
“Feel this!” Jan Hus and the Preaching of Reformation

Thomas A. Fudge

(*Christchurch, New Zealand*)

In his sermon for Palm Sunday 1406, in a moving display of oratory, the Prague priest Jan Hus enjoined his congregation neither simply to hear nor to know, but to feel the message. “He [Christ] puts death to flight, and restores us to life: Feel this! He was killed that he might make whole, he died that he might live: Feel this! He is spotted that he might cleanse: Feel this!”¹ The repeated Czech equivalent of the Latin *Hoc sentite* brought preacher, gospel and congregation together in a unique liturgical and spiritual relationship.

Jan Hus has remained a contested figure of late medieval history. He is either heretic or saint, criminal or martyr, Czech hero or vilified outcast, profound thinker or plagiarizer. To this day he remains controversial. Whatever conclusions history may yet draw concerning this peasant from south Bohemia, Jan Hus was first and foremost a preacher. Popular songs sung by his followers gave fervent testimony: “If you want to know the Bible, you must go to Bethlehem and learn it on the walls as Master Jan of Husinec preached it.”² On the walls of his preaching center, the Bethlehem Chapel, Hus had inscribed several texts in Latin and in the common tongue. Moreover, pictures on those same walls attracted attention for many years.³ Hus later counselled his followers to learn the truth on the walls of the chapel of Bethlehem.⁴ Other Bohemian popular songs lauded Hus as a most honest preacher.⁵ Even his later detractors acknowledged his exceptional presence as a preacher of the gospel. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, referred to Hus as a powerful speaker.⁶ Modern scholars have described Hus’ sermons as the chief event of the times,⁷ while others

¹Jan Hus, *Sermo in Dominica Palmarum*, Opera Omnia 7:168.

²Jiří Daňhelka, ed., *Husitské písně* [Hussite Songs] (Prague, 1952) 133.

³There are several studies of these pictures in their historical context and evolution. František M. Bartoš, “Po stopách obrazů v Betlemské kapli z doby Husovy,” [An investigation of the symbols at the Bethlehem Chapel from the time of Hus] *Jihočeský sborník historický* 20 (1951) 121-7, and several related essays by Thomas A. Fudge, “Art and Propaganda in Hussite Bohemia,” *Religio. Revue pro religionistiku* 1,2 (1993) 135-52, “Visual Heresy and the Communication of Ideas in the Hussite Reformation,” *Kosmas: Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 12,1 (1996) 120-51, “Visual Heresy and Popular Religion in Early Modern Europe,” *History Now Te Pae Tawhito o te Wā* 3 (May 1997) 1-7 and *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* [St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History] (Aldershot, 1998) 178-274.

⁴S. Harrison Thomson, ed., *Magistri Johannis Hus Tractatus de ecclesia* (Cambridge and Boulder, 1956) 217. František Šmahel, “Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia,” in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, eds., Anne Hudson and Peter Biller (Cambridge, 1994) 238 underscores the potential problems confronting the laity with respect to Latin inscriptions.

⁵Daňhelka, ed., *Husitské písně* 143.

⁶*Historia bohémica in Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1571) c. 35.

⁷František Palacký, *Geschichte von Böhmen*, 5 vv. (Prague, 1836-67) 3,1:214.

have asserted that Jan Hus controlled Prague from his pulpit.⁸ The hyperbole suggests a kernel of truth. One of the primary sources for an indication of Hus as a reformer can be found in his preaching activity.⁹

Preaching specifically, and the sermon in general, played an essential rôle in later medieval European society. Even as late as the sixteenth century, more than one hundred years after the invention of the movable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, Europe remained an oral culture. Books may have proliferated but the majority of people in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages were conventionally illiterate. Preaching, then, in such a context took on the importance of instruction, the communication of ideas and therefore was a social force essentially unrivalled. By the fifteenth century popular preaching came more and more to function in the life of the community. Jan Hus would preach *ad clericos* [to the clergy] as well as *ad populum* [to the people]. In these contexts his sermons became both a lamp and a mirror on life in late medieval Bohemia. It was his sermons to popular audiences which galvanised the already developing reform movement in Prague; a tradition already a generation in the making. His activities constituted the preaching of reformation. The repetition of sermons, frequent preaching, increased the effects of reformation and potentially expanded the range of advocates for the reforms demanded.¹⁰ In this attention to popular preaching Hus was no innovator. Indeed, he stood in a long line of popular preaching tradition in late medieval Bohemia: Konrad of Waldhauser, Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, Matěj of Janov, Jan Protiva, Štěpán of Kolín, Jan of Štěkna, Petr of Stupna and others.¹¹ Such traditions were not unusual. Popular preaching had been widespread in Europe from at least the twelfth century and there is legislation in the capitularies of Charlemagne from the ninth century calling for vernacular preaching. Sermons in the common language came to occupy a central place in the development of reformation in Bohemia. Once again, the Hussites were not the originators of this practice. Indeed, sermons preached in the vernacular both to clerical and lay audiences were fairly widespread in western Europe by the fifteenth century.

Jan Hus inherited this medieval preaching tradition. What makes Hus worthy of attention is his persuasive preaching of reformation. Bethlehem Chapel was the third such church in Prague dedicated to those reforming trends beginning to emerge in Bohemia.¹² A recognition of his qualities as a preacher precipitated Hus' appointment

⁸František Kavka, *The Hussite Movement and the Czech Reformation* [Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale 5] (1960) 837.

⁹Thomas A. Fudge, "Il predicatore di Jan Hus," in *Dizionario de Omiletica*, Manlio Sodi and Achille M. Triacca, eds, (Turin & Bergamo, 1998) 684-88.

¹⁰Šmahel, "Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia," 243.

¹¹The first five are relatively well known figures, often discussed in the literature of the early Hussite movement. The latter pair are more obscure. Jan of Štěkna (+1405) was a Cistercian and professor in the faculty of theology at the University of Cracow and served as confessor to the Polish queen, Jadwiga. He had preached in the Bethlehem Chapel and had once been a colleague of the young Jan Hus. Petr of Stupna (+1407) was renowned for his musical abilities and preaching. In one of his sermons as rector of the university on 29 November 1409, Jan Hus praised both men for their eloquent and fervent preaching. See the address in Matthias Flacius Illyricus, ed., *Historia et Monumenta Ioannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis, Confessorum Christi, etc* (Nürnberg, 1715), 2:62-6. On Hus as a preacher see also Anežka Vidmanová, "Hus als Prediger," CV 19 (1976) 65-81.

¹²On this chapel see Otakar Odložilík, "The Bethlehem Chapel in Prague: Remarks on its Foundation Charter," *Studien zur Älteren Geschichte Osteuropas* [Wiener Archiv für Geschichte des Slawentums und

to the pulpit of Bethlehem Chapel in 1402. His preaching primarily centered on issues of moral and social reform. Hus used the pulpit of Bethlehem Chapel as a venue for addressing pressing needs in Czech society, including issues concerning ecclesiastical *renovatio* and *reformatio*. In this Hus attracted the condemnation of those not so inclined. While Hus' sermons included many references to social conditions in Prague and Bohemia, his comments must not in every instance be taken as factual without independent corroboration. Religious reformers such as Tomáš Štítý (+ 1401) and Hus frequently complained of the unfair taxation of peasants and attempted to make this a source for widespread social ills. This may have been the case in certain times and particular places but extant records do not always support such claims. Nonetheless, vernacular preaching proved attractive to the masses in Prague. Indeed, Bethlehem Chapel had been founded specifically for preaching in the vernacular. Petr of Stupna preached Czech sermons in St. Vitus' Cathedral, but otherwise only Hus' chapel featured regular vernacular preaching. His audience consisted of an excellent cross-section of Prague: women, children, servants, magistrates, university masters, tradesmen, artisans, merchants, Queen Sophie, the archbishop's sister, and other political and military figures including Jan Žižka. Contemporary sources reveal that the Bethlehem Chapel was nearly always full. This non-parochial chapel functioned as an essential venue for the spoken word in the early Bohemian Reformation.¹³

It has been estimated that Hus preached about three thousand sermons during his career as rector of the Bethlehem Chapel.¹⁴ There are at least nine collections of Hus' Latin sermons extant in addition to his Czech sermons.¹⁵ His early sermons of 1401-1403 are preserved in manuscripts in the Praemonstratensian Strahov Monastery in Prague.¹⁶ These sermons preached in the Church of St. Michael in Prague's Old Town and in the Bethlehem Chapel are entirely orthodox in their call for moral reform, while they reflect the influence of the Czech reform tradition. There are seventy-seven sermons for holy days wherein one finds discourses on New Testament personalities such as SS. Matthew, John Baptist, Mary Magdalene and others. There are also sermons dealing with the holy men and women of Bohemian history: SS. Vojtěch, Ludmila, and Václav. The doctrinal content is consistent with the topics and

Osteuropas 2,1] (Graz and Cologne, 1956) 125-41 and more recently Thomas A. Fudge, "Ansellus dei' and the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague," *CV* 35,2 (1993) 127-61. Prior to its foundation the chapel of the Jerusalem experiment of Jan Milíč introduced frequent communion, moral reform and emphasized the social implications of the gospel. A second chapel known as Božieho Tela, "Corpus Christi", likewise practiced lay communion and adhered to the evolving spirit of reform which in Bohemia must be traced from the 1340s.

