

The
Birth,
Life,
and
Death
of the Bohemian
Revival



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Revival**

Mike Atnip

In the spirit of:

Isaiah 55:1

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price,

and

Luke 6:38

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again,

and

Act 2:44

And all that believed were together, and had all things common,

and

Act 4:32

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common,

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Prologue

It is with great joy that I present the following story to the public. There are those who have no interest in history; that is perfectly fine. Then there are the rest of us. To these latter I dedicate this book.

History holds within her bosom innumerable lessons for the inquiring soul. Some inquiries are easy enough, because someone who has trod before put some thought into the future and recorded the deeds that he had witnessed.

Other inquiries are not so simple. The story that this book unfolds to us is one of this latter class.

Actually, one of the early Bohemian Brethren bishops did think of the future and record the story for us: but alas all found copies were destroyed by his enemies, and none have appeared since that time.

This narrative is thus pieced together from many sources. I am not really the author of this story as much as I am the compiler. In fact, some sections of this book are almost completely made up of long quotations from other works, with a few minor edits and perhaps a phrase or two stuck in here or there.

Now for the confession: With great resolution I started putting this book together with the intention to duly recognize each source, in the bibliography.

Well, here we are, two changes of residency—with the resulting topsy-turvy mix of notes and papers—and a couple of years or so later... You probably know what I am about to say: it did not happen. This project had to be put on the back burner several times. As well, in my excitement of finding an interesting quote or tidbit to mix into the narrative, I sometimes just plumb forgot to write down the source. This is especially true of information gleaned from the internet. It is so easy to copy and paste...and forget to acknowledge the source. As far as I know, I have not infringed upon any copyrights, as copyright law permits short quotations for educational purposes. All of the longer quotes I mentioned above are from public domain sources.

And a word about names: Using sources from Czech, English, and German, the variants in names of places and people have been immense and confusing. Top that off with the fact that I do not

read Czech, and very little German. While I have tried to standardize the names, keep in mind as you go through the story that you may see variants. This is especially true for name places, as Bohemia was the meeting place of two cultures, German and Slav. The Germans had names for some of the towns that differed from the name that the Slavs used; not just a German form, but a totally different name in some cases. Mix that in with the English name of the same place and you have a real potpourri.

In cases where I know the anglicanized version of a person's given name, I have tried to use that, as I am an English speaker and most of the readers of this book will be also. Thus Jiri is George and Jan is John. I know Georges and Johns, but Jiri is some unknown fellow who hales from some other people group; maybe not quite like I am. And Jan is a girl, is she not?

It is my desire that the characters in this story seem like real folks, just like the ones who live just down the road from you. And the fact is, they were real, common, everyday humans just like the people in the house down the road from you.

For place names, I have used the anglicanized Czech name (accent marks removed), if I could find it. For those who may not know—like I did not before starting this book—where Bohemia was, it is basically the western half of the modern Czech Republic (the darker portion of the front cover). The eastern half of this country is made up of what used to be Moravia, and parts of Silesia (lighter portion).

This book is not really finished, I just quit working on it. If anyone desires to refine it further, they are welcome.

Without any further delay, I commend you to the story of the birth, life, and death of a revival of primitive Christianity.

—Mike Atnip

—January, 2009

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*The beautiful Czech countryside,
“where only man is vile...”*

Part 1 Birth Pangs

Fired by the WORD

“The Czech Reformation was born under the impetus of the Word of God”.¹

Sound familiar?

It does to me!

Countless times I have heard a testimony along the following strain: “And then I started to read the Bible...”

The revival that occurred in 14th and 15th-century Bohemia was started when men and women began once again to take the Word of God at face value. One of the quickest ways to drown a revival is to separate it from what God has said. Once there is no more “Thus saith the Lord”, death is at the door, if not already over the threshold.

And... There were a people in Bohemia that proclaimed God’s Word during the so-called “dark ages”. Peter Waldo, a famed Waldensian,² was said to have died there in 1218, after being chased out of his native Lyons for “heresy”. For the next couple of decades, these “Waldensian” believers followed Jesus, preached itinerantly, and lived in simplicity in Bohemia, gathering in little groups at night or in secluded places, for fear of reprisal by the “official” church.



Peter Waldo obeyed Jesus by giving away his wealth.

¹ A quote from Rudolf Rican’s book, “*The History of the Unity of Brethren*”.

² Many historians now believe that this Peter Waldo did not begin the “Waldensian” movement as many have previously believed. Some medieval Waldensians referred to Waldo as the “Restorer”, with the understanding that Waldensian-type churches had existed for centuries before Peter Waldo came on the scene. And, there is historical evidence for this view.

But God has no grandchildren, and the following generations slowly began to conform themselves to the society around them to soften the persecution. Some attended mass and baptized their babies, even though officially they did not all agree with such practices. And besides, instead of practicing what they had previously called “apostolic poverty”, they now began to accumulate wealth. There were those among them who did not compromise as much, and these were willing to admit the drift. Brother Gregory, whom we shall meet a little later, wrote of them as follows:

Certain Waldensians admitted that they had strayed from the paths of their predecessors, and that there existed among them the iniquity of taking money away from the people, amassing wealth, and neglecting the poor; whereas it is certainly opposed to Christian belief that a minister should accumulate wealth, since he should employ his own worldly possessions, and even those inherited from his parents, in the giving of alms, and not leave the poor in their necessity...

The Waldensians are not to be thought of as one homogeneous group with a unified doctrinal statement and practice of faith.³ At the time of our story, one Fred Reiser was a leader among the German Waldensians. The son of a Waldensian *barba*,⁴ Fred had contact with the early Bohemian revival, and certainly had some influence and input into it. As well, he was on the receiving end, being ordained among the Bohemian Taborites as some point. Traveling about Europe, from Poland to Switzerland and into various regions of Germany, he preached and helped reorganize the faltering Waldensian communities. At Strasburg, he met his end, tied to a stake and burned in the year 1435.

³ There are a number of broad histories written about the Waldensians, but the problem is that these histories tend to focus on one aspect or lineage of the story. Were the facts really known about just exactly what the “Waldensians” believed and practiced, many of us who point to them as our spiritual ancestors might just get red-faced. But that is another book...

⁴ Italian for “uncle”. The itinerant Waldensian ministers were called this, probably in contrast to the Catholic use of “father” for a priest.

Chastened by the Plague

One should not look into medieval history without considering the effect of the Black Plague that swept through the land in the mid 14th century.

Killing thousands, literally, every day, the “Great Mortality” as it was then called eventually took 1/3 of Europe's people to their grave: and fast! Within seven days of infection, 50% of infected humans die, barring modern medical intervention or an act of mercy from God.

Jews, vagabonds, and other minorities were blamed and banished or burned at the stake. But the real culprit was the tiny flea and its host, the black rat. Actually, the culprit was even smaller than the flea, since it was the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium that has claimed 200 million lives.⁵

However, we are not so concerned about the cause in our study, as we are the effect. To imagine the effect, just imagine 1 out of every 3 of your neighbors dying within a couple weeks time. You have no certain information as to what the cause is, and neither does anyone else.

Suddenly, preparation for the future—the “after-life”—comes barging into your thoughts.

Bohemia was “spared” from the plague; only about 10-15% of the population died. While that is certainly a better statistic than the 30-60% that other areas of Europe reported, it was enough to put death on the forefront of everyone's mind.

As with modern AIDS, many people, preachers included, felt that God was punishing Europe for its sins. Calls to repentance began to sound forth. People became serious about eternity. And, importantly for our story, many people began to look to the Church for answers to life's serious questions: like, how does one get saved from his sins?

⁵ There are various other suspects as to the cause of the Black Plague, but this one is the most suspicious. Perhaps the most enigmatic point of the whole thing is that while the bacterium are still extant, the plague itself has “disappeared”.

Medieval churchianity

To further understand the spiritual conditions of 14th-century Bohemia, we must needs study the history of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries, the Church and the State had walked together in an unholy alliance. There was the “Holy Roman Emperor”,⁶ who was supposed to be secular king over “corpus cristianum”,⁷ or Christendom; and there was the pope, who was to be the spiritual leader over the same.

Sometimes the relationship between the Emperor and the Pope was sweet, more often than not, sour. Each side jostled for more authority. Finally, the French King Philip “The Fair” captured Pope Boniface VIII at his French summer home and basically had him murdered by cruel treatment.⁸ For some sixty years, the popes ruled Rome from France, until Pope Gregory XI finally had enough of French oversight and returned to Italy. France “fixed” the situation by electing its own pope, Clement VII. In some places, this created rival cardinals and bishops in the same city, some holding to the French pope, some to the Italian. In the end, both sets of Cardinals got tired of the whole mess and, hoping to end the controversy, called a conference—without either of the two popes there—to elect a true pope. They succeeded in choosing John XXIII.

Now there were three rival popes! The popely rich but obviously confused Catholic Church was at a loss as to who was its vicar of Christ: three men all claimed the position. Added to this was a running distrust and sometimes open antagonism between local priests and the monastic orders, all across Europe. All this,

⁶ Voltaire said the “Holy Roman Empire” was “neither holy, nor Roman, nor empire”. This was certainly true in his time, and mostly true in the time of our story. It was not holy, and it was not Roman. It was barely a unified empire. The political maps of medieval Europe seem to have changed at every whim. With over 100 little States in Europe at the time, loyalties were changed as often as men change gloves. And many times these little States were included in the map of “The Empire”, but the reality was that their loyalty to the Emperor was only on paper.

⁷ Latin for 'Body of Christ'.

⁸ 1303 AD.

Good King Wenceslas

Allegro

The musical score is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of five systems, each with a vocal line and a guitar accompaniment line. The lyrics are as follows:

1. Good King Wen - ces - las look'd out, On the feast of Ste - phen,
 2. "Hith - er, page, and stand by me, If thou know'st it tell - ing,
 3. "Bring me flesh, and bring me wine, Bring me pine - logs hith - er:
 4. "Sire, the night is dark - er now, And the wind grows strong - er;
 5. In his mas - ter's steps he trod, Where the snow lay dint - ed;

When the snow lay round - a - bout, Deep and crisp and e - ven.
 You - der peas - ant, who is he? Where and what his dwell - ing?"
 Thou and I shall see him dine, When we bear them thith - er."
 Fails my heart I know not how; I can go no long - er."
 Heat was in the ver - y sod Which the Saint had print - ed.

Bright - ly shone the moon that night, Though the frost was cru - el,
 "Sire, he lives a good league hence, Un - der - neath the moun - tain,
 Page and mon - arch, forth they went, Forth they went to - geth - er;
 "Mark my foot - steps, my good page, Tread thou in them hold - ly;
 There - fore, Chris - tian men, be sure, Wealth or rank pos - sess - ing,

When a poor man came in sight, Gath - 'ring win - ter fu - el.
 Right a - gainst the for - est fence, By Saint Ag - nes' foun - tain."
 Through the rude wind's wild la - ment And the bit - ter weath - er.
 Thou shalt find the win - ter's rage Freeze thy blood less cold - ly."
 Ye who now will bless the poor, Shall your - selves find bless - ing.

While the story of this song may not have one lick of historical veracity to it, it does represent the idealism that many medieval people looked up to in reference to the king/serf relationship. The "Good King Wenceslas" referred to was actually a Duke, but the stories of his piety and humility had been handed down for centuries among the Bohemians. He is the main patron saint of the modern Czech Republic even today. This is traditionally a "Christmas carol", as St. Stephen's feast is the day after Christmas.

of course, contributed to a rising feeling of distrust towards the Church by the laity.

In Bohemia, on the political scene, King Wencesles IV⁹ decided to not support any of the rival popes, and called for the Bohemian people to back him in this move.

Not only was the “head” sick; even modern Catholic historians acknowledge that it was a time of general laxity in the church. Of the monks, it is reported that they hunted, they gambled, they caroused, they committed adultery, and the suggestion was solemnly made that they should be provided with concubines. It certainly did not help matters for the Church to hold title to 1/3 of the land in Bohemia.¹⁰

In the midst of this, came the preaching of the Word...

Conrad and John

The scene is a town some forty miles north of Prague. A traveling preacher is scheduled to speak. He begins his sermon.

From across the street, church bells start pealing. Are they calling the faithful to listen? No, some Franciscan monks are trying to drown out a certain Conrad. His preaching grates on them...probably because he preaches against their lax lifestyle.

The next day when the preacher begins his sermon again, they do not ring the bells: they enter the crowd that has gathered and begin to openly shout Conrad down. Push comes to shove, quite literally, and the gathering turns into an open fray between those supporting Conrad and those supporting the mendicant friars.¹¹ When things get out of hand, the friars sneak away as best as they can.

⁹ He was named after “Good King Wencesles” of the Christmas song on the preceding page. This first Wencesles was a devout Catholic Duke that supported missionary efforts to convert the Slavs. He was murdered on the way to a church meeting, at the very door of the chapel, by three men working in collaboration with his very own brother.

¹⁰ Why go on a crusade? “All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested.” Thus promised Pope Urban II. And if you died in the process, your land was turned over to the Church. By this means, the Church became owner of a huge amount of property.

From Austria, Conrad Stiekm (d. 1369)—more commonly called “Waldhauser”, from the convent he originated from in northern Austria—had been asked to preach¹² in Bohemia. Denouncing the prevalent evils, thousands came to listen to his expositions of the Gospels. Since the crowds could not fit in the chapels, he preached in the open air. The later Moravian bishop Edmund de Schweinitz described Conrad in the following terms:

His bearing was calm, his thoughts were set forth with great clearness, his language was plain, but forcible and eloquent. With a boldness that came from God and feared neither man nor the devil, he exposed the vices of the times and called sinners to repentance. The result was wonderful. Women who had been leaders of extravagant and immodest fashions laid aside their costly robes, glittering with gold and pearls, and devoted themselves to works of charity. Usurers fattening themselves on unrighteous gains made restitution. Notorious libertines set an example of holy living.

Conrad had a “special” message for the begging friars: “If the men who founded your orders would see the worldliness in which you live,” he said, “they would be horrified.” Raising the challenge further, he told them that if their founders could return to earth, they would be stoned by their present disciples. In the same strain, they were reprovved for the asking of alms for themselves.

Of course the monks did not like Conrad’s challenge, and threatened to kill him. However, when push came to shove this time, they did not show their faces at a trial charging Conrad with heresy.

¹¹ 'Mendicant' means begging, and 'friar' means 'brother'. These were the “poor” Church orders who sometimes acted like professional beggars. Conrad himself was an Augustinian 'brother', but he had little sympathy for the begging friars who had little spiritual desires, but much interest in being leeches on others.

¹² By the Emperor himself!

So Conrad just kept on preaching. As well as moral reform, Conrad preached against prevailing social evils, where proud nobility snuffed noses at the serf. Conrad ‘stood with the underdog’ and proclaimed the equality of all men. In fact, he upheld the simple country life as an ideal: “More deceit and disbelief arises from the towns than the village,” he wrote.

He describes his own preaching in the following words:

Not willing that the blood of souls should be required at my hands, I traced, as I was able, in the Holy Scripture, the future dangers impending the souls of men.

No wonder he had the reputation as “a disturber of public peace!”

During an earlier journey to Rome, Conrad had seen first-hand the invalidity of pilgrimages and indulgences: multitudes went to Rome to buy forgiveness for their sins;¹³ without one streak of genuine repentance in their heart.

Then while there, they added insult to injury in getting seduced by the debauchery of the papal city.



Charles IV put Prague on the map by choosing it to be his imperial seat. The former “frontier town” suddenly became a bustling city with people of all sorts of people passing through. But perhaps the most important consequence was the connection made with Britain, when Charles' daughter Anne married Richard II, King of England. Among the resulting cultural exchanges was that of Lollard and Wycliffian ideas being brought to Prague. “Infected” with these ideas, John Huss began to preach them.

¹³ A pilgrimage to Rome could obtain forgiveness of sins, according to the pope that made that offer. It is recorded that somewhere around 1 million souls found themselves at Rome during Conrad’s time there.

About the same time, John Milic began to preach. He, in contrast to Conrad's German and Latin, initially used the local dialect—a new thing—and worked among the poor sections of Prague. At one time, he had been a private secretary for Emperor Charles IV,¹⁴ the owner of an estate that produced a very healthy income, and an arch-deacon. But in the year 1363, he renounced his position and income so as to disassociate himself from all simony,¹⁵ and devoted the remainder of his life to preaching the Gospel and doing charitable deeds.

His labours came to fruition in the form of a whole city block of brothels¹⁶ that closed down when the women that staffed them—hundreds of them¹⁷—became new creatures in Christ Jesus. From these converts and others, Milic helped raze the debauched “Little Venice” section of Prague and in its place founded “New Jerusalem”, a home for wayward girls and a school to prepare evangelists. To expand the sphere of his message into the upper classes, he, in spite of his advanced age, set himself to learn German, eventually becoming fluent in this tongue.

He hoped that his labors—which by now included preaching daily for two or three hours, and Sundays and fast days two to five times to huge crowds¹⁸—would put together a model congregation that others would be stimulated to copy. Both Conrad and John were priests basically hoping to restore the Catholic Church from within; obviously with a deeper spirituality than was found among the average church leader of their times. It is written of Conrad

¹⁴ He later became convinced that Charles was Anti-Christ, even posting a notice on the door of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome that Anti-Christ had come—which occasioned him a spell in jail. On another occasion, he publicly reproved Charles by name in a sermon, in the Emperor's presence. But Charles saw him as a zealot with good motives and did nothing to suppress him.

¹⁵ The buying of church offices, like Simon the Sorcerer tried to do.

¹⁶ Legalized prostitution was an accepted norm in medieval Europe, even in Catholic cities. The idea was that it was better that the young men be guided towards marriage, rather than sodomy. For this reason, the law only allowed single men to do business with the houses of disrepute.

¹⁷ One historian reports “thousands” of rescued women. This number is probably stretched. Be it hundreds of thousands, God send us some John Milics!

¹⁸ Besides private counseling.

that he taught “the necessity of a living Christianity, of a renewal of the heart, and of saving faith.”

And Tom...

Thomas of Stitny (c. 1331-c. 1401) was another one of the men that began to call for reform of the church, “in head and members”. He wrote in the language of the common people, urging for moral reforms. While he supported the doctrine of a three-tiered Corpus Cristianum,¹⁹ he had a maxim for it: ‘The lord is made in order to serve the people.’ In other words, those in privileged positions were obligated to minister to the “lower” positions. He wrote:

“I was instigated by a sermon of St. Augustine’s to write Bohemian books, relating to Holy scriptures, with greater boldness; for from it anyone can observe how good a thing it is to read Holy Scripture. ... Anyone would be rightly terrified who should stop a king’s letters which he sends to his queen; if he learned that the king knew it. And how much greater is the Lord God than any king! How much dearer to him is His Bride—that is, any soul that longs after Him—than was ever queen dear to any king!

...But because our king is so merciful, more so than anyone can imagine, He hath been pleased to send us by patriarchs and prophets the Holy Scripture—missionary letters as it were—whereby He invites us to return to our fatherland, and points out the way. And if this be so, dear brethren, what mean those servants who are so neglectful of their Lord that they will not even read the letters from Him, in which He invites them to His blissful kingdom!

¹⁹ We will deal with this idea shortly, but to help us understand the term, “three-tiered” refers to the three classes of society: Secular rulers, ecclesiastical rulers, and the common man. The latter made up 97% of the population of Europe.

“‘It is proper to love God in such a manner as not to desire any recompense from Him, that it may not be a hireling and slavish love.’ I know that I ought not to love Him for any other recompense which is not Himself, if I wish to love Him rightly... And what manner of love would that be, if anyone were to say to me, ‘I love you, but I pay no regard to you?’ And if such love cannot be pleasing to a poor creature like myself, how can it be pleasing to God...?”

A wise and noble mistress is like the moon. For as the moon receives all its beauty from the sun, so has she honor from her husband, if they look upon each other faithfully and truly with true love, so that there is no impediment between them through which true love may vanish. As we see, when the earth is between the sun and the moon, because the sun cannot look directly upon the moon owing to it, the moon immediately vanishes; if the sun also were to lose its beauty, the moon would not be beautiful at all. Therefore mistresses do err who hold their husbands cheap or ridicule them, or who say to anyone whatsoever, without very urgent need, what is to the disgrace of their husbands.²⁰

Concerning the monks, he wrote:²¹

And thus have they fallen away from love, they have not the peace of God in the mind, they do not rejoice with God in devotion, but quarrel, hate each other, condemn each other, priding themselves against each other, for love has sunken low in them on account of avarice because they have forsaken God for money, breaking his holy laws and the oath of their own promise. And besides this—which is the most dreadful wickedness—they are irritated, they are annoyed at every good preacher or every good man who understands their error; they would gladly make him out to

²⁰ He is referring, I presume, of Christ and the church.

²¹ Remember while reading the following, he was not anti-Catholic.

be a heretic that they may have greater freedom for their cunning.

In regards to sports, Milic drew some lines:

...The tourney, because that injurious pastime ought not to be termed a pastime...is prohibited in the spiritual laws. Thus it has been appointed as a penalty...that he who is killed in a tournament, or dies from an injury there received, is not to be buried in consecrated ground... Dances, too, have much evil attaching to them—pride, licentiousness, envy. Therefore...holy men condemn dances as being the cause of much evil. Games at dice, too, are an ill pastime, for avarice will ere long be there.

Of hunting I say this, that those hunts which are connected with vain-glory—as, for instance, awaiting the attack of a bear or boar—are not good. It is not good to risk life without other necessity for that vainglorious idea... We are not placed here to give ourselves up to pastimes, but to do what is needful for ourselves or our neighbors, each according to his station...

And then Matt

Of all who listened to these capital city preachers, none, perhaps, let the words of Christ transform his life more drastically than a young man named Matthias, the son of a Czech nobleman from Johnov.

No one expected Matt to turn out different from his friends—riding horses, playing, dancing, and jousting on feast days. When he discovered the joy of following Christ, nothing else attracted him anymore. He wrote:

“Once, my mind was encompassed by a thick wall; I thought of nothing but what delighted the eye and the ear, till it pleased the Lord Jesus to deliver me as a brand from the burning. And while I, worst slave to my passions, was resisting him in every way, he de-

livered me from the flames of Sodom, and brought me into the place of sorrow, of great adversities, and of much contempt. Then first I became poor and contrite, and searched with trembling the word of God. [Into my heart had] entered...a certain fire, subtle, low, strong, and unusual, but exceeding sweet.²²

Instead of seeking lively company, Matt spent long periods out on the fields and in the woods, alone. He spoke continually with Christ, and when his former companions met him, he warned them earnestly to “turn from images to the real person.”

Like John Milic, his teacher, Matt spoke to the people in ordinary Bohemian. He believed Christians should take part in frequent—daily if possible—communion in bread and wine. He spoke against the exaltation of the clergy and identified the “many rules made by the church to take the place of Scripture” as the “chief cause of corruption” in medieval Europe.

“I consider it essential,” he wrote, “to root out all weeds, to restore the Word of God on earth, to bring back the Church of Christ to its original, healthy, condensed condition, and to keep only such regulations as date from the time of the Apostles.” “All works of men,” he added, “their ceremonies and traditions, shall soon be totally destroyed; the Lord Jesus shall alone be exalted, and His Word shall stand forever.”

The temptation to go with the flow at times haunted him. Should he simply shut his mouth and accept generous offers of promotion or material gain? He tells of his experience in these things:

“My feet had almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped; and, unless a crucified Jesus had come to my rescue, my soul had sunk to hell. But He, my most faithful and loving Saviour, in whom is no guile, showed to me their counsels; and I knew the face of the harlot, by which she allures all that stand at the corners of the streets and the entrances of the paths.

²² Only those who have tasted can understand the rapture of those words!

Nevertheless, I prayed to God and the Father of Jesus Christ my Lord, holding up the Bible in my hands; and I cried out, with heart and voice, ‘O Lord and Father, who ordains my life, leave me not to their thoughts and counsels, and let me not be taken in their net, lest I fall under that reproachful sin which shall sting my conscience, and drive out wisdom from my soul!’

...I confess, before God and his Christ, that so alluring was this harlot, Antichrist, that she so well feigned herself the true spouse of Jesus Christ—or rather, Satan by his arts so tricked her out—that from my early years I was long in doubt what I should choose, or what keep: *whether* I should seek out and chase after benefices,²³ and thirstily grasp for honors, which to some extent I did, or rather, go forth without the camp, bearing the poverty and reproach of Christ: *whether*, with the many, I should live in quest of an easy and quiet life for the moment, or rather, cling to the faithful and holy truth of the gospel: *whether* to commend what almost all commend; lay my plans as many do; dispense with and gloss over the scriptures, as many of the great and learned and famous of this day do; or rather, manfully inculcate and accuse their unfruitful works of darkness, and so hold to the simple truth of the divine words, which plainly contravene the lives and morals of men of this age, and prove them false brethren: *whether* I should follow the spirit of wisdom with its suggestions, which I believe the divine Spirit of Jesus, or follow the sentiment of the great multitude, which, in their self-indulgence, without show of mercy or charity, while lovers of this world and full of carnal vanities, they claim to be safe.

I confess that between these two courses I hung wavering in doubt; and unless our Lord Jesus be our keeper, none will escape the honeyed face and smile of this

²³ Income producing assets that were given as part of a ministerial position.



The interior of Bethlehem Chapel, where John Huss and other preachers began to return to preaching the Word of God, to large crowds.

harlot—the tricks of Satan and the snares of Anti-christ.”

Advocating the primacy of Scripture, his ideal of a Christian was “the simple man” and a return to primitive Christianity²⁴—with its community of goods and agape love—as in the early days of the New Testament church. He was not out to establish another sect; he, like the German Pietists some 200 years later, wanted to establish an “ecclesiola in ecclesiola”.²⁵ As well, Matt felt that the State was not capable of reforming the church, even though this idea was the accepted mentality of his day.

In 1389, a meeting of bishops in Prague decided to stop Matt's influence at all costs. They ordered him to stop preaching on pain of death and forbade him to attend religious meetings outside his

²⁴ The word 'primitive' here is used in the sense of 'prime' or 'first', not in the idea of 'old-fashioned' as many use it today in the USA. At the council of Basil—which we will come to in a few pages—Palomar of Barcelona mocked primitive Christianity as a fellowship of the “stupid and the gloomy”. Is the book of Acts a fellowship of the “stupid and gloomy”?

²⁵ Latin for “church within a church”.

hometown. Five years later, suffering continual harassment, he died. But the seeds he had sown lived on.

Milic's New Jerusalem was forced to close—by people jealous of its success—but some of the city's more spiritual element had Bethlehem Chapel built in its place. This was a private chapel with seating for 3000, in which the Word of God would be expounded in the local dialect. As a sign of the times, side by side on its walls were paintings of the pope, resplendent on horseback, and of Jesus, cross-laden on foot.

In the coming days, this chapel would be a center-of-sorts for the preaching that would shake the people of Prague and Bohemia, with ripples touching every corner of Europe.

Roasted Goose

While all these rumblings jostled Bohemia, in England things were shaking a bit also. The Lollard²⁶ movement was taking off, and John Wycliffe was preaching “strange” things at Oxford. He was bold enough to say that the Scriptures took precedence over tradition, the church should not be a holder of property,²⁷ and that the doctrine of Peterine Supremacy²⁸ and the doctrine of transubstantiation²⁹ were a farce.

A young Praguite in the audience, Jerome, became enthused with his teaching and carried it back to his homeland. Preaching that the Roman Church had apostatized, he caught the attention of John Huss, theological doctor and confessor to the Queen of Bohemia.

Using local Bohemian, John began to preach some of the same things, introduced congregational singing, and denounced simony.

