
The Place of Children in Utraquist Liturgical Song

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“Praise God, little children, you little infants,
because he doesn’t drive you away from himself
but feeds you with his holy body.”

The publication of the first critical edition of the *Jistebnický Kancionál*,¹ containing what is effectively the oldest Utraquist hymnal, provides access to a number of hymns concerning children. The Kancionál, dated to the third decade of the fifteenth century, is an important monument in the history of the western liturgy as a whole as it is the first witness we have of an attempt to translate the Roman Mass and Office into the vernacular intended for regular pastoral use. Along with notated Czech translations of texts for the proper for the eucharist and Office the codex contains a collection of over sixty vernacular hymns and songs. In thirteen of them, children play an important role and figure under a variety of themes, ranging from catechetical texts, to hymns on children’s place at the eucharist to the eschatological role played by children in both imaging the heavenly Jerusalem on earth and leading the praises of the assembly of the redeemed in heaven. While it is difficult to attribute exact dates to the all of the hymns and songs in the *Jistebnický Kancionál*, those concerning children were most likely composed between about 1417, when the communion of infants and small children was restored, and sometime in the early 1420s when the compilers of the codex finished their work.

Since the beginning of the Bohemian sacramental and liturgical renewal movement in the fourteenth century, apologies for the practice of frequent communion often referred to the *parvuli in Christo* (the little ones in Christ) as being those to whom particular care should be paid and to whom it was important to give the eucharist frequently. At first, these “little ones” were understood to be the poor, the simple, and the socially marginalised who

¹ *Jistebnice Kancionál*. MS Prague, National Museum Library II. C. 7. *Critical Edition*. edd. Jaroslav Kolár et al. Only the first volume (*Graduale*) [Monumenta Liturgica Bohemica II] (Brno, 2005) has been published. Volume 2 (*Cantionale*) is currently in preparation. The entire manuscript can be studied in digital form on: www.manuscriptorium.com. The manuscript was paginated by hand in the nineteenth century (recto, upper right corner) the webpage has foliated the text. This article contains both JK p = f.

could not fulfil the rigorous requirements that were imposed on would-be communicants and who were thus kept from regular reception of the sacrament.² By the fifteenth century, the term appears to have come to include those who were more literally the “little ones in Christ” – infants and children and, soon, its use became restricted to them. Just as Jesus had invited the poor and socially marginalised to occupy seats at his banquet, so, too, ran the argument, he also invited children and infants to his table – for had he not held up a child as the model of the ideal inheritor of his kingdom? Thus, infants and children came to hold a particular place in Utraquist ecclesiology and eucharistic theology and, accordingly, found an important place in their rapidly growing corpus of vernacular hymnody.

Popular song had played an important role in the Bohemian reform movement from the first years of the fifteenth century. Proponents of reform as well as its opponents had long used song in their public demonstrations. Neither the efforts of the Archbishop of Prague, Zbyněk Zajíc of Hasenburk, nor the injunctions of Pope Martin V had much success in suppressing their use. While some of the hymns were intended to be provocative and polemical, most were clearly intended to play a catechetical role so that those who sang them appropriated the fundamental rationale for a particular party's position. In a world in which most were illiterate, there could be few better ways of communicating important teachings than with song in the vernacular. The *Jistebnický Kancionál* contains a large number of these catechetical songs. Several are of particular interest here as they address themselves to the question of infants, children and the eucharist.

Singing about communion sub utraque and communion for all the baptised.

Two hymns in particular, “First, opening the Bible” (*Bibli najprv otevrúcei*)³ and “Let us belong to the wise God,” (*Patřmež k Bohu tak múdrému*)⁴ provide a fundamental catechesis on the biblical and patristic foundations for giving the eucharist sub utraque to all, including children. The hymn “First, opening the Bible” is a rehearsal of what were held to be some of the important Old and New Testament injunctions for the reception of the eucharist sub utraque. While

² See “Elevation, communion and substitutes,” in Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991) 63–82; David R. Holeton, “Les conditions de la communion fréquente,” in *La Communion des tout – petits enfants: Une étude du mouvement eucharistique en Bohême vers la fin du Moyen-Âge*. [Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae Subsidia, No. 50] (Rome, 1988) 58–61; *ibid.* “The Bohemian Eucharistic Movement in its European Context” *BRRP* 1 (1996) 30f.; *ibid.* “The Sacramental Theology of Tomáš Štítný of Štítné,” *BRRP* 4 (2002) 66ff.

³ JK no. 73, 52–53, ff. 32v–33r.

⁴ JK no. 78, 56–57, ff. 34v–35r.

children are not first mentioned in the hymn, they are introduced in the final strophe where they add their “amens” of approbation to the catena of texts. The final phrase reminds the community that *all* have been called to the Supper.

Here begins a song to the honour and praise of God according to parables of the Old Testament, about the manner in which faithful Christians, according to Christ's words in the New Testament, are to treat his holy body and his holy blood as declared by St Paul.

First opening the Bible at <1> Kings chapter nineteen <5 ff.>, and reading, we discover together in a parable what we are expected to fulfil.

The angel said to Elijah: “Get up and fortify yourself, the long journey you must travel will be an upwards journey if you fortify yourself with bread and then with drink from the cup.”

