
Was the Bohemian Reformation a Failure?

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Introduction

Among the twenty monumental canvases that comprise Alfons Mucha's *Slav Epic*, one stands out for its decidedly funereal tone.¹ In the centre of the massive painting, an elderly man is depicted slumped over in a chair, gazing at the slate gray North Sea off the coast of Naarden, a town in the Netherlands. In the left foreground of the picture, a huddled group of refugees is presided over by a man standing with his arms raised and head bowed, as if in prayer. The composition is bookended by two bedraggled strings of people walking towards the centre of the frame. Dark clouds threaten overhead, and a few windblown clumps of seagrass represent the only signs of life. The title of the painting is *The Last Days of Jan Amos Komenský*, and it depicts the final resting place of the last bishop of the Czech Unity of Brethren. Symbolically speaking, though, the scene portrayed in this canvas seems to represent the burial plot of the entire Bohemian reformation.

Amidst all the visible markers of desolation that populate this canvas, however, there is a small, lit lantern visible to the left of the seated Komenský. A few crouching individuals are turned towards it, and this source of light provides the painting with its subtitle: *A Flicker of Hope*. At first glance, this subtitle seems paradoxical, as the broken man and his followers seem entirely bereft of this cardinal virtue. The emphasis on hope, however, reflects an interpretation of the Bohemian reformation and its ostensible end in the aftermath of the Battle of White Mountain that was quite characteristic of Czech culture at the turn of the twentieth century. For artists, authors, historians, religious leaders, and politicians at this time, the Bohemian reformation had been an experiment in religious and social change that came to a crashing halt in

1 The *Slav Epic*, which Mucha began painting in 1910, include two cycles of canvases, one depicting events from pan-Slavic history and the other depicting scenes from Czech history. Most of the paintings in both cycles portray high points in the history of the Slavic peoples, so that the contrast between their content and bright color palettes are heightened vis-à-vis this particular image of Komenský. On the *Epic* and Mucha's conception of history, see Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia, A Czech History* (Princeton, 1998) 150–153; and idem, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century, A Surrealist History* (Princeton, 2013) 152–153.

1620.² The failure of Czech Protestants to resist the political and religious oppression of the Austrian Habsburgs at this moment did not, however, represent the ultimate end of the Czech nation that had been chosen by God to first receive his renascent gospel. Rather, their defeat had initiated a caesura in Czech history that could finally be closed by those seeking to become the leaders of a revived nation.³

This modern interpretation of the Bohemian reformation's collapse at the beginning of the Thirty Years War was beholden to political and confessional agendas that sought to capitalise on the rise and fall of a religiously unique medieval Czech nation in order to justify certain courses of political action. This was true of nineteenth-century liberal nationalists, early twentieth-century Czech Protestants, and Communists after World War II.⁴ Despite the disparate goals of these various actors, their rhetoric overlapped and combined to inscribe a deep impression of the Bohemian reformation's failure on the modern Czech historical consciousness. This essay seeks to contest this impression. By tracing the origins of this narrative back, somewhat ironically, to the historical writings that Jan Amos Komenský (d. 1670, and known as Comenius) composed in the aftermath of the Battle of White Mountain, this article will highlight how the theological and apologetic ends, to which Komenský put his narrative of failure effectively, initiated four centuries of scholarship and cultural production. Komenský's narrative and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* within the historiography as well as in popular cultural history emphasised the inability of the Bohemian reformation's proponents to create sustainable communities and confessions.⁵

But why ask this essay's titular question? What is to be gained by arguing that we ought to reconsider or reject the conclusion (often implicit) that the Bohemian reformation was a failure? On the one hand, there is a historiographical issue at stake. The history of the churches that emerged from the Hussite revolution and their interactions with international Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remains marginalised in broader

2 For an overview of this modern view of late medieval Czech history, see Jiří Rak, *Bývalí Čechové, České historické mýty a stereotypy* [There used to be Czechs, The Czech Historical Myths and Stereotypes] (Jinočany, 1994).

3 For a detailed analysis of the intellectual links between the Bohemian reformation and Czech National Awakening, see Zdeněk David, *Realism, Tolerance, and Liberalism in the Czech National Awakening, Legacies of the Bohemian Reformation* (Washington DC, 2010).

4 On the multitude of parties who claimed to be heirs of the Hussites, see Peter Pabian, "Inventing the Hussite Nation, Liberals, Catholics, and Protestants in Conflict over Czech National Identity," *BRRP* 6 (2007) 275–282; and Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas, National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, 2009).

5 On the theological context and impact of Comenius's historical writings, see Vladimír Urbánek, "Patria Lost and Chosen People, The Case of the Seventeenth-Century Bohemian Protestant Exiles," in T. Balázs and M. Zászkaliczky (eds.), *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories, and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Boston, 2010) 587–609.

reformation scholarship. One reason for this lack of attention is the perception that the Czech churches and their practices offered little by way of innovation or inspiration for later reformers. Surveys of the European reformations tend to mention the Bohemian reformation only in preliminary chapters on antecedents to reform and final chapters on religious warfare and the outcomes of the reformations; and in the latter contexts, the Czech lands are only depicted as “thoroughly subjected” to the Austrian Habsburgs, and their failed revolt in 1618 memorialised as an “irredeemable catastrophe” that led to the unprecedented disappearance of an entire church.⁶

On the other hand, whether we tell the story of the Bohemian reformation as a tragic failure or not dramatically affects the contours of contemporary narratives and interpretations of that movement. If the Czech lands’ indigenous reformation effectively failed in 1620, then it becomes easy to read backwards from White Mountain to discover the crucial moments and turning points when the seeds were sown for this later catastrophe. The battle of Lipany in 1434, the Utraquists’ refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Unity of Brethren during the reign of George of Poděbrady, the ascension of the Habsburgs to the Bohemian throne in 1526, and the tepid response of the Czechs to the Protestant cause in the Schmalkaldic War in 1547: these events become inflection points along a narrative arc that leads inexorably to the failed Bohemian revolt of 1620. If the master narrative of failure is dropped, however, it becomes possible to construct an interpretative framework that refuses to tell the story of the slow decline and disastrous fall of the Hussite revolution. And this framework can enable scholars to reimagine the way we narrate the history of the Bohemian reformation and to assert its fundamental significance for the broader history of early modern Europe’s conflicts over religious reform.

The Failed Reformation?

In thinking about questions of success and failure regarding the Bohemian reformation, it is instructive to consider the discussion of this issue among scholars of sixteenth-century religious reform. Beginning over forty years ago, when the American historian Gerald Strauss dared to argue that the German reformation had failed to alter the religious life of the laity significantly during its first century, there has been a lively debate over what could constitute adequate metrics for assessing such a question.⁷ In his work, Strauss used both

6 Such is the representative conclusion drawn by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation, A History* (New York, 2003) 496–497. Contrast the more nuanced framing in Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia, Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (New York, 2009) 5–15.

