
***Errores quorundam Bernhardinorum:* Franciscans and the Bohemian Reformation**

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Prologue: John of Capistrano's Mission

John of Capistrano, an Italian Franciscan, served as a Vicar General of the Observant Congregation, and as a spiritual heir and successor of St. Bernardine of Siena. Setting out in 1451 on a grand mission of preaching in Central Europe, he aimed at confounding the ideas of the Bohemian Reformation, and at returning the Utraquist Church under the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome. An additional intent was to propagate of the Observant branch of the Franciscan Order.¹ Having traveled from Italy through the Austrian lands to Moravia, Capistrano entered Brno on 31 July 1451 as Apostolic Commissioner and General Inquisitor, and commenced his Anti-Utraquist campaign. He provoked strong polemical reactions when he rejected unconditionally the *Compactata* of Basel, one of the most significant documents of Bohemian Utraquism. Jan Rokycana the Archbishop Elect of Prague and the Utraquists' leader, challenged Capistrano to a theological debate concerning the lay chalice, but the event failed to take place. Although Capistrano remained in the Bohemian Lands until 1454, his goal of the Bohemian heretics' mass return to Rome proved unrealizable. Likewise his ambitious dream of a triumphal entry into a repentant Prague was never fulfilled. The deeply disappointed Franciscan is said to have finally prophesied : " Ego Praga intrare non possum, brevi tempore catuli mei intrabunt [I cannot enter Prague, but soon my puppies will enter]." Capistrano called "puppies" the young followers whom he had won for the Order and for the Observance.² His militancy would continue through them, and it was exactly these Franciscans who would become the principal opponents of Utraquism and a buttress of the Roman renewal in the Bohemian Lands.

Spread of the Observance in the Bohemian Lands

Capistrano's hazy notions about an imminent Roman triumph in the Kingdom of Bohemia soon dissolved, and his endeavors focused above all on the implantation of the Franciscan Observance. The first Observant monastery was founded by him in Brno as early as 1451, and entrusted to the spiritual protection of

1) The basic monograph is Johannes Höfer, *Johannes Kapistran: Ein Leben im Kampf um die Reform der Kirche*, [Bibliotheca Franciscana, vol. 1-2] (Rome, 1964-65). The most detailed treatment of the Bohemian aspects is still Zdeněk Nejedlý, "Česká missie Jana Kapistrána," ČČM 74 (1900), 57-72, 200-242, 334-352, 447-464.

2) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum de Observancia Provincie Bohemie*, MS Prague, KNM VIII F 75 p. 78.

St. Bernardine of Siena, his recently canonized precursor.³ On 6 March 1452, Pope Nicholas V confirmed the inclusion of all the monasteries founded by Capistrano in a new Observant Vicariate which, until 1467, would operate within the single Franciscan Province covering Austria, Bohemia, and Poland.. An Italian, Gabriel of Verona, was elected the Vicar at the first Provincial Chapter held in Vienna in September 1452.⁴ The new monasteries owed their origin both to Capistrano's direct personal initiative, and to the impact of his homiletic campaign.⁵ These foundations initially occurred outside Bohemia proper: Olomouc in Moravia, and Wrocław, Opava, Bytom, Koźle, and Głubczyce in Silesia, all by 1453, and two years later in Jemnice in Moravia. Strongly Utraquist Bohemia belonged initially to the Observant Vicariate only *pro forma*, inasmuch as attempts to establish monasteries there had failed. Only unorganized Franciscans could penetrate Bohemia, such as a small group which found shelter in the burgher house of Jan Hladík in Plzeň. The situation changed in 1459 when, at the request of Jiří of Poděbrady, the Utraquist King of Bohemia, Pope Pius II ordered the Minorite Monastery of Our Lady transferred to the above-mentioned Franciscans in Plzeň.⁶ The chain of events leading to this transfer had begun with a fugitive monk from Plzeň who traveled to see the pope and offered him the monastery for the Observance.⁷ Furthermore in 1460, with the King's approval, Vicar Gabriel of Verona took over the abandoned monastery of St. Ambrose in the New Town of Prague, and introduced there initially five monks.⁸ Thereby was fulfilled Capistrano's prophecy about his disciples' entry into the capital of the Bohemian Kingdom. In 1465 Franciscans were introduced into Tachov in Bohemia, as well as into Głogów in Silesia; papal permission for the former had been granted as early as 1460.⁹