This bread is now the body of God,⁵ prepared for Christians. Here is Godhead and humanity in both kinds both of them are the entire sacrament, ordained for people for their happiness.

Being moved by the Holy Spirit, David earnestly ordered his deacons, priests and princes to give praise to the precious Lord God, each according to his rank.

In the sixteenth chapter of the <1> Book of Chronicles <1 ff.>, what he ordered them and us to do at this very time in us is destroyed what should be performed by us.

To praise God and laud his name
by word and deed
David greatly cherished what the Lord God had appointed.

Let us bear in mind the new testament, given by Christ. The evangelists bear witness to what Christ, through his power, bequeathed in his memory, so that he might sanctify man thereby.

Saint Paul also writes to the people of Corinth: <1 Cor. 11: 23ff.> “I received from Jesus for your salvation. The Lord Jesus declared thus and I followed him in this.

⁵ To this day the “Body of God” (*Boží tělo*) is the usual Czech formulation of the English “Body of Christ”.

When Christ was to be betrayed, after the ceremonial supper he took bread, blessed it and broke it saying: 'This is my body: Do this in memory of me, whenever you receive it.'

Then he also took the chalice, the supper being ended: 'Drink of it all of you. This is my blood of the new testament. Eat my body and drink my blood and thus you will fulfil my testament.'

He then repeated those words to all faithful Christians. What he declared to the Corinthians, he also intended for others, he said to them and us: "let each one test himself first."

Saint Paul, [and we] believe this firmly, said through the Holy Spirit, "as long it should last," and wrote to all the faithful: "until the one shall come who will judge all."⁶

Let us accept with grace
the scripture concerning both testaments,
a sacred thing given to all the faithful and not seek to alter it.
In this way we will appease God's anger.

Let us return to the custom agreed by God
if we desire the peace of eternal life afterwards
to live for ever and rejoice with Jesus.

And you, dear Saviour, who loves everything good
pray unite both laity and clergy in one will
so that we may magnify your law and fulfil it duly

Children, let us all say: Amen, amen, amen, amen,
for our neighbour, brother and friend, Father, Son and Saviour
has invited us all to the feast and given his body and blood for us to
receive.

The second hymn, "Let us belong to the wise God," devotes itself entirely to presenting a catena of versified proof texts on why infants and children are given communion.

⁶ Paraphrase 1 Cor 11:26.

Here begins a hymn to the honour and praise of God that the blood and body of the Lord Jesus Christ must not only be given to the old, but also to the young and to children in memory of him.

Let us belong to the wise God who was poor for us in the world,
to the Lord Jesus,
[and], devoted to his laws more than to the customs of the world,
may we the faithful all bind ourselves.

Christ commands baptism and no one is exempt
either by estate or age, saying, “he who is not born of the Holy Spirit
and of water will not get to heaven.” <Jn. 3:5>

Likewise no one is exempt, neither young nor old, saying
“if you do not receive the body of the Son of Man and his blood
you will not enter into life.” <Jn. 6:53>

Before all true Christians, the saints of olden day
such as Timothy and after him Dyonisius, taught by Paul the Apostle.⁷

Let us see what God’s great martyr Cyprian
affirms about children, and also abide by
Saints Augustine, John Chrysostom and Remigius.

Timothy, that saint who was mocked by non-believers,
gave to children the body of Jesus Christ as well as baptism, wrote to
Dyonisius asking what he was to do.

Dyonisius wrote back to Timothy
telling him that he should continue
to give [communion] to children in both kinds
and not be downhearted despite the mockery
and errors of non-believers.⁸

In his letters Cyprian the Martyr wrote
that one little girl not yet able to speak,

⁷ At the time the hymn was written, the corpus of texts now known under the name of Pseudo-Dionysius were still universally regarded to be the works of Dionysius, converted by Paul on the Areopagus. The gloss by Peter of Spain (then understood to be part of the original) played a fundamental role in the Utraquist case for baptismal communion presented at the Council of Basel as “Dionysius” states that no sacrament is complete unless it is fulfilled in the eucharist – *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* III, Title, gloss.

⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* VII,11.

having been instructed by her elders
received God's blood.⁹

There is also St Augustine
who, in his books about the baptism of children, states explicitly
that the body of Jesus Christ was given for the life of the world
and also for the lives of children.

And if children being here in the world do not eat the body of the Son
they will not have eternal life.
So declares Augustine.¹⁰

According to St John Chrysostom: none will come to heaven
unless they be born of water and Spirit and eat the body of God
and drink the holy blood.¹¹

St Remigius also declares that the body and blood of God
is to be given to those in need for their fortification.¹²
So here you have six courageous witnesses
with which let us be content.

Let us flee to Jesus and to God his Father
that they may open to us all holy reading of the truth
required for salvation through the Spirit.

So that, by knowing it with the help of the Holy Spirit
we may fulfil it and, dwelling in grace, attain the Kingdom of God.
Let us all say: Amen.

As florilegia of biblical and "patristic" texts the hymns present a handful of the most commonly cited authors used in the defence of giving communion to infants and children. By the time the hymns were written, communion sub utraque was well established in Bohemia and, with it, two of its foundational biblical texts John 3:5 (Unless one is born of water and the Spirit...) and John 6:53 (Unless you eat of the flesh...) had become well known to all as fundamental proof-texts on which the practice of communion sub utraque

⁹ Cyprian, *De lapsis* cc. 25, 26.

