

---



---

**Matěj of Janov and His Work**  
***Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti:***  
**The Significance of Volume VI and Its Relation**  
**to the Previously Published Volumes**

---



---

**Jana Nechutová**

(Brno)

The teaching of Matěj of Janov, also called the Master of Paris,<sup>1</sup> is contained in his large work, *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*. It is in Latin with six sizable volumes, divided into five Books. The title, translated into English, means *The Rules of the Old and the New Testament*. František Palacký has written in his magisterial work on the progenitors of the Bohemian Reformation, that the title was not particularly expressive, for, strictly speaking, Matěj's work is "an investigation concerning true and false Christianity". Palacký's description of the content of Janov's work is correct, yet Janov's title seems to express the work's substance fairly well: after all the "rules" with their biblical origin and foundation ("of the Old and New Testaments") should be for the believer an introduction to the true and full Christian life. Among the biblical rules, which Matěj characterizes at the start of his work, there is the chief rule, *regula principalis, generalis*, which is identical with the Prime Truth in the Platonic – or more properly Neoplatonic – sense, and thus explicitly also with Christ. In this construction of dogma and moral theology in which the *regula principalis* serves as the starting point, as well as the purpose and the end, of all the other rules (*regulae*), we recognize two principles characterizing Matěj's teaching. (1) First, there was his biblicism, or the biblical principle, which subsequently would play a decisive role in the Protestant Reformation of Germany and Switzerland. Even observing the application of this principle in merely an extrinsic way, we note that Matěj, contrary to virtually all contemporary theologians, severely limits his references to the writings of the established fathers and doctors of the

---

1) As yet unsurpassed is the voluminous monograph by Vlastimil Kybal, *Mistr Matěj z Janova, jeho život, spisy a učení* (Prague, 1905). See also Václav Novotný, *Náboženské hnutí české ve 14. a 15. století* (Prague, 1915); Milan Machovec, *Husovo učení a význam v tradici českého národa* (Prague, 1953); Paul De Vooght, *L'hérésie de Jean Huss*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Louvain, 1975), 1:24–38; and three articles by Jana Nechutová, "Filosofické zdroje díla M. Matěje z Janova", *Filosofický časopis* 18 (1970), 1010–1018; "M. Matěj z Janova v odborné literatuře", *SPBBFU E* 17 (1972), 119–133; "Traktát Mikuláše z Drážďan *De imaginibus* a jeho vztah k Matěji z Janova", *SPFFBU E9* (1964), 149–162.

Church, and to the decrees of canon law. Instead, he concentrates on Scripture to which he refers frequently and extensively. (2) Second, there was the precept deriving from the task which Matěj attributed to the “fundamental Rule” (*regula principalis, principalis*), namely that every Christian is obligated by this Rule which operates outside of – and independently of – any institution. Hence the dogmas of the institutional church are not the obligatory norms. Theoretically, it would be possible from the outset to view this thesis as a heresy because it challenges the authority of the Roman Church. In the context of Matěj’s time, however, such a conclusion is not so easily drawn. Our author does not find the ecclesiastical institution problematic *per se*, but does have reservations about the contemporary church which, because of the schism within the papacy was deprived of one of its “marks” (namely, its unity) which is fundamental to its holiness.

Matěj’s biblicism is connected with a phenomenon which Amadeo Molnár calls “reductionism”. Often appearing in reforming currents within Christianity, this stance rejects everything that cannot be found in Scripture itself and which is not in accordance with the life, practice and example of Christ, his apostles, and the primitive church. These extraneous, non-Scriptural practices Matěj designates as human invention (*adinventiones, traditiones hominum*). Here we are at the core of his teaching: the truth of Christ stands on one side, human invention on the other. Antichrist (whom Matěj does not identify with a specific person) is the ruler of the world of human invention. The Body of the Antichrist (the Great Antichrist) is comprised those ecclesiastics (from both the regular and secular clergy) and laypeople who cling to human tradition and neglect the true core of Christian faith.

