

Miroslav Somr, Ludmila Opekarová

When the pulpit was power : the word as the power of the powerless

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When the pulpit was power. The word as the power of the powerless

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Introduction

Historically, we can consider John Hus not only a reformer but also a campaigner for the rights of the poor and oppressed. When John Hus mounted the pulpit in the Bethlehem Chapel in 1402, the unprivileged were for the first time invited to be part of public affairs. John Hus as a preacher got closer to common people but as a result his opinions appeared in opposition to the views of official representatives of the medieval church. The church, which was not only dogmatic, ideologically, but also inexhaustible greedy, economically speaking. The Church became secular, but the church also turned away from life in poverty, from helping and protecting the poor. The corruption captivated the powerful and the rule fell into two popes, one in Rome and the other in Avignon. The schism led to the loss of church authority and the power was transferred to the general council.

Appointing John Hus the preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel and the sight of him standing at the position where the Gospel sounds lit a flame in the hearts of the powerless and gave them strength to seek truth in Holy Scripture. Here starts the dramatic struggle when „v duchovenstvu ustydlá láska a v lidu rozmnožena jest nepravost pro nedostatek lásky v duchovenstvu, ježto ustává od zbožného kázání evangelia a od pravého následování Krista <...> Pročež,

* Dr Sc. Miroslav Somr jest pracownikiem Wydziału Pedagogicznego Uniwersytetu w Czeskich Budziejowicach. Dr Ludmila Opekarová jest pracownikiem Instytutu Techniki i Biznesu w Czeskich Budziejowicach.

nejdůstojnější Otče, otevřte duchovní oko: zamilujte si dobré, poznejte zlé. Nechť Vás neulichotí rozmařilci a lakomci, nýbrž ať Vás těší pokorní a milovníci chudoby. Žeňte lenochy do práce, nebraňte těm, kdož věrně pracují o žni Páně <...> Psal bych více, ale brání mi v tom povinnosti kázati evangelium¹.

Bethlehem odyssey

At the beginning, the relationship between Hus and the archbishop was neutral. Zbyněk Zajíc of Hazemburk at first did not oppose the reforming preaching movement. The main reason was to avoid possible conflict with the King. On the one hand, the King, influenced by the Queen, sympathised with Hus. But on the other hand, the King was following “diplomatic” strategy led by the aim to win the Pope’s favour. This political interest was more important to the King than the spiritual, love proselytizing voice of Hus. However, this voice was becoming more and more appealing, reforming, correcting and combative, but at the same time more persuasive and attractive for the common people from all walks of life. From the very beginning it was the voice of truth, where the struggle for preaching the Gospel was internally connected with the minds and hearts of the underprivileged, lonely, humiliated and lost in the world of lies and adversity. The forthcoming stage of the reformist preaching movement started by Jan Milíč from Kroměříž, had prepared the grounds for the Bethlehem Chapel, which became the centre of the flame of the truth.

Every journey not only has its destination, it also has a beginning. From that we continue, being aware that the journey of truth cannot be a roundabout way. Hus was a brave man. He wanted to separate the Archbishop from the King’s influence. Thus he addressed his letter straight to the Rome. The consequences were unpredictable, not diplomatic but problematic. It was not Gospel and not the return to the essential principles that the Church was going to care about. It was the word of the privileged, powerful and blinded by greed that he heard as response. The answer was cruel, harsh and indirect. The Archbishop ordered to close the Bethlehem Chapel. Hus appealed against it and the Rome Church shot another arrow – on 18th July 1410 Prague was anathemized. The Bethlehem preacher remained alone. The situation became too turbulent in the

¹ Husův list z června 1408.

triangle of the three powers: the King, the Archbishop, the Rome. The power of the powerful turned against the Gospel which sounded from the pulpit – the pulpit being a power in the Middle Ages (by K. M Bartoš) to which the hearts and minds of the powerless were bond. This was a new situation. Hus had not realized that his preaching would become for the world of the “heartless privileged” a spark which would start the future flame in which his opponents would burn the truth while his followers would find God’s solace and message. *“The truth in the theological context, as Hus sees it, is the truth of Gospel and, even more clearly, it is the truth Christ”*.

In the Bethlehem Chapel Hus’s message that justice is to arrive with Gospel-truth and bring to an end their suffering, went along with the belief of his audience. It relieved their hearts and minds of humble resignation and awakened their longing for justice and freedom. What did the strength of his word lie in? The belief that the Kingdom of God is to spread forth through the land and Hus was preparing his followers for this moment. The social aspect of this message connected the world of his believers with the Kingdom of Heaven and his preaching had the power of a prophecy.

