

“The Knowledge and Eloquence of the Priest is a Gift from God.” **The Homiletic Self-Promotion of Jan Hus**

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Jesus sent [his disciples] to preach as stated in Luke 9 “in all cities and places they encounter.” But today’s priests do not obey this call, because now they are not sent to preach or to collect men, but rather they go forth to fill up the purse. Jesus sent preachers who consider the welfare of the people and the honour of the Lord. If truly a priest preaches for the purse, accepting money, he is sent not from Jesus but from Mammon. If truly he preaches on account of the gullet, so he may live luxuriously, he is sent from Belial; if truly he preaches to bring himself glory, he is from Satan.¹

Jan Hus preached this message in his last recorded sermon on the feast of Sts. Simon and Jude, (28 October) 1411. In the face of excommunication and the threat of interdict against Prague, Hus never strayed from his duties as a preacher to his congregation. Preachers throughout Christendom commonly stressed the significance of preaching to salvation, and medieval sermon guide books, known in Latin as *artes praedicandi*, often expressed in detail preaching’s critical role in leading people to salvation.² How a priest then relayed that importance to the audience, however, varied depending on the orator. Preachers such as Hus often established their own ways for promoting their preaching style and authority. One possible way for a preacher to stress the importance of the sermon was through a trope of humility, which expressed his unworthiness. Such language illustrated the preacher’s reliance on the Holy Spirit, as well as directing attention to the divine inspiration of the sermon.³ On the complete opposite of the spectrum,

¹ Jan Hus, *M. Io. Hus Sermones in Capella Bethlehem*, ed. Václav Flajšhans (Prague, 1938–1942) v. 5, 132.

² David L. d’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (New York, 1985/repr. 2002) 8.

³ Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2004) 59, further Peter Francis Howard, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus, 1427–1459* (Florence, 1995) 43.

other famous preachers, for example the two Florentine preachers Giovanni Dominici (d.1420) and Bernardino of Siena (d.1444), likened their voices unto the voice of God. Rather than express humility, Bernardino, for example, famously stated that all one needed for salvation was “to hear *fra Bernardino*.”⁴ Hus attempted to tread a careful path between self-exaltation and self-deprecation while promoting his preaching to his audience in Bethlehem Chapel. Hus certainly never stated that his was the voice of God, but rather emphasised God’s voice in the Gospel message in conjunction with his own skill at sharing that message. These were common and powerful portions of Hus’s message to his audience, and they played a critical role in establishing his authority at Bethlehem Chapel.

Hus perceived the preacher to be an instrument of God’s will on earth and stated that “the knowledge and eloquence of the priest is a gift from God.”⁵ Hus’s stated motivations and strategies for promoting his sermons therefore reveals the larger purpose that he assigned to them. More simply stated, understanding why Hus preached brings clarity to what Hus preached. In this article, I will examine three major themes concerning the promotion and authority of the preacher that are generally reflected in Hus’s sermons. First, Hus perceived his preaching of the Gospel as critical to the spiritual life of the church. Therefore, he devoted significant attention to addressing the proper way to preach. Second, Hus argued his authority derived from the scriptural mandate that made preaching the primary task of the followers of Christ. This call to preach played an even greater role in his sermons over time and evolved into one of Hus’s primary defences as his enemies increased in number. Finally, Hus linked effective preaching to a life devoted to the imitation of Christ and the authority that resulted from a moral life in Jesus’ image.

Hus’s homiletic themes and the content of his sermons at Bethlehem Chapel resembled those of many contemporary, charismatic preachers, yet the context of Hus’s preaching necessitated a significantly different approach. Many famous itinerant preachers moved from place to place with invitations from civic institutions to preach temporarily in a city.⁶ In large part, this was due to the predominance of the mendicant orders in promoting popular, almost revivalist, preaching events.⁷ Bernardino of Siena, for example, frequently relocated from city to city in Northern Italy, often with only limited opportunities to impress his audience. To insure that he had the greatest possible impact, he commonly boasted of his preaching skill and reputation in each

⁴ Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444)* (Turnhout, 2001) 37.

⁵ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 26 (Sermon for Lent I [1 March 1411]).

⁶ Ottó Sándor Geceer, “Preaching and Publicness: St. John of Capistrano and the Making of his Charisma North of the Alps,” in *Charisma and Religious Authority*, ed. Katherine L. Jansen and Miri Rubin (Turnhout, 2010) 149.

⁷ D’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, 4, 34; *ibid.*, *Medieval Religious Rationalities: a Weberian Analysis* (Cambridge, 2010) 104–105.

new location.⁸ John of Capistrano (d.1456) also moved throughout Italy and Central Europe preaching with similar requirements in places as far from his birth place as Poland.⁹ The Dominican friar Vincent Ferrer (d. 1419) left the papal court of Benedict XIII in 1399 and wandered Europe as a prophet for nearly two decades.¹⁰ Indulgence preachers, begging friars, and Waldensians crisscrossed Christendom, attempting to gain the notice of audiences large and small throughout the later Middle Ages.¹¹ Few charismatics, though, had opportunities to develop roots or to preach long-term to the same audience.

Jan Hus, on the other hand, generally stayed within the confines of his adopted city of Prague. Although the majority of preaching in the Middle Ages was done by priests in their own locale, Hus is one of the few to gain major notoriety as a preacher while remaining in a single venue for nearly a decade.¹² This meant that many people probably heard Hus repeatedly, some, perhaps even daily. As a result of Hus's relatively stable pulpit, he was able to develop his reputation as an authoritative preacher over time, and his sermons reflect an environment in which he did not need to assert his authority blatantly in every sermon. Hus had the luxury of using a variety of themes and strategies to insure that the audience gave his words the utmost respect. To examine how Hus intentionally promoted his authority through his preaching, one needs to look beyond individual sermons to witness how his homiletic corpus functioned as a collective whole.

Hus derived a part of his authority from expounding on the technique and value of proper preaching. On several occasions, he described the value of the preacher's profession to the audience, which consequently established his position to listeners as the ideal preacher. He consistently expressed the importance of his words to his audience, and through his preaching

⁸ Cynthia Polecristi, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena and his Audience* (Washington D.C., 2000) 21, 66; Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers*, 52; Gecser, "Preaching and Publicness," 156–157.

