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Special Issue Editor's Introduction: Jan Hus at 600

Thomas A. Fudge

The career of Jan Hus ended abruptly 600 years ago. While it is impossible to argue for positioning Hus among the greatest of medieval thinkers, he must take a prominent place among the reformers of the later Middle Ages. His life was defined by his death and the particularly gruesome details of his execution made his entire life, at least in the minds of many of his Czech contemporaries, worthy of positive re-evaluation. In the wake of the Council of Constance, his acts and actions were understandably elevated to a realm of metahistorical significance. He became a national hero to the Czechs, a John Baptist forerunner to the Protestants, and a man worthy only of the fires of hell for many Catholics. These responses guaranteed Hus a permanent place in historical debate. For far too long, non-Catholic western Christianity has been dominated by figures like Luther and Calvin and western religious history (or old-fashioned Church History) has privileged the reformations of the sixteenth century to such an inordinate extent that reformers and reform movements after 1200 have been generally reduced to anachronistic glimmers of that which was still to come. A proper assessment of Hus rebuts those misguided assumptions.

Jan Hus was not a Protestant, let alone the first Protestant despite what some modern representations promote. He did not translate the Bible into Czech. He did not translate the liturgy into the vernacular. He was not the first to preach in the common language. He did not adhere to or promote a Protestant idea of *sola scriptura*. He did not initiate congregational singing. He was not a blind disciple of Wyclif. He was not attacked by the hierarchy of the medieval church for no reason. His trial which culminated at Constance was not illegal and his death was not judicial murder. He did not have a beard, despite the many iconographical representations. He was not the founder of the modern Moravian Church or the modern Unity of Brethren. He did not say at the pyre, or anywhere else for that matter, that authorities in Germany would roast a goose but in a hundred years a swan would sing and that swan would not be silenced. Poggio Bracciolini did not write an account of the Hus trial. The small book which continues to be reprinted alleging such an account is both unworthy and unreliable and is unadulterated nineteenth-century fiction. To borrow a line from Dorothy Parker, *Hus the Heretic by Poggius the Papist* is not a book which should be set aside lightly, it should be hurled with some force! These are only some of the misconceptions attached to the life and memory of this Bohemian priest. In short, Hus has been subjected to the same fate Luther once noted was the ill fortune of scripture, that is, both have wax noses which have been, and continue to be, twisted into a variety of shapes and postures to suit a myriad of purposes ranging from the religious to the political.¹

Who is Jan Hus? He is the hero of a dozen faces. He has been held up as a Communist, a rebel, a Roman Catholic, a strident nationalist, a religious reformer,

¹ Luther frequently used the image of a wax nose to reflect the various uses of Scripture. See for example his Lectures on Genesis, trans., George V. Schick, in Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), vol. 3, p. 191.

a social revolutionary, a Wyclifite, a Protestant, an Evangelical Christian, a symbol of freedom, a Czech national hero, a heretic, and a saint. He has been all of these things and more to many people almost from the time of his immolation six centuries ago. Both the drama of history and historiography means that he remains a contested figure. Nevertheless, whatever else Hus might be, he was first and foremost a priest, a Catholic reformer of the later Middle Ages. He was a churchman and his life was committed to God and to the religious practices of his time. This is a fundamental point. One ignores that fact at one's own peril. It also seems certain that it is folly to attempt to approach Hus through the prism of the Reformation, Martin Luther, John Foxe, Mathias Facius Illyricus, and the many disciples of the histories they inspired. Hus must be accessed through his own historical context and especially by means of his own writings. One hundred years ago, it was fashionable in the Anglo world to take the view that a perusal of his Czech writings was unnecessary for understanding Hus.² That view was as limited as it was incorrect.

This special issue of *Kosmas* has been planned as a concentrated analysis of Jan Hus in history and in legacy. Its scope spans the time from the beginning of intellectual conflict at Charles University in Prague at the turn of the fifteenth century, when Hus was a young untested academic, to an alleged discovery of a Hus relic in 2012. The initial aim was to involve scholars on both sides of the Atlantic and to represent current research being undertaken by Anglo and Czech scholars, both those of the younger generation and experts more firmly advanced in their careers. That goal was partially thwarted by several factors. First, a number of scholars who were approached declined the opportunity to contribute on account of other pressing commitments. On the other hand, one Czech scholar elected not to contribute with the rejoinder "I am not enthusiastic" with reference to having their work published in English. Poor soul. Illness prevented others from fulfilling initial intentions to write for this special issue. For example, David R. Holeton had agreed and was expected to contribute on the subject of Hus in the history of liturgy. In the absence of an article from his pen, interested readers may find his published essays on the theme useful.³ There had been a specific commission for an essay on aspects of the Hus trial. One was submitted but it had to be rejected for it did not make contributions beyond what has already been

² David S. Schaff, *John Huss: His Life, Teachings and Death after Five Hundred Years* (New York: Scribner's, 1915), p. vii.