It is interesting that Hus’s personality caught the attention of Benitto Mussolini, one of the most notorious dictators of the 20th century. The translation of Mussolini’s treatise, John Hus, a man of truth, is included in the Czech translation of the bellow cited monograph³ Benitto Mussolini, the future leader of Italian fascism, dictator and oppressor of human freedom, introduced his work with the statement: “I commend this booklet printing, I wish that it stirred resentment in the reader’s heart towards the spiritual and secular tyranny of any form, whether theocratic, whether Jacobin⁴”. His words and the actual discourse on the man of truth became uncomfortable to him after his accession to power and the booklet was withdrawn from all libraries. The monograph by Pavel Helan presents facts about the circumstances of its printing in Rome, its translation into English and also about the response the book met with in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. After the Second World War, the book

² P. Černý, *Autorita Bible u Mistra Jana z Husince*, [w:] T. Butta et al., *Mistr Jan Hus v proměnách času, Církev československá husitská*, Praha 2012, p. 68.

³ P. Helan, *Duce a kacíf: literární mládí Benita Mussoliniho a jeho kniha Jan Hus, muž pravdy*, (Deus et gentes, sv. 4) Brno 2006, p. 399.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 289.

has been published in its original version in Italy three times.

We focus on this publication and make a few comments on several aspects of the book. Firstly, it is referred to the monograph of Friedrich von Bezold *History of the German Reformation* (Berlin, Rothe, 1890). Mussolini quotes from the Italian edition (Società Editrice Libreria, Milano 1902). “Curia was called a gigantic machine for making money; the saying that Rome was all for sale, was not at all an exaggeration, because the money could achieve everything from the smallest benefice to the Cardinal’s hat, and from the permission to use butter during the Lent to absolution of murder and incest”⁵. The Church hierarchy ends up with its impiety at the very edge of moral decline and money became the sole instrument for forgiveness of sin and vice. Common people were humbled and impoverished, the name of Christ and his mission on earth was shrouded in impiety of declining morals of the clergy which was sinking in its own corruption. Preaching received a new dimension of education of people who had been kept in ignorance and on the edge of social humiliation. Christ and the authority of the Bible became fundamental pillars of faith, truth and power of the personality of John Hus. The truth of words stood up against the corruption of the church and it also brought unrest in the minds of the people. Direct appeal of this kind of preaching – to hold the Bible as the law and subject to the Church’s justice was enhanced by helpfulness and intelligibility. The Bethlehem Chapel was the temple of the people. Its size did not reach the heavens as St. Vitus Cathedral. Its size grew in the minds and hearts of common people. Hus was immersed in the inner experience, so devoted to love of truth, vaulting arch of unity of faith and life of his preacher’s message. He seemed not to realize the social power of words preached by the noble native language of his faithful. However, the power of his opponents was increasing and Hus sought the protection of the King, who turned out to be unstable, preferring his comfortable ways, and even stingy. Eva Kantůrková explains the King’s attitude to Hus. She says that Hus simply could not be the King’s favourite: “if Václav ever supported Hus’s side, it was only in cases when he expected some political profit; as for heresy, the King wanted peace and quiet in his country, as far as the Church was concerned, he definitely had no need to criticise vices, he ignored them because he himself committed a lot of sin. He rather required

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 399.

the high clergy to be in a subordinate position <...> That amazing conflict with archbishop Jan of Jenštejn did not originate from theological or moral reasons but because Jenštejn was King's core rival⁶. However the King had an even stronger rival: the high nobility. He personally was closer to gentry and sought their support. The power of high nobility was stronger than his own, "defending the historical rights of Czech national representation and their pride on the one hand, on the other hand struggling for power and influence to control the country at the expense of the King and the Church"⁷. The say of the powerful could not reconcile the moral of the gospel-truth. Preaching the Gospel meant to Hus the awakening of faith of man and his communication with God. It was an invitation to the living community, invitation to mutual love and loving one's neighbour, to deep understanding to the Holy Scripture. Hus himself felt a deep bond of empathy with his neighbours and their experience of genuine life. Follower of Christ, in whom Hus conceived the truth, reflecting both, Christ's divinity and Christ's human devotion. "People were gathering around him, eager to listen and ask for advice in all problems of conscience. They were extremely keen to experience informal service and prayers in the language they could understand. Thirst to hear the truth could not be allayed by the greedy priests who were serving just for an inevitably short time. Here their souls were offered such nourishment which they responded to with enthusiasm and devotion"⁸.

The Bethlehem Chapel, originally supported by the King and attended by secular power, resisted the corrupted high ranks of the Church and after ten years of Hus's influence became the throne of truth, justice and moral. This struggle was a permanent companion of Hus his entire life. It was Christ, the son of God sent to this world, who became a protector, challenger and conscience of the worldly life of a man, now becoming moral and proud, fearless and determined, conscious of one's mission of charity and their own self-dignity. However, the powerful of this world aligned to destroy this voice of truth. For this purpose, the secular power and the church power betrayed both faith and reason. "Hus as a preacher articulates the connection between Holy Scripture and everyday life of people, with their struggles, with their effort to resist

⁶ E. Kantůrková, *Jan Hus: příspěvek k národní identitě*, Praha 2008, p. 112-113.

⁷ J. Spěváček, *Václav IV*, Praha 1986, p. 20.