¹⁰ The Utraquists drew widely on Augustine as a witness to the importance of infant communion. See *La Communion*, 269–277.

¹¹ John Chrysostom *Sermo ad Neophytos* 16.

¹² The works of Remigius, the last of the "patristic" witnesses cited was believed to have been the Remigius who baptised Clovis, king of the Franks and who was also identified with the Carolingian scholar Remigius of Auxerre. The texts referred to are, in fact, the work of Haymo of Halberstadt, *Homilia* 43.

had come to be accepted as a part of “the Law of God”, adherence to which was believed by Utraquists to be required of all Christians. More than any other, it was these two texts (read along with the various institution narratives e.g. “drink you all of this”) that had brought Utraquists to hold that the dominical commands applied to all, regardless of age.

Together, these two hymns provided adult Utraquists with an *aide mémoire* of the basic scriptural and patristic proof texts for their practice which they could use as an arsenal when called upon to make an apology for the rightness of their practices should they fall into dispute with the diminishing minority of the population who still adhered to the sub una party and which accepted neither communion sub utraque nor communion for all the baptised. As children grew old enough to sing and to remember the words of these hymns, they would begin to comprehend why they had been brought to be fed sub utraque at the Lord’s Table at least weekly from the time of their baptism. As such, these hymns are a fine example of liturgical mystagogia in which experience is provided with a biblical/patristic/theological rationale.

Children Singing the Decalogue: a way to life?

For the more radical Utraquists in Southern Bohemia, the Decalogue was held in particularly high regard and played an important role in determining which “public sins” were to be publicly punished as maintained in the third of the Four Articles of Prague. Hence, all must learn the Decalogue. The *Jistebnický Kancionál* contains four versions of the Decalogue of which two are simply notated translations of the text without any addition and the other two are expanded paraphrases intended to be catechetical with glosses emphasizing certain aspects of the Commandments.

Two of these catechetical hymns pay close attention to children and their coming to know the Ten Commandments. The first, “Well, Christians of the true faith,” (*Nuž křesťané viery pravé*),¹³ attributed to the radical priest Jan Čapek, is primarily a versified paraphrase of the Decalogue. It begins with a general exhortation to the fear of God and a fulfilment of the Commandments. The hymn first addresses the adults who are reminded that children follow closely behind and that it is their voices that will soon fill the streets with song. In an era of heightened eschatological expectation there was a vivid sense of the heavenly Jerusalem having descended to earth (Rev 21:1–8). The songs of children in the streets become a sign that the earthly cities of “faithful Czechs” are being transformed into cities of God.

¹³ JK no. 72, 51–52, ff. 32r-v.

Well, Christians of the true faith
let us now exert ourselves.
Although we formerly cared for nought
let us now endeavour
to fear God.

Let us fulfil his commandments
and study him.
It is shameful indeed
not to wish
to know God.

Children are not lagging behind in this
even though they are unschooled.
Soon you will hear singing
in all the streets
from the little ones.

[There follows an extended rehearsal of the commandments and concludes with these two verses.]

Lord God, give freedom
to all who love you.
Let them profess your truth
wherever they be
in Christendom.

Let us all long for this
although it was announced to us.
God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
singing together: Amen,
amen, amen.

The hymn “Listen to God’s commandment” (*Slyšte prikázanie božie*),¹⁴ takes a somewhat different turn. While setting out to teach the Decalogue to adults, the text makes it very clear that the children are also to learn the Ten Commandments. This time the eschatological motive is future rather than realised as learning the Decalogue is seen as a part of their preparation for the life to come in which they will join with the adults in the heavenly chorus which, with Christ, will sing God’s eternal praise.

¹⁴ JK no. 84, 62–63, ff. 37v–38r.

Listen to God's commandment, those of you who want the eternal reward,
which is to see God.

This is what the Lord God commanded and to which he committed his people.
Teach this to your children, you adults.

That they should have no other gods or worship anyone else
but the living God.

That they do not take his name in vain or ever swear by it,
avoid the second.

It is commanded to observe the Sabbath; instil this in your children
because the Lord God has commanded it.

[The hymn rehearses the remaining commandments without mentioning children and concludes:]

All those who sing this song, will save themselves eternally from death,
and enjoy all divine happiness

where the saints dwell they rejoice eternally with the Lord,
and sing with Christ from the beginning of time.

The ultimate purpose of learning the Commandments is clearly both doxological and eschatological rather than simply inculcating "correct" behaviour thereby maintaining the social order here on earth. In an apocalyptic age which was filled with the expectation of the coming of the heavenly kingdom, we are presented first with the image of children filling the streets with song as a foretaste of God's reign and, then, with the whole community of the redeemed, young and old, singing God's praises in heaven.