¹³Šmahel, "Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia," 248.

¹⁴Václav Flajšhans, ed., *Mistra Jana Husi Sebrané spisy* [The Collected Works of Master Jan Hus] (Prague, n.d.) 6:iv. On the Bethlehem sermons see further František M. Bartoš, "Problém Husových tzv. Betlemských kázání" [The Problem with the so-called Bethlehem Sermons of Hus], in *Husův sborník* [Hus Memorial Volume], ed., Rudolf Řičan (Prague, 1966) 42-7 and Eva Kamínková, "Husova Betlémská kázání a jejich dvě recenze" [Hus's Bethlehem Sermons and their two Recensions], *Acta universitatis carolinae, philosophica et historica*, 1963 [Monographia, 2] (Prague, 1963).

¹⁵There is a list in Václav Flajšhans, ed., *Sermones de sanctis* in *Mistra Jana Husi Sebrané spisy* volume 7:iv-vi. Czech scholarship on these sermons see Karel Červený, "Překlad několika Husových latinských kázání" [Several translations of Hus' Latin Sermons], in *Hus stále živý* [Hus always Living], ed., Miloslav Kaňák (Prague, 1965) 69-86.

¹⁶They have been edited and published. František Šimek, ed., *Mistr Jan Hus: Česká kázání sváteční* [Master Jan Hus: Czech holy day sermons] (Prague, 1952).

interpretation of medieval preaching in the orthodox catholic tradition.¹⁷ Even modern scholars who tend to see heresy in Hus at every corner admit the essential orthodoxy of Hus' early sermons wherein there is present the exposition of catholic doctrine without polemic, argument or contest.¹⁸

Hus' *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur* consist of ninety-nine sermons and date from 30 November 1404 to 22 November 1405.¹⁹ These sermons, together with those preserved from 1408, continue the conservative reformist trends, and are also devoid of any discernable Wyclifite influence.²⁰ His later sermons in the Bethlehem Chapel from 1410-1411 begin increasingly to critique the institutional church and its practices and may be related to parallel political and ecclesiastical developments.²¹ Hus' consistent orthodox sermons did create controversy as early as 1405 by denouncing popular religious superstitions at Litomyšl in eastern Bohemia and at Wilsnack in Brandenburg.²² In these sermons Hus spared none of those responsible for leading the people of God astray.²³ In 1408 Hus defended preaching without an official approbation and drew criticism from his clerical colleagues and especially from the higher clergy. The exacerbation of the papal schism in 1409 as a result of the efforts of the Council of Pisa thrust Hus into opposition with Archbishop Zbyněk who in turn fell from favor with King Václav IV. In the same year the king issued a decree from Kutná Hora allowing the Charles University in Prague to pass from German control into the hands of the Czechs. Hus became university rector later that year. Religious conflicts precipitated the public burning of heretical books in 1410 by order of Zbyněk despite great outcry. There is good reason for associating these events with the radicalizing of Hus' preaching.

As early as 1404 in his sermon "throwing aside the works of darkness", Hus condemned the practice of charging fees for divine ministry. This custom was contrary to the idea of the Law of God.²⁴ Grace was free and to extort payment for what had

¹⁷Šimek points out that in these sermons there is neither trace of the influence of Wyclif nor elements which might be adjudicated to be dogmatically unsound or at variance with the official church. *Mistr Jan Hus: Česká kázání sváteční* xliii.

¹⁸For example see Jan Sedlák, "Husův vývoj dle jeho postil," *Studie a texty k náboženským dějinám českým* 2 (Olomouc, 1915) 397-8.

¹⁹Hus' sermons delivered in 1404-5 may be found in *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur* [Opera Omnia 7], while the 1408 homilies have been collected in Flajšhans, *ibid.* vv. 7-8.

²⁰See also Anežka Vidmanová, "Husova tzv. postilla De tempore (1408/9)" [The so-called Hus Postil De Tempore of 1408-9] *Listy filologický* 94 (1971) 7-22.

²¹Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411*, 6 vv (Prague, 1938-45).

²²Hus wrote a tract against the veracity of Christ's blood appearing on communion hosts at the site of several popular pilgrimage destinations. *De omni sanguine Christi glorificato*. See the text in *Historia et Monumenta* 1: 191-202. This treatise principally denounced the shrine at Wilsnack. In his *Postil* Hus asserted that priests at Litomyšl confessed to perpetrating the fraud by dipping the host in blood and then claiming some type of miraculous intervention. J.B. Jeschke, ed., *Mistr Jan Hus, Postilla* [Master Jan Hus, Postil] (Prague, 1952) 207.

²³There are a variety of denunciations against what Hus refers to as "manufactured miracles" in his *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, Opera Omnia 7:107, 130, 216, 568, and *passim*.

²⁴Anežka Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus Magister Universitatis Carolinae Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* (Prague, 1958) 109.

been proffered without charge was, for Hus, entirely reprehensible.²⁵ Hus' last important collection of sermons is his *Postil* which was completed at Kozí Hrádek on 27 October 1413.²⁶ The *Postil* contains sermons on the gospel for each Sunday of the year and essentially is a re-working of his Latin *Postil* of 1410-1411. In the introduction to this collection Hus stated that he wished to place the gospel text first, followed by the exposition so that the word of God might speak first and louder than the word of Hus.²⁷

The sermons of Master Jan Hus abound in references to Scripture, the Fathers, and canon law. Among the Fathers Hus referred most often to Augustine, Gregory, Cyril, Jerome, and John Chrysostom. Frequently Hus quoted extensively from Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas as well as other patristic and medieval luminaries. He did not eschew classical sources. One finds references to the life of Alexander the Great and Virgil in his sermons.²⁸ There is also a clear doctrinal element present with emphasis upon morality and spiritual edification. Hus castigated faithless priests relentlessly.

Given the radicalism of the later Hussite movement one is somewhat surprised to find a lack of revolutionary material in the corpus of Hus' sermons. This is not to suggest that the preaching of reformation by Hus was entirely jejune. Indeed not. His sermons produced a significant and lasting effect. But the polemical notions of Hus shouting his heresies from the pulpit of the Bethlehem Chapel are clearly unwarranted. Instead, Hus' sermons are genuinely orthodox and were delivered with pastoral concerns. In the introduction to his commentary of the Apostles' Creed [*Výklad víry*] Hus wrote: "Because I am a priest, sent by God in the hope that I should teach the people to believe, to fulfil the commandments of God, and to pray to God aright, I wish briefly to expound these things to simple people."²⁹ Hus' sermons are more like commentaries on texts rather than expositions based on a pericope, and as such, are lacking in illustrative material. The preaching of reformation had its disadvantages. Sermons generally were not repeated, they were singular events. This meant that the impact was by necessity limited. Furthermore, there persisted "communication flaws".³⁰ In other words, what Hus said and what people heard are two separate questions. Verbal texts, like written ones, have a life of their own and the ensuing interpretations many and varied.