The favorable relations between the Bohemian King and the Roman Curia made the emergence of the Franciscan cloisters possible. The turning points came in 1462 when Pius II declared the *Compactata* abrogated, and in 1466 when his successor Paul II proclaimed King George deprived of his throne as a heretic, and initiated a crusade against the Bohemian Utraquists. Gabriel of Verona abetted these measures of ecclesiastical policy, and subsequently became a supporter of the Hungarian King Matthias.¹⁰ These developments caused a setback for the Franciscans' cause in Bohemia. The Papal Legate, Rudolf von Rüdeshheim, ordered

3) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 53.

4) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 55.

5) The process is described on the basis of the above-mentioned *Chronica* in Klemens Minařík, "Vikáři české františkánské provincie od r. 1451 až do r. 1517," *Sborník historického kroužku* 15 (1914), no. 3-4, 201-218; 16 (1915), no. 1, 1-9. The most recent work on the monasteries in Bohemia is Pavel Vlček, Petr Sommer, and Dušan Foltýn, *Encyklopedie českých klášterů* (Prague, 1997).

6) State Central Archive [SÚA] in Prague, Franciscan Order Collection [fond ŘF], Documents no. 31, 34.

7) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 78; Frater Nicolai Glassberger, *Chronica*, [Analecta Franciscana II] (Quaracchi, 1887) 384-385.

8) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 78; Glassberger, *Chronica*, 385.

9) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 93.

10) Karl Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus, Kaiser Friedrich III. und das Reich: Zum hunyadisch-habsburgischen Gegensatz in Donauraum*, [Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 72] (Munich, 1975) 35, 57, 133ff.

them to abandon the Prague monastery of St. Ambrose at Pentecost of 1468. They turned the keys over to their benefactor, King Jiří of Poděbrady who, in turn, provided them with an escort to the county of Kłodzko.¹¹ At about that time, the Franciscans also abandoned the Tachov monastery which was recorded as deserted in 1472.¹²

The Bohemian ambience turned more favorable for the Franciscans only after the deaths of Jiří of Poděbrady and Jan Rokycana in 1471. The newly elected King Vladislav Jagellon initially had to contest the throne of Bohemia with King Matthias of Hungary, the pope's favorite. The treaty of Olomouc permitted both rulers the title of the King of Bohemia, and Matthias retained control over Bohemia's dependent lands. Both Vladislav and Matthias enthusiastically supported the Franciscan Observance and, as a result, several new monasteries emerged, particularly in Silesia. A hermitage was founded in Ketzerdorf and a monastery in Znojmo in 1470. On 18 June 1473, Mark, the Cardinal Patriarch of Aquileia, acting in Vienna as a papal legate, empowered the Vicar of the Bohemian Observants, Pavel of Moravia, to establish ten new monasteries.¹³ Franciscan monasteries sprang up in Kadaň and Opole in 1473, in Krupka in 1474, in Jindřichův Hradec, Kłodzko, Legnica, and Nysa in 1475, in Těšín in 1476, and in Horažďovice around 1480. The monastery in Prague was restored briefly in 1482, and the last foundations occurred in Jawor in 1488, in Bechyně in 1490, in Racibórz and Uherské Hradiště in 1491, and in Kamenec in 1492. Aside from the king and the royal free towns, the Franciscans received significant support from the nobles, for whom the sponsorship of the glamorous new order had become a matter of prestige. Particularly in Bohemia, it was not only an expression of personal piety, but also a flaunting of political and religious hubris in the face of the Utraquist majority.