³ These include "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 DC: The Pastoral Press, 1990), pp. 137-152, "'O felix Bohemia - O felix Constantia': The Liturgical Celebration of Saint Jan Hus," in Ferdinand Seibt, ed., *Jan Hus: Zwischen Zeiten, Völkern, Konfessionen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997), pp. 385-403, and "The Celebration of Jan Hus in the Life of the Churches" *Studia Liturgica* 35 (2005), pp. 32-59. He has written two other essays in collaboration with Hana Vihová-Wörner, "A Remarkable Witness to the Feast of Saint Jan Hus" *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice* 7 (2009), pp. 156-84 and "The Second Life of Jan Hus: Liturgy, Commemoration, and Music," in František Šmahel and Ota Pavlíček, eds., *A Companion to Jan Hus* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 289-324.

published elsewhere. This is regrettable because 2015 is the six hundredth anniversary of the culmination of the trial and the proceedings during the Council of Constance from late 1414 to mid-year 1415 remain the best known period of Hus' life and perhaps the most controversial. In the end, we are left with a smaller volume (nine essays) than planned (twelve essays) and one which is also less unified than initially conceived. This is often the fate of edited collections. Notwithstanding, this collection of essays represents the work of five Czech and four Anglo scholars.

The death of Jiří Kejř on April 27, 2015 was hardly unexpected as he was in his ninety-fourth year and had lived through a period of failing health. His departure deprives the world of Hussite scholarship of a keen voice, an agile mind, and a valued participant in the scholarly debates about Hus. He was a man of enormous humanity, kindness and integrity. His passing diminishes us all. A moment of silence in his honor and memory on June 24 during the "International Hussite Symposium on Jan Hus 1415 and 600 Years Later," sponsored by the Hussite Museum in Tábor, Czech Republic, was entirely appropriate.

The selection of essays published in this edition of *Kosmas* intentionally reflects the broad scope of current scholarship devoted to the life and time of Jan Hus. The articles have been arranged in order of chronology, not in sequence of significance. Stephen Lahey's essay takes up a familiar theme but one which remains important and badly in need of new interpretation. Stanislav Znojmo was one of Hus' teachers, an important interpreter of Wyclif, and a member of the reform party in Prague until an abrupt conversion experience sent him back within the ranks of the official church where he became, along with his colleague Štěpán Pálež, one of Hus' opponents. Lahey looks carefully at Stanislav in the intellectual context and philosophical debates in which Hus worked. Understanding context is an essential component for evaluation.

Reid Weber explores what he points out as an overlooked element in Hus' preaching, to wit, the presence of anti-Judaism in the sermons of Hus. Weber has correctly identified his subject as an unexplored topic. His delineation and interpretation may be controversial. First, because of what it assumes and the resulting evidential basis, and, second, because it may be regarded as acquiescing in political correctness, which might be considered the bane of the modern academy. Regardless of how the essay is read, the topic should be evaluated on its own merits. The fact that the subject has been essentially overlooked heretofore makes the article an important historiographical contribution.

Marcela Perett and Antonín Váhala have independently dealt with a similar body of Hus' writings and come to quite different conclusions. Both are especially interested in Hus' vernacular work which comes largely from his period of exile from 1412 onwards. Perett sees the emphasis on the common language as a strategy of survival and vindication while Váhala prefers to understand the increasing use of the vernacular as a commitment to lay spirituality and the efforts of a preacher-priest in exile to continue his work among the congregation of Bethlehem Chapel from a distance. By comparing and contrasting the interpretations, both essays contribute to our understanding of the role played by

the vernacular within the reform movements of the later Middle Ages and Hus' contribution to that emerging culture. The development of faction formation and the evolution of spirituality may not be as mutually exclusive as they might appear at first blush.