⁹ The most detailed biography of John of Capestrano is Johannes Hofer, *Kapistran: Ein Leben im Kampfum die Reform der Kirche*, v. 2, ed. Ottokar Bonman (Heidelberg, 1964–65); Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1979) 125; Gecser, "Preaching and Publicness," 148–159.

¹⁰ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378–1417* (University Park, PA, 2006) 78.

¹¹ Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (New York; Oxford, 1992) 19; John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2008) 45. For more general studies of the late medieval religious milieu see: John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77 (2008) 274; Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages*, 179; Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*. Trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, 1995) 163; and Malcom Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, 2002).

¹² Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus* (Prague, 1915) 95.

he demonstrated the potentially contradictory attributes of humility and authority from his own pulpit. In this respect, Hus differed little from his contemporaries or medieval preachers in general, but the circumstances of his life led him to emphasise his authority to a far greater extent as his career progressed. Indeed, as his authority to preach increasingly came under attack, his self-promotion became more a matter of justifying his place in the pulpit rather than convincing listeners of the efficacy of his preaching. Hus, however, is remarkably consistent in his message, and common themes and preaching strategies did emerge between the liturgical years 1404–1405 and 1410–1411. Hus proclaimed his authority through interconnecting rhetorical strategies that buttressed his position in the pulpit. Despite the dramatic change of tone resulting from the instability of his life in 1411, his self-promotion consistently drew on similar tropes and rehearsed the same themes.

Historians who have noted the importance of Hus's preaching have typically highlighted his use of the vernacular or his immersion in controversy. The reasons behind his success in the pulpit, however, have received little attention. Famous and frequently cited twentieth-century scholars of Hus, such as Paul De Vooght, Matthew Spinka, Howard Kaminsky, Vlastimil Kybal, and František Bartoš, used his sermons to investigate doctrinal issues central to the Bohemian reform, rather than focusing on the sermons themselves. They saw Hus as the leader of a movement that was already in motion and that had gained popular support from its inception.¹³ This may be true, but the sermons themselves functioned within a more complex context and, until recently, no one had tried to understand the function of the sermons themselves. Thomas Fudge's article "Feel This!" is one exception to this general trend, in that it attempts to analyse the development of an emotional connection to the audience. His article, however, focuses on connecting Hus to a narrative of the "preaching of reformation," a teleological concept that still limits the understanding of Hus's popularity to an anachronistic narrative that tends to ignore many of Hus's common homiletic themes.¹⁴ Few scholars have thoroughly analysed the sermons themselves for the purpose of understanding Hus's preaching and audience.¹⁵ A narrow focus on the sermons themselves reveals how Hus described his value as a preacher, what he considered to be his reasons for success, and how his preaching established his position in defiance of local authorities. Hus's self-promotion from the

¹³ More teleological than simply linking Hus to an organised Bohemian reform movement, Kaminsky describes Hus as the recognised leader of a "revolutionary movement," implying a Marxist inspired interpretation that Hus promoted far more than simple religious morality and reform. HHR, 52.

¹⁴ Fudge, "Feel This!," BRRP 4 (2000) 108.

¹⁵ Spinka, for example, employs Hus's sermons as examples of his theology and politics throughout his life. Spinka, however, rarely focuses on the sermons themselves but rather picks out sermons that fit his themes, for example see his use of Hus's sermons in Spinka, *John Hus's Concept of the Church* (Princeton, 1966) 44, 56, 101.

pulpit became a critical component of his authority to preach and increasingly became his answer to the political and theological debates surrounding his pastoral ministry. Through his consistent emphasis on the power of his preaching, Hus defended his place in the pulpit both before and after his own excommunication.¹⁶ Hus desired that his audience accept him as the ideal preacher, and the surviving evidence and his enduring legacy suggest he succeeded. To his audience, Hus personified the ideal preacher called by Christ.

In his sermons, Hus commonly discussed the necessary components for proper preaching, which he embodied, while criticising in general terms an ineffective and uninspired alternative. Yet, Hus attributed a far greater purpose to his preaching than the mere condemnation of clerical opponents or challenging problematic church practices. To Hus, preaching the Gospel was the purpose of the universal Church, and the failure to do so was a rejection of Christ's commission to the apostles, and thus a rejection of Christ himself. This loss of focus, according to Hus, had grave repercussions in a church fractured by schism and under the growing influence of the devil among both the laity and the clergy.¹⁷ Hus summarised this point in May of 1411 in his letter to John Barbatus in which he wrote, "Relying on that, I desired in preaching to obey only God rather than the pope or the archbishop and the rest of the satraps opposing the word of Christ, 'Go into all the world,' etc. I made this remark so that you may know how to oppose the devil's dogs."¹⁸

Hus did not hide his intentions for his sermons, and he often spoke with great simplicity and clarity as to why he felt his preaching was of the utmost importance. In the wake of being charged with heresy and excommunicated in 1410, Hus continued to justify continued preaching in the context of his sermons. Lacking the bishop's blessing, Hus explicitly based his authority to preach on God's command found in Luke 9: <1–3>: "Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal." Hus interpreted Jesus's command to the apostles as his command to Hus as well. The result is a clear correlation between Hus's promotion of his work as a preacher and the buttressing of his authority to preach.

Proper Preaching

Hus considered proper and effective preaching as a sign that a preacher's authority derived from God. In particular, a true preacher could demonstrate

¹⁶ Hus explicitly lays out his defence of preaching in his letter written to John Barbatus and the People of Krumlov found in Novotný, 91 and translated in Spinka, *Letters of John Hus* (Manchester, 1972) 50–53.

¹⁷ Spinka, *John Hus's Concept of the Church*, 261.