Franciscans Versus the Utraquists

Despite some internal dissensions, the Franciscans functioned (like the Jesuits would a century later) as the spiritual storm troopers of the Roman Church in Bohemia, displaying ostentatiously their abhorrence of Utraquism. Matching the Jesuits in their zeal more than in their diplomatic skills, the maladroit friars often ended up with their noses bloodied. Their squeamishness was evident, for instance, in their refusal in 1453 to take over the monastery of the Reformed Conventuals in Głogów because the lord of the town, Duke Bolek, had sympathized with "the perfidious Hussites".¹⁴ Their vitriolic preaching abetted King Matthias's crusade against the Utraquists in 1468 and 1469.¹⁵ The Utraquist leaders, first Rokycana, then Koranda, therefore, were not sparing in their criticism of these obnoxious militants "in their cowls and sandals".¹⁶ Pope Sixtus IV approved and supported the provocative daunting of the dissidents from Rome in 1475 when he permitted the

11) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 97, Glassberger, *Chronica*, 427.

12) SÚA Prague, fond ŘF, document no. 49.

13) SÚA Prague, fond ŘF, document no. 52.

14) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 60.

15) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 96; Glassberger, *Chronica*, 404, 427-428, 435.

16) Jan Rokycana, *Postilla*, ed. František Šimák (Prague, 1929) 2:152, 579, 660, 800; Václav Koranda, *Manuálík*, ed. Josef Truhlář (Prague, 1888) 45-96.

Franciscans in Bohemia to conduct religious services "in the face of the heretics".¹⁷ After the lifting of the interdict from Prague in 1482, the Franciscans enthusiastically joined the offensive against the lay chalice. Their restored monastery of St. Ambrose turned into an important centre of the campaign against Utraquism. It was largely in response to these Roman shenanigans that the uprising erupted in Prague in September 1483. The rebuilt monastery of the discalced Friars became the main target of the crowd and was razed to the ground. It was a measure of the Utraquists' bitterness against the Franciscan Observance that the Franciscans were excluded from the amnesty when the Minorites, the Dominicans, and the Carmelites were permitted to return to Prague in 1496.¹⁸

The Franciscan province of Bohemia boasted a large number of stalwart opponents of the Bohemian Reformation. The Vicar himself, Pavel of Moravia, conducted a cross examination in Klodzko in 1478 of a group of Unity members, called "Hussites and Berghards", who journeyed to the persecuted Waldensians of Brandenburg.¹⁹ His major triumph was the conversion from the Unity to the Roman Church of the Highest Court Steward [*hofmistr*], Vilém of Pernštejn in 1490.²⁰ The distinction of being Utraquism's fiercest opponent belonged to Jakub of Głogów, who preached the crusade against Bohemian dissidents in 1468 as far as Nuremberg.²¹ After Jakub's solemn interment in the Kadaň monastery in 1488, some Brethren spat on his grave and dishonoured his clothing.²² Also the Franciscan Bishop, Jan Filipec, shared in the efforts to suppress the Bohemian Reformation. As one of King Vladislav II's two representatives at the Bohemian Diet of 1508 he forced through the so-called St. James Day Mandate against the Brethren. Assigned the same function at the Moravian Diet in the same year, the bishop succeeded in securing at least a limited acceptance of the Mandate also in Bohemia's sister land.²³ Also Franciscan Jan Vodňanský, a convert from Utraquism, conducted polemics in writing against the Bohemian Reformation, and against the teaching of Luther as well.²⁴

An unknown Franciscan expressed his sorrow over the erring Bohemia and the allegedly diminished glory of the Kingdom in the following inflammatory elegy: "O Praga quondam civitas splendida Bohemorum, veritas magistra, nunc perfidissimorum hereticorum magistra errorum" [Oh, Prague, once the Bohemians' splendid city, a teacher of verities, now the teacher of the most perfidious heretics' errors].²⁵

17) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 116.