To underscore the conservative, orthodox nature of Hus' preaching one may note that in 1403 Hus preached twenty-five times on the Virgin Mary and her feasts. In these sermons he accepted the tenets of her virginity, annunciation, assumption and intercession on behalf of sinners. His preaching revealed consistent orthodoxy on

²⁵ Articulated in this fashion in the sermon "Abiciamus opera tenebrarum" in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 109.

²⁶ Jeschke, *Mistr Jan Hus, Postilla*.

²⁷ Jeschke, *Postilla*. 12. On Hus' use of scripture in the *Postil* see Emanuel Michálek, "K biblickým citátům v Husově české nedělní Postile" [The Biblical citations in Hus' Sunday Czech Postil] *Listy filologické* 93 (1970) 21-8.

²⁸ See for example his sermon *Confirmate corda vestra* in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 123.

²⁹ The text of the exposition appears in Karel J. Erben, ed., *Mistra Jana Husi: Sebrané spisy české* (Prague, 1865) 1: 1-52.

³⁰ Šmahel, "Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia," 243.

topics such as baptism and penance.³¹ Hus' christology is likewise consistent with later medieval theology *vis-à-vis* the dual nature of Christ and his sinlessness. There are repeated exhortations to follow Christ and a call for transformation, both moral and spiritual. In his exposition of morality Hus was strongly ascetic: he denounced sexual misconduct, greed, gluttony, drunkenness, rich clothing, pride, games, dancing, hunting, and simony. His message of moral renewal was one of discipline, humility, poverty and a consistent rejection of the world.³² In this world-negating context, Hus offered the alternative of Christ who had come in human form specifically to rectify the follies and foibles of humankind. Human restoration could only be accomplished by the promise of eternal life extended in the shedding of blood.³³ Hus' doctrine of salvation is not misrepresented as *theologia crucis*. In his *Postil* the water of baptism symbolized by the flow of water from the side of Christ on the cross is for Hus "an abundant spring for the cleansing of sin."³⁴ This theology of the cross is the heart of Hus' preaching. In this conviction the Prague priest developed the preaching of reformation. "[Christ] came to call sinners to repentance in order to compel carnal people away from the vices of carnality. He came to draw those stricken with cold to the fires of love. To those blinded by ignorance he has come to shine upon them. This all-powerful lord came not to kill the living but to call to life those already dead, in body and in soul."³⁵ This is the remedy for those who have followed Satan, the first to fall, into the ways of unrighteousness.³⁶ According to the preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel, Christ has come to give his own single life in exchange for the lives of the many. "[Christ] came to humankind, came on account of humankind, came as a human."³⁷ Rather than human works, Christ became the foundation for redemption and the power of God for salvation. Humans, spiritually dead in sin, find new life through God's action in Christ. Here, Hus is thoroughly Augustinian. Salvation is based squarely on a predestination determined by God. Neither popes nor peasants are different in this regard. Both are recipients of divine grace, neither one nor the other can penetrate the mysteries of God.³⁸ The soteriological principle was entirely the prerogative of God. Humankind are the recipients, the beneficiaries, but never the cause or the reason. Even the human

³¹For example his Sermon for Trinity Sunday, Opera Omnia 7:280. On penance his sermon for the First Sunday in Lent of the same year is instructive. *Ibid.* 127.

³²Jan Sedlák, ed., *Studie a texty k životopisu Husovui* [Studies and texts toward a biography of Hus], 3 vv. (Olomouc, 1914-19) 2:394-9.

³³Second Sermon for Easter Day, Opera Omnia 7:178.

³⁴Erben, ed., *Mistra Jana Husi: Sebrané spisy české* 2:234-5.

³⁵"Venit equidem, ut peccatores ad penitentiam vocaret, carnales a carnalibus viciis retraheret, in frigidatos igne caritatis accenderet, cecatos ignorancia saluberima irradiaret doctrina. Venit omnipotens Dominus, non vivos mortificare, sed mortuos tam corporis quam anime suscitara." This in his sermon *Confirmata corda vestra* in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermons* 119.

³⁶Stated as such in his sermon *Abiciamus opera tenebrarum* in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 100.

³⁷This in his sermon *Confirmate corda vestra*. In Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 119. Hus is in fact quoting Bernard: ". . . venit ad homines, venit propter homines, venit homo." PL 183, col. 43. Compare Hus' sermon for Palm Sunday 1406 where he again makes clear that Christ assumed flesh for no other purpose than to effect salvation for all people. Salvation is offered as an eternal medicine, which Hus understands as the blood of Christ, designed to cure all people for all time. Opera Omnia 7:168.

³⁸Jeschke, *Postilla* 174.

longing for God is a result of God. In a series of sermons Hus dispatched the ghost of Pelagius and proclaimed Christ as the gift of divine grace.³⁹ Indeed, for Hus it was a matter of acceptance. “Feel this sensation within yourselves” It was incumbent for the faithful to practice their faith and to come to terms with an experience of the crucified.⁴⁰ The preaching of reformation in Hus’ Prague was a matter of knowledge, acceptance and experience. “Feel this!” But even in this overwhelming Augustinian sense Hus does not admit that divine grace is irresistible. There are those, the preacher asserted, who spurn the grace offered.⁴¹ Humans are not merely pawns in a cosmic game. Hus did allow for choice in the offering and accepting of divine grace. Humankind have been given the gift of free will by God and no one can be compelled to forsake evil and do good. The dignity of humankind consisted, for Hus, in the matter of free will.⁴² Here he seems to swerve toward the Pelagian option, but in the context of his corpus of sermons that option consistently paled in the light of divine initiative.⁴³

In the preaching of salvation in a reformation context Jan Hus decried in strident terms the sale and acquisition of indulgences. The preaching of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins was nothing other than deception, theological error and ecclesiastical abuse. His sermon for 10 December 1410 put a fine point on the arbitrariness of the practice. The priests declare, “give nothing but money and your sins shall be forgiven, free from punishment and guilt.” More than a century later Luther would declare that the Dominican indulgence vendor Johannes Tetzel preached, “as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.”⁴⁴ Hus affirmed that Prague indulgence sellers would spread wide their hands and announce to their hearers that whoever placed money in their out-stretched hands would immediately have their sins remitted. Even if the one who bought an indulgence was a wicked individual and should die, their soul would go to heaven. By contrast a morally upright person, failing to procure an indulgence would be consigned to eternal damnation in the absence of an indulgence.⁴⁵ The entire enterprise lacked all merit, according to Hus, indeed no biblical justification could be found. St. Paul had taught nothing of the practice, but had rather expended his energy on preaching the gospel of Christ.⁴⁶ Hus

³⁹Among a variety of sermon texts the following are especially cogent in their articulation of this theme: “Dixit Martha ad Iesum,” in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 158 and 165, Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, Opera Omnia 7:46, Sermon for Christmas Eve, *ibid.* 64 and 72, Sermon for Epiphany, *ibid.* 74, Sermon for Easter, *ibid.* 180-1, Sermon for Epiphany, *ibid.* 74-5 and Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, *ibid.* 42.

⁴⁰Sermon for Palm Sunday, preaching on Philippians 2:5, Opera Omnia 7:167-70.

⁴¹Put forth in his sermon “*Spiritum nolite extinguere*” in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 141.

⁴²Hus, *Sermo I in Quadragesima*, Opera Omnia 7:123.

⁴³*Spiritum nolite extinguere* in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus . . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 142-3. On the topic of salvation one may consult with benefit C. Daniel Crews, “The Theology of John Hus with special reference to his concepts of Salvation,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1975. Crews uses a number of Hus’ sermons consistently to demonstrate the doctrine of salvation espoused by the Prague preacher.

⁴⁴“Wider Hans Worst”, 1541, in *Luthers Werke* 51: 538.

⁴⁵This in his sermon for St. Wenceslas’ Day (28 September 1411 or 1412). The text is Mt 16. Flajšhans dates the sermon to 1411 though it was probably the latter. See Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 5: 80-2 at 82.

⁴⁶Sermon on the feast day of St. Laurence from the text of II Corinthians 6. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus*

declared the proffering of indulgences pompous and an arrogant affront to Christ. In a sermon Hus inferred that such priests actually preached to their congregations in this manner: “You knaves! We can give you the Holy Ghost or send you to hell.”⁴⁷ The preaching of reformation divested clerics of that assumed power and declared that God alone possessed the authority of salvation and damnation. As Christ in the Apocalypse of St. John asserts: “I have the keys of death and hell” (1:18).