7 First articulated arguments in Gerald Strauss, “Success and Failure in the German Reformation,” *Past & Present* 67 (1975) 30–63, for later expanded version see Gerald Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning, Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, 1978).

the reformers' own words and the state of communal religious life recorded in German visitation records to argue that Protestant reformers had not met their own expectations. In both these sets of sources, Strauss found enough evidence to assert that: "Early hopes for a renewal of religious and moral life in society were not fulfilled. Experiments in mass indoctrination were stillborn or turned out not to work. The Gospel had not been implanted in the hearts and minds of men. An attitude of utter indifference prevailed towards the established religion, its teachings, its sacraments and its ministers."⁸ In short: even though they created new churches, Protestants failed to fill them with true Christians.

In the aftermath of his early publications, many scholars contested Strauss's conclusions based on his selection of primary sources and the more fundamental question of whether Protestant reformers thought that the improvement of human morality or piety was actually possible.⁹ But even the scholars who critiqued Strauss's source analysis effectively conceded that he had made it impossible for historians simply to assume the success of the reformation process, at least in Germany.¹⁰ Rather, Strauss had forced scholars to be explicit about how they would measure the relative achievements and setbacks that religious reformers faced in early modern Europe. For Strauss, the primary obstacle that the evangelical churches faced was the persistence of traditional, popular religious beliefs among the laity. As Protestant churches underwent the transition from their potentially revolutionary, charismatic age (which only lasted for about a decade) into an era of routinization and consolidation, their transformation alienated laypeople who did not see how the churches' demands and interests lined up with their own.¹¹ Church leaders made choices based on political calculations that were geared towards securing their own authority, so the relatively savvy laity checked out and returned to familiar "superstitious" beliefs and practices.¹²

8 Strauss, "Success and Failure," 59, cf. Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 299.

9 A major argument against Strauss was that his sources were predominantly rural; scholars argued that urban populations would have displayed far greater theological acumen and support for their churches than their rural counterparts, due to the resources dedicated to conversion in the cities. A second leading critique of Strauss's conclusions was that he simply did not understand how the leading reformer's negative anthropology would have led them to conclude that the type of moral and educational melioration that Strauss sought was simply impossible due to man's fallen nature. For examples of these arguments, see James Kittelson, "Successes and Failures in the German Reformation, The Report from Strasbourg," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 73 (1982) 153–175; Heiko Oberman, "Martin Luther, Vorläufer der Reformation," in E. Jürgel et alii (eds.), *Verifikationen* (Tübingen, 1982) 91–119; and Scott Hendrix, "Luther's Impact on the Sixteenth Century," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985) 3–14.

10 This point is made forcefully in Geoffrey Parker, "Success and Failure during the First Century of the Reformation," *Past & Present* 136 (1992) 43–82.

11 This conclusion is elaborated upon in Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 302–307.

12 This was a particular point of emphasis in a later article by Strauss that he wrote in answer to many of the critics cited above. See Gerald Strauss, "The Reformation and Its Public in an Age of Orthodoxy," in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed.), *The German People and the Reformation*

It is not hard to see how this interpretation lines up with many assessments of the Bohemian reformation and its evolution, particularly after the Battle of Lipany and the subsequent signing of the Basel and Jihlava *Compactata*. I have argued elsewhere that this moment in the 1430s serves as a decisive marker in the historiography on the Bohemian reformation as a whole, with the revolutionary era preceding these events garnering a disproportionate amount of scholarly and popular attention.¹³ This imbalance is due to the perception that the liquidation of the most revolutionary elements within the Hussite movement led to the neutering of that movement as a whole; the Hussites' surrender of their collective, messianic mission for the reform of all Christendom thus represented a fatal attenuation of their revolutionary program.¹⁴ What would happen, however, if we shifted the criteria for the "success" of the Bohemian reformation beyond this totalizing vision? If Lipany and Basel are understood not as the first step towards the ultimate end of the Bohemian reformation, but rather as a cautious, transitional step towards the establishment of a legal and political framework for religious coexistence, then modern judgments about success and failure might change. And if we consider how the experience of debate and dialogue made necessary by the Bohemian reformation's history of uneasy coexistence equipped the Unity and Utraquists to negotiate the sixteenth-century religious landscape, then it becomes possible to discern their impact on the formation of new churches in that era.¹⁵ In sum, asking new questions about what constituted success in the Czech context could enable historians to redraw the lines that both separate and connect the history of the Hussite revolution from the history of the Bohemian reformation that succeeded it.

(Ithaca, 1988) 194–214. For a recent overview of reformers' views on superstition and its role in retarding the spread of evangelical religion, see Alexandra Walsham, "The Reformation and the 'Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed," *Historical Journal* 51 (2008) 497–528; and Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe, Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (New York, 2010) 156–195.

- 13 Phillip Haberkern, "What's in a Name, or What's at Stake When We Talk About Hussites?" *History Compass* 9 (2011) 791–801; and idem, *Patron Saint and Prophet, Jan Hus in the Bohemian and German Reformations* (New York, 2016) 68–148.
- 14 On Hussite concepts of the chosen Czech nation and its messianic mission, see Rudolf Urbánek, "Počátky českého mesianismu [Beginnings of the Czech Messianism]," in O. Odložilík et al. (eds.), *Českou minulostí [Czech History and the Past]* (Prague, 1929) 124–145; idem, "Český mesianismus ve své době hrdinské [The Czech Messianism in its Heroic Period]," in *Z husitského věku [From the Hussite Epoch]* (Prague, 1957) 7–28; and František Šmahel, "The Idea of the 'Nation' in Hussite Bohemia," *Historica* 16 (1969) 143–247; and *Historica* 17 (1969) 93–197.
- 15 Regarding the Utraquists, this argument is made thoughtfully in David, *Finding*, 45–142. Cf. the most recent analysis of the Unity of Brethren's interactions with Protestant reformers in Craig Atwood, *The Theology of the Czech Brethren from Hus to Comenius* (Pennsylvania, 2009) 243–326.