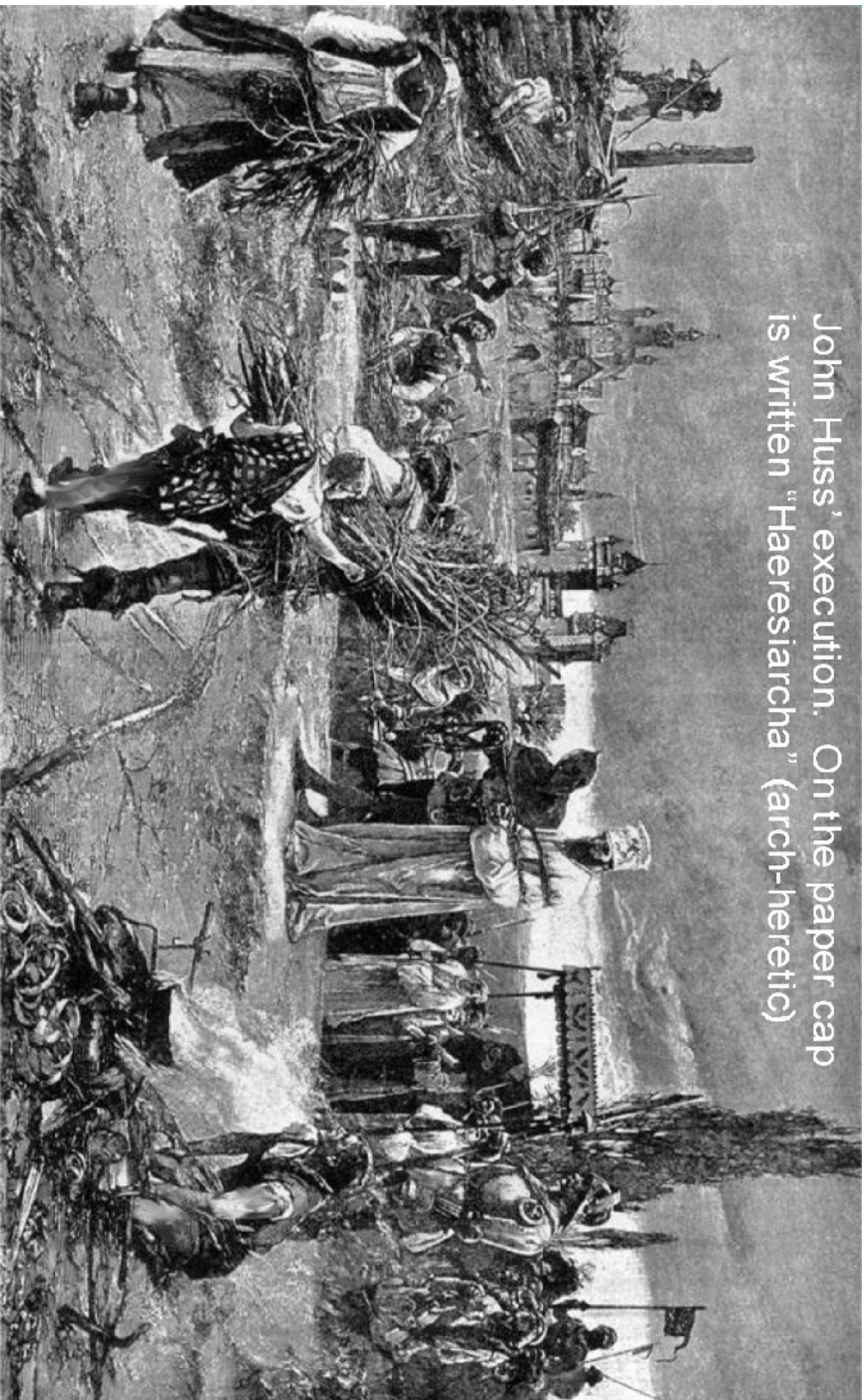
²⁶ From a Dutch word meaning “mumbler”, as mockery of their prayers. Our English “lullaby” is rooted in the same word. This movement deserves its own book, so I only briefly touch it here.

²⁷ That is, lands and estates other than perhaps chapels.

²⁸ This doctrine teaches that the Apostle Peter had supremacy over the other bishops. Whoever then took Peter's place became the chief bishop, or pope.

²⁹ A big word that means that upon the blessing of a priest, the Catholic wafer turned, quite literally, into the body of Christ.

John Huss' execution. On the paper cap
is written "Haeresiarcha" (arch-heretic)



When Pope John XXIII sent sellers of indulgences to Bohemia to support his war on Naples, John vehemently protested.³⁰

By the year 1411, John's teachings, which drew large numbers of hearers, were making enough waves to cause the Catholic Church to tell him to stop preaching. In reaction, some University students burned the papal bull. King Wencesles executed several of these rioters, and the pope put Prague under an interdict.³¹ A short while later, Huss was excommunicated and spent the next two years in exile in south Bohemia.

His exile was not wasted time. He wrote fifteen books and studied the Bohemian language. Without necessarily trying to do so, he set the standards of writing for this otherwise little-used tongue. As well, he preached to the poor farmers in the region, who soaked in his messages and admired him as a great man of God.

Then came the great council of the Catholic Church on Lake Constance in 1414.³² This was called to settle once for all the "great schism" caused by having three popes each claiming to be the legitimate one. As well, this reunion of Catholic leaders was to deal with the rising storm of "heresy" that was rumbling in Prague and Bohemia.

John Huss was summoned to appear before the council to defend his orthodoxy.

The Emperor Sigismund granted Huss a guarantee of safe conduct. Thinking it would be a great opportunity to expound the truths he had "discovered", John went. He tried to explain his views. Ears were closed. He was accused of espousing doctrines which he had never taught. His defense was useless, even though he had only tried to reform, and never agitate separation from, the Church. The pope declared that the church is not required to keep faith with heretics, and hence his guaranty of safe-conduct was worthless.

³⁰ Remember, this was 100 years before Martin Luther.

³¹ Basically an embargo that did not allow anyone to do "spiritual" business in Prague: no weddings, funerals, etc.

³² This lasted 3 ½ years.

The Council took matters in their hands—and out of the hands of the three popes. They charged John XXIII with some serious sins; he left town “in a huff”. Now, instead of the pope as final authority over Christendom, the Council considered itself as the chief earthly authority. In vain, they tried to persuade John Huss of this “truth”. One of the “doctors” told Huss:

Even though the council should tell you that you have but one eye, and you have two, you would be bound to assent to their statement.

John was of better character than that, and replied, “And I, while God spares my reason, would never allow such a thing, though the whole world were agreed upon it, because I could not say it without wounding my conscience.”

For his obstinacy and refusal to accept the Council's doctrines as truth, he was thrown into a dungeon and sentenced to be burned to death as an arch-heretic.

Shortly before the flames were lit, John told them, “Today you roast a live goose”—the name Huss meant goose in Bohemian—“but within 100 years there will arise a swan that you will not be able to catch nor harm.”³³ The flame was lit, and when it had done its duty, John's ashes were thrown into the nearby river. In the place of his execution, a dead mule was buried: supposedly to convince any passersby that all arch-heretics stink pretty bad after they die.

The day after his execution, the following was posted—by an anonymous person—on every chapel door in Constance:

The Holy Ghost, to the believers in Constance, greeting: Pay attention to your own business. As to us, being occupied elsewhere, we cannot remain any longer in the midst of you. Adieu.

Not too long after these events, Jerome of Prague met the same fate as the Goose.

³³ Historical evidence of this saying is scanty. Some feel this was a prophecy of Martin Luther, who came a century later. But as our story proceeds, we could well deduce that this was fulfilled right in Bohemia!



Tabor, base of the Taborites. Old fortifications can still be seen on the lower left of this photo.

The Hussites are Born

The news of Huss' execution stirred the Bohemian nation to its depths. He and Jerome were looked upon as national heroes and martyrs. The revolt which followed threatened the very existence of the papal rule in Bohemia. The populace of Prague stoned the houses of the priests unfriendly to the Huss; and the archbishop himself was attacked in his palace, and with difficulty eluded the popular rage by fleeing. The popular excitement ran so high that, during a Hussite procession, the crowd rushed into the council-house and threw out of the window seven of the councilors who had dared to insult the procession.

The Hussites, the name given to the adherents of the new body, soon divided into two organized parties: the Taborites rejected transubstantiation, the worship of saints, purgatory, prayers for the dead, indulgences and priestly confession, and renounced oaths, dances and other amusements. They admitted laymen to the office of preaching, and used the national tongue in all parts of the public service. Partially blind John Zizka, one of their first leaders, held the sword in the spirit of one of the Old Testament Judges. After



John Zizka was a brilliant general, one of the very few in history who never lost a battle. Maneuvering farm wagons mounted with fortifications and guns into strategic positions, he set the example for modern tanks and artillery. His reputation was that of daring and brilliancy, yet he was considered by some to be pious—he forced his soldiers to act mercifully and once even ordered his entire army pray to God for forgiveness of their sins when they disobeyed. He never seemed to learn though, that God's true righteousness can never be brought about by force of the sword.

his death, the stricter wing of the Taborites of which he directed received the name of The Orphans, owing to their almost fanatical following of him. One of his dying wishes was that his skin could be turned into drums so he could still lead his army on after his death.

The Calixtines,³⁴ or Utraquists,³⁵ agreed in demanding the distribution of the communion cup to the laity, but when it came down to it, they disagreed on how far the reform should go. The Prague Utraquists were not ready to go as far as the Taborites, some of

³⁴ Means “people of the chalice (cup)”.

³⁵ From the Latin phrase “*comunion sub Utraquist especie*” which means “communion under both kinds”. In the Roman Catholic Church, only priests are allowed to partake of the wine. Lay members receive bread only. Thus the communion cup became the symbol of the Hussite reformation.

whom entered chapels and smashed statues and destroyed the pictures of the “saints”. At Tabor, their center in south Bohemia, they set up stone tables and had mass communion services, in which up to 40,000 people at a time partook of the bread and wine.

Chiliasm ideas of a visible kingdom of God imminently to come had invaded their midst, as well as a vision to practice the Sermon on the Mount. But when the predicted date for Christ’s return to set up his Kingdom came and passed without any Jesus appearing, the chiliasm ideas began to fade away.

Emperor Martin V now summoned Europe to a crusade against Bohemia, offering the usual indulgences,³⁶ as Innocent III had done two centuries before when he summoned a crusade against the Albigensians in southern France. In obedience to the papal mandate, 150,000 men gathered from all parts of Europe and began marching towards Prague to destroy “the heretics”.

In spite of differences in how far to reform the church, practically all the “Hussites” were united in one thing: they did not want to be Catholics. A conference was called in Prague to determine how to handle the impending attack of the Catholic crusaders. Should they follow the teachings of Wycliffe and Huss, who in spite of some misgivings, had determined that “just war” was not sin for Christians? Or should they follow the non-resistant ideals—based on the sermon on the mount—that many of the south Bohemians had upheld for several years now?

So they gathered in Prague to make a decision. Time was short. The Crusaders were on their way from Germany.

“The time to wander with a pilgrim's staff is over,” one of them said. “Now we shall have to march, sword in hand.”

³⁶ Supposedly, one could have his sins forgiven by joining in a crusade to eliminate heretics.

Part II Birth

Then Came Peter...

As one-eyed, fiery John Zizka and Nicholas of Hussinec declared at Prague that the time had come for the faithful to take up arms in their own defense, Peter Chelcicky was present at the debate, and contended that for Christians, war was a crime. “What is war?” he asked. “It is a breach of the laws of God! All soldiers are violent men, murderers, a godless mob!”

In 1420, Peter had traveled to Prague and listened to these men defend their views in the Bethlehem Chapel. What they said did not convince him. “You will not bring the kingdom of heaven to earth,” he told them, “as long as the hell of hatred burns in your hearts.”

On his visit there, he met the Hussite theologian, Jacob of Stribro in a back room of the Bethlehem chapel. Their conversa-

Peter Chelcicky was one of the few South Bohemians who stuck to their earlier resolve to practice the Sermon on the Mount. His sword was a pen, which he used extensively in his later years, authoring over 50 books and tracts.

The name Chelcicky simply means “from Chelcice”, a small town in south Bohemia. The date of his birth and death are still unknown. He lived and died fighting for the kingdom of God, with his pen, voice, and example. He is considered to be one of the founding voices of the Unity of Brothers, even though he died before they ever became fully and officially organized.



tion, under Peter's direction, turned quickly to the Sermon on the Mount. They discussed what Jesus taught on wealth, on speaking the truth without swearing, and on returning good for evil.

"Our faith compels us to bind wounds," Peter explained, "not to make blood run." With sharp but honest words, he rebuked the Hussites for using worldly power. He told them how war comes from a desire to own things, and how Christ frees us from that desire.

Jacob did not accept Peter's rebuke. When Peter asked Jacob by what Biblical authority he could justify war, Jacob—like John Wycliffe and John Huss—defended the use of the sword, saying war is necessary and Christians must fight against Turks and infidels, "But with great love toward God and with nothing other in mind than that God would be glorified." For this reason, he explained, Christian soldiers must "avoid all brutality, excessive greediness, and other irregularities." In the end, Jacob had to admit that in justifying war "only the saints of old³⁷ say so."

Peter had no time for such talk. "How your master Jacob would rage against someone for eating a blood sausage on Friday," he wrote to the archbishop-elect Rokycana in a letter soon afterward, "yet if he sheds his brother's blood on the scaffold or on the field of battle you praise him; this man whose own conscience has been stolen from him by those 'saints of old'." Pointing to more inconsistencies he continued:

You would not allow an individual to chase others and kill them. But if a nobleman gathers a great army of peasants and makes of them warriors who can kill others with the power of an army, you do not consider them murderers. Neither is it held against their conscience, but they boast and think of themselves as heroes for murdering the godless! This is the poison poured out among Christians by learned men who do not follow the meek Lord Jesus, but the counsel of the Great Whore of Babylon. And for this reason our land is filled with abominations and blood!

³⁷ Old Testament saints.

I do not want to make light of the preaching and good works done by men like John Huss, Matthias, and Jacob, in the name of God. But I say that they too have drunk the wine of the Great Whore, with which she has besotted all nations and people... They have written things that contradict God's laws, especially where Master Huss has written about bearing the sword, swearing oaths, and venerating images. Therefore I cannot condone what they have passed on of an offensive nature to the scandalizing of many...

Peter could speak with a certain authority, as he had enlisted, we are told, in the army in his younger days. He there discovered that a soldier's life was wicked. He then thought of entering a monastery, but was shocked by what he heard of the immoralities committed within those walls. Finally, he returned to his little property at Chelcice in south Bohemia, and picked up his pen to spend his time in writing pamphlets about the troubles of his country. He gained a smattering of education in Prague. He had studied the writings of Wycliffe and of Huss, and often appealed to Wycliffe in his works. He could quote, when he liked, from the early church writings. He had a good working knowledge of the Bible; and, above all, he had the teaching of Christ and the Apostles engraved upon his conscience and his heart.

As he was not a priest, he could afford to be independent; as he knew but little Latin, he wrote in Bohemian; and thus, like Stitny and Huss before him, he appealed to the people in a language they could all understand. Of all the leaders of men in Bohemia, this Peter was the most original and daring. As he pondered on the woes of his native land, he came to the firm but sad conclusion that the whole system of religion mixed with politics was rotten to the core.

Peter and War...

As we shall see in the following pages, Peter Chelcicky was a writer. His first tract was titled, *On Spiritual Warfare*,³⁸ and dealt

³⁸ This has just been translated to English in the last year or so.

with the Christian's use of arms. He had been in fellowship with the Taborites as long as they had taught non-resistance. But after the council at Prague, he drew back. He wrote:

Our brethren [who once followed the Scriptural injunction against the use of violence] to our great shame and sorrow, have been cleverly seduced by Satan. They have turned from Scriptures in strange and unheard-of imaginings and doings.

At the same time, he reproved the chiliasts³⁹ who announced a certain day⁴⁰ for the coming judgment. The devil, Peter wrote, had appeared in the trappings of “the prophets of the Old Testament.”

Even after the prophesied date came and went without anything unusual happening, a few ecstasies still held to a physical millennial deliverance. Martin Husska was one of these men, a gifted orator with the charisma to attract a following. In his zeal to show his disbelief in transubstantiation, he was known to literally trample upon consecrated Catholic communion “hosts”. Peter wrote of him:

Martin was not humble and willing to suffer for Christ... He confessed to us his belief that there will be a new Kingdom of Saints established on earth, and that the good will no longer suffer, and [he said] that... ‘if Christians were always to have to suffer [on this earth], I would not want to be a servant of God’.

Some of Martin's like-minded friends took their liberty and “ran with it”. Thinking they were above sinning while in the heavenly state of communion services, they reportedly turned their love feasts into the wrong type of “love”.⁴¹ Deciding that feudalism was evil, they destroyed all class levels, everyone putting his earn-

³⁹ “Chiliast” has to do with a belief in a visible political reign of Christ, as the Greek word for “1000” is rooted in “chili”.

⁴⁰ Between February 10 and 14 of 1420.

⁴¹ I write these words with a bit of caution: the Adamites were now “heretics” in the eyes of the Hussites and the accusations against them may have been exaggerated, as is usually the case in allegations against any “heretic” by any other religious group.

ings into a pot and practicing a form of community of goods. As well, they refused to pay taxes, saying that lords and priests needed to be severely punished for their sins. Martin recanted of his beliefs for a while, but later picked up his ideas again. The Hussite general Zizca finally ordered his execution. Some time later Zizca invaded the Adamites’—so called from their dressing like Adam before the fall—home base and basically annihilated them.

Peter lived in the midst of all these doings. He strongly disagreed with the Adamites, but to punish them by death as the Hussites had done was not according to the gospel in his eyes. It is not that Peter had no wrongs that he could have sought revenge for: While in Prague debating with the Hussites about war, Catholics troops had arrested the leader of his church and burned him for heresy.

The following are more quotes from his writings against the use of violence, even to “enlarge the kingdom of God”:

Where has God recalled His commands, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ ‘Thou shalt not take thy neighbor’s goods’? If God has not repealed these commands, they ought still to be obeyed today in Prague and Tabor. I have learned from Christ, and by Christ I stand; and if the Apostle Peter himself were to come down from Heaven and begin to advocate the sword and to gather together an army in order to defend the truth, even then I would not believe him.

It is impossible, as some doctors have argued, to kill with love in one’s heart.

And all these call themselves Christians, and unitedly call upon God as ‘Our Father who art in Heaven’. All come out on the Lord’s side and demonstrate their loyalty to God by drenching the earth with the blood of other children of God. And they continually pray in unison: ‘Forgive us as we forgive one another’. Yet each one tries to collect as large a company of warriors as possible, and never thinks of forgiving even those

nearest to him. Therefore their prayers are the greatest blasphemy...

The executioner who kills is as much a wrong-doer as the criminal who is killed.

If he [Christ] had wanted people to cut each other up, to hang, drown, and burn each other, and otherwise pour out human blood for his Law, then that Old Law could also have stood unchanged, with the same bloody deeds as before.

Cruel punishments...torture, blinding, cutting-off of hands, confiscation of estates, deportation from towns [are unchristian].

No one may stray from the way of Christ and follow the emperor with his sword, for this way is not changed just because Caesar has become a 'Christian'.

[Even though] rulers sin by acting unjustly, [servants] also commit a sin in seeking vengeance on such lords.

In time of war [the nobility] make warriors of tanners and shoemakers and weavers, of anyone able to wield a club...for neither the king nor the princes nor the nobles nor the lesser gentry do the fighting themselves, but compel their peasants to do it for them.

The saints should be obedient to the higher powers, but with circumspection, that is to say, in those things... which are not contrary to God. They should, therefore, render the dues and services which rulers require of their subjects...[But] a man opposing the state in...perverse wickedness, commits no sin nor is he in fear of damnation, since we can find in the Scriptures similar examples among righteous men.

[The primitive Christians were] humble and lowly people, who, when kings and princes came against them, prayed to God, dispensing with shield and weapons.

Not limiting his non-resistance to military questions, Peter wrote:

Among Christians, secular courts are a disgrace and a sin.

It would be shameful to fight and quarrel over material justice, over worldly goods.

For God did not, through his apostles, ordain a king for the Holy Church, to bear her tribulations on his sword, to fight for her against her enemies, and through force to make that Church serve him. God never set up [among the believers] magistrates or councilmen, in order that the holy church should appear before them suing about the goods of this world, nor did he appoint policemen and executioners so that its members might hang one another or torture each other on the rack on account of temporal things. Such conduct should be left to the pagan and worldly... For the holy church is spiritual and needs only spiritual officials for its edification.

According to the faith, [Christians] must be more eager to be put to the sword than to commit such actions contrary to God's commandment.

If anyone, a Jew or a heretic or an enemy, is ever in need, then according to the principles of love it is his duty to see that he does not die from hunger or cold or any other calamity.

For disputes among brethren, "the least of the brethren" were to be called as judges in the situation at hand. If the one found to be the offender did not repent, he was to be expelled from the brotherhood. But, Peter wrote, "No harm should be done him, such as killing him in his sins, but let him be cast out, thereby preserving our own purity."

The Fruits of Resistance

Time passed since Peter had written his first tract. The Catholic forces attacked Bohemia five times. Five times they were driven back by Zizca's "Warriors of God". Heady from victory, these poorly armed peasants—"the terror of Europe"—even took the offensive to make invasions into Germany and other surrounding areas. But when they were not fighting the Catholics, they took to bickering and fighting among themselves. Eventually, the Prague Utraquists were, after ferocious battles,⁴² able to wipe out the Taborite's base.

Peter looked on with sadness and horror as his beloved Bohemia went up in smoke. He wrote:

For the sake of the future, we should not gloss over those things which we have now been suffering, and been eyewitnesses of, for over fifteen years⁴³...when for reasons of faith one side has risen up against the other in its wrath and savageness... What this side has proclaimed as truth, the other has condemned as error... The fire they have lit they have been unable to quench. Everywhere murder, rapine, and want have flourished and multitudes have perished... Every town in the land has girded itself to battle, has been enclosed with walls and surrounded with moats... Whoever would enter or leave the town is imprisoned and robbed and killed... On every side there is only want and fear, in the home and in the fields and in the forest and on the mountains. Nowhere may one find rest and peace. The laboring people is stripped of everything, downtrodden, oppressed, beaten, robbed, so that many are driven to want and hunger to leave their land. Some even must pay their dues to castle or town thrice over, even four times, now to one side, now to the other. For otherwise they would be driven from house and fields. And what is not taken from them by the

⁴² One of which left, it is said, 22,000 victims.

⁴³ Referring, most likely, to the so-called Hussite Wars (c.1420-1434).

castle in dues is eaten up by the armies...that prey upon the land.

A contemporary Utraquist, John of Pribram, gave a similar report:

Those peasants who used quietly to pay one year's rent now have to pay such rents five or six times over, as well as other dues. Nor can they be left alone either at home or in the forests or in holes in the earth. Yea! Everything is plundered and ransacked and driven away.

“The time to wander with a pilgrim's staff is over,” one of them had said. “Now we shall have to march, sword in hand.”

Many years after marching, sword in hand, had left them in such a position that they could not even peacefully wander with a staff... And this in spite of the fact that the Catholics, the original enemy, had been thoroughly routed!

Peter and Castes

Strange hybrids result when men begin to try and accommodate Christianity to the surrounding culture.⁴⁴ In the days before Rome was “Christianized”, there was the idea that society was to be divided into three tiers: secular rulers, spiritual rulers, and workers. The first two were to live off the labors of the working poor. The ruling positions were not doled out according to ability, but rather one was born—or bought or bribed his way—into the “better” positions. The whole idea was nothing less than a European caste system.

⁴⁴ Instead of conforming the culture to Christ... The official word for this is syncretism, “syn” meaning “same”, and “cret” meaning “Crete”. This meant, originally, a union with the Cretians. For all the failures of syncretism we have before us in the history of the church, modern missiology is still full of it. Missionaries are told left and right that they must learn the culture of the people they are going to minister to, so they can adapt Christ's teachings to it with the least pain as possible for the converts. The result is a cross-less “Christianity”.

When the Catholic Church “Christianized” Rome, it “Christianized” the above doctrine, calling it the Corpus Cristianum. The congregation at Rome backed up its claim of supreme spiritual oversight by a fraudulent document called the Donation of Constantine. This “donation” was none other than Constantine, Roman Emperor, giving the Bishop of Rome spiritual oversight over his dominion.⁴⁵

“Since that time,” said Peter, “these two powers, Imperial and Papal, have clung together. They have turned everything to account in Church and in Christendom for their own impious purposes. Theologians, professors, and priests are the satraps of the Emperor. They ask the Emperor to protect them, so that they may sleep as long as possible, and they create war so that they may have everything under their thumb.”

To the spiritual leaders, Peter had some advice. In today’s English he might have said, “Get a job!” But I shall let him speak for himself in the following selected quotes:

They should set a good example of industry, should do nothing to justify the taunt that they had chosen their calling from material considerations; although worthy preachers should not be disallowed from receiving those things necessary.

All are his pilgrim people where there is industriousness, forbearance of pain, affliction, humiliation, and poverty even unto the cross.

Indeed, I trust God that till my dying day I shall never assent to this doctrine concerning Christ’s Body, which holds it right that these two arrogant estates [secular and spiritual leaders] should exempt themselves [from hard work] and lay the whole burden on the common folk; should as it were ‘ride upon them’, and consider themselves superior within Christ’s body to the common man on whom they ride...not as one member to

⁴⁵ Even the Catholic Church now recognizes this document as an 8th-century forgery.

another, but as beasts whom it is of little account to work to death.

To whom the whore who sits on the Roman throne has given birth, freely and without pain, sitting on silken cushions, and whose lives she has established in soft effeminacy... And they do all this with the blood of the common working people, from whom they get these things with the lies they think up—not as though from limbs of one body, but as though from contemptible dogs.

[They are] ‘honorable’ men, who sit in great houses, these purple men, with their beautiful mantles, their high caps, their fat stomachs. As for love of pleasure, immorality, laziness, greediness, uncharitableness and cruelty—as for these things, the priests do not hold them as sins when committed by princes, nobles and rich commoners. They do not tell them plainly, ‘You will go to hell if you live on the fat of the poor, and live a bestial life,’ although they know that the rich are condemned to eternal death by such behavior. Oh, no! They prefer to give them a grand funeral. A crowd of priests, clergy, and other folk make a long procession. The bells are rung. There are masses, singings, candles and offerings. The virtues of the dead man are proclaimed from the pulpit. They enter his soul in the books of their cloisters and churches to be continually prayed for, and if what they say be true, that soul cannot possibly perish, for he has been so kind to the Church, and must, indeed, be well cared for.

[The supposedly poor Friars] pretend to follow Christ, and have plenty to eat every day. They have fish, spices, brawn, herrings, figs, almonds, Greek wine and other luxuries. They generally drink good wine and rich beer in large quantities, and so they go to sleep. When they cannot get luxuries, they fill themselves with vulgar puddings till they nearly burst. And this is

the way the priests “fast”. Many citizens would readily welcome this kind of “poverty”.

They prepare Him as a sweet sauce for the world, so that the world may not have to shape its course after Him and His heavy Cross, but that they may conform to the world; and they make Him softer than oil, so that every wound may be soothed, and the violent, thieves, murderers and adulterers may have an easy entrance into heaven.⁴⁶



Albertus Magnus, who upheld war while sitting snugly in a safe fortress. Peter Chelcicky felt this was hypocrisy. If Albertus wanted war, he should have been the first to grab the sword.

In a special denunciation, Peter picked out Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), a Benedictine monk who thoroughly supported war for Christians. The idea of a fat scholar, sitting snugly in a castle and stirring up the war spirit among believers, was more than Peter could handle. He wrote:

It seemed to Albert that it would be better to favor the bliss of a gluttonous and debauched and fat-thickened life, a life with a pot belly and reddened cheeks,⁴⁷ a worry-free life sitting in a fortress under the protection of the sword, without fear of adversity, consigning all opposition unto the sword, enjoying God’s holy orders in security, proclaiming God’s praise and honor.