⁸ P. Roubicek, J. Kalmer, *Warrior of God, the Life and Death of John Hus*, London 1947, p. 71.

temptation and to make decisions in harmony with Gospel. <...> Christ to Hus means an absolute example of proper life, thus means inspirations and sets example for remedy of life of the Church and society⁹.

In this historical moment we cannot omit the character of King Václav IV, whose part has to be clarified. He held the throne for forty-one years, including the intervals when he was captured and imprisoned by his deceitful noblemen. He did not lose the Czech crown while regaining the Roman one. Still, we can say he did not earn the same greatness his father had. Václav could never resist temptations of all kinds, all pleasures and excitement. He was a wine-lover, a women-admirer and attracted by all thrills of hunts and wild feasts but was unable to recognize the expediency of his companions and the guile of his enemies, especially the Nobility Union, which had been a supporter of his brother.

This period of time was laden with heresy and superstition. People found their moral credit in the Bible and they deeply felt its contradictions. Country shacks and modest town houses seemed trivial in the presents of solemn Gothic cathedrals. Humble servants of God were dazzled by their magnificence. In this monumental milieu, the clergy abused the power of God's word to chain "the human herd" to earthly duties. The young, only thirty-four year old preacher became a moral critic of the heartless virtues of this historical moment. It was a time when "the love of God and neighbour, unfortunately, so ran cold, that somehow there was no care about spiritual things, because all our care and effort was immersed in the secular sludge"¹⁰.

John Wycliffe's writings emerged at the beginning of the 15th century as a reminder of the state of affairs and as a call for the establishment of order in the Church. They were neither an incentive for Hus nor a memento of secession from the tradition of the Church. To him, they were an internal signal to restore order in harmony of the Gospel and the moral order of the mission of the Church. Hus adopted Wycliffe's method of thinking. In accordance with his philosophical and spiritual roots, he is in favour of Platonism and ideas of St. Augustine: the path to authenticity and to moral purity of the faith. Hus is not just a reformist. He is a spiritual messenger who leads man to the roots of the authenticity of faith by the power of his ideas. Faith is for Hus a moral

⁹ T. Butta et al., *Mistr Jan Hus v proměnách času a jeho poselství víry dnešku*, Praha 2012, p. 70.

¹⁰ E. Kantůrková, op. cit., p. 37.

postulate stemming in Christ's mission; its identity and in his purity of the moral edification of man. Hus's preaching is the message of Christ in the name of the man, who is the messenger of God, worthy of our daily pursuits. Hus intransigence and sincerity is contained relationship to the grandeur of faith in Christ's message to man. Hus got involved in an argument with Prague Archbishop Zbynek Zajic of Hazemburk. Explosive atmosphere at Prague University and Master Jan's preaching activity also led to a dispute for Wycliffe, which broke out in 1403 at Prague University and escalated to Bethlehem. But much more than intellectual differences on Wycliffe's heresy between Czech and foreign masters it was Hus's performance and his uncompromising attitude that stood in the forefront. Hus was able to separate intellectual "trendy" criticism from practical moral criticism of abuses in the Church manifested in social life. Corruption and sin even entered the life of lower clergy. Bethlehem was the spark to ignite the flame in which "fight became father and king of all" (Heraclitus).

Hus's preachings on Sundays and holidays stirred up anger and hope. The Czech language proved its emotional and expressive abundance and the word became an arrow fired into the hearts and minds of the faithful and susceptible crowd. Not only servants of God, but his followers turned out to be faith advocates, fair and committed defenders of the doctrine of Christ. However, the fire of hatred and iniquity was to scorch everything treasured in the books of purity. Fire as a tool of malice and pettiness reproached the moral values of life. Books that became a sincere soul, on the other hand, were the centre of a curse. The dissemination and reading of them was prohibited. In 1410 the Archbishop ordered the burning of Wycliffe's books. That was the coming of the Antichrist, who, in the name of the Lord, attempted to extinguish the fire of consciousness and conscience of their fellow men. It was an act of violence turned against their fellow-men, against genuine faith and civil justice. Don't burn, but read the books of heretics, called Hus from the pulpit of Bethlehem and he wrote a treatise *De libris hereticorum legendis* (On reading books of heretics).

Hus based his sermons on the authority of the Bible, which is the criterion of our lives and the firm anchoring of our faith. But the Bible is not intended only for the traditional interpretation. Hus's preaching is based on its broad content and meets the needs of the servants of God. For their enlightenment the Bible must not only be read, but also interpreted and taught. A man is thus generously

presented with a gift of Gospel and this opens him a doorway to God's grace. The Gospel to Hus is an instrument helping a preacher to lead the humiliated and oppressed to salvation. Hus highlights the moral aspects of Holy Scripture: "In Hus's works we can trace certain development towards deliverance of God's words from his lowly position and his elevation to the means of salvation. Hus considered preaching and sacrament, in essence the same. Proclamation of the Word is the power that overcomes sin and grace granted"¹¹.

The Church protected its supreme position also statutorily. In the first place churches provided sacrament, preparation for the messianic grace. The church, temple of the Lord was a holy and consecrated space under the canopy of heavens so close to God which made a man feel humble, bowing in front of his greatness.

