Introduction

The 2002 Prague Symposium

The symposium on the Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice held at the Vila Lanna, Prague from 19-22 June 2002 was the second in this series of symposia to be held as an independent conference. Thanks to the sponsorship of the Philosophical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences more than thirty scholars were able to share their work on the Bohemian Reformation and aspects of its religious practice. Papers presented covered the breadth of the Bohemian reform movement from its intellectual and pastoral roots in the fourteenth century to its less explored later phases on the eve of Bílá Hora (the Battle of the White Mountain) and the exile thereafter. In these collected papers which, for the first time will be published in two parts, the reader is once again afforded the occasion to read on subjects for which there is little or no literature available outside the Czech language as well as studies on aspects of the Bohemian Reformation that explore matters never before treated in print. While these papers fill gaps in our understanding of the history and religious practice of the Bohemian Reformation, a careful reading will make it clear that there are still many questions left unanswered and that there are many traditionally accepted opinions which must be re-evaluated. It is to some of those questions that the scholars gathering at Vila Lanna in June 2004 for the next symposium will address themselves.

The Introductions to this journal have, in the past, provided a locus for the expression of the editors' opinions on what appears to be an emerging consensus on the Bohemian Reformation and Utraquism in current historiography. In keeping with that tradition, we offer the following observations.

A Fresh Look at the Bohemian Reformation

The sixteenth-century Czech Utraquist Church, which sought to balance traditional orthodoxy with tolerance and a liberal view of the church community, had declared its autonomy from Rome upon the execution of Jan Hus for alleged heresy at Constance in 1415. Against the Roman usage, the Utraquists adopted lay communion in both kinds – hence their name from the Latin *communicantes sub utraque*, or "*pod obojí*" in Czech. In the opinion of the editors of the BRRP, there is an emerging consensus in current historiography on three major issues of the history of the Bohemian Reformation.

First, the designation of the Bohemian Church as Hussite (rather than Utraquist) is inappropriate. It obscures the essential continuation with the medieval church by insinuating that Hus was a founder of a new religious denomination. It is also misleading inasmuch as Hus was venerated as a garden-variety saint, not viewed as a principal theologian, much less as a founder. Hus was in one respect much more than the Bohemian church, in another respect much less. As the champion of human rights on a world stage, he belongs to all ages and all humanity. As a participant in the Bohemian reform movement, he did not aspire to found a new religion, but rather shared with his fellow reformers a search for no more (and no less) than the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church of the West cleansed from the (for them) unacceptable overlay of papal monarchism. The term >Hussite= was never adopted by the Utraquists themselves, but was pejoratively applied to them by their enemies.

Second, the Utraquist Church preserved its distinctiveness and integrity until its suppression in 1622 during the Counter Reformation. It was not an incoherent assembly of Crypto-Lutherans or "Neo-Utraquists", and Crypto-Catholics or "Old Utraquists". This scepticism about the Church=s viability and authenticity stemmed primarily from its distinctive religious *via media*, which ran against the ingrained principles of the Reformation era (post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism and fully reformed Protestantism), and then against the ingrained conventions of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century secular historiography. Actually, on the one hand, Utraquism remained loyal to its fifteenth century theological stand rejecting papal monarchism, but retaining Pre-Protestant theology. On the other hand, the Consistory, the Church=s ruling body, maintained a liberal ecclesiology which in fact increasingly diverged from (rather than converged with) the Roman Curia=s position after the Council of Trent. The Utraquist Church remained a single entity B organisationally, theologically, and liturgically B during the entire span of time from the martyrdom of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague at Constance in 1415 and 1416 to that of Jan Locika of Domažlice and Vavřinec Hanžburský of Kopeček in the aftermath of the battle of White Mountain.

Third, its apparent latitudinarianism was not a sign of theological and ecclesiological confusion, but a mark of tolerance and liberalism which sought to promote traditional orthodoxy through discussion and consensus rather than authoritarian fiat. The Utraquists= sense of preserving an integrity of the doctrinal fundamentals, compared with the more radical dissidents, probably freed them, at least in part, from the compulsion of a militant assertion of orthodoxy. This contrasted with the harsh self-righteous stance of the Lutherans toward the Calvinists and the Zwinglians, and that of the Calvinists vis-à-vis the Unitarians. Their relative serenity led the Utraquists to acquire the aura of flexibility and tolerance, verging on a gentle bemusement and bonhomie, with respect to what they regarded as the foibles of others. Another way of looking at this exceptional characteristic of the Utraquists is to say that they escaped the need of "confessionalisation" in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. They avoided the process by which the Protestant groups had to define themselves against each other and against the Church of Rome, and by which the latter had to adopt its own demarcations against the churches of the Reformation. The Utraquists were already secure in their own delimitation vis-à-vis both Roman authoritarianism (since the period of Hus and the *Compactata*), and vis-à-vis the Protestant biblical reductionism through the fifteenth-century encounters with the Taborites and the Brethren, the more radical (Pre-Protestant) off-shoots of the Bohemian Reformation. Accordingly, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the Utraquists were spared the process of differentiation, sometimes called confessionalisation, which often led others to cast anathemas against one another, and which in general militated against the adoption of tolerant attitudes.

Zdeněk V. David
Woodrow Wilson Center
Washington

David R. Holeton
UK – HTF
Prague

Co-organisers of the Symposium