⁵ When Sigismund managed to have himself crowned in the Prague Castle on 28 July 1420 the radical Hussite response to those who had taken part in the clandestine affair was to demand repentance in fear of the “law of God”.⁹⁶ Even near the very end of the revolutionary period after the disastrous fratricidal Battle of Lipany in 1434 a Czech chronicler bewailing the grim tragedy still couched his lament in the context of *boží zákon*: “Dear God, what a grievous loss, these Czechs and valiant fighters for Thine holy law.”⁹⁷ Clearly, there was but one objective in the struggle.

91) Chelčický essentially is relying upon statements made by Matěj Louda of Chlumčany, a Táborite, who was at Basel. See Chelčický’s “Reply to Rokycana”, 272.

92) “... abychom utvořili božskou jednotu za svobodu božího zákona...” “The Proclamation of the Pilgrims from Bzí Hora 17 September 1419” in Molnár, *Husitské Manifesty* 63.

93) “The Letter of All the Czech Land”, (1431) in *ibid.* 177.

94) MS Prague, KNM IV B 24 f. 25. Compare the same drawing in MS Göttingen, Universitätsbibliothek Theol. 182 p. 59.

95) Latin graduále, MS Mlada Boleslav, Mus. Reg. 1/70a *olim* II A 1 ff. 115’.

96) *Prorok koruny české ...* [The Prophet of the Czech Crown] in Jiří Daňhelka, ed., *Husitské skladby budyšínského rukopisu* [Hussite Compositions in the Bautzen Manuscript] (Prague 1952) 76.

97) Cited in František M. Bartoš, *The Hussite Revolution 1424–1437*, trans., J. Weir, ed., John M. Klassen, [East European Monographs 203] (New York 1986) 119.

On the other side, the view of the “law of God” with its Hussite law-giver Moses was exceedingly more suspicious. The anonymous anti-Hussite work “Václav, Havel and Tábor” expressed the concern thus: “When your Moses-Žižka the executioner talks to God ... [then the Hussites] will strike their clubs against the rock ... water will come forth from the rock. And when you cross the Danube on dry ground like the Israelites at Jordan ... when this happens all the land beyond the Danube will belong to you.”⁹⁸ Even other Hussites were genuinely skeptical of forcing the law of God. The archconservative Hussite Jan Příbram and his circle of support opposed Jan Želivský and Prokop Holý when the radical priests insisted that certain practices were harmful to the “law of God”. The Příbram circle laughed at the priests and retorted that the bloody sword was being held against the throats of the true faithful.⁹⁹ Surely the radical Hussites believed sincerely, and their opponents were duly fearful, that the adherents of the “law of God” could well cut a wide and deep furrow across the landscape of late medieval Europe. The furrow already dug by the Bohemian Reformation was being felt religiously, socially, and politically.

IV.

What was the effect of the “law of God” on behavior? How did it alter or establish religious practice in Bohemia? From the standpoint of doctrine or theology the following could be noted: the introduction of the lay chalice, apostolic rule in the community, a sense of realized eschatology, the Hussites as God’s chosen people, the armies of God are to rescue the embattled righteous and punish sinners, oppose anti-christ, and follow the “law of God”.¹⁰⁰ From the standpoint of liturgy, religious practice was only slightly altered in some contexts, and thoroughly innovative in others. The

conservative Praguers consistently chose the way of a more catholic looking liturgical reformation.¹⁰¹ By contrast, the Táborites simplified liturgy by centering worship around preaching and the eucharist while abandoning

98) MS Mnichovo Hradiště, Arch. Nat.1266 ff. 194’–213’. The full text has been published in František Svejtkovský, *Veršované skladby doby husitské* 116–50. The reference is on 142.

99) František M. Bartoš, “Pád Želivského” [The Fall of Želivský] *Jihočeský sborník historický* 21, 3 (1952) 77–8.

100) See my “Myth, Heresy and Propaganda in the Radical Hussite Movement, 1409–1437”, (Ph. D. diss., Cambridge University, 1992) 114–148.

101) See David R. HOLETON, “The Evolution of Utraquist Liturgy: A Precursor of Western Liturgical Reform”, *Studia Liturgica* 25 (1995) 49–65.

vestments and most ecclesiastical fixtures. Congregational singing was encouraged and the entire liturgy was performed in the vernacular.¹⁰² The *sanctorale* was reformed in a number of ways but most importantly in the elevation of Jan Hus to the status of “saint” and the celebration of his feast on 6 July.¹⁰³ A wealth of liturgical material was produced as a result of this feast.¹⁰⁴ The ideas of frequent communion, the lay chalice, and the lay chalice for all the baptized, including children, were further liturgical developments in the Bohemian Reformation. To varying degrees the use of the vernacular became standard liturgical practice.¹⁰⁵

Religious practice in Bohemia was further changed by the increased involvement of women and laypersons. As a result of the radicalizing of the movement and the implications of the “law of God” ordinary people gained a more active participation in religious matters.¹⁰⁶ A contemporary rhyme alluded to the fact that “the old woman is knitting, her clothes are tattered, but she knows the law of God”.¹⁰⁷

The social implications of the “law of God” were most evident in the Táborsite context: the chalice, legal codes abolished and replaced with divine laws, social egalitarianism/communism, remittance of debts and former social obligations, an invalidating of worldly authority structures, a renunciation of worldly goods, and a general, albeit short-lived, contravening of the old order.¹⁰⁸ It should also be pointed out that the revolution in the social order of estates within the conservative Prague ranks must figure, to some extent,

102) Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* IV 249ff.