In chapels people were only prepared to take sacrament. We could rather say that people of those times, wandering in the waves and storms of life, were exposed to theological humiliation. However, at the time of Hus, preaching among these faithful servants of God is the message of the Word of God that should lead the lowly status and show them the way to salvation. The word spoken in the native language became the way to grace and to the expulsion of sin. The Bethlehem Chapel, as we have already pointed out, became the Temple of pure faith, connecting hearts and minds of the believers. Sermon addressed to common people (*ad populum*) exceeded the threshold of mere mentoring and ascended to the pedestal of the educational advancement. To preach the Gospel meant to offer education and education led people to the recognition of the value of faith for moral uplift of man. Not the over the church and its institutions. "The most faithful, the most truthful, the safest and the most powerful interpretation of the Holy Scripture is the example of life of Jesus Christ and his apostles"¹².

Unfair justice

After 1408 the Gospel which was preached uncompromisingly, truly, passionately and convincingly began to be sharply criticized by the high and

¹¹ P. Černý, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹² A. Molnár, *Slovem obnovená. Čtení o reformaci*, Praha 1977, p. 83.

ordinary clergy. Hus's criticism was perceived as an attack on the very essence of a position of the Church in the social hierarchy. Hus's preaching was much more effective than he had intended. This was caused by its moral and educational ethos. It received the popular support of those who had been humiliated in their human mission in this world and had been referred to humility and obedience of the future world. It was a world beyond the life of this world; a world where the entire human race is destined. The Church appropriated its authority as the only guide on this journey and its authority had been publicly declared by its entire hierarchical structure. The Pope was not only infallible and the only ruler of this world, he was also a social leader of the justice of God's kingdom. The authority of the infallibility of the Church replaced the essential respect for man – a creature of God. Hus on the contrary presents publicly his deep reverence for Christ's word which he aimed at common man. People did not only listen to those words. The faithful son of the Church was becoming a humble son of God and was perceiving his own true value and nature of God's justice in the (un)fair world of His existence. "Hus's concept of truth also has strong eschatological accents. Follower of Jan Milíč of Kroměříž Hus emphasizes the arrival of God's Kingdom. The only preparatory way how to get to this kingdom is following Christ. The eschatological vision leads Hus to the following of a confessor, which is a source of hope and victory of truth in the final judgment"¹³. Hus's last major and most mature work called Books on Simony was finished on 27th October 1413 when staying in Kozí Hrádek. As a centrepiece of his preaching, it has a substantial educational purpose and is a testament of the moral message of faith as a tool for everyday life. The twelve years spent as a preacher in Prague since his ordination as a priest until his exile in October 1412 is proof that Hus now sees his mission in preaching as an educational, social mission. When he mounted the Bethlehem pulpit in March 1402, it was an ideological social basis of God's message of folk religion that was designed for a wide space of his time. The essential feature of Hus's preaching was his continuity to his predecessor, especially the ideas of the school of Jan Milíč of Kroměříž. As mentioned above, it was not a takeover of Wycliffe's teachings. Hus took over his methodology, filled, and developed the content into an uncompromising ideal of poverty: the poverty of the clergy and the

¹³ P. Černý, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

ideal of humility and simplicity of life as it was brought by the Czech school of preaching in the example of Christ. Jan Hus did not go astray. It was exactly the opposite. He walked up to the border, where he met with that bigoted practice of the Church hierarchy. So the question is - was it a naivety, rebellion or just a reform intransigence? It was an inner conviction about the authenticity of the faith and the message of Christ in this world. Hus exceeded the individual dimension of this relationship and transferred his own standards to the social level of life. „Milosrdný spasitel, pán všemohúci, syn boží, Ježíš Kristus, pravý böh a pravý člověk, přišel, jest na svět, aby svědectvie pravdě vydal, o nebeském království kázal, ovcé zahynulé shledal, a cestu jim slovem i skutkem k věčné radosti ukázal, v tom plně vůli otcě svého, pána boha”¹⁴.

The reconstruction of piety is inseparable from the reconstruction of the Church legal system. The grounds for this revision were laid by the Dutch thinker Geert de Groote (1340 – 1384), *Devotio moderna*. His ideas met with positive response in Bohemia.

It was the emperor Charles IV who had cared about the reconstruction of the Church in the previous period; he himself being pious, devoted Christian and considerate sovereign. His support of the preaching movement formed the grounds for later reformist efforts which were to come later personified in Hus. At this stage, Czech reformation gets its practical dimension connecting faith and life. From the distant heavenly image to the unearthly justice and profundity, the son of God descends to this world bringing real justice and profundity. He teaches man how to live moral life. His message articulated by priests invites man to lead the way to achieve human individuality, and genuine faith leads to achieve human dignity. Man reborn in Christ has his social, moral and human dimension. Man, being one of God's creatures, is to attempt this ideal through his whole life. This message is heard from the Bethlehem Chapel in the Czech language.