To the secular leaders of the State, Peter had the following reproof:

⁴⁶ 600 years later and Jesus is now “sweeter” than ever. Even sodomites may now slide gracefully into the Church, sugar-coated with the “imputed righteousness” of this sweet Jesus!

⁴⁷ These words may seem unusually harsh to our North American “Christianity”, where the sin of gluttony runs unbounded and nobody, to speak of, raises his voice. Have you ever heard of a church disciplining someone for gluttony here in the USA? Do we not have any problems with this sin? Or do we overlook it? Somehow, about 20% of American children are now considered to be “obese” by the federal government, yet we never discipline obesity in our churches.

If your forefathers bought human beings together with their hereditary rights to property,⁴⁸ then they bought something that was not theirs to buy and sell.

[The feudal lord is a sluggard who] can sit in the cool shade and ridicule the ‘louts’ and ‘boors’ roasting in the heat, or drive them out into the bitter cold in their smocks to trap hares, and himself sit in the warm indoors.

Since the nobility had usually acquired their position through violence or money, Peter had no confidence in their supposed superiority. He wrote:

If they now had no money in addition to their birth, hunger would force them to drop their coat-of-arms and take to the plow. Wealth alone, therefore, sustains the honor of their nobility and the fame of their birth... Lacking money, they would soon sink back to the level of the peasantry and, as they scorn work, they would often go hungry. If [the labor of their serfs] disappeared, their noble birth would decay miserably.

“Civil authorities,” Peter wrote, “cannot direct the life of obedience to God, because they rely on cruel compulsion.” For this he gave an example:

Not all tools can be used for every trade, and every trade has tools of its own. A blacksmith cannot hold a horseshoe in the fire with a spindle and a woman cannot spin with a blacksmith’s tongs. Therefore, just as tongs pertain to the blacksmith and a spindle to the wo-

⁴⁸ One negative aspect of the passing away of serfdom is that we now have a hard time grasping the meaning of the word “lord”. In those days, the nobility either inherited or bought property. Those living on the land were part of the property and now belonged to the lord. In some places, the peasantry had the option of moving away if they did not like the lord. In others, they had to “grin and bear it.” All said and done, one could not live on a piece of land without asking permission and paying rents or other dues. This included, in most occasions, the right of the lord to send the serfs off to fight his battles. Is Jesus your Lord?

man, civil authority is suitable for some things and religious authority for others.

The crooked members that hold the sword oppress the other, lesser members, afflicting them, beating them, putting them into prison, weighing them down with a forced labor, rents, and other contrivances, so they go wan and pale... For the common, scorned people are like dogs in the eyes of the powerful, who can hardly even think up new ways of insulting them. Some say 'peasant blister'... some say 'screech owl', some say 'lout'. Insult is more abundant than honor from the more 'honorable' members.

Ever since Augustine in his famous treatise *The City of God* had affirmed the notion, using Romans 13 as a basis, the idea of three God-ordained classes of society had been firmly rooted within Christendom. Peter called such Scriptural manipulating, "milking the Scriptures." To him, the term "State Church" was a total contradiction of terms.

Kings and Princes invade the church as wolves among a flock of sheep.

These two classes, the temporal order of force and Christ's way of love, are far removed from each other...an action done because of compulsion of authority is quite different from one done through love and from the good will arising out of words of truth. The civil authority is as far as removed from Christ's truth inscribed in His gospel, as is Christian faith from the necessity of using such authority. Those in power are not led by faith nor does faith need them... Faith supported solely by spiritual power stands firm without the power of [carnal] authority, which only brings fear and can only attain what it wishes under threat of compulsion.

[Power can only be wielded] by the worst of men who are without any faith or virtue, since it is by means of

terrible punishments that the state compels evildoers to some measure of justice in outward matters.

[Civil] authority cannot exist without cruelty. If it ceases to be cruel, it will at once perish of itself, since none will fear it...Therefore, [civil] authority is far removed from love.

Peter Chelcicky has been called an anarchist for perpetuating the idea of a breakdown of the social classes. But he was not a revolutionary in the physical sense of the word—even though Karl Kautsky opinionated that “Chelcicky was a communist in the original Christian sense.”⁴⁹ Peter acknowledged the Christian’s duty to submit to the civil authorities, but only so far as not to violate the Word of God. While Peter’s teaching on the elimination of social classes was similar to that of modern-day “Liberation Theology”,⁵⁰ he had no desire to make it happen by force of the sword or by voting. The only revolution that Peter preached was the coming of the Kingdom of God into the hearts and minds of those who expressly permitted Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, to be their only Lord and Saviour.

Peter and Separation from the World

Peter was consistent in not using political “ropes” to pull his point of view. He taught that the State had a job to do, and that the Church should let them alone to do it. If the Church had a job to do, then it should not turn to the State. But, not only were Christians to abstain from being magistrates and knights, they were to not to sue using secular courts. Furthermore, since Jesus forbade the swearing of oaths, many professions were not compatible to walk-

⁴⁹ Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), born in Prague, was the man who molded “orthodox” socialist/communist thought after the death of Engels. He holds Peter up as a medieval Marxist-of-sorts, although he is honest enough to admit that Peter Chelcicky’s and Karl Marx’s *modus operandi* were quite distinct one from the other.

⁵⁰ “Liberation Theology” is a somewhat broad term which basically teaches that the calling of the church is to “liberate” the poor from poverty and the politically oppressed from abusive governments. This teaching is somewhat strong in parts of Latin America, where poverty and political corruption run rampant.

ing with Christ, as an oath was required in many business professions. Beyond that, Peter even had a great suspicion of any buying and reselling to make a living: it smelled too much like trying to live off of others without honest laboring; and besides, there was usually a lot of price bickering in the markets.⁵¹ In fact, city life in itself was deemed incompatible with following Jesus, as most people who relocated themselves within city walls did so for material or political advancement. In the cities, Peter wrote, “the fullness of authority lies in the accumulation of wealth and vast gatherings of armed men, castles, and walled towns, while the fullness and completion of faith lies in God's wisdom and the strength of the Holy Spirit.”

Therefore true Christians must never, if possible, live in a town at all. If Christians, said Peter, lived in a town, and paid the usual rates and taxes,⁵² they were simply helping to support a system which existed for the protection of “robbers”. He regarded towns as the abodes of vice, and the citizens thereof as dishonest and unprincipled. The first town, he said, was built by the murderer, Cain. He first murdered his brother Abel; he then gathered his followers together; he then built a city, surrounded by walls; and thus, by robbery and violence, he became a well-to-do man. And modern towns, said Peter, were not a lick better.

At that time, the citizens of some towns in Bohemia enjoyed certain special rights and privileges; and this, to Peter, seemed grossly unfair. He condemned those citizens as thieves. “They are,” he said, “the strength of Anti-Christ; they are adversaries to Christ; they are an evil rabble; they are bold in wickedness; and though they pretend to follow the truth, they will sit at tables with wicked people and knavish followers of Judas.” For true Christians, therefore, there was only one course open: Instead of living in godless towns, they should try to settle in country places, earn their living as farmers or gardeners, and so keep as clear of the State as possible. They must never try to make big profits in business. If

⁵¹ The early Anabaptists (at least some of them), 100 years after Chelcicky, also forbade the making of a living by buying and reselling.

⁵² To live in a walled city cost more than to live on an unprotected rural property.

they did, they were simply robbing and cheating their neighbors.⁵³ They should strive to cut off all unnecessary connection with that unchristian institution called the State, which thrives on force and wealth.

Whatever his occupation, the Christian must not accumulate wealth, declared Peter. Not that he should be like the mendicant friars, for whom he had little use. Honest labor, without strivings for selfish gain, was the goal. All excess should be used to bless others.

I shall again let Peter speak for himself as to his understanding of the relationship between the Christian and mammon:

If a man has not been deceived by greed, why should he need property or take any heed of worldly things?

Whoever is not of God cannot truly enjoy or hold anything belonging to God, except as a man of violence unlawfully enjoys and holds what is not his own.

It is difficult to ‘buy and resell’ anything without sin, on account of excessive greed.

Every kind of trade and profit-making occupation connected with the town should be avoided in order not to harm one’s soul.

The true word of God says, “The earth and everything in it is the Lord’s, its mountains, its valleys, and its

⁵³ The old European idea of “just price” seems to have faded into oblivion. “Just price” was the concept of selling an article at a fixed price, with a fixed level of gain per item (say for example, \$.10 per bushel of wheat) . One was not allowed—buyer or seller—to “bicker” with the price to make a better deal for himself, nor to take advantage of another’s ignorance of the price. If a natural disaster occurred or something else affected the supply, one was not allowed to raise his price so as to “take advantage of the situation.” There were actually laws that forbade such activities, and even here in the USA. In the 1600’s, there is record of the conviction of a rich merchant who was making too much profit from his merchandise. This principle is in direct opposition to those who buy a train-car load of OSB, then wait for a hurricane to hit Florida so they can make \$10/sheet in the resulting shortage of building materials.

fields.” God is the only rightful ruler of the earth. . . . Whoever does not belong to God has no right to possess or hold anything that belongs to him. If anyone claims ownership of earthly goods, he does so because he has taken possession of them illegally and through violence.

In disobedience to God’s law, our fathers bought and established illegal claims for us...⁵⁴ And this is what we have inherited from them: poverty, shame, death, and in the end, hell.

If you who are big, fat, and self-satisfied, say, “Our fathers bought these people and these manors for our inheritance,” then, indeed they engaged in evil business and made an expensive bargain! For who has the right to buy people, to enslave them, and to treat them with indignities as if they were cattle... You prefer dogs to people, whom you curse, despise, and beat—from whom you extort taxes and for whom you forge fetters—while you say to your dogs, “Here pup, come lie on this pillow!”

Jesus is now very poor. He does not have multitudes following him. The few who stick with him are the outcast and unlearned, for the doctors of this age are too rich and too famous. They have engendered many servants of God with their swords—that is why all the world looks up to them.

When a people wise in this world see Christ—abandoned, dressed in the garb of poverty, and surrounded by danger—they turn away from him and follow after wealthy and popular men who serve God with great learning in cathedrals, in armies, with civil authority, with thumbscrews, city-halls, pillories and gallows.

⁵⁴ Referring, most likely, to those who bought or inherited properties that included the serfs living on that property.



Peter Chelcicky talking with the Prague leaders.

The whole wise world runs after them, but only “fools” dare follow Christ and suffer the ridicule of all.

Oh how small and barren is the dominion of earthly kings compared with the dominion of Christ! Earthly rulers heap burdens and suffering on their subjects instead of freedom and consolation. By way of contrast, the kingdom of Christ is so powerful and perfect that if the whole world accepted him, it would have peace and all things would work together for good. There would be no need of temporal rulers anymore, for all would live by grace and truth.

Perhaps the word “simplicity” would sum up Peter’s ideal; living for God without ensnaring oneself in the affairs of this life. Peter himself was a small farmer, even though with his abilities he could have probably gained a position of leadership in the Hussite movement. So relatively unknown he was, that neither the date of his birth nor that of his death is certain. He must have been born into a relatively well-to-do family, as he somehow had learned to read and write, and, in his earlier days, had enough money to buy books. But nobody really knows: Peter was not about to use his moderate means to advance himself. To do so would have made him a foremost hypocrite!

Then there were “lovely and delightful things, colors, fine costumes, beautiful dresses, perfumes, tasty dishes, unusual objects, soft raiment, fine rooms, physical beauty in man or woman.” Peter’s discernment of these? Hindrances to following “the narrow way” and snares set by the devil for the unwary.

“[Certain] men,” said he, “wear capes reaching down to the ground,⁵⁵ and their long hair falls down to their shoulders; and the women wear so many petticoats that they can hardly drag themselves along, and strut about like the Pope’s courtesans, to the surprise and disgust of the whole world.” The brethren who gathered with him at Chelcice wore simple gray robes with a cord tied around the waist. These brethren were Christ’s flock, “who, hearing His voice and believing in Him, are ready to follow in His footsteps, turning aside from the world for His sake and placing their hopes for their own welfare in Him alone.”

Time and again Peter would warn souls about the dangers of living to gratify the five senses.⁵⁶

Those who live for the external physical senses and have abandoned the heart⁵⁷ are not able to perceive the inner and spiritual things, nor be participants in them.

⁵⁵ Obviously referring to capes worn merely for adornment. Capes, worn by men as a raincoat, normally only reached to the midriff.

⁵⁶ He was not alone in this. The Taborites and the Utraquists also spoke openly and boldly against these forms of worldliness. Researching the Hussite reformation, one sees the word “puritanical—used by modern historians—more than once!

Whoever can attain and learn from Jesus to recognize what the inner spiritual life is, by which man comes to understand the discipleship of an inward faith, can reach the love of God, not letting his thoughts spill out into many things and not leading the heart into lethargy so that it becomes accustomed to it and, like a vagabond, wants to be home only as a guest and to wander out upon the highway through the gate of the physical senses; wanting to see, observe and question everything wherever something new occurs, wanting to give shelter to everything, no matter where it might come from, chattering needlessly about everything and wanting out of habit to be a guest anywhere—such is the physical life. But to have control over these things and to be lord over the senses and the heart protects one against such diversions; this is to be alive, according to the spirit of faith.⁵⁸

Peter, The Bible, and Faith

“Is the law of God sufficient, without worldly laws, to guide and direct us in the path of the true Christian religion? With trembling, I answer, it is. It was sufficient for Christ Himself, and it was sufficient for His disciples.” As is easy to see in these words, Peter was “a man of The Book”. He also wrote:

Every doctrine needs to be tested by Christ’s words and life, to see if it accords with His example and teachings.

The law [Christ’s] is no less sufficient today than it was from the beginning.

⁵⁷ To understand him, picture the body as a circle. Inside that circle is another one, called the inner man. In which circle do you spend most of your time living: in the outer (seeking bodily sensations), or the inner one (seeking to refine character traits such as gentleness, kindness, humility, etc.)?

⁵⁸ I suggest you reread this last paragraph slowly. It is a meaty piece, worthy of a good chew.

I acknowledge all the holy doctors, those of today too, so far as they can point out to me through their learning the path of true understanding in those matters which God has shown me in His law...and I follow them thankfully and regard them as right when they give real understanding and enlightenment here or proclaim faithfully some hidden truth.⁵⁹

Whoever is not sincerely brought to the Christian faith through the preaching of the gospel, will never be brought by force, just as no one will ever learn the Czech language properly by means of the German. [Elsewhere he says:] [Using] the sword of the temporal power on drunkards and thieves and other sinners, wishing by this sword to conceive Christ's spirit [is like] a company of priests gathered around an old woman demanding that she should give birth.

That person lives by faith who makes his life agree with the faith and conducts it in obedience to God in accordance with an understanding of the meaning of the faith of Christ...⁶⁰

True God and true man, perfect and complete, Christ taught us masterfully how to please God in everything. Not only did he give us a perfect example, he also makes it possible for us to follow it. We only sin when we go after the things Christ condemned, or when we turn our backs on His way of life. His whole life on earth was an example and a lesson for us.

And the law of God is one and forms a unity of such goodness and loving-kindness that it can receive the greatest multitude of men, so that all could become one. If only the world would have faith in the law of God and obey it, all could be one in Christ, for this law

⁵⁹ And this is the way we need to look at Peter, today: "Follow me as I follow Christ..."

⁶⁰ Compare this definition of "saving faith" with the modern "Evangelical" one!

leads men so that each takes his place in parity with his brother, loves the other as himself, bears his brother's burden, and does to all others as he would wish for himself. Hence, there can be no better word for mankind as it journeys along its way in this worldly pilgrimage, for this word will lead men into the truest life and make them most pleasing to God and a benefit to each other, to that each one will become a second self to his brother.

The Net of True Faith

Peter wrote like a common man. Largely self-taught, his spelling was not always correct, and when he used the word *kopyto* (“hoof” in Bohemian) instead of *kapitola* (chapter) his enemies did not lose their chance. “Doctor Kopytarum” (Doctor Hoof) they called him, and made fun of his largest and most significant work, *The Net of True Faith*⁶¹ he wrote between 1440 and 1443. This was perhaps a culmination of his exposure of ‘Antichrist’ and the resulting chaos that ensued following the wedding between the church and the state.

Using the allegory of Christ's net [true faith] thrown into the world (Luke 5:4-11), it gathered, he says, all kinds of fishes. The end of the world was to be a judgment, in which the good ones and the bad would be separated. But with the coming of Constantine—who should have been made to renounce his position when he became a “Christian”—into the church, two great whales entered the net, as well as other great fishes. These great animals thrashed and banged around until the net was all broken up and had great holes in it.

“Through His disciples,” said Peter, “Christ caught the world in the net of true faith, but the bigger fishes, breaking the net, escaped. Then others followed through these same holes made by the big fishes, and the net was left almost empty.” The meaning was clear to all. The two whales who broke it were the Emperor

⁶¹ Most times you will see this work titled as only *The Net of Faith*. But I have noticed that those writers who know Czech well often insert “true” into the title.

and the pope; the big fishes were the mighty “learned persons, heretics and offenders”; and the little fishes were the true followers of Christ.

“Since that time,” Peter wrote, “all live in hypocrisy, from the least to the greatest, figuring out how to be Christian while doing everything their flesh desires. Everyone seeks the honor of the world and flatters it with pleasant talk. Everyone wants peace with the world to avoid suffering its persecution in any way—so to compare today’s Christianity with that of the early church is like comparing night to day.”

The pope abandoned apostolic poverty and tried to rule in pagan fashion both believers and the world. Only he could validate the ministry of other priests, the pope claimed. He took to himself divine prerogatives, i.e., the forgiveness of sins, and he multiplied the number of laws that were contrary to God's law. Likewise, the emperor was guilty of infiltrating the net with paganism and pagan rulership. Civil authority operated by coercion, which is contrary to the love of Christ. A true Christian cannot be civil ruler over either true fellow Christians or the strayed, disobedient ones, because coercion and brotherly equality and love are incompatible. War and bloodshed are not Christ's way. Hence the coercive method of civil authority and the persuasive method of Christ must be kept distinct.

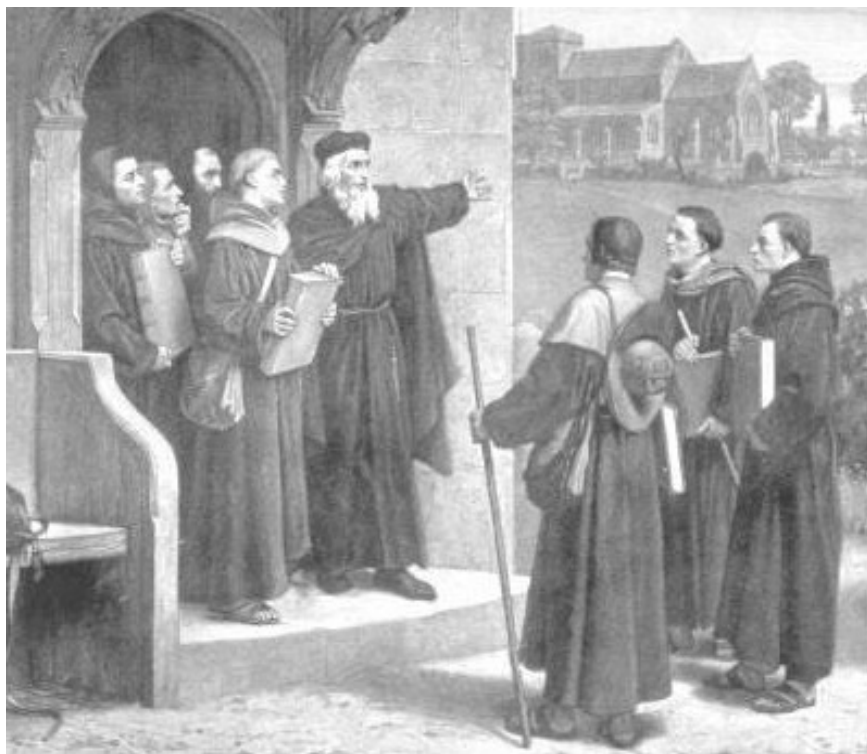
In an exposé of his understanding of salvation, Peter wrote:

God has borne witness that He Himself remits sins and forgives the world, possessing in Himself the unique right of forgiving sins, because He is Himself at once God and man. And on this account He died as a man for sins and gave Himself to God on the cross as an offering for sins. Thus God obtained by Him and His pains the forgiveness of the sins of the world. So He alone has the power and the right to forgive men their sins. Therefore, the great priest [the pope], in utmost pomp with which he raises himself above all that is called God, as a robber has laid hands on these rights of Christ. He has instituted the pilgrimage to Rome

through which sins are to be cleansed away. Therefore, drunken crowds run together from all lands, and he, the father of all evil, distributes his blessing from a high place to the crowds that they may have the forgiveness of all sins and deliverance from all judgment. He saves from hell and purgatory, and there is no reason why anyone should go there. Also, he sends into all lands tickets, for money, which ensure deliverance from all sins and pains; they do not even need to take the trouble to come to him, they have only to send the money and all is forgiven them. What belongs to the Lord alone, this official has taken to himself, and he draws the praise which belongs to his Lord, and becomes rich through the sale of these things. What is left for Christ to do for us when this official frees us from all sins and judgment and can make us just and holy? It is only our sins that stand in the way of our salvation. If the great priest remits all these, what shall the poor Lord Jesus do? Why does the world neglect Him so and does not seek salvation from Him? Simply on this account: the great priest overshadows Him with his majesty and makes Him darkness in the world, while he, the great priest, has a great name in the world and unexampled renown. So that the Lord Jesus, already crucified, is held up to the world's laughter, and only the great priest is talked about, and the world seeks and finds salvation in him.⁶²

So wrote Peter. Fifty-some works by his pen are extant, although only a small fragment is available to those unfamiliar with his beloved Bohemian. If he had no other gift, he was a writer. Even today, his works are valued by secularists for their peculiar style and witty comparisons. He was also a leader, after the death of Vojtech, of the little band of brothers that gathered in Chelcice. There is evidence that he may have ministered in other nearby

⁶² Is it any wonder then, how Peter so easily called the pope "Antichrist"? While I do not personally think the pope is *the* anti-christ, he certainly fits the bill to be *an* anti-christ.



John Wycliffe, giving Bibles out to itinerant Lollard preachers. Lollardy had a definite impact upon the Bohemian revival. Peter Payne, "The Wandering Lollard", spent many years in Bohemia.

brotherhoods of same precious faith. But other details about his personal life are non-existent, or yet to be dug out of some hidden manuscript. He lived, he wrote, he died.

Yet he lives on. As we shall soon see, his writings helped to shape the Unitas Fratrum. It is partially for this reason that I include so many quotes from him in this book, as his writings motivated others to put them into action. Several centuries later, the Moravian Brethren revived the once-dead Unity of Brothers. And in the 19th century, when Peter's bones had long returned to dust, another author was molded by his writings: none other than the famed—greatest, in the eyes of many—Russian writer Tolstoy.

Meanwhile, in the political scene of Bohemia...

I Have a Dream...

“In that time there will be no king on earth and no master, nor will there be a subject, and all taxes will have an end, no one will force any other to do something, because they all will be equally brothers and sisters. As in the city of Tabor there is no ‘mine’ and no ‘yours’, but all is in common, the like it shall be everywhere and nobody shall have a special property, and those who have such property commits a mortal sin.”

For a serf in 15th-century Bohemia, the above words were like the song of Peter Piper. Multitudes of country folk arose and followed men preaching such doctrines, even if they were a bit illusive. But in the cities, not all were willing to wander too far from the Catholic Church. So the city Hussites sat down at the negotiating table with the Catholic leaders.

After the disastrous rout of the Catholic army, led by Cardinal Cesarini at Tauss, Aug. 14, 1431, the history of the Hussite movement passed into a third stage, marked by the negotiations begun by the Council of Basel. It was a new spectacle for a Catholic ecumenical council to treat with “heretics” as with a party having rights. The leaders of the Bohemian delegation were John Rokycana of the Utraquist party and the Taborite, Procopius. Rokycana⁶³ was the pastor of the Teyn Church in Prague.

The council recognized the austere principles of the Hussites by calling upon the Basel authorities to prohibit all dancing and gambling and the appearance of loose women on the streets.⁶⁴ On their arrival, Jan. 4, 1433, the Bohemians were assigned to four public lodging houses, and a large supply of wine and provisions placed at their disposal. Delegations from the council and from the city bade them formal welcome. The Taborites aroused great curi-

⁶³ This is his “last name”, which most histories use to refer to him. It is, as with most of the men of that time, simply the name of his home town, with a suffix.

⁶⁴ This goes to show that in spite of the Hussite’s taking up of arms, they were very strong moralists in other areas.

osity by the omission of all Latin from the services and discarding altar and priestly vestments.

On the floor of the council, the Bohemians coupled praise with the names of Wycliffe and Huss, and would tolerate no references to themselves as heretics. The discussions were prolonged to a wearisome length, some of their number occupying as much as two or three days in their addresses. Among the chief speakers was the English "Wandering Lollard", Peter Payne, whose address consumed three days. The final agreement of four articles, known as the Compactata, was ratified by deputies of the council and of the three Bohemian parties giving one another the hand.

This compact demanded [1]the free preaching of the Gospel, [2]the distribution of the cup to the laity, [3]the execution of punishment for mortal sins by the civil court, [4]and the return of the clergy to the practice of Apostolic poverty. The Calixtines confined the use of Czech in the church service to the Scripture readings.

Although technically the question was settled, the Taborites were not satisfied. The Utraquists approached closer to the Catholics. Hostilities broke out between the two Hussite parties, and after a wholesale massacre in Prague, involving, it is said, 22,000 victims, the two sides joined in open war. The Taborites were defeated in the battle at Lipan, May 30, 1434, and Procopius slain. The power of the Taborites was now gone, and in 1452 they lost Mt. Tabor, their chief stronghold.

The Emperor now entered upon possession of his Bohemian kingdom and granted full recognition to the Utraquist priests, promising to give his sanction to the elections of bishops made by the popular will and to secure their ratification by the pope. Rokycana was elected archbishop of Prague by the Bohemian diet of 1435. But Emperor Sigismund died soon after, in 1437, and the archbishop never received papal recognition, although he administered the affairs of the diocese until his death in 1471.

Rokycana- The Man of the Middle Road

“God, grant us the grace to find a middle road,” cried out Rokycana.

A brilliant idea is an excellent thing. A man to work it out is still better. At the very time when Peter Chelcicky’s followers were marshaling their forces, John Rokycana, Archbishop-elect of Prague, was making a mighty stir in that drunken city. What Peter had done with his pen, Rokycana was doing with his tongue. He preached Peter’s doctrines in the great Teyn Church; he corresponded with him on the burning topics of the day; he went to see him at his home; he recommended his works to his hearers; and week by week, in fiery language, he denounced the Church of Rome as Babylon, and the Pope as Antichrist himself.

His style was vivid and picturesque, his language cutting and clear. One day he compared the Church of Rome to a burned and ruined city, wherein the beasts of the forests made their lairs; and, again, he compared her to a storm-tossed ship, which sank beneath the howling waves because the sailors were fighting each other. “It is better,” he said, “to tie a dog to a pulpit than allow a priest to defile it. It is better, oh, women! for your sons to be hangmen than to be priests; for the hangman only kills the body, while the priest kills the soul. Look there,” he suddenly exclaimed one Sunday, pointing to a picture of the apostle Peter on the wall, “there is as much difference between the priests of today and the twelve apostles as there is between that old painting and the living Peter in heaven. For the priests have put the devil into the sacraments themselves, and are leading you straight to the fires of Hell.”