The Failure of the Bohemian Reformation: Origins

In order to understand fully the strength of the idea that the Bohemian reformation failed, it is first necessary to appreciate its origins in the seventeenth century. Indeed, the notion that the defeat of the Czech Protestants at the Battle of White Mountain and their subsequent oppression at the hands of Ferdinand II represented the consequences of a profound moral failure dates back to the first years after this disastrous sequence of events. In both pamphlet publications and more substantial works of history, the suppression of the Bohemian reformation was interpreted by contemporaries as divine punishment for the nation's failure to maintain its faith and morality. According to this view, the Czech people had been chosen by God as the first to receive the nascent gospel in the years around 1400, and they had been charged to preserve it and disseminate it to the rest of Christendom. Political protection for this evangelical teaching had allowed complacency and moral laxity to set in, and the Czechs had consequently strayed from their divine mission. As such, their defeat and dispersal in the opening phase of the Thirty Years War was a clear sign of God's righteous anger at their failure.¹⁶

The most eloquent and influential proponent of this interpretation of the Bohemian reformation's end was Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius). Among all of his work as an irenic philosopher, pedagogical innovator, ecclesiastical leader, and encyclopedic collector of human knowledge, Comenius also authored a series of historical works that offered theological explanations for the punishment of the Czech people at the hands of the Austrian Habsburgs.¹⁷ These reflections were primarily intended to garner international aid for the religious exiles from Bohemia and Moravia, so they highlighted the suffering of the Czech churches on behalf of the Gospel and emphasised the debt they were owed by other evangelical nations.¹⁸ This portrayal of the Czech churches, and especially the Unity, therefore invoked the ancient Israelites

16 On the Czechs' perception of their "chosen" status and the impact of this idea on texts from the Thirty Years War, see Lucie Storchová, "Der eschatologische Ton in den Vorworten der Drucke Velislavins, Zur Position der Eschatologie als Quelle der Ethik im späthumanistischen Diskurs," *Acta Comeniana* 18 (2004) 7–41; and Urbánek, "Patria Lost," 591–603. Cf. the more realistic account of the Czech exiles' existence in Lenka Bobková, "The Exile," in J. Palmittessa (ed.), *Between Lipany and White Mountain, Essays in Late Medieval and Early Modern Bohemian History in Modern Czech Scholarship* (Leiden, 2014) 300–328.

17 For an overview of Comenius's life, see the magisterial biography by Milada Blekastad, *Comenius, Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk, und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský* (Prague, 1969).

18 On the efforts to secure support for the Unity after their exile from the Czech lands, see Vladimír Urbánek, "Comenius, the Unity of Brethren, and Correspondence Networks," *Journal of Moravian History* 14 (2014) 30–50; and idem, "Displaced Intellectuals and Rebuilt Networks, The Protestant Exiles from the Lands of the Bohemian Crown," in T. Fehler et al. (eds.), *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2014) 167–179 and 230–234.

who were forced into exile as a consequence of their failure to honor their privileged, covenant relationship with God. The equation of the Czechs with the Israelites was also meant, however, to remind Comenius's co-religionists that redemption was possible, if only they might engage in true penitence and restore the discipline of the Unity's earliest days.¹⁹

Comenius developed this understanding of the Bohemian reformation's collapse over the course of decades. He began working out his ideas about how God had punished the Czech people in his work *Sorrowful*, which he published in two parts in 1623/1624. It was in this text that he first articulated the idea that God had exhibited a righteous anger towards the Czechs for their lukewarm faith and morals, and he called for the nation's collective repentance.²⁰ A similar focus on divine chastisement characterised Comenius's *Haggaeus Redivivus*, which he wrote in 1630/31. This book, however, also contained hints of optimism that reflected the reversal of Habsburg fortunes in the Thirty Years War. In this work, Comenius seemed to believe that the sincere penitence of the Czech exiles over the course of the previous decade had been sufficient and presaged their return home.²¹ Sadly for Comenius, this repatriation did not happen. Comenius thus followed up *Haggaeus Redivivus* with a *History of the Persecution of the Bohemian Church*, which he wrote in 1634 but published only in 1647.²² A second edition quickly followed the first, as did German and English translations, and two Czech editions were published in 1655 and 1663. Comenius explicitly conceptualised this text as a Czech extension of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and it emphasised the continuing centrality of suffering and martyrdom in Czech religious experience. In doing so, the *History* staked a claim for the Bohemians' privileged place within the history of international Protestantism because it had produced the first, the most numerous, and most recent martyrs for the cause.

The stress on the credit that the Unity and other Czech churches merited due to their consistent opposition to the Roman church also animated Comenius's edition of the Polish scholar Jan Łasicki's *Histories of the Origins and Acts of the Bohemian Brethren*, which was originally written in 1599 but

19 On the identification of the Czechs with the Israelites in Comenius's work, see Blekastad, *Comenius*, especially 195ff. Cf. Dagmar Čapková, "Comenius and his Ideals, Escape from the Labyrinth," in M. Greengrass et al. (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation, Studies in Intellectual Communication* (New York, 1994) 75–91.

20 A modern, critical edition of this text has been published as Jan Amos Komenský, *Truchlivý I/II* [Sorrowful], ed. M. Kopecký et alii, *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského* [The Works of Jan Amos Comenius] (Prague, 1978) 3:17–101.

21 A modern, critical edition of this text has been published as Jan Amos Komenský, *Haggaeus Redivivus*, (ed.) A. Škarka et alii, *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského* [The Works of Jan Amos Comenius] (Prague, 1971) 2:289–401.

22 All citations to this text are taken from the second edition Jan Amos Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum Ecclesiae Bohemicae* (Amsterdam, 1648). For the following publication history of this text, see Urbánek, "Patria Lost," 599–600.

published with commentary by Comenius in 1649.²³ Along with this work, Comenius wrote a *Brief History of the Slavic Churches*, also known as the *Historiola*, which appeared in 1660 and was subsequently reprinted with Comenius's *Account of the Discipline and Religious Orders within the Unity of Czech Brethren*.²⁴ If read along with *The History of the Persecution of the Bohemian Church*, these writings formed a sort of historical triptych that put the Unity at the forefront of the history of religious reform in all the Slavic lands, highlighting the faithful suffering of its members and establishing the Unity's perseverance as a barometer for the strength of piety in the Czech lands as a whole. Generally speaking, the Brethren served as a sort of synecdoche for the entire community of Bohemian and Moravian Christians in Comenius's histories; as the Brethren's discipline and purity waxed and waned, so too did the fortunes of all the Czech churches. In effect, Comenius made the history of his church representative of the history of the entire church in the Czech lands, a strategy that allowed him to draw sweeping conclusions based on his interpretation of the Unity's past.