As a result, the conflict between the secular and religious power escalated. The Archbishop Zdeněk Zajíc of Hazemburk ordered the burning of Wycliffe's books at the stake. Hus protested strongly against the barbaric act from his pulpit. In return, the Archbishop anathemized him and had the anathemy

¹⁴ J. Hus, *Postilla: vyloženie svatých čtení nedělních*, (Spisy Komenského evangelické fakulty bohoslovecké, sv. 20), Praha 1952, p. 11.

confirmed by the new Pope Jan XXIII. Here we can find the irreversible antagonism between the rigid orthodox medieval theology and reformist movement; between the authority of power and the authority of faith. When in the following year the Archbishop laid Prague under an interdict (ban of all services) he broke the limits of legal justice and proved that it was deep below morality. The power of the Church abused the Gospel for the benefit of the dogmatics. Thus, the genuine faith grounded on the Gospel became the faith of the heretics. From this moment on, seeking the truth meant parting the ways and one had to decide which way to take. Some people entered history as crusaders, others followed the light of God's justice in this world.

In October 1412, after the interdict was imposed on Prague, Jan Hus had to leave the city and take refuge in the country. From this moment his faithful were further away than it seemed. He did not stop preaching, and he became more dedicated to writing; focusing on the moral reform, and the struggle for moral redress entered another moment. This is another more socially visible escalating phenomenon of the medieval world – simony. Believers are submitted to blackmail and false persuasion that only those will be recognized faithful sons and daughters of the Church and find salvation and redemption from sin who will resort to indulgences. This was declared by the Pope in May 1412 in name of Church purification.

This is simony which Hus comments, „svaté věci prodávání a kupování se rozlilo po celém těle církve”¹⁵. Selling ecclesiastical dignities, church offices, prebends, and ruthless enforcement of charges for sacraments, which culminated in selling indulgences, became a manifestation of an immoral approach and the decay of the Church. Economic interests outweigh religious and secular and completely obscured the idea of piety, simplicity and human cohesion. Hus appeared “on the periphery of interest” of both of the two protagonists. The Archbishop and the King were equally eager for wealth and equally indifferent to the interests of their subjects. The Church became the largest feudal landowner which raised its confidence and profligacy. The King was as greedy and intemperate as the Church representatives. The growth of their economic wealth sharpened social antagonism and radicalized the society. Hus's immediate reaction was current and brave. In early November 1412, he

¹⁵ J. Hus, *Knížky o svatokupectví*, Praha 1954, p. 26.

began writing Books on Simony (completed in February 1413). This work is characterized by its directness and revolutionary appeal. Evil is in them not only detected, but also frowned upon. It is not just about finding the state. Hus here also acts as a challenger to fight against the evils, the evil that lies in the very bosom of society. Older resources refer to this work (Books on Simony) as revolutionary, calling it “direct prologue to the Hussite revolutionary movement”¹⁶. It is one-sided and misleading to some extent. Hus’s text undoubtedly has an appealing charge. It is lavished with sharp expressions and his word has striking power. Hus employed here his preacher’s ability to seek his own way to the truth and earthly justice. Its immediacy and life experience, illustrated with examples from real life, documents how the period was corrupted with its indomitable desire for material wealth and how it moved away from its original mission. The Church ceased to be a community of the poor and oppressed. Spirituality was replaced by materialism; by the passion for worldly possessions. Faith was no longer an instrument of understanding God’s message, on the contrary: a privilege of the powerful. The more convinced of their predestination and privilege the Church hierarchy was, the more orthodox they became. Faith ceased to be a message and became a dogma of the Church. Thus the content of Hus’s preachings was in conflict with theological structures of the Church. To Hus the original idea of church as a community living in poverty and unity was not only an ideal but a challenge for everyday life. Hus as a preacher and philosopher relieved his teaching of subtleties of scholastic philosophy. The style and literary refinement of his work met with positive response of his followers. As a rhetor Hus is unique and appealing, man with principles, he brings understanding and encouragement, no tones of anger, no pandering to the audience.

Books on Simony excel in their immediacy and show life in its complexity and authenticity. Therefore, they have a striking style and determination to put things in a human perspective. Not only they condemn abuses, they are also appealing to their eradication. They explain that a half-truth is the same sin as a lie, and that Gospel is not the privilege of the powerful. Simony is a sin and a tool for economic domination of the unworthy and fallen “servants” of the Church. It ceased to serve people and the duty to serve became just greed of

¹⁶ Ibid., Předmluva.

mammon, of opulence, possessions and extravagance. „Svatokupectví, jakož slovo to vzní, jest svaté věci kupování. A že kupec slove i ten, jenž kupuje, i ten, jenž prodává, protož také svatokupec slove ten, jenž svatú věcku prodává, i ten, jenž kupuje. A tak svatokupectví slove svaté věci kupování i prodávání“¹⁷.

