
Milíč's *Sermo de die novissimo* in Its European Context

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The sermons of Jan Milíč of Kroměříž often deal with eschatological expectations concerning the appearance of the Antichrist on earth, and visions of the Last Judgment. These aspects of Milíč's writings have received copious attention in the long tradition of historical literature on the religious reform movement in Bohemia during the Middle Ages.¹ Historical scholarship has paid much less attention to placing Milíč's specific opinions within the broader context of European mediaeval texts, which had treated similar issues.² The purpose of my article is, first to outline the characteristics of mediaeval speculation about the Antichrist and to consider their reflection in Milíč's text, *Sermo de die novissimo*;³ second, to point out several significant leitmotifs in this sermon. The text of the article is, therefore, divided into several sections by subject, which, however, are not arranged chronologically, and do not deal exhaustively with all issues.

After the Downfall of Antichrist

Milíč's idea about the amount of time that would elapse between Antichrist's fall and Christ's arrival for the conduct of the Last Judgment is perhaps the best introduction into our subject: "We do not have any certainty concerning this time, whether it will last more than fifteen days as Jerome has found recorded, or forty-five days, or still longer, we do not know. Likewise, nobody (but God himself) knows when – following forty days – there will appear those fifteen signs that are to occur during fifteen days."⁴

The issue of a possible hiatus between the down fall of the Antichrist and the staging of the Last Judgment by Christ has puzzled biblical exegetes from Patristic times to that of Milíč. The point of departure for the discussion was the assertion in the Book of Revelation (Rev 20:1-3) of a millennial kingdom of Christ after the shackling of the Antichrist/Satan. One of the earliest Latin exegeses of the Apocalypse by Victorinus of Pettau, written c. A. D. 300, interpreted Christ's millennial kingdom in the literal chiliastic sense.⁵ The altered situation of the post-

¹ Amedeo Molnár, "Eschatologická naděje české reformace," *Od reformace k zítřku* (Prague, 1956) 14-17; *Husitská revoluce* 2:181-198, including bibliographic references 2:325-326. See also the recent monograph by Peter C. A. Morée, *Preaching in Fourteenth-Century Bohemia: The Life and Ideas of Milicius de Chremsir (+1374) and His Significance in the historiography of Bohemia* (Slavkov, 1999).

² The last systematic probing in this area is, to my knowledge, the monograph of Karel Chytil, *Antikrist v naukách a mění středověku a husitské obrazné antithese* (Prague, 1918), which however did not deal with the text of *Sermo de die novissimo*.

³ Cited from Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, "Sermo de die novissimo," ed. František M. Bartoš, *Reformační sborník* 8 (1941) 51-58.

⁴ Karel Červený, tr., "Kázání Milíče, dobré paměti, o posledním dni Páně," in Miloslav Kaňák, *Milíč z Kroměříže* (Prague, 1975) 113; Milíč, *Sermo* 53-54.

⁵ E. Ann Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, edd., *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992) 38-39.

Constantine church led St. Jerome in the latter fourth century to reinterpret Victorinus's chiliasm. Utilizing an allegorical explanation, he managed to eliminate Victorinus's literal exegesis.⁶ Although he put to rest the apocalyptic expectations connected with the Revelation to St. John, his interpretation of the Book of Daniel reopened the door of chiliasm halfway.⁷ His commentary addressed the discrepancy between two numerical data which Daniel's prophecy connected with the end of time (Dan 12:11-12). The first number of 1,290 days that would pass from the beginning of the "the abomination of desolation" was deemed by St. Jerome to designate the length of Antichrist's reign in the world. Daniel's second number of 1,335 days, according to Jerome, designated the time period from the start of "the abomination of desolation" until the end of time. Comparison of the two produced a difference of forty-five days that would pass between the terminus of Antichrist's reign and the end of time. Jerome designated the forty-five days as *dies silentium*, designed to test the patience of the saints.⁸ He also noted in his commentary on Matthew (Mt 24:37-39) that this time period would be the days of peace (*pax*), which many would fill with debaucheries. Those unfortunates, however, would be fated to a sudden destruction (1 Tess 5:3). In the meantime, the elect would patiently await the arrival of the Judge.⁹