The most significant of these conclusions took the form of a paradoxical rule for understanding how the internal dynamics of the Unity determined its fate within the wider world. Essentially, this rule stated that for the Unity of Brethren, the worst of times were always the best of times. It was during periods of persecution that the Brethren maintained their faith and discipline as bulwarks against diabolical opposition, which guaranteed their survival and even growth. This success contained, however, the seeds of eventual failure because any increase in the Unity's political acceptance or accommodation to the world opened the door for moral laxity and devotional apathy to creep in. Such failure provoked the righteous anger of God in turn, who would then allow the renewal of persecution against the Unity. This oppression would result in the revival of faith and morals, and the cycle would begin anew. Comenius's reliance on this rubric for interpreting the history of the Bohemian reformation gave his texts a distinctive tone. Moments that might be considered auspicious, such as the Czech evangelicals' drafting of the Confession of 1575 or the granting of the Letter of Majesty in 1609, became ominous signs of things to come, while acts of violence or repression were read as positive indicators of faith. Granted, this inverted sense of suffering's benefits had been characteristic of Christian historiography back to Eusebius, but in Comenius's hands it cast a long shadow in terms of explaining the ultimate failure of the Bohemian reformation.²⁵

23 Jan Łasicki, *Historiae de Origine et Rebus Gestis Fratrum Bohemicorum Liber Octavus*, ed. J. A. Comenius (1649).

24 Citations to this text are taken from Jan Amos Comenius, *Ecclesiae Slavonicae ab ipsis Apostolis Fundatae...Brevis Historiola*, in *Historia Fratrum Bohemorum, eorum Ordo et Disciplina Ecclesiastica* (Halle, 1702). The *Historiola* is paginated separately in this edition.

25 Scholarly treatments of the centrality of martyrdom for the creation of early and early modern Christian culture are legion. Among recent studies on the early church, see particularly

Along with his overarching, cyclical view of the past, Comenius also articulated a prophetic understanding of history in which the final redemption of God's people had been guaranteed by divine revelation. The timeframe for that process had not been laid out explicitly, of course, and events in Comenius's own life had certainly suggested a lengthy deferral. Military disaster and exile could not, however, override the divine plan that had been laid down for the Unity and the Czech people as a whole. They had survived suffering before, and would certainly do so again. Comenius's histories therefore centered the entire history of the church in the Czech lands on the generative suffering of martyrs. From the earliest missions among the Slavs to the death of St. Wenceslas at his brother's hands, Satan had always sought to eradicate true religion among the Czech people. In defiance of this diabolical opposition, Comenius portrayed the faithful as an army drawn up in battle line who would resist "the enemy of salvation" and take inspiration from the martyrs whose witness inspired their friends and followers.²⁶ Comenius was also clear that the strength of God's people was not actually military, but a matter of belief. To this effect, he cited a fourteenth-century prophecy (attributed to Matěj of Janov) that foretold the victory of religious reform in the Czech lands without the benefit of worldly power: "Now the fury of the enemies of the truth overwhelms us, but this will not last forever. For a humble people without arms or power will arise, against whom these enemies shall not be able to prevail."²⁷

Comenius located the origins of this "humble people" in the life and death of Jan Hus, and he invoked the "example of Master Hus" as a standard of proper behaviour throughout his histories.²⁸ Comenius also identified the initial failures to protect Hus's legacy rather early in the history of the Hussite revolution, with the debates over Eucharistic theology and liturgical practice in the 1420s marking a first moment where the Bohemian reformation could have gone off the rails. According to Comenius, though, God had been merciful and aroused an external enemy at this time who had forced the Hussites

Robin Darling Young, *In Procession before the World, Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, 2001); Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory, Early Christian Culture Making* (New York, 2004); and Nicole Kelley, "Philosophy as Training for Death, Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises," *Church History* 75 (2006) 723–747. For early modern cognates, see Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints, Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, GA, 1987); Peter Burschel, *Sterben und Unsterblichkeit, Zur Kultur des Martyriums in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 2004); and Nikki Shepardson, *Burning Zeal, The Rhetoric of Martyrdom and the Protestant Community in Reformation France, 1520–1570* (Bethlehem, 2007).

26 Comenius, *Historiola*, 2. On Comenius's use of this image as a framework for understanding the sweep of church history, see Daniel Neval, "As Gold Is Purified by Fire; Comenius' Understanding of the History of the Unitas Fratrum," *BRRP* 5/2 (2005) 433–441, especially 433–434.

27 Comenius, *Historiola*, 6.

28 Comenius, *Historiola*, 13, cf. *Historia Persecutionum*, 55.

either to unify or to face certain extermination.²⁹ Comenius argued that this unity, which was built on the foundation of the Four Articles, lasted until the Council of Basel. It was only during negotiations with the Council that Jan Rokycana (whom Comenius routinely lambasted for his flip-flopping and worldly ambition) and many other Hussites “retreated from the footsteps of Hus and returned to the camp of Antichrist” in their efforts to secure peace with Rome.³⁰ The Hussites’ subsequent rapprochement with emperor and pope thus closed the loop on the first iteration of the cycle of reformation history in the Czech lands, marked as it was with error and fragmentation overcome only by the presence of diabolically inspired, armed opposition.

Comenius’s narration of the following decades was unsurprisingly bleak, as this era was characterised by the Utraquists’ fitful efforts to reunite fully with Rome; a royal campaign to eliminate Tábor as the last visible bastion of revolutionary purity; and the rise of new external enemies that threatened the Czech lands’ peace. In the face of these decidedly negative developments, however, the emergence of the Unity of Brethren in the 1450s provided hope for the survival of the Bohemian reformation. It was the Unity, after all, who returned to the teachings of figures like Jan Hus and Petr Chelčický in order to create a community that was devoted to the law of God and deeply hostile to worldly vanities. It was the Unity who demanded moral purity from its priests and mutual support among all its members. It was the Unity that had “chosen the cross and ignominy,” rather than “the hope of glory,” which allowed them to flourish despite the persecution of their leaders by the Czech crown and its Utraquist allies.³¹ In analysing this persecution, Comenius was explicit about its diabolical origins, noting that the founding of the Brethren “displeased Satan, and he therefore incited a new and harsh tempest to overwhelm it.”³² No matter its cause, though, the arrest and torture of the Unity’s leaders had the opposite of its intended effect. Namely, it encouraged the Unity to break decisively from the Catholic and Utraquist churches by choosing its own priests and constructing communities that lived apart from the world. Or, as Comenius would later put it in his general conclusion to Łasicki’s *History of the Origins of the Unity*: “Truly our church was born, grew, and prospered in persecution; in peace, it withered. Let it therefore be returned to suffering, that it might be reborn.”³³

As Comenius narrated the later history of the Brethren’s growth and theological development, the underlying dynamics at work in these early episodes played out again and again. The official persecution of the Brethren that began again in 1503 with a string of royal mandates issued by King Ladislav,

29 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 53.

30 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 55.

31 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 62.

32 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 63.