The theology of Jan Hus expressed in his sermons centered around the tripartite advent of Christ. In his sermon for the First Sunday of Advent Hus explained the three-fold coming of Christ. The first visit was as a child through the Virgin Mary. The second visitation was spiritual through divine grace. The third coming of Christ lay in the future in the day of judgment. Knowing these things, Hus preached, “we ought to be diligent in the practice of right living. [Christ] came in his incarnation to secure salvation, by grace he comes to us and for the third time he will appear in judgment to provide for us a kingdom which shall have no end.”⁴⁸ Final judgment is a theme in his sermons. In his preaching, Hus becomes “an eschatological figure and his preaching is an eschatological act.”⁴⁹ Thus far the preaching of reformation by Hus is entirely consistent with the teachings of the official church.

Hus’ sermons are less orthodox on the subjects of authority and the nature of the church. He stood firmly upon the medieval and social theories regarding authority. Unlike Wyclif, Hus did not reject canon law. However, in a sermon on 22 June 1410 Hus rejected the authority of the local hierarchy but in the same year made it clear that authority was legitimate insofar as it adhered to the law of Christ.⁵⁰ In 1410 after Archbishop Zbyněk carried out the destruction of more than 200 volumes of the works of John Wyclif, despite the protests of many including Hus, the preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel preached sermons to overflowing crowds appealing to the word of God as the principle rule in what was rightly interpreted as a challenge both to temporal and ecclesiastical authorities. Hus’ sermons perceived Christ, not Peter, as the rock upon which the church was founded and built. The church was defined in Hus’ preaching, as the whole number of the elect: *totus numerus predestinatorum*. His extant *Sermo de ecclesia* from 19 January 1410 dealt with the scriptural and doctrinal foundations of the church wherein Hus contended that the church was comprised not of popes and cardinals but of the predestinate.⁵¹ In his *De ecclesia* in 1413 Hus restated this conviction. “The pope is neither the head of the holy, universal catholic church, nor do the cardinals constitute the body.”⁵² As in *De ecclesia*, the early sermons preached by Hus consistently identified Christ, not Peter, as the rock upon

Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411 4: 328-32; see especially 330.

⁴⁷“Et presertim sacerdotes pomposi, qui dicunt: ‘Ribaldi, nos possumus vos mittere in infernum et eciam dare spiritum sanctum.’” Preaching from the text of John 10 on Tuesday after Pentecost. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 4: 163-72 at 171.

⁴⁸Jeschke, *Postilla* 13-15.

⁴⁹Peter C.A. Morée, *Preaching in Fourteenth-Century Bohemia: The Life and Ideas of Millicius de Chremsir (+1374) and his Significance in the Historiography of Bohemia* (Heršpice, 1999) 165.

⁵⁰Jan Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus* (Prague, 1915) 116-26 and 156.

⁵¹Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus* 123; *De ecclesia* 51-2.

⁵²*De ecclesia* 51-2.

which the church had been built.⁵³ In support of his proposition Hus called upon St. Augustine's *Retractationes* and appealed also to the Pauline conclusion of the first Corinthian letter (3:11): "For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." His later sermons continued to define the church in this manner. This would find cogent expression in his *De ecclesia*. "The holy, catholic, universal church is the totality of those predestined (*omnium predestinatorium universitas*) that is to say, all those predestined, past, present and future."⁵⁴ Hence, Christ remained the head of the holy, universal church. The community of the faithful constituted his body, the predestined were part of this body and as such belonged to the church. Hus based his theology on the grounds of divine wisdom and purpose. Once again an Augustinian influence emerges.

Throughout his tenure as preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel Hus raised the ire of the clergy by consistently denouncing clerical misconduct. His earliest sermons contain denunciations of the scandals of clerics;⁵⁵ his later sermons condemned priests for their lack of concern for their specific ministries.⁵⁶ Bishops, priests and canons came under the censure of the preacher in Bethlehem Chapel. Hus deplored the commonplace of hurrying through the liturgy and then rushing out to secular duties, dances and other forms of debauchery. Jan Železný, Bishop of Litomyšl, would hurry from a celebration of the mass, lay aside his vestments, put on armour, mount a stallion and head off to battle. The bishop became the general within minutes. Hus castigated such clerics as unfaithful and devilish in the manner of Judas of old.⁵⁷ Hus reserved his most severe invectives for those who filled ecclesiastical offices and abused the privilege entrusted to them.

Priests are now sent that they would not preach but that they will fill their bags [28 October 1411]. . . . They deserve hanging in hell [26 April 1411] They wander as bulls in heat, they are not worthy of anything other than sitting in the kitchen and feeding their bellies [24 June 1411] The voice of some of the spiritual ones is as the devil and praise themselves for it, being immoral and against preaching in the chapel. Egotistical preachers cry in a high voice like wolves [2 June 1411]. These priests are parasites, whose work is as nothing in the Church, and are not real spiritual fathers [7 June 1411]. . . . They serve mass for the sake of money, and then gamble for this money. They are money misers these become fat swine [5 July 1411]. We resemble the swine who are in the mud, as long as there fall for us husks, we roll in the mud and eat them but when the husks stop coming we raise our heads from the mud and look for more husks If a common man admonishes a priest who is immoral, he receives this answer from the priest: "What are you trying to preach to me? Did I

⁵³*Sermones de sanctis*, ed., Flajšhans 7: 80-4.

⁵⁴*De ecclesia* 2.

⁵⁵*Sermo in Dominica Secunda Quadragesime Opera Omnia* 7:130.

⁵⁶An example of this is the dossier compiled after more than 300 parish visitations in the Archdiocese of Prague in the later fourteenth century. Ivan Hlaváček and Zdeňka Hledíková, eds, *Protocollum visitationis archidiaconatus Pragensis annis 1379-1382 per Paulum de Janowicz archidiaconum Pragensem factae* (Prague, 1973).

⁵⁷This is his sermon for the Second Sunday after Christmas. Hus was preaching on the text of Lk 2:42-52. Jeschke, *Postilla* 42.

tend the plow with you?" [3 May 1411] "I am to serve in my office for the glory of God, serve mass so that I can accumulate a large offering" – those who say this and do so are in corruption. They are drunks, whose stomachs growl with great drinking; are gluttons whose stomach is overfilled until their double chins hang down [3 December 1410].⁵⁸

His frequent use of the term "we" in describing the clergy may suggest that Hus did not assume a posture of self-righteousness but instead included himself among the preachers in need of consistent accountability and reform. All of these themes had been intoned earlier. Clerics committing fornication were sons of Satan and without correction, repentance and a change in lifestyle ought to be excommunicated and expelled from their office. The practice of simony, rooted as it was in avarice, led to a spiritual divesting of the church. Simoniacs, or "the Lord's fat ones", came under special and continual censure in Hus' sermons as noted below.

In 1405 Hus was appointed synodal preacher in Prague. At the convocations of the Synod of Prague Hus frequently used such occasions to remonstrate with his fellow priests and to engage in the preaching of reformation. His synodal sermons of 1405 and 1407 particularly called the clergy to accountability.⁵⁹ In his 1405 sermon Hus invoked the authority of Bernard of Clairvaux in contrasting the lives of fifteenth-century clerics with that of Christ. He puts these words in the mouth of Christ: "Everyone who passes by, pause and consider if there has been any sorrow like mine. Clothed in these rags I weep while my priests go about in scarlet. I suffer great agony in a sweat of blood while they take delight in luxurious bathing. All through the night I am mocked and spat upon while they enjoy feasting and drunkenness. I groan upon the cross as they repose upon the softest beds."⁶⁰ Hus appealed to his colleagues to abandon the pursuit of material wealth, ecclesiastical ambition and the acquisition of temporal property. In its place Hus demanded *imitatio Christi* and a pursuit of godly virtue. Hus accused many of his colleagues of having taken holy orders with the singular desire to feed themselves and gain wealth by appropriating money from the poor in the manner of Judas Iscariot.⁶¹ Such clerics do not feed the sheep. Instead Hus declared that in their hands the keys were used to gain worldly power rather than opening the doors to the kingdom of God.⁶² Hus' consistent, strident calls for a reform of the church in head and in members attracted resistance from several quarters. Spies were placed in the Bethlehem Chapel and made regular reports on the content of the sermons preached

⁵⁸These extracts are taken from Hus' sermons in Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411*. Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, on the parallel texts of Mt 10, Lk 9 and Mk 3 *ibid.* 5:131-4; Second Sunday after Easter, on Jn 10 *ibid.* 4:77-80 at 78; Feast of S. John the Baptist, on Lk 1, *ibid.* 4:220-24; Tuesday after Pentecost, on Jn 10, *ibid.* 4: 163-72; Trinity Sunday, on Jn 3, *ibid.* 4:177-83; Fourth Sunday after Trinity, on Lk 6, *ibid.* 4: 258-61; "czo ty mye mass chlape kazaty, zprawy swoy pluh a roly." Third Sunday after Easter, on 1 Pt 2, *ibid.* 4:104-108 at 107; and *ibid.* 2:3-6.