Many authors explore Jan Hus's ideas about the Church, and the resulting concentrated and single-minded desire for truth and the path of the Church towards its fulfilment. Christ is the Truth, according to Hus. The primary ecclesiological thesis appears in his writings *De ecclesia* (1413) in different variations. He says again: “Kristus sám je hlavou svaté církve obecné a všichni předurčení (praedestinati) minulí i budoucí jsou jeho mystickým tělem“¹⁸.

There is much controversy about this work (*De ecclesia*) as for how far Jan Hus only adopts John Wycliffe's thoughts and opinions and to what extent he presents his own ideas. For Hus, however, one meaning has another dimension: personal, existential. This work was almost fatal for him - at least for two reasons: first, it provided the basis for the 30 propositions convicted by the Council of Constance and secondly, it provided arguments for controversy with his colleagues, university Masters Stanislav from Znojmo, Štěpán Pálec.

However, in our opinion, the fundamental fact is that it is not only an intellectual work, theoretical work, but a work that has practical and existential meanings. Hus became one of the *pioneers* of theological reflection on the Church through this work.

After a short stay in Prague, Hus returned to the new exile. At the end of 1414, there was a major change – the Emperor Sigismund obtained for Hus a hearing at the Church Council, the largest ecclesiastical tribunal. The Emperor granted him a safe-conduct, which was nothing more than a “passport“ to Hus with one important variation: Hus was guaranteed only a safe way to Constance, not safe return. The evidence is in the letter written before his departure to the council addressed to his friends in early October 1414.

„<...> Věrní a milí přátelé! Víte, že jsem s Vámi věrně pracoval po dlouhý čas, káže Vám slovo Boží bez kacřství a bez bludů, jakož víte, že usilování mé bylo, jest i bude až do mé smrti o Vaše spasení. A zamýšlel jsem kázati Vám před svým odjezdem, než bych odjel na koncil do Kostnice /než nebylo to již možno/ a zejména Vám

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸ J. Hus, *O církvi*, VII, 1-2, [w:] Mistr Jan Hus, *O církvi*, Praha 1965.

ohlásiti křivá svědectví i svědky, kteří proti mně svědčili. A budou Vám oznámeni, proto, abyste, zatratí-li mne neb odsoudí na smrt, Vy, to vědouce, se nelekali, že bych byl odsouzen pro nějaké kacířství, jež bych držel. A také proto, abyste stáli v té pravdě bez strachu a bez viklání, kterou dal Vám poznati Pán Bůh skrze věrné kazatele i skrze mě nestatečného <...> Ale doufám svému milostivému, moudrému a mocnému Spasiteli, že pro své zaslíbení a pro Vaši věrnou modlitbu dá mi mudrost a statečnost Ducha svatého, abych setrval a oni aby nemohli mne uchýliti na křivou stranu, i když mi dá trpěti pokušení, pohanění, vězení neb smrt <...> Protož, milí bratří i milé sestry, modlete se snažně, ať mi ráčí dáti setrvání a aby mě ráčil ostříhati od poskvrnění. A je-li k jeho chvále a k našemu prospěchu má smrt, ať mi ji ráčí dáti podstoupiti bez zlého strachu. Již mě snad v Praze před smrtí neužríte. Pakli mě ovšem mocný Bůh ráčí Vám vrátiti, bude naše shledání tím radostnější. A ovšem, když se shledáme spolu v radosti nebeské. Bůh milosrdný <...> rač Vás ve všem dobrém uzpůsobiti, abyste plnili jeho vůli ve svornosti bez roztržky, a majíce pokoj ve ctnostech, abyste věčného pokoje došli skrze Pána našeho Jezu Krista. Jemuž jest chvála a bude na věky se všemi vyvolenými, s nimiž setrvávají v pravdě, budeme přebývati v radosti. Amen¹⁹.

On November the 3rd 1414, after a three-week long journey, Hus arrived to Constance, the town of his hope. He believed that thanks to the truth of his ideas, through faith in his thought, he would be able to defend his teaching. We are not going to give a detailed account of Hus's situation in this historical moment. Hus had been preparing for his trial very thoroughly. He called for reconciliation of man with God, with others and with oneself. In his sermon at the Council of Constance he wanted to talk about three kinds of peace, which „*má svůj původ v Boží moci, moudrosti a dobrotivosti, prosme Boha míru ať sešle tomuto domu první mír, aby Boha nade vše miloval. Ať sešle tomuto domu druhý mír, aby se svatě spravoval. A ať sešle tomuto domu třetí mír, aby všem bližním prospěl k spáse*“²⁰. However, the council rejected Hus's voice as his words were too appealing and thus, his sentence had to be irreversible, harsh and extremely cruel. Christ's justice was too far away and the earthly chains too heavy to allow freedom. Freedom of speech and the truth of life for the man who was predestined to the judgment at the stake.

We want to highlight two crucial moments that decided the course of the man's life. Hus “whether as a person who has influenced his contemporaries and

¹⁹ *Sto listů M. Jana Husi*. Praha 1949.

²⁰ J. Hus, *Sermo de pace: Řeč o míru*, Praha ²1995, p. 39.

through various social spheres catalyzed a massive movement of the Hussite revolution, as a thinker and public figure acting like religious-reform potential, exceeds the time and geographical boundaries of his work²¹.