The Venerable Bede utilized Jerome's exegetical work in his commentaries. While he incorporated the period after the Antichrist's fall firmly into his earthly history of the church,¹⁰ he also indicated in his *Chronica* that Jerome's count of forty-five days should not be understood literally, because it was for God to decide the length of the hiatus between the Antichrist's demise and the coming of Christ.¹¹ In the mid-ninth century, Haimo of Auxerre presented a new perspective on the forty-five-day period. In his explication of 1 Thessalonians, he designated the hiatus as the time of peace to be devoted mainly to penance,¹² although the servants of the Antichrist (*ministri Antichristi*), remaining after his fall, would be enjoying carnal pleasures. Yet, Haimo in his commentaries on 2 Thessalonians noted that the forty-five days would be followed by a period, probably brief, before Christ's coming. The precise length of that period was utterly unknown.¹³ In mid-tenth century, Adso of Montier-en-Der somewhat modified Haimo's commentaries. He maintained that the first period after the Antichrist's downfall would not last forty-five, but only 40 days, a time span equal to that of Lent. He likewise considered this time to be earmarked for the penance of those who wavered in their faith during the Antichrist's reign.¹⁴

⁶ The exegetical approaches of Tyconius and Augustine exemplify similar shifts to allegorical (or spiritual) explications of eschatological and apocalyptic texts in the Bible; see Emmerson and McGinn, *Apocalypse*, 20-37.

⁷ Robert E. Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints: The Time after Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought," *Traditio* 32 (1976) 101-102.

⁸ *Commentarii in Daniele*, PL 25:579C.

⁹ *Commentarii in Matheum*, PL 26:182A.

¹⁰ *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93:154B-C, in which the period is identified with the seventh seal in John's Revelation; for Bede, each of the seals designates a particular epoch of ecclesiastical history.

¹¹ Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints," 105 n. 25.

¹² *In Epistolam I. ad Thessalonicenses*, PL 117:773D-774A. On the question of authorship of this text, see Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints," 106 n. 28.

¹³ *In Epistolam II. ad Thessalonicenses*, PL 117:781D.

¹⁴ Adso Deruensis, *De ortu et tempore antichristi*, web page <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/adso.html>

The discussed authors established the mediaeval eschatological chronology, with which Milíč of Kroněříž had to come to grips.¹⁵ Although I have not yet succeeded in determining the exact source, Milíč might have become acquainted with this tradition either through the *Compendium theologicæ veritatis* of Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg,¹⁶ or through the *Elucidarium* of Honorius Augustodunensis.¹⁷ The text of Milíč's *Sermo* sought to minimize the period between the Antichrist's fall and Christ's arrival, and he saw the purpose of this pause as an opportunity to repent. Before, proceeding further with the analysis of the *Sermo*, let us consider an intriguing discrepancy in the chronology of Milíč's texts.

Sermo de die novissimo versus Libellus de Antichristo

A comparison of *Sermo de die novissimo* with Milíč's *Libellus de Antichristo*¹⁸ reveals a startling discrepancy in the use of the numerical data from the prophecy of Daniel. As noted, the reference to forty-five days between the Antichrist's fall and Christ's arrival, used by Milíč in the *Sermo*, stemmed from St. Jerome who had literally interpreted the figures 1290 and 1335 as days. In the *Libellus*, however, Milíč with reference to Ezechiel 4:6 uses the numerical data of Daniel's prophecy not as days, but rather as years! The first known author to use such a calculation was Arnold of Villanova, who not only substituted forty-five years for forty-five days, but also used the data to compute the time of Antichrist's arrival, which he established as A.D. 1365 or somewhat later.¹⁹

The Conversion of the Jews

One of the most notable themes in Milíč's sermon is his description of the behaviour of the Jews and the misguided Christians following the Antichrist's downfall.²⁰ Having realized that they were deceived [*videbunt se iam deceptos*] by the Antichrist, the Jews would seek a reconciliation with God. Devoting themselves to the study of the Prophets, they would learn from the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 1:16) to be baptized and purified by water. Their baptism follows the conversion [*conversio*] to the Christian faith. After repentance, the Jewish converts would preach penance to the Christians who had been seduced during his reign of the Antichrist.

Regrettably, I have not yet determined the full source of Milíč's narrative, only partial parallels. Adso of Montier-en-Dor offered the conventional mediaeval

¹⁵ The reference to the fifteen signs during fifteen days stems from a tradition that emerged around A. D. 1000 and this topos has been attributed to St. Jerome. Among those who first recorded the legend of fifteen signs was Peter Damian, *De novissimis et Antichristo*, PL 145:839C-D. Subsequently, the legend was frequently included in the speculations concerning the Antichrist.