⁵⁹His synodal sermon preached at the archiepiscopal palace on 19 October 1405 titled "Love the Lord Thy God . . ." is notable for its unrelenting assault on the mischief that Prague clergy ostensibly were engaging in. His sermon in 1407 constituted a classic denunciation of clerical abuses. He used the text, "stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth...."

⁶⁰*Historia et Monumenta* 2:25-31.

⁶¹Sermon on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 2:154-62 at 157.

⁶²Flajšhans, ed., *Sermones de sanctis* 6:86.

there.⁶³ In 1408 members of the Prague clergy accused Hus of preaching scandalous sermons before great congregations, composed of men and women. These sermons his peers alleged caused the common people to hate the priesthood.⁶⁴

The city of Christ stood opposed to the city of antichrist in Hussite iconography and Hus used the distinction to drive home his emphases on moral reform. The house of God built on the foundations of faith and virtue had as its four corners courage, modesty, justice and prudence.⁶⁵ The gods of the world were identified by Hus as avarice, gluttony, lechery, pride and the hatred of Christ.⁶⁶ The preaching of reformation sought both to uphold the house of God and destroy the gods of the world. The distinction can also be found in Hus' preaching on the nature of the church.⁶⁷

Following the imposition of interdict upon Prague in 1412 Hus retired to south Bohemia where he continued his to preach. He began preaching in towns and marketplaces, in rural villages, in the forest, in fields, in barns and outside castles.⁶⁸ His preaching became increasingly recalcitrant and began to exhibit ideas now in the shadows of orthodoxy. In his *Postil* Hus condemned the pride of the papacy and denounced the veneration of the office as blasphemous and offensive to Christ.⁶⁹ Hus identified Rome as the pinnacle of antichrist wherein the evils of pride, sexual immorality, hypocrisy and simoniacal greed were most evident.⁷⁰ In this identification Hus essentially divorced the official church from the aforementioned house of God and seemed to place her among the gods of the world. According to Hus, the only reliable means for ascertaining whether a pope was the vicar of Christ or the minister of antichrist was contingent on that pope conforming to *boží zákon* [the Law of God] both in lifestyle and administration. "The one who acts contrary to Christ" in these matters is a member of antichrist. Among his early sermons we find the suggestion that a pope persisting in conduct unbecoming to holiness and godliness might in fact be deprived

⁶³See *Documenta* 176.

⁶⁴*Documenta* 154-5.

⁶⁵These two motifs formed an essential component in the propaganda of the Hussite movement. Pictures positing the two cities as implacable foes appeared in the Jena Codex, Prague, National Museum Library MS. IV B 24, ff. 10^b-11^a. There is a brief description in Fudge, "Visual Heresy and the Communication of Ideas in the Hussite Reformation," 132. Hus' articulation is in his *Postil*. See Karel J. Erben, ed., *Mistri Jana Husi: Sebrané spisy české* 2:422.

⁶⁶See Hus' *Výklad na páteř* [Exposition of the Lord's Prayer], *Opera Omnia* 1:388.

⁶⁷See for example his sermon on the text of Gal 4:30 wherein Hus draws a line between the church of Christ and the church of the wicked. Schmidtová, *Sermo in Dominica Quarta Quadragesime* *Opera Omnia* 7:150-1.

⁶⁸*Knížky proti knězi kuchmistrovi* [Books against the priest cookmaster], in *Opera Omnia* 4:312 and *Staří letopisové čeští od r. 1378 do 1527* [Old Czech annalists from 1378 to 1527] František Palacký in *Scriptores rerum bohemicarum* (Prague, 1829) 3: 471-2.

⁶⁹Jeschke, *Postilla* 147.

⁷⁰Jeschke, *Postilla* 21. In a letter to Křišť'an of Prachatice in April 1413 Hus drew this contrast. ". . . in that holy place where sat the holiest, most pious, gentlest, humblest, poorest, most untiring, most patient, most chaste man . . . now sits a man called most holy, but in reality the worst, cruellest, most vindictive, proudest, richest in the world, laziest, most impatient, and most unchaste . . ." Hus concluded he had identified the "abomination of desolation." In *The Letters of John Hus*, ed., Matthew Spinka (Manchester, 1972) 100.

of office by the clergy.⁷¹ Referring to the text of Mt 18:6 Hus deplored the offences perpetrated by the clergy. “Dear Christ! Should all who offend others by pernicious behavior be drowned, there would be left very few lawyers and priests. From the pope on down there are few not guilty of greed, pride and fornication, to say nothing of monks and priests living in concubinage.”⁷²

Hussite iconography from around 1412 throughout the fifteenth-century regularly portrayed Christ and the pope in contrasting ways. One example featured Christ washing the feet of his disciples while the pope had his feet kissed by monks. Another was that of Christ and the pope passing through town. This motif can be found in the sermons of Hus. While Christ rode on a small donkey, the pope sat upon a large white horse or war horse. The pope’s stallion had a golden bridle, the harnessing was decorated with precious stones and colored tassels hung down to the ground. So opulent did the pope appear that the people barely noticed and paid no heed to the lowly Christ passing by on his humble donkey. Instead they knelt before the pope, adored him, declared his holiness as he rode beneath a richly embroidered canopy. According to Hus, the pope enjoyed the scene as multitudes pressed together attempting to get near and took great pleasure in the praise being lavished upon him. All the while, Hus preached, Christ passed by on a small donkey weeping, ignored and humiliated. The preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel declared that such a scene accurately reflected the state of affairs in the official church in later medieval Europe and was blasphemy against Christ and the Word of God. Moreover, it patently bore the marks of antichrist.⁷³ This was not an isolated example of Hus’ attitude in the preaching of reformation. His sermons and writings are peppered with denunciations against the spirit of antichrist which Hus felt was pervasive in the Latin church at the end of the Middle Ages. Yet even in these strong words we find Hus continuing to refer to the curia as the ministers of Christ.⁷⁴ This may suggest that in the preaching of reformation Jan Hus continued to be reticent about equating completely the official church with the gods of this world. In this posture he reveals himself to be less of a radical preacher and reformer than Wyclif, Jakoubek of Stříbro and, later, Jan Želivský.

One of the critical elements in the eventual downfall of Jan Hus was his presumed intellectual and spiritual alliance with the English archheretic John Wyclif. That question cannot be explored here in any detail. Sufficient to say, Wyclif severed all moorings with the official church in 1380 when he published his *De eucharistia*. That treatise constituted a full-scale attack upon the doctrine of the sacrament of the eucharist.⁷⁵ A commission at Oxford declared it heretical. With this verdict Wyclif lost the support of his protector John of Gaunt and was subsequently banished from Oxford University. He retired to his parish in Lutterworth, defiantly breathing out further fulminations against the papacy and the official church. It was his heresy with respect to the eucharist which gave him such notoriety. In essence, Wyclif’s acceptance of the philosophical position of realism had as a consequence his public denial of

⁷¹*Sermo in Dominica infra Octavam Nativitatis Domini*, Opera Omnia 7:92.

⁷²Jeschke, *Postilla* 312.

⁷³Jeschke, *Postilla* 146-7.

⁷⁴In his sermon “Vos estis sal terre,” in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 149.