¹⁸ Translated in Spinka, *The Letters of John Hus*, 53.

his authority to his audience by drawing attention to his own competency. By teaching his audience how to identify proper preaching, Hus therefore seems to have intended that others recognise him as the model of such a preacher. On 22 February 1405, in the afternoon sermon on Sexagesima, Hus explained to his audience the necessary components of a good sermon. He provided his six *cautelae* (cautions) for preaching to illustrate the thought required to preach the Gospel correctly and ensure the audience's understanding:

1. Do not argue in falsehoods; they murder the spirit of the listener.
2. Do not make false accusations in order to make yourself a modern apostle.
3. Think well before you speak.
4. Do not use noxious words; the sermon should be pleasing and useful.
5. Flee from wordiness.
6. As for the time of speaking, measure the place and the listeners, because in Eccles. 3 <7> it is written: "A time for speaking and a time for silence." And again: "The wise will be silent until the proper time, the boasting fool ignores the time." <Sirach 20: 6>

At the end of this list, Hus's stated, "Alas! These conditions we do not especially observe in our preachers, some fabricate false indulgences and reliquaries for deceiving people, others deceive through visions and miracles, and like false apostles they praise their own life while reproaching the faults of others."¹⁹ The list serves as an example of the fascinating relationship between Hus and his audience, which almost certainly contained a mixture of clerics and lay people. Hus's reference to wordiness may have raised any number of smiles, smirks, and further interactions with his audience, especially if they appreciated the irony that a number of Hus's sermons are rather long depending on the day. Another way to interpret this passage is that Hus may have given this statement with all seriousness and without humour. Unfortunately, the witnesses to the sermon (both the audience present and manuscripts recording the event) provide no suggestions as to Hus's delivery, yet the content itself provides a starting point to how Hus understood his position at the Bethlehem Chapel.

Hus's cautions illustrated his concern for his primary craft at the Bethlehem Chapel and his goal of effectively preaching the Gospel to his audience. In this sermon, Hus included some of, although certainly not all, the characteristics of good and poor preaching. He discussed preaching in detail and explicitly told his audience what they should expect both from him and other preachers. The cautions fit in with the preaching conventions of Hus's contemporaries, as many late medieval preachers employed a humility trope in the pro-theme of a sermon. The expectation of a medieval pro-theme

¹⁹ Jan Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v.7, 106, 107.

was that it set the stage and purpose of a sermon.²⁰ It often contained a declaration of the preacher's unworthiness to preach and expressed his reliance on inspiration from God and the authority of the scriptures.²¹ Likewise, Hus often asserted the divine origins of his authority to preach in his pro-themes. This assertion most commonly appeared in the form of immediate references to the scripture and exempla from authorities. In the case of the cautions, Hus based his sermon initially on the authority of the Apostle Paul through a citation of 2 Corinthians 12. Hus began the sermon: "The Apostle teaches these words to every man, so that they might not preserve uncertainty over certainty. So they might unite the unknowing with the knowledge of God. So they might not presume to preach their own mighty deeds."²² Hus typically continued to incorporate similar citations throughout the sermon, thereby rooting all his major statements in the authority of either scripture or the fathers and doctors of the church. This approach, commonly described as the "golden chain of citation," allowed preachers to base their authority on the words of scripture, the church fathers, and well-known theologians. In this way, a preacher's words followed a chain of authority that linked his sermon to the sources of Christian authority, and most commonly to the words of Jesus Christ himself.²³ Hus relied heavily on this approach in every sermon and homily, yet in conjunction with the use of citations he also included non-traditional references such as the cautions, which supported his position in the pulpit by illustrating his competence in the preacher's art.²⁴ The cautions seem less the expected humility trope and more of a statement of Hus's superiority to other preachers.

In the example of the *cautelae*, Hus highlighted his own aptitude for preaching as evidence of his authority. The first two *cautelae* focus on the truthful authority of the preacher, and the final four discuss characteristics of the effective sermon. By stating these points, he shared his personal standard for preaching and informed his audience why his preaching was superior to any alternative. For example, by placing significant emphasis on not telling lies, Hus obviously must be telling the truth. By stating the importance of brevity in speaking, he suggested his sermons must be an appropriate length to avoid wordiness. By stating that one must preach at a proper time, he

²⁰ Peter C. A. Moreé, *Preaching in Fourteenth Century Bohemia* (Prague, 1999) 160; Phyllis B. Roberts, "The *Ars Praedicatori* and the Medieval Sermon," in: ed. Carolyn Muessig, *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2002) 49–50; James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of the Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Tempe, AZ, 2001) 325.

²¹ Howard, *Beyond the Written Word*, 43.

²² Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v.7, 106.

²³ Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, 14.

²⁴ In this way, Hus is also similar too, but perhaps more modest than, Bernardino of Siena and Giovanni Dominici. Nirit Debby highlights that these two preachers quite openly equated their voice with the voice of God, a level of self-promotion that Hus never reached. Nirit Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers*, 39.

implied that times exist when pulpits should be silent and preachers should consider the audience in that decision. By defining bad preaching through the *cautelae*, he effectively argues his own preaching prowess to his audience.

Spread throughout Hus's sermons is a wide assortment of remarks concerning other attributes necessary for proper preaching. One common ingredient that Hus considered necessary for a successful sermon is love. He explained to his audience that "a sermon without love (*karitate*) is not fruitful."²⁵ This element in his sermons stands out more clearly in his early sermons than the later polemical ones. Hus, undoubtedly, was aware of the need to express love within his sermons. *Caritas* as a rhetorical device did not exist in classical oratory; rather, it was introduced through the Church fathers in works that Hus frequently cited. Both Augustine and later Gregory expressed concern that the rhetorical techniques employed in Christian sermons often originated in the works of Cicero and other classical pagan writers. These techniques appealed to the audience's sense of reason, but the Christian preacher needed to reach his listeners' souls. The Church fathers therefore viewed Christian love as the bridge between the preacher and his listeners which led to conversion.²⁶ Hus was clearly aware of this requirement and spoke quite beautifully about the necessity of love, stating, "But just as the brightness of the sun exceeds the brightness of the other stars, thus the duty of love surpasses all duties, since all prior duties ought to be ordered finally according to this very love."²⁷

A separate requirement for proper preaching is humility. Hus stated on the First Sunday of Lent [1 March] in 1411 that it is "the devil who tempts us with pride in our speech... therefore repent of these [sins] and be humble in speech."²⁸ Hus's concern for the sins of voice appeared again on Lent III [15 March] during the same year in a sermon discussing the powers of Satan and demons. Here, Hus described the devil as a wolf lunging to kill by the throat (meaning temptations of speech) because it is by the throat that the preacher spreads the Word of God.²⁹ Although Hus considered humility a key aspect in imitating Christ, he specifically asserted its necessity for preaching. In this respect, humility is a critical part of establishing a preacher's authority, and although Hus placed himself in the role of the ideal preacher, his emphasis on humility need not contradict his self-promotion. Rarely did Hus declare himself above any other specific priest, nor did he declare himself above the Gospel.³⁰ Hus displayed his humility, not through grandiose statements of piety, but through his emphasis on the Gospel and his projection of Christian morality. Hus hoped that his emphasis on the value of humility

²⁵ Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v. 7, 112.