¹⁶ This work was frequently copied also in Bohemia; see Karel Chytil, *Antikrist v naukách* 32 n. 35. Hugo is based on Haimo.

¹⁷ The work of Honorius was likewise copied in Bohemia; see *ibid.* Honorius followed the tradition of Adso.

¹⁸ Ferdinand Menčík, "Milíč a dva jeho spisy z roku 1367," VKČSN, tř. Filosofie-historie-filologie (Prague, 1890) 309-336; Kaňák, *Milíč z Kroměříže* 120-127.

¹⁹ See Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints," 130-131; *idem*, "Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in Emerson and McGinn, *The Apocalypse* 63; Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End* (New York, 1979) 224. Nicholas of Lyra also noted that the forty-five days could be understood as forty-five years, although he knew that the University of Paris, in the person of Jean Quidort, opposed such an interpretation. Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints," 131 n.107.

²⁰ Bartoš, ed., "Sermo de die novissimo," 53.

exegesis that connected the Jews' conversion to Christianity, just before the Antichrist's arrival, with the preaching of the prophets Elijah and Enoch.²¹ Adso did not mention either the baptisms or the conversions in the time after the Antichrist's downfall, which according to him was earmarked for penance. It was probably Honorius of Autun (*Augustodunensis*) who, in the twelfth century, had broached in his liturgical treatise *Gemma animae* (c. A. D. 1115) the matter of baptisms²² and conversions,²³ following the demise of the Antichrist. Since he had dated the conversion of the Jews (thanks to Elijah and Enoch) to the period during the Antichrist's reign, the subsequent baptisms and conversions evidently involved infidels, who would be affected by the preaching of the church after Antichrist's annihilation. Elements of Honorius's account are reflected subsequently in the writings of Otto of Freising and Hildegard of Bingen, although in a manner that resembled Milíč's version more closely. According to Otto, even though Elijah and Enoch came to preach during the Antichrist's reign, the conversion of the Jews occurred only after the Antichrist's downfall, when the Jews realized the Antichrist's deceptions.²⁴ Hildegard's *Scivitas* (written independently of Otto) came closest to Milíč's account: Elijah and Enoch preached only to the Christians under the Antichrist,²⁵ and the conversion of the Jews followed independently.²⁶ The one missing piece of the puzzle is a source that would explicitly assign to the Jews the active role of preachers, following the Antichrist's demise.

Otherwise, a peculiarity of Milíč's approach is that – contrary to other sources – he did not mention the conversion of the infidels. Milíč's version likewise differed from the account of the Dominican Hugh of St. Cher that Milíč might have known through the intermediary of Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg.²⁷ According to Hugh of St. Cher, the downfall of the Antichrist would be followed by a period of free preaching that would be performed by an eschatological order of preachers (*ordo predicatorum*). Both the Jews and the infidels would be converted thanks to these homilies.²⁸

An interesting aspect of Milíč's sermon was his probable use of the Jewish theme as a vehicle for criticizing the state of the contemporary church in Bohemia and in Rome, where most likely he planned to deliver his homily.²⁹ Hence he did not mention the conversions of the infidels, but instead presented a bipolar situation with the virtuous Jews on one side and the Christians on the other. In a similar vein, he depicted the behaviour of the Jews after the Antichrist's downfall. Their conversion to the Christian faith did not result from the churchmen's preaching, but from the

²¹ Adso Deruensis, *De ortu et tempore antichristi*, web page <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/adso.html>

²² Honorius Augustodunensis, *Gemma animae*, PL 172:679C.

²³ PL 172:471C-D.

²⁴ Lerner, "Refreshment of Saints," 112 n. 47.

²⁵ Milíč, *Sermo de die novissimo*, 52: "Elyam et Enoch ad confortandum electos et ad predicandum sanctis...."

²⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivitas*, PL 197:438C-D, 722B.

²⁷ Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg borrowed for his compendium entire passages from Hugh of St. Cher's *Aser Pinguis*; see Robert E. Lerner, "Poverty, Preaching and Eschatology in the Revelation Commentaries of Hugh of St. Cher," in Katharine Walsh and Diana Wood, edd. *The Bible in the Medieval World* (Oxford, 1985) 162 n.18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 178 ff. Concerning the same conclusion in the case of Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg, see Lerner, "Refreshment of Saints," 122 n. 83.

²⁹ "Milíčův traktát o Antikristovi," in Kaňák, *Milíč z Kroměříže* 121 ff.