The first moment was the weakness of the Czech King, who surrendered the fate of his faithful follower to his unreliable and ambitious brother, Emperor Sigismund – a faithful son of the Church who respected its power. Hus found himself outside the sphere of interest of the Czech Kingdom and except for a few of his faithful, he lost the support of secular law. He had lost ecclesiastical justice much earlier. This situation gave the Council an irrevocable power of its own judgment, and canon law at this point does not allow Hus any hope of justice. He could not but wait for the verdict. Justice was awaiting the opportunity to pronounce this historical sentence of the expected right of the powerful.

The stake burst into flames on the bank of the Rhine on 6th July 1415. The flame of truth was then ignited in the hearts of “heretics”. The second moment was the end of the historical life of Jan Hus, which he was destined to by the Church. The end of his life was aligned with the expected reconstruction of the Church hierarchy. With John XXIII deposed and the unity of the Church restored, the position of the Church’s power was re-established in the stronghold of the . Everything that was in the way and prevented the Church from this return had to be destroyed and removed. The goal and mission of the Church is to prepare believers for eternal life. The Holy Scripture must be read and not interpreted, as was ordered by the Church. The earthly world but walked different paths to the world of God’s justice. Every journey has a beginning and an end. This path, however, does not end with reconciliation and peace. After the sudden death of King Václav IV in 1419, unrest spread in the country. In accordance with Jan Hus’s message, only preachers offered the opportunity of remedy and the way to salvation. The king died and people did not wish a new emperor and king to take the throne. They expected God to come and rule in person. Adventists prophesied the end of the world, chiliasts promised the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth. On the one hand destruction and on the other side heavenly paradise, life of joy and happiness. Everyone believed that Christ would come, and His arrival was even predicted on 10 – 14th

²¹ J. Smrčka, *Hus v proměnách času, pohledy historiků*, [w:] T. Butta et al., *Mistra Jan Hus v proměnách času a jeho poselství dnešku*, Praha 2012, p.18.

February 1420. But God did not come and impatience grew. Again, the cleansing fire was expected to bring salvation. The flames flared all over Bohemia to open the doorway to the heavenly kingdom. Hus's idea of the world of divine justice for the people of good will was thwarted by cruelty and violence of the impatient and faithless.

In the southern region of the country where Hus had been born, the fire of violence exploded and spread destruction all over the country. Hus's teaching, a candle giving light to all, turned into a fire that engulfed material values. Finally, claims of Hussite preachers "if you do not start burning, you will be burnt yourselves" determined the atmosphere of the time²². The period became turbulent, troubled, and the Gospel disappeared in darkness of war. The turmoil suppressed the voice of human hearts and considerate minds. Waiting for the truth and reconciliation had to go through catharsis to return to the moral purification of faith. Symbolically, president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk decided to adopt the idea "Truth Prevails" to be put on the presidential flag.

Conclusion

After the nation won independence in 1918, new intellectual horizons opened and the need to realize the nation's historical values, which also led also to re-establishing the ideal of John Hus as a symbol. After 300 years, a man with heart filled with love for truth and faith in the victory, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, connected the humanitarian legacy of Hus with the democratic movement in Bohemia: the best traditions of the Czech Reformation with the traditional legacy of the Unity of Czech Brethren. Thus the last Bishop John Amos Comenius, together with John Hus, personified the best principles and the fight for the rights of the nation and its identity. He became the successor of the noble struggle for human consciousness and conscience, freedom of thought and freedom during less favourable times, when the need to protect truth and justice became alarming. When Archbishop Schwarzenberg condemned the Hussites and their struggle for the rights of the Czechs calling them "a bunch of looters and arsonists". In this conflict as well as other key points in

²² P. Kosatík, *České okamžiky*, Praha 2011, p. 18.

our history, Masaryk appeared fearless and combative, defending the martyr and symbol of the values of truth and justice, Jan Hus. He suggested that the Hus monument should be built, and he himself contributed financially to the issue of Hus's writings.

In the monograph *John Hus (Our national revival and reformation)* Masaryk wrote: "The Reformation began on the grounds of the university - at least the university led it, from Wycliffe Hus himself drew his first philosophical training. People followed their master, no difference between philosophy, science, academic or popular, scholars or laics. After Hus there were especially Brethren, mindful of religious reform, who cared for education above all: Comenius became a teacher of the world"²³. Masaryk pointed out that the Council committed acts of terrible violence to Hus, spiritual violence first, then the physical violence of the crusades that came afterwards. Not until these days had Hus been rehabilitated. The Church, having condemned and repudiated Hus, did not realize that his death had purifying effect on the Church itself²⁴.