This theme recurs in another hymn attributed to the radical priest Jan Čapek, "Children, sing to God," (*Dietky, Bohu zpievajme*).¹⁵ At the beginning children are called to praise God along with their elders. Surprisingly, though, this summons to sing to God is given what, at the time, was a most remarkable eschatological twist. For, here, we are given an image of children and adults singing together in the peaceable kingdom. Remarkably, those who are included in this chorus are Bohemia's geographical neighbours and traditional enemies (Germans, Saxons, Hungarians, Swabs and Austrians as well

¹⁵ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu* [The History of Hussite Song] (Prague, 1956) vol. 6, 193.

as “unfaithful Czechs”) all of whom opposed both Utraquism and the communion of children. Likened to those whom Jesus reprimanded for keeping the children from him, they have been reconciled to “God’s truth” (communion sub utraque for all) and are now able to join with the children and all “faithful Czechs” in praising God.

Children, let us sing to God,
let us give him glory and praise
along with the elders.

Not only <with> Germans, Saxons, Hungarians
Swabs and Austrians
as well as unfaithful Czechs.

Whom he made sad and frightened
when he chased them away from the little ones
[both] hither and yon
to bring consolation to his loved and faithful ones.

Dear Father, accept our praise
from your faithful Czechs.

Let us praise God with joy
as the Scriptures teach us all.

Children and the Eucharist: A theology in song

Not surprisingly, a significant number of hymns in the *Kancionál* were written to encourage all the faithful to come to the eucharistic banquet. Repeatedly, children are specifically included in their number. In the hymn “In his time God gives his marvellous gifts,” (*Časy svými jistými*)¹⁶ the faithful are reminded of how God fed the people of Israel in the wilderness and how he feeds them now. They are then warned of the dangers of refusing such a generous gift.

This song tells us of how he calls us to his Holy Supper.

In his time God gives his marvellous gifts, as we learn from Holy Scripture.

¹⁶ JK no. 76, 54–55, ff. 33v–34r.

Refrain: So invited, hurry to the feast
prepare yourselves with your children for everything is ready
with one heart prepared to go to his table.

Who has invited all to himself, both good and wicked
the good as his friends, but as a command to the wicked. *Refrain.*

Eat the body and drink the blood, all who wish to have life
and not to die from snakes in the desert. *Refrain*

For with this bread and bread of the Father
they went from Egypt to the Promised Land, along with their children
taking everything with them and not wanting to leave anything behind.
Refrain

This sacrament also has the virtue of taking away the evil of our sins
but because we always sin we always take communion. *Refrain*

[The hymn continues with a reminder that the first Christians received
communion daily, that God wishes to feed his people with “daily bread”
and that those who refuse this invitation will face divine punishment.]

In this hymn we find several important themes of Utraquist theology which differ significantly from the current theology and piety of the time. In an age in which preparation for communion had been highly individualistic, the theology here is highly communitarian. Adults, along with their children, are “to hurry to the feast” and are reminded of this in the refrain after every verse.

This resonates with the “movement to the hills” during the summer of 1419 when Wenceslaus IV, under pressure from Pope Martin V, expelled many Utraquist priests from their parishes and replaced them with sub unists. This was the principle catalyst for the “Hussite Revolution” which began that summer. With their church buildings no longer available for their use, priests and people loyal to the chalice made their way to local hilltops where there was preaching, opportunity to confess, and celebrations of the eucharist at which all received communion sub utraque. These hilltop events included meals at which all shared the food they had brought with them.¹⁷ The general atmosphere was eschatologically charged and, as “family events”, they were perceived as a recreation of the community meals found in the Acts of the Apostles. As communities expelled from their buildings, there was a strong sense of having become a pilgrim people, wandering through the desert and all its risks towards a promised but uncertain future. Thus there was a personal identification with the exodus of the people of Israel of whom they sang.

¹⁷ Several accounts of these events can be found in HHR, 278–280.

In the hymn, it is clear that God's invitation to the banquet includes both the good and the wicked. This, too, reflects Bohemian eucharistic theology as it developed during the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Matěj (Matthias) of Janov (c. 1350/1355—1393), the greatest contemporary advocate of frequent communion, found himself faced with the medieval theological tradition and its accompanying popular piety which supported eucharistic abstinence as the better practice. Like elsewhere in Europe, this was simply a popular distillation of the scholastic reflection on the question of whether more respect was given the sacrament by communicating often or rarely. The bulk of theological opinion held that the average (imperfect) Christian best honoured the sacrament by abstaining from frequent communion.

Matěj and his theological allies took the opposite point of view. For them, the sacrament was, first and foremost, for eating. In so doing, the communicant was changed and slowly perfected by the One s/he consumed thus, in turn, becoming more worthy of receiving the sacrament. The apocalyptically charged atmosphere of the time heightened the sense of urgency – frequent communion fortified the individual for the imminent last battle – so that all the baptised must communicate often so that all might be saved. Thus they sang the refrain which exhorted both adults and children to hurry together to the banquet which has been prepared.

Another hymn, "Let us praise God, who is ever good" (*Chvalmž Boha vždy dobrého*)¹⁸ also contains a rich tapestry of themes. First of all, the hymn is a call to all the faithful to give praise for God's goodness given to all – both old and young alike. This thanksgiving quickly focuses on the eucharist and almost immediately turns to the importance of children's participation in the sacrament.

This hymn tells how the Lord God gives us his gifts in a wonderful way and invites us to his Holy Supper:

Let us praise God, who is ever good and merciful to sinners:
the heavenly Father;
let us praise also his Son, blessed for ever and ever
and the Holy Spirit.

Refrain: Who out of his divine goodness
dispenses his bounty from heaven to each of the faithful.

