
Re-envisioning the Saint's Life in Utraquist Historical Writing

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In the year 1517, a close observer of Prague city life describes for us the festivities that marked the feast day in honour of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague:

On Sunday on the vigil for Master Jan Hus and Master Jerome of Prague, God's martyrs, after morning mass, as well as on the Monday of this holiday, the Prague City Council had a bonfire lit on the small island under the bridge near the cross; on the bridge tower the trumpeters trumpeted and the drummers drummed in celebration; on the bridge they shot from harquebuses, and by the mills they shot from the ramparts towards Petřín Hill. Lord Mayor Zikmund of Tvář, with Lord Jan Hlavsa and several other lords were on the bridge tower looking down on the bonfire below. On the bridge and on the banks of the Vltava throngs of people gathered. But the lord canons on the Castle were none too pleased.¹

The magistrates of Prague, surveying their domain from their tower perch, had reason to look on the festivities with contentment. After a century of political turmoil and violence, the city's fortunes looked bright. King Vladislav, who had once attempted a Roman Catholic restoration of the realm, had recently died, leaving behind a young and absent heir. A pact of toleration between Roman Catholics and Utraquists had held for many years. A simmering economic feud with the country nobility had been patched over. Most importantly, the Old Town and the New Town, which once had fought pitched battles against each other, were now making preparations to tear down their fortifications and merge into one great metropolis. It only seems natural that the burghers would celebrate the day of their blessed saints with blaring trumpets, blazing guns, and joyous throngs.

There was more to this day of joyous celebration than meets the eye, however. The very notion that a day should be set aside to honour a saint, any saint, much less one executed as a heretic by a full council of the Catholic Church, was a matter of no small controversy in the lands of the Czech crown. From the Roman Catholic point of view, Jan Hus and his followers were arch-enemies of the Church.

¹ Prague, National Museum MS III B 12 [text L], f.260^b. "V neděli u vigillii mistra Jana Husi a mistra Jeronyma Pražského, mučedníkův Božích, když bylo po jitřni, a potom i v pondělí na týž svátek konšelé pražští pálili oheň pod mostem na malém ostrůvku blíž krucifixa a na věží mostské trubači slavně troubili, na bubny bubnovali, z hakovnic z mostu stříleli a z tarasnic také stříleli od mlýnův ku Petřínu; a pan purkmistr Sigmund od Tvář s panem Janem Hlavsou, a někteří jiní z pánův byli na věž na mostě, dívající se na ten oheň dolův, kdež lidu bylo veliké množství na mostě i po březích. A páni kanovníci z hradu nelibě to nesli." Published, with minor omissions, in František Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští* [The Old Czech Annalists] (Prague, 1829). This, and all future reference, will be to the reprint, *Dílo Františka Palackého* [The Works of František Palacký] ed. Jaroslav Charvát, (Prague, 1941) 341.

As the chronicler tells us, the Roman Catholic canons of St. Vitus' cathedral, looking down from the Castle ramparts, were dismayed by the festivities across the river (the shooting of heavy guns in their general direction, whether purely in celebration or not, must have been disquieting). Roman Catholic clerics had been complaining about the commemoration of St. Jan Hus ever since 1416, when the canons of Olomouc Cathedral wrote to the prelates at the Council of Constance that the people were holding services and feasts in commemoration of the Bohemians burned on the banks of the Rhine. Their complaints were of little effect. Soon, liturgical books were adding rites in honour of the martyrdom of Jan Hus and Jerome on 6 July institutionalizing this new feast day.²

From the reformers' perspective as well, the celebration of a saint's day – if not a day for Hus specifically – was a contentious matter. The very idea of the cult of saints, around which so much of late mediaeval religious life revolved (the liturgy, feast days, pilgrimage, intercession for those in purgatory, etc.), was called into question, if not rejected outright, by a wide spectrum of theologians of the Bohemian reform movement. Suspicion of saints is found in the work of the theologian who laid the foundations for religious change in Bohemia, the fourteenth-century Paris-educated cleric Matěj of Janov, who called for a spiritual life centred on devotion to the Eucharist. At a time when the laity often took communion no more than once *annually*, Matěj argued that weekly or even daily communion should be within the grasp of all Christians. Matěj considered devotion to saints to be an obstacle to wider eucharistic devotion, and for this reason argued for a diminished role for the cult of saints.³

Matěj's line of thinking was followed closely by Jakoubek of Strěbro, the Prague priest and theologian who restored the practice of giving the chalice to the laity during the Mass, in defiance of the Council of Constance, in 1414. Jakoubek believed that the Eucharist should replace the cult of sacred images in the affections of the laity, but he continued to support throughout his life the cult of saints and its connection to the sacramental system, including the ideas of intercession and Purgatory. Jakoubek's 1417 polemic on the cult of images and saints, "*Posicio de imaginibus et adoracione illarum*," subsequently influenced both the moderate and radical strands of the Bohemian reform.⁴

This is not to say, however, that radical Hussites⁵ were always in agreement with Jakoubek in their attitudes towards saints, relics, their cults and images. Accusations of iconoclasm were raised against the Hussites as early as 1414. At his trial in Constance, Jerome of Prague, was accused of preaching against sacred

² David Holeton, "*O felix Bohemia--O felix Constantia*": the Liturgical Commemoration of Saint Jan Hus," in Ferdinand Seibt, ed., *Jan Hus: Zwischen Zeiten, Völkern, Konfessionen* (Munich, 1997) 390. See also, David Holeton, "The Office of Jan Hus: An Unrecorded Antiphony in the Metropolitan Library of Estergom," in J. Neil Alexander, ed., *Time and Community. Festschrift for Thomas J. Talley* (Washington, D.C., 1990) 137-152.

³ Ota Halama, *Otázka svatých v České reformaci - její proměny od doby Karla IV. do doby České konfese* [The question of the saints in the Czech reformation - its transformations from the age of Charles IV to the time of the Czech Confession] (Brno, 2002) 12-13.

⁴ Halama, *Otázka svatých* 16-17.

⁵ Recognizing that the word "Hussite" was a term of opprobrium coined by the opponents of the Bohemian Reformation, it is used in this text sparingly, and only because no better term exists as a shorthand for all of the various supporters of the Reform movement, especially in the days before the defeat of the radical reformers at the Battle of Lipany.

images, of scattering relics at a Carmelite church, and of inciting others to smear crucifixes with excrement at monastery churches.⁶ Although Jerome denied these charges, the spectre of iconoclasm and the dishonouring of saints was clearly a new threat that Hussite radicalism brought before the Church hierarchy. In 1419, with the outbreak of revolutionary violence, this threat became a reality, as rampaging mobs from the New Town and the countryside tore up church altars, looted sacred images, killed and dispossessed monks and nuns, and burned down monasteries. Episodes of iconoclastic violence recurred again in 1421.

The destruction of images was a very limited phenomenon. For the most part, both Hussite moderates and radicals removed sacred images from churches rather than destroying them.⁷ Nevertheless, the radical wing of the Hussite movement, centred around the south Bohemian town of Tábor, took a firm line against saints and their accoutrements. In 1424 the Taborite leaders convened a synod in Klatovy, in southwest Bohemia. There, a number of decrees were promulgated in order to differentiate the Taborite position from that of the moderates of Prague. While the Praguers held that saints help the faithful and therefore should be besought for intercession, the Taborite position maintained that although saints may help the faithful, there is no scriptural basis for invoking their intercession. The Klatovy synod also strongly de-emphasized the role of feast days. While Prague preserved the observance of feasts for ancient saints and martyrs along with feasts for Jesus, Mary, and the apostles, the Taborites decreed that only feast days for those saints attested in the New Testament should be observed. Furthermore, in the Taborite view, the observance of the saint's day was to consist in attending sermons on the Gospels and the saints. It was not meant to be an opportunity for idleness and sin — the Taborites did not prohibit work on feast days, and even encouraged it. Finally, at Klatovy the Taborite priests, unlike their Prague counterparts, firmly and definitively rejected the doctrine of Purgatory.⁸

The iconoclasm and radical theological positions of the Taborite party incited the condemnation of both Roman Catholics and the conservative Hussite masters of Prague, who upheld traditional teachings. In response to these attacks, Nicholas of Pelhřimov, elected spiritual leader of Tábor in 1420, was forced to refine the radical position. Nicholas was ultimately willing to allow a place for the saints, but demanded that this place be sharply proscribed: “We will not wittingly pray to the saints, nor supplicate them for intercession,” Nicholas wrote, “lest we pay them the honour that is owed only to God, *even if we naturally concede that it is necessary to respect [the saints] and to imitate them.*” [my emphasis]⁹

By the early 1430s, when the Hussite leaders from all the main factions travelled to Basel to negotiate with the Church Council convened there, Nicholas was able to avoid delving into the question of the saints (which was not a topic high

⁶ Thomas Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot, 1998) 252.