What, then, is that neglected true core of Christian faith and life? In conformity with the fundamental belief of the Church (regardless of time or place) Matěj affirmed that this centre is Christ, his cross and his resurrection. More specifically, Matěj affirmed that the visible and vivid sign of Christ’s grace and of his sacrifice on the cross is the eucharist, the sacrament of the altar, and specifically the sacramental reception of the body and blood of Christ. This communion is indispensable food for every Christian individual, for it not only unites each individual woman or man with Christ, it also leads to the true unity of mutual love among those Christians who share in the sacrament. Matěj calls this unity of Christians a “community of saints” (*communio sanctorum*). Thanks to the semantic range of the Latin word *communio*, Matěj – like mediaeval theologians in general – is able to use this term in a multivocally. First, he thus designates the sacrament of the altar (the eucharist or the Lord’s Supper) itself, as well as its effect that is, the union of believers with one another and with Christ. Second, Matěj uses *communio* as a synonym for the church. This definition of the church as *communio sanctorum* is not, of course, original to Matěj. Our theologian ultimately inherited this metaphor from St. Augustine and adopted it from the

Augustinian current in mediaeval theology. In general, the Bohemian Reformation gravitated to Augustinian theology, including the Augustinian variants of Platonic or Neoplatonic thought, in preference to the scholastic thought that dominated theological reflection in the High Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup>

From his belief in the unifying effects of communion, Matěj drew the conclusion that the sacrament must be received frequently by the laity, including both women and those living in the married state. Matěj lets this postulate resound frequently and loudly throughout the entire structure of his *Regulae* so that it can be regarded as the principal thesis of his work.<sup>3</sup> According to Matěj, frequent reception of communion augmented its saving and unifying strength. This power to save was of particular importance in these perilous times when the church had undergone a schism which left it with two popes each claiming to be head. Matěj's vehement advocacy of frequent sacramental communion led to the erroneous conclusion by some (including František Palacký) that our theologian stood for lay communion from the chalice, that is, for Utraquism. While a certain kernel of truth for this assumption lies in the fact that Matěj wished to equalize the rights to the eucharist of both the laity and the clergy, his remedy extended only to advocating equal and frequent access to communion and not to restoring the distribution of the chalice to the laity. Another probable cause of this erroneous opinion about Matěj's alleged Utraquism was the fact that the subsequent advocates of the chalice, particularly the early theoreticians of Utraquism such as Jakoubek of Stříbro and Nicholas of Dresden, sought support for their position in Matěj's writings. Both Jakoubek and Nicholas quoted frequently and copiously from the *Regulae*, though usually – according to the custom of the times – without mentioning Matěj's name.

As noted earlier, the true believers, who form the body of Christ, or the one and true church of Christ, are opposed (according to Matěj) by the body of the Antichrist whose members are distinguished by their adherence to human tradition, or their attachment to “human invention”. Among these traditions Matěj denounces most emphatically the veneration of images and statues which divert, in the most dangerous and marked manner, the simple believer's attention from the core of the Christian message. To this concern, the author of the *Regulae* devotes, among other passages, the entire Sixth Distinction of the Fifth Book. Subsequently, Matěj's teaching would become one of the sources of the Hussite iconoclasm. Jakoubek and Nicholas also responded to this aversion to sacred images.

As a precursor of the Bohemian Reformation, Matěj naturally connects the person of the Antichrist with eschatology (the science of the last things).

---

2) On Matěj's teaching about the church, see Emil Valasek, *Das Kirchenverständnis des Matthias von Janov* (Rome, 1972).

3) In his *Učení M. Matěje z Janova o častém sv. přijímání* (Olomouc, 1946) Ondřej M. Petru devoted an entire monograph to this aspect of Matěj's teaching.

He is not, of course, fully original in his concept of the Antichrist, or in his expectations of the end of all things after the coming of Elijah and Enoch, and after the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into this world. Such apocalyptic forebodings were endemic in his century filled, as it was, with catastrophic events. Matěj could seek inspiration for their theological formulations in the (at times) extravagant writings of his compatriot, Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, who in turn drew on contemporary popular prophecies, such as those of the Sybils, Cyril, and Jean de Rupesciss. Another source of Matěj's inspiration in the field of eschatology came from French theology and mysticism, with which he became familiar during his stay at the Sorbonne. In particular, the treatise of the Parisian Masters, *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, dating to the early thirteenth century, appears in its entirety in the Third Book of the *Regulae* in which it forms a part of the Distinction dealing with Antichrist. There were also attempts to relate Matěj's eschatology to the teaching of Joachim of Fiore, the famous Cistercian abbot of Calabria.