103) Holeton, D. “The Office of Jan Hus: An Unrecorded Antiphonary in the Metropolitan Library of Estergom” in *Time and Community* [Festschrift for Thomas J. Talley], ed., J. Neil Alexander (Washington, D. C. 1990) 137–52.

104) See Jana Fojtíková, “Hudební doklady Husova kultu z 15. a 16. století” [Musical Documents of the Cult of Hus from the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries] *Miscellanea musicologica* 29 (1981) 51–142.

105) See the concise summarizing study by David R. Holeton, “Sacramental and Liturgical Reform in Late Mediaeval Bohemia”, *Studia Liturgica* 17 (1987) 87–96.

106) František Šmahel, “Husitští ‚doktoři‘ jehly a verpánku” [The Hussite ‘doctors’ of the Needle and the Cobbler’s Stool] in *Směřování Sborník k šedesátinám Amedea Molnára* [Directions Studies Presented to Amedeo Molnár on his 60th Birthday] ed., Noemi Rejchrtová (Prague 1983) 89–96. See especially 91.

107) Cited in Kolářová–Císařová, *Žena v hnutí husitském* 114.

108) See my “Myth, Heresy and Propaganda in the Radical Hussite Movement”, 148–167.

within the social implications of the “law of God”.¹⁰⁹ Radical Hussites, committed to the establishment of the “law of God”, emerged as power brokers in the Bohemian reformation: Ambrož at Hradec Králové, Jan Želivský in Prague, Matěj Louda of Chlumčany and Mikuláš Biskupec at Tábor. Indeed, Priest Želivský, perhaps more than anyone else, made the transition from detached social critic to active social revolutionary.¹¹⁰ The Hussites deprived the church of property and secular authority, though as František Šmahel rightly notes, “the secular power of the clergy had been pushed out of the door only to return rapidly by the window”.¹¹¹ This remained one of the paradoxes of the Bohemian Reformation which even the “law of God” could not resolve. Even though three quarters of the ecclesiastical landed property and about 170 monastic buildings were confiscated as a result of the implementation of the “law of God”,¹¹² the economic plight of the peasants remained virtually unchanged.¹¹³ However, the movement was not a class warfare, as some schools of thought have insisted. The Hussite movement was a union of persons from all classes in a common cause. It is this feature which sets the Hussites apart from other late medieval and early modern revolutions and rebellions.¹¹⁴

The “law of God” from the beginning to the end of the revolutionary period served as a clarion call to discipleship, righteousness and godliness, albeit played in a distinctively Hussite key! Jan Roháč of Dubá, as early as 3 February 1421 had warned the staunch Hussite opponent Oldřich Rožmberk to cease opposing the “law of God”. By the end of 1434 “The Táborite Manifesto of Jan Roháč of Dubá” was published in which Roháč declared

109) See especially Ferdinand Seibt, *Hussitica. Zur Struktur einer Revolution* (Graz/Cologne 1965) 181 and *passim*. While one must exercise more caution here in utilizing the “law of God” motif it is too restrictive to exclude this thesis from the revolutionary consequences of the Hussite movement as some scholars have done. While Seibt’s thesis has not found wide acceptance its merit should not be disparaged.

110) Božena Kopiczková, “Pražský radikalismus a valdenství” [Prague Radicalism and Waldensianism] *Pražský sborník historický* 20 (1987) 28.

111) František Šmahel, “The Hussite Critique of the Clergy’s Civil Dominion” in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edd., Heiko A. Oberman and Peter A. Dykema (Leiden/New York 1993) 89.

112) On this see Amedeo Molnár, “The Ideological Significance of Hussitism” *Communio Viatorum* 31 (1988) 119–120 with references to the Czech sources.

113) Rostislav Nový, “Poddání v husitské revoluci” [Subjects in the Hussite Revolution] *Husitský Tábor* 4 (1981) 93–100. See also John Klassen, “The Disadvantaged and the Hussite Revolution”, *International Review of Social History* 35 (1990) especially 266–272.

114) Jiří Kejř, *Husité* [The Hussites] (Prague 1984) 59.

that Sigismund was the greatest enemy of the “law of God” who, along with his henchmen, was seeking to conceal the truth of God from the people.¹¹⁵ Heretics from other countries were attracted to Bohemia because of the alleged freedom of the “law of God” and the practice of evangelical truth.¹¹⁶ The rumor was not farfetched. On 17 October 1425 peace between the quarreling factions at Tábor and Prague was reached at Vršovice. The “Peace of Vršovice” was to last for a year. In accordance with the decree a general assembly of all Hussite parties met in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague in January 1426. On 11 January Jakoubek opened the meeting referring to Jan Hus, the struggle, the famous rallies of 1419, the Four Articles of Prague, and the continued resolve both in Prague and at Tábor to defend the “law of God”.¹¹⁷ The following month a resolution of the regional assembly at Písek on 6 February indicated that the Tábórites “... were prepared to obey a properly constituted secular power as long as there was not disagreement with the law of God”.¹¹⁸ The continuity and centrality of the is remarkable.