²⁶ Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 291.

²⁷ Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v. 7, 96.

²⁸ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, v. 3, 99.

³⁰ Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 63–64.

would lead his audience to recognise his own modesty. This approach, although not unique, stands in sharp contrast to certain previously mentioned medieval charismatics.

Yet another concern for Hus was the content of a sermon, in particular that a preacher should never lose the Gospel message. As previously illustrated in the Sexagesima sermon containing the *cautulae*, Hus decried the preaching of fables and fabricated revelation. He addressed this point again in his sermon on Trinity XI [30 August] 1405. Early in the text he argued that “This is the order of preaching, that the gospel will be preached – not performances, nor tales, nor the lies of spoils – the people may receive the gospel with an attentive mind, and preaching and hearing this gospel, they may stand by faith in the gospel, and third, insofar as both are working well according to the gospel, [the people] may be saved.”³¹ Hus’s emphasis on the message, although certainly not surprising, reveals two significant characteristics concerning Hus and his audience. First, Hus definitively stated that the power of his preaching comes directly from the power of the Gospel. According to Hus, it is the power of the Gospel and the people’s desire for its message that draws his listeners to him. For example, in the afternoon sermon on Easter V Sunday, 24 May 1405, Hus addressed that power and how his audience should receive it. The sermon is suffused with vibrant imagery and an emphasis not on the preacher, but rather on the listener. Hus referred to the promise of the Gospel as delightful, and he called the listener to “study the word, elicit the senses.”³² This use of sensory language, although employed relatively infrequently, does exist in many places within Hus’s sermons. Here, the reference to senses may also refer to the application of the rhetorical and hermeneutical “four senses of interpretation,” which was also a common motif in traditional preaching. When referring to the use of the senses, Hus may also be implying the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses that had long occupied an essential place in scholastic university educations.³³

The second characteristic of Hus’s preaching as it specifically related to his audience was his repeated emphasis on the preacher’s influence as a necessary first step in sinners’ acceptance of the Gospel. The Gospel should be the central point of the sermon, and Hus commonly alluded to himself as a conduit of that message. To illustrate that point, Hus offered up numerous scriptural examples. Repentance is a major recurring theme throughout his sermons, and he often referred to the value of preaching in the context of

³¹ Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v.7, 425. Hus’s meaning of fables seems fairly straight forward as he himself rarely seems to have indulged in non-scriptural narratives when he preached. “Spoils,” when appearing in scripture, are often interchangeable with a prize. In this case, Hus is probably referring to earthly rewards for faith as opposed to heavenly gifts.

³² *Ibid.*, 225–226.

³³ Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 327; Harry Caplan, “The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching,” *Speculum* 4 (1924) 283–284.

sin and conviction. Hus invoked John the Baptist on the Fourth Sunday of Advent [21 December] 1404, stating, “Behold the great preacher calling to repentance... behold the call to penitence in works serving as an example,” and he subsequently described John’s success in bringing Herod to repentance through a sermon.³⁴ On the Fifth Sunday after Easter [24 May] 1405, Hus preached on James 1 and similarly highlighted the necessity of preaching to lead sinners to repentance. Reflecting on the passage, he stated, “James shows that the word of God can save the spirit if received.”³⁵ In this it is shown, however, that the word having been received justifies nothing, if not completed through works. The necessity of preaching for repentance is only one of many foundational tasks of the clergy and is of particular importance in what Hus commonly referred to as Christ’s mandate to preach.

The Mandate to Preach

Hus described a clear mandate from scripture for preaching to his audience. He explained that God demands that his followers preach, and that the failure to do so had dire consequences. In a sermon on Matthew 21, preached as the second sermon on Palm Sunday [12 April] 1405, Hus exhorted his fellow preachers to call upon the people to prepare for the Lord’s coming, declaring: “O preachers, speak and wish not to be silent.”³⁶ Hus based this sermon on how Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem, as told in Matthew 21, fulfils the prophecy of the Messiah entering Jerusalem found in Isaiah 62. The chapter, steeped with eschatological imagery, foretells the coming of the Messiah. Hus, however, focused not on the coming of Christ or even the waiting of the church, but rather he placed his emphasis on the need for the people to hear of the coming kingdom.³⁷ This sermon sheds light on how Hus considered his role in the Church to be militant. Hus and his fellow priests must announce the coming of the Lord. Their duty was to inform and warn the people of Prague to prepare for the arrival of the king.³⁸

Just as good sermons could lead people to God, Hus often emphasised how bad preaching or the absence of preaching could lead people astray. To cite an early example, Hus preached on Trinity V [19 July 1405]:

Notice how the crowds gathered and listened fervently to the word of God. So that they could hear, they knocked one another over in attempts to get close to Jesus. Their zeal was caused by the power of the

³⁴ Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v. 7, 54, 56.

³⁵ Loc. cit.

³⁶ Ibid., 171.