Jews' own study of the prophetic books. After their penance, conversion, and baptism, it would be precisely the Jews who would preach to the misguided Christians after Antichrist's demise. In all likelihood, we can view Milíč's account as a salvo aimed against the theology of the monastic orders, contradicting the above-mentioned assertions of Hugh of St. Cher. Milíč's grudge can be explained by the fact that members of the monastic orders had previously criticized his sermons and later, together with the secular clergy of Prague, had denounced him to the higher ecclesiastical authorities.³⁰ Considering the typical mediaeval attitude of the Christians toward the Jews, it would seem that Milíč, with a considerable dose of irony, wished to pillory the poor quality of preaching by the clergy, both regular and secular, of his time.³¹

Book Burning and Temple Construction by the Antichrist

Other notable topoi in Milíč's sermon are represented by two events during the Antichrist's reign: the burning of the books of the Christian testament, and the reconstruction, in cooperation with the Jews, of the Temple that emperors Vespasian and Titus had destroyed.³² Both themes must be seen the light of three sources available in Bohemia in the time of Milíč. The first is the *Velislav Bible*, the second, the *Compendium* of Hugh Ripelin of Strasbourg, and the third, the *Chronica Boemorum* of Jan Marignola.³³ Karel Chytil undertook a detailed comparison between the texts of Hugh's *Compendium*, and the texts that accompany the illustrations in the *Velislav Bible* and concern the life of the Antichrist.³⁴ His research reveals that the texts in the *Velislav Bible* frequently cite verbatim sentences in the *Compendium*. An important exception for our purposes is that only the *Velislav Bible*, and not the *Compendium*, refers to both the burning of philosophical and theological books by the Antichrist, and to the subsequent destruction and restoration of the Temple by the Jews and the Antichrist. The *Compendium* merely mentions the Temple's rebuilding. Marignola's *Chronica Boemorum*, on the contrary, maintains that a third Temple would never be built.³⁵ Milíč follows the *Compendium* on the restoration of the Temple.³⁶ There is a discrepancy between him and the *Velislav Bible* on the issue of book burning. Milíč opines that the books of the Christian faith

³⁰ See *ibid.* 25.

³¹ Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein refers to possible close contacts and perhaps even theological discussions between the Jews and Christians in Prague in the early decades of the fifteenth century. It is, however, an interesting interpretation of known sources without any additional confirmation. No sources are available on this issue for the late fourteenth century. See Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, "Eschatological Trends in Bohemian Jewry during the Hussite period," in *Prophecy and Millenarianism in Honor of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. Ann Williams (Harlow, 1980) 241-256.

³² Milíč, "Sermo," 53.

³³ FRB 3.

³⁴ Chytil, *Antikrist v naukách* 227-232. My following comments are based on Chytil's comparison.

³⁵ See also Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, "Hussitentum and Judentum," *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Juden in der Čechoslovakischen Republik* 8 (1936) 4 ff.

³⁶ Even here, however, Milíč's text could be interpreted in accordance with traditional exegesis that viewed the Church community as a Temple. Milíč does not explicitly mention the building of a new Temple: "Domine, templum nostrum debes reparare... Tunc congregabitur coram ipso [Antichristus] omnis populus ludeorum et omnes seducti christianorum et tunc stabit Antichristus in loco sancto i. e. in templo et mnis populus cadet terram..." Milíč, "Sermo," 53; hence the rebuilding of the Temple could be understood as the assembling of an anti-Church, in the midst of which the Antichrist would be seated and venerated; it may be noted that Adso Dereunsis in *De ortu et tempore antichristi* intimated a similar idea, although in a less concise form than Milíč.