⁷ Halama, *Otázka svatých* 53-55.

⁸ Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967) 500-516. Kaminsky collected the scattered and fragmentary evidence for a list of decrees, including ones concerning saints and feast days, adopted by the Synod of Klatovy. This list of decrees, responding to a similar list made previously by Prague Hussites, was circulated in Latin and Czech and served as the basis for Taborite doctrine for years to come.

⁹ Halama, *Otázka svatých* 45.

on the agenda). Nevertheless, he did engage in polemics with church leaders over the issue of images and the cult of relics. On these issues he was inflexible – the biblical injunctions against veneration of images was clear. Fortunately for all those involved he did not engage his opponents concerning the cult of the saints, lest the entire Czech mission be compromised.¹⁰

The question of whether saints would survive in Hussite Bohemia was definitively settled, not in a learned disputation, but by force of arms, when the party of Tábor was defeated by the Prague Utraquists on the field of Lipany in 1434. From 1440 to 1471, the Archbishop-elect of Prague, Jan Rokycana, guided the Utraquist Church on questions of faith and practice. Rokycana placed himself firmly in the tradition of Jakoubek. He did not oppose the cult of relics and images outright, but he sought to limit their popularity since he saw them as impediments to Eucharistic devotion. Likewise, he condemned those who honoured the saints more than Christ, and he reminded his auditors and readers that saints alone had absolutely no power to forgive a person his sins. Nevertheless, he did not oppose saints, relics and images outright, only their overemphasis in current church practice at the expense of a devotion centred on Christ.¹¹

Thus, by the later fifteenth century, a middle ground was forged for saints in Bohemia. The iconoclasm that marked the outbreak of radical Hussitism quickly disappeared, but the practice of pilgrimage to saints' shrines or churches famed for their relic collections also fell into decline.¹² The Utraquist liturgical calendar remained largely undifferentiated from the Roman, although some of the saints who offended Utraquist sensibilities, particularly Dominic, whose followers led the crusading armies into Bohemia, were excised from most Utraquist liturgical calendars.¹³ The sixth of July was dedicated to St. Jan Hus, but no miracle stories were circulated about Hus; he did not appear to people in visions or dreams, and pilgrims did not flock to his birthplace. Furthermore, no proper hagiographies were written of Hus or Jerome at all. When, in 1495, a Czech translator of the *Golden Legend* wanted to incorporate the stories of Hus and Jerome into his work, he simply used eye-witness accounts of their final days – accounts that are historically credible without a touch of the supernatural.¹⁴

And so it remained throughout the tenure of Rokycana: saints and their cults were not banished from his Utraquist Church organization, nor did they flourish. The living saint, a central figure in the religious life of late mediaeval communities, was nowhere to be found in Bohemia during the long years of Rokycana's tenure as head of the Utraquist Church, unless we count enemies of the Bohemian Reform:

¹⁰ Halama, *Otázka svatých* 50.

¹¹ Halama, *Otázka svatých* 58-60.

¹² Halama, *Otázka svatých* 66-67. Rokycana's successor, Václav Koranda the Younger, wrote polemics against pilgrimage, as well as sacred images and relics, while virtually ignoring the issue of saints and intercession.

¹³ Holeton, "O felix Bohemia," 389.

¹⁴ Z.V. Tobolka, *Kališnický pasionál z roku 1495* [An Utraquist Passional from the Year 1495] (Prague, 1926). This book is a facsimile edition of the 1495 original. The material on Hus and Jerome comprise a supplement, placed at the end of the book, after the index. The book was sold without the supplement, but with no other changes, to Roman Catholics. According to Tobolka 5, the translation reduced the number of miracle stories found in the original in order to suit Utraquist tastes.

the Observant Franciscan St. John Capistrano was one of the great miracle workers of his age, but even his wondrous powers were not enough to win the credence of the Czech “heretics” during his sojourn on Czech soil between 1451 and 1454.

Rokycana died in February 1471, within one month of the death of the “Hussite” king, George of Poděbradý, who had for so long protected and nurtured the Utraquist Church. The death of these two seminal figures led to a change in the power dynamic, both in the spiritual and secular realms. The new king, Vladislav Jagellon, son of the Polish king, was a Roman Catholic and, although he agreed at his election to uphold the Utraquist tradition, he did not make things easy for supporters of the chalice. At the same time, with Rokycana’s death, the last great figure from the heroic age of the Hussite Revolution was gone, and new heroes had to be conjured up – heroes who would hold the line against Vladislav’s assaults and who would prove the continued viability and strength of the Utraquist Church. In a word, the Utraquist Church of the late fifteenth century needed saints.

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The Old Czech Annals comprise one of our most important sources for the history of Prague and the Utraquist movement in the fifteenth century and early sixteenth centuries. The authors of the Annals represent various strands of the Bohemian Reform movement, although by and large they reflect the interests of the more conservative Prague Utraquist hierarchy. The annalists were not, however, overly concerned with theological disputes. Their gaze was fixed firmly on issues of concern to the Czech-speaking laity. One might say that it was the role of the Old Czech Annalists to make sense of the profound changes in Bohemian religious, political, and economic life, and to provide their readership with the proper point of view to take concerning the pressing issues of the day.

It is in this context that we find the only known attempts to create new Utraquist saints since the deaths of Hus and Jerome. The hagiographies of the Old Czech Annals comprise mini-texts, termed by Czech scholars “relations,” which were embedded within the larger chronicle narratives.¹⁵ The authors of these “relations” do not appear to be the authors of the wider chronicle, but rather close associates of the “saint” whose cause they were promoting. They wrote their accounts specifically to persuade the public of their subject’s holiness. The “relations” were then inserted wholesale, in the proper chronological spot, into a limited number of the manuscripts that contain the Old Czech Annals. The hagiographies that we will consider made their way into the Annals between 1480 and 1520,¹⁶ well after the death of Rokycana. Thus, although one of the three concerns a priest who died back in the early years of the Hussite Revolution, we can

¹⁵ According to the editors of an anthology of Hussite literature, these “relations” [*relace*] were a special kind of Hussite historical propaganda, meant to be read at a public gathering such as a diet. Unfortunately, this claim appears to be purely speculative. Bohuslav Havránek, Josef Hrabák, Jiří Daňhelka, edd., *Výbor z české literatury doby husitské* [*Selections from Czech Literature of the Hussite Period*] (Prague, 1963) 478.

¹⁶ Wrocław University Library MS M1306, which includes text R, the oldest manuscript of the Old Czech Annals recording the *vita* of Jan Želivský, has been dated to 1488. R. Heck, “Czasy Karola IV. we wrocławskim rękopisie Starych Latopisów Czeskich,” *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity* 27 (1980) 49-52. Prague National Museum MS IV E 28, housing text K, which records the *vitae* of Michal Polák and Jan Bechyňka, is dated to 1518, based on a colophon. Naturally, the colophon dates the manuscript, not the ur-text, which could quite plausibly be older.

consider these works as reflecting Utraquist thinking on saints and saint's lives in the post-Rokycana era.