³⁷ Ibid., 170–171.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

Word of God as well as by their love for it. Today, however, hearers of the Word falter. The clergy preach myths and lies that the crowds like to hear. But because the people are not hearing the Truth of God, they can neither see him, nor love him. This is reminiscent of what Paul reported in 2 Tim. 4: “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”³⁹

Hus argued that if priests will preach the Gospel, then the people will come to hear them, but in the absence of sound preaching, the people will turn to the myths mentioned by Paul. In Hus’s time these could easily include indulgences and relics. Also quite likely is that Hus referred to his personal encounter with priests deceiving the laity from the pulpit. This may also be a direct condemnation of the fraudulent Wilsnack miracles, which he investigated as part of an inquiry sent by Archbishop Zbyněk into the reported miracles in Brandenburg. The priests of Wilsnack had declared that their eucharistic hosts were bleeding, and as a result had profited considerably from flocks of pilgrims hoping to witness the miracle themselves.⁴⁰ The investigation concluded that the priests had been falsely claiming miracles in order to lure pilgrims for financial gain.⁴¹

Hus illustrated that along with a failure to combat false doctrines, the absence of proper preaching is problematic to the Christian life. In 1405, he pointed out the danger of the absence of preaching for both the laity and the clergy. For example, on Trinity XVI [4 October], Hus discussed the spiritual failures of the people of Ephesus who, upon the departure of Paul, “fail [in] the spiritual journey having been deprived of so great an apostle and preacher who comforted while instructing them in the way of the Spirit.”⁴² Following closely that thought, Hus, a mere two weeks later, chided priests who avoided the pulpit. He decried their failure and the danger to priests who stray from preaching the Gospel by explaining that “the learned clerics should observe such words, those who crave silence, they do not preach, they place the light of knowledge under the bed of destruction, under the way of avarice, and under the worldly vessel of fear and in secret private religion.”⁴³ Prague itself was in the midst of a revival, and the renewed emphasis on preaching may have

³⁹ Ibid., 338.

⁴⁰ For a more in depth study, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007).

⁴¹ Vidmanová, “Hus Als Prediger,” CV 19 (1976) 73; Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 27; Spinka, *John Hus’s Concept of the Church*, 59; Sedlák, *M. Jan Hus*, 104–05; Oakely, *The Western Church*, 240.

⁴² Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v.7, 485.

⁴³ Ibid., 517.

resonated with his audience as part of the current atmosphere of reform.⁴⁴ By upbraiding priests who were failing to fulfil Christ's mandate, Hus indirectly underscores his own commitment to preaching.

Years later, Hus continued to refer to the failures of the contemporary clergy, but with even greater disapproval. Hus's call to preachers increased substantially as the growing threats to his own preaching mission increased. Hus went so far as to suggest in 1411 that the primary action of any priest should be preaching the Word, describing temporal gains and ceremonies as interfering with Christ's mandate.⁴⁵ He considered those activities as mere distractions from preaching the Word. He stated on Trinity XII [30 August 1411]:

When the crowd rushed etc. Therefore, because of these two [reasons] it is said we are punished, we that are good Christians. Because truly when we stray from those two mandates, we stray from Christ, we priests on account of our ceremonies, *missacionem* [liturgical rites],⁴⁶ and our desire for temporal riches, because we decline to teach what we were taught. Similarly, you, who do not relinquish your sin and in this way you value risk, you trust so greatly our *missacionibus* [liturgical rites] and prayers, which you collect with no small price and you neglect the recital of the Word of God, on the contrary you withdraw from preaching the Word.⁴⁷

Hus begins to tie the mandate to preach explicitly with the preaching and imitation of Christ. Following a statement of Bernard of Clairvaux, Hus asserted, "It follows: 'therefore because they hold no order, for that reason they go where nothing is ordered, and always they inhabit perpetual horror.' And why? Because we are not imitating Christ, who is working for our salvation."⁴⁸ This statement concluded a lengthy sermon by Hus on preaching and the failure of corrupt priests. He borrowed extensively from Gregory and Bernard throughout this sermon to describe a people without the guidance of a worthy preacher. He commonly alluded to humanity's propensity for sin and,

⁴⁴ For the most recent compilation and reconsideration of the growing emphasis on preaching in late medieval Bohemia, see Pavel Soukup, *Reformní Kazatelství a Jakoubek ze Stríbra* [Preaching Reform and Jakoubek of Stríbro] (Prague, 2011) 68–92.

⁴⁵ Preaching on the sacraments can be found throughout Hus's preaching. A number of secondary works have also been written specifically on Hus's views on the sacraments including: Stanislav Sousedík, *Učení o eucharistii v díle M. Jana Husa* [Teaching on the Eucharist in the Works of Jan Hus] (Prague, 1998); Jiří Kejř, "Teaching on Repentance and Confession in the Bohemian Reformation," *BRRP* 5,1 (2002) 89–115; Olivier Marin, "Les usages de la liturgie dans la predication," *BRRP* 6 (2007) 54, 64.

⁴⁶ The word *missacionem* continues to be problematic in this passage, and despite tracking the word through other texts it remains unclear exactly to what it refers [perhaps: liturgical rites Ed.].

⁴⁷ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 4, 265.

⁴⁸ *Loc. cit.*

although not always linked explicitly to an absence of preaching, one may easily recognise repentance as a primary goal of Hus's preaching. This sentence also serves to introduce another major theme that Hus used to support his authority to preach: the example of Christ.

Preaching in Imitation of Christ

Hus's self-promotion through comparison with Christ did not initially dominate his preaching. Similar to his previously mentioned reference to the absence of Paul, Hus commonly linked himself to the qualities of effective, well-known, or scriptural preachers. He often drew examples from biblical and early church figures specifically to reference the power of preaching. Reflection on Paul's rhetorical abilities, for example, appears in a number of places in his sermons. He described Paul's exemplary preaching as a military captain exhorting his soldiers. Describing preaching in military terms as motivation for fighting against evil is a technique Hus commonly employed. Although not particularly common in the *Collecta*, this technique appears in his early sermons, and like many themes involving threats to the faithful it appears more frequently later in his life.⁴⁹

Although Hus mentioned the preaching careers of both Paul and John the Baptist on many occasions in 1405, direct reference to the preaching of Christ is sparse. In one sermon, Hus compared the work of Christ and Satan. "For Christ hunts the soul through his preaching, which Jeremiah 16 describes as a chase to give blessing. But the Devil hunts for the purpose of giving damnation."⁵⁰ This sermon, however, was predominately concerned with themes of repentance and maintains only a rather weak connection to the model of Christ and his preaching as the sermon continued. By 1410, however, Hus's primary example of godly preaching was the recorded words and acts of Christ. This is not to say that a Christ-centred model was absent from his previous preaching, for it is not unusual to find Hus referred to Jesus the context of humility and resistance to temptation, but Christ's link to preaching remained unrefined.⁵¹ After Hus's excommunication in 1411, though, he relied mostly on explicit parallels with Jesus Christ to illustrate what and how a preacher preaches.