The “law of God” became a virtual *leitmotif* for Hussite practice. Even if spelled out only in terms of the Four Articles, the results, in consequence of religious practice, were sweeping. Free preaching, completely divorced from the context of canon law, the doctors of the church, conciliar decrees, ecclesiastical tradition, and in some cases, the physical church itself, smelled suspiciously of defiance and revolution. The practice of utraquism not only circumvented ordinary Roman practice since the twelfth century, it also ignored the decree of the Council of Constance. By the time the Hussites got around to demanding the secularizing of ecclesiastical wealth, apostolic poverty for clerics, and the punishment of serious sins, religious practice, at least on the surface, seemed completely reconstituted. As noted previously, the social implications were equally far reaching. Even the long-held ideas of

115) The letter is translated in full in my “Myth, Heresy and Propaganda in the Radical Hussite Movement”, 372. The manifesto is dated 21 December 1434 and appears in Molnár, ed., *Husitské manifesty* 214–217.

116) Vavřinec of Březová reported that in 1418 forty “Picards”, along with their families arrived in Prague following reports of the favorable light Bohemia was extending to the “law of God”. *Historia Hussitica* 431.

117) On this see František M. Bartoš, “Sněm husitské revoluce v Betlémské Kapli” [The Meeting of the Hussite Revolution in the Bethlehem Chapel] *Jihočeský sborník historický* 18 (1949) 97–102.

118) Palacký, ed., *Archiv český* III, 256–59.

monarchy, social order, and the christendom did not survive intact after their confrontation with the Hussite “law of God”.¹¹⁹

To be sure the “law of God” produced a popular religion within the Bohemian Reformation.¹²⁰ Yet the popular understanding of the concept of the law of God seems to have remained somewhat vague. In some instances it merely produced a mob frenzy which gave way to unrestrained iconoclasm, destruction, and death. The Hussites promised so much that the emotional tidal wave which inundated Bohemia was inevitable. The band-wagon riders were caught up in the delirium of excitement, religious entrepreneurialism, and an uninhibited freedom seldom tolerated by medieval society. For a time the “law of God” turned the world upside down, and the peasants and ordinary folk went happily along. The popular support and enthusiasm for the “law of God”, even in its refreshing ambiguity, resembled the response to the preaching of the First Crusade by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095 when the audience in one accord cried out “*Deus vult*” – it is the will of God! Thus the “law of God” became the will of God and its vagueness seemed not to hinder its effectiveness.

Analyzing the “law of God” concept is especially helpful in measuring the goals of the Bohemian Reformation against the current trends in the church. The developments of the Hussite movement *vis-à-vis* reforming objectives and counter-balancing ecclesiastical trends elucidates the significance or lack thereof of the proponents of the “law of God”.¹²¹ The success of the “law of God” as a vehicle for religious and social change, though limited in many respects, can be attributed predominately to the reality that religion permeated society in late medieval Europe to a depth and extent that today is almost unimaginable.¹²²

Where the “law of God” failed socially and where it never totally succeeded religiously it is possible to point to its apparent, though perhaps temporary, success in its relationship to the “daughters of the devil”. From the twelfth century onward, there is a considerable preoccupation in clerical

119) John Klassen, “Images of Anti-Majesty in Hussite Literature”, *Bohemia* 33, 2, (1992) 267–281.

120) See my “The ‘Crown’ and the ‘Red Gown’: Hussite Popular Religion” in *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1300–1800*, edd., R. W. Scribner and Trevor Johnson (London, forthcoming).

121) One of the better analyses of these issues is František Šmahel, *Dějiny Tábora* [The History of Tábor], 2 vv. (České Budějovice 1988, 1990) especially v. I.

122) Kejř, *Husité* 41.

literature with the “daughters of the devil” who were married to the estates of society. A flyleaf of a thirteenth-century Florentine manuscript contains the following:

The devil has nine daughters whom he has married off:
simony to the secular lords
hypocrisy to the monks
rapine to the knights
sacrilege to the peasants
feint to the sergeants
fraud to the merchants
usury to the burgesses
worldly pomp to the matrons
and luxury which he did not want to marry
to anyone but whom he offers to all as a common whore.¹²³

Clearly, if we are to believe Archdeacon Pavel of Janovic and the Hussites, all the “daughters of the devil” lived in Bohemia in the later Middle Ages. The radical spirit of the Bohemian Reformation, summed up cogently in the principle “the law of God”, both contended with, and divorced all nine “daughters of the devil” leaving the spouseless estates to be courted by the Hussite “law of God”.

123) Cited in Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400–1500*, trans., Julia Barrow, (Oxford 1988) 263.