⁷⁵Johann Loserth, ed., *Iohannis Wyclif, De eucharistia tractatus maior* (London, 1892).

transubstantiation. In its place Wyclif advanced the theory of remanence. Jan Hus was charged with following the Englishman into this error. While Hus steadfastly denied the charge and his denials can easily be buttressed by an examination of his writings: it persisted as an issue throughout his trial at the Council of Constance in 1415.⁷⁶ It is manifestly clear that Hus did not teach the Wyclifite doctrine of the sacrament of the altar.⁷⁷ The closest Hus appears to come to Wyclif was in his ninth sermon for Holy Trinity, 1413. While expounding on Mt 9:1-8 Hus declared it blasphemy to consider or teach that in the words of consecration a priest actually created the body of God in the mass.⁷⁸ This assertion was repeated by Hus at least once thereafter in print and inscribed upon the wall at Bethlehem Chapel.⁷⁹ Notwithstanding this, only by the greatest stretch of the imagination can these comments in Hus' *Postil* be construed as an attack upon the dogma of transubstantiation. Instead of challenging tradition Hus was decrying ecclesiastical abuses. Refraining comment entirely on the nature of the communion elements the Prague preacher was reserving for God the ability to create while declaring emphatically that humans, priests or otherwise, have not the power to create. Yet again the theology of Augustine is evident. This is substantially different from the themes developed by Wyclif in his works. Even during the early days of reform in Prague when the works of Wyclif were being publicly debated and defended it was not Hus but rather the erstwhile reformers Štěpán Pálec and Stanislav of Znojmo who defended vigorously Wyclif's eucharistic propositions. Following these debates and the defection of both masters to the anti-reform side, Hus reminded them of their outspoken enthusiasm for heresy. In his *Contra Stephanum Palecz* of 1412 Hus suggested what may have been a painful recollection for Pálec "Can you not recall the arguments of your colleague Stanislav, who, before the assembly of the university withstood calls for the condemnation of those articles [of Wyclif on the eucharist]. Can you not recall how you approved those articles?"⁸⁰ That Wyclif was one of Hus' sources, even in preaching, cannot be denied. His sermon, "Vos estis sal terre" in 1410 quite clearly is dependent on Wyclif especially in the early stages.⁸¹ But even overt and acknowledged influence does not necessarily inculcate one in heresy, a fact Hus' judges appear not to have considered.

On the matter of the sacrament, Hus appears to have always maintained the traditional doctrine. His early sermons reflect his position. Moreover, his *Postil*, written in exile contains clear articulation of Hus' position that in the sacrament the elements of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ.⁸² This is entirely consistently with the medieval dogma of transubstantiation and completely at odds with

⁷⁶There were several discussions during the proceedings. See for example Matthew Spinka, ed., *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (New York, 1965) 167-9, 215, 227.

⁷⁷His sermon for Trinity Sunday described the sacrament in traditional terms. Opera Omnia 7:281. Indeed, the corpus of Hus' writings demonstrate his conviction in the mass as a sacrifice offered to God underscored by an acceptance of the doctrine of transubstantiation. See for example his *De ecclesia* 48.

⁷⁸Jeschke, *Postilla* 411.

⁷⁹Hus, *De sex erroribus* which survives in more than 20 manuscripts. This an edition in Bohumil Ryba, *Betlemské texty* (Prague, 1951) 39-63 for the Latin text and 65-104 for the Czech.

⁸⁰The text appears in *Magistri Iohannis Hus: Polemica*, Opera Omnia 22:233-69 at 265.

⁸¹Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 149-56.

⁸²Jeschke, *Postilla* 92.

the theory of Wyclif concerning the eucharist. Distinguishing between spiritual and sacramental communing, Hus asserted that the one without mortal sin partaking receives the body of Christ both spiritually and sacramentally, while those who commune unworthily receive a sacramental condemnation. According to Hus the sacrament of the altar symbolized the death of Christ, remitted sins, provided the Christian with a defence against temptation and sin, communicated divine grace and in the end was the means for receiving eternal life.⁸³

It was not Wyclif, however, who played the principle rôle of influence in Hus' sermons. In his book *De ecclesia* Hus made reference by citation or otherwise to Augustine more than one hundred times.⁸⁴ Hus' sermons reveal a similar dependence. Early sermons indicate that concepts and language had been borrowed from the church father.⁸⁵ While all of this is true it is possible that the Augustinian influence upon Master Hus was not always that of Augustine. Frequently, Hus misquoted or mis-attributed quotations. Hence, there are times when Hus cited Augustine but in reality was confusing Augustine with Gregory or some other ecclesiastical luminary.⁸⁶ Even in light of the evidence demonstrating numerous citation errors Augustine remained a fundamental influence upon Hus in the latter's preaching of reformation.

Most of Hus' extant sermons were prepared in Latin thus the majority of the sermon texts are in Latin, though Hus delivered them in Czech. This assumption is supported by the fact that the bulk of his sermons were preached in the Bethlehem Chapel which had been founded specifically in 1391 for preaching in the vernacular. Having prepared the sermon in Latin, Hus then preached his message in the common language, probably in a freer, extemporaneous manner. The same could be said for many of the later Hussite preachers such as Priest Jan Želivský (+1422) who would prove to be the most popular preacher in Prague after the death of Jan Hus.⁸⁷ The extant outlines of Hus' sermons are fairly extensive with an abundance of biblical and patristic quotations, a point underscored by scholars who have studied Hus' sermons.⁸⁸ His preaching style was direct and personable. Frequently, Hus addressed his audience in Bethlehem Chapel according to their occupations: "Beloved in Christ, my fellow tailors, clerks, shoemakers, bootmakers . . ." Hus' quotation of biblical texts in his sermons avoided the use of technical, archaic Czech and utilized language close to colloquial speech.⁸⁹ This was an integral aspect of preaching the reformation in Bohemia. Hus endeavoured to speak on the level of his audience and thus we find him making constant reference to the practical experiences of daily life in Prague. Though

⁸³Šimek, ed., *Mistr Jan Hus: Česká kázání sváteční* 96-9.

⁸⁴Paul De Vooght, *Hussiana* (Louvain, 1960) 66.

⁸⁵See for example Hus' sermons for Palm Sunday, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday 1404-5, and the sermons "Dixit Martha ad Iesum," 157-78 and "Beati oculi," 179-85 in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendations, sermones*.

⁸⁶Crews, "The Theology of John Hus with special reference to his concepts of Salvation," 186.

⁸⁷A recent evaluation of Želivský and his preaching can be found in David R. Holeton, "Revelation and Revolution in Late Medieval Bohemia," CV 36,1 (1994) 29-45, especially 37-43.

⁸⁸For example Matthew Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church* (Princeton, 1966) 56.

⁸⁹On the use of colloquialism in Hus' sermons I am indebted to the observations of František Svejkský, "The Conception of the 'Vernacular' in Czech Literature and Culture of the Fifteenth Century," in *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question*, eds., Riccardo Picchio and Harvey Goldblatt (New Haven, 1984) 1: 333.

the language used in the sermons was often blunt and concise Hus personalized the sermonic delivery by using the phrases *us*, *we*, *you*, and *I* to emphasize the relevant nature of his discourse. In his preaching Hus identified himself with sinners referred to in biblical pericopes. Occasionally he noted “. . . the sinner himself, such as Hus” In his later career when his preaching became more radicalized the persistent use of *we* instead of *they* served to motivate the people to see themselves in the context of the sermon as the direct recipients of the implications of the gospel and the intended audience for the message of the biblical mandates.

On Christmas Day, 1413, Hus prepared a Christmas sermon in the form of a letter for his former congregation in the Bethlehem Chapel. It underscored the simplicity of his sermons, his straightforward approach and his general avoidance of theological abstraction.

Dearly beloved! Today, as it were, an angel is saying to the shepherds: “I bring to you glad tidings of great joy for all people”As you remember these things, dear friends, be joyful for today God has been born in flesh in order that there may be glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and good will among humankind. Be joyful that today the infinitely great one has been born a child Be joyful that today a reconciler has been born in order to reconcile humans with God Be joyful that today one has been born in order to cleanse sinners from sin . . . in order that there may be glory to God in the highest Be joyful with exceeding great joy that today a king has been born and has come to distribute the fullness of the kingdom of heaven Be joyful that today God has become bread for the hungry and refreshment for the weary that there may be peace on earth. Be joyful that as the eternal God has been born, we mortals may live forever. Be joyful that the rich lord of the universe lies in a manger as a poor person in order that he may make all needy people rich that there may be glory to God in the highest. . . . Be joyful that today is born one who can free us from all misery there is born this day one to comfort the sorrowful that there may be glory to God in the highest and peace on earth for all people. May it please the God born this day to grant to us that good will, peace and joy.⁹⁰

This Christmas meditation is representative of Hus’ sermons in terms of style, tone, language and message. Even in exile the pastor continued as shepherd.