In his 1411 sermons, Hus derived a large part of his preaching authority by comparing his own life and preaching to that of Christ's. In this aspect, his sermon on Trinity V [12 July 1411], focused entirely on how a cleric should preach

⁴⁹ The widespread use of this metaphor in the period is treated by Pavel Soukup in his "Metaphors of the Spiritual Struggle Early in the Bohemian Reformation: The Exegesis of the *Arma Spiritualia* in Hus, Jakoubek, and Chelčický," in BRRP 6 (2004) 87–110; Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO v.7, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

in comparison to Christ. Hus placed his primary focus on the example of Christ and preached a sermon that explained how imitating Christ affected preachers and their audience. An obvious undercurrent in the sermon was his defence of his decision to continue preaching, despite being forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities. The scriptural basis of this text is Luke 5 <1ff.>, which describes a scene where Jesus's audience grew so large that he was forced to preach from a boat off the shore. Hus drew two general conclusions from this passage:

First, the words of Christ were attentively heard by the people; you likewise press forward to hear the word of God. Second, Luke shows that Christ was diligent in regular preaching. These two interpretations are brought to you...so that you may hear the word of Christ with compassion, so that you may be fulfilled by work in him, so that by the sermon you may believe, and so that together we may teach and preach everywhere using that example of Christ, the one who preaches standing in the sea!⁵²

Hus said that although evil attempts were made to hinder him from fulfilling his duties, the presence of a large and enthusiastic audience vindicated his preaching. Hus supported himself further by citing John Chrysostom, who said that just as “the sign of a good farmer is the barn having been filled, a sign of good preaching is the church full of listeners. Therefore, because Christ is the best preacher in word and sermon, because from nothing he is able to mend, for that reason listeners and the crowd press forward, as they listen to him. From that, therefore, is the preacher so great; he is worthy of our imitation.”⁵³ Following Chrysostom, Hus concluded that the size of Christ's audience proved him to be a great preacher. The insistence that the presence of so many listeners is the sign of good preaching is a remarkable addition to his expectations of a good preacher and one of his most obvious references to his own rhetorical abilities and the context of the Bethlehem Chapel.

The need for preachers to imitate Christ is a repeated theme throughout Hus's later sermons. Historians have often described Hus as a critic of clerical immorality, and a considerable portion of that critique was concerned with how preachers failed to model the life of Christ.⁵⁴ On Lent I [1 March] 1411, Hus preached: “Each minister of Christ should first conform himself to Christ, however much he is able, so he might imitate Christ well and teach as he lives, so that he is humble, chaste, tolerant, and thus to others just as Christ, yet not totally and equal to Christ.”⁵⁵ Later, on Lent IV [22 March],

⁵² Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 4, 264.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 264–265.

⁵⁴ Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 63; Spinka, *John Hus's Concept of the Church*, 62; HHR, 40.

⁵⁵ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 28.

Hus again made the comparison: “And therefore those listeners and preachers are imitators of Christ. So if one from pure intentions wishes good to men, then they know that he is sent from God.”⁵⁶ The claim that preaching authority derives from personal morality is hardly new to Hus. Personal morality was a cornerstone of mendicant preaching in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as justification for preaching by such groups as the Waldensians.⁵⁷ Hus frequently employed this motif as well, making such statements as “be open, stand always unto death, preach against evil priests who are not preaching to the sins of the people, because of this in the end those priests are given over to death and placed in the dung heap; and having been disgraced and bound together, they are finally stoned.”⁵⁸

In 1411, with Hus excommunicated and forbidden to preach, he defended the priestly call to preach even more vehemently. With the removal of his ecclesiastical authorisation to preach, Hus worked harder to demonstrate his moral authority to continue.⁵⁹ He went so far as to describe his enemies’ attempts to prevent his preaching as the work of the devil. He stated on Lent II [8 March] that “the devil opposes the way and does not wish us to hear the word on Sunday. Others who do not wish this are limbs (*membra*) of the devil.”⁶⁰ Hus used the biblical calling to preach as a shield, defending himself against both official prohibition and charges of disobedience. By placing himself under the higher calling to preach, Hus justified his own disobedience of the ecclesiastical injunction banning him from the pulpit.⁶¹ Furthermore, his continued presence at the Bethlehem Chapel demonstrated his willingness to defy the authorities for the sake of the Gospel to the congregation. From the beginning of his public career, Hus consistently emphasised the necessity of preaching. The 1410–1411 sermons show how little Hus’s opinion on that matter had changed. Later sermons merely reflect an ever-more hostile environment, which compelled him to address the issue of authority directly.

One witnesses the complete deployment of Hus’s self-defence in two documents of late May, 1411. The first was a sermon, and the second was a letter attributed by Novotný and Spinka to the following day that further defended his place in the pulpit.⁶² On Easter VI [24 May], Hus preached on John 15: 26: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁷ Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, 6. It is also one of the reasons that many historians have looked for Waldensian influence in the Bohemian reform, with inconclusive results. See further: Soukup, *Reformní kazatelství a Jakoubek ze Stříbra*, 44–67; HHR, 125; Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride*, 37–41.

⁵⁸ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 124.

⁵⁹ Claire M. Waters discusses the conflict between authorisation and authority in more general terms with a gendered component. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, 2.

⁶⁰ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 63.

⁶¹ Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 71–72.

⁶² Novotný, 90 and Spinka ed., *The Letters of John Hus*, 50.

Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me.”⁶³ This chapter of John tells of Christ’s prophecy to his apostles concerning how they would be hated by the world. This is a powerful message, and Hus developed the verse into a long sermon concerning the persecution of the faithful. He returned to many of his previous arguments explaining how the world hates those who speak the truth and how those speaking the truth inspired by the Holy Spirit need not fear. Through this sermon, Hus, without explicitly naming his enemies, countered charges against himself while focusing on questions about the foundation of religious authority.