If an eloquent speaker attacks the clergy, he is sure to draw a crowd. The Teyn church was crammed. The people listened with delight as he backed up his hot attack with texts from the prophet Jeremiah. No wonder they cried in their simple zeal: “Behold, a second John Huss has arisen.”

But John Rokycana was no second John Huss. For all his fire in the pulpit, he was only a craven at heart. “If a true Christian,” said he to a friend, “were to turn up now in Prague, he would be gaped at like a stag with golden horns.”

But he himself was no stag with golden horns.

As he thundered against the Church of Rome, he was seeking not the Kingdom of God, but his own fame and glory. His followers soon discovered his weakness. Among those who thronged to hear his sermons were certain quiet men of action, who were not content to paw the ground for ever. They were followers of the teachings that Peter of Chelcice expounded; they passed his pamphlets in secret from hand to hand; they took down notes of Rokycana's sermons; and now they resolved to practice what they heard.

If Peter had taught them nothing else, he had at least convinced them all that the first duty of Christian men was to quit the Church of Rome. Again and again they appealed to Rokycana to be their head, to act up to his words, and to lead them out to the promised land. The great orator hemmed and hawed, put them off with excuses, and told them, after the manner of cowards, that they were too hasty and reckless. "I know you are right," said he, "but if I joined your ranks I should be reviled on every hand."

"After us," Rokycana prophesied in a sermon, "shall a people come well-pleasing unto God and right healthy for men; they shall follow the Scriptures, and the example of Christ and the footsteps of the Apostles."

But poor Rokycana dared not be one of the number that "followed the Scriptures". He was content to merely talk, and not walk. He was, indeed, a "man of the middle road" who would not walk the narrow way, but neither did he prefer the broad way. His greatest mistake was to not realize that there is no middle road: It is merely an illusion, a by-path of the broad way.

Poor Rokycana. Every article I read about him painted him as the great compromiser: all talk and little walk. Thunder and lightning and storm-tossed clouds, but no rain.



Litice Castle—now over 700 years old—still lifts its head above the Divoka Orlice river, which swirls around the castle knoll almost 360°, as seen in the Google Earth image below. Part of the castle has been repaired, but most of it lies disintegrating. It is now owned by the State. Some of the brothers suffered in the castle dungeons during times of persecution.



Part III Maturity

Gregory “The Patriarch”

But these listeners were not to be cowed. The more they studied Peter’s writings, the more they lost faith in Rokycana. As Rokycana refused to lead them, they left his church in a body, and found a braver leader among themselves: Gregory. He was already a middle-aged man. He was the son of a Bohemian knight, and although a nobleman, was so impoverished that he was forced to support himself as a journeyman tailor. And, he was nephew to Rokycana himself.

He had spent his youth in the Slaven cloister at Prague as a bare-footed monk, had found the cloister not so moral as he had expected, had left it in disgust, and was now well-known in Bohemia as a man of sterling character, pious and sensible, humble and strict, active and spirited, a good writer and a good speaker. He was a personal friend of Peter, had studied his works with care, and is said to have been particularly fond of a little essay entitled “The Image of the Beast,” which he had borrowed from a blacksmith in Wachovia. Like Peter, Gregory was gifted in writing. But unlike Peter,⁶⁵ Gregory was also a gifted preacher.

As time went on Gregory lost patience with Rokycana, came into touch with the little congregations at Vilenov and Divisov,⁶⁶ visited Peter on his farm, and gradually formed the plan of founding an independent society, and thus doing himself what Rokycana was afraid to do: put his preaching into practice.

As soldiers desert a cowardly general and rally round the standard of a brave one, so these listeners in the old Teyn Church fell away from halting Rokycana, and rallied round Gregory “the Patriarch”.⁶⁷ From all parts of Bohemia, from all ranks of society, from

⁶⁵ In no writings have I found any reference to Peter Chelcicky's preaching abilities. I assume, therefore, that he was no gifted orator.

⁶⁶ Sister congregations to Peter's home congregation.

⁶⁷ Many historians use the title “the Patriarch” when writing of Gregory. In respect to Gregory, whose character is clear enough to know that he would prefer not to be known as the “Patriarch” of the *Unitas Fratrum*, I do not generally call him that in this story.

all whom Peter's writings had touched, from all who were disgusted with the Church of Rome, and who wished to see the church of the Apostles bloom in purity and beauty again, from all especially who desired the ministration of priests of moral character—from all these was his little band recruited. How it all happened we know not; but slowly the numbers swelled. At last the terrible question arose: How and where must they live?

In the year 1457, Vadislav Postumus, King of Bohemia, died, and George Podiebrad reigned in his stead; and about the same time it came to the ears of Gregory that in the barony of Senftenberg, on the north-east border of Bohemia, south of the road from Hradec Kralove to Breslau in Silesia, there lay a village that would serve as a home for him and his co-disciples. The village was called Kunvald, and the old castle just a couple miles down the valley was called Litice.



Kunvald, Czech Republic, where the Unity of Brothers began its journey.

The village was almost deserted, and only a few simple folk—leftovers from the better sort of the Taborites—lived there now. What better base could be found? Gregory laid the scheme before his uncle Rokycana; Rokycana, who sympathized with their views and wished to help them—and was maybe glad to get them out his sight so they would not prod him to live what he preached—brought the matter before King George. The King, who owned the estate, gave his gracious permission. Gregory and his faithful friends soon wended their way to Kunvald, and there began to form the first settlement of the Brethren.

And now many others from far and wide came to make Kunvald their home. Some came from the Teyn Church in Prague, some across the Glatz Hills from Moravia, some from Vilenov, Divisov and Chelcice, and some from the Utraquist Church at Koniggratz. Certain delegates from the remnants of the Adamites presented themselves with proposals for a union with the Brotherhood. These proposals were rejected. The “freedom” of the Adamites was too off-balance; hence only a few members of that sect were admitted, after having abjured their errors. And some came in from little Waldensian groups that lay dotted here and there about the land. There were citizens from Prague and other cities. There were bachelors and masters from the great University. There were peasants and nobles, learned and simple, rich and poor, with their wives and children; and thus did many, who longed to be pure and follow the Master and Him alone, find a Bethany of Peace in the smiling little valley of Kunvald.

They found the peasant village almost deserted. The few who lived there received them kindly, and the young men and women set to work with a will. On steep fields above the Orlice, gurgling down the valley, they began to plant crops. They cared for cows and tended bees. From forests above them they brought wood to repair the houses and build more. Fruit trees in the village began to bear again, after careful pruning, and vegetables thrived in the fertile soil.

But the new settlers at Kunvald set their goal on far more than material prosperity. Slowly, peacefully, they returned to following Christ. One by one they dropped the superfluous ceremonies of the medieval church and worked out a brotherly agreement on how to worship. At first they called themselves *Fratres Legis Christi* (brothers in the law of Christ). However, the Bohemian name *Jednota Bratrská*⁶⁸ eventually became more common.

⁶⁸ The exact meaning of this name is contested. Most translate it “Unity of Brothers”. However, “jednota” was also used among them to refer to other church groups, as “jednota Lutheran”. Thus, they may have simply been calling themselves, Church of the Brothers. Or, Community of the Brothers. Jednota can be translated to English in any of the following terms: association, oneness, unison, union, accord, community or unity.

The believers at Kunvald did not intend to begin a “new group.” They believed the Lord wanted them to let their light shine within Christianity at large. But following the pattern of the community at Chelce, they agreed on a way of life that led to profound ethical separation.

In their “brotherly agreement” they decided not to testify in court, swear oaths, do civil service of any kind, manage inns, or get involved in buying or selling anything more than the bare necessities of life. They also decided that no one among them could hold worldly rank or privilege. No one should make dice, attend or work in a theater, paint pictures or play music for a living, go to fairs or celebrations of feast days, take interest on money, or be involved with astrology, witchcraft, or alchemy. A very modest type of gray and white dress was agreed on, and all were expected to take part in daily prayers and the care of the sick. Every member of the Brotherhood was, of course, most strictly forbidden to participate in the Government through the acceptance of any post, either in the general or communal departments, or in military service, as well as by any appeal or complaint to the Government.

Complete equality was to prevail in the community; there were to be no poor and no rich. Before being admitted to the community, every wealthy person or member of a privileged class had to relinquish his property and his privileges. No “Brother” was to engage in trading, lend money on interest, or keep an inn. On the other hand, the rules of the fraternity made it obligatory on each member to assist any Brother who might be in want. To live, work, and suffer in silence were the sole duties imposed upon the pious Christian.

Although private proprietorship and the separate family were not prohibited, celibacy was regarded as a better state than that of marriage. The unmarried members lived in brother-houses and sister-houses, where they worked and shared their lives.

Soon after their arrival in Kunvald, the community chose twenty-eight men⁶⁹ for its leaders. “At that time,” a member wrote,

⁶⁹ Of these 28, three were former priests and nine had graduated from the University. The decision to join the Brethren was not a wild venture of ‘uneducated’ people recklessly seeking an adventure.

“friend longed for friend and brother for brother, so that more persons continually joined the group and their numbers increased.” In 1459, a group led by an ex-Taborite priest, Stephan, joined at Klatov in Moravia.

Gregory traveled continually, visiting interested seekers. Then the descendants of Waldensian families in southern Bohemia and Moravia’s mountain regions began to find their way into the new movement, so that by 1461 it included several thousand members.

Little by little, as their walk with Christ matured, their hopes of functioning as a spiritual “church within the church” faded. They saw less of a future all the time for the Hussite movement, and began to think seriously of doing things another way.⁷⁰ They wrote to Rokycana:

“As we knew not where to turn, we turned in prayer to God Himself, and besought Him to reveal to us His gracious will in all things. We wanted to walk in His ways; we wanted instruction in His wisdom; and in His mercy, He answered our prayers.”

They divided themselves into three classes, the Beginners, the Learners and the Perfect; and the Perfect gave up their private property for the good of the common cause. They had overseers to care for the poor. They had priests to administer communion. They had godly laymen to teach the Scriptures. They had visitors to see to the purity of family life. They were shut off from the madding crowd by a narrow gorge, with the Eagle Mountains towering on the one side and the hoary old castle of Litice, a few miles off, on the other; and there in that fruitful valley, where orchards smiled and gardens bloomed, and neat little cottages peeped out from the woodland, they plied their trades and read their Bibles, and kept themselves pure and unspotted from the world under the eye of God Almighty.

⁷⁰ Up to this point, a Hussite priest had served them communion.

Eating the Rack for Breakfast

However, it was not long before these Brethren had to show of what metal they were made. With each other they were at peace, but in Bohemia the sea still rolled from the storm.

It is curious how people reasoned in those days. As the Brethren used bread instead of wafer at the Holy Communion, a rumor reached the ears of the King that they were dangerous conspirators, and held secret meetings of a mysterious and unholy nature. Ol' King George held himself an orthodox King, and had sworn to allow no heretics in his kingdom since the support of the Pope was needed to realize his ambition to the crown of The Holy Roman Empire. As soon, therefore, as he heard that Gregory had come on a visit to Prague, and was actually holding a meeting of University students in the New Town, he came down upon them like a wolf on the fold, and gave orders to arrest them on the spot—he was sure they were hatching a villainous plot of some kind!

In vain a friendly magistrate sent warning to the students. Two of them resolved, despite Gregory's advice, to await their fate and 'stand to their guns'. "Come what may," said they, in their fiery zeal, "let the rack be our breakfast and the stake our dinner!" With this, Gregory and a few others felt obliged to stick with them.

The door of the room flew open. The magistrate and his bailiffs appeared.

"All," said the magistrate, as he stood at the threshold, "who wish to live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Follow me to prison."

They followed him, and were at once stretched upon the rack. As soon as the students felt the pain of torture their courage melted like April snow. After they had tasted "the breakfast", they had no appetite for "the dinner"...

They went in a body—except Gregory—to the Teyn Church, mounted the pulpit one by one, pleaded guilty to the charges brought against them, and confessed, before an admiring crowd, their full belief in all the dogmas of the Holy Church of Rome.⁷¹

⁷¹ They later repented of this recantation.

But for Gregory, who was now growing old, the pain was too severe. His wrists cracked; he fainted, and was thought to be dead, and in his swoon he dreamed a dream which seemed to him like the dreams of the prophets of old. He saw, in a lovely meadow, a tree laden with fruit; the fruit was being plucked by birds; the flights of the birds were guided by a youth of heavenly beauty, and the tree was guarded by three men whose faces he seemed to know. What meant that dream to Gregory and his Brethren? It was a vision of the good time coming. The tree was the church of the Brethren. The fruit was her Bible teaching. The birds were her ministers and helpers. The youth of radiant beauty was the Divine Master Himself. And the three men who stood on guard were... who???

While Gregory lay in his swoon, his old teacher, his uncle, and his sometime friend, John Rokycana, hearing that he was dying, came to see him. His conscience was stricken, his heart bled, and, wringing his hands in agony, he moaned: "Oh, my Gregory, my Gregory, I wish I could be where you are."

The brethren back at Litice wrote to Rokycana:

Have we deserved the persecutions you have brought upon us? Have we not been your disciples? Have we not followed your own words in refusing to remain in connection with the corrupt church? Is it right to invoke the civil power against us? Civil power is intended for the punishment of those who have broken the laws of society and must be coerced within proper bounds. But it belongs to the heathen world. It is absolutely wrong to use it in matters of faith... Are you not of the world and bound to perish with the world?

When Gregory recovered, Rokycana pleaded for him, and the King eventually allowed him freedom and he returned to a village a few miles distant from Kunvald.

Pitmen

Meanwhile, the first persecution of the Brethren had begun in deadly earnest. King George Podiebrad issued an order that all his

subjects were to join either the Utraquist or the Roman Catholic Church. He issued another order that all priests who conducted the Communion in the blasphemous manner of the Brethren should forthwith be put to death. The Kunvald priest, old Michael, was cast into a dungeon; four leading Brethren were burned alive; the peaceful home in Kunvald was broken; and the Brethren fled to the woods and mountains.

For two full years they lived the life of hunted deer in the forest. As they dared not light a fire by day, they cooked their meals by night; and then, while the enemy dreamed and slept, they read their Bibles by the watch-fires' glare, and prayed till the blood was dripping from their knees. If provisions ran short, they formed a procession, and marched in single file to the nearest village; and when the snow lay on the ground they trailed behind them a pine-tree branch, so that folk would think a wild beast had been prowling around. We can see them gathering in those Bohemian glades. As the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky, and the night wind kissed the pine trees, they read to each other the golden promise that where two or three were gathered together in His name, He would be in the midst of them; and rejoiced that they, the chosen of God, had been called to suffer for the truth.

In vain they appealed to Rokycana; he had done with them for ever. "You are of the world," they wrote to him in return, "and will perish with the world."

They were said to have made a covenant with the devil, and were commonly dubbed "Pitmen"⁷² because they lived in pits and caves. Yet not for a moment did they lose hope. At the very time when the king in his folly thought they were crushed beneath his foot, they were in reality steadily increasing in numbers. As their

⁷² From this living in caves they were called by their enemies jamnici, or cave-dwellers. It is possible that the appellation of jamnici may have originated previous to this persecution. As early as the fourteenth century the Beghards of Western Germany bore the nickname of "Nookers" (Winkler), on account of the secrecy of their meetings; while in East Germany they were called "Hole-dwellers" (Grubenheimer). The word jamnici (from the Bohemian jama, a hole or cave) is a translation of the German Grubenheimer, and perhaps indicates that the Beghard tradition was active among the Bohemian Brethren.

watch-fires shone in the darkness of the forests, so their pure lives shone among a darkened people. No weapon did they own except the pen. They never retaliated, never rebelled, never took up arms in their own defense, never even appealed to the arm of justice.

When smitten on one cheek, they turned the other; and from ill-report they went to good report, till the King for very shame had to let them be, well aware was he that brutal force could never stamp out spiritual life. "I advise you," said a certain Bishop, "to shed no more blood. Martyrdom is somewhat like a half-roasted joint of meat, apt to breed maggots."

Unity and Division, almost...

Within a few short years of officially breaking from the "established" churches of Bohemia, questions of unity and division rocked the fledgling movement. First was a question of unity. Should they unite with the Waldensians?

Meetings with some Waldensian ministers were called and details discussed. From the Brothers' point of view, the Waldensians had a clear enough doctrine, except...many of the Waldensians did not practice what they were supposed to be practicing. In particular was the accumulation of wealth by some, and the not-so-honest acceptance of certain Catholic and Ultraquist practices. Officially, the Waldensians did not agree with some practices, but they seemed to have developed the "knack" of keeping quiet and going along with things to avoid persecution.

The Waldensian elders were humble and honest. It was true, they admitted. They would try to correct those things.

But when they consulted with their Ultraquist friends, the Waldensians were discouraged from such a venture as being a bit "radical". So the union between them never became official.

Then came the division, almost. The issue was how to view communion. Did the bread and wine turn into the literal body and blood of Jesus at the blessing of the priest/minister?

This was one of *the* big questions of the day. Among the brothers were various understandings, as they had come from various

backgrounds. It threatened to rupture the unity, as such question often times do.

Peter Chelcicky was probably the “hero” of the day. The healing balm was a statement that appears to have originated from him:

All who receive the sacrament in truth, through faith, believe and confess that it is the true body and blood of Christ, according to His word and mind, without adding anything, or taking anything away, and rejecting all human explanations.

Did that mean transubstantiation, consubstantiation, remanance, real presence, relational presence, or memorialism?⁷³

Well, the statement meant that those who partook of the communion bread and wine were eating the body and blood of Jesus. End of controversy.

In a letter to Rokycana in 1468, the brothers wrote:

For more than eight years we have set aside all [theological] writings and tracts, and avoid them, especially those of Martinek and Biskupec.

Instead of long-winded theological treatises, the brothers united around obeying Jesus. In simple words, their view of Christianity focused upon living right, not believing right. This will be demonstrated in how they went about...

Applying the Word to Everyday Life

Loving Christ and committed to following him together, believers from Kunvald, from Southern Bohemia, and from towns and villages throughout other Czech regions, gathered in a great meeting near Rychnov in 1464. Forced to secrecy, they gathered in the mountains under the open sky. But the document they prepared did not remain a secret, in spite of the fact that they never intended it to become public.

Among other things, the Brethren agreed in the meeting near Rychnov:

⁷³ All of these are big, “educated” terms for what happens when one partakes of the Lord’s supper. Look them up if you care to find which one fits you best.

...to maintain the bond of love among ourselves, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to set our hope in God. This we will demonstrate in what we say and how we help one another, in the spirit of love, to live honestly, humbly, quietly, meekly, soberly, and patiently. And through this—through our true love one for another—we will show to others what we believe and in whom we place our hope.

We agree to obey everything the Lord asks of us in Scripture. Along with this we agree to accept graciously the instructions, warnings, and reproof of our brothers and sisters. Doing this, we will keep the covenant we have made with God and his Holy Spirit through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will confess our faults and shortcomings. We will humble ourselves and be subject one to another. We will keep the fear of God before our eyes when others reprove us, seeking to change our ways for the better and to confess our sins before God and man. If any one of us does not keep the rules we have made, and proves unfaithful to our covenant with God and our Christian fellowship, we must declare—even though with deep regret—that we cannot assure him of salvation. It may even become necessary for us to exclude him from our church fellowship. And if anyone is excluded from our communion on account of some grievous transgression or glaring mistake in doctrine we cannot re-admit him until he has entirely cleared himself and amply proven that he has changed his ways.

We agree that all of us should faithfully keep the apostles' instructions in all things. Our priests and teachers, in particular, should set a good example to others. They should walk humbly in word and deed, so that others may have no reason to accuse them. Those who give up personal estates for the church should keep to their decision and not reclaim estates,

money, or property. Rather, they should follow the example of the first Christians, submitting with glad hearts to holding all things in common as it is written, “They had all things in common and distributed to everyone as needed.”⁷⁴ This is a praiseworthy and reasonable example for us, especially for those who become messengers of the churches, so that they may learn to be content with simple food and clothing, leaving the rest to the Lord who cares for them. They ought to abstain from extravagance and content themselves with the support the stewards of the common fund are able to give them.

Along with this, our priests and teachers should be freed from all care regarding their earthly needs, so they may devote themselves to spiritual duties. They must bear patiently what God allows to come upon them: distress, hunger, cold, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself—after the example of the first Christians who consecrated themselves to God. They must surrender themselves to Christ’s rule, following him patiently, and forsaking the world.

Those of us who have of this world’s things should remember the poor and give freely to them, according to the word of God. At the same time we should work with our own hands what is good. Our trading should be only in heavenly goods and treasures, supplying our neighbors with the Word of God, teaching them, and praying that the Lord would give them grace.

Our priests and teachers may, however, work around home if they have nothing else to do. Whatever they can spare, they should also share with the poor, but if

⁷⁴ Those who lived with no personal possessions were encouraged by the Unity of Brothers to put no pressure on the rest. Neither did the believers force new converts to give up possessions against their will: “If anyone wishes to keep something for a good reason, to give it into safe-keeping, or to bequeath it to someone after death, it may be done,” states an old community statute.

they suffer need they should be supported, with the consent of all, from our general fund.

The same rule applies to brothers and sisters working in trades or hiring themselves out to earn a decent living. Whoever goes on errands or is employed to do a certain work, shall be paid fairly for his labor, unless he can and will do it for nothing to help the congregation.

Toward strangers and travelers we will show kind hospitality, in particular if they have left home to spread the Gospel. When we see any of our brothers or sisters in need, we will follow the example of the apostles and those who have gone before us in the faith, sharing with them what the Lord in his mercy has given us.

If all Christians faithfully stood together in love, if everyone eagerly carried the other's burden, all of Christ's commandments would be fulfilled. Sympathizing love is the perfection of Christian faith. It is what builds and keeps spirituality alive. It is the firmest and most enduring bond of human happiness. The one who does not love has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

With brotherly kindness we will receive penitent souls, gladly helping those who turn from the world to God to know the truth. No matter who comes to us, he shall find among us a joyful reception. We will speak with him in good faith, give him the advice, the instructions, and whatever warnings he needs, so that he may walk right and grow spiritually.

We will not change our place of residence unless it becomes clear that we would be of greater usefulness to the church of God in another place.

We will take special care of the orphans, the widows, and the poor, receiving them in the name of Christ. What we give them will be done in the spirit of love.

We consider it our duty to care for those who are persecuted or driven into exile for what they believe. We will ask about them and help as much as we can.

Whenever money is paid out of the congregation's general fund to help the poor, the treasurer is to keep a faithful and correct account of it. He shall ask whoever gets the money for a receipt. This is to prevent any suspicion and false report, and to preserve harmony in the congregation.

We will seek our rest in the Lord and guard against the dazzling seductions of the world. The tempting exterior of worldly-mindedness, the subtlety and secret malice of its wicked spirit continually try to overcome Christian simplicity of heart. The world's flattering delusions are dangerous rocks for the faithful. The world's spirit is one of selfishness, the pursuit of temporary pleasures that are often unattainable anyway, and it does nothing more than deceive. From such a spirit, may the Lord in his mercy save us!

We consider it our responsibility to obey our earthly rulers in all humility, to show them loyalty in all things, and to pray to God for them.

We will seek peace in our congregations, and do all we can for common harmony and well-being. In this way, our conscience will be at rest in God, and the grace of God will be with us at all times.⁷⁵

The whole "agreement" contains not one "theological statement" such as might be found in modern "confessions of faith". The second paragraph of the document is typical of the remaining. It starts out saying: "We are moreover agreed, all and each to show

⁷⁵From the *Confession of the Brothers of Christ's Gospel*, 1464.

willing obedience in all things, as the inspired Scriptures of our Lord exhort us to do...”

From other documents of those early days, we find that all work was sacred. If a man was not able to show that his trade was according to the law of Christ and of direct service to His holy cause, he was not allowed to carry it on at all. He must either change his calling or leave the church. In the Brethren’s church there were no dice makers, no actors, no painters, no professional musicians, no wizards or seers, no alchemists, no astrologers, no courtesans or panderers.

For art, for music, for letters and for pleasure the Brethren had no respect, and the fathers were warned against staying out at night and frequenting the card-room and the liquor-saloon. And yet, these ‘stern’ Brethren were kind and tender-hearted. If the accounts handed down are to be believed, the villages where the Brethren settled were the homes of happiness and peace.

For the poorest of all, those in actual need, they had special collections several times a year. This fund was called the Korbona, and was managed by three officials. The first kept the box, the second the key, the third the accounts.

There were three degrees of church discipline. For the first offense the sinner was privately admonished. For the second he was rebuked before the Elders, and excluded from the Holy Communion until he repented. For the third he was denounced in the Church before the whole congregation, and the loud “Amen” of the assembled members proclaimed his banishment from the church.

Ordinations

And now the time drew near for Gregory’s dream to come true. When the Brethren settled in the valley of Kunvald, they had only done half their work. They had quit the “benighted” Church of Rome. They had settled on a Utraquist estate; they were under the protection of a Utraquist King; they attended services conducted by Utraquist priests. However, this mix of light and darkness could not last for ever. If they wished to be godly men themselves, they must have godly men in the pulpits. What reason had they,

the chosen of God, to listen to sermons from men in league with the State? What reason had they to take the bread and wine from the tainted hands of Utraquist priests? What reason had they to confess their sins to men with the brand of Rome upon their foreheads?

If they were to have any priests at all, those priests, like Caesar's wife, must be above suspicion. They must be pastors after God's own heart, who should feed the people with knowledge and understanding. They must be clear of any connection with the State. They must be innocent of the crime of simony. They must work with their hands for their living, and be willing to spend their money on the poor.

But where could such clean vessels of the Lord be found? For a while the Brethren were almost in despair; for a while they were even half inclined to do without priests at all.⁷⁶ In vain they searched the country round; in vain they inquired about priests in foreign lands. When they asked about the pure Nestorian Church that supposedly existed in India, they received the answer that that Church was now as corrupt as the Romish. When they asked about the Greek Church in Russia, they received the answer that the Russian Bishops were willing to consecrate any man, good or bad, so long as he paid the fees.

The question was pressing. If they did without good priests much longer, they would lose their reason for being a separate brotherhood. "You must," said Martin Lupac, a sympathizing Utraquist priest and Rokycana's assistant, "establish a proper order of priests from among yourselves. If you do not, the whole cause will be ruined. To do without priests⁷⁷ is no sin against God; but it is a sin against your fellow-men." For his advice to the brethren, Martin lost his job with Rokycana and suffered a prison sentence.

They pondered on the fateful question for three years. They had now become a powerful body; they were founding settlements all

⁷⁶ It is to be remembered that they were finding their way out of Romanism. Naturally, they carried some ideas, unintentionally like we so often do, with them. See also the following footnote.

⁷⁷ He probably used the term priest more in the sense of a minister than what we often think of as "priest".

over the land; they stood, they said, for the truth as it was in Jesus; they had all one faith, one hope, one aim, one sense of the Spirit leading them onward; and they perceived that if they were to weather the gale in those stormy times, they must cut the chains that bound them to Rome, and fly their own colors in the breeze.

And so, in 1467, about ten years after the foundation of Kunvald, there met at Lhota a gathering of the Brethren to settle the momentous question, “Is it God’s will that we separate entirely from the power of the Papacy, and hence from its priesthood? Is it God’s will that we institute, according to the model of the primitive church, a ministerial order of our own?” Laying these questions to the lot, both had come back in the affirmative.⁷⁸



The present owner of this property at Kunvald asserts that this is the home place of Matthias, first bishop of the Unity of Brothers.

For weeks they had prayed and fasted day and night. About sixty brethren arrived for the meeting. The meeting was held in a tanner’s cottage, under a cedar tree. Their unofficial leader was Gregory.

After prayer and earnest exhortation, they chose nine candidates. Then they put twelve slips of paper into a clay pot. Nine of the slips were blank.⁷⁹ Three said ‘jest’ (it is). A little boy named Procop pulled them out and gave them to the brothers.