33 Comenius, *Historia de Origine*, 306.

for instance, produced martyrs whose witness strengthened the remaining Brethren and provided examples of suffering that prevented them from slackening in discipline.³⁴ Ladislav's actions also prompted some "of the more pure among the Calixtines" to become martyrs, which proved that not only the Unity, but all Czech churches, raised up people who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice on God's behalf.³⁵ The expansion of God's kingdom also benefited unexpectedly from the expulsion of the Unity after the Schmalkaldic War in 1547, when they received "miraculous divine protection along their journey" to Poland and Hungary and founded new communities that would provide refuge for later generations of exiles.³⁶

Conversely, the relative peace of the later sixteenth century proved to be dangerous for the Unity. Indeed, the preparation of the Bohemian Confession in 1575, the cessation of persecution under the Habsburg kings Matthias and Rudolf II, and the religious toleration proclaimed in the Letter of Majesty in 1609, far from representing major gains for the Unity and their potential evangelical *confrères*, became the immediate precursors of their downfall:

And then a more pure religion flourished in the whole kingdom, with Pseudo-Hussitism slowly being destroyed, so that hardly a hundredth of the population did not profess evangelical doctrine. But alas! Alongside the gradual growth of the freedom of religion (as it is wont to occur), so did moral license creep in and discipline (among those whom it had previously strengthened) begin to be destroyed in an incredible manner.³⁷

This statement, originally written in 1634, reflected Comenius's interpretation of the recent, heart breaking events that had seen his family destroyed and his church expelled from the Czech lands in 1627. He later reiterated these ideas in a stunning epitaph for the Czech Brethren written in 1649: "Not by the persecution of external enemies, but by the neglect of its discipline, did the much feared ruin of the Unity come to pass ... Our enemies did not utterly destroy us, but we ourselves did."³⁸ With these words, Comenius concluded that the failure of the Bohemian reformation had been moral. When finally granted the chance for peace, the Unity (and by extension, the entirety of the Czech nation) had been lulled into a sense of false security that revealed the relatively shallow roots of their religious traditions and piety.

Despite this harsh judgment and the seeming finality of the Bohemian reformation's defeat at White Mountain, Comenius stayed true to his rubric for

34 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 78–86

35 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 92ff.

36 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 114–116.

37 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 135.

38 Comenius, in Łasicki, *Historia de Origine*, 300–301.

church history and offered a guarded optimism regarding the future revival of the Christian community in the Czech lands. This hope emerged from his belief that the overwhelming brutality deployed against the Unity and other Czech evangelicals would produce the same kind of resurgence in piety and discipline that had occurred previously. Thus, alongside a catalogue of over 250 pages detailing Habsburg attacks against the Czech clergy, nobility, common laypeople, civic governments, church structures, art, and learning that comprised the bulk of his *History*, Comenius included extensive accounts of evangelical martyrdoms and concluded with a chapter on “the faithful remnant of Bohemians” who persisted in the wake “of such desolation” as evidence of the Czechs’ irrepressible faith.³⁹ In these sections, Comenius acknowledged and praised the faithful who had remained underground in Bohemia and Moravia, but refused to bow before the Habsburg Baal that sat on the Czech throne. It was these people, after all, who would welcome back the exiles who had fled the Czech lands and serve as the “holy seed” that God would use “to sow anew the field of the Bohemian church.”⁴⁰

This outlook for the future was complemented by the conclusion of the *Historiola*, where Comenius laid out what Daniel Neval has called a “theology of the dispersed rest.”⁴¹ In the final ten sections of this work, Comenius assembled a concatenation of biblical quotations that equated the present-day exiles from the Czech lands to the ancient Israelites and members of the primitive church who had been overwhelmed by persecution, but whose flame had not been extinguished.⁴² On the contrary, the earlier incarnations of God’s chosen people had survived by recognizing their sins, publicly repenting them, and patiently bearing the righteous “discipline” to which they were subjected by God. In this way they had been purified “as gold in the fire,” and so too would the Unity be returned to a state of purity by its present suffering. Comenius ended this text by echoing the words of Daniel 9 and asking God to avert his wrath and enable his people to return home, not because of their merits, “but on account of your great compassion.”⁴³ It was the expectation that this prayer might be answered that provided the proverbial “flicker of hope” to Comenius’s audience of exiles and their potential supporters from across Protestant Europe.

We know, of course, that Comenius’s desires for return were never met, and that the Czech Protestants’ collective repentance never gained a divine

39 In totality, Comenius’s account of the Czechs’ suffering at the outset of the Thirty Years War comprises 251 pages and fifty-six chapters of material. These chapters include both individual martyr stories and accounts of the suppression of the Czech evangelicals in a number of specific cities. For these quotations on the surviving Czech Protestants, see Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 425.

40 Comenius, *Historia Persecutionum*, 430.

41 Neval, “As Gold Purified by Fire,” 439.

42 Comenius, *Historiola*, 46.

43 Comenius, *Historiola*, 48.

reprieve. What persisted from Comenius's historical writings, however, was their assessment of why the Bohemian reformation had faltered in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The timeline of crucial mistakes made along the way that Comenius first laid out also remained prevalent in later works, as did his judgment about which figures (most notably Rokycana) had orchestrated the events that served as crucial forks in the road to the Bohemian reformation's end. As influential as his reflection on failure, however, was Comenius's expectation for the eventual, ultimate fulfillment of the Bohemian reformation's promise. The language used to express this expectation changed over time, incorporating liberal nationalist, modern confessional, and socialist idioms in turn. But the twinned notions of Czech "chosenness" and the deferred destiny of the nation remained central to all of these discourses' claims about representing the true culmination of the Bohemian reformation.

Modern Narratives of Failure

To a large degree, the conviction that the Bohemian reformation had been a failure was encoded in the DNA of the modern Czech nation. Whether in the hands of liberal nineteenth-century nationalists searching for the historical foundations of an independent Czech polity, early twentieth-century Protestants creating an indissoluble link between Czech religious and national identity, or post-war Communists elaborating on the reformation origins of their ideas about social justice and revolution, the Hussite era proved to be a goldmine of potential precedents for modern political action.⁴⁴ This search for antecedents also required that each of these groups demonstrate that the work begun by the Czech reformers in the fifteenth century had not been finished. Czech nationalists, Protestants, and Communists therefore argued that the Hussites' audacious and unprecedented efforts to reform society had been suppressed by external forces and internal incoherence, and as such required the modern avatars of the Czech people and nation to rise up and complete them. Depending on the historical moment and political motivation of a given thinker, the reasons and precise dates for the failure of the Hussite revolution changed. What remained constant from the mid-nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, however, was the invocation of the Hussite past as a justification for political action and an admonition regarding the resistance that projects for Czech self-realization would inevitably face.