The sermon begins by setting the biblical context leading to Pentecost. Hus describes the mental and emotional state of the apostles, explaining that they were “abandoned, because of the absence of their Lord, saddened on account of a future with certain persecution, that Jesus Christ had foretold to them, ignorant because they did not know scripture perfectly, fearful because they did not believe they would receive help to persevere in the truth of Christ, and by this they were all defective.”⁶⁴ Hus closely followed the theme of truth from this point forward in the sermon. He explained that the Holy Spirit speaks through the mouths of the faithful before earthly authorities and that the faithful need not fear to speak the divinely inspired truth. The forces of evil, on the other hand, strike against the truth. Hus explained, “The devil is the opposition and the fighter of the truth. Therefore those who pursue the defence of the truth, they are from the Holy Spirit and thus of God. Those who truly try to oppress and crush the truth of the law of God, they are leaders sent from the Devil and Antichrist.”⁶⁵

Slowly through the sermon, Hus began to speak more in the first person and relate the sermon explicitly to the present. For example, he began to refer to his own relationship with the Holy Spirit. He stated, “Because by inspiration you are with me, in my preaching and works, you see my bodily profession of truth and will give to me the testimony for conversion.”⁶⁶ Here, Hus set himself in the place of the Apostles as one being directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Medieval preachers commonly inserted contemporary examples into their sermons. In the past, Hus inserted examples of Christendom, Bohemia, Prague, the university, and even Bethlehem Chapel while often alluding to his own role. In this sermon, at a time where he certainly could relate to feeling persecuted by the Devil and Antichrist, Hus is applying the Gospel example directly and explicitly to himself.

The remainder of this sermon is built around the phrase “thus and now,” which emphasises the strong connections Hus drew between himself and the Apostles, along with a forthright denial of the ecclesiastical hierarchy’s right

⁶³ *Vulgate*, John 15: 26.

⁶⁴ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 4, 135.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

to excommunicate him or any other. Hus wove these themes together while drawing his audience into his own suffering, thus transforming them into apostles and assuming the role of Christ for himself. Hus draws a direct corollary between himself and his audience as he explains that the followers of Christ who “frequently heard his sermons were excommunicated.”⁶⁷ Hus followed this train of thought:

Thus and now... As those who are not preaching in the private place, are not following the knowledge of God, who commands that there be preaching everywhere, they cast the faithful of Christ out of the Synagogue; out of the wicked assembly. But those faithful who have been cast out should not be afraid of this happening to them, for if it does, they will not feel ashamed, even though confused by evil they are brought together. The first element of excommunication is being denied communion. That is followed by *de facto* expulsion. The fact is that Christ, our head, was himself cast from a community of evil... Thus and now, excommunication, no matter what words are used to label it, means only that one is separated from communion with the Church.⁶⁸

Hus explicitly illustrated how even under excommunication his life and preaching continued to imitate Christ. Just as the world rejected Christ, so too did the world reject Hus. This is an obvious continuation of Hus’s reliance on the model of Christ. He declared to his audience that because he spoke the truth and because his listeners heard the truth, then they must be prepared to face persecution and excommunication as a sign that they are following Christ’s will.

Hus emphasised further the similarities between the situation at the Bethlehem Chapel and the sufferings of Christ and the Apostles. Through this sermon he explicitly drew numerous comparisons with Christ. Declaring his own innocence as one without mortal sin, Hus linked his preaching authority to his personal imitation of the sinless Christ. At this time and with this sermon, Hus declared his innocence as an ultimate defence against his critics. Hus said:

“The other form of excommunication is moral, people who have been excommunicated find that, consequently, others avoid speaking to them. They are denounced on account of manifest sin. If, however, they have committed no mortal sins, then excommunication does not have that ostracising effect. Therefore, if on account of the word of God one is excommunicated yet does not have mortal sin present within him, then he should not fear frivolous denunciation, because that is not the law. He will not falter, having already gained the kingdom of heaven. If

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 138–139.

any of Christ's true disciples are excommunicated unjustly, Christ says to them, 'You will be cast from the synagogue, you will be expelled, just as they expelled me.'⁶⁹

Hus described excommunication in terms of his imitation of Christ, providing key evidence that he, like Christ, preached the truth and is being persecuted for it in his own time. As a final component to this sermon, Hus turned the tables on his accusers by declaring that they are themselves excommunicated. He denied the authority of those attempting to drag him from the pulpit by arguing that they are excommunicated not by the Church militant, but by God directly: "And these who are excommunicated are not able to excommunicate, not if he has in himself mortal sin, because Isaiah 59 <2>says 'your sins divide you from your God,' from whose grace you have been separated."⁷⁰

Hus's declaration that neither he nor his followers need fear excommunication is reiterated in a letter to his staunch supporter John Barbatus (Bradáček) and the people of Krumlov, which may have been written the following day [25 May]. In the letter, Hus summarised his reasons for continuing to preach:

"It is obvious from this that those who prohibit preaching are false witnesses and guilty of sacrilege, and consequently excommunicated by the Lord, according to the declaration of the prophet pronouncing excommunication, 'They who wander from thy commandment are accursed.' As far as my case is concerned, Jerome says in his letter to Rusticus, the bishop of Narbonne, 'therefore let none of the bishops, puffed up with envy of diabolical temptation, be angry when the priests occasionally exhort the people, or when they preach in churches – as has been said – if they pronounce blessings upon the people. For I would answer him, who would refuse me these things: whoever does not wish that priests do what God enjoins them to do, let him declare that he is greater than Christ!'⁷¹

Here, once again, Hus compares himself with Christ and takes a step further by asserting that those declaring him excommunicated are themselves excommunicated and deprived of their authority. In his sermons from the same period, Hus seems to have moved from defending his preaching authority simply by promoting his superiority over other preachers to the point of rejecting the notion that he could be removed from the pulpit at all, for he declared that such an attempt would result in the excommunication of the one who tried because of their suppression of evangelical truth.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁷⁰ Loc. cit.

⁷¹ Novotný places this date during the month of May. Spinka, on the other hand, gives this letter a more precise date; but it is unclear whether he based this dating on the sermon. Novotný, 91. Translated in Matthew Spinka ed., *The Letters of John Hus*, 50.

Conclusion

Examining how Hus had long promoted his preaching at Bethlehem Chapel places his defiant statements of 1411 in the context of his entire preaching career. Hus built his preaching reputation, as many preachers before him, on the examples of Christ and Scripture. The unique circumstances around Hus's preaching, however, pushed him to change relatively standard rhetorical analogies into more dramatic and forceful sermons. He continued to promote his style of preaching and adapted it to defend his place as a virtuous preacher. A looming question is whether Hus intentionally increased the defiance within his preaching to promote a situation where the controversy could only result in victory or martyrdom. Did he want to die for his belief?

The historian must not push Hus too quickly to martyrdom at Constance. Placing Jan Hus on an inevitable path to the stake may be easy, but no one can be completely sure what Hus's precise motivations were. One cannot help but marvel at his willingness to place himself in a role that would seem to have no alternative but ending in martyrdom. However, Hus is hardly the first or only preacher to highlight his willingness to die for his beliefs. What must not be forgotten is that he was also quite capable of adapting to the situation and context of his audience. His self-promotion from the pulpit drew on his listeners' expectations, many of which he explicitly encouraged. As he came under increasing pressure from his enemies, Hus described himself in a way that brought him ever closer to the place of Christ before his audience. It is especially tempting to examine Hus's preaching on the Holy Martyrs and on feast days such as that of St. Lawrence and to jump to the conclusion that he was prophesying his own fiery end.⁷² Hus remarked on martyrdom numerous times in his career, but it seems unlikely that earlier references are synonymous with the desire to die.⁷³ When an historian considers Constance as the defining point in Hus's short life, sermons on martyrs seem to give evidence that he was seriously considering putting his feet on the path to martyrdom early in his career.⁷⁴ Yet, his sermons reveal a priest who built on Christian rhetoric that glorified and employed martyr stories frequently in the liturgical year. In fact, tales and images of martyrdom permeated medieval Christian culture, with the most common examples dating to the earliest Christian

⁷² Examples of sermons discussing martyrdom include: Trinity IX [16 August] 1405, in Hus, *Sermones de tempore qui Collecta dicuntur*, MIHO, v. 7, 400; Easter I [30 April] 1411 in Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 4, 52, and Hus's sermons on the Holy Innocents [26 December] which appears in Flajšhans, *Ibid.*, v. 2, 168 but according to Flajšhans it also appears nearly in its entirety in the collections of the *Puncta* manuscripts and *Sermones de Sanctis*.

⁷³ Brad Gregory, *Salvation at the Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1999) 65.

⁷⁴ Thomas Fudge is the most recent example of a scholar discussing Hus in terms of a "martyr complex." Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 4.

martyrs. Brad Gregory goes so far as to suggest that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, prior to Hus's execution, opportunities to die for one's faith had "virtually vanished."⁷⁵ The prominent scholar Richard Kieckhefer even described martyrdom as having transformed into a "pious dream" and a "fantasy."⁷⁶ Hus would have identified himself with the Christian martyrs praised in hagiographic *vitae* and art of the period. Although certainty is difficult, he probably felt nothing in common with foreign heretics who did not support the truth of the word of God, but rather perished in error. Hus never considered himself a heretic. Even though Hus probably would not have condoned their deaths, he likely did not identify with those who most closely shared his fate.⁷⁷ Hus's reverence for martyrdom reflected a desire to conform to the examples of Christ, the Apostles, the saints, and the Christian fathers as those were the images and tales on which he preached and those examples permeated Christian and Bohemian society.⁷⁸

In front of the Bethlehem audience, the turbulent context of Prague pushed Hus to develop his early forms of promotion to more dramatic lengths than their previous incarnations. His invocation of Christ's death as an analogy for his own possible fate suggested a similar conclusion waited for him. This, however, does not suggest that Hus was actively seeking that fate at Bethlehem Chapel. Rather, his well-documented reaction to his detractors was to refuse compromise.⁷⁹ Compromise or recantation at the Council of Constance would have clearly deviated from the words of his sermons and tainted his own legacy with the same hypocrisy he frequently decried in others. Rather, Hus created his own charismatic identity in an imitation of Christ that effectively trapped him into an ending of either acquittal or death. This is not to suggest his ideas might not have changed after interdict and exile, but to burden Hus with a martyr complex is to disregard the complexity of his preaching and his position in the pulpit. Hus's sermons do not suggest that he wanted to die for his beliefs, although willingness to die may be a different matter. If death was his goal, then why not present himself for judgment at the papal curia in Rome when summoned for trial in 1411?⁸⁰

In conclusion, the sermons of Jan Hus provide a critical insight into how his celebrity and popularity developed. Today, historians attest to his fame as a preacher without fully understanding how his sermons and homilies functioned as a whole. If one takes the time to examine how Hus's preaching

⁷⁵ Gregory, *Salvation at the Stake*, 27.

⁷⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984), 66–67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁸ This desire in the late medieval context is perhaps best illustrated by the hagiography of saints in imitation of Christ. See: Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

⁷⁹ Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 131–132; Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church*, 148–149.

⁸⁰ Kejíř, *Husův Proces* (Prague, 2000) 59; Fudge, *Jan Hus*, 118.

functioned, then how Hus created his own celebrity and generated his authority from the pulpit becomes clearer. Hus's successful promotion of the proper way to preach, of God's mandate to preach, and of preaching in imitation of Christ served to position him as a priest who followed the law and Gospel of Christ. Therefore, he created his own image as a worthy successor to the Apostles. Hus was a masterful preacher, and his sermons attest to his ability to shape, and meet, his audiences' expectations to the fullest extent. Hus proclaimed to his audience that "the knowledge and eloquence of a priest is a gift from God," and he ensured through his sermons that his congregation would see him and hear his words as the embodiments of that divine gift.⁸¹

⁸¹ Flajšhans, *M. Hus Sermones in Bethlehem*, v. 3, 26.