\* \* \*

Matěj was born sometime in the period between 1350 and 1355 and, according to the best reckoning, in Janov near Mladá Vožice in Central Bohemia. Soon thereafter, still in his early youth, he came to Prague where for a brief time he was either a pupil, or at least an eager listener, of Jan Milíč of Kroměříž. It is thought probable that his journey to, and stay in, Prague was facilitated and even financed by his older countryman, Vojtěch Raňkův, a Master of the University of Paris and a professor at the University of Prague, who stemmed from, and was surnamed after, the village of Ježov, not far from Mladá Vožice. Matěj was profoundly influenced by Milíč's intellectual example as well as by his homiletic prowess; the impact of Milíč's personality would follow him throughout his life, and would provide him with numerous stimuli in his theological work. Beginning in 1372, we find Matěj studying in Paris, probably again subsidized by Vojtěch Raňkův of Ježov. Living in considerable financial straits, he nevertheless attained the degree of master of liberal arts in 1376. Thereafter he lectured at the faculty of arts, and continued his studies at the faculty of theology, from which, however, he never obtained a degree.

The University of Paris profoundly impressed Matěj. Whenever he refers to his alma mater in his literary work – and he does so often – he speaks of her not only with respect, but also in tones of deep affection and devotion, often waxing almost poetic. Vlastimil Kybal, in his unsurpassed, and perhaps unsurpassable, study of Matěj identifies Matěj's stay in Paris, and specifically his studies at the theological faculty, as the second seminal influence on his thought, next to the impact of Milíč. Through the Parisian theologians and his study of Augustine and Jerome, Matěj discovered Scripture which would

become the wellspring of his theological consciousness and the paramount source of his teaching.

Returning to Prague in 1381, Matěj found shelter in the house of Vojtěch Raňkův and, with his benefactor's assistance, was appointed a confessor and titular canon without a benefice at St. Vitus Cathedral. Evidently he gained a decent living only in 1388 when he was provided as prebend in Velká Ves near Podbořany in Northern Bohemia. A vicar performed the parish duties, while Matěj received the income from the benefice. Remaining in Prague, Matěj apparently continued to serve as confessor and preacher at St. Vitus while pursuing his literary projects. In addition, he evidently preached occasionally in Czech at St. Nicholas Church and in the Old Town of Prague. The archiepiscopal consistory, however, found some of the views expressed in his sermons objectionable. Summoned before the archiepiscopal court on the occasion of the Prague Synod of 19 October 1389, Matěj was forced to publicly renounce certain of his opinions such as those concerning the veneration of saints and the frequent communion of the laity. Although Matěj did so (reluctantly and with troubled conscience), he was still inhibited from any public activity or appearance in Prague for half a year.

He clashed again with the archiepiscopal curia on 14 July 1392 when he faced the Vicar General of the archbishop of Prague. Evidently on this occasion he was confronted by the subsequently controversial Johánek of Pomuk (Jan Nepomuk) who, at the archbishop's request, was to assess the orthodoxy of two of Matěj's books, which have been subsequently lost and whose contents are unknown. The denouement of this trial is also unknown. Again, on 13 September 1392, Matěj stood before the archbishop's court, but we are ignorant of the charge. We only know from the court's records that in the resolution of this case Matěj promised obedience to the archbishop and that Master Jan, in turn, granted him permission to continue performing his priestly functions.

It is remarkable that, despite this harassment, Matěj scored, within his lifetime, a major victory for the desirability of frequent communion for the laity of both sexes. It so happened that the contemporary orientation of religious life toward a charismatic spirituality aroused the yearning for frequent communion in many churchmen, including Vojtěch Raňkův and, above all, Jan of Jenštejn, the Archbishop of Prague. The synod of June 1391 permitted lay people to receive the sacrament of the altar as often as it was appropriate to their perceived spiritual needs.