In the preaching of reformation Hus emphatically called his parishioners to an intimate understanding of their faith and a personal experience of the reality of Christ. “Feel this!” His Palm Sunday sermon for 1406 noted earlier is a classic witness. The sermon functioned in the reform program of Hus as a vehicle for bringing together the spiritual and the worldly and in that union an opportunity for grace, revival and reform.

The preaching of reformation consistently removed the gospel from its biblical context and placed it squarely within Czech parameters. For example, Hus sermon on the Feast of St. Stephen, 1410 likened Prague to the biblical Jerusalem. Where Jesus once said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who murders the prophets,” so now Christ called in Hus’ voice, “O Prague, Prague, who murders my prophets, Milíč, Konrad and Matěj, and stones them!”⁹¹ Further, “if Prague will not receive the gospel, then she shall suffer

⁹⁰Novotný no. 71.

⁹¹“Venient hec omnia super generacionem istam, peccatricem, homicidarum, maledictam hec

as did Bethsaida, Capernaum and Sodom”⁹² The style of Hus’ sermons is generally consistent with the style of preaching in the later Middle Ages, especially in its allegorical, anagogic and tropological dimensions.⁹³ His preaching was particularly pedagogical and exhortatory, always with the goal of moral transformation and spiritual awakening. The form of many sermons was distinctively aesthetical in their use of prose writing, declensions, the old Czech rhyme and poetic forms. Hus’ sermons also employed the vehicles of sarcasm, irony, warning, instruction, admonition, and encouragement. Many of the extant sermons of Hus were of course taken down in shorthand by hearers and thus the problem of accuracy becomes a concern in any scholarly investigation of them. The printed sermons reflect one response to the disadvantages of preaching noted earlier. Preachers like Jan Milíč of Kroměříž made available the texts of his sermons to be copied by scribes in order that what was preached one day theoretically might be circulated the next.⁹⁴ While the printed sermon texts certainly reached a potentially wider audience there remains the problem of literacy and the reality that printed texts almost without exception lack the fiery emotion and appeal which must have accompanied the oral delivery in the preaching of reformation. These printed versions of verbal texts provide more evidence of Jan Hus as a teacher, scholar and writer than they do of Hus the preacher.⁹⁵

For Jan Hus, preaching was the chief task of the pastor. This is clear from his *De quinque officiis sacerdotis* wherein Hus listed the duties of a priest and made preaching the primary item.⁹⁶ “God has instructed we priests to preach and give witness. This is the mandate of all preachers, none are excluded. There is no other command even from the common people than to preach the word of God.”⁹⁷ Yet all around, Hus declared, were priests failing to fulfil the duty of their office which was to preach the gospel.⁹⁸ In his sermon *Vos estis sal terre*, Hus applied the metaphor of salt principally to the priesthood. Through preaching, this salt provided seasoning which brought

vindictarum genera - et ad confirmationem huius geminat bis, dicens: ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem!’: nominis repetitio est signum compassionis et vindicte; i.e. habitatores Jerusalem, per methonimiam figuram super malos loquitur, quia multi in Jerusalem sancti erant, qui aurabant eum, et super illos non fuit locutus. Et etiam dicit posset: ‘Praho, Praho!’, homines malos denotando, qui sanctos predicatores persecuntur que occidis prophetas: hanyely kazatele, Milicze, Conrada, Matyege....” Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 2:142-7; see 146-7. Hus’ text was Mt 23.

⁹²Sermon on the Feast of St. Matthias 1411, on Mt 11 and Lk 10 in Flajšhans, ed., *ibid.* 2:262-6, especially 262-3.

⁹³Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church* 57.

⁹⁴Our information on this comes from the *Narracio de Milicio* in *Regulae* 3:367. It is doubtful that 200-300 scribes were working on the copy process at any one time as the anonymous fourteenth-century author suggests.

⁹⁵Šmahel, “Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia,” 243.

⁹⁶My attention was drawn to this fact by the short but instructive article by David R. Holeton, “Liturgická a svátostná teologie mistra Jana Husa: Byl Jan Hus reformátorem liturgie?” [The Liturgical and Sacramental Theology of Jan Hus: Was Jan Hus a Liturgical Reformer?] *Theologická revue* 67,1 (1996) 11.

⁹⁷Sermon on Monday after Pentecost 1 June 1411 on Acts 10. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 4: 160-3 at 161.

⁹⁸Sermon on the Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, 1411 on the parallel gospel pericopes of Mt 10, Lk 9 and Mk 3. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 5: 131-4 at 133.

hearers to Christ.⁹⁹ If preaching was the chief task of the priest, Hus was able also to enumerate the several benefits preaching held for those who faithfully attended the sermon. Those benefits included stimulating reason, aid in eliminating sin, comfort in controlling evil desire, destroying the propensity toward carnality and sin, keeping the enemies of salvation at bay, and finally a channel of divine grace.¹⁰⁰ Thus, when ordered to desist from his regular preaching, Hus refused to comply.¹⁰¹ In defiance to the order Hus appealed and introduced his appeal in a sermon.¹⁰² In a letter to the supreme court of Bohemia Hus admitted, “. . . I am not willing to obey either the pope or the archbishop in their prohibition of my preaching, for it is contrary to God and to my salvation.”¹⁰³ Hus’ refusal to comply with the authorities on this matter was something he consistently drew public attention to. In his sermon for Palm Sunday 1411 Hus insinuated that the use of the vernacular in the Bethlehem Chapel was at the heart of the issue to stop his preaching.

The devil has taken notice of this and now he attempts to persuade masters, priests and lawyers to denounce those who sing praises to God. . . . They insist that those who do so should be silent. . . . In the name of God they say, “we curse in Jesus’ name everyone who goes to Bethlehem [Chapel] and also all those who sing [in the vernacular] *God has arisen from the dead, Christ Jesus, bountiful priest*” But Jesus the Lord responds to those who raise such objections: “Indeed, I say to you, if these people are silent, then rocks will speak up.” Know this that the meek, ignorant ones will sing regardless of your complaints. The humble people shall sing with great joy to the savior of mercy, Christ Jesus.¹⁰⁴

In his fourth sermon for Pentecost 1411, while preaching from the text of Jn 6:1-14 Hus digressed into the prohibition against preaching and dismissed it as an “unworthy” and “evil scheme”.¹⁰⁵ In his fourth Trinity sermon, preaching on the text of Lk 14:16-24 Hus again condemned the prohibition.¹⁰⁶ In his Trinity V sermon on Lk 5:1-11 yet again the defiant preacher underscored his refusal to obey the decree.¹⁰⁷ According to Hus, a good priest was a true servant of Christ and in his spiritual office was therefore of greater dignity than the secular king. Thus the commands of Christ, in this instance to preach, superseded all commands to the contrary. The king, however, was also ordained of God and was thus, in his secular office of greater importance than the priest.¹⁰⁸ Yet Jan Hus claimed that obedience to God was of greater significance than

⁹⁹Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 114.

¹⁰⁰Jeschke, *Postilla* 28.

¹⁰¹The decree, “Alexander pp. V Zbynconem archiepiscopum Pragensem prohibere jubet”, was dated 20 December 1409. In *Documenta* 374-6.

¹⁰²*Documenta* 405 and 281.

¹⁰³See the text of the letter in *The Letters of John Hus* 90-2.

¹⁰⁴Jeschke, *Postilla* 151-3.

¹⁰⁵Jeschke, *Postilla* 132-3.

¹⁰⁶Jeschke, *Postilla* 281-2.

¹⁰⁷Jeschke, *Postilla* 306.