The Utraquist hagiographer had largely to abandon traditional models of sanctity and find new ways of describing and defining sainthood. Many saints in the late mediaeval Latin world came from the ranks of monks, nuns and the mendicant orders. These types of saints were to find no welcome among the Utraquist faithful, however. The monastic life was rejected by nearly all Hussites, and monastic houses were destroyed in large numbers across Bohemia in the fifteenth century.¹⁷ The mendicants, who led the effort to crush the reform movement both through their preaching and through their leadership in undertaking the crusade, were the most virulently hated by the Utraquists. No follower of Francis or Dominic was going to become a popular object of veneration among those devoted to the chalice.

Laywomen, it would seem, might have made popular saints among the Utraquists. Women were enthusiastic supporters of the Bohemian reform from the origins of the movement. Pious burgher wives as well as reformed prostitutes flocked to the preaching of Milíč and Jan Hus, and formed associations dedicated to spiritual renewal. Noblewomen and queens patronized reforming preachers and protected them in times of danger. Cross-dressing women were even rumoured to have fought with the Taborite hosts.¹⁸ Throughout Europe, women such as Catherine of Siena and Brigita of Sweden were among the most popular saints of the later Middle Ages. Their devotion to the Eucharist would seemingly have made them appropriate models for Utraquist sanctity. This, however, was not the case. Laywomen who were widely venerated in the later Middle Ages tended to be closely associated with the Dominicans and Franciscans. The mendicants frequently acted as spiritual directors to holy women, recording their visions and writing their hagiographies. In return, the friars received a kind of spiritual benefit-by-association.¹⁹ This association possibly tainted the stature of lay women saints in the eyes of Utraquists, no matter how reverently holy women venerated the Eucharist.

In the place of monks, nuns, friars, and laywomen, Utraquist saints promoted by the Old Czech Annals were plucked almost without exception from that largely overlooked religious category, the parish priest. And what made these humble priests saints? Mediaeval saints, by definition, were miracle workers and were frequently visionaries as well. Although Utraquists may not have discounted visions altogether, they largely considered miracle workers and the cult of relics that they spawned to be superstition. Could one be a saint without performing miracles? This was a central problem that the Utraquist hagiographers of the later fifteenth century had to solve.

All saints imitate Christ in some manner. Many late mediaeval saints imitated Christ by intense, self-inflicted suffering, but few were able to achieve the ultimate

¹⁷ Josef Macek, *Víra a zbožnost jagellonského věku [Faith and Piety in the Jagellonian Era]* (Prague, 2001) 200-222.

¹⁸ John Klassen, "Women and Religious Reform in Late Medieval Bohemia," *Renaissance and Reformation* N.S. V (1981) 203-221.

¹⁹ John Coakley, "Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth-Century Franciscans and Dominicans," *Church History* 60 (1991) 445-460.

sacrifice of martyrdom, as much as they may have longed for it.²⁰ This option was, however, open to Utraquist saints, and martyrdom became the standard by which sanctity was measured in the Utraquist Church. Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague achieved sainthood primarily by means of their martyrdom at the hands of the Council of Constance. To their ranks were added the numerous Hussite priests and laymen who were tossed alive into the deep mine shafts of Kutná Hora. Martyrdom was the ultimate *imitatio Christi*, and it had the additional bonus of linking the Utraquist Church with the primitive church of the pre-Constantinian era. Like those early Christian martyrs, the Hussite martyrs infused tremendous strength into their besieged followers and admirers. As Brad Gregory writes about martyrs of the sixteenth century, “Any compromise could unfold only ‘over their dead bodies’ and the memory of their refusal to submit.”²¹

Martyrs were critically important to bolstering the Hussite movement, which constantly faced pressure, both externally and internally, to compromise with Rome. Yet martyrdom alone did not necessarily confer sainthood in Reform-era Bohemia. The first Hussite martyrs were university students, executed by the lords of the Old Town in 1412 for actively disrupting the efforts of indulgence sellers at three of the main churches in Prague. The three students decided to take action after attending a learned disputation at the university concerning indulgences, and subsequent preaching by Hus at the Bethlehem Chapel. The Old Czech Annals tell us that after the executions the students’ corpses were wrapped in white sheets and carried in procession to the Bethlehem Chapel for their funeral. Along the way, one Master Jičín “began to sing the responsory with a joyful voice: *‘Isti sunt sancti,’* which is sung for holy martyrs.”²² In the following days, the Annals claim that protesters gathered outside the Old Town Hall and Hus preached on the worthiness of the three “martyrs”. Yet, there is no real suggestion in the Annals or elsewhere that these martyrs, summarily executed for acting on their strongly-held beliefs, were considered objects of veneration in heaven. The three students were anonymous figures —despite achieving martyrdom, they lacked certain qualifications that were to become necessary in the creation of Utraquist saints.

What were these qualifications? Like Hus and Jerome, the new saints were priests and leaders of the reform community of Prague. Parish priests were placed front and centre by the Utraquist movement, for two reasons. First, it was the priests who provided the Eucharistic bread and the wine to the laity. It was their job to put the cult of the Eucharist into action. Furthermore, the second critical component of the Bohemian reform was regular preaching of the word of God, in the vernacular – a function performed by priests (although some Hussite streams encouraged lay preaching). The Utraquists, and the Bohemian reform movement generally, had the

²⁰ “Dying for the faith became a frontier phenomenon in the West, a real possibility only for Crusaders or, from the thirteenth century, for mendicant missionaries in the Middle East, Asia, or northern Africa.” Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) 30.

²¹ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake* 7.

²² František Šimek, ed., *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu novočeským pravopisem* [The Old Czech Annals from the Wrocław Manuscript using modern Czech orthography] (Prague, 1937) 11. “*Ale začav responsoř veselým hlasem: „Isti sunt sancti“, kteroužto o svatých mučedlníciích zpívají.*” Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 36. The Palacký text reads, “...velikým hlasem,” “with a great voice.”

effect of thrusting the ordinary parish priest into the forefront of religious life, after centuries of playing second fiddle to reforming monks and friars.

The hagiographies also emphasized the leadership role of the parish priests as a necessary component of sanctity. Parish priests, along with the university masters, were on the front line of the battle with Rome to reform the Church. They were crucial to the fight and, what is more, they were in short supply. The fact that the Utraquists, unlike the more radical Taborites and later, the Unity of Brethren, were never willing to break the historic or “apostolic” succession in the consecration of priests meant that a shortage of priests was an endemic problem. As long as the papacy was unwilling to consecrate an Utraquist bishop, prospective Utraquist priests had to travel abroad to find a sympathetic or simoniac bishop, or else a foreign bishop had to move to Bohemia, as happened on two occasions.²³ Such a difficult and dangerous job required some inspirational models.

Two other related qualities are characteristic of Utraquist saints. First of all, they had to demonstrate heroic patience and fortitude in the face of persecution, as further proof of the righteousness of their cause. And just to make absolutely certain what this cause was, the Utraquist saint was required to testify to his beliefs in a public forum, just as Hus had testified to his before the Council of Constance. One might expect all martyrs to display patience and fortitude, but this is not the case. For example, the three students killed by the Prague town council in 1412 were clearly hotheads, looking for trouble. Furthermore, their deaths were carried out in secret, giving them no chance to testify their faith bravely in public. Let us now take a look at the evidence.

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Of the hagiographies found in the Old Czech Annals, the most controversial candidate for sainthood has to be Jan Želivský, parish priest of the church of Mary of the Snows in the Prague New Town. Želivský was a fiery preacher whose sermon on 30 July 1419 instigated the first Prague Defenestration, in which an angry mob, after ransacking Želivský’s former church of St. Stephen, entered the New Town Hall, defenestrated the town councillors and slew with swords, spears, and clubs those who survived the fall. This event led directly to the revolutionary period of the Bohemian Reformation, a time in which townsmen and peasants fought side by side with noblemen to keep foreign crusaders and a hostile king out of the kingdom.