To old and young alike, he opens straight way his treasures
and gives to all. *Refrain*

He takes nothing for himself, but shares everything with us
and to the meek most of all. *Refrain*

¹⁸ JK no. 77, 54–55, ff. 34r-35v.

O, your mercy is excessive, good Lord; was it not enough,
what you did for us? *Refrain*

Having an only Son, so very dear to you,
and equally divine, *Refrain*

You gave us him here on this earth, blood and body in dual essence
for eternal life *Refrain*

So that we may consume him, eating and drinking and thanking
our Lord in heaven. *Refrain*

Through his holy body and the blood that flowed from him,
prepare us for goodness. *Refrain*

O elders, start to sing, lest your children escape you,
hastening to God. *Refrain*

Wishing to feast with God, children must accomplish
a worthy supper. *Refrain*

Let us all cry aloud, for he invites us to his table,
he desires it of everyone. *Refrain*

Be joyful, poor wretches; all you little children
are invited to the feast. *Refrain*

Let him give you his body for that which is dearer than gold
with meekness to the little ones. *Refrain*

O dear Father in heaven, we sinners pray to you.
have mercy on us. *Refrain*

We, your little servants, to whom you have been Father from the first
ask for food. *Refrain*

Give bread, the food of your body, give blood from your chalice
so that we may recognise you. *Refrain*

The hymn then takes a polemical turn, addressing those priests who seem to be uncertain about giving communion to infants and children. John 6:53 (on the necessity of communion *sub utraque*) is invoked after which children themselves ask the priest accusingly how he could possibly obstruct their salvation by refusing them the sacrament. Here we encounter the

theme of children as inheritors of the kingdom of God to whom the sacrament cannot be denied, a theme that will recur in other hymns. Then, once again, the hymn goes on at length about the necessity of the sacrament for the salvation of all – particularly the young – invoking Cyprian and Scripture.

Do not take offence, O priest,
the words of Christ apply to all and sundry *Refrain*

Saying: “You will not enter into life unless you all eat of me
and drink of my blood.” *Refrain*

And how will you now explain why you obstruct our salvation
although we are innocent? *Refrain*

We disregard customs that are in any way outdated
and vilify the truth. *Refrain*

“Now custom must give way to truth,” says that great pillar of the church
Saint Cyprian. *Refrain*

“But from the mouths of babies and other little children
honour is paid to God.” *Refrain*

Thus speaks David, the prophet who suffers all children
to go to Jesus *Refrain*

to eat his body and drink his holy blood
of the sacred table. *Refrain*

The kingdom of God belongs to children to whom the holy treasure
of the church must not be denied. *Refrain*

The body of God, and baptism, that double general sacrament
must be given to all. *Refrain*

Wherever they are able to go, both the elderly and children
should take both. *Refrain*

If you old ones do not wish to for fear of God’s face
allow the little ones at least! *Refrain*

Teach, lead and enjoin, and endeavour yourselves
to give yourselves to Christ. *Refrain*

Let us all pray to the Lord, that his faithful family
should not vanish into flame *Refrain*

but let the body of your Son give the blood of eternal life.
And let us all say: Amen. *Refrain*

The rebuke to those who deny communion to infants can be found in a stronger form in the hymn “King Jesus Christ, beloved Lord,” (*Iesu Christe králi. Pane zmilely*).¹⁹

King Jesus Christ, beloved Lord,
glorified with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In supplication we pray to you: help your family
and do not let the small children die.

Having suffered violence for generations
the care of the first sins without relenting.

Having through you a second birth
of your holy baptism and renewal.

The food of your body for redemption
and the blood of the precious wine to extirpate sin.

Also for the increase of mercy
you give in the sacrament for increase of virtue.

O Jesus, begotten in the body,
in the womb of your mother, a virgin most pure,

who cheered the child that was hailed by the voice
and was still being carried in Elizabeth’s belly.

When it had recognised you it delighted in you
and although it was not yet born it loved you.

Be pleased to cheer children brought to you
and quickly free them from the sin of blasphemy.

Just as you freed the enslaved children,
greatly afflicted by the pagans from Egypt.

¹⁹ JK no. 88, 67–68, ff. 40r-v.

When they had to go into the desert with their elders
to sacrifice to God with the adults.

Wanting to admit the men but not the children
wanting to separate them from God's sacrifices.

The same is done now with children
who are separated from God

not wanting to admit them to God's sacraments,
putting the children off with cunning reasons.

And so children continue to suffer violence,
having obstacles and difficulties placed in their path to God.

In the same way that they were reproached
when they carried them to you and were rebuked.

Indeed they were hindered and berated
by your disciples, as being unworthy.

Likewise in the temple when they were singing their praises to you
the teachers of the law complained and reproached you

as being unwise to let them shout like that
that they acknowledged you as their Saviour.

And you excused them by citing David,
that young children are to praise you.

And not only children,
but also infants, if they are together.

So now let Christian children be released
and the holy prophecy be fulfilled.

That they will bring to you their sons in their arms
and also their daughters on their shoulders and their backs.

May God be praised for ever and ever
that you revealed to us the scriptures of the holy prophets.

Amen.