Matěj died soon thereafter, on 30 November 1393 although, until recently, the year 1394 was the date usually cited, despite the fact that Zdeněk Nejedlý had pointed out the error of such a dating as early as 1906. By a curious coincidence death came in the same year to two contrasting figures of Czech religious history: to Jan of Pomuk who was later canonized by the Roman Church and transformed into a symbol of the Bohemian Counter Reformation, and to our Matěj who would be recognized as a

seminal inspirer of the Bohemian Reformation. Ironically, both men were to have their mortal remains interred in St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. While Matěj died young (only a little over forty) his historical role and theological influence are those of one who had lived to a much greater age. In this light, his achievements seem even more remarkable.

In any assessment of Matěj's character and accomplishments there are certain problematic issues which cannot avoid mention. Among these are his non-residence while holding title to the parish of Nová Ves, as well as his apparent avarice in pursuing benefices while in Paris where he twice (in 1377 and 1382) turned to the papal curia with his requests. Apparently Matěj had no aversion to resorting to ecclesiastical courts to exact a source of income. The moral side of such quests must be judged cautiously and in the context of the times. It would be unfair simply to conclude that Matěj failed to adhere to the moral principles enshrined in his writings. The secular (i.e. diocesan) clergy of the time could not live without the income guaranteed by an ecclesiastical benefice. Matěj's pursuit of a benefice before returning to Prague must be understood as a means necessary to insure his livelihood once home. Thus, Matěj's actions are not a reprehensible betrayal of moral principle, but rather a common approach to the solution of existential needs.

This having been said, it also meant that Matěj was a man of different mettle than his master, Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, who chose the path of heroic moral virtue. Milíč was willing to abandon a secure income, and to risk relying on the vagaries of charity in order to finance his shelter for former prostitutes, as well as his assistance to those in material or spiritual need. In his thirst for justice, he took seriously and literally the call to evangelical poverty. As Matěj himself testifies in the biography of his saintly master, Milíč abandoned both his property and his profitable post in the royal chancery for the life of voluntary poverty which he then dedicated to preaching the word of God and to serving the poor and needy. Matěj was a quintessential intellectual, not a man of practical affairs. He was not suited to seek out sponsors or secular patrons and, instead, subsisted in the manner standard for the secular clergy of his time. It is evident, however, from various allusions in his principal work that he did experience the pangs of conscience for his conformity in these matters.

Aside from his pivotal work, *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, relatively little has survived from Matěj's writings:<sup>4</sup> two treatises, *Super passione Cristi* and *De decem preceptis*, and several sermons. As noted earlier, *Regulae* is a voluminous work divided into five Books, which Matěj began writing around 1387. The Books are subdivided into Tracts, Distinctions, and Chapters. Aside from a general prologue, there are

---

4) For a listing of his works, see Pavel Spunar, *Repertorium auctorum Bohemorum protractum idearum post Universitatem Pragensem condidam illustrans* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1986).

prologues to the individual Books, and to some of the lesser subdivisions.<sup>5</sup> The *Regulae* have the status of the first work of systematic theology in the Bohemian Reformation. Its influence was particularly important in the development of theological positions on the Antichrist, frequent communion, and the veneration of images where it served as a major source especially for Jakoubek and Nicholas of Dresden. The literary and stylistic aspects of Matěj's work have not yet been fully analyzed and assessed. In general it is possible to say that the text is prolix and tests the reader's stamina with its frequent repetitions, but the specific doctrinal formulations are precise in substance and couched in an expressive diction which can be truly inspirational.