18) František Šmahel, "Pražské povstání 1483," *Pražský sborník historický* (1986) 45-46, 69, 89.

19) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 169; Amedeo Molnár, Valdenští: evropský rozměr jejich vzdoru (Prague, 1991) 249.

20) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 161.

21) Glassberger, *Chronica*, 435.

22) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 150 n.

23) Ferdinand Hrejsa, *Dějiny křesťanství v Československu* (Prague, 1948) 4:173-175.

24) Josef Truhlář, "O životě a spisech známých i domnělých bosáka Jana Vodňanského," ČČM (1884) 524-547.

25) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 139.

Franciscans as Heretics

Petr Nosek of Klatovy, a Dominican lector in Brno and Olomouc, busied himself with the gathering and updating of contemporary inquisitorial literature. Sometime between 1458 and 1462 he composed a sizable treatise *Confessiones sectarum bohemicarum*, mapping a wide spectrum of Bohemia's nonconformist Christians. Surprisingly, the work includes also a section on "Errores quorundam bernhardinorum."²⁶ The learned Dominican presents thirty-one heretical articles or propositions which he attributes to certain Franciscans of the Bohemian Province. In view of the traditional rivalry between the sons of St. Dominic and those of St. Francis, this syllabus of errors must be treated with a sizable grain of salt. The alleged Franciscan errors may be divided into two groups. The first set contains articles which stem from the tradition of Franciscan spiritualism, emphasizing the uniqueness of the Franciscan Observants and their devotional superiority to other orders.²⁷ Only they allegedly observed fully the vow of poverty [veram pauperitatis regulam], and thus perfectly followed Christ and the Apostles. They called themselves "Seraphics" on the ground that they reached the same perfection as the Seraphim or the Archangels. They held the Dominicans and the Minorites in contempt, denying them a chance of salvation. Their respect for the name of Jesus and for St. Bernardine of Siena was excessive. Capistrano was accorded the same power as the pope.

The alleged extolling of the Franciscans as a Seraphic order, and their constant lionizing of Capistrano as an extraordinary person, evoked Joachim of Fiore's eschatological vision of the spiritual order of the last age, which would be headed by a *predicator veritatis* [preacher of truth]. Along the same lines, Franciscan Jan Vodňanský documented the presence in Bohemia of Franciscan refugees from Italy, perhaps the Fraticeli. Likewise, he knew that from his order there were brethren from Plzeň and Jemnice who had defected to the Berghards.²⁸ Joachimite echoes emanated also from the Franciscan milieu in Cheb, then belonging to the order's province of Saxony. The recently reconstituted monastery in Cheb was occupied by sympathizers of a nonconformist group of so-called Wirbergers, who expected an imminent arrival of the parousia, to be preceded by the epiphany of a mysterious *unctus salvatoris*. Although contemporaries saw the Wirbergers as followers of Bohemian heterodoxy, their Joachimite inspiration was undeniable.²⁹ The same tradition conditioned the intellectual outlook of Commissioner General, Nicholas of Monte, who at the Provincial Chapter in Brno in 1477 repeatedly declared himself the prophet of the eschaton. Most of his brethren, however, had little sympathy for his annunciations, considering them symptoms of a mental illness.³⁰

26) Augustin Neumann, *České sekty ve století XIV. a XV.* (Brno, 1920) 39-42 [supplements].

27) *Ibid.*, 40-41.

28) *Ibid.*, 56-57.

29) Glassberger, *Chronica*, 422-426; Alexander Patschovsky, "Die Wirsberger: Zeugen der Geisteswelt Joachims von Fiore in Deutschland während des 15. Jahrhunderts?" in *Il profetismo giachimita tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, [Opere di Giacchine da Fiore strumenti, 3] (Genoa, 1991) 227-257.

30) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 148.