The vehemence of the rebuke to those who would not give communion to children and infants may well reflect the hymn's origins during the days when the communion of all the baptised was being introduced – not without stiff opposition from some conservative Utraquist quarters.²⁰ What emerges strongly is the place of all baptised children at the eucharistic table by right and not on sufferance.

Another hymn “Christians, let us rise from our sins,” (*Křesťané, z hřiechův povstaňme*)²¹ also includes an extended exhortation on the importance of including children at the eucharist. Beginning as a call to repentance, the hymn then turns to giving thanks for God's goodness in sending Jesus and, above all, for the gift of the eucharist. Thereupon follows an exhortation not to prevent children from coming to the eucharist and a reminder of the things Jesus said about children. The hymn then returns to a call to repentance and prays for God's mercy at the time of judgment and concludes with a series of bitterly anticlerical verses in which the clergy are rebuked for deceiving and misleading the people. In these verses (omitted here) we find a reflection of the last of the Four Articles of Prague which enjoins clerical poverty and an assurance that the clergy maintain a lifestyle in conformity with the Gospel.

Christians, let us rise from our sins
and accept true repentance
and we shall not die for ever.

* * *

You gave us his body to eat
and his holy blood to drink.
What more could you do for us?

If we fail to be grateful
for you great mercy
woe to us wretched sinners,
because the inhabitants of Sodom will be better off than us.

Let us not prevent little children
or oppose it
when they eat the body of Jesus.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven
as Christ himself said
and holy David also wrote:

²⁰ *La communion*, 112ff.

²¹ JK no. 89 pp. 68–70; ff. 40v- 41v.

“From the lips of children
and infants
you have ordained praise
to silence the foe.”

For do not look upon persons
or judge by faces
but by justice.

No one is rejected
as he died for all
for old and young alike.

Praise God, little children
you little infants
because he doesn't drive you away from himself
but feeds you with his holy body.

Let us implore dear Jesus,
who is so kind to us,
to send down upon us the Holy Spirit.

Let us call upon him boldly
to have mercy on us,
humbling ourselves to him and saying:

“Send down the Holy Spirit
that precious teacher
to enlighten our hearts
and enthuse us with his love.”

Grant that we may renounce all sins,
anger you no longer,
and come to holy repentance.

* * *

Praise be to God the Father,
and to his dear Son,
and also to the Holy Spirit,
Godhead indivisible.

Children as Intercessors on Behalf of the Whole Community.

The hymn “Falling on our knees” (*Padnúc na svá kolena*)²² at first appears to be simply a hymn of intercession having little to do with children as it makes its way through petitions for the unity of the church, forgiveness, eventual presence with Christ at the heavenly banquet, the gifts of the Spirit and the banishment of the devil and all his works. However, coming to the end, one might be slightly taken aback to discover that it is on the voices of the children that the community relies as it is they who intercede for the whole community and it is their voices that lead the assembly in its praise.²³

Falling on our knees,
let us all say these words:
Jesus, son of David,
hear the voices of your servants.

For your great goodness,
please bring about unity in the church.
For your dear holy wounds,
remember your Christians.

Deign to give consolation and forgiveness of sins to all for in no one else
is there salvation.

Therefore we ask you,
as there is no hope in anyone
but you, Christ the King:
have pity on us.

As you did with Peter,
with Zacchaeus and Matthew,
and with sundry others.
remember us in your kingdom.

That we may be with you
and eat and drink
your glorious supper in heaven.

²² JK no. 87, 66–67, ff. 39v-40r.

²³ The question has been posed as to whether these intercessors are children only in the sense that all are “children of God”. The language used e.g. “Receive the voices of your children / from us little, innocent ones” (the term “*parvuli in Christo*” having come to be restricted to children in Utraquist use of the time) and “tell your children about them and instruct them” severely limit this possibility.

Let us enjoy
 a measure of the eternal satisfaction
 attained by the first of the faithful:
 Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and others.

Wanting to bring us there,
 deliver us from all wickedness.
 Sow in our hearts love and faith,
 for they are joys that bind us
 as a community our joyous pilgrimage.

O celestial wisdom
 rid us of the evil murderer of the body
 and the world, and the tyrant the Devil.

Confirm us in your mercy,
 let us enjoy your presence
 and allow us to attain the joy
 of your true eternal life.

Praise the Father and the Son
 and the Holy Spirit
 one Lord.
 Give us grace and your joy.

Receive the voices of your children
 from us little, innocent ones.
 O Father God, praise be to you.
 Amen.

Another hymn “Let us remember the benevolence” (*Dobroděnie pamatujsme*)²⁴ is an admonition to thanksgiving. Following a well-used model, the hymnodist cites a series of biblical figures for their conspicuous thanksgiving along with examples of those who were admonished in Scripture for their ingratitude. The singers themselves are then urged to recall God’s good deeds and are exhorted to tell their children, instructing them to praise God always:

Therefore, O Czechs, remember
 God’s good deeds
 that he now performs
 and tell your children about them
 and instruct them

²⁴ JK no. 117, 90, f. 51v.

to praise their God always
 thanking him
 and not angering him
 so that we may live with him
 for ever in his kingdom.

There follows several verses on the dangers of ingratitude and warnings against those who do not acknowledge God as the source of all goodness. The hymn ends with a call for the whole community to join in a song of praise but, once again, it is the children's voices who lead the chorus and it is they who bid the elders add their "amens" and "alleluias".