For historical objectivity, we will comment on the monument of Jan Hus, which was to be a monument to his particular message and intellectual legacy. After his return to Prague on December the 21st, 1918 at 13.15, Masaryk was rode by car through Wenceslas Square along Celetná Street to the Old Town Square, where he got out and stood in front of the magnificent Šaloun's statue of John Hus, the site from which the former Marian column had disappeared. There the President delivered an address which was the first in his homeland, now an independent republic. Not a word about himself, "a man who raised Hus's name on his shield, when in Geneva he privately proclaimed war on Austria". The author of his biography Jan Herben reported: "Having finished his speech, the President looked at the statue of Hus, which had been erected in Old Town Square in 1915 when he was far away from his country"²⁵.

If it were an objective statement, we could say that most people also focus their attention in another direction. The past is too distant, present and future dismissive eagerly awaited. "The Church in the times of Hus forgot that the ultimate authority was God, not the institution of the Church. Its representatives

²³ T.G. Masaryk, *Jan Hus. Naše národní obrození a naše reformace*, Praha 1896, p. 317.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ J. Galandauer, *Pomník Mistra Jana Husa. Český symbol ze žuly a bronzu*, Praha 2008, p. 160.

talked about God all the time, while in practice they created their own rules²⁶.

Historians never stopped paying attention to John Hus and still continue in endless discussions about his teachings. The Church, however, had long been reluctant to reveal the essence of the dispute about the authenticity of his faith. So far, the most important forum in the Czech Republic came together after 75 years when, during Pope John Paul II's 1990 Prague visit, the Catholic Church made a decision to clarify the meaning of John Hus's teaching and define him in a larger historical context among the reformers of the Church, following the standpoint of Cardinal Josef Beran. A subsequent scientific conference, which convened in 1993 in Bayreuth (September 22 to 26) under the name "John Hus – Between Times, Peoples and Confessions", first tried to clarify the aspects of scientific importance and the work of John Hus. In the same year Cardinal Miloslav Vlk appointed "The Commission for studying problems associated with the personality, life and work of John Hus within the Czech Bishops' Conference", which consisted of representatives of the Catholic Church together with delegates of the Protestant churches, specialists from the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and from the universities in Prague, Brno and Olomouc. „The subject of the research and lively debate was Hus's teaching in terms of its theological and social content, apart from exploring the impact on the development of contemporary Czech society²⁷". An international conference convened on 15 – 18 December 1999 to consider the results of this commission on Jan Hus (Convegno internazionale zu Johannes Hus). The place of their meeting was the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome in Aula of Paul VI. At the congress the participants showed ecumenical pluralism of scientific knowledge. An example is a different view on the trial with Hus between Catholic scientist Karel Malý and evangelical researcher Jiří Kejř. As the former rector of Charles University, Malý opined that even that process cannot be based only on positive law, but it is necessary to take into account the natural law. Only such an approach can lead to finding justice. Legal historian Jiří Kejř appreciated the course of the conference which ran the discussions in an international and interconfessional spirit seeking historical truth about

²⁶ B. Higgins, *Hus drží klíč. Jan Hus hovoří k dnešní České republice*, Jindřichův Hradec 2004, p. 50.

²⁷ J. Pánek, M. Polívka, *Jan Hus ve Vatikánu. Mezinárodní rozprava o českém reformátoru v 15. století a jeho recepci na prahu třetího tisíciletí*, Praha 2000, p. 111.

Jan Hus and gave impetus for further scientific research. The highlight of the symposium in Rome was the address given by the Pope John Paul II. The highest representative of the Roman Catholic Church called for re-assessment of the reformer Jan Hus, and also put forward the essential and urgent question whether it is possible that the figure of Jan Hus today should unite Christians of various denominations rather than divide them. The words of John Paul II recited on the eve of the Great Jubilee, were filled with Christian humility and sincerity, for the first time these words called for reconciliation and expressed a wish for understanding the man whose ideas have penetrated into the minds and hearts of people across the globe. „I feel an obligation to express profound regret for the cruel death inflicted on Jan Hus, and for the subsequent blow, a source of conflict which divided minds and hearts of the Czech people <...> Wounds of past centuries must be healed through new views and through new relationships“²⁸.

Moravian Brethren spread the ideas of John Hus to Germany, Saxony, Holland, even to faraway Africa and America. The stake which was the last stand of Hus lit the flame of words of truth. Since then we have never stopped seeking the path to reconciliation and human understanding. And it was Pope John Paul II himself who set an example that this goal can be achieved. We do not live in the past but we want to understand the past, conceive the essence of the past and learn from it. The message of John Hus is still valid, fair, kind and genuine.

The pulpit in his time was power. The word was power. Today's world of modern media should respect the value of words. The word is still, in our days, a way to the life in truth. John Hus is a symbol of healing the wounds that endured centuries.

ABSTRACT

John Hus is one of the most significant figures in history, not only in Bohemia but also in Europe and the world. His preaching is not mere mentoring – it also has educational impact and a strong social dimension. The word becomes a cultivating social instrument and the Bethlehem Chapel the temple of the poor and humiliated. Burned for heresy Hus enters his second, historical life.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 111.

His stake in Constance is the spark leading to conflagration of the Hussite movement and to the Czech Reformation. A man turned his face to another man and raised his sight.

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