The student of Hussitica will recognize the seminal and significant work of Jiří Kejř especially in terms of medieval legal culture, his analysis of the Hus trial, and his unparalleled knowledge of the factors which remain pertinent for a proper understanding of Hus' career.⁴ The majority of Kejř's work has appeared in Czech, which means that the full impact of his interpretation of this fascinating history has been under-appreciated by many scholars in the west. Kejř had been willing to write for the special issue but illness and then death prevented an entirely new or original essay from his pen. It was decided there was sufficient importance for bringing one of his Czech-language essays to a wider readership. While others have argued that Michael de Causis posed the most significant threat to Hus during the course of his legal ordeal, there can be no underestimating the role played by Štěpán Páleč in the prosecution of Jan Hus. This essay brings into sharp focus the relationship between two men who were once friends but who both, independently, declared they preferred truth over friendship. Hence, they became mortal enemies and maintained their position against the other to the bitter end.

Milena Bílková has analyzed a number of visual depictions of Jan Hus from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and situated these art pieces within the oral and visual culture of the later Middle Ages. Writing from the perspective of an art historian, she argues with some conviction and persuasion that the cult of Hus and his *memoria* were formed and reinforced by iconography. Her essay includes the reproduction of several important images of Hus which she interprets and places in context. The fact that medieval Europe was largely a visual culture makes her understanding of Hus an important one. The parallel, of course, is the place of Hus in music and liturgy of the same period. The last three essays in this collection leap forward in time across centuries and take up more modern manifestations of the legacy of Jan Hus.

Craig Atwood presents a revisionist corrective to traditions (including his own) which have claimed Hus but are manifestly not sufficiently *au fait* with him. Atwood argues that Moravian legends, for example, have supplanted the historical Hus. After the seventeenth century, when the well-established Hussite tradition in the Czech lands was uprooted and overthrown by the storm of the Counter Reformation, the descendants of Hus were forced either underground or into exile. Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) is the best known of these exiles. Contrary to popular assumption, the thread of Hussite history was completely severed and eventually lost. Its apparent re-emergence in the eighteenth century under the leadership of Zinzendorf and the establishment of the Moravian tradition was not without its challenges and problems with respect to its assumed connection to Jan

⁴ The most important is Jiří Kejř, *Husův proces* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2000).

Hus. Atwood offers a balanced assessment of Hus' legacy within the historical progeny of the *Unitas Fratrum*.

Zdeněk David focuses his essay on one of the most important Czech personalities of the twentieth century. Thomas G. Masaryk's understanding and interpretation of Hus represents an example of the political uses of Hus and his legacy. As David points out, one of the basic ideological foundations of the First Czechoslovak Republic was Masaryk's use of Hus and the Hussite tradition. Unlike subsequent uses of Hus by successive Communist governments of Czechoslovakia and the secular uses of Hus in the contemporary Czech Republic, both in political contexts and in popular culture, Masaryk did not attempt to ignore the religious aspects of Hus' thought. Fundamentally, Masaryk had more in common with Palacký in the nineteenth century than with Josef Pekař in the twentieth century.

The last essay, by Thomas A. Fudge, is an evaluation of a widely publicized relic discovered in a French museum and brought to international attention by German scholars in 2012. The textile, hailed as a piece of Hus' robe, featured in a major exhibition in 2014 in Germany and was thereafter displayed at the Hussite Museum in Tábor, Czech Republic in 2015. Is it possible that something of material value belonging to Hus survived the ravages of 600 years? The essay revisits the trial of Jan Hus and summarizes the significance of medieval relics. With these two subjects as context, the Hus relic is examined, and the scientific analysis undergirding the links to Hus are considered. The article questions the German claims, and considers the nature of textile analysis and their promise before exploring how the Council of Constance was marketed as a tourist attraction in the nineteenth century before suggesting how this might shed light on the secret history of Jan Hus' old coat.

The essays of Stephen Lahey, Reid Weber, Marcela Perett, Antonín Váhala, and Zdeněk V. David are parts of larger evolving projects which each of these scholars are working on. For example, Lahey is currently researching the manner in which the thought of John Wyclif was received at Prague's Charles University at the turn of the fifteenth century. While Lahey looks at Stanislav Znojmo in this essay, he is also interested in Štěpán Páleč, Hus himself, Jerome of Prague, Jakoubek Stříbro, and Mikuláš Biskupec. Lahey is especially intrigued with Wyclif's philosophical thought, and has been tracing those emphases within the metaphysical realism which had developed up to 1409 and which burst into a combustion of considerable force shaping the Hussite Revolution. Reid Weber's work on Hus' sermons is the first examination in sixty years and in terms of English far surpasses previous scholarship. A revised version of his doctoral work may soon be expected in publication. Marcela Perett's book on vernacular writings within the Hussite reform movement will explore the dynamics of the several Hussite trajectories which find impetus in the work of Jan Hus. Antonín Váhala is completing his PhD which has an analytic textual basis in the Czech works of Hus. The focus on spirituality promises new insights within the *de rigueur* of the academic discipline. Zdeněk V. David's essay is a trailer for his larger work, currently in process, which will result in a monograph devoted to exploring

the philosophical foundations of Masaryk's political ideology. It may then be anticipated that many of the themes represented in the essays which form this special edition of *Kosmas* will bear even greater fruit in the near future.