Let us all with our voices,
 and hence with our hearts
 call on God
 and never stop
 thanking him together
 after the example of the saints.

Children, let us praise the Lord
 and his Son
 and the Holy Spirit
 one Lord
 out of his goodness.

You who are aged, say amen with us:
 Amen, alleluia,
 amen, alleluia,
 amen, amen, alleluia,
 amen, alleluia. Etc.

Singing About Children During the Liturgical Seasons

There are two hymns in which the role of children figures importantly during the celebration of the liturgical year. The first, "All children, young and old," (*Dietky mladé i staré*),²⁵ was composed for Advent/Christmas and the second "According to God's law," (*Podlé božieho zákona*)²⁶ is a hymn for the feast of the Purification on 2 February. In "All children, young and old," the community as a whole is first called upon to celebrate the coming Jesus whom the prophets foretold. The development of the hymn then follows a somewhat

²⁵ JK no. 122, 94–95, ff. 53v-54r.

²⁶ JK no. 101d, 79, f. 46r.

unexpected path. Not surprising for the liturgical season, the older members of the community are bidden to be joyful along with all the infants for “the king of angels wished to be a little infant to dwell among us.” But rather unexpectedly, the hymn then segues into a series of verses on Jesus’s acceptance of children and his promise of the kingdom to them followed by a reminder of his solemn warnings to those who would reject children and not repent of their own sins.

All children, young and old,
virgins, young men
and all Christians
let us celebrate this moment
when we gladly await
our Saviour
the Lord Jesus Christ the King
our Saviour.

who was through
the prophets foretold
that he should come into the world
and be of a virgin born
to work for his people
to free them
from the power of the cruel devil,
the murderer of his people.

...

Especially may there be gladness, and merrimaking
for us, all your children
that, as the king of angels
wished to be a little infant
to dwell among us.
He loved us greatly,
he showed us his humility
embracing us.

For us he chastened his disciples
taught them
because they would not allow parents
to bring us <children> to him.
And Jesus said to them,
to all of his disciples:
“Suffer little children to come to me,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

...

For he loved us
 and laid his hands upon us
 he embraced us
 and gave us his blessing
 he spoke to the lawyers
 and explained the Scripture concerning us
 that through young babes begins God's praise.

He promised the kingdom to us
 the little ones and said to the old:
 "Unless you turn about,
 you will not enter the kingdom,"
 and so don't hesitate
 to return to him
 and leave your anger behind
 if you wish to dwell with him.

Children, let us give praise
 to him, the mighty Father
 to his wise Son
 to the good Holy Spirit
 singing joyfully
 with our hearts throbbing
 let us praise him, children, with our whole hearts
 and in speech as well.

Of him always joyfully
 let us sing and say:
 The Saviour is born
 the redeemer of all sinners.
 Glory to God in the highest
 and peace be on earth
 to all people of good will,
 let there be joy and gladness.

Here, during the season when we are hardly surprised to encounter infants in hymnody, we encounter language that is certainly not that of "Christian children all must be / mild, obedient, good as he"²⁷ in which children are exhorted to passive obedience and emulation of a sentimentalised Jesus. Instead, the

²⁷ Cecil Frances Alexander (née Humphreys), "Once in Royal David's City," in: *Hymns for Little Children* (London, 1848). While the verse containing this line is omitted or replaced in most contemporary hymnals, it is still widely sung at Christmas and broadcast around the world in the Carol Service from King's College, Cambridge.

hymnodist turns quickly from Jesus's will to take the form of an infant in humility to warnings to adults and a reminder of his reproaches to those who would try and prevent children's access to his person and who do not recognise children's primacy of place as citizens in God's kingdom. As elsewhere, the hymn ends with the voices of children leading the praises of the community, here in joining with the heavenly host and singing the angelic hymn.

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple forty days after Jesus's birth was initially celebrated as a Christological feast which, over time, came to be increasingly understood as a Marian feast and kept under the title the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The *Jistebnický Kancionál* has a hymn under each title. The first hymn, "According to God's law," is headed "*De purificatione*" and begins by recounting the story of Joseph and Mary taking the infant Jesus to the temple (Luke 2:22–40). It goes on to suggest that Jesus's presentation in the temple was a model for others that they, too, might bring their children with them as they go to the temple to make sacrifice. The last lines turn from the biblical event and interpret the meaning of the historic events for those now singing the hymn: they are to bring children to Jesus, "little ones to the little one / equals to an equal." This turn to the hymn gives a status to children otherwise unheard of in the large corpus of hymns composed for the Presentation.²⁸

According to God's law
when they went to the temple,
Joseph and Mary
took the child with them.
Then they sacrificed
and paid for it.

Simeon, a righteous man
and one who feared God,
took the child in his arms
and praised God.
The prophetess Anna
bore witness to Him.

All this is duly
described in scripture

²⁸ The second hymn, headed "*De presentacione Iesu Cristi in templum*," (JK no. 101e, 79, f. 46r.) is devoted to three events in Jesus's life associated with the temple or synagogue: first, the story of Jesus going to the temple with his parents when he was twelve and being left behind (Luke 2:41–51); second Jesus's visit to the synagogue in Nazareth and his prophetic interpretation of a passage from Isaiah (Luke 4:16ff.) and a final, collective strophe, in which various acts of salvation were performed on feast days, including driving demons from the temple. No mention is made of the events usually commemorated at the feast of the Presentation.

and to all people for instruction
to everyone given
to old, young, men, women
and also to mothers
children, virgins, widows,
princes, old men and old women.