The publication of Matěj's *Regulae* has extended over almost the entire twentieth century. Books I–III, edited by Vlastimil Kybal, were published in Innsbruck as volumes 1–4 in 1908–1913 (in the series *Prameny českého hnutí náboženského ve XIV. a XV. století*); Book IV, edited by Kybal and Otakar Odložilík, appeared as volume 5 in Prague in 1926; and finally Book V, edited by Jana Nechutová with the assistance of Helena Krmíčková, as volume 6 in Munich in 1993 (in the series *Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum*).<sup>6</sup> Hence the entire edition was completed with the publication of Book V as volume 6 of the entire work, with the discrepancy caused by the fact that Book III occupies two volumes (3–4). Collegium Carolinum, and particularly Professor Ferdinand Seibt, deserve the principal credit for the publication of the final volume at a time when suitable conditions did not exist in former Czechoslovakia. Academia, which was to have published the final volume, withdrew from its undertaking in the 1970s. The various university series within the Republic did not offer viable alternatives because of the unusual length of the volume. The eventual publication in Munich in 1993 happily coincided with the six hundredth anniversary of Matěj's death, the *Regulae* themselves probably being completed the year preceding his death.

Let us now turn, at least briefly, to the overall context of Matěj's role among Hus's predecessors and to the circumstances behind the launching of the Bohemian Reformation. Let us recall the character of the second half of the fourteenth century pregnant, as it was, with crises; the political importance of Charles IV's reign; the character of ecclesiastical administration under archbishops Arnošt of Pardubice, Jan Očko of Vlašim, and Jan of Jenštejn; and the beginnings of the so-called early Czech humanism, the extent of which still remains controversial. Of singular importance are the principal currents of spirituality of that period: these should be divided into two types. The first is represented by the spirituality of

---

5) The prologues in Matěj's *Regulae* are discussed in Miloslav Šváb, *Prology a epilogy v české předhusitské literatuře*, [Monografie Pedagogické fakulty v Plzni, 1] (Prague, 1966).

6) A selection from the *Regulae* appeared in Czech as *Výbor z Pravidel Starého a Nového Zákona Matěje z Janova, Mistra Pařížského*, tr. Rudolf Schenk (Prague, 1954), with an introduction by Miloslav Kaňák.

the monasteries, that is not only Cistercian and Premonstratensian, but also Augustinian and ultimately even Franciscan. This spirituality is marked by a strong tendency towards introversion. It emphasizes personal piety and a personal approach to God, following a progression from initiation to an advanced state and finally to a state of perfection [*perfectorum*]. The other type of spirituality is rather extroverted and socially directed with an inclination more to the *vita activa* than to the *vita meditativa*. This type is marked by a concern for the external state of the church and society, and hence has a tendency toward a vociferous and relentless critique of conditions, focusing on the Curia, but also applied to the church in its entirety. At the same time, it should be pointed out that theoretically and overtly both types preach an ideal of *vita mixta*, that is the ideal of combining the active and the contemplative life. In practice, however, the emphases of the two spiritualities are mutually contradictory. The inheritors of both types of spirituality are Hus and the Utraquists, in other words the Bohemian Reformation.<sup>7</sup>

Matěj belongs to the second current, the outwardly directed *vita activa*, although the *via contemplativa* is not entirely alien to him. As stated earlier, the principal thrust of his work is an exhortation to frequent communion by the laity. In this exhortation there resound both an internal genuineness and a deepening of the personal piety of the individual who craves the frequent communion. What is important above all, however, is Matěj's conviction that the remedy for the contemporary deplorable state of the world can be found nowhere else except in a renewed emphasis on Christianity's central core, that is in Christ and his visible presence, in other words in the sacrament of the altar. Other papers in this collection deal with the eucharist's significance for the developmental thrust of the Bohemian Reformation. As far as the eucharistic aspect is concerned, Matěj is the first in his time to offer an extended theological foundation for the centrality of the reception of the eucharist by lay Christians. Various adumbrations are present in the teachings of his predecessors, particularly Milíč of Kroměříž, as well as of his contemporaries, such as Matthew of Cracow and Henry of Bitterfeld. The subject is also touched upon by the author or authors of the Cistercian *Malogranata*, the outstanding work of monastic spirituality in contemporary Bohemia.