Matthias, a twenty-five-year-old farmer of Kunvald, Thomas of Prelouic, and Elias of Chrenouic, a miller, drew the ‘jest’ slips. Then, Gregory stepped forward and announced with trembling voice that these three men were the very three that he had seen in

⁷⁸ The use of the lot for such questions I personally hold in disesteem. Nonetheless, it is a historical fact. Perhaps this is the origin of the later Moravian Brethren’s liberal use of the same.

⁷⁹ This left the possibility that none of the nine would be chosen.



Brandys nad Orlice in the foreground center, where Gregory ended his earthly journey. About 7 miles distant (white dot in upper middle) is Litice Castle. Another 7 miles further, near the upper edge, is Kunvald. Most likely forest would have covered much more of the land in those days.

his trance in the torture-chamber at Prague. Together the members of the meeting arose and greeted the chosen three.

Then all the men in the meeting were rebaptized by the newly-chosen ministers.⁸⁰

Together, the next day, they sang a hymn written for the occasion, :

*We needed faithful men, and He
Granted us such. Most earnestly,
We Pray, Lord, let Thy gifts descend,
That blessing may Thy work attend.*

But a “problem” remained: if these three men, now chosen by Christ, were to be acknowledged as ministers in Bohemia by the

⁸⁰ It is to be noted that this was not so much a renunciation of the practice of infant baptism as it was a renunciation of baptism by unworthy ministers (priests). An early Confession of Faith declared that all converts from Catholicism must be rebaptized.

general populace, they must be ordained in the “orthodox” way, by a bishop of pure descent from the Apostles.⁸¹ For this purpose they applied to Stephen, a Bishop⁸² of the Waldensians. He was just the man they needed. He was a man of noble character. He was a man whose word could be trusted. He had often given them information about the Waldensian line of bishops. He had told them how that line ran back to the days of the early Church.⁸³ He had told them how the Waldensian bishops had kept the ancient faith unsullied, and had never broken the law of Christ by uniting with the wicked State. To that line of bishops he himself belonged.

What purer orders could they desire? They believed his statements; they trusted his honor; they admired his personal character; and now they sent old Michael Bradacius to see him in South Moravia and to lay their case before him. The old Bishop shed tears of joy. “He laid his hand on my head,” reported Michael, “and consecrated me a bishop.” Forthwith the newly-ordained Michael returned to Lhota, re-ordained the chosen three as ministers, and consecrated Matthias of Kunvald a Bishop.⁸⁴ Michael then

⁸¹ It is not clear how strong they held to this idea in later days. But remember, we are in 15th-century Bohemia, finding our way out of Catholicism with very few other contemporary or historical examples of how to do it.

⁸² The ordination that had taken place at the meeting was performed by “elders”, not a “bishop”. Even though there were converted priests or ministers from Waldensian, Catholic, and Utraquist background at the meeting when the three men were chosen and ordained, none of these ministers had been ordained as a “bishop”. Some histories say that although a minister from all three backgrounds—Catholic, Waldensian, and Utraquist—had helped in the ordination just to be sure they caught all three lineages, some of the brothers' consciences were not at rest, since none of them were “bishops”. In their minds, only a bishop could ordain a minister.

⁸³ It appears that many Waldensians of the period believed this, although modern “hard” proof is simply lacking. It is very probable that some sort of non-Catholic line of churches has existed from the apostles. There is, simply said, no certain proof of “apostolic lineage” though.

⁸⁴ The accounts of these ordinations by Stephan vary. This is a version of the more traditionally accepted view. The obscurity is understandable; over 500 years have passed now. Only one thing seems to be for sure; the Brothers did seek out a “pure” priesthood to legitimize the new ministry. And they did want a “bishop” to ordain the three, not a “priest/minister”.

laid down his own bishopric, and let the three chosen men be leaders of the Unity.

A goal was reached; the church was ‘officially’ founded; the work of Gregory was closing down. For twenty years he had taught his Brethren to study the mind of Christ in the Scriptures and to seek the guidance of God in united prayer, and now he saw them joined as one to face the rising storm.

“From now on,” he wrote gladly to King George Podiebrad, “we are done with the Church of Rome.” As he saw the evening of life draw near, he urged his Brethren more and more to hold fast the teaching that Peter of Chelcice had shared with them, and to regulate their daily conduct by the law of Christ; and by that law of Christ he probably meant the “Six Commandments” of the Sermon on the Mount.

He took these Commandments literally, and enforced them with a ‘rod of iron’. No brother could be a judge or magistrate or councillor. No Brother could take an oath or keep an inn, or trade beyond the simple needs of life. No noble, unless he laid down his rank, could become a brother at all. No peasant could render military service or act as a bailiff on a farm. No brother could ever divorce his wife or take an action at law.

As long as Gregory remained in their midst, the brethren held true to him as their leader. He had not, says the Bohemian historian Anton Gindely, a single trace of personal ambition in his nature; and, though he might have become a bishop, he remained a layman to the end. Full of years, he died on Sept.13th, 1473, and his bones were laid in a cleft where tufts of forget-me-not grow, at Brandys nad Orlice.

From his extant writings, we learn a little of how Gregory viewed and lived the Christian life:⁸⁵

God gave the kings of the earth a sword, but only to preserve order in the world according to his will, and to control those who would disturb the common good...
When, through the treachery of the priests, the rulers’ sword is turned against people on account of their

⁸⁵ Very little, unfortunately, of Gregory's writings are in English.

faith, they no longer use it for God. No earthly ruler can put faith into people's hearts without their assent, or bring them to faith by force.

Christ sent his messengers into the world to preach the good news without the help of civil powers, magistrates, hangmen, and soldiers... But Christians, like sheep among wolves, suffer unto death before calling pagan authorities to their defense.

The Life of a Unitas Fratrum Minister

No portion of the Unitas Fratrum⁸⁶ was more carefully watched than the ministers. As the chief object which the Brethren set before them was obedience to the Law of Christ, it followed, as the night the day, that the chief quality required in a minister was not theological learning, but personal character. When a man came forward as a candidate for the ministry he knew that he would have to stand a most searching examination. His character and conduct were thoroughly sifted. He must have a working knowledge of the Bible, a blameless record, and a living faith in God. For classical learning the Brethren had an honest contempt. It smacked too much of Rome and monkery. As long as the candidate was a holy man, and could teach the people the plain truths of the Christian faith, they felt that nothing more was required, and did not expect him to know Greek and Hebrew.

In vain Luther, in a friendly letter, urged them to cultivate more knowledge. "We have no need," they replied, "of teachers who understand other tongues, such as Greek and Hebrew. It is not our custom to appoint ministers who have been trained at advanced schools in languages and fine arts. We prefer Bohemians and Germans who have come to a knowledge of the truth through personal experience and practical service, and who are therefore qualified to impart to others the piety they have first acquired themselves. And here we are true to the law of God and the practice of the early Church." Instead of regarding learning as an aid to faith, they re-

⁸⁶ "Unitas Fratrum" is Latin for "United Brethren". The Unity of Brothers is known by this name in some parts of the world.

garded it as an hindrance and a snare. It led, they declared, to wordy battles, to quarrels, to splits, to uncertainties, to doubts, to corruptions. As long, they said, as the ministers of the church of Christ were simple and unlettered men, so long was the church a united body of believers; but as soon as the parsons began to be scholars, all sorts of evils arose. What good, they argued, had learning done in the past? It had kept the Bible in Latin, and had thus hidden its truths from the common people. "And therefore," they insisted, "we despise the learning of tongues."

For this "narrow" attitude they had also another reason. In order to be true to the practice of the early church, they laid down the strict rule that all ministers should earn their living by manual labor; and the result was that even if a minister wished to study, he could not find time to do so. For his work as a minister he never received a penny of salary. If a man among the Brethren entered the ministry, he did so for the pure love of the work. He had no chance of becoming rich. He was not allowed to engage in a business that brought in large profits. If he earned any more in the sweat of his brow than he needed to make ends meet, he handed the surplus over to the general funds of the Church; and if someone kindly left him some money, that money was treated in the same way.

He was to be as moderate as possible in eating and drinking; he was to avoid all gaudy show in dress and house; he was not to go to fairs and banquets; as well, he was not to marry except with the consent and approval of the elders.

And yet, for all his humble style, the minister was held in honor. As the solemn time of ordination drew near there were consultations of ministers, and days set apart for fasting and prayer throughout the whole church. The duties were many and various. He was commonly spoken of, not as a priest, but as the "servant" of the Church. He was not a priest in the Romish sense of the word. He had no distinctive sacerdotal powers. He had no more power to consecrate communion than any godly layman. Of priests as a separate class, they knew nothing. All true believers in Christ, said one of their regulations, were priests.

As the times were stormy, and persecution might break out at any moment, the brethren—at a meeting in 1504—laid down the rule that when their meetings at a chapel were forbidden, they should be held in private houses, and then, if a minister was not available, any godly layman was authorized to conduct the holy communion.

And so the minister was simply a useful “servant.” He gave instruction in Christian doctrine. He heard confessions. He expelled sinners. He welcomed penitents. He administered communion. He trained the younger brothers. If he had the needful gift, he preached; if not, he read printed sermons. He was not a ruler lord-ing it over the flock; he was rather a “servant”.

He was bound, for a fairly obvious reason, to take a companion with him when he called at the house of the sick. He was not allowed to visit single women or widows. If he did, there might be scandals about him, as there were about the Catholic priests. For the spiritual needs of all unmarried women, the Brethren made special provision. They were visited by a special “Committee of Women,” and the minister was not allowed to interfere.

The good man did not even possess a home of his own. Instead of living in a private house, he occupied a set of rooms in a large building known as the Brothers' House; and the minister, as the name implies, was not the only Brother in it. “As Eli had trained Samuel, as Elijah had trained Elisha, as Christ had trained His disciples, as Paul trained Timothy and Titus,” so a minister of the Brethren had young men under his charge. There, under the minister's eye, the candidates for service in the Church were trained. Neither now nor at any period of their history had the Bohemian Brethren any theological colleges. If a boy desired to become a minister, he entered the Brethren's House at an early age, and was there taught a useful trade.

Lashback—2nd persecution

When Rokycana, the Hussite archbishop, and King George Prodebrady, the landlord of Litice and Kunvald, heard of the ordinations at Nova Bystrice, they were furious—both with the Waldensians and the Unity of Brothers.



Mlada Boleslav became a center for the Unity's printing operations. I do not know if the big building in the picture is the monastery that they were allowed to use, but this building may well have been present in that day. Today, Mlada Boleslav is the richest town in the Czech Republic, due to the Skoda automobile factory locted there.

In his earlier years, Rokycana had spoken in favor of New Testament methods. He had shared many of Gregory's concerns about the Hussites. But now that a vigorous new movement, in every way more Christ-like than his own, sprang up around him, he hated it. Preaching against the "new heretics", he stirred up the rulers of Bohemia and Moravia against them.

Old Stephan, the Waldensian bishop from whom they had received the official "lineage", fell into the hands of Roman Catholic authorities, who burned him alive in Vienna, in 1467. In Bohemia, the Hussites tortured Jacob Hulava in front of his family and burned him, along with four peasants on the estate of the Baron Zdenek Kostka at Predhradi u Skutce. Throughout other Bohemian regions they seized the brothers' possessions and drove them, with their families, from their homes. But none suffered more than the community at Kunvald itself.

Beginning with the arrest of some of its leaders, left to suffer in the Litice castle dungeons, the settlement built up with so much joy disintegrated in untold grief. Driven from their homes in the middle of winter, many perished in the fields from hunger and cold. Some whom the authorities captured had their hands cut off. Others they dragged along behind horses until they died, or burned at the stake. Hunted like deer, the brothers again hid in mountain forests, daring to make fires only at night. Whenever possible they returned good for evil, and when invited, they even dared make trips to visit seekers in Bohemian towns.

In 1471, within a short time of one another, Rokycana and King George Prodebady died, and persecution let off. Then, cautiously reappearing out of the woods, the believers who had survived returned to Kunvald.

More Brothers and Sisters

Not only did the survivors return, others joined. Nine years after Rokycana's death and the end of persecution under the Husites, the Bohemian Brothers received a most significant group of new members. Arriving penniless—hungry children with big eyes, widows in rags, old men pulling carts or pushing wheel-barrows—they were German Waldensians from Konigsberg (Chojna) and Angermunde in the province of Brandenburg. In Bohemian lands they settled in and around Lanskrone east of Litomysl and around Fulnek on the lands of John of Zerotin, between Olomouc and Moravska Ostrava.⁸⁷

Celebrating the Lord's supper in simple services throughout war-torn Bohemia and Moravia, the Unity of Brothers became a quiet but powerful movement. After the ordination of its leaders by Stephan, the Waldensian bishop, and the adoption of its own

⁸⁷ Since 1458 the Waldensians of Brandenburg had suffered heavy persecution. In 1479 they sent their leader, a brother named Peter, to establish contact with believers in Bohemia. The following year, four brothers of the Unitas Fratrum set out to visit them, in return. At Kladsko in Bohemia, the officials detained them, but one, a German citizen named Thomas from the district of Lanskrone, was allowed to continue on his way. Through this contact the Waldensians of the Brandenburg lowlands decided to move to Czech lands.

rules (like at the meeting near Rychnov), it chose its own way. But those who belonged to the Unity never thought of themselves as the church of Christ in its entirety. In another general meeting, in 1486, the brothers concluded:

No one church, however numerous, constitutes the universal church embracing all believers. But wherever there is true faith, as described in the Scriptures, there is a part of the holy catholic church. ... We should thank God for all who serve him, but no one should lightly leave his own communion and commitment to join another.

One of the last things Brother Gregory told the believers gathered around his bed—Brother Matthias the bishop among them—was, “Beware of educated and learned persons who may come after me to corrupt the faith.”

His warning was prophetic. But for the time being, the Unity of Brothers could not comprehend it.

After they buried Gregory in secret, in a wooded ravine on the Klopot mountain, a strange peace came to believers in Czech lands. The Hussite government, occupied in strife with Hungary, ignored them. A friendly baron, John Tovacovsky of Mlada Boleslav gave them an abandoned monastery in which to live, and in its seclusion the Unity of Brothers thrived.

They called the old monastery “Mount Carmel.” In its chapel they met for simple meetings. In its scriptorium they set to copying and binding gospel books.⁸⁸ They used one of its halls for a school, and many families moved into its cloistered wings, the surrounding outbuildings, and villages nearby. It did not take long for their witness to result in more congregations taking shape in the nearby town of Vinarice, in Lenesice near Louny, in Brandys nad Labem, Rychnov, Benatky, and Nemecky Brod.

⁸⁸ Along with works of an instructive nature (the writings of Peter Chelcicky and Gregory), the brothers produced the first non-Catholic hymnal in Europe.

Tried by Fire

In 1487, a new law in Bohemia made it impossible for workers on feudal estates to move freely from place to place. This same law gave their masters the right to buy or sell their labor (as serfs) and to exercise complete authority, including capital punishment, over them. To make matters worse, Moravia fell under the power of Roman Catholic Hungary.

For some years there dwelt in the town of Mlada Boleslav a smart young man named John Lezek. He began life as a brewer's apprentice; he then entered the service of a Brother, and learned a good deal of the Brethren's manners and customs; and now he saw the chance of turning his knowledge to good account. If only he told a good tale against the Brethren, he would be sure to be a popular hero. For this purpose he visited the parish priest, and confessed to a number of abominations committed by him while among the wicked Brethren.

The parish priest was delighted; the penitent was taken to the Church; and there he told the assembled crowd the story of his guilty past. Of all the bad men in the country, he said, these Brethren were the worst. He had even robbed his own father with their consent and approval. They blasphemed. They took the Communion bread to their house, and there hacked it in pieces. They were thieves, and he himself had committed many a burglary for them. They murdered men and kidnapped their wives. They had tried to blow up Rokycana in the Teyn Church with gunpowder. They swarmed naked up pillars like Adam and Eve, and handed each other apples. They prepared poisonous drinks, and put poisonous smelling powders in their letters. They were skilled in witchcraft, worshiped Beelzebub, and were wont irreverently to say that the way to Hell was paved with the bald heads of priests.

As this story was both alarming and lively, the parish priest had it taken down, sealed and signed by witnesses, copied out, and scattered broadcast through the land. In vain John Lezek confessed soon after, when brought by the Brethren before a Magistrate, that his whole story was a vile invention. If a man tells a

falsehood and then denies it, he does not thereby prevent the falsehood from spreading.

For now a more powerful foe than Lezek made himself felt in the land. Of all the Popes that ever donned the tiara, Alexander VI is said to have presented the most successful image of the devil. He was the father of the prince of poisoners, Caesar Borgia; he was greedy, immoral, fond of ease and pleasure. For all that, he was pious enough in a way of his own; and now, in his zeal for the Catholic cause, he took stern measures against the church of the Brethren.

He had heard some terrible tales about them. He heard that Peter's pamphlet, "The Antichrist," was read all over the country. He heard that the number of the Brethren now was over 100,000.⁸⁹ He resolved to crush them to powder.⁹⁰ He sent an agent, the Dominican, Dr. Henry Institoris, as censor of the press. As soon as Institoris arrived on the scene, he heard, to his horror, that most of the Brethren could read; and thereupon he informed the Pope that they had learned this art from the devil. He revived the stories of Lezek, the popular feeling was fanned to fury, and wire-pullers worked on the tender heart of the King.

"Hunt out and destroy these shameless vagabonds," wrote Dr. Augustin Kasebrot to King Vladislav, "they are not even good enough to be burnt at the stake. They ought to have their bodies torn by wild beasts and their blood licked up by dogs."

Someone sent word to the King to say that the Brethren were planning to defend their cause with the sword. "What!" said the King, "do they mean to play Zizka? Well, well! We know how to stop that!" They were worse than Huss, he declared; they believed neither in God nor in the Communion; they were a set of lazy vagabonds. He would soon pay them out for their devilish craft, and sweep them off the face of the earth. And to this end he summoned the Diet, and, by the consent of all three Estates, issued the famous Edict of St. James.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Several indications are that this was the case.

⁹⁰ Papal Bull, Feb. 4th, 1500

⁹¹ July 25th, 1508

The edict was sweeping and thorough. The meetings of the Brethren, public and private, were forbidden. The books and writings of the Brethren must be burnt. All in Bohemia who refused to join the Utraquist or Roman Catholic Church were to be expelled from the country; all nobles harboring Brethren were to be fined, and all their priests and teachers were to be imprisoned.

The persecution began. In the village of Kutna Hora lived a brother, by name Andrew Poliwka. As Kutna Hora was a Romanist village, and seeking escape from constant harassment, Andrew found refuge at the "Mount of Olives" in Litomysl. But his wife, a loyal Hussite, would not go with him. He returned to the village, and, desiring to please her, attended the parish Church.

Andrew had consented, but not under the conditions imposed.

The occasion was an installation service. As the sermon ended and the communion host was raised, he could hold his tongue no longer. "Silence, Parson Jacob," he cried to the priest, "You have babbled enough! Mine hour is come; I will speak. Dear friends," he continued, turning to the people, "what are you doing? What are you adoring? An idol made of bread! Oh! Adore the living God in heaven! He is blessed for evermore!" The priest ordered him to hold his peace. He only cried out the louder. He was seized, his head was dashed against the pillar, and he was dragged bleeding to prison. Next day he was tried, and asked to explain why he had interrupted the service.

"Who caused Abram," he answered, "to forsake his idolatry and adore the living God? Who induced Daniel to flee from idols?" In vain was he stretched upon the rack. No further answer would he give. He was burnt to death at the stake. As the flames began to lick his face, he prayed aloud: "Jesus, thou Son of the living God, have mercy upon me, miserable sinner."

"Now he calls on Jesus whose sacraments he despised!" his persecutors jeered. But those who knew Andrew, John and Michael Nadrzibka, John Herbek, Mathias Prokop, and others burned with them for what they believed, did not make fun. The witness of the Brothers struck them to the heart and many kept joining the movement—in spite of persecution.

At Strakonic dwelt the brother George Wolinsky, a dependent of Baron John of Rosenberg. The Baron was a mighty man. He was Grand Prior of the Knights of Malta; he was an orthodox subject of the King, and he determined that on his estate no villainous Picards⁹² should live. "See," he said one day to George, "I have made you a servant in the Church. You must go to Church. You are a Picard, and I have received instructions from Prague that all men on my estate must be either Utraquists or Catholics."

The Brother refused; the Baron insisted; and the Prior of Strakonic was brought to convert the heretic. "No one," said the Prior, "should ever be tortured into faith. The right method is reasonable instruction, and innocent blood always cries to Heaven, 'Lord, Lord, when wilt Thou avenge me.'"

But this common sense was lost on the furious Baron. As Brother George refused to yield, the Baron cast him into the deepest dungeon of his castle. The bread and meat he had secreted in his pockets were removed. The door of the dungeon was barred, and all that was left for the comfort of his soul was a heap of straw whereon to die and a comb to do his hair. For five days he lay in the dark, and then the Baron came to see him. The prisoner was almost dead. His teeth were closed; his mouth was rigid; the last spark of life was feebly glimmering. The Baron was aghast. George's mouth was forced open, hot soup was poured in, the prisoner revived, and the Baron burst into tears.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I am glad he is living"; and allowed George to return to his Brethren.

⁹² A common derogatory appellation that the Brethren received. The name derived probably from some "heretics" that originated in Picardy, France. Their main "offense" was to say that the communion bread was symbolic, and not the physical, literal body of Christ. The Unitas Fratrum did not fully hold to this view, but all "heretics" were soon lumped under that name.

Part IV Sick unto Death

Disunity of the Unity

The trouble began with money—and prestige.

During their first years at Kunvald and in Southern Bohemia, whoever joined the Unity of Brothers left his fortune behind. Knights and nobles gave up their titles to become simple followers of Christ. Of these, the Baron Strachota of Orlice near Kysperk, left a shining example. Not only did he give up his castle, he took up book-keeping and began to work in a mill. All who knew him respected him as a wise and godly man.

John Kostka and his wife, the owners of Litomyšl, also became converted and gave their property to Bohua, their son. Then Bohus wished to join the church too—and things became complicated.

A large number of Unity families lived at Litomyšl. By asking Bohus Kostka to get rid of his estate, they would have put themselves on the street. “Could this be fair?” they asked themselves. “What if all the barons should get converted? Would we all have to move all the time?”

A brother from Wotic, also named Gregory, wrote a tract *On the Civil Power* that, like Peter Chelcicky’s books, warned against any acceptance of government officials, knights, or barons, into the brotherhood. The bishop, Matthias of Kunvald stood with him. So did many more. But to follow Christ in a feudal society did not look easy to the families living and working in the town of Litomyšl itself.

Not only did the problem of Bohus Kostka’s membership face them, but because nearly everyone in the town belonged to the church, they faced the question of who to elect for town councilors, judges, and policemen. Every feudal estate was responsible to keep its own order.

“Should we have a worldly and unconverted minority rule over all of us?” the people of Litomyšl asked. “Would it not be better to make responsible decisions ourselves?”

Bohus Kostka, owner of the estate, pushed for Unity members to become its officials and could not understand what held them back. Neither could others. A prominent Hussite priest wrote in 1492:

There have been, and still are, people among us who refuse to accept office as town councilor or any other official position. They say they do not want to administer justice, basing their action on the command of Christ, “judge not that you be not judged” which they, of course, interpret in their own way. But if these brothers are indeed so much better than the rest of us, if they are indeed lovers of justice and truth, why should they not take positions of authority to deal out fair and Christian justice so that righteousness may be established among us, and what is wrong put down? ... I think it is perverse of them to regard the rest of us as “unbelievers,” and that they should be punished for it. By trusting in themselves alone, they insult their neighbors and put themselves off from other Christians devoted to God’s truth.

At Litomyšl, brothers of the Unity heard this criticism and felt bad. They felt they should do their part as responsible citizens. “But how could you be judges and councilors without exercising violence?” Bishop Matthias and those with him asked. “How could you hold civil office and not swear oaths?”

The brothers at Litomyšl did not know. But when their bishop suggested they leave their trades in town and go back to living as shepherds and field workers, they protested. “We cannot all live in the country,” a soap maker answered. “Cows do not give soap, and even if they did, men who work with them get appointed as judges and councilors too!”

During the time these questions troubled the Unity of Brothers, new faces appeared among them. By now, fifty or more years after his death, Peter Chelcicky’s writings were well known. Scholars looked through them, and even though considered heretical, copies of them lay in important libraries. It was there, in the library of the

university at Prague, that Luke, a young Hussite, discovered them in the 1470s.

Luke not only read Peter Chelcicky; he visited the brothers at Mount Carmel (Mlada Boleslav) to find out how they lived and believed. They impressed him, and with a circle of scholarly friends, he moved there to join them after his graduation.

This brought more trouble.

The owner of Mlada Boleslav was a woman, the baroness Johanka Tovacovska z Krajku, who also admired the Unity. With the coming of Luke and his friends, she found the believers' community on her lands even more attractive. Now it no longer consisted of simple farmers and tradesmen. With scholars and gifted educators among them, the baroness felt there might be room for her—with her title and fortune—as well.

The brothers were not sure.

After many meetings, counsel, and prayer, they finally called leaders from the entire movement to Brandys nad Orlici in the early 1490s. Some nobles, interested in joining, came too. So did the scholar, Luke, and his friends from Mlada Boleslav and Litomysl. All troublesome issues came up for a vote in which Brother Matthias—unwilling to cause division—refused to take part, then the brothers drew up a statement of compromise.

They recommended that no one should take government office of his own free will, that church members should not keep a tavern, go to war, judge others, or apply torture and capital punishment. But if the state, or their position in society demanded it, then no one would judge them for it. Every case should be evaluated on its own, much would be left to individual conscience, and there was to be no more “stirring up of trouble” about things of this nature.

The Unity of Brothers, by this time, was directed by an “Inner Council” elected to help Bishop Matthias. These men, with the approval of others gathered at Brandys, passed a further resolution:

If anyone's conscience does not permit him to become a town councilor, a judge, or to hold another civil office, he should not feel pressured into doing it by the fact that the brotherhood allows it on certain condi-

tions. Rather, if he holds to his conviction and wants to suffer for it, he shall have the liberty of doing so, only on the condition that he does not criticize those who feel and do otherwise. He should not consider himself any better than those who co-operate with the government and thereby avoid suffering.⁹³

The Inner Council dismissed the brothers at Brandys with a solemn warning not to go home and talk about controversial issues among themselves. If anyone had a complaint, they said, he should come directly to them or to Brother Matthias, the bishop:

If, after thinking this over, or for any other reason, a brother should object to what we have decided, he should neither speak or act, neither openly or in secret, against it. Rather he should bring his complaint in person, or writing. ... Anyone who disregards this instruction should be admonished, and if he refuses to accept correction, and keeps causing a disturbance and division, he shall be held back from communion. If he still remains obstinate, and corrupts others with his point of view, he shall be expelled from his congregation, and if that does not turn him back from his wickedness, he shall be expelled from the Unity of Brothers itself.

In other words, people were allowed to disagree, but they were to keep their mouth shut about it.

Two men, at least, made their way home from the big meeting at Brandys with heavy hearts. They were Amos Stekensky, a collector of bee's wax from Vodnany close to Chelcice, and his co-worker, Jacob. Their hearts told them that the Unity of Brothers, in deciding to relax its position on civil office and to allow the wealthy and powerful to become part of it, had made a terrible mistake. No sooner did they come home to southern Bohemia—into the area where Peter Waldo spent his last years, and where

⁹³Uh-oh.... “Avoiding suffering!?”



Vilemov, Moravia, where a congregation of the Little Group took shape. The Little Group must have felt as lonely as this house on a winter day, when so very few took a stand against the drifting of the Unity. When persecution got heavy in Bohemia, many of the Unity members moved to Moravia, along with Anabaptists from Austria and Germany.