That they go to the temple
taking children with them
and making pious sacrifice.
they took children to it.
Let us take small children to Jesus
that dear child
little ones to the little one
equals to an equal.

Conclusion

In the collection of about just over sixty vernacular hymns in the *Jistebnický Kancionál*, over a dozen give infants and children a prominent place. Some of these hymns are clearly intended to be catechetical and both adults and children are taught why communion sub utraque was requisite for the salvation of all. In other hymns, children play important roles in the transformation of both church and society. Held up by Jesus as the ideal citizens in God's reign, children serve as models for a new world in which human norms are turned upside down. Thus, their rightful place at the eucharistic table is to be defended and those who would deny it risk their own souls as well as those of the children.

In these hymns, we discover popular testimony to an exceptional period in the history of western Christianity which first saw the widespread restoration of frequent communion, then the chalice for the laity and, just a short while later, communion for all the baptised. This movement had no parallels in the "Second Reformation" of the sixteenth century where the major reformers did little to renew the basic inherited mediaeval patterns of Christian Initiation. When the question of restoring the communion of all the baptised was raised during this period, it was generally in a polemical context and served as an ideal tool for the emerging "believers Baptist" (anabaptist) attacks on the theological inconsistency of the paedobaptists who practiced infant baptism while disallowing infant communion.²⁹

²⁹ David R. Holeton, "Communion of All the Baptized in Anglican Tradition," *Anglican Theological Review* 69,1 (1987) 21–28; idem, *Infant Communion – Then and Now*, [Grove Liturgical Studies No. 27] (Bramcote, 1981) 16–20; Mark Dalby, *Infant Communion: Post-Reformation to Present Day* [Joint Liturgical Studies 67] (Norfolk, 2009) 8–10.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the restoration of the pastoral practice of communicating all the baptised was unheard of in the “mainline” western churches. Where it had appeared, it was in small “separated” or “called” churches such as the Usagers among the Non-Jurors³⁰ in the eighteenth century and the Catholic Apostolic Church³¹ beginning in the nineteenth. It was only after the Second World War, in the light of the evident failure of the inherited patterns of Christian Initiation in the major western churches and the subsequent renewal of the theology and practice of initiation that has marked the life of these churches over the recent decades, that the question of the communion of all the baptised began to be posed afresh. Today, it is common to see infants and children regularly receiving communion alongside adults.

Unlike in the Utraquist experience, however, the regular presence of young communicants at the Sunday eucharist has made little impact on what the communities of which they are members sing. A perusal of contemporary hymnals shows no impact of this major change in pastoral practice on hymnody – children are not named among the communicants.³² While a certain “time lapse” must be allowed for new hymns to be written and win a place in hymn books, one might have thought that there would be some evidence of this radical development which is one of the most visible changes in eucharistic practice and which has now been a regular part of church life for over forty years. New hymn books have begun to include baptismal hymns chosen from the growing corpus of texts which assume that adults, along with infants and children, are normal candidates for baptism so that the choice of hymnody for baptisms is no longer limited to the “traditional” texts that assumed passive infants to be the only candidates.

Seeing adults as regular candidates for baptism has helped transform communities’ understanding of the meaning of baptism and has often given them

³⁰ A group of nine bishops and about 400 clergy of the Church of England who refused to take an oath of loyalty (hence, “non-jurors”) to William and Mary as James II (to whom they had sworn loyalty while king) was still alive. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century there was a schism within the group when one group introduced a number of practices (hence, “usagers”) which they believed to be the practice of the primitive church, including infant communion.

³¹ The Catholic Apostolic Church, sometimes known as the “Irvingites” began as a religious revival in England in the 1830s and grew to 1,000 parishes spread world-wide. One of their fundamental principles was that on a Sunday there would be only one celebration of the eucharist in each of their churches at which the bishop would preside and all the baptised would communicate, regardless of age.

³² This is true of both *The Hymnal 1982* of the Episcopal Church and *Common Praise* of the Anglican Church of Canada. The closest text I have found is Brian Wren’s “I come with joy to meet my Lord” the second verse of which reads: “I come with Christians far and near / to find, as all are fed, / the new community of love / in Christ’s communion bread.” In communities where all the baptised receive communion, the verse powerfully confirms the practice, but it is unlikely, however, to lead communities to begin the practice which was unlikely in Wren’s own mind when he wrote the hymn in 1971.

a new vision of the baptismal life. It is natural that this finds itself reflected in baptismal hymnody. One might have thought that seeing children and infants as regular communicants would have presented an even greater stimulus to the Christian imagination so that it, too, would have found its way into hymnody. This would be particularly true of those churches that had traditionally insisted on confirmation after an extended course of catechesis before admission to communion. Seeing the very young as communicants challenges our assumption of the established order of things as infants and young children are clearly not capable of fulfilling the standards of age and knowledge that formerly were required. That is certainly something to sing about. Here, the *Jistebnický Kancionál* has something to offer to the churches of our own day.