²³ One of the reforms of the Hussite movement was a major reduction in the number of priests and other church officials, reducing the financial burden that the clerical class placed on the laity. This eased the shortage of priests, but it did not eliminate it by any means, as is made clear by references to this problem in the annals. For example, in 1482, when the Italian bishop Augustine Lucian arrived in Bohemia, the chronicler writes, “In foreign realms Bohemians, devotees of Christ’s chalice, were not allowed to be ordained into the priesthood, and so God offered his aid when, at the request of several priests and Prague masters and perhaps even Czech lords, Augustine, bishop of Santorino, came to Bohemia from Italy.” Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští* 192; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 289. Bishop Augustine, who had been an auxiliary bishop at Modena, immediately set out across Bohemia, ordaining priests as he went, and he remained a leading figure in the realm until his death in 1493. In 1504, a second Italian bishop arrived in Bohemia for the same reason — to ordain new priests. Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští* 227; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 318. Concerning the problem of a shortage of priests see also Josef Macek, *Víra a zbožnost jagellonského věku* [Faith and Piety in the Jagellonian Age] (Prague, 2001) 118-138.

Prague at this time was divided into two camps: the radical reformers associated with Tábor controlled the New Town, while the conservative party, supported by the university masters, controlled the Old Town (a third camp, noblemen, sometimes royalists, controlled the Castle across the river). From his influential pulpit, Jan Želivský soon came to wield power over the affairs of the New Town, belittling the basic Hussite tenet that priests not hold secular power. From this New Town base, he attempted to extend his authority into the Old Town.

In March of 1422, the mayor and captain of the Old Town, both supporters of Utraquist reform,²⁴ fearing Želivský's encroaching powers, lured him into their stronghold, the Old Town Hall, and quickly arrested and executed him along with a number of his priestly supporters. The Old Czech Annals contain two accounts of Želivský's confrontation with the mayor, his arrest and execution. The first account, which is found in manuscripts composed in the mid-fifteenth century, is unsympathetic to Želivský, focusing on the riots which followed the news of the priest's execution, and the revenge killings of prominent citizens.²⁵

The second account is a "relation", presented as an eye-witness account by one of Želivský's associates, a priest who claims to have been present at his death yet inexplicably was spared execution. This relation is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the Annals, nor in any other manuscripts that can be dated to the time of Želivský's death. It has been preserved in four manuscripts of the Old Czech Annals [G,I,R,T], the earliest of which [R] dates from the end of the fifteenth century.²⁶ Nevertheless, the account has an *aura* of authenticity. It is unusually detailed, filled with directly reported speech and a blow-by-blow account of the day of martyrdom. It is possible that it was originally penned soon after the events it describes, intended as propaganda designed to persuade its readers and hearers that Želivský was unjustly killed and that his killers needed to be brought to justice.²⁷ However, by the end of the fifteenth century, when the "relation" found its way into our manuscripts, this original context would have been lost. Without context, the account simply appears to tell of the martyrdom of a brave defender of the chalice, even though in this case both sides – murderers as well as martyrs – were firm defenders of reform, and the dispute was a political one.

²⁴ Non-Hussites had been run out of town during Emperor Sigismund's siege of Prague in 1420 and were not to return in any numbers until at least 1437.

²⁵ Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 39-40. František Šimek and Miloslav Kaňák, eds. *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* [The Old Czech Annals from the Křižovnický Manuscript] (Prague, 1959) 73-74.

²⁶ Since Palacký's 1829 edition, the different manuscripts of the Old Czech Annals have been identified by the uppercase letters A – Z, as well as by a few lowercase letters. Texts G, I, and T are all located in the National Library of the Czech Republic in Prague: MS XXII A 1, MS XIX C 19, and MS 95 fond Osek, respectively. Text R is located in the Wrocław University Library MS M1306. Detailed information concerning each manuscript text is available in an appendix to my dissertation.

²⁷ Evidence for this position is presented in some versions of the Annals. The "relation" account of Želivský's death is followed by a list of accusations made by one of Želivský's supporters against the leading priests of Hussite Prague, and the accusations seem to fit together with the relation. Those accused of conspiring against Želivský include the conservatives Christian of Prachatice, Jan Příbram, and Prokop of Plzeň, as well as the centrists Jakoubek of Stříbro and Jan Rokycana, and even the more radical Peter Payne (known as "Master English"). This document appears to be contemporary because it is hard to explain why such a list of accusations would be drawn up many years after those listed were all dead. Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 43-44; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 79-81.

Our eye-witness narrator reports that, along with Želivský, twelve fellow priests (a number which clearly frames the hero's death in apostolic terms) were arrested and summarily sentenced to death. As the only priest present who was not to die that day, the narrator heard all their confessions. While speaking with each, he made a point of asking them whether they had any regrets about their Utraquist leanings: "I asked each of them individually, 'Dear Brother, it is now a matter of your life; and many have suspected that you would have some doubts concerning the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.' And they answered me saying: 'No, dear brother! Even today we took communion with the body and blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ and with this, God grant it, we will die happy.'"²⁸ Naturally, as priests, these martyrs had every right to the chalice. But the Annals are not meant to be read in a sophisticated manner. Priests or no, they were persecuted as Utraquists and so taking the chalice during their final communion was an act of bravery and defiance.

The account suggests that if the priests had just abjured the chalice, they might have saved their lives ("It is a matter of your life," the confessor tells each priest, as if they could still turn back). This choice appears to be nonsense, for in 1422, the one thing that all sides in Prague agreed on was the chalice! Certainly in 1422 the lords of the Old Town would not have beheaded thirteen priests for nothing more than giving the wine to the laity — evidence which suggests that even if the relation was written soon after the events described, it was reworked at a later date. For, if not in 1422, then by the time this story first makes its way into the Old Czech Annals, sometime after 1480, openly propagating the chalice from the pulpits of Prague could have been cause for martyrdom. It was at this point that the young Czech king, Vladislav Jagellon, son of the king of Poland, turned his back on the Utraquist allies who had placed him on the throne and began the persecution of non-Roman Catholics. During this period of Roman Catholic restoration, priests and laymen who openly supported the chalice were subject to torture, imprisonment and martyrdom, as will become evident in the case of the priest Michal Polák. For this reason, by the 1480s, openly testifying to belief in Utraquism was a necessary precondition of the martyr's death, and hence this twist was added to the story of the judicial murder of Želivský and his associates.

Of the thirteen martyrs, only Želivský is given a name and an independent identity. Although we know him from other sources as a master of political manipulation and inflammatory rhetoric,²⁹ here he is portrayed as a brave, otherworldly representative of the common people of Prague. As a parish priest, he repeatedly expresses concern for his flock. Standing before the mayor and captain [*hejtman*] of the Old Town he warns them: "do not seize people's homes, vineyards or other things which were given to them by the great community assembly [*velka*

²⁸ Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu 42-43*; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického 77*. "A jiní bratří, kteří sú s ním stínáni, každý přišed ke mně, Pánu Bohu se vinen dal z hřiechuov. A tu sem jich tázal každého zvláště řka: 'Milí bratří, jižť vám o životy jde! Jakož sú se mnozí o vás domnievali, že byšte nětco pochybovali o těle a o krvi Pána Ježíše Krista?' A oni mi odpověděli řkúce: 'Nic, milý bratře! A my dnes přijímali tělo a krev svého milého Pána Ježíše Krista, a tím bóhdá veselejší zemřem'"

²⁹ The conservative, yet most reliable, of all Hussite chroniclers, Vavřinec of Březová paints Želivský in these terms in the "Hussite Chronicle".

obec].”³⁰ Before he died, he encouraged his confessor to keep up the spirits of the common people, the “poor wretches,” as he called them, who would be demoralized by the loss of their leader.³¹

When the executioners arrived, Želivský led his disciples to the chopping block. He openly gave thanks to God that he be allowed to suffer, and then “without any fear bowed his head under the sword.”³² The executioner, so moved by Želivský’s piety, was not able to carry out his duties, and asked for his aid: “Dear priest Jan, give me your hands that I might bind them, for otherwise I cannot carry this out.” The priest, meeting his fate like a lamb at the slaughter (or perhaps more willingly), freely complied, and with the martyr’s hands bound behind his back, the executioner proceeded with his job.³³

A description of Želivský’s funeral follows the execution.³⁴ Želivský’s helper and successor, the priest Jakub, read the account of the death of the Protomartyr Stephen from the Acts of the Apostles [6:8-8:1]. Stephen, like Želivský, was the victim of secret plotting by city elders who seized him and set false witnesses against him. Although Stephen spoke openly and truthfully, his accusers shut their ears against him and stoned him to death. The narrator tells us that priest Jakub finished his reading with the words, “Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him.”³⁵ As Jakub finished his oration, bedlam broke out in the church. “The people were so sorrowful that several were carried from the church half dead and several went mad from sorrow and lay ill on the benches.”³⁶ Priest Jakub had masterfully turned Želivský’s death into a living passion play. Jakub explained to his audience how Želivský, like Stephen, was martyred for his devotion to Christ’s word. The leaders of the Old Town imitated perfectly the cruel

³⁰ Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 41; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 75-76. “Chcete-li obec sjednati, toto máte zachovati: neberte domuov, vinic i jiných věcí, což jest komu veliká obec dala.” Redistribution of monastic land as well as property of exiled Roman Catholic burghers was a contentious issue of the time. Želivský’s apparent support for a distribution favouring the commoners makes it clear why he was such a favourite of the Communists.