Matěj discusses the issue of frequent communion briefly, under the title "De venerabili sacramento", in the second tract of the First Book, and then more fully in the entire Fourth and Fifth books. The recently published Fifth Book is titled simply *De corpore Christi*. Despite the fact that Matěj's extensive *Regulae* contain frequent repetitions, to the point of tediousness for the reader, without the edition of this volume, our notion of Matěj's conception of

---

7) Here we are putting aside the terminological confusion, with some preferring to substitute for "Bohemian Reformation", terms such as "The Reform", "The First Reformation", or merely "The Reformational Currents".



the eucharist would remain incomplete. I would like to point out at least one Distinction, demonstrating the broad scope of his cultural and historical vision (rather unusual for his time), which can range over the institutions of both Old Testament Judaism and Pre-Christian antiquity. He can speak about the Jewish Passover, or about pagan rituals and sacrifices, as containing the precious embryos of recognizing God's salvific relationship with human kind. Hence the sacrifice of Christ, in a sense, both perfected and fulfilled the earlier rituals and sacrifices of both Jew and gentile. A careful reading of this Distinction's text reveals Matěj's view that the offering of sacrifice, as a realized archetype, is initially approached through several imperfect steps or stages. While it is certain that this view is not original with our theologian (similar analogies could be undoubtedly found elsewhere in scholastic and patristic literature beginning, perhaps, with Augustine). Nevertheless, within the context of Czech theological thought, this view had an aura of startling novelty and freshness in the fourteenth century.

Parts of the Fifth Book have been available since 1954 when Rudolf Schenk translated them from an early fifteenth-century manuscript for his *Výbor z Pravidel Starého a Nového Zákona Matěje z Janova, Mistra Pařížského*.<sup>8</sup> Among other topics, his selections also cover some of Matěj's views about images and statues in churches, in other words about the use and misuse of ecclesiastical art. The full coverage of Matěj's views, *De imaginibus*, which comprises the Sixth Distinction of the Fifth Book, is however contained only in a manuscript in the Chapter Library in Olomouc.<sup>9</sup> This manuscript is used in the new edition of *Regulae*, but not by Schenk in his selections. Hence the text of the Distinction *De imaginibus* has been available in print only since 1993. Because of its paramount importance for Czech cultural history, I republished this text a year later with a Czech translation in order to increase its accessibility.<sup>10</sup>

Matěj restates in this connection that the sole binding principles of Christian existence are to be found in the life of Christ and the practice of the primitive and Apostolic church, and, above all, in the truth revealed in Scripture by Christ, the Word of God. What is not in harmony with those principles is human invention which Matěj saw as belonging less to Christian faith than to the arsenal of the Antichrist. Church decoration, such as alluring paintings and statues, are not only irrelevant to primitive Christianity, but also distract the believers' attention from what is central to that which is superficial, extrinsic, and even harmful. Hence, images should be removed from churches. Matěj, however, does not embrace an uncompromising iconoclasm. Outside the churches, he allows for the existence of such images for pedagogical reasons, if they communicate the message of Christ

---

8) See note 6 above.

9) Under the signature CO 211.

10) See Milan Machovec and Jana Nechutová, *Mladá Vožice k počtě M. Matěje z Janova* (Mladá Vožice, 1994).

and his saints in a suitable manner; he simply requires that images do not distract the faithful from the path towards their true centre which is Christ and the sacrament of the eucharist. Nevertheless, Matěj's Sixth Distinction, which was often cited during the Bohemian Reformation, particularly by Jakoubek and Nicholas of Dresden, was also misinterpreted and embraced by those who uncompromisingly opposed paintings, statues, and religious art in general.

The publication of the Fifth Book marks the following: (1) it completes the edition of Matěj of Janov's *Regulae*; (2) it provides for the first time a full knowledge of his teaching about frequent lay communion; (3) it completes our understanding of Matěj's view concerning images. In addition, (4) the volume is important from the viewpoint of manuscript sources as it is the only volume to utilize the above-mentioned Olomouc manuscript.<sup>11</sup> Jan Sedlák discovered this source early in the twentieth century, but even Otakar Odložilík could not yet use it fully as a basis for his edition of the Fourth Book of the *Regulae*, despite his conviction of its importance. The issue of the manuscript sources, however, is too complex and technical to be discussed here. The interested reader should turn to the introduction of the Fifth Book. The Munich edition of 1993 contains the relevant information in Latin, as well as in an abbreviated German version.

(Translation from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David.)

---

11) See note 9.