Such invocations began, of course, with the leaders of the Czech National Awakening in the mid-nineteenth century. The work of František Palacký in particular elevated the Hussite revolution to a position of primacy within the

44 On these groups and their appropriation of the Hussite past, see Pabian, "Inventing the Hussite Nation;" and Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, 74–114, 170–209.

nascent national historical consciousness, identifying Jan Hus and his successors as the first embodiments of a tolerant, rational, and progressive Czech identity. Palacký placed these virtues in opposition to feudalism, Catholicism, and Germanic culture, and the conflict between these two ideologies structured his history of the Czech people.⁴⁵ This opposition also played out in Palacký's own career, as he worked to counter the interpretations of Hussite history put forth by Konstantin von Höfler, a German historian working in Munich, and attacks on Comenius that identified him as "a fanatical and overly ambitious agitator."⁴⁶ Palacký argued vociferously that von Höfler had condemned Jan Hus and the Hussites in his scholarship as a proxy for undermining the modern Czech people's desires for self-determination; historiography here repeated history (as is so often the case), with Palacký lionizing the revolutionary Hussites, Taborites, and Unity of Brethren as the champions of a set of civic virtues that could serve as the foundation for a new Czech nation.⁴⁷

Certainly Palacký could be critiqued for his Manichaeic view of fifteenth-century central European society and his ahistorical, if optimistic, attribution of modern liberal values to the leaders of the Bohemian reformation. Still, the so-called "father of the Czech nation" both established the relevance of Hussite history for modern Czechs and provided a remarkable corpus of resources with which to study it through his tireless editorial efforts. He also created a template for interpreting the history of the Hussite revolution by identifying it as a movement that embraced progressive ideals and was consequently opposed by reactionary traditionalists who sought to preserve the social, religious, and political status quo.⁴⁸ One unavoidable conclusion within this interpretive schema was that those who opposed the revolution had eventually won. Palacký considered 1627 to have marked the ultimate victory of these forces. That year marked both the rewriting of the Land Ordinance

45 On these binaries and their place in Palacký's historical scholarship, see Josef Zacek, *Palacký, The Historian as Scholar and Nationalist* (The Hague, 1970) 84–85. See also Kořalka, *František Palacký (1798–1876), Der Historiker der Tschechen im österreichischen Vielvölkerstaat* (Vienna, 2007) 351–358.

46 Palacký wrote a biography of Comenius in 1829, largely as a response to accusations such as this, which was leveled by the Austrian nobleman and historian Josef Hormayr. On Palacký's treatment of Comenius, see Jan Kumpere, "Comenius, Between Hagiography and Historiography, Reflections on the Changing Image of the Czech Reformer," in C. Binfield (ed.), *Sainthood Revisioned, Studies in Hagiography and Biography* (Sheffield, 1995) 27–32; and Kořalka, *František Palacký*, 145–49.

47 For an account of this scholarly debate, see Peter Morée, "Jan Hus as a Threat to the German Future in Central Europe, The Bohemian Reformer in the Controversy between Constantin Höfler and František Palacký," *BRRP* 4, 295–307. Cf. Kořalka, *František Palacký*, 358–364.

48 František Šmahel, "Old Czech were Hefty Heroes, The Construction and Reconstruction of Czech National History in its Relationship to the 'great' Medieval Past," in R. J. Evans and G. Marchal (eds.), *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States, History, Nationhood, and the Search for Origins* (New York, 2011) 245–258.

and the issuing of a decree that exiled the remaining Utraquists and members of the Unity from the Czech lands, which cemented the ascendance of Catholic, imperial power over the kingdom. For Palacký, the bookend to this date was 1434, as the defeat of the military brotherhoods at Lipany represented the elimination of the truly “democratic” elements within the Hussite movement and the surrender of its aspirations to export its radical idealism to the whole of Christendom. Reflecting on the consequences of this battle, Palacký provided a telling summary judgment of the Bohemian reformation as a whole: “Our fall was the fall of a hero who dies for right and truth. Though our former life has disappeared in time, it has not disappeared in eternity.”⁴⁹

Palacký’s interpretation of the Bohemian reformation and its relevance to contemporary Czech history proved immensely influential across a number of intellectual and cultural domains. First and foremost, his work inspired generations of scholars to examine the history of the Hussites and to continue his work as an editor and publisher of medieval sources for Czech history. Perhaps more significantly, Palacký’s conception of the underlying dynamics of his nation’s history also became politically operative, with Tomáš Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, explicitly adopting Palacký’s ideas as a crucial component of his political rhetoric.⁵⁰ The celebration of the Hussite past and the memorialization of the “tragic” events that undermined the revolution also made their way into more popular forms of cultural discourse. The novels and plays of Alois Jirásek, the Lipany mural prepared by Luděk Marold for the 1898 Exhibition of Architecture and Engineering in Prague, and the *Slav Epic* of Alfons Mucha all brought Hussite history to the people of the Czech nation, making the religious revolutionaries emblematic of a collective national spirit.⁵¹ In these popular vehicles, Jan Hus, Jan Žižka, and Jan Amos Comenius became a trinity of sorts for the popular reception of the Bohemian reformation, exemplifying the noble suffering and fierce independence of the Czechs as a whole. Conversely, artistic depictions of Lipany and the exile of Czech Protestants after White Mountain were coloured with sombre hues and littered with the broken symbols of Hussite glory – literally, in the case of Marold’s diorama. Such representations, particularly when combined with an ascendant political rhetoric, engrained the notion of the Bohemian reformation’s failure in the mind of modern audiences.⁵²

49 For an analysis of Palacký’s schema of Czech history, see Zacek, *The Historian as Scholar*, 85–88. This quotation, which was taken from a book dedication written by Palacký to Ondřej Rudelbach in 1824, is on 87–88.

50 The most comprehensive overview of Palacký’s immediate influence on the historiography of the Bohemian reformation can be found in František Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution* (Hannover, 2002) 1:11–19. On Masaryk’s adoption of Palacký’s historical outlook, see Jaroslav Marek, *O historismu a dějepisectví* [On Historicism and Historiography] (Prague, 1992) 162–168.

51 Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 134–135 and 150–153.

52 Sayer, *Prague, The Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 152–154.

The above references to the Hussite revolution were largely free of explicit religious associations. For many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Czech artists and political leaders, the Hussites were champions of the Czech nation, but not any specific creed within that body politic. Alongside this political use of the Hussites, however, there existed a strain of more overtly religious rhetoric that sought to make the new Czechoslovakia a Protestant nation that traced its religious identity and inheritance back to the Hussites.⁵³ This rhetoric had surfaced as early as 1869, during celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Jan Hus's birth; it crested in the campaign to create a Hus memorial in Old Town Square and the subsequent "war of symbols" between the Hus statue and the Marian column that stood across from it in this contested public space.⁵⁴ This column had been erected as a tribute to the preservation of the city at the end of the Thirty Years War, but it was indelibly linked in the minds of the people to the re-Catholicization of the Czech lands during the decades surrounding 1648. As such, the toppling of the column after the recognition of Czech independence in 1918 and subsequent attacks on other Catholic monuments represented an effort to eradicate the visible remnants of foreign, Catholic intervention in the Czech lands and replace them with memorials to an alternate history of religious life in the nation.⁵⁵