³¹ Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 42; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 77.

³² Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 43; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 77. “A on ihned neřekl slova i jde před nimi napřed z světnice; sepnuv ruce, i řekl: ‘Otče nebeský, děkujit, žes’ mi dal od svých trpěti.’ Pak dále praví, ktož sú tu byli, kterak se pokorně měl a beze všeho strachu pod meč hlavy naklonil.” Interestingly, the narrator admits he was not present at the actual place of execution: “Then those who were there further relate...” [*Pak dále praví, ktož sú byli...*]. This appears to be another touch of authenticity (i.e. the narrator was not at the execution, but he was present prior to that moment), but considering the blithe continuation of directly reported speech, it appears rather to confirm the mythic nature of the account.

³³ Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu* 42; Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 77. “A kat jemu řekl: ‘Milý kněže Jene, dáš ruce, ať svíží, nebť bych tak nemohl nic učiniti.’ A tak, svázav jemu ruce opak, i stal mu hlavu i jeho bratřím.”

³⁴ The funeral does not appear in Text R, the Wrocław Manuscript. It does appear in Text G, the Křižovnický Manuscript, as well as Text I.

³⁵ Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 79. “‘Pochovali jsú Štěpána, muže bojícíeho se Pána Boha,’ a učinili jsú kvílenie veliké nad ním.”

³⁶ Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 79. “Neb tak veliké zarmúcenie bylo v lidu, že některé jako napoly mrtvé vlačili z kostela, a někteří jsú se zbláznili a v ložiech leželi nemocni jsúce.”

antagonists of St. Stephen, shutting their ears against the truth. And the mourners, on cue, wailed uncontrollably at the funeral, demanding Želivský's canonization alongside Stephen and the other martyrs. "Let the Lord God be praised through the ages," the narrator concludes, "that he spread the renown of the Czech land by means of such a martyr."³⁷

Whether or not Želivský was considered a saint by his hagiographer or others is a question open to interpretation. He is given the appellation "martyr" [*mučedlník*] rather than saint. Hitherto, martyrs were saints almost by definition, but these terms were to be sundered during the Reformation and clearly the terms were in flux in Utraquist practice. There is no known evidence that Želivský was venerated in the liturgy or in popular practice, or that he served as an intercessor. On the other hand, he is directly compared to St. Stephen in a sacred drama performed in his own parish church, which indicates that, at least one raconteur of his death wanted to make Želivský a saint. What is clearer is that patterns in the telling of Želivský's final days are repeated in the hagiographies of later figures openly acknowledged as saints. The priest and his disciples had to testify openly to their unwavering commitment to Utraquism. He had to defend bravely his position in the face of death, and greet his martyrdom with dignity and even joy. No miracles accompanied his death, which is perfectly in keeping with Utraquism. The martyr Želivský may not have been venerated as a saint interceding for believers, but he established a pattern for martyr-saints that followed.

* * *

Michal Polák was a parish priest who came to Prague from his native Poland in his youth, studied at the university there, briefly returned to his homeland to be ordained, and then came back to Bohemia to serve under Jan Rokycana. After Rokycana's death, Michal served as the spiritual leader of two of the most significant reform parishes in Prague: St. Mary Before Týn in the Old Town Square, the centre of Prague Utraquist life, and the St. Giles' in the Old Town, which made him, *ex officio*, one of the leaders of the Utraquist hierarchy.³⁸

According to one account in the Old Czech Annals, Michal helped pave the way for the coronation of his fellow Pole, Prince Vladislav, to the Bohemian throne, which was left vacant at George of Poděbradý's death in 1471.³⁹ But good relations with the king, his compatriot, were not to last. Vladislav was put on the throne by the Utraquists, and kept there during the long war against the Bohemian Roman Catholic lords and Matthias Corvinus, the Roman Catholic king of Hungary, but he remained committed to the Church of Rome. Soon after a peace treaty was signed in 1479, Vladislav threw over his old Calixtine allies and strove to suppress the

³⁷ Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 79. "Budiž Pán Buoħ na věky pochválen, že Českú zemi takovým jest mučedlníkem oslavil!"

³⁸ F. M. Bartoš, "Dvě studie o husitských postilách" [Two Studies on Hussite Postils] *Rozpravy Československé akademie věd* 65 (1955) 68-82, provides biographical information on Michal Polák, much of which derives from a letter written by Michal in 1476. The Latin letter is printed in full on 81-82.

³⁹ Text K, f.222r, reads, "příst Michal, parish priest from St. Giles, a vigorous and outspoken preacher, was a major reason that Vladislav became king in Bohemia, and how he repaid him afterward!" "Kněz Michal, farář od sv. Jiljí, živý kazatel a upřímny, kterýž byl veliká příčina, že jest byl král Vladislav králem v Čechách, a jak se mu potom oplatil." See also Palacký, *Starí letopisové čeští*, 189.

Utraquist hierarchy. A controversy that broke out over the public singing of anti-papal Czech songs gave the king the opportunity he sought to crack down. The song was banned and those who continued to sing it in Prague and in Kutná Hora were arrested. Prominent townsmen in both cities were jailed and tortured, and some died under torture.⁴⁰

Vladislav then had four of the leading Prague priests arrested, most prominently Michal Polák [“The Pole”]. As in the case with Želivský, the story of Michal’s arrest and death is told twice, once as a short account that appears in numerous manuscripts, the second as a full-fledged *passio*, a “relation”, purportedly written by an eye-witness narrator and inserted into two manuscripts [K, M].⁴¹ In this case the eye-witness narrator was one of the four priests arrested with Michal. He tells us how Michal immediately assumed leadership of the group, speaking boldly before the king and his Catholic accusers: “I understand that these accusations against me are due to our giving the Blood of the Lord to children. We have hope in the Lord, and we will not repudiate this as long as our heart beats in our body, for the truth is with us.”⁴² Here Michal *testifies* both to the truth of the fundamental Utraquist practice, a practice under royal attack, of giving the chalice to the laity, as well as to the even more contentious (for Roman Catholics) practice of providing communion to the very young including infants. His brave testimony is, however, just the beginning of his ordeal.

Michal and his three companions were immediately sent off to Karlštejn castle outside of Prague, where they were thrown in the dungeons to rot. The dungeon transformed Michal. Here he had the opportunity to play the role of the self-mortifying, emotional late-mediaeval saint—but unlike his counterparts elsewhere in Europe, the stimulus for Michal’s condition did not lie in the abstract wish for a mystical union with God, but in the very real suffering brought on him by persecution. In prison, Michal was unwilling to waste even a second in which he could serve God. He requested a Bible from the guards, and the four priests, reading aloud, managed to read the entire Old Testament in their first four weeks in captivity. Michal rarely slept, and ate so little that the others did not know how his body could endure. He prayed constantly, sighing, lifting his eyes to heaven, beating his breast and crying frequently. Crying “tears of devotion” are a ubiquitous feature of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hagiography. Frequent tears were a sign of the saint’s religious fervour. They expressed both the saint’s anguished compassion for the suffering Christ, as well as the intense joy that he or she felt in partaking in Christ’s love and compassion.⁴³

⁴⁰ Text K, f.221^a, Text O, f.240^a. The song, “Faithful Christians,” [“Věrní křesťané.”] was said to include verses directly calling the pope “antichrist.” See also Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 188-189. Palacký’s text is not very reliable at this point. The salient facts are accurately reported, but the texts have been rearranged and the most incendiary lines have been omitted.