Peter Chelcicky had taught—than they began to write, discuss the matter with their friends, and pray.

Amos wrote a tract, describing in simple Bohemian how Christ rejected Satan's offer of worldly power, and why his followers do the same. He explained why it was right for unbelieving authorities to have power in the world, but why it did not belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. The New Testament, Amos wrote, is the sole authority of Christ's followers, but the Old Testament is not, in its letter form, an authority at all—the difference being that Christ has now established his Kingdom on earth.

Hundreds of believers in southern Bohemia and elsewhere stood with Amos and Jacob. For a time even Brother Matthias, the bishop, returned to the church's former position. He declared the compromise of Brandys null and void, and dismissed the Inner Coun-

cil. However, it did not last. The brothers of Litomysl and Mlada Boleslav—chief among them Luke and his educated friends—criticized the old way. Gregory and Peter Chelcicky were good men, they said, but their teaching was off-balance and impractical. It served a generation of farmers well, but it did not fit intellectuals and people in ‘higher’ walks of life.

Within months, confusion and unrest overtook the Unity of Brothers as never before. Matthias and his conservative friends resigned their leadership, and a team of trained theologians (Luke among them) took over. A new Inner Council, hostile to the old way, re-enforced the compromise of Brandys. To that they added a decree stating that Gregory's and Peter Chelcicky's writings should no longer be considered authoritative. They allowed Matthias to keep his office, but only as a figurehead. His duties they restricted to officiating at ordinations and to serving as moderator in church meetings.

During the Lent season of 1495, Matthias and Luke made a final attempt to keep the south Bohemians in the Unity of Brothers. They met with Amos Stekensky, and those who agreed with him, in Jacob's house, not far from the historic village of Chelcice. All day they discussed the way of Christ and the way of the world. It turned dark. The time for the evening meal came and went. The the men reached no agreement. Matthias had firmly decided to keep the church together at all costs. Luke pushed for a more open and “balanced” understanding, spending much time explaining what Christ meant when he forbade the swearing of oaths—that there are three kinds of oaths, the false, the careless, and the true, and that Christ only condemned the first two. But the south Bohemians stood firm.

No matter how grandly Matthias and Luke promised their views full toleration in the church, the *Mensi strana*—the ‘Little Group’ as it came to be called—had no desire to be “back in a net with the rich, the powerful, and those who defend their lives with the sword.” For this “insubordination” and “sowing of discord”, the leaders of the church finally excommunicated Amos Stekensky, Jacob, and all who supported them, and the Unity's disunity became final.

Tracing the Little Group's Journey

Nothing, in the face of the Big Group's apostasy, surprised those of the Little Group more than the fact that their own group was so little.

Even though a vast number of brothers and sisters sympathized with them, only a few, at the last moment, sided with Amos, Jacob, and those who determined with them, to stick to the way of Christ at all costs. Perhaps they hesitated because of the Little Group's unconditional tone. "There is no middle way between carrying the the commands of Christ in every detail, and conforming to the world on the other," Amos wrote in a letter to Jacob. "Farmers take better care of their pigs," Jacob, in turn, wrote to Matthias, "than what you have taken care of the Lord's flock."

But here and there, in southern Bohemia and Moravia, in Klatov and Beroun, in Lanskroun, and even at the "Mount of Olives" in Litomysl, congregations of the Little Group took shape. Matous a weaver of Lanskroun, Andrew a cobbler, John a miller from Susice, Riha a weaver from Votice, Havel a tailor from Litomysl, Jirik a cooper from Votice, and Pavel a convert from the extinct Taborites became active workers among them.

At the old monastery in Vilemov, the brothers reprinted Peter Chelcicky's *The Net of True Faith*, and circulated hand written tracts. They took a dim view of higher education and because they would not take oaths—required in larger businesses—they contented themselves with working as farmers or craftsmen.

For years after the division, those of the Big Group tried to woo the Little Group back into their number, but without success. In a reply to them, Jacob wrote:

Now the Brothers say, "Let us open the gates of the fold to gather in more sheep. But when they open it up, the sheep already inside run out and the wolves tear them to pieces. ... The gates of the fold are the commandments and prohibitions of Christ who is the strait path and the narrow door. Whoever tries to make this gate wider and says a brother may be a town councilor or a judge, take oaths, or exercise the bloody rights of

the sword, is a thief and a murderer trying to come in some other way.

In the same tract, Jacob explained more beliefs of the Little Group:

From the beginning of the world good people have had to suffer. Those who have fallen away from the faith⁹⁴ have tried to prove that if a person suffers, being able to defend himself, his suffering is only like that of a donkey or another animal. But Christ did not take this view. He did not hesitate to lay his yoke upon his disciples and ask them, for the sake of the Kingdom, to renounce their property and families. Christ found his followers among the lowly and poor, among servants, not rulers; for it is not the poor who rule the world, but the rich. Christianity is a religion that blesses the poor and promises nothing but misery to the rich.

During the early years of the Unity, many renounced great estates, honor, fame, and a luxurious life. They suffered great trials, imprisonment, torture, and even death itself, with joy. Some of these, like the Sarovec and Sudomer families and our Brother Votik, lived afterwards on the same level as the simple Brothers. But now people with estates, the rich, the honored, and those who are friends with the world are coming into the church just as they are.

Throughout the centuries, the true Christian faith has been held by only a small minority of those who say they believe. Whenever the church grew very large the seed of true faith disappeared among them, but God preserves it among the faithful few. It is better to be on the right path with the chosen few than on the wrong path with the majority. It was to the small flock that Christ's words of comfort were directed, and when the great church fell away in the time of Constantine, it

⁹⁴ Referring here to Luke and other leaders of the Big Group

was only a few—the Waldensians—who stayed with the Truth. But now even they have departed from their former teachings.

Every movement, even though God begins it, suffers decline and corruption with time, because of the enemy's wickedness. Now that is happening to the Unity of Brothers. Those looking on can see, by comparing the Unity to what it used to be, that what began in the Spirit is ending in the flesh. This is happening because the brothers wanted to avoid persecution and win large numbers of people into the church who were unwilling to make the sacrifices formerly demanded for entry into the brotherhood.

Every word of Christ means exactly what it says, and He will in the end accept only those who accept His teaching. Heaven and earth will pass away before the least of His words. This is true in the matter of the oath. When Christ says, "Swear not at all," he means every kind of oath, just as James in James 5:12. And when Christians begin to set this aside and break His rule, they soon break his command to love their enemies as well—along with the rest of his commands in the Sermon on the Mount. Any attempt to do away with this one command is an attack on all the rest.

There is no proof whatsoever that men exercising civil power have ever belonged to or had part in the holy church. To try and mix the two [the church with civil power] would be like mixing fire with water. Christian groups who do not listen to Christ's commands in the Sermon on the Mount, and who allow their members to participate in the government are in fact the legions of damnation. You [of the Big Group] say you have not accepted the ways of the unbelieving world. But what else is it? Not only have you accepted them but with pious words you try to hide the fact that you have now given liberty for brothers to take office, swear and

fight in wars, deliver thieves up to justice, to the rack and the scaffold and to return evil for evil.

Why have we broken away from you? In the first place, it is because you oppress us by force. In second place, because you set yourselves up to judge but are not in a position to do so. In third place, because we cannot submit to your prostitution of doctrine through which you have corrupted what the Holy Scriptures teach.

In reality it is not we who have separated ourselves from you, but you from us. We are the ones who have stayed with what we formerly believed, and you are the ones who have brought in new and unheard of changes. The doctrine we now hold, many among you—like Brother Matthias, for instance—held for years, and we are minded to hold to it until we die. It is the doctrine we believed for years under Brother Gregory, and many brothers and sisters still hold it dear. But now you, Matthias, have of your own free will, as you say in a letter, deserted these teachings. Not only this, you have gone so far as to warn the congregations of the Unity against them.

Community at Letovice in Moravia

After the division of the Unity of Brothers, darkness and danger settled on Czech lands. By this time, the crown of Bohemia had passed to a son of the King of Poland. He married a French Catholic princess and persecution increased. Here and there, believers who refused to conform, suffered burning at the stake.

Among the believers of the Little Group, not everything went peacefully. When the time came to ordain new leaders, Amos and Jacob disagreed on how to go about it. Jacob returned to the Big Group and many others lost interest. Then a new face appeared among the faithful.

A knife grinder from Prague, a young man named John Kale-nec, who had eagerly sought the way of Christ, first among the

Hussites, then among the Lutherans, turned to the Unity of Brothers. Like Luke years earlier, he traveled to Mlada Boleslav and Brandys, to see how they lived and what they believed.

Unlike Luke—with whom he spoke at Mlada Boleslav—John saw with grief and displeasure the worldly ways of those who had joined the Unity. The thirst for the Truth gave him no rest until he discovered the Little Group, among whom he became a member with great joy around 1520.

So energetic was John Kalenec in his newfound brotherhood that the congregation at Prague grew rapidly, and when old Amos died in 1522, he became the Little Group's leader. This alarmed the Hussite rulers of the city who branded him on his face, whipped him publicly, and expelled him from the city in 1524. Two sisters and a brother lost their lives by burning, and others got long jail sentences.

From Prague, John fled to a settlement of the Little Group at Letovice, far to the east, in Moravia. Other believers found their way there, and it became the center of the movement. From there, John carried on a lively correspondence and studied the New Testament eagerly to discover even more about the way of Christ. Under his leadership, the Little Group returned to baptizing only adults, on confession of faith. Although they never received the appellation of “anabaptist”, they certainly practiced just that. Their testimony against all forms of violence and swearing of oaths stood firm. And they chose to live, like Christ, in voluntary poverty.⁹⁵ Like in early Christian times, and among the Waldensians and Albigenses before them, they had all things common, and many of them remained single.

No writing from the community at Letovice appeared in print.⁹⁶ But from John's letters that survive, their strong feeling against all forms of “worldliness” become clear. To those of the Big Group, John wrote:

⁹⁵ The words “voluntary poverty” scare some Christians. But what is meant here is a non-accumulation of money or goods. It does not mean that the believers went about begging to make a living, as some of the Catholic Orders mistakenly did.

⁹⁶ Printing in those days was still a complicated and expensive procedure.

You permit your members to carry on trades that you did not formerly allow. Now they take interest on money. They buy things cheap and sell them for much more. Many of you who could exist on a single craft, freely pursue several trades. More than that, you add field to field, you continually make more gardens, meadows, and vineyards, and buy up house after house, even village after village. . . .

In earlier times, Brother Luke warned those who dealt in clothing, those who dyed material, and tailors, to keep themselves from the vanity and wickedness of the world. But now you wear stylish clothes and live in luxurious houses. In the same way, your sisters, following your example, wear costly robes of velvet and lace. They put on fancily embroidered under-clothing, and dresses decorated with silk and gold.

Sebastian Franck, a contemporary historian describing the Little Group in Moravia, wrote in 1531:

They agree altogether with the Anabaptists. Like them, they hold all things in common. They baptize no children and do not believe that the body of the Lord is present in the sacrament.

Indeed, the similarity between some Czech believers and their Anabaptist neighbors was too great to miss. Thus Sebastian Franck was not nearly the first, nor the only one, to notice it.

New Brothers in Czech Lands

Only a few years after John Kalenec fled from Prague to Moravia, he learned of a new group settling around Mikulov , Husstopece, Slavkov u Brna and elsewhere on the lands of the Lords von Lichtenstein. Like the Waldensians, coming to Moravia years before, they were refugees. And like the Waldensians they were German people. But they came from Switzerland and Austria, and they belonged to the new “Anabaptist” movement.

Even though communication was a problem, both the Little and Big Groups of the Unity of Brothers in Moravia hastened to meet their new neighbors and discover what they believed. The results were interesting, but did not lead to full-fledged unity.

On one hand, those of the Big Group had become far too involved in commerce and government for the Anabaptists to feel at one with them. Instead of coming to terms in spiritual matters, they came to terms materially, and at least eighteen Anabaptist “Bruderhof” flourished on estates of Big Group nobility.⁹⁷

On the other hand, the Anabaptists did not live up to the ideals of the Little Group, patterned after centuries of careful and serious-minded following of Christ. Some Anabaptists—those in the city of Mikulov under Balthasar Hubmaier—did not hold a clear testimony against the use of the sword. Others, as reported by John Kalenec, tolerated “worldly and frivolous professions” like wood carving, painting, the cutting of jewels, and tavern-keeping. Worst of all, even the most conservative group, those named for their leader, Jacob Hutter, had moral problems among them that they did not always take care of. In the Moravian town of Zadovice a group of Hutterite men, out for something to drink, stole several barrels of beer from the manorial brewery. In another incident, Hutterites were rightfully accused of stealing wood from a private forest. “And such men,” a Czech brother wrote, “claim that they have mortified their flesh and are born again!”⁹⁸

John Kalenec, after lamenting the Anabaptists’ spiritual pride and lack of love in condemning all who did not practice community just like them, praised them, however, for what he found good. “We rejoice in the fact that you have condemned infant bap-

⁹⁷ Among these were the lords von Zerotin, prominent members of the Unity of Brothers (Big Group), who protected the Anabaptists on many occasions, and granted them material concessions. Important Anabaptist communities on Big Group lands were Rocice (Rossitz), Pouzdrany (Pausram), Zidlochovice (Seelowitz), and Breclav (Lundenburg).

⁹⁸ Reported in a letter copied at Kyjov in Moravia, on July 1, 1589. It is to be noted that these incidents were probably the exceptions, not the rule. The early Hutterites had a good reputation all-in-all.

tism,⁹⁹ baptizing a second time in faith,” he wrote to them, “and also that you have attained the equality of the First Kingdom, that is, of the Church, where none may say: This is mine.” And when the Anabaptists faced persecution, the Bohemian brothers stood ready to help where they could.

As time went on the Little Group seems to have been absorbed into this “new” movement.¹⁰⁰ By the late mid-16th century, they disappear from the records as a distinct group.

The Community at Habrovany

Just as close to the center of the Little Group at Letovice as the Anabaptists, and even closer to them in background and belief, stood the community at Habrovany, a short distance north of Slavkov u Brna.

The Habrovany brothers shared with the Little Group the spiritual background of the Waldensians in southern Bohemia, the revivals under Peter Chelcicky and Gregory, and the trial of persecution under Hussite and Catholic authorities. But they did not stand in direct association.

In 1528, the Moravian nobleman John Dubcansky decided to follow Christ. Unlike Bohus Kostka, however, he did not try to be a Christian and live in sumptuousness at the same time.¹⁰¹ He took the Sermon on the Mount as his guide and rejected violence and civil office at once. That brought him into contact with Vaclav of Lilec, the former rector of the monastery at Vilemov near Chelcice, and with Matthias, a solitudinarian from Zatec in western Bohemia.

⁹⁹ While the Little Group praised them for rebaptism, the Big Group moved further away from it. It is recorded that three meetings took place between the Anabaptists and the Big Group to discuss unity. After the unsuccessful talks, Luke, the Bishop of the Big Group, wrote in a personal letter that rebaptism was unnecessary and ought to be dropped from the Big Group's practice.

¹⁰⁰ Among the first Anabaptists burned at the stake in Moravia, at Brno in May, 1528, was John Cizek, a former member of the Unity of Brothers. Other records indicate that John Kalenec, the Little Group bishop, visited among Anabaptists congregations.

¹⁰¹ This is something we North Americans seem bent on trying to prove wrong: that one can live sumptuously on earth and still make heaven.

Long a refuge of the Waldensians, the Zatec area had a history of radical Christianity. On the German side of the mountains, at Zwickau, a group of prophets helped launch the Protestant Reformation. On the Bohemian side, Matthias, a trapper who spent long times in the forest alone, discovered peace in Christ, and on his return to civilization he began to preach on streets and squares, calling everyone to repent “for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” A year after Matthias began to preach, in 1520, a terrible plague struck Bohemia. Afraid to die, many, even in Prague, listened to his warnings and got converted. Others took deep offense.

Mathias spoke fearlessly against the corruption of wealth and power. In 1525 the Hussites threw him into prison. When they released him, a year later, they drove him from Prague and he went to live with John Dubcansky, the converted nobleman at Habrovany in Moravia. There Vaclav of Lilec joined them, and in 1528 they established a new congregation along the lines of Peter Chelicky and Gregory’s teaching, based on the Sermon on the Mount.

Like the Little Group of the Unity, the brothers at Habrovany took a clear stand against all types of violence, the swearing of oaths, and participation in civil government. The “outward sacraments” of baptism and communion however, were not as important to them, and believing in the priesthood of all believers, they had no ordained leaders. At Lulec in Moravia, they set up a print shop from where, after 1530, a steady stream of books and tracts appeared. In 1537, the authorities imprisoned John Dubcansky, and not long after, this group also disappeared from the records.

Tracing the Big Group

Once free of constant criticism by the Little Group, the Vetsi strana, the “Big Group” as people called it, made bold and rapid moves toward society and the world. Luke, with the support of the Unity’s publishing house at Mlada Boleslav, wrote voluminous works defending the oath and participation in war. He explained why “turning the other cheek” is only a spiritual, not a physical concept, and following his teaching that to hold possessions is

“morally neutral,” members of the Unity began to see wealth and prestige as signs of the blessing of God.

Along with this, Luke returned to John Huss and John Wycliffe’s teaching of a threefold society. Christ did not come to restructure society, he said, but to correct its abuses. And the idea of correcting them by force did not bother him. “To kill and destroy the enemies of the Lord, providing it is done justly and without hatred, is not inconsistent with showing them love... Moderation should of course be used, but I cannot say it is wrong to go about with daggers.”¹⁰²

Matthias, the old Bishop that had been with Gregory, himself wrote in defense of what the Unity now practiced:

We do not forbid you to lead the rich toward voluntary poverty, to snatch them from civil offices that endanger their souls, and lead them toward a more perfect life and closer imitation of Christ. But that is not for all men. Christ said it is difficult, but not impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Some who believed in Christ, such as the Roman Centurion, were men with authority.

Against the Little Group’s accusation that higher learning and the study of theology had corrupted the church, a theologian in the Big Group wrote a book, *On the Learned Men*, and Luke expressed disgust at the primitive Unity writings and viewpoints of “unlearned innovators.”

During this time, they made their position still clearer. Instead of taking Peter Chelcicky as their ‘guide’, they now took “the Bible and the Bible alone”. “We content ourselves,” they solemnly declared, at another Synod held at Rychnov, “with those sacred books which have been accepted from of old by all Christians, and are found in the Bible.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² From a writing of Luke against the Little Group

¹⁰³ Sounds good: “the Bible and the Bible alone.” What this really translated into in this case was “applying our understanding of the Bible, instead of Peter Chelcicky’s.” This good sounding phrase can mean something other than what it is supposed to!

No longer did they honor the memory of Peter Chelcicky; no longer did they hold to his views in their writings. Now, instead of counting Peter as the founding voice of their movement, they began to regard themselves as the disciples of John Huss. In days gone by, they had spoken of Huss as a “causer of war.” Now they held his name and memory sacred; and from this time onward the real followers of Peter’s teachings were, not the Brethren as a whole, but the “little group” led by Amos and Jacob.

In another meeting of its leaders, the Big Group decided to tolerate tavern ownership and liquor brewing among them, providing its members did not drink to excess; and Luke’s statement on civil power became their own:

Civil power, with its laws and punishments, may be exercised in the Unity and in the holy church. A lord owning estates, castles, fortresses and towns may be accepted into the Unity without having to relinquish the sword, and may become a brother while continuing to order punishments and executions... It is not impossible to hang a man while having love towards him in one’s heart.

After old Bishop Matthias died and Luke became bishop of the Unity, he reintroduced elaborate rituals, silver and gilt communion vessels, and embroidered robes for its priests. Financed by the baron, Bohus Kostka—by now a member of the church—he and other delegates traveled to Greece, Asia Minor, and Europe to find like-minded people and support for their actions.¹⁰⁴ But they found none, and in a later historian’s words,

Out of Bohemian puritans who followed Peter Chelcicky rather than John Huss—people who admired celibacy like Paul, who swore no oaths, who held no civil office, who indulged in no luxury, who tolerated no wealth, who charged no interest on money, who took no part whatsoever in war—had arisen well-to-do cap-

¹⁰⁴ On this trip they visited the Waldensians in the Cottian Alps, by now far removed from their forefathers’ beliefs, and witness the burning of Savonarola in Florence.

italists, honorable householders, very successful businessmen, respected town officials and sworn in, very active generals and statesmen.

On Dec. 11th, 1528, Luke of Prague, the Big Group's Bishop, breathed his last. As Gregory had gone to his rest when a new party was rising among the Brethren, so Luke of Prague crossed the cold river of death when new ideas from Germany were stirring the hearts of the Big Group.

He was never quite easy in his mind about Martin Luther. He still believed in the Seven Sacraments. He still believed in the Brethren's system of moral discipline—despite the fact that he was responsible for compromising it. He still believed, for practical reasons, in the superiority of celibacy for the clergy. "This eating," he wrote, "this drinking, this self-indulgence, this marrying, this living to the world—what a poor preparation it is for men who are leaving Babylon. If a man does this he is yoking himself with strangers. Marriage never made anyone holy yet. It is a hindrance to the higher life, and causes endless trouble."

Above all, he objected to Luther's way of teaching the "great doctrine" of justification by faith.

"Never, never," he said, in a letter to Luther, "can you ascribe a man's salvation to faith alone. The Scriptures are against you.¹⁰⁵ You think that in this you are doing a good work, but you are really fighting against Christ Himself and clinging to an error." He regarded Luther's teaching as extreme and one-sided. He was shocked by what he heard of the jovial life led by Luther's students at Wittenberg, and could never understand how a rollicking youth could be a preparation for a holy ministry. As Gregory had warned Matthias against "the learned Brethren," so Luke, in his turn, now warned the Brethren against the loose lives of Luther's merry-hearted students; and, in order to preserve the Brethren's discipline, he now issued a comprehensive treatise, divided into two parts. The first was entitled "*Instructions for Priests*", and the second "*Instructions and Admonitions for All Occupations, All*

¹⁰⁵ Do a search to find the only place where "faith" and "alone" are found together in the English Bible, and see what that verse says.

Ages in Life, All Ranks and All Sorts of Characters". As he lay on his death-bed at Mlada Boleslav, his heart was stirred by mingled feelings. He would rather see his Church alone and pure than swept away in the Protestant current.

But it was too late. He who had given the flesh six inches, now had remorse when it was taking a yard.

Literature Outreach

During these times, the use of printed literature was growing. Seeing it as an avenue to reaching souls, the Brethren put this new technology to use.

"Very rarely," says the historian Gindely, "has a Christian [group] sent into the world so many writings in its defense." The number of their works, from their foundation to their almost complete extinction, after the death of Comenius in 1670, is much larger than that of all other contemporary literature combined. They were the first to have the Bible printed in the mother tongue (in Venice), so that in this respect the Bohemians took precedence of all other nations. At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were five printing establishments in Bohemia—one Catholic in Pilsen, one Utraquist in Prague, and three belonging to the Bohemian Brethren in Mlada Boleslav, Litosmyl, and Weisswasser respectively. Even these three could not always meet the demands made on them, and occasionally they had their books printed in Nurenberg. During the first decade of the 1500s, fifty of the sixty works published were from the Brethren.

Peculiar, but strictly in accord with their firm discipline, was the regulation that no member should write and publish a book without the consent of the community. "No one with us," says their Church ordinance, "has permission to publish books before they are previously examined by the other members of the community, and authorized by their unanimous approval."

Johannes Lasitzki, a Pole, who visited the Brotherhood in 1571, writes as follows in his work, *De origine et rebus jectis Fratrum Bohemorum*:

“No book appears without a previous examination by several elders and Church officials, chosen and appointed for the purpose ... It is also the custom not to allow any work to be published in one member’s name only (except under special conditions), but in the name of the whole Brotherhood. Thus each member of the spiritual body gets quite as much honor from the work as any other, and every opportunity is removed for the indulgence of the vain thirst for fame which as a rule titillates the minds of authors, while the writings themselves acquire so much the greater weight and esteem.”

As the Brethren downplayed University education, it is natural to draw the plain conclusion that among them the common people were the most benighted and ignorant in the land. The very opposite was the case. Among them, the common people were the most enlightened in the country. Of the Bohemian people in those days, there were few who could read or write; of the Brethren there was scarcely one who could not. If the Brethren taught the people nothing else, they at least taught them to read their native tongue; and their object in this was to spread the knowledge of the Bible.

However, in those days a man who could read was regarded as a prodigy of learning. The result of this education was widespread alarm. As the report gained ground that among the Brethren the humblest people could read as well as the priest, the good folk in Bohemia felt compelled to concoct some explanation, and the only explanation they could imagine was that the Brethren had the special assistance of the devil. If a man, said they, joined the ranks of the Brethren, the devil immediately taught him the art of reading, and if, on the other hand, he deserted the Brethren, the devil promptly robbed him of the power, and reduced him again to a wholesome benighted condition.

In this instance, however, the devil was innocent. The real culprit was Bishop Luke of Prague. In spite of his compromise, he made a positive step in basic education of the Brethren. The greatest was perhaps his publication of his “*Catechism for Children*,” commonly known as “*The Children’s Questions*”. It was a

masterly and comprehensive treatise, published first, of course, in the Bohemian language in 1502. It was published again in a German edition for the benefit of the German members of the Church in 1522. Both the Lutheran and the Reformed Church printed and used it among their congregations. And thus it exercised a profound influence on the whole course of the Protestant Reformation, both in Germany and in Switzerland.

This was not a book for the preachers. It was a book for the fathers of families; a book found in every brother's home. It was the children's "Reader." As the boys and girls grew up in the Brethren's church, they learned to read, not in national schools, but in their own homes.

Among them, the duties of a father were clearly defined. He was both a schoolmaster and a religious instructor. He was the priest in his own family. He was to bring his children up in the Christian faith. He was not to allow them to roam at pleasure, or play with the wicked children of the world. He was to see that they were devout at prayers, respectful in speech, and noble and upright in conduct. He was not to allow brothers and sisters to sleep in the same room, or boys and girls to roam the daisied fields together. He was not to strike his children with a stick or with his fists. If he struck them at all, he must do so with a switch. Above all, he had to teach his children the Catechism.

Part V Burial

John Augusta: Joining Hands with Protestantism

As Bishop Luke lay dying at Mlada Boleslav, there was rising to fame among the Big Group the most brilliant and powerful leader they had ever known. Again we turn to the old Teyn Church; again the preacher is denouncing the priests; and again in the pew is an eager listener with soul aflame with zeal. The listeners name was John Augusta. He was born, in 1500, at Prague. His father was a hatter, and in all probability he learned the trade himself. He was brought up in the Utraquist faith; he took the sacrament every Sunday in the famous old Teyn Church; and there he heard the preacher declare that the priests in Prague cared for nothing but comfort, and that the average Christians of the day were no better than crack-brained heathen sprinkled with holy water. The young man was staggered; he consulted other priests, and the others told him the same dismal tale. One loaned him a pamphlet, entitled "*The Antichrist*";¹⁰⁶ another lent him a treatise by Huss; and a third said solemnly: "My son, I see that God has more in store for you than I can understand."

However, the strangest event of all was still to come. As he rode one day in a covered wagon with two Ultraquist priests of high rank, it so happened that one of them turned to Augusta and urged him to leave the Utraquist Church and join the ranks of the Big Group at Mlada Boleslav. Augusta was horrified!

Again he consulted the learned priest; again he received the same strange counsel; and one day the priest ran after him, called him back, and said: "Listen, dear brother! I beseech you, leave us. You will get no good among us. Go to the Brethren at Mlada Boleslav, and there your soul will find rest."