The second set of Nosek's indictment contained articles inspired by the several currents in the Bohemian Reformation.³¹ According to their Dominican accuser, the Franciscans for instance maintained that a priest, who was in mortal sin, could not administer the sacraments validly. Instead of sanctifying the Body of Christ, such a cleric engaged in idolatry. Similarly, the faithful who are in mortal sin do not receive the sacrament legitimately. The Dominican grew indignant over the alleged assertion about the admissibility of lay communion *sub utraque*, even with papal permission, and specifically over their claim that a Christian could be saved whether he received *sub utraque* or *sub una* [*omnis christianus potest sub utraque specie communicare, sicut sub una et salvus fieri*]. More cogently, Nosek accused some Franciscans of casting doubt on Christ's real presence in the eucharist and advancing instead the doctrine of symbolic presence [*sacramentum est sacre rei signum*]. Thereby they would have agreed with certain Taborite groups and the subsequent Unity of Brethren.

The situation of religious pluralism in the Bohemian Lands would naturally influence the attitudes of the Roman Church's adherents, including the Franciscans. A cloud of suspicion continuously hovered over the female members of the Franciscan Third Order, who lived first in group houses and, later, in small nunneries.³² The friars often preached critically concerning the current conditions of the church, particularly about the improprieties among the secular clergy. The Provincial Franciscan Chapter, sitting in Kožle in 1471, reacted with an emphatic reminder of a standing prohibition of preaching negatively about the clergy [*predicatores...non predicent contra clerum*].³³ The same chapter dealt with the case of the disobedient Franciscan, Kryštof of Wittbach, who allegedly disdained his superiors. Cited before the chapter, Kryštof failed to appear. Deserting the order, he fled first to Hungary, and from there to Poland and Livonia, where he became involved in a popular uprising. Finally captured, he was beheaded and quartered.³⁴ Of course, not every rebellious friar ended up so pitifully.

Tempestuous events, causing a major scandal, occurred in Olomouc in 1479 at the time of King Vladislav II's meeting with King Matthias Corvinus there. Accompanied by a woman, three friars escaped from the local Franciscan monastery. They were captured at midnight, and then led by the light of torches and with the shouts of the roused inhabitants across town to the gates of the monastery. The guardian received the defecting friars and personally supervised their penance. The woman was brought into the town prison and subjected to a cross-examination. The public assumed that a moral transgression had occurred. The woman's virginity, however, was found inviolate and she was released. Then it appeared that she belonged to a nonconformist Christian group, apparently the Unity of Brethren. The anonymous chronicler of this event bitterly deplored the diffusion of this sect in Bohemia.³⁵ Another pair of fugitive Franciscans, accused of heresy, appeared in chains in 1488 before the Provincial Chapter in Brno, which was to decide their fate.

31) Neumann, *České sekty ve století XIV. a XV.*, 39-40, 42.

32) Klemens Minařík, "Terciáři v klášteřích františkánských," *Sborník historického kroužku* 26 (1926) 53-54; *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 102.

33) *Constituciones provinciales facte in capitulo Cossleni 1471*, MS Prague, NK XIV H 22 f. 75r.

34) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 112.

35) *Ibid.*, 123-124.

The actual procedures extended for several years and the duo was ultimately condemned to life imprisonment.³⁶

A major opponent of the Bohemian Reformation was the Dominican Jindřich Institoris, a notorious inquisitor, commissioned by the pope with the immolation of "heretical" books. In 1500 he conducted a theological disputation in the Dominican monastery in Olomouc with Vavřinec Krasonický and Tůma Přeloučský, members of the Unity.³⁷ Subsequently, Institoris composed an apology of the Roman Church, titled *Clypeus*. Having received the tome for an assessment, the Franciscans of Olomouc viewed Institoris's work a provocation, and referred to the aging inquisitor as "*delirus apostolus sed non Cristi, nostri ordinis maximus prosecutor*."³⁸ Both the inquisitor's regular disputation with the Bohemian dissidents, and the overt disrespect of the Olomouc Franciscans toward the inquisition, heralded the epochal changes in the Western Christianity, which would culminate in the European Reformation.