⁴¹ Text K, ff.223^a-229^b, has been dated to 1518 (see n. 15 above). Text M, (Prague National Library MS XIX A 50) ff.367^b-, is a seventeenth-century manuscript. Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští*, has printed a reliable version of text K on 415-420.

⁴² Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 416. “Rozumiem, že nenie več ta pro jiné, než pro krev Kristovu a dítkám rozdávanie; doufáme Pánu Bohu, dokavadž duše naše jest v prsech našich, že toho neustúpíme, neb pravda bude s námi.”

⁴³ Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago and London, 1984) 180-182.

Where other saints sought out the sick and the infirm to drink their pus or care for them in their filth, Michal was “blessed” with putrid accommodations which he could not leave. The prison was both dark and foul, without fresh air. Michal revelled in this atmosphere. His biographer tells us how, “Once his soul rejoiced and he lifted his eyes to heaven, and he fell face first to the earth and with his mouth he kissed the ground, and he spread his arms through the human excrement like on the cross and with tears he thanked God for this purification. When we wondered about this he said to us, ‘Don’t think, my sons, that I have lost all reason. I do this that you might know how gladly I bear these things, for I know that through it I will come to eternal joy.’”⁴⁴ Later Michal, to increase his suffering further, bound chains around his throat and fettered his legs, and he struck his head on a part of the ground strewn with sawdust until his companions grew frightened.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, after such self-inflicted suffering and abnegation in these fetid conditions, Michal eventually grew sick and died in prison, ensuring his martyrdom. Our narrator makes it fully clear that Michal was not just a victim of the king, but a saint. As is typical of most saints, we are told that Michal was pure from his earliest childhood, that his body was never blemished by sin, and what’s more, that “throughout his whole life he never took communion in one kind alone.”⁴⁶ In other words, Michal, although born and raised in Roman Catholic Poland, was a natural born Utraquist.

At the end of the story, our narrator tells us outright, “He was a man of God, certainly a great saint, honourable priest Michal Polák, and our exemplary father. I end here the Life of the holy priest Michal, whose soul was accepted into God’s kingdom and heavenly joy.”⁴⁷ The author has left no room for ambiguity: Michal, the Polish parish priest was a saint. He served God both as a leader of the faithful and as an example of the most perfect life.

Michal was a bridging figure. He possessed the “unquiet soul” so familiar to us from the lives of the late mediaeval saints. But Michal is perhaps different from these saints in that they created horrible discomfort out of the relatively benign circumstances of their homes and monasteries, while Michal on the other hand was thrust into asceticism by circumstance, specifically by the persecution of the Catholic king. Thus Michal’s saintly acts connect both with the heroic renunciation and mortification of the fourteenth century saints and the great martyrs of the early Christian period, martyrs to whom the Utraquists and later Protestant reformers were so drawn. Furthermore, Michal exhibited the specific characteristics of the Utraquist

⁴⁴ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 418. “A jednu některý čas v duchu se rozveselil, zdvihl oči k nebi, padl na zemi, potom na svú tvář, zemi jest líbal usty a ruce na kříž roztáhl mezi lajny člověčími, s pláčem Bohu díky činil z takového očištění; a když jsme my na to hledíce se divili, řekl jest: ‘Nemněte, synové moji milí, nebo nečiním toho bez rozumu, bychť se snad smyslem pomínul, ale abyšte poznali, kterak já velmi rád tyto věci trpím věda, že skrze to dojdou věčné radosti...’”

⁴⁵ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 419.

⁴⁶ How Michal had access to the chalice as a youth in Poland is not explained by the annalists. Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 417. “On ačkoli byl cizozemec, kompaktáty odsúzen pravdy pana Krista Ježíše, nebo toliko Čechuom a Moravanuom jsú vydána, ale nebyl jest cizozemec od zákona pana Krista; nikdá přes celý život svojo nepřijímal pod jednu zpusobú....”

⁴⁷ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 420 “...tento muž boží byl jest a jistě veliký svatý, kněz Michal Polák poctivý a otec náš příkladný. Dokonal sem život svatého kněze Michala, jehož duše do království a do nebeské radosti se dostala.”

saint: he was a parish priest, a preacher and leader of the lay community; he openly testified and bravely held to his Utraquist beliefs, and for this he died a martyr's death. Michal was a critical figure, in life and in death, for the Utraquists' struggle for survival in the 1480s, and he entered their liturgical calendar on 6 July as a saint alongside Jan Hus and Jerome.⁴⁸

* * *

The apotheosis of Michal Polák can be read as an Utraquist act of resistance to the king's policy of re-Catholicizing Bohemia, a resistance which culminated with the Prague Insurrection of 1483. During the Insurrection, the Calixtine burghers retook control of the city after a period of domination by Catholic lords appointed by Vladislav. This uprising was one indication that the forced suppression of the Utraquist Church was futile, and in 1485 a historic pact of toleration was enacted with the Peace of Kutná Hora, which gave the Utraquist and Roman Catholic Church equal standing in Bohemia and Moravia.

The popular Utraquist preacher and parish priest, Jan Bechyňka, died in 1507, twenty-two years after the Kutná Hora settlement. This settlement created a new difficulty for Bechyňka's prospective hagiographer. There had been no Utraquist martyrs since Michal Polák's death in 1480, yet the Utraquist Church continued to need heroes to bolster its membership, which continually felt pressured from both the traditionalists who wanted to make their peace with Rome, and supporters of the Unity of Brethren who felt that Utraquism had betrayed its early promise.

About Jan Bechyňka we know very little. He was apparently one of those priests who was forced to travel abroad for his ordination. It was said that he travelled with a group of priests to be ordained by the Armenian bishop, who probably resided in Lvov, at the time.⁴⁹ We know little else about Bechyňka except the few clues he drops in his surviving allegorical Czech sermons. He was something of a Czech patriot, a staunch Utraquist who railed against both Roman Catholics and the upstart Unity of Brethren.

Bechyňka's biographer struggled within the structural confines of Utraquist hagiography to create a suitable portrait.⁵⁰ His strategy is to declare right off Bechyňka's saintliness, and to enumerate his saintly qualities:

⁴⁸ Bartoš, "Dvě studie," 79, n.34, lists four liturgical texts that make reference to Michal. The first is a Kyrie found in the Louny Kancionál. The other three texts, including an Alleluia and a Prose, were edited by Václav Novotný, FRB 8 (1932) 460-1, 467. According to Bartoš, the liturgical texts are found in sixteenth-century manuscripts but they almost certainly reflect exemplars that were composed much closer to the date of Michal's death.

⁴⁹ This event is described in a work by Master Matouš Kolín z Chotěřiny, printed by Václav Chaloupecký, "Pře kněžská z r. 1562," *Věstník královské české společnosti nauk* (1925) 136. On this and other details of Bechyňka's life and work, see Noemi Rejchrtová, "Jan Bechyňka - kněz a literát," [Jan Bechyňka – priest and man of letters] pp.5-34, in *Praga Mystica: z dějin české reformace*, [Acta Reformationem Bohemicam Illustrantia, 3] (Prague, 1984).

⁵⁰ Unlike the biographers of Jan Želivský and Michal Polák, Bechyňka's biographer does not identify himself or explain his relationship to his subject. The form of this *vita* is, like the others, a "relation," inserted only into a limited number of the chronicle manuscripts. Like Michal's *vita*, it appears only in text K, ff.283^a-285^b and text M, and was accurately copied by Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští* 425-427.