Publishers and editors of journals, outside Czech territories, have seldom appreciated the importance of Hus and the movements for reform which bore his name. This should be deplored. There has been some shift in this posture in the last few years with Oxford University Press (as an example) publishing at least three monographs on Hus and related topics.⁵ The willingness of *Kosmas* to produce a special issue on Hus to coincide with the sixcentennial of his demise will be a contribution to continued Hus studies in the Anglo world. An understanding of Hus within his historiographical context is essential. Jarold Zeman's useful and historic study guide is badly in need of updating.⁶ Whether or not anyone will take up that challenge, remains to be seen. In the meantime, an analytic survey of historiography will be forthcoming and will seek to explore and delineate several issues of research importance.⁷ This extended essay will address issues of scope and criteria, historiographical trajectories, significant mileposts in the development of Hus scholarship, the nature of understanding and interpretation in Anglo scholarship, Jan Hus in the twentieth century, Hus after the seminal work of Matthew Spinka, and the future of Jan Hus studies.

Two of the essays in this collection were originally written in Czech. Hugh Agnew deserves special thanks for undertaking the lion's share of the translation burden for allowing Jiří Kejř and Milena Bílková to speak in English. I am further grateful to all those who were involved in the peer-review process which each of these essays passed through. Two brief comments on nomenclature and editorial policy. First, I do not agree with some of my colleagues who insist that certain language and terminology should be excised from scholarly discourse. In terms of late medieval Czech history, this often surrounds terms like "Hussite" and "heresy" and its cognates. I routinely refer to reform movements in Bohemia, especially in the fifteenth century, as Hussite and I have argued that Hus, along with many of his followers were, by the standards of the fifteenth century, heretics. However, I do not accept that such nomenclature must be understood as pejorative. I neither encourage nor require colleagues to adopt my considered and chosen terminology. I also agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. Therefore, in this special issue of *Kosmas*, I have been content to allow authors to use terms like Hussite, Utraquist and

⁵ These include Thomas A. Fudge, *The Trial of Jan Hus: Medieval Heresy and Criminal Procedure* (2013), Phillip N. Haberkern, *Patron Saint and Prophet: Jan Hus in the Bohemian and German Reformation* (2016), and Fudge, *Jerome of Prague and the Foundations of the Hussite Movement* (2016).

⁶ Jarold K. Zeman, *The Hussite Movement and the Reformation in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia (1350-1650): A Bibliographical Study Guide (With Particular Reference to Resources in North America)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Slavic Publications, 1977).

⁷ Thomas A. Fudge, "Jan Hus in English Language Historiography, 1863-2013," *Journal of Moravian History*, 16 (No. 2, 2016), forthcoming.

heresy/heretic as they see fit and have made no attempt to standardize nomenclature. Diversity of opinion and interpretation is welcomed rather than deplored or controlled. My own editorial philosophy extends along the same trajectory, and the fact that I oversaw the peer-review process and ultimately decided to publish the essays which appear herein cannot be equated with agreement on the arguments presented in the several essays. I am quite uncertain, for example, about the validity of giving too much credence to the intellectual climate at Charles University in terms of religious reform (Lahey), and I find myself unpersuaded by some of the argument concerning Hus and Jews (Weber). The idea, however, of suppressing ideas which do not meet with my own approval is abhorrent. In my opinion, editors who operate on a contrary platform should be stood down. After all, Jan Hus opposed the death penalty for heretics and argued persuasively that the books of dissenters should be read and not destroyed.⁸ However he is understood or perceived today, Hus was a contested and controversial figure in 1415 and he remains so in 2015. These essays are offered in hopes of stimulating further research and as a modest means of better understanding the life and legacy of one of medieval Europe's most fascinating figures.

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⁸ See the essay "The Other Sheep: Reflections on Heresy by a Suspected Heretic," in Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus Between Time and Eternity: Reconsidering a Medieval Heretic* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 141-164.