Despite its centrality in the public commemoration of the Hussite past and its importance for the modern Czech nation, even the Hus statue in Old Town Square incorporated symbolic representations of failure. The heroic figure of Hus certainly dominates. He "stands triumphant, his gaze one of spirituality, inner strength, and peacefulness." The grouping of weary but unbroken Hussite warriors and priests that stand below him also communicate the steadfastness and faith of the nation. But alongside these figures, and juxtaposed to their defiance, are exiles who "cling to each other, run from pursuers, and appear haggard and worn." Their presence implies the partial and interrupted realization of Hus's vision for the Czech people, which was only fulfilled by the independent Czech nation in the twentieth century. The sculptor of this monument, Ladislav Šaloun, noted that these exiles conveyed the deep tragedy of Czech history, but he embedded their story of loss within a larger, circular design suggesting that despite hardship, the people always

53 Petr Pabian, "Protestanská verze české národní identity ve druhé polovině 19. století [The Protestant Version of the Czech National Identity in the Second of the 19th Century]," *Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Ostraviensis, Historica* 11 (2004) 137–148; cf. Catholic counterclaims about Czech national identity in Cynthia Paces, "The Czech Nation Must be Catholic! An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism during the First Republic," *Nationalities Papers* 27 (1999) 407–428.

54 On these commemorations of Hus, see Peter Morée, "Inventing Rituals to Commemorate Jan Hus between 1865 and 1965," *BRRP* 10 (2015) 371–387. Regarding the symbolic opposition between the Hus statue and Marian column, see Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints, How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, 2007) 135–140; and Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 117ff.

55 Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, 87ff.

endured.⁵⁶ And for Šaloun and his contemporaries, the wheel of history had turned once more and enabled the restoration of the Czech nation.

The propagation of the idea that the formation of the modern Czech nation represented the culmination of a long-deferred historical process reached its apex under the Communist regime that assumed power in 1948. Inspired by Palacký's rhetoric from the previous century, but more focused on Tábor and the Hussites' rejection of feudal social and economic norms, Czech Communist writers identified the Hussites as the harbingers of socialist revolution and themselves as their logical heirs.⁵⁷ The most passionate expositor of this view was Zdeněk Nejedlý, a medievalist who became secretary of education for the nation in 1948. In pamphlets such as *Communists: The Inheritors of the Great Traditions of the Czech Nation*, Nejedlý positioned contemporary socialism as "the final product of a glorious tradition stretching back through the centuries."⁵⁸ Certainly Nejedlý downplayed the religious elements of the Hussite revolution in favor of its social and political radicalism, although his rhetoric included a vein of secularised eschatology that paralleled Christian concepts about the trajectory of history and its culmination in an era of human liberation.⁵⁹ This vision was also complemented by the Communists' surprising embrace of Czech Protestants, who served as international advocates for the regime's support of social justice and equality. The leader of the Czech evangelicals, Josef L. Hromádka, thus linked the origins of the Czech nation in the Bohemian reformation (especially among the Unity of Brethren) to the current Communist regime by emphasizing that the latter governed "in the spirit of the greatest ideals and movements of our history, of the old Hussites, who had a deep concern exactly for the common, poor, exploited, and unprivileged man."⁶⁰

The Communist adaptation of Hussite history for the modern Czech nation shared a great deal with the liberal rhetoric that first emerged in the National Awakening of the previous century. Both emphasised the liberating,

56 Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, 41–42.

57 Petr Čornej, "Vývoj názorů na husitství v díle Zdeňka Nejedlého v letech 1898–1920 [The Development of Views on Hussitism in the Writings of Zdeněk Nejedlý between 1898–1920]," *Česká literatura* 26 (1978) 235–247; Peter Morée, "Not Preaching from the Pulpit, but Marching in the Streets, The Communist Use of Jan Hus," *BRRP* 6 (2007) 283–296; and Abrams, *Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*, 94–101.

58 Cited in Abrams, *Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*, 98.

59 Morée, "Not Preaching from the Pulpit," 293–294.

60 This quotation is cited in Peter Morée, "'On the Basis of the Historical Background of the Hussite Reformation we Regard the Socialist Movements as a Part of our History,' The Political Functions of the Bohemian Reformation for Czech Protestants in the Twentieth Century," *BRRP* 8 (2011) 340–359. On Hromádka's impact in shaping the relationship between Czech Protestants and the Communist government more generally, see Peter Morée, "Nejpokrokovější církevní pracovník," *Protestantské církve a Josef Lukl Hromádka v letech 1945–1969* ["The Most Progressive Church Worker," *The Protestant Churches and Josef Lukl Hromádka in the years 1945 and 1969*] (Benešov, 2015).

progressive elements of the Bohemian reformation's ideology, which they placed in opposition to the traditional social, political, and religious structures that sought to suppress them. Alongside these continuities there were, of course, substantial differences. The singular nationalism of nineteenth-century Hussite proponents, for instance, was attenuated by Communists' international focus, and the National Awakening's appeal to the Hussites' toleration and desire for freedom of conscience fell out of favor after 1948. Still, the fact that both of these disparate movements appealed to the Hussite past in order to justify their political programs was significant, and within both these programs the inability of the Bohemian reformation to accomplish its stated goals was central. Put plainly, because the Czech nation as a primarily religious community had fallen in the seventeenth century, its modern inheritors could resurrect it as a political body.

Ways Forward

In essence, this essay has argued that the modern perception of the Bohemian reformation's failure to achieve the revolutionary (or messianic) goals it set for itself is the product of overlapping discourses that were produced from the seventeenth until the mid-twentieth century. These discourses were articulated in learned histories, monumental artworks, popular literature, and political treatises, all of which turned to the medieval history of the Czech lands as a resource in modern debates over cultural identity and political autonomy. I would not argue that these various cultural productions consciously or intentionally cultivated a perception of the Bohemian reformation's failure among their audiences. Rather, my contention is that the contemporary marginalization of the Bohemian reformation among scholarly and popular histories of early modern Europe is the product of a largely unexamined tendency to read early modern Czech history backwards from White Mountain, which stands as the climactic moment in the story of the Bohemian reformation's collapse. And because the history of the Bohemian reformation is written from this perspective, then it becomes possible to overlook or dismiss its signal successes in terms of establishing new forms of devotional and liturgical practice, creating legal frameworks for religious co-existence, and sustaining substantive theological dialogue across confessional lines. The Bohemian reformation was both precocious and ambitious in these domains, even in direct comparison to its German, Swiss, or English counterparts, but this fact is not sufficiently recognised.