Reading of the acts of many celebrated men, we commemorate them and we believe that they are holy; therefore we who knew the celebrated man, endowed through the great gifts of God all-powerful, a preacher well-versed in Holy Scriptures and a faithful teacher, a man diligent in fasts and in numerous prayers, living a very strict life, the priest Jan Bechyňka, about whom we do not doubt that *he looks now in the face of God all-powerful together with the other saints, for the consolation of penitent people*, [emphasis mine] this was the end of his life.⁵¹

In this opening declaration, our narrator asserts Bechyňka's sainthood, and enumerates his holy qualities: he is a preacher well-versed in Scripture and a teacher who lives a strict, moral life. Moreover, Bechyňka now dwells with God, "*for the consolation of penitent people.*" That is, he is now in a position to *intercede* with God on behalf of the faithful, which, besides being an example to imitate and/or admire, is the saint's primary function. Intercession was the function most hotly disputed by early Hussite theologians. In this *vita*, the hagiographer seems to take the traditional Roman Catholic position, without belabouring the issue.

The account goes on to describe Bechyňka's final three days on this earth. We hear nothing of the priest's childhood, no miracles, no self-flagellation, no struggles with demons. Bechyňka's holiness is demonstrated primarily through his actions during his final hours on earth. Three days before his death, he was overtaken by illness, apparently the plague. In spite of his weak condition, we learn that "he went to church and served the body of the Lord and the blood of the Lord to both adults and children, which gave him special pleasure."⁵² He then, with difficulty, spoke one last time before his congregation. He made an open confession of his sins and then he testified publicly that he was dying in the true faith in Christ, not in the heretical faith of the Unity of Brethren or others. He finished with a fire and brimstone sermon on dying.

After finishing his sermon, Bechyňka "cried sorrowfully" and made the painful trip home unaided.⁵³ The remainder of the account focuses on the priest's suffering: the tumours under his armpits, the blisters on his breast. Bechyňka called out to God to increase his suffering: "Give me these pains, bleed dry my sinful blood, of which I accumulated plenty in feasting and in good living."⁵⁴ Bechyňka accepts and welcomes his pain as a rite of purification. Denied the martyrdom of Hus and Michal, Bechyňka views his final illness as a martyrdom of his body, for the sake of his community as well as his own purgation.

⁵¹ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 425. "Poněvadž mnohých slavných mužov skutky čtúce připomínáme sobě, věříce o nich, že světí jsú: protož znavše slavného muže velikými dary od Pána Boha všemohucího obdařeného, v známosti Písem svatých kazatele a učitele věrného, obcování šlechtetného v postech, v modlitbách mnohých a života velmi přísného, kněze Jana Bechyňky, o kterém nepochybujeme, že patří v tvář Pána Boha všemohucího s jinými svatými a pro potěšení lidem kajícím, tento konec života jeho byl jest."

⁵² Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 425. "Léta od narození pana Ježíše Krista 1507 v středu po Všech svatých, když byl navštíven od Pána Boha nemocí, šel jest do kostela, i přísluhoval jest tělem božím a krví boží lidem starým i také dítkám a při nich měl veliké potěšení."

⁵³ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 426. "A ty všechny řeči žalostným pláčem dokonal i šel do domu svého bez lidské pomoci."

⁵⁴ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 426. "Daj mi těch bolestí zde dosti, ať hříšnú krev ze mne vytáhnú, kteréž sem se v hodováních a v bydle dobrém nastřebal."

We see more clearly the communal nature of Bechyňka's suffering the following day, a Friday, when the priest asked to be transferred to larger quarters, apparently expressly so that more witnesses might be able to observe his final passion.⁵⁵ In front of an audience, he put on a display of pained piety, crying and praying constantly to God for salvation and for death: "My God," he exclaimed, "they ridiculed you, as well as me, your unworthy servant. My God, already I thirst for you like a deer greedy for water."⁵⁶ The ridicule (which appears merely rhetorical — nowhere does the narrator describe Bechyňka being ridiculed) and the thirst echo Christ's treatment on the road to Cavalry and his thirst on the cross.⁵⁷ This allusion is confirmed when Bechyňka asked for one final favour, to die that day, Friday, "in memory of his innocent passion."⁵⁸ The favour is granted, and with his passing and during the burial there was thunderous lamentation: "There was such lamentation, that the most wretched person could hardly hold back his crying from grief, and even from the children there was such great crying that it could be clearly heard far away."⁵⁹

Bechyňka's manner of death was clearly crucial both to him and his hagiographer. He died within full view of the public, like the martyrs of old, mauled by savage beasts in the arena, setting an example through his heroic fortitude. The lamentation that followed served to confirm the priest's saintly status. The whole populace, even the children, were bemoaning the loss of their holy protector, seemingly demanding of God that he be returned to them as a saint.

The basis for Bechyňka's sainthood was nevertheless about as prosaic as it could be: He was a morally upright teacher, a passionate preacher who testified to his Utraquist faith to the bitter end. Besides his work as teacher and preacher, his *imitatio Christi* consisted primarily in dying a horrible, yet natural, death openly and with dignity, on a Friday. The Utraquist's critics on one side, the Roman Catholics, would probably deny that Bechyňka demonstrated sufficient characteristics of sanctity. Critics on the other side, the Unity of Brethren, denied the entire concept of the saints. It was between these poles that the Utraquist hagiographer had to work, striving to find a heroic model to hold the reforming middle ground.

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These *relace* found in the Old Czech Annals are rare examples of Utraquist hagiography in the era before the arrival of the Lutheran Confession in Bohemia. They still exist today only because one or two of the compilers of the Old Czech

⁵⁵ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 426. "Ten pátek po Věech svatých, maje svůj čas oznámen již blízko, kázal se u větší světnici položití."

⁵⁶ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 426. "Bože muoj, tobě sú se posmievali, i mně, sluze tvému nehodnému; Bože muoj, žízním již k tobě jako lačný jelen k vodě." Here the priest echoes Psalm 42:1: "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God." [Thanks to Prof. Marcia Colish for bringing this to my attention.]

⁵⁷ Bechyňka's "thirst" also brings to mind courtly love poetry and the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs.

⁵⁸ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 426-7. "Tak se modlil rozličnými modlitbami, i za to, aby mu Pán Buh ráčil dáti v pátek jeho život dokonati, na památku jeho nevinného umučení."

⁵⁹ Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 427. "A při jeho pohřbu pláč veliký byl, že žalostí najzúfalejší člověk stěžka by se mohl zdržeti od pláče; nebo i od dětí byl pláč veliký, ježto jest mohl dobře daleko slyšán býti."

Annals, a work written by and for the urban laity, chose to preserve them in their manuscripts. Written in a straightforward Czech prose, these hagiographies provided their readers with a new conception of sanctity, centred around absolute devotion to the Eucharist in both kinds for adults and children. For the Utraquist hagiographer, the saint *had* to be a priest, both because priests were so central to Eucharistic devotion and because priests were in short supply.⁶⁰ The saintly priest had to exhibit heroic fortitude, patience, learning, preaching, leadership ability and moral rectitude. He *could* undergo great torment and cry effusively, but his holiness would not be manifested by anything so unseemly as miracles or even visions.

Not that the miraculous was completely excluded from the Utraquist worldview. In 1492, when long-dormant silver mines were reopened in Kutná Hora, the miners found human remains. These mines were the site of one of the most notorious episodes in the history of the Hussite Revolution and the chronicler had no difficulty accounting for the bones. They were relics of “faithful Czechs,”⁶¹ tossed dead or alive into the deep shafts by the Roman Catholic royalists who dominated Kutná Hora at the time. The victims, including captured priests, were never forgotten by the Utraquist faithful. They were memorialized in the liturgy as the “Martyrs of Kutná Hora,” and venerated collectively as saints along with Jan Hus and Jerome.⁶²

This was a noteworthy find--relics of legendary martyrs. But an even more remarkable discovery was soon made as mining was resumed in the old shafts:

Here the miners also found during mining a body, but not the whole thing, only the upper part of the torso, and this body gave off a beautiful and sweet scent like myrrh; everyone in Kutná Hora can testify to this. People believe that it is the body of the parish priest Jan Chůdek of Kouřim, whom they beheaded together with other priests and threw into the pit, and this happened in the year of our Lord 1419.⁶³

The remains of this priest of Kouřim, executed over seventy years previously, clearly exhibited signs God’s favour: the body, miraculously preserved, giving off the sweet scent of expensive perfume. It was perhaps a small miracle, yet it is another indication of the continued vitality of ancient traditions associated with saints and their relics among Utraquist authors and their lay readership.