Augusta was shocked beyond measure. He hated the Brethren, regarded them as beasts, and had often warned others against them. But now he went to see them himself, and found to his joy that

¹⁰⁶ Peter Chelcicky's tract, likely. But there may have been others tracts with the same name.

they followed the Scriptures, obeyed the Gospel¹⁰⁷ and enforced their rules without respect of persons. For a while he was in a quandary. His conscience drew him to the Big Group, his honor held him to the Utraquists, and finally his own father-confessor settled the question for him.

“Dear friend,” said the man, “entrust your soul to the Brethren. Never mind if some of them are hypocrites, who do not obey their own rules. It is your business to obey the rules yourself. What more do you want? If you return to us in Prague, you will meet with none but sinners and sodomites.”

And so, by the advice of Utraquist priests, this ardent young man joined the ranks of the Brethren, was probably trained in the Brethren’s house at Mlada Boleslav, and was soon ordained as a minister. Forthwith he rose to fame and power in the pulpit. His manner was dignified and noble. His brow was lofty, his eye flashing, his bearing the bearing of a commanding king. He was a splendid speaker, a ready debater, a ruler of men, an inspirer of action; he was known ere long as the Bohemian Luther; and he spread the fame of the Brethren’s Church throughout the Protestant world.

Full soon, in truth, he began his great campaign. As he entered on his work as a preacher of the Gospel, he found that among the younger Brethren there were quite a number who did not feel at all disposed to be bound by the warning words of Luke of Prague. They had been to the great Wittenberg University; they had mingled with Luther’s students; they had listened to the talk of Michael Weiss, who had been a monk at Breslau, and had brought Lutheran opinions with him; they admired both Luther and Melancthon; and they now resolved, with one consent, that if the candlestick of the Brethren’s Church was not to be moved from out its place, they must step shoulder to shoulder with Luther, become a regiment in the conquering Protestant army, and march with him to the goodly land where the flower of the ‘glad free Gospel bloomed in purity and sweet perfume.’

¹⁰⁷ That is, more than the Utraquists did.

At the first opportunity Augusta, their leader, brought forward their views. At a Synod held at Brandys nad Orlici—summoned by John Augusta's friend, John Horn, the senior Bishop of the Big Group, for the purpose of electing some new Bishops—Augusta rose to address the assembly. He spoke in the name of the younger clergy, and immediately commenced an attack upon the old Executive Council. He accused them of listlessness and sloth; he said that they could not understand the spirit of the age, and he ended his speech by proposing himself and four other broad-minded men as members of the Council. The old men were shocked; the young were entranced; and Augusta was elected and consecrated a Bishop, and thus, at the age of thirty-two, became the leader of the Big Group. He had three great schemes in view:

1. Friendly relations with Protestants in other countries.
2. Legal recognition of the Brethren in Bohemia.
3. The union of all Bohemian Protestants.

First, then, with Augusta to lead them on, the Big Group brethren enlisted in the Protestant army. As the Protestants in Germany had issued the Confession of Augsburg, and had it read in solemn style before the face of the Emperor, Charles V, so now the Big Group issued a new and full "Confession of Faith," to be sent first to George, Margrave of Brandenburg, and then laid in due time before Ferdinand, King of Bohemia.

Peter Chelcicky and Gregory would have "turned over in their grave!" Joining in the military and mixing Church and State!

Even now the Big Group did not, like Luther, lay stress on the doctrine of 'justification by faith alone'. And yet Luther had no fault to find with this Confession. It was addressed to him, was printed at Wittenberg, was issued with his consent and approval, and was praised by him in a preface. It was read and approved by John Calvin, by Martin Bucer, by Philip Melancthon, by pious old George, Margrave of Brandenburg, and by John Frederick, Elector of Saxony. Again and again the Big Group sent deputies to see the great Protestant leaders. At Wittenberg, Augusta discussed good morals with Luther and Melancthon; and at Strasburg, Cerwenka, the Big Group's historian, held friendly counsel with Martin Bucer

and Calvin. Never had the Bohemian Brethren been so widely known, and never had they received so many compliments. Formerly Luther, who liked straight talk, had called the Brethren “sour-looking hypocrites and self-grown saints, who believe in nothing but what they themselves teach.”

But now he was all good humor. “There never have been any Christians,” he said, in a lecture to his students, “so like the apostles in doctrine and constitution as these Bohemian Brethren.”

“Tell your Brethren,” he said to their deputies, “to hold fast what God has given them, and never give up their constitution and discipline. Let them take no heed of revilements. The world will behave foolishly. If you in Bohemia were to live as we do, what is said of us would be said of you, and if we were to live as you do, what is said of you would be said of us.” “We have never,” he added, in a letter to the Brethren, “attained to such a discipline and holy life as is found among you, but in the future we shall make it our aim to attain it.”¹⁰⁸

The other “great Reformers” were just as enthusiastic. “How shall I,” said Bucer, “instruct those whom God Himself has instructed! You alone, in all the world, combine a wholesome discipline with a pure faith.”

“We,” said Calvin, “have long since recognized the value of such a system, but cannot, in any way, attain to it.”

“I am pleased,” said Melancthon, “with the strict discipline enforced in your congregations. I wish we could have a stricter discipline in ours.”

Meanwhile Augusta pushed his second plan; Legal recognition of the Big Group. The task before him was gigantic. A great event had taken place in Bohemia. At the battle of Mohacz, in a war with the Turks, Louis, King of Bohemia, fell from his horse when crossing a stream, and was drowned.¹⁰⁹ The old line of Bohemian Kings had come to an end. The crown fell into the hands of the

¹⁰⁸ Such words of praise, for a compromised lifestyle. Yet Luther seemed not to realized that his very doctrine inhibited his followers from attaining such ‘high’ morality!

¹⁰⁹ In the year 1526.

Hapsburgs—the fervent supporters of the Church of Rome. The King of Bohemia, Ferdinand I, was likewise King of Hungary, Archduke of Austria, King of the Romans, and brother of the Emperor Charles V, the head of the Holy Roman Empire.

For the Big Group the situation was momentous. As Augusta scanned the widening view, he saw that the time was coming fast when “the brethren”, whether they wanted to or not, would be called to “play their part like men” in a vast European conflict. Already the Emperor Charles V had threatened to crush the Reformation by force; already the Protestant princes in Germany had formed the Smalkald League; and Augusta, scenting the battle from afar, resolved to build a 'fortress' for the Brethren.

His policy was clear and simple. If the King of Bohemia joined forces with the Emperor, the days of the Big Group would soon be over. So he, John Augusta, would make the King of Bohemia their friend, and thus save them from destruction.

For this purpose, Augusta now instructed the powerful Baron, Conrad Krajek, the richest member of the Big Group, to present their Confession of Faith to King Ferdinand. The Baron undertook the task. He was the leader of a group of Barons who had recently joined the Church; he had built the great Zbor of the Brethren in Mlada Boleslav, known as “Mount Carmel”; he had been the first to suggest a Confession of Faith, and now, having signed the Confession himself, he sought out the King at Vienna, and was admitted to a private interview.¹¹⁰

The scene was stormy. “We would like to know,” said the King, “how you Brethren came to adopt this faith. The devil has persuaded you.”

“Not the devil, gracious liege,” replied the Baron, “but Christ the Lord through the Holy Scriptures. If Christ was a Picard, then I am one too.”

The King was beside himself with rage.

“What business,” he shouted, “have you to meddle with such things? You are neither Pope, nor Emperor, nor King. Believe

¹¹⁰ Nov. 11th, 1535

what you will! We shall not prevent you! If you really want to go to hell, go by all means!”

The Baron was silent. The King paused.

“Yes, yes,” he continued, “You may believe what you like and we shall not prevent you; but all the same, I give you warning that we shall put a stop to your meetings, where you carry on your hocus-pocus.”

The Baron was almost weeping.

“Your Majesty,” he protested, “should not be so hard on me and my noble friends. We are the most loyal subjects in your kingdom.”

The King softened, spoke more gently, but still held to his point.

“I swore,” he said, “at my coronation to give justice to the Ultraquists and Catholics, and I know what the statute says.”

As the King spoke those ominous words, he was referring, as the Baron knew full well, to the terrible Edict of St. James. The interview ended; the Baron withdrew; the issue still hung doubtful.

And yet the Baron had not spoken in vain. For three days the King was left undisturbed; and then two other Barons appeared and presented the Confession, signed by twelve nobles and thirty-three knights, in due form.

“Do you really think,” they humbly said, “that it helps the unity of the kingdom when priests are allowed to say in the pulpit that it is less sinful to kill a Picard than it is to kill a dog.”

The King was touched; his anger was gone, and a week later he promised the Barons that as long as they, the Big Group, were loyal subjects, he would allow them to worship as they pleased.

For some years the new policy worked very well, and the King kept his promise. The Big Group’s numbers were extending on every hand. They had now at least four hundred churches and 200,000 members. They printed and published translations of Luther’s works. They had a church in the city of Prague itself. They enjoyed the favor of the leading nobles in the land; and Augusta, in a famous sermon, expressed the hope that before very

long the Brethren and Utraquists would be united and form one National Protestant Church...¹¹¹

Unexpected Reverse

At this point something did take a turn for the better. As the Big Group was now so friendly with Luther, there was a danger that they would abandon their discipline—what was left of it—and become ashamed of their own little Church, and try to totally imitate the teaching and practice of their powerful Protestant friends. For some years after Bishop Luke’s death, they actually gave way to this temptation, and Luke’s last treatise, “Regulations for Priests,” was scornfully cast aside.

However, the The Big Group soon returned to their senses—at least a little. As John Augusta and John Horn traveled in Germany, they made the strange and startling discovery that, after all, the Brethren’s Church was better off than their Protestant friend’s churches. For a while they were dazzled by the brilliance of the Lutheran preachers; but in the end they came to the conclusion that although these preachers were clever men, they had not so firm a grip on Divine truth as the their own preachers. At last, in 1546, the Big Group met in a Synod at Mlada Boleslav to discuss the whole situation. With tears in his eyes, John Horn addressed the assembly. “I have never understood until now,” he said, “what a costly treasure our Church is. I have been blinded by the reading of German books! I have never found any thing so good in those books as we have in the books of the Brethren. You have no need, beloved Brethren, to seek for instruction from others. You have enough at home. I exhort you to study what you have already; you will find there all you need.”

Again the church discipline was revived in vigor;¹¹² again, by Augusta’s advice, the Catechism of Luke was put into common use, and the Brethren began to open schools and teach their principles to others.

¹¹¹ And who changed so as to make this formerly inviable union possible?

¹¹² Not the original discipline of Chelcicky or Gregory, of course, but the modified of Luke of Prague.

But now their fondest hopes were doomed to be blasted. For the last time Augusta went to Wittenberg to discuss the value of discipline with Luther, and as his stay drew to a close he warned the man that if the German theologians spent so much time in spinning doctrines and so little time in teaching morals, there was danger brewing ahead.

The warning soon came true. The Reformer died. The gathering clouds in Germany burst, and the Smalkald War broke out. The storm swept on to Bohemia. As the Emperor gathered his forces in Germany to crush the Protestant Princes to powder, so Ferdinand in Bohemia summoned his subjects to rally round his standard at Litomerice and defend the kingdom and the throne against the Protestant rebels. For the first time in their history, the Bohemian Brethren were ordered to take sides in a civil war.

The situation was delicate. If they fought for the Catholic King Ferdinand, they would be untrue to their faith; if they fought against him, they would be disloyal to their country.

As soon as they could possibly do so, the Big Group elders issued a form of prayer to be used in all their churches. It was a prayer for the kingdom and the throne. But meanwhile, others were taking definite sides. At Litomerice, the Catholics and old-fashioned Utraquists mustered to fight for the King; and at Prague the Protestant nobles met to defend the cause of religious liberty. They met in secret at a Big Group member's house; they formed a Committee of Safety of eight, and of those eight, four were Big Group members. They passed a resolution to defy the King, and send help to the German Protestant leader, John Frederick, Elector of Saxony.

And then the retribution fell like a bolt from the blue. The great battle of Muhlberg was fought;¹¹³ the Protestant troops were routed; the Elector of Saxony was captured; the Emperor was master of Germany, and Ferdinand returned to Prague with vengeance written on his brow. He called a council at Prague Castle, summoned the nobles and knights before him, ordered them to de-

¹¹³ April 24th, 1547

liver up their treasonable papers, came down on many with heavy fines, and condemned the ringleaders to death.

The Wages of Rebellion

At eight in the morning, August 22nd, four Barons were led out to execution in Prague. The scaffold was erected in a public place that all the people might see and learn a lesson. Among the Barons was Wenzel Petipesky, a member of the Big Group's Church. He was to be the first to die. As he was led from his cell by the executioner, he called out in a loud voice, which could be heard far and wide: "My dear Brethren, we go happy in the name of the Lord, for we go in the narrow way."

Narrow way? Since when did armed rebellion become the narrow way?

He walked to the scaffold with his hands bound before him while two boys played his dead march on drums. As he reached the scaffold the drums ceased, and the executioner announced that the prisoner was dying because he had tried to dethrone King Ferdinand and put another King in his place.

"That," said Petipesky, "was never the case."

"Never mind, my Lord," roared the executioner, "it will not help you now."

"My God," said Petipesky, "I leave all to You." And his head rolled on the ground.¹¹⁴

The worst was still to come. As Ferdinand came out of the castle church on Sunday morning, September 18th, he was met by a deputation of Utraquists and Catholics, who besought him to protect them against the cruelties inflicted on them by the 'Picards'. The King soon eased their minds. He had heard a rumor that John Augusta was the real leader of the revolt; he regarded the Brethren as traitors; he no longer felt bound by his promise to spare them; and, therefore, reviving the Edict of St. James, he issued an order that all their meetings should be suppressed, all their property be confiscated, all their churches be purified and transformed into Ro-

¹¹⁴ This goes to show that not all who die a 'martyr's death' will be ready to meet God on the judgment day.

manist Chapels, and all their priests be captured and brought to the castle in Prague.

The Big Group brethren pleaded not guilty. They had not, as a whole body, taken any part in the conspiracy against the King. Instead of plotting against him, in fact, they had prayed and fasted in every parish for the kingdom and the throne. If the King, they protested, desired to punish the few guilty Brethren, by all means let him do so; but let him not crush the innocent many for the sake of a guilty few.

“My word,” replied the King, “is final.” The Brethren continued to protest. And the King retorted by issuing an order that all Brethren who lived on Royal estates must either accept the Catholic faith or leave the country before six weeks were over.¹¹⁵

Exodus

Ferdinand was astounded at the result of this decree. Unwilling to face persecution as an “illegal church”, thousands from the Big Group went over en masse to the Utraquists. A minority that refused, about 1500 people, fled on foot and in refugee wagon trains through Silesia to Poland. The Anabaptists fled east, to Hungary, and the Little Group, with the brothers at Habrovany¹¹⁶ simply disappeared.

The End of John Augusta

Meanwhile, John Augusta, the leader of the Big Group still in Bohemia, was passing through the furnace of affliction.

Of all the tools employed by Ferdinand, the most crafty, active and ambitious was a certain officer named Sebastian Schoneich, who, in the words of the great historian, Gindely, was one of those men fitted by nature for the post of hangman.

For some months this man had distinguished himself by his zeal in the cause of the King. He had seized sixteen heads of families for singing hymns at a baker’s funeral, had thrown them into the

¹¹⁵ May, 1548

¹¹⁶ This was the independent congregation of believers that also practiced the Sermon on the Mount.

sewer drains of the White Tower at Prague, and had left them there to mend their ways in the midst of filth and horrible stenches. And now he occupied the position of town-captain of Litosmyl. For some time Augusta had been hiding in the neighboring woods, and only two or three Brethren knew his exact abode. Persecution had done her work, and treachery now did hers.

Among the inhabitants of Litosmyl were certain renegade Brethren, and these now said to the Royal Commissioners: "If the King could only capture and torture Augusta, he could unearth the whole conspiracy."

"Where is Augusta?" asked the Commissioners.

"He is not at home," replied the traitors, "But if you will ask his friend, Jacob Bilek, he will tell you all you want to know."

The wily Schoneich laid his plot. If only he could capture Augusta, he would win the favor of the King and fill his own pockets with money. As he strolled one day through the streets of Litosmyl he met a certain innocent Brother Henry, and there and then began his deadly work.

"If you know," he said, "where Augusta is, tell him I desire an interview with him. I will meet him wherever he likes. I have something special to say to him, something good, not only for him, but for the whole Unity. But breathe not a word of this to anyone else. Not a soul—not even yourself—must know about the matter."

The message to Augusta was sent. He replied that he would grant the interview on condition that Schoneich would guarantee his personal safety.

"That," replied Schoneich, "is quite impossible. I cannot give any security whatever. The whole business must be perfectly secret. Not a soul must be present but Augusta and myself. I wouldn't have the King know about this for a thousand groschen. Tell Augusta not to be afraid of me. I have no instructions concerning him. He can come with an easy mind to Litosmyl. If he will not trust me as far as that, let him name the place himself, and I will go though it be a dozen miles away."

But Augusta still returned the same answer, and Schoneich had to strengthen his plea. Again he met the guileless Brother Henry, and again he stormed him with his eloquent tongue.

“Have you no better answer from Augusta?” he asked.

“No,” replied Brother Henry.

“My dear, my only Henry,” pleaded Schoneich, “I do so long for a little chat with Augusta. My heart bleeds with sympathy for you. I am expecting the King’s Commissioners. They may be here any moment. It will go hard with you poor folk when they come. If only I could have a talk with Augusta, it would be so much better for you all. But do tell him not to be afraid of me. I have no instructions concerning him. I will wager my neck for that,” he said, putting his finger to his throat. “I am willing to give my life for you poor Brethren.”

The shot went home. As Augusta lay in his safe retreat he had written stirring letters to the Brethren urging them to be true to their colors; and now, he heard from his friends in Litosmyl that Schoneich was an evangelical saint, and that if he would only confer with the saint he might render his Brethren signal service, and deliver them from their distresses. He responded nobly to the appeal. For the sake of the Church he had led so long, he would risk his liberty and his life. In vain the voice of prudence said “Stay!”; the voice of love said “Go!”; and Augusta agreed to meet the Captain in a wood three miles from the town.

The Captain chuckled.

The time was fixed, and, the night before, the artful plotter sent three of his trusty friends to lie in wait. As the morning broke of the fateful day,¹¹⁷ Augusta, still suspecting a trap, sent his secretary, Jacob Bilek, in advance to spy the land; and the three brave men sprang out upon him and carried him off to Schoneich. And then, at the appointed hour, came John Augusta himself. He had dressed himself as a country peasant, carried a hoe in his hand, and strolled in the woodland whistling a merry tune. For the moment the hirelings were baffled. They seized him and let him go; they seized him again and let him go again; they seized him, for the

¹¹⁷ April 25th, 1548

third time, searched him, and found a fine handkerchief in his bosom.

“Ah,” said one of them, “a country peasant does not use a handkerchief like this.”

The game was up. Augusta stood revealed, and Schoneich, hearing the glorious news, came prancing up on his horse.

“My lord,” said Augusta, “is this what you call faith?”

“Did you never hear,” said Schoneich, “that promises made in the night are never binding? Did you never hear of a certain Jew with his red beard and yellow bag? Did you never hear of the mighty power of money? And where have you come from this morning? I hear you have plenty of money in your possession. Where is that money now?”

As they rode next day in a covered wagon on their way to the city of Prague, the Captain pestered Augusta with many questions.

“My dear Johannes,” said the jovial wag, “where have you been? With whom? Where are your letters and your clothes? Whose is this cap? Where did you get it? Who lent it to you? What do they call him? Where does he live? Where is your horse? Where is your money? Where are your companions?”

“Why do you ask so many questions?” asked Augusta.

“Because,” replied Schoneich, letting out the murder, “I want to be able to give information about you. I don’t want to be called a donkey or a calf.”

Augusta was now imprisoned in the White Tower at Prague. He was placed in the wine vaults below the castle, had heavy fetters on his hands and feet, and sat for days in a crunched position. The historic contest began. For two hours at a stretch the King’s examiners riddled Augusta with questions. “Who sent the letter to the King?” they asked. “Where do the Brethren keep their papers and money? To whom did the Brethren turn for help when the King called on his subjects to support him? Who went with you to Wittenberg? For what and for whom did the Brethren pray.”

“They prayed,” said Augusta, “that God would incline the heart of the King to be gracious to us.”

“By what means did the Brethren defend themselves?”

“By patience,” replied Augusta.

“To whom did they apply for help?”

Augusta pointed to heaven.

As Augusta's answers to all these questions were not considered satisfactory, they next endeavored to sharpen his wits by torturing a German counterfeiter in his presence; and when this mode of persuasion failed, they tortured Augusta himself. They stripped him naked. They stretched him face downwards on a ladder. They smeared his hips with boiling pitch. They set the spluttering mess on fire, and drew it off, skin and all, with a pair of tongs. They screwed him tightly in the stocks. They hung him up to the ceiling by a hook, with the point run through his flesh. They laid him flat upon his back and pressed great stones on his stomach.

It was all in vain. Again they urged him to confess the part that he and the Brethren had played in the great revolt, and again Augusta bravely replied that the Brethren as a whole had taken no part.

At this the King himself intervened. For some months he had been busy enough at Augsburg, assisting the Emperor in his work; but now he sent a letter to Prague, with full instructions how to deal with Augusta. If gentle measures did not succeed, then sterner measures, said he, must be employed. He had three new tortures to suggest. First, he said, let Augusta be watched and deprived of sleep for five or six days. Next, he must be strapped to a shutter, with his head hanging over one end; he must have vinegar rubbed into his nostrils; he must have a beetle fastened on to his stomach; and in this position, with his neck aching, his nostrils smarting, and the beetle working its way to his vitals, he must be kept for two days and two nights. And, third, if these measures did not act, he must be fed with highly seasoned food and allowed nothing to drink.

But these suggestions were never carried out. As the messenger hastened with the King's note, and the Brethren on the northern frontier were setting out for Poland, Augusta and Bilek were on their way to the famous old castle of Krivoklat. For ages that

castle, built on a rock, and hidden away in darkling woods, had been renowned in Bohemian lore. There the mother of Charles IV had heard the nightingales sing; there had many a rebel suffered in the terrible "torture-tower"; and there Augusta and his faithful friend Bilek¹¹⁸ were to lie for many a long and weary day.

They were taken to Krivoklat in two separate wagons. They traveled by night and arrived about mid-day; they were placed in two separate cells, and for sixteen years the fortunes of the Brethren centered round Krivoklat Castle.

If the Bishop had been the vilest criminal, he could not have been more grossly insulted. For two years he had to share his cell with a vulgar German counterfeiter; and the counterfeiter, just for the fun of it, often hit him on the head.

The cell was almost pitch-dark. The window was shuttered within and without, and the merest glimmer from the cell next door struggled in through a chink four inches broad. At meals alone he was permitted half a candle. For bedding he had a leather bolster, a coverlet and what Germans call a "bed-sack." For food he was allowed two rations of meat, two chunks of bread, and two jugs of barley-beer a day. His shirt was washed about once every two weeks, his face and hands twice a week, his head twice a year, and the rest of his body never. He was not allowed the use of a knife and fork. He was not allowed to speak to the prison attendants. He had no books, no papers, no ink, no news of the world without; and there for three years he sat in the dark, as lonely as the famous prisoner of Chillon. Again, by the King's command, he was tortured, with a gag in his mouth to stifle his screams and a threat that if he would not confess he should have an interview with the hangman; and again he refused to deny his brethren, and was flung back into his corner.

¹¹⁸ One historian writes of this man: "If ever a man had just cause to hate the Church of Rome, it was surely this humble friend of Augusta; and yet he wrote a full account of their dreary years in prison without saying one bitter word against his persecutors and tormentors. From this point of view, his book is delightful. It is full of piety, of trust in God, of vivid dramatic description; it has not a bitter word from cover to cover; and thus it is a beautiful and precious example of the broad and charitable spirit of the Unity of Brothers."



Krivoklat Castle, where John Augusta was imprisoned in the dungeons for many years.

The delivering angel came in humble guise. Among the warders who guarded his cell was a daring youth who had lived at Litosmyl. He had been brought up among the Brethren. He regarded the Bishop as a martyr. His wife lived in a cottage near the castle; and now, drunken rascal though he was, he risked his life for Augusta's sake, used his cottage as a secret post office, and handed in to the suffering Bishop letters, books, ink, paper, pens, money and candles.

The Brethren stationed a priest in Krivoklat village. The Bishop was soon as bright and active as ever. By day he buried his tools in the ground; by night he plugged every chink and cranny, and applied himself to his labors. Not yet was his spirit broken; not yet was his mind unhinged. As his candle burned in that gloomy dungeon in the silent watches of the night, so the fire of his genius shone anew in those darksome days of trial and persecution; and still he urged his afflicted Brethren to be true to the faith of their fathers, to hold fast the Apostles' Creed, and to look onward to the

brighter day when once again their pathway would shine as the wings of a dove that are covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold. He comforted Bilek in his affliction; he published a volume of sermons for the elders to read in secret; he composed a number of stirring and triumphant hymns; and there he penned the noble words still sung in the Brethren's Church:

*Praise God for ever,
Boundless is his favor,
To his Church and chosen flock,
Founded on Christ the Rock.*

As he lay in his cell, he pondered much on the sad fate of his Brethren. At one time he heard a rumor that the church was almost extinct. Some, he knew, had fled to Poland. Some had settled in Moravia. Some, robbed of lands and homes, were roaming the country as peddlers or earning a scanty living as farm laborers. And some, alas! had lowered the flag and joined the Church of Rome.

And yet Augusta had never abandoned hope. For ten years, despite a few interruptions, he kept in almost constant touch, not only with his own Brethren, but also with the Protestant world at large. He was still, he thought, the loved and honored leader; he was still, in his mind, the mightiest religious force in the land; and now, in his dungeon, he sketched a plan to heal his country's woes and form the true disciples of Christ into one grand national Protestant army against which both Pope and Emperor would for ever contend in vain.

As he lay in his dungeon forming plans for the Church he loved so well, it slowly dawned upon Augusta that his Brethren were ceasing to trust him, and that the sun of his power, which had shone so brightly, was now sloping slowly to its setting. He heard of one change after another taking place without his consent. He heard that the Council had condemned his sermons as too learned and dry for the common people, and that they had altered them to suit their own opinions. He heard that his hymns, which he had

desired to see in the new Hymn-book, had been mangled in a similar manner. The Brethren did not even tell him what they were doing. They simply left him out in the cold. What he himself heard, he heard by chance, and that was the “most unkind cut of all.” His authority was gone; his position was lost—new bishops had been ordained to take his place. His hopes were blasted; and his early guidance, his entreaties, his services, his sufferings were all, he thought, forgotten by an ungrateful church.

As Augusta heard of all these changes, a glorious vision rose before his mind. At first he was offended, quarreled with the Brethren, and declared the new Bishops invalid. But at last his better feelings gained the mastery. He would not sulk like a petted child; he would render his Brethren the greatest service in his power. He would fight his way to liberty; he would resume his place on the bridge, and before long he would make the Big Group the national Church of Bohemia.

So Augusta appealed for liberty. The issue before him was now perfectly clear. There was one road to freedom and one only. He must sign the form of recantation in full. The form was drastic. He must renounce all his previous religious opinions. He must acknowledge the Roman Catholic Church and submit to her in all things. He must eschew the gatherings of Waldensians, Picards, and all other “apostates”, denounce their teaching as depraved, and recognize the Church of Rome as the one true Church of Christ. He must labor for the unity of the Church and endeavor to bring his Brethren into the fold. He must never again interpret the Scriptures according to his own understanding, but submit rather to the exposition and authority of the Holy Roman Church, which alone was fit to decide on questions of doctrine. He must do his duty by the King, obey him and serve him with zeal as a loyal subject. And finally he must write out the whole recantation with his own hand, take a public oath to keep it, and have it signed and sealed by witnesses.

