

Introduction

Historical research into the Bohemian Reformation has, perhaps, never been quite as broadly based as it is at present. This is true both for the distances which separate the students of the period as it is for the temporal breadth of the material studied. This volume reflects that breadth for the scholars represented here are based as far apart as the Czech Republic, the United States of America, Canada, and New Zealand and the focus of their research spans the period from before the birth of Hus himself to last days of Utraquism.

While this augurs very well for the future of Bohemian Reformation studies, it risks the possibility of scholars working in isolation and without opportunity for dialogue. One means to surmount this potential problem is the biennial World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (Společnosti pro vědy a umění). Here, in the context of an international congress of thousands devoted to a wide variety of disciplines, a small group of scholars can meet to share their own research on the Bohemian Reformation.

The Eighteenth SVU World Congress, held in Prague from 26–29 August 1994, provided the first occasion on which a concerted effort was made to bring together a symposium devoted specifically to the Bohemian Reformation. This volume represents a collection of some of the papers presented at that symposium.

While Drs. František Šmahel and Vilém Herold had promised the texts of their papers to other publications before the Congress, the summaries published here not only give the essence of what they presented but provide information not otherwise available in English. František Šmahel puts the Bohemian Reformation into a social and ecclesiastical context which provides an important background in which the collection, as a whole, can be read. A conjunction of secular and ecclesiastical phenomena, unique to the Czech Lands, provided fertile soil for a revolution that was to shake late western mediæval culture.

Vilém Herold seeks to determine whether and to what extent it is legitimate to identify as “Hussite” academic philosophy as it developed at the University of Prague during the end of the fourteenth and first two decades of the fifteenth century. He is able to demonstrate that the radical thought developed by the University’s Faculty of Arts, which was made accessible to a wider public through the *quodlibet* disputations, contributed to the general radicalization of Bohemian society at large.

The theme for the SVU Congress was “Czech and Slovak Contributions to World Culture” and, in the light of that theme, participants were encouraged, if possible, to relate their work to the manner in which events in the Czech Republic or Slovakia related to European and World culture in general. For a movement that has usually been studied in isolation this has not often been the case. Usually it has been regarded as a curiosity – *La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique* as Šmahel has called it. When the Bohemian Reformation has been compared to its homologues beyond the frontiers of the Kingdom of Bohemia, it is often perceived as being a mere implementation of the Wyclifite programme in the Bohemian realms in which there is little acknowledgement of the importance of the strong indigenous impetus for reform which was well established long before the works of Wyclif arrived in the realm. This general theme provided the opportunity to relate the interplay between Bohemia and other contemporary European movements. Dr. David Holeton looks at the Bohemian eucharistic movement in the context of other similar mediæval movements and identifies causes for the success found in Bohemia compared to the relative failure elsewhere. He demonstrates that a particular constellation of pastoral experience, backed by academic and popular writings and, finally, ecclesiastic approbation made viable for Bohemia what would not take root elsewhere.

Dr. Thomas Fudge traces the origins and development of the illusive term “Law of God” which played such an important rôle in the development of practice and thought in the Bohemian Reformation. As the principle *judex* by which all religious thought and practice were to be judged, the importance of the term cannot be overestimated as it served as the criterion by which the possibility of religious dialogue could take place both in pluralist Bohemia and with the churches of surrounding nations.

The final essay, by Dr. Zdeněk David, addresses a subject on which little literature is available in any language, let alone English. Later Ultraquism is a topic which has been served very badly by historians. By those interested in the “Hussite Revolution” it has usually been dismissed as either “Roman Catholicism with the chalice” or the vestiges of a failed revolution. Only recently are scholars looking carefully at what was actually transpiring in the theological reflection and pastoral practice of this period. In looking at the life and work of the ultraquist theologian Bohuslav Bílejovský, David shows that there was a rigour and creativity in ultraquist theology which has not been generally acknowledged. Striving for a *via media* was both unfashionable and unpopular in an age characterised by religious acrimony and polemic. In a more ecumenical age, the merits of Bílejovský’s efforts can be

better appreciated as can moderate Utraquism's adumbration of the course Anglicanism was to follow over a century later.

Drawn together within these covers, it is hoped that these essays will give readers who do not have facility with the Czech language access to dimensions of the Bohemian Reformation otherwise unavailable to them. There are vast areas within the period that are still *terra incognita*, begging to be explored. It was the hope of those who organized and participated in the 1994 symposium that SVU World Congresses would continue to be a venue in which scholars from around the world could meet to share the fruits of their research in this largely unknown area of history. This hope is already being realised for, by the time this collection is published, a larger group of scholars will have met in Brno during the 1996 SVU World Congress.

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