⁶⁰ There is, of course, some irony in this emphasis on the priestly saint, since the original intent of the lay chalice was to reduce the barriers between clergy and laity.

⁶¹ Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 304. “Horníci, dobývající starých doluov, do kterýchžto někdy metali věrné Čechy, kteříž přijímali tělo a krev Pána Ježíše pod obojí zpuosobú, u týchž doluov dobývali kostí těch Čechuov také.”

⁶² Václav Novotný, FRB 8 (1932). See pages 458, 460, 461, 467 for examples of the martyrs of Kutná Hora in the liturgy. They also appear in sermons (368) and songs (453) dedicated to Jan Hus, Jerome and other Czech martyr-saints.

⁶³ Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 304. “I našli jsou jedno tělo, ač ne celé, ale toliko prsi s žebrami, neb havěři to rozpa[l]ovali, dobývající perku; a to tělo tak jest velmi čistú a libú vuoni mělo jakožto myrra výborná. To jest všudy u Hory svědomo bylo; a tak jsou se domyšlovali, že by to tělo bylo kněze Jana Chudka, faráře kúřimského, kteréhož jsou vydali někdy s jinými kněžími a do šachty uvrhli, a to se stalo léta Božieho MCCCCXIX.”

Interestingly, in the liturgical texts individual martyrs from Kutná Hora are not named. One may then wonder how this particular torso was identified as the priest Jan Chůdek. One possibility is that the Old Czech Annals were consulted. The entry for Text R from 1419 describes how Chůdek was beheaded and tossed into the pit along with two colleagues. Šimek, *Staré letopisy české z vřatlavského rukopisu* 21. Chůdek’s death is also attested in Vavřinec of Březová’s “Hussite Chronicle”.

The discovery of Jan Chůdek's body was also significant in that it created a very real connection between the Utraquist faithful and their heroic forebears. A similar connection, through the celebration of Jan Hus Day, came to play a more prominent role in Utraquist life in the early sixteenth century, if the Old Czech Annals are any indication. There is not a single reference in the Old Czech Annals to the celebration of Jan Hus Day throughout the entire fifteenth century. In fact, there are some indications that the Utraquist city fathers were attempting to suppress the frequent celebrations accompanying saints' days. The story of a dispute in 1483 informs us that while Prague churches adhering to the Roman rite held annual fairs [*posvícenie*] on the day of the church's patron saint, Utraquist churches all held their fair on the same day, St. Wenceslaus's Day, a kind of national holiday.⁶⁴ This policy of downplaying saints' days, along with the feasting and partying that they engendered, suited perfectly the stricter interpreters of Utraquist practice.

The first mention of Jan Hus Day in the Old Czech Annals does not come until 1503. At this time, the Utraquist leaders decided to declare the "vigil of the saint Master Jan Hus" a day of fasting and prayer as a means of imploring God for much-needed rain. This was a significant step, in that it raised Hus' feast day to the level of those for Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and only a few others. The fast was mandated by both the priests and the civic authorities, yet nevertheless ended in failure, a failure blamed on the refusal of the "Roman" party to join the fast: "But the Roman party didn't want to fast or even to commemorate this day. They went through Prague over to the Castle and some went to Malá Strana [on the royalist side of the river] so that they could eat meat and not fast for Saint Master Hus. And so the Lord God did not send rain."⁶⁵ Despite the apparent failure of the fast to achieve its aims, this report indicates that Hus was being revered not only as a pious example for others to emulate, but as a full-fledged saint, one capable of acting as a patron and intercessor before God.

In this first mention of a major observance of St. Jan Hus, the commemoration takes a form that most Utraquists could agree on — a day of fasting and prayer. The second mention of Jan Hus Day takes on a much different form. As was quoted at length at the very beginning of this chapter, the celebrations of 5-6 July 1517 were marked by great throngs, bonfires, blaring trumpets, and booming guns. Jan Hus has been transformed from patron, invoked for help through prayer and fasts, to a symbol of Utraquist triumph and unity, to be celebrated with all fanfare.

Soon Hus will also be invoked as a rallying cry and a threat to any who may attempt to overturn the status quo. In 1521, the chronicler makes one final mention of how Jan Hus Day was memorialized. In this year, the Utraquists gathered at the St. James monastery, founded by the hated Minorites, now exiled from Prague. From there they marched to the bridge and then down to St. Mary of the Snows, Jan

⁶⁴ This also appears to be an indication that the Utraquists saw themselves as forging a national church, rather than just being a reforming branch of the universal Roman church. Šimek and Kaňák, *Staré letopisy české z rukopisu křižovnického* 290.

⁶⁵ Prague National Museum V E 89 [text O] f.253^b. "Item u vigílii S. Jana Husi byl uložen od knieží a od pánův pod obojí způsobu po Praze půst a den modlitebný, aby Pán Bůh ráčil déšť dáti. Ale strana Římská nechtěla se postiti ani svietiti na ten den, kteří byli po Praze šli na hrad a někteří na Malou Stranu aby maso jedli a nepostili se S. Mistru Husovi. A Pán Bůh také déšť nedal." See also Text L, f.138^a, Palacký, *Staří letopisové čeští* 224.

Želivský's former church, singing all the while songs about Jan Hus as well as the infamous "*Věrní křesťané silně doufejme,*" ["O faithful Christians, let us hope mightily"] the song which instigated the martyrdoms of 1483. This was the second time in two years that the Utraquists engaged in such celebrations on Hus's day. Neither the destinations of the marchers nor their songs were chosen by accident, but were purposely provocative. Commencing the procession at the former Minorite monastery, where the mendicants had twice been banished from the city, symbolized the Utraquist triumph over their main adversaries, as did the public singing of songs that had once been banned by royal proclamation. Ending the procession at St. Mary of the Snows, where Želivský had fomented revolutionary violence, was no subtle threat to those who sought a new Roman Catholic restoration. The Utraquist public knew this history well, as did the city fathers. The chronicler tells us that there was such fear in the city that the monasteries would once again be plundered that all the gates of Prague, the stone bridge, and Malá Strana were locked up for the day.⁶⁶

Like the concept of the saint, the saint's day had come full circle in Utraquist practice. Hussite radicals had once rejected all saints not connected directly to Christ in the New Testament. They treated saints as moral exemplars only and rejected saints' days for any purpose other than reflection and prayer. But the Utraquists of early sixteenth-century Prague celebrated Jan Hus Day with all the hoopla of a national holiday, and used it as a reminder of the forces that could be unleashed by invoking Hus' name. It is perhaps not surprising that Jan Hus Day came to accrue such latent energy. After all, over the years more and more martyrs, whose memories could inflame great passion, were added to this day: the fiery Czech zealot Jerome of Prague; the pitiable martyrs of Kutná Hora, whose recently-found relics brought their tragedy freshly to light; the courageous Pole Michal. Through this day, now a great feast, and under the guidance of new saints representing the virtues of the reforming church, the Utraquist faithful were able to look to forward a future filled with the greatest of promise.

⁶⁶ Text L, f.284^a. "v neděli po mistru Janovi Husovi milovníci a obhájcové pravdy boží sebravše se pospolu šli do kláštera k sv. Jakubu a tam zpívali píseň tu '*V naději boží mistr Jan Hus etc.*' a potom '*Věrní křesťané silně doufejme etc.*' Odtud šli k sv. Klímentu k mostu, potom k Matce boží Sněžné, zpívající ty písně pobožné. A předtím na dvě létě také u Matky boží zpívali, z náboženství-li to činili či jinak, nevím. A v tu neděli zavřeli všecky brány v Praze, i na mostě, i na Malé Straně, bojíce se nějaké pohromy na kláštery." See also Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští* 373.