What may be necessary in drawing attention to these achievements is to uncouple them from Lipany and White Mountain, the two tragic battles that tend to frame the entire history of the post-revolutionary Bohemian reformation. Considering the histories of the developing Utraquist church and nascent Unity of Brethren in their own terms will emphasise different

aspects of their identity that developed in dialogue with each other, as well as with Catholic and international Protestant interlocutors. One aspect of the Bohemian reformation's history that has been treated from this perspective concerns religious co-existence. Many scholars have analysed the *de facto* political arrangements and *de jure* treaties that made the Czech lands the first bi-confessional polity in Europe, even as more mainstream treatments of the topic have essentially ignored the Czech precedent for sixteenth-century history.⁶¹ Within this history, the negotiations over the *Compactata*, the issuing of the Peace of Kutná Hora, the implementation of the St. James Day Mandate, the composition of the Bohemian Confession, and the granting of the Letter of Majesty mark out non-teleological phases in a long, fraught discussion over the limits of religious toleration. It would be disingenuous to attribute true religious tolerance to early modern Czechs; the prevalence of sharp polemics between Catholics, the Unity and Utraquists, on the one hand, and the continuing reality of persecution and martyrdom, on the other, show how strenuously all religious actors sought to assert their claims to divine truth.⁶² But it is still impossible to deny that from roughly 1435 until about 1620, the disparate churches within the Czech lands undertook the most long-lasting and expansive discussion of religious co-existence in Europe.

Beyond this extant subfield of Czech historiography, there are other domains in which the influence, or at least contributions, of the Czech churches to larger debates within the European reformations are starting to be recognised. Scholars are beginning to examine Luther's extended dialogues with the Utraquists on the nature of the priesthood and the Unity on Eucharistic theology, for instance, to see how these exchanges may have affected his sacramental and ecclesiological thought.⁶³ Further, Hussite manuscripts on the Eucharist in Swiss archives and the Unity's published writings from the 1520s

61 On the practical and legal frameworks for coexistence that developed in the Czech lands in the course of the Bohemian reformation, see Winfried Eberhard, "Entstehungsbedingungen für öffentlich Toleranz am Beispiel des Kuttenberger Religionsfriedens von 1485," *CV* 19 (1986) 129–153; Anna Skybová, "Politische Aspekte der Existenz zweier Konfessionen im Königreichen Böhmen bis zum Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts," in G. Vogler (ed.), *Martin Luther, Leben, Werk, und Wirkung* (Berlin, 1986) 463–480; Jaroslav Pánek, "The Question of Tolerance in Bohemia and Moravia in the Age of the Reformation," in O. Grell and R. Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (New York, 1996) 231–248; František Šmahel, "Pax externa et interna, Vom Heiligen Krieg zur Erzwungenen Toleranz im hussitischen Böhmen," in A. Patschovsky and H. Zimmerman (eds.), *Toleranz im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1998) 211–273; and Josef Válka, "Tolerance or Co-Existence? Relations between Religious Groups from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," in Palmitessa, *Between Lipany and White Mountain*, 182–196. In contrast to these studies, there is essentially no discussion of the Czech case in Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith, Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2007).

62 Pace the second section of David, *Realism, Tolerance, and Liberalism*.

63 See, e.g. David, *Finding*, 45–79; and Atwood, *The Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 243–272.

are being mined to see how their arguments influenced early Reformed ideas about sacramental theology.⁶⁴ In addition, it is becoming more widely recognised that the Unity's practices of communal discipline and understanding of confirmation's role in binding an individual to a Christian community influenced Martin Bucer's conception of the *corpus Christianorum*, which influenced Calvin in turn.⁶⁵ Beyond these theological echoes, the circulation of Unity catechisms and hymn collections in the 1520s seems to have exercised some influence on the explosive growth of these genres among the nascent Protestant churches, thus showing the devotional resonances between the Bohemian reformation and its sixteenth-century counterparts.⁶⁶ And finally, the circulation of Hussite "classics" among the Holy Roman Empire's reading public from the 1520s on ensured that political and theological arguments first developed a century earlier could be adapted to the debates that set the course for sixteenth-century reform efforts.

Much of the previous paragraph is necessarily written in the subjunctive. The research efforts it describes are still developing, and many of their findings are currently provisional. But all of these avenues of investigation offer the potential for further exploration into specific aspects of the Bohemian reformation's influence beyond Czech borders, and collectively they invite a reconsideration of the Utraquists' and Unity's success in carving out a space for themselves in the landscape of early modern religious reform. Put plainly, both the Utraquists and the Unity inserted themselves into the major debates that shaped the nascent Protestant churches, and they drew on the Czech lands' history of reform to justify their stances within these dialogues.⁶⁷ By not tethering these international entanglements to the *longue durée* of the Bohemian reformation's history, the leaders of the Unity and Utraquist church at this time, mindful of the religious legacy they had inherited from the Hussite revolution and unapologetic about the strategies they

64 On this area of influence, see Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy, A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (New York, 2011) especially 80–90.

65 On these links, see the fundamental work of Amedeo Molnár, "La correspondance entre les frères tchèques et Bucer de 1540 à 1542," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 31 (1951) 102–156; and the more recent elaborations by Willem Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer* (New York, 1996) 337–339; and Matthew Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church* (New York, 2017) 58ff.

66 Frustratingly, scholars of the sixteenth-century reformations allude to the importance of Lukáš of Prague's question-and-answer catechism, known as the *Kinderfragen*, and Michael Weisse's German edition of the Brethren's hymns that was published in 1531, but tend not to treat their influence substantively. See, e.g. Elsie McKee, *Reforming Popular Piety in Sixteenth-Century Strasbourg, Katharina Schütz Zell and her Hymnbook* (Princeton, 1994); and Lee Palmer Wandel, *Reading Catechisms, Teaching Religion* (Boston, 2015).

67 These types of interaction are analysed with regard to Martin Luther in Phillip Haberkern, "Luther's Understanding of Earlier Reformers," in D. Nelson and P. Hinlicky (eds.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther* (2017, published online at <http://religion.oxfordre.com>).

employed to advance their confessional agendas, are allowed to take center stage without making concessions to events that would not take place for another hundred years.

This essay has sought to illuminate the genealogy of narratives that consider the Bohemian reformation a failure and present potential alternatives to these narratives. These efforts have been made with one eye towards establishing the relevance and significance of Bohemian history for the wider European reformations in the sixteenth century, and with another towards balancing out the implicit characterization of the Bohemian reformation as a failure. Such presentations in the past have shaded the history of religious reform in the Czech lands with somber tones and a tragic air, much as Mucha portrayed the last days of Comenius in Naarden. But it does not have to be this way. Success and failure can be redefined, or this normative binary could be set aside altogether. We must, however, recognise its long life and prevalence as a historiographical trope as a first step towards comprehending and counteracting the deep imprint it has left on scholarly and popular perceptions of the Bohemian reformation.