Epilogue: The Lutheran Reformation and the Demise of the Franciscan Province

The Franciscan community in Wrocław was thrown into disarray by the onslaught of Martin Luther's teaching. In a notorious case, Franciscan Rafael Hanisch left the order to become the Evangelical Provost in the Wrocław Church of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ In 1522 the council of the city, composed of Lutheran converts, expelled the Franciscans altogether from its precincts.⁴⁰ At the critical moment of the Reformation's emergence, the Franciscans of the Bohemian Lands had lost their most important monastery, which had served as the sole center of higher studies in the Province. A Provincial Chapter, convoked to Brno on 21 September 1522, attempted to resolve this predicament.⁴¹ Combating Lutheranism required an intellectual rearmament. The long standing dispute over the value of learning was forgotten, and the Provincial Francis of Bavaria decided, with the consent of all the chapter members, to foster higher studies in three monasteries. The program of instruction was to be directed by Bachelor Diviš of Krupka as lector in Kadaň (for Bohemia), by Bachelor Ambrož of Wrocław as lector in Brno (for Moravia), and by the ungraduated Kašpar of Bautzen as lector in Nysa (for Silesia). These monastic programs became the foci of erudition and counter-reformatory tendencies.

Nevertheless, the Reformation continued to advance. In 1523 Luther's teaching found an advocate in Franciscan Benedikt of Plzeň at Jindřichův Hradec under the protection of no less than Adam of Hradec, the Supreme Chancellor of

36) *Ibid.*, 153.

37) Hrejsa, *Dějiny křesťanství v Československu*, 4:158-160; Vojtěch Sokol, "Vavřinec Krasonický," *Acta reformationem bohemicam illustratia* 3 (1984) 62-66.

38) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 185

39) Lucius Teichmann, "Die franziskanische Observanzbewegung in Ost-Mitteleuropa und ihre politische-nationale Komponente im böhmisch-schlesischen Raum," *Archiv für schlesische Kirchengeschichte* 49 (1991) 205-218 particularly 216-217.

40) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 265nn.

41) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 300-301.

the Bohemian Kingdom.⁴² The convocation of Utraquists from Bohemia and Moravia, held in Prague early in 1524, included among its participants the apostate Franciscan, Kliment Bosák, an outstanding preacher and composer of religious hymns.⁴³ The climax came at the Provincial Chapter in Kadaň in the summer of 1524. The earlier mentioned lector, Diviš of Krupka, submitted for the chapter's consideration a set of evangelical propositions. When the majority of the chapter members rejected the new teaching, Diviš and his disciples left the Order and embraced Lutheranism. By this time, the Franciscans had registered altogether twenty-one defectors.⁴⁴

The events at Kadaň marked the beginning of a gradual self-destruction of the Bohemian Lands' Franciscan Province. Ambrož of Wrocław, the lector in Brno, likewise apostatized from the Roman Church in 1524.⁴⁵ Kašpar of Bautzen, the lector in Nysa, did not go so far but, as early as 1525, he left the order.⁴⁶ By 1533 a third of the friars had defected from the order, mainly to Lutheranism. Only pitiful remnants remained from the Franciscan Province of the Bohemian Lands, once a mighty pillar of Roman renewal, and distinguished at its origin by the towering figure of John of Capistrano. Contrariwise, Bohemian Utraquism, under the challenge of the novel ideas of the European Reformation, was proving its strength and vitality.

(Translation from the Czech by Zdeněk V. David)

42) *Ibid.*, 303nn.

43) Hrejsa, *Dějiny křesťanství v Československu*, 4:270.

44) *Chronica Fratrum Minorum*, 309.

45) *Ibid.*, 301.

46) *Ibid.*, 309.