(*codices nostre fidei*) would be consumed by flames. According to the *Velislav Bible*, such a fate would be the lot of the books of those philosophers and theologians whom the Antichrist had failed to win over to his side. In my opinion, it is not possible to determine whether Milíč derived the theme of book burning from the *Velislav Bible*, or whether both texts drew on a common source that I have not yet been able to identify. A third possibility might be their original interpretation of 1 Maccabees [1,41-66], which mentions the burning of the Old Testament books by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Several instances of a parallel between book burning incidents and 1 Maccabees can be cited. First, 1 Maccabees connects the book burning with the desecration of the Second Temple by Antiochus IV, just as Milíč and the *Velislav Bible* indicate that the book burning followed the desecration of the Temple by the Antichrist. Second, the text of Gerhoch of Reichersberg develops a parallel between the actions of Antioch IV and those of the Antichrist.³⁷ Third, a parallel between Antioch IV and the Antichrist may be suggested by an illustration in the *Velislav Bible*, depicting Antichrist as a statue, or an idol, which his adherents adore signifying their view of him as God.³⁸ Fourth and last, a link with the book 1 Maccabees can be seen in the text cited by Amedeo Molnár and F. M. Dobiáš in their book, *Husova výzbroj do Kostnice*:³⁹ “Behold, you read this in the Bible. You can directly feel that our case is similar. Letters were sent to all the towns of Bohemia that an anathema was pronounced against Hus so that he may neither preach, nor perform the sacrifice of reconciliation in the temple of God. It is not enough for them that they had burned the books of God’s testament, they ask in addition to obtain other books so that those could also be burned, and the persons who had possessed them could be destroyed...Behold, how the church of Jesus Christ has been desecrated!” This text, which I have not been able to locate, not only alludes to the book 1 Maccabees, but also links Antiochus IV’s action with Archbishop Zbyněk’s burning of philosophical and theological writings of Wyclif, promulgated at the Synod of June 1410.⁴⁰ The implicit allusion to the Antichrist becomes even more palpable if we recall that it was precisely philosophical and theological books that the Antichrist ordered burned according to the *Velislav Bible*.

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Let us now recapitulate the findings concerning the derivation of Milíč’s *Sermo de die novissimo*. Inasmuch as we were unable to identify a single comprehensive source from which the author could draw the various topoi of the Last Judgment, it must be assumed that he utilized several texts that mapped the extant mediaeval

³⁷ McGinn, ed., *Visions of the End* 106: “Many affirm that Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the final Antichrist... [Antichrist] like another Antioch [he] will grow strong against the few elect...” Equating the Third Temple with the Church, Gerhoch thus follows the exegetical tradition of Adso, for whose equation of Antioch with Antichrist, see *ibid.* 84. On Gerhoch’s relation with the Bohemian lands, see Chytil, *Antikrist v naukách* 38-40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 76. 1 Maccabees suggests that the statue of God Baal-Šamém (Zeus) might have been erected by Antiochus IV for adoration in the Temple, see Stanislav Segert, *Starověké dějiny Židů* (Prague, 1995) 150.

³⁹ Amedeo Molnár and F. M. Dobiáš, edd. and tr., *Husova výzbroj do Kostnice* (Prague, 1965) 24-25.

⁴⁰ It is uncertain to what extent the book-burning of 16 July 1410 might have been perceived as an apocalyptic or eschatological sign. Such an indication might be embedded in the record of Hus’s sermon of 22 July 1410; see Milan Svoboda and Václav Flajšhans, ed., *Mistra Jana Husi sebrané spisy* (Prague, 1904) 1:243 ff.

tradition of the Antichrist tale.⁴¹ Milíč's treatment of the time period following the Antichrist's demise is conventional, summing up the extant exegetical tradition. The theme for the Jews' conversion to Christianity is treated more independently. While the topic appears in the twelfth-century writings of Otto of Freising and Hildegard of Bingen, Milíč adds the peculiar twist about their exegetical and preaching activity in this period. His assertion may be seen as a thinly veiled expression of contempt for the level of preaching by contemporary regular and secular clergy. Similarly intriguing is the tale of the burning of the books of Christian faith, a parallel for which can be found only in the *Velislav Bible*. This theme may be a product of exegetical work on 1 Maccabees. An echo of this tradition of interpretation may be also discerned in the voices that reacted to the burning of Wyclif's books in July 1410.

A critical edition of Milíč's *Sermo de die novissimo* might permit a more precise identification of sources. It might also help to elucidate Milíč's articulation of the Day of Judgment into seven parts corresponding to the seven fanfares by which the angels announce the seven signs in the seventh chapter of the Revelation to St. John. Such an exegetical application, to my knowledge, does not appear in the extant commentaries on the Apocalypse.

[Translated from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David]

⁴¹ He himself indicated the multiplicity of sources, stating his predicament en face of the Antichrist theme: "Finally I was so dejected that – with the permission of my confessor – I started reading the Bible and other books concerning this matter [Antichrist] and contemplated the years of Daniel. And nobody could instruct me about it [the Antichrist's advent], neither among the Jews, nor among the Christians..." Kaňák, *Milíč z Kroměříže* 121. The reference to the Jews remains enigmatic. He might have alluded simply to the Old Testament, or to other Jewish literature, or even to genuine discussion with the Jews in Prague.