¹⁰⁸“Sed humilis sacerdotes dicant, quod sacerdos rite et sancte sacerdocio fruens est minister Christi et in supremo officio spirituali post Christum, post apostolos et Virginem Mariam. Et est in officio spirituali

obedience to temporal authority. On 20 December 1410 he defended his preaching prerogative in a sermon on obedience. Not only did Hus withstand the order of the authorities, he suggested he would do all he could to impede those same authorities in their execution of that which he considered contrary to the Law of God.

But someone will say, “Nevertheless you, Hus, do not want to be submissive to your prelates, do not hear your elders, not even the archbishop.” I respond: “I wish to be like Balaam’s ass. Because indeed the prelates of Balaam are seated upon me and desire to compel me to go against the commands of the Lord, to not preach. I will impair the feet of their desire and will not listen to them; but in freedom and honesty will be in subjection to God in all things, because the angel of the Lord stands before me”¹⁰⁹

Hus likewise proclaimed from his pulpit that should ecclesiastical leaders set forth ideas and commands contrary to the Law of God, people were under obligation neither to adhere to them nor obey. If fact, disobedience in such circumstances was entirely appropriate.¹¹⁰ As one who stood squarely on the medieval ground of political and social theory respecting order, Hus did regard civil and ecclesiastical authority as ordained by God.¹¹¹ The prelate and the prince had been given power to protect the good and hold in check the evil.¹¹² One should neither hinder nor impair the operation of the other. Hus’ opposition to the preaching of the cross in the crusading context is well known and indeed the point at which King Wenceslaus IV and Hus begin to go separate ways. The preaching of reformation included a firm critique of the offer to forgive sins to those aiding the holy war declared by crusading bulls.¹¹³

The charges of Donatism levelled against the Prague preacher are illegitimate though not without some basis. Hus did condemn unworthy ministrations of the divine service and clearly stated that priests in mortal sin were unworthy ministers. Yet, the sacraments and proclamation of the gospel by such individuals might still have great benefit for the hearers and those receiving the sacraments, even if it produced damnation in the unworthy priest. A sinful priest saying mass might bring condemnation on himself, but for the faithful it remained an untainted channel of grace

dignior rege seculari. Et tunc rex, quia eque unctus sicund sacerdos, est dignior in domino seculari quam sacerdos. Et ergo rex debet parere consilio sacerdotis in spiritualibus et sacerdos quilibet mandatis regis in temporalibus. Citra tamen illos duos racione officii in dignitate stat esse unam vetulum omnia mandata Dei servantem non ex officio, sed vite sanctitate digniorem aput Deum.” Sermon on the Feast of the Assumption, 1411, based on Lk 10. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 4:333-9 at 334.

¹⁰⁹Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 2:100-104 at 102.

¹¹⁰This is in the sermon “you are the salt of the earth” in Schmidtová, *Iohannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones* 118.

¹¹¹Enrico Molnar, “Wyclif, Hus and the problem of Authority,” in Ferdinand Seibt, ed. *Jan Hus: Zwischen Zeiten, Völkern, Konfessionen* (Munich, 1997) 167-182 at 175.

¹¹²Sermon on 30 March 1411, Monday after the First Sunday in Lent, on the text of Jonah 3. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem, 1410-1411* 3:176-8.

¹¹³See for example his strongly-worded opposition in his *Postil*. Jeschke, *Postilla* 22-3. “Divná věc: sami nemohú sebe zbaviti blech a much, a pak chtějí jině zbaviti pekelných muk svým dáváním, ani se modléce za to, ani dobře jinak jsouce živi! = [How odd! They are impotent by themselves to get rid of fleas and flies. Yet they presume to relieve others of the sufferings of hell, by money, without praying or living well!] *Ibid.* 22.

in the sense *ex opere operato*.¹¹⁴

On 23 April 1411, preaching on Hebrews 13:17 Hus related his divine calling to preach the Word of God to the whole world and to withstand commands to the contrary even until death. Just before his death at the stake in 1415 Hus again, for the last time, gave witness to his own sense of mission as a preacher: “the principle intention of my preaching . . . was . . . to turn men from sin

. . . . And in the truth of the Gospel that I . . . preached . . . I am willing gladly to die today.”¹¹⁵

There are two misconceptions about the preaching of Jan Hus. First, he is too often cast as a proto-Protestant and made to bear the ideology of certain sixteenth-century reformers. While Hus did speak much of grace, faith, and the authority of Scripture *a fortiori* he knew nothing of *sola fide* or *sola scriptura*. Throughout the works and sermons of Jan Hus we can locate emphases upon the theological principle *fides caritate formata*, that salvation is apprehended when faith is formed or completed in love or good works.¹¹⁶ The preaching of reformation need not be required to conform to the emphases of the European movements associated with Luther and Calvin. Second, Hus did not follow the pre-Hussite reformers and Wyclif in their emphasis of preaching at the expense of liturgy.¹¹⁷ Bethlehem Chapel was a balanced, proportional blending of preaching and liturgical celebration. While he was the first to introduce biblical exegesis into Czech preaching he contributed modestly to the developing liturgical reforms which the Bohemian Reformation was later to yield up to the evolution of ecclesiastical history.

On 23 May 1416 the university in Prague gave witness that Jan Hus as a minister and preacher was an unequalled master.

O incomparable man shining greater than all by the example of magnificent holiness. O humble man gleaming with the light of great piety, who scorned wealth and ministered to those in poverty. He opened his heart and did not refuse to kneel at the bedside of the sick. With tears he drew the hardened to repentance. By his matchless sweetness he calmed fierce minds. He raged against the vices of humankind particularly the rich and arrogant clergy. He founded his appeals on the ancient and neglected Scriptural remedies. Formed in great love, this new motive caused him to follow in the footsteps of the apostles and through pastoral care he revived in both clergy and laity the righteousness of life as in the primitive church. Through courage and wisdom in speech he surpassed all others, demonstrating in all things the works of love,

¹¹⁴Schmidtová, *Johannes Hus. . . Positiones, recommendationes, sermones*, 165 and especially his sermon “Dixit Martha ad Iesum” *ibid.* 167 and 174-5. Hus makes clear that evil priests can and do legitimately consecrate the body and blood of Christ in the mass but they do so to their own destruction and damnation. The communicants are not affected. This in his sermon on the Feast of the Nativity of St. John Baptist, 1411. The text was Lk 1. Flajšhans, ed., *Mag. Io. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem 1410-1411* 4:220-24 at 223.

¹¹⁵Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* 233.

¹¹⁶Schmidtová, *Magister Johannes Hus, Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur* 189.

¹¹⁷Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* [History of the Hussite Songs] 6 vv. (Prague, 1954-6), 3:33 suggests that pre-Hussite reformers emphasized preaching to such an extent as to imperil liturgy. That seems somewhat exaggerated and is patently untrue if applied to Hus.

pure faith, and consistent truth in everything he became a Master of life without compare.¹¹⁸

His presence, passion and prowess as a preacher of the gospel was later acknowledged by the prince of sixteenth-century preachers, Martin Luther, who after reading Hus' sermons in an Erfurt monastery library considered them to be magnificent.

When I was a tyro at Erfurt, I found in the library of the convent a volume of *The Sermons of John Hus*. When I read the title I had a great curiosity to know what doctrines that heresiarch had propagated, since a volume like this in a public library had been saved from the fire. On reading I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.¹¹⁹

Jan Hus was a university professor, academic administrator, priest, author, Utraquist *saint*, national hero, and religious martyr. He was all of these things; but chiefly, in his own mind, he was pastor and preacher to the faithful church of God in Prague. His own words are perhaps the best summary of his motivation and career: "By the help of God I have preached, still am preaching, and if His grace will allow, shall continue to preach; if perchance I may be able to lead some poor, tired, blind, or halting soul into the house of Christ to the King's supper."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸*Historia et Monumenta* 1:103.

¹¹⁹Luther's opinion appeared in the preface to the first volume of *Historia et Monumenta* and was included in the introductions to the first and second English editions of Hus' letters. *Letters of John Huss*, trans., Campbell MacKenzie (Edinburgh, 1846) 9 and *The Letters of John Hus*, eds., Herbert B. Workman and R. Martin Pope (London, 1904) 1. I cite from the second edition.

¹²⁰Quoted in Pope and Workman, eds., *The Letters of John Hus* 87.