Augusta refused point blank. His hopes of liberty vanished. His heart sank in despair. “They might as well,” said Bilek, his fellow-prisoner, “have asked him to walk on his head.”

Another Route

But here Lord Sternberg, Governor of the Castle, suggested another path. If Augusta, said he, would not join the Church of Rome, perhaps he would at least join the Utraquists—the Hussites. He had been a Utraquist in his youth; the Brethren were Utraquists under another name; and all that Augusta had to do was to give himself his proper name,¹¹⁹ and his dungeon door would fly open.

A series of ambiguously written “confessions” was extended by Augusta. But his captors could see through them all. Augusta sank back exhausted in his cell. But the kindly Governor was still resolved to smooth the way for his prisoners. “I will not rest,” he said, “till I see them at liberty.” He suggested that Augusta should have an interview with the Jesuits!

“What would be the good of that?” said Augusta. “I should be like a little dog in the midst of a pack of lions. I pray you, let these negotiations cease. I would rather stay where I am. It is clear there is no escape for me unless I am false to my honor and my conscience. I will never recant nor act against my conscience. May God help me to keep true till death.”

At last, however, Augusta gave way, attended mass, with Bilek, in the castle chapel, and consented to an interview with the Jesuits, on condition that Bilek should go with him, and that he should also be allowed another interview with the Utraquists.

The day for the duel arrived. The chosen spot was the new Jesuit College at Prague. As they drove to the city, both Augusta and Bilek were allowed to stretch their limbs and even get out of sight of their guards. At Prague they were allowed a dip in the Royal Bath. It was the first bath they had had for fourteen years, and the people came from far and near to gaze upon their scars.

The meeting might as well have been an attempt at reconciling a cat and dog. Augusta was not about to become Catholic. The Jesuits were not the least interested in acknowledging the Big Group as a legitimate church.

¹¹⁹ Is not it amazing how those outside of the church have a better understanding of things than those inside? Sternburg recognized that the Unity of Brothers was not a whole ways off from the Utraquists.

The Jesuits reported him hard in the head, and had him sent back to his cell.

For two more years he waited in despair, and then he was brought to the White Tower again, and visited by two Utraquist Priests, Mystopol and Martin. The last chance, they told him, had now arrived. They had come as messengers from the Archduke Ferdinand and from the Emperor himself.

“I know,” said one of them, “on what you are relying and how you console yourself, but I warn you it will avail you nothing.”

They indeed knew Augusta, and should not have wasted their time with him. Neither they nor he were willing to give ground. However, Augusta did throw them an offer: Why doesn't the Utraquist Church join hands with the Big Group, and then all Bohemia would join together to support them?

At this grand scheme, Augusta lost support from both sides.

“You shift about,” wrote the Big Group brethren, “in a most remarkable manner. You make out the Utraquist Church to be different from what it really is, in order to keep a door open through which you may go.” In their judgment he was nothing but an ambitious schemer. If his scheme were carried out, they said, he would not only be First Elder of the Brethren's Church, but administrator of the whole united Church.

And to the Utraquists, he was trying to connive his way out of the White Tower dungeon.

At last, however, King Maximilian interceded with the Emperor in his favor, and Augusta was set free on the one condition that he would not preach in public.¹²⁰ His hair was white; his beard was long; his brow was furrowed; his health was shattered; and he spent his last days amongst the Brethren, a defeated and broken-hearted man. He was restored to his old position as First Elder; he settled down again at Mlada Boleslav; and yet somehow the old confidence was never completely restored.¹²¹

¹²⁰ 1564

¹²¹ His physical condition pretty well describes the spiritual condition of the Big Group.

In vain he upheld his daring scheme of union. John Blahoslav opposed him to the teeth. For the time, at least, John Blahoslav was in the right. Augusta throughout had made one fatal blunder. As the Ultra-Quists were now more Protestant in doctrine, he thought that they had begun to love the Brethren. The very contrary was the case.



Despised by friend and foe alike, the old white-haired Bishop tottered to the silent tomb. "He kept out of the way," says the sad old record, "as long as he could; he had been among us long enough."

John Blahoslav (1523-1571) was a Big Group historian and bishop.

The Golden Age of Fool's Gold 1572-1603

As the Emperor Maximilian II set out from the Royal Castle in Prague for a drive, he met a baron famous in all the land. The baron was John von Zerotin, the richest member of the Big Group's Church in Moravia. He had come to Prague on very important business. His home lay at Namiest, in Moravia. He lived in a stately castle, built on two huge crags, and surrounded by the houses of his retainers and domestics. His estate was twenty-five miles square. He had a lovely park of beeches, pines and old oaks. He held his court in kingly style. He had gentlemen of the chamber of noble birth. He had pages and secretaries, esquierries and masters of the chase. He had valets, lackeys, grooms, stable-boys, huntsmen, barbers, watchmen, cooks, tailors, shoemakers, and saddlers. He had sat at the feet of Blahoslav, the learned Church historian: he kept a Court Chaplain, who was, of course, a pastor of the Big Group's Church; and now he had come to talk things over with the head of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Emperor offered the Baron a seat in his carriage. The "Brother" and the Emperor drove on side by side.



From people who practiced community of goods and gave their excess to the poor, the Unity of Brothers came to include men like John von Zerotin, owner of the above castle with its surrounding estate of 25 miles square.

“I hear,” said the Emperor, “that the Picards are giving up their religion and going over to the Utraquists.”

The Baron was astounded. He had never, he said, heard the slightest whisper that the Brethren intended to abandon their own Confessions.

“I have heard it,” said the Emperor, “as positive fact from Baron Hassenstein himself.”

“It is not true,” replied Zerotin.

“What, then,” said the Emperor, “do the Utraquists mean when they say that they are the true Hussites, and wish me to protect them in their religion?”

“Your gracious Majesty,” replied Zerotin, “the Brethren, called Picards, are the true Hussites:¹²² they have kept their faith un-

¹²² Notice how the big Group now looked to John Huss’ example instead Peter Chelcicky’s.

lied, as you may see yourself from the Confession they presented to you.”

The Emperor looked puzzled. He was waxing old and feeble, and his memory was failing.

“What!” he said, “have the Picards got a Confession?”

He was soon to hear the real truth of the matter. For some months there had sat in Prague a committee of learned divines, who had met for the purpose of drawing up a National Protestant Bohemian Confession. The dream of John Augusta seemed to be coming true. The Big Group took their part in the proceedings. “We are striving,” said Slawata, one of their deputies, “for peace, love and unity. We have no desire to be censors of dogmas. We leave such matters to theological experts.” The Confession was prepared, read out at the Diet, and presented to the Emperor. It was a compromise between the teaching of Luther and the teaching of the Brethren. In its doctrine of justification by faith, it followed the teaching of Luther.¹²³ in its doctrine of the Lord’s Supper it inclined to the view of the Brethren. The Emperor attended the Diet in person, and made a notable speech.

“I promise,” he said, “on my honor as an Emperor, that I will never oppress or hinder you in the exercise of your religion; and I pledge my word in my own name and also in the name of my successors.”

Let us try to grasp the meaning of this performance. As the Edict of St. James was still in force, the Unity of Brothers, in the eyes of the law, were still heretics and rebels; they had no legal standing in the country; and at any moment the King in his fury might order them to quit the land once more. But the truth is that the King of Bohemia was now a mere figurehead. The real power lay in the hands of the barons. The barons were Protestant almost to a man.

It was the age of material prosperity. As the sun of “freedom” shone upon their way, the Big Group drifted further still from the “ascetic” ideas of Peter and Gregory. They had now all classes in their ranks. They had seventeen rich and powerful barons, of the

¹²³ Hear the death bells tolling?

stamp of John Zerotin; they had over a hundred and forty knights; they had capitalists, flourishing tradesmen, mayors, and even generals in the Army, and the Lord High Chamberlain now complained that two-thirds of the people in Bohemia were Big Group members.

The Letter of Majesty

Of all the members of the Big Group's Church in Bohemia, the most powerful and the most discontented was Baron Wenzel von Budowa. He was now fifty-six years of age. He had traveled in Germany, Denmark, Holland, England, France and Italy. He had studied at several famous universities. He had made the acquaintance of many learned men. He had entered the Imperial service, and served as ambassador at Constantinople. He had mastered Turkish and Arabic, had studied the Mohammedan religion, had published the Al Koran in Bohemian, and had written a treatise denouncing the creed and practice of Islam as Satanic in origin and character.

He belonged to the Emperor's Privy Council, and also to the Imperial Court of Appeal. He took part in theological controversies, and preached sermons to his tenants. He was the bosom friend of Baron Charles von Zerotin, the leading Big Group member of Moravia. He corresponded, from time to time, with the struggling Protestants in Hungary, and had now become the recognized leader, not only of the Brethren, but of all "evangelicals" in Bohemia.

He had one great purpose to attain. As the Brethren had rendered such signal service to the moral welfare of the land, it seemed to him absurd and unfair that they should still be under the ban of the law and still be denounced in Catholic pulpits as children of the devil. He resolved to remedy the evil. The Emperor, Rudolph I, paved the way. He was just the man that Budowa required. He was weak in body and in mind. He had ruined his health, said popular scandal, by indulging in dissolute pleasures. His face was shriveled, his hair bleached, his back bent, his step tottering. He was too much interested in astrology, gems, pictures, horses, antique relics and similar curiosities to take much interest

in government; he suffered from religious mania, and was constantly afraid of being murdered.

And now he committed an act of astounding folly. He first revived the Edict of St. James, ordered the nobles throughout the land to turn out all Protestant pastors, and sent a body of armed men to close the Big Group's House at Mlada Boleslav; and then, having disgusted two-thirds of his loyal subjects, he summoned a Diet, and asked for money for a crusade against the Turks.

This was more than Wenzel could endure. He attended the Diet, and made a brilliant speech. He had nothing, he said, to say against the Emperor. He would not blame him for reviving the musty Edict. For that he blamed some secret disturbers of the peace. If the Emperor needed money and men, the loyal knights and nobles of Bohemia would support him. But that support would be given on certain conditions. If the Emperor wished his subjects to be loyal, he must first obey the law of the land himself. "We stand," he said, "one and all by the Confession of 1575, and we do not know a single person who is prepared to submit to the Consistory at Prague." He finished, wept, prepared a petition, and sent it in to the poor invisible Rudolph. And Rudolph replied as Emperors sometimes do. He replied by closing the Diet.

Again, however, six years later, Budowa returned to the attack. He was acting, not merely on behalf of the Brethren, but on behalf of all Protestants in the country. And this fact is the key to the situation. As we follow the dramatic story to its sad and tragic close, we must remember that from this time onward the Brethren, for all intents and purposes, had almost abandoned their position as a separate Church, and had cast in their lot with the other Protestants in Bohemia. They were striving now for the recognition, not of their own Confession of Faith, but of the general Bohemian Protestant Confession presented to the Emperor, Maximilian II. And so, Budowa became a national hero. He called a meeting of Lutherans and Brethren in the historic "Green Saloon," prepared a resolution demanding that the Protestant Confession be inscribed in the Statute Book, and, followed by a crowd of nobles and knights, was admitted to the sacred presence of the Emperor.

Again the Diet was summoned. The hall was crammed, and knights and nobles jostled each other in the corridors and in the square outside. For some weeks the Emperor, secluded in his cabinet, held to his point like a hero. The debate was conducted in somewhat marvelous fashion. There, in the Green Saloon, sat the Protestants, preparing proposals and petitions. There, in the Archbishop's palace, sat the Catholics, rather few in number, and wondering what to do. And there, in his chamber, sat the grizzly, rickety, imperial Lion, consulting with his councilors, Martinic and Slawata, and dictating his replies. And then, when the king had his answer ready, the Diet met in the Council Chamber to hear it read aloud. His first reply was now as sharp as ever. He declared that the faith of the Church of Rome was the only lawful faith in Bohemia. "And as for these Brethren," he said, "whose teaching has been so often forbidden by royal decrees and decisions of the Diet, I order them, like my predecessors, to fall in with the Utraquists or Catholics, and declare that their meetings shall not be permitted on any pretense whatever."

In vain the Protestants, by way of reply, drew up a monster petition, and set forth their grievances in detail. They suffered, they said, not from actual persecution, but from nasty insults and petty annoyances. They were still described in Catholic pulpits as heretics and children of the devil. They were still forbidden to honor the memory of Huss. They were still forbidden to print books without the consent of the Archbishop. The King snapped them short. He told the estates to end their babble, and again closed the Diet.

The blood of Budowa was up. The debate, thought he, was fast becoming a farce. The King was fooling his subjects. The King must be taught a lesson. As the Diet broke up, he stood at the door, and shouted out in ringing tones: "Let all who love the King and the land, let all who care for unity and love, let all who remember the zeal of our fathers, meet here at six tomorrow morn."

He spent the night with some trusty allies, prepared another declaration, met his friends in the morning, and informed the King, in language clear, that the Protestants had now determined to win their rights by force. And Budowa was soon true to his word. He

sent envoys asking for help to the King's brother Matthias, to the Elector of Saxony, to the Duke of Brunswick, and to other Protestant leaders. He called a meeting of nobles and knights in the courtyard of the castle, and there, with heads bared and right hands upraised, they swore to be true to each other and to win their liberty at any price, even at the price of blood.¹²⁴ He arranged for an independent meeting in the town hall of the New Town. The King forbade the meeting. What better place, replied Budowa, would His Majesty like to suggest? As he led his men across the long Prague bridge, he was followed by thousands of supporters. He arrived in due time at the square in front of the hall. The Royal Captain appeared and ordered him off. The crowd jeered and whistled the Captain away.

And yet Budowa did not desire to be a "vulgar" rebel. He insisted that every session in the hall should be begun and ended with prayer. He informed the King, again and again, that all he wished was liberty of worship for Protestants. He did his best to put an end to the street rows, the drunken brawls, that now disgraced the city.

For the third time the King summoned the Diet. The last round in the terrible combat now began. He ordered the estates to appear in civilian's dress. They arrived armed to the teeth. He ordered them to open the proceedings by attending mass in the Cathedral. The Catholics alone obeyed; the Protestants held a service of their own; and yet, despite these danger signals, the King was as stubborn as ever, and again he sent a message to say that he held to his first decision. The Diet was thunderstruck, furious, desperate.

"We have had enough of useless talk," said Count Matthias Thurn; "it is time to take to arms."¹²⁵ The long fight was drawing to a finish. As the King refused to listen, the members of the Diet, one and all, Protestants and Catholics alike, prepared an ultimatum demanding that all evangelical nobles, knights, citizens and peas-

¹²⁴ Remember now, that this is the "Big Group" of the Unity of Brothers that Chelcicky and Gregory had guided 100 years earlier.

¹²⁵ If we remember back to the beginning of our story, the Bohemians were debating non-resistance, and finally decided to defend themselves. Here they are taking the offensive.

ants should have full and perfect liberty to worship God in their own way, and to build schools and churches on all Royal estates; and, in order that the King might realize the facts of the case, Budowa formed a Board of thirty directors, of whom fourteen were of the Big Group, raised an army in Prague, and sent the nobles flying through the land to levy money and troops. The country, in fact, was now in open revolt. And thus, at length compelled by brute force, the poor old King gave way, and made his name famous in history by signing the Letter of Majesty and granting full religious liberty to all adherents of the Bohemian National Protestant Confession. All adherents of the Confession could worship as they pleased, and all classes, except the peasantry, could build schools and churches on Royal estates. "No decree of any kind," ran one sweeping clause, "shall be issued either by us or by our heirs and succeeding kings against the above established religious peace."

The delight in Prague was boundless. The Letter of Majesty was carried through the streets in grand triumphal procession. The walls were adorned with flaming posters. The bells of the churches were rung. The people met in the Church of the Holy Cross, and there sang jubilant psalms of thanksgiving and praise. The King's couriers posted through the land to tell the gladsome news; the letter was hailed as the heavenly herald of peace and goodwill to men; and Budowa was adored as a national hero, and the redresser of his people's wrongs.

But...

As Matthias was growing old and feeble, it was time to choose his successor; and Matthias, therefore, summoned a Diet, and informed the Estates, to their great surprise, that all they had to do now was to accept as King his adopted son, Ferdinand Archduke of Styria. At first the Diet was thunderstruck. They had met to choose their own King. They intended to choose a Protestant, and now they were commanded to choose this Ferdinand, the most zealous Catholic in Europe. And yet, for some unknown reason, the Diet actually yielded. They surrendered their elective rights; they accepted Ferdinand as King, and thus, at this critical point in

the history of the country, they allowed a Catholic devotee to become the ruler of a Protestant people.

In Ferdinand, they had accepted a man who was pledged to fight for the Church of Rome with every breath of his body. He was a man of fervent piety. He was a pupil of the Jesuits. He regarded himself as the divinely appointed champion of the Catholic faith. He had already stamped out the Protestants in Styria. He had a strong will and a clear conception of what he regarded as his duty. He would rather, he declared, beg his bread from door to door, with his family clinging affectionately around him, than allow a single Protestant in his dominions. "I would rather," he said, "rule over a wilderness than over heretics."

But what about his oath to observe the Letter of Majesty? Should he take the oath or not? If he took it he would be untrue to his conscience; if he refused he could never be crowned King of Bohemia. He consulted his friends the Jesuits. They soon eased his conscience. It was wicked, they said, of Rudolph II to sign such a monstrous document; but it was not wicked for the new King to take the oath to keep it. And, therefore, Ferdinand took the oath, and was crowned King of Bohemia.

"We shall now see," said a lady at the ceremony, "whether the Protestants are to rule the Catholics or the Catholics the Protestants."

The Protestants summoned their assembly, prepared a petition, and sent it off to Matthias. He replied that their assembly was illegal. He refused to remedy their grievances. "The Defenders" were goaded to fury. At their head was a violent man, Henry Thurn. He resolved on open rebellion. He would have the new King Ferdinand dethroned and have his two councilors, Martinic and Slawata, put to death. It was the 23rd of May, 1618. At an early hour on that fatal day, the Protestant Convention met in the Hradschin, and then, a little later, the fiery Thurn sallied out with a body of armed supporters, arrived at the Royal Castle, and forced his way into the Regent's Chamber, where the King's Councillors were assembled.



Prague Castle, the largest castle in the world. Imagine getting thrown out of one of the top floor windows, in "good old Bohemian fashion", at the command of a member of the Unity of Brothers.

There, in a corner by the stove, sat Martinic and Slawata. There, in that Regent's Chamber, began the cause of all the woe that followed. There was struck the first blow of the Thirty Years' War. As Thurn and his henchmen stood in the presence of the two men, who, in their opinion, had done the most to poison the mind of Matthias, they felt that the decisive moment had come. The interview was stormy. Voices rang in wild confusion. The Protestant spokesman was Paul von Rican. He accused Martinic and Slawata of two great crimes. They had openly broken the Letter of Majesty, and had dictated King Matthias's last reply. He appealed to his supporters crowded into the corridor outside.

"Yes, yes," shouted the crowd.

"Into the Black Tower with them," said some.

"No, no," said Rupow, a member of the Big Group's Church, "Out of the window with them, in the good old Bohemian fashion."

At this signal, agreed upon before, Martinic was dragged to the window. He begged for a father confessor.

“Commend your soul to God,” said someone. “Are we to allow any Jesuit scoundrels here?”

“Jesus! Mary!” he screamed.

He was flung headlong from the window. He clutched at the windowsill. A blow came down on his hands. He had to let go, and down he fell, seventy feet, into the moat below.

“Let us see,” said someone, “whether his Mary will help him.”

He fell on a heap of soft rubbish. He scrambled away with only a wound in the head.

“His Mary has helped him!” cried one of the men.

They now flung Slawata out of the window, and his secretary Fabricius after him. Not one of the three was killed, not one was even maimed for life, and through the country the rumor spread that all three had been delivered by the Virgin Mary.

From that moment war was inevitable. The Protestants elected Frederick, Elector Palatine, and son-in-law of James I of England, as King of Bohemia; and they ordered the Jesuits out of the kingdom.

There was a strange scene in Prague when these Jesuits departed. They formed in procession in the streets, and, clad in black, marched off with bowed heads and loud wailing.

For the moment the Protestants of Prague were wild with joy. In the great Cathedral they pulled off the ornaments and destroyed costly pictures.

What happened next is unclear: Details are not needed, and are scarce. We know that the Catholics were now united and the Protestants quarreling with each other; we know that Ferdinand was prompt and vigorous, and the new King Frederick slack; and we know, finally, that the Catholic army, commanded by the famous general Tilly, was far superior to the Protestant army under Christian of Anhalt.



The battle of White Mountain, just outside of Prague: "Christians" fighting other "Christians" for control of the government.

At last the Catholic army appeared before the walls of Prague. The battle of the White Hill was fought.¹²⁶ The new King was entertaining some ambassadors to dinner in the city. The Protestant army was routed, the new King fled from the country.

The conqueror consisted in a certain Prince Lichtenstein. He was made regent of Prague, and was entrusted with the duty of restoring the country to order. He set about his work in a cool and methodical manner. He cleared the rabble out of the streets. He recalled the Jesuits. He ordered the Big Group out of the kingdom. He put a Roman Catholic priest into every church in Prague; and then he made the strange announcement that all the rebels, as they were called, would be freely pardoned, and invited the leading Protestant nobles to appear before him at Prague. They walked into the trap like flies into a cobweb.

If the nobles had only cared to do so, they might all have escaped after the battle of White Mountain. Tilly, the victorious general, had purposely given them time to do so. But for some reason they nearly all preferred to stay. And now Lichtenstein had them in his grasp. He had forty-seven leaders arrested in one night. He

¹²⁶ November 8th, 1620

imprisoned them in the castle tower, had them tried and condemned, obtained the approval of Ferdinand, and then, while some were pardoned, informed the remaining twenty-seven that they had two days in which to prepare for death. They were to die on June 21st. Among those leaders were about a dozen Big Group Brethren.

The Last of the Bohemian Brethren

We have arrived at the last act of the tragedy. We have seen the grim drama develop, and when the curtain falls the stage will be covered with corpses and blood.

Prague was divided into two parts, the Old Town and the New Town. In the middle of the Old Town was a large open space, called the Great Square. On the west side of the Great Square stood the Council House, on the east the old Teyn Church where the preachers in days gone by had thundered out against carnality. The condemned prisoners, half of whom were Big Group Brethren, were in the Council House: in front of their window was the scaffold, draped in black cloth, twenty feet high, and twenty-two yards square; from the window they stepped out on to a balcony, and from the balcony to the scaffold ran a short flight of steps. In that Great Square, and on that scaffold, we find the scene of our story.

When early in the morning of Monday, June 21st, the assembled prisoners looked out of the windows of their rooms to take their last view of earth, they saw a splendid, a brilliant, a gorgeous, but to them a terrible scene. They saw God's sun just rising in the east and reddening the sky and shining in each other's faces; they saw the dark black scaffold bathed in light, and the squares of infantry and cavalry ranged around it; they saw the eager, excited throng, surging and swaying in the Square below and crowding on the house-tops to right and left; and they saw on the further side of the square the lovely twin towers of the old Teyn Church, where Gregory had knelt and Rokycana had preached in the brave days of old. As the church clocks chimed the hour of five, a gun was fired from the castle; the prisoners were informed that their hour had come, and were ordered to prepare for their doom; and the new Re-



27 crosses are inlaid into the cobblestones of Prague's Old Town Square in memory of the 27 Protestant and Unity men who died on "The Day of Blood", decapitated for rebellion against the king.

gent Lichtenstein and the magistrates stepped out on to the balcony, an awning above them to screen them from the rising sun.

As there was now a long morning's work to be done, that work was begun at once. The heads of the victims fell off the block in quick succession while the trumpets brayed and the drums beat an accompaniment. Grim and ghastly was the scene in that Great Square in Prague, on that bright June morning about 400 hundred years ago.

Each of the condemned had fortified themselves to look the waiting angel of death in the face. As they sat in their rooms the evening before—a sabbath evening it was—they had all, in one way or another, sought God in prayer. In one room the prisoners had taken the Communion together, in another they joined in singing psalms and hymns; in another they had feasted in a last feast of love. Among these were various shades of faith—Lutherans, Calvinists, Utraquists, Big Group brethren; but now all differ-

ences were laid aside, for all was nearly over now.¹²⁷ One laid the cloth, and another the plates; a third brought water and a fourth said the simple grace. As the night wore on they lay down on tables and benches to snatch a few hours of that troubled sleep which gives no rest. At two they were all broad awake again, and again the sound of psalms and hymns was heard; and as the first gleams of light appeared each dressed himself as though for a wedding, and carefully turned down the ruffle of his collar so as to give the executioner no extra trouble.

Swiftly, in order, and without much cruelty, the gory work was done. The morning's program had all been carefully arranged. At each corner of the square was a squad of soldiers to hold the people in awe, and to prevent an attempt at rescue. One man, named Mydlar, was the executioner; and, being a Protestant,¹²⁸ he performed his duties with as much decency and humanity as possible. He used four different swords, and was paid about £100 for his morning's work. With his first sword he beheaded eleven; with his second, five; with his two last, eight. The first of these swords is still to be seen at Prague,¹²⁹ and has the names of its eleven victims engraved upon it. Among these names is the name of Wenzel von Budowa. In every instance Mydlar seems to have done his duty at one blow. At his side stood an assistant, and six masked men in black. As soon as Mydlar had severed the neck, the assistant placed the dead man's right hand on the block; the sword fell again; the hand dropped at the wrist; and the men in black, as silent as night, gathered up the bleeding members, wrapped them in clean black cloth, and swiftly bore them away.

The name of Budowa was second on the list. "My heart impelled me to come," he said. "To forsake my country and its cause would have been sinning against my conscience. Here am I, my

¹²⁷ And there really was very little difference now anyways.

¹²⁸ Little details such as this show the glaring inconsistency of the so-called Protestant Reformation.

¹²⁹ Since this was written about a century ago, I do not know if it is still in existence.

God, do unto your servant as seems good unto You. I would rather die myself than see my country die.”¹³⁰

A few days before his head rolled off, on the Monday morning, he was given another chance to deny his faith. The Jesuits came to see him.

“We have come to save my lord’s soul,” they said, “and to perform a work of mercy.”

“Dear fathers,” replied Budowa, “I thank my God that His Holy Spirit has given me the assurance that I will be saved through the blood of the Lamb.” He appealed to the words of St. Paul: “I know whom I have believed: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.”

“I go,” he declared, “in the garment of righteousness; thus arrayed shall I appear before God.”

Alone, with firm step he strode to the scaffold, stroking proudly his silver hair and beard.

“You old grey head of mine,” said he, “you are highly honored; you shalt be adorned with the Martyr-Crown.”¹³¹

The newly-cropped heads were spitted on poles in the city, there to grin for full ten years as a warning to all rebels.

Forced Out

Meanwhile, the Brethren were expelled from Bohemia. It is a striking proof of the influence of the Brethren that Ferdinand turned his attention to them before he troubled about the other Protestants. They had been the first in moral power; they had done the most to spread the knowledge of the Bible; they had produced the greatest literary men of the country; and, therefore, now they must be the first to go. What actually happened to many of the

¹³⁰ Here we see patriotism for a political realm, instead of “patriotism” for righteousness, peace and joy.

¹³¹ A sad reminder that not all “martyrs” will go to heaven, in spite of the fact that they speak good words and have falsely convinced themselves of being righteous. They that DO righteousness are righteous, not those who believe they are righteous.

Brethren during the next few years no tongue can tell. But we know enough. We know that Ferdinand cut the Letter of Majesty in two with his scissors. We know that 36,000 families left Bohemia and Moravia—among them 1400 families of the “nobility”—and that the population of Bohemia dwindled from three million to one. Over three hundred castles and forts, one hundred towns, and eleven thousand villages disappeared from the face of the earth.

We know that about one-half of the property—lands, houses, castles, churches—passed over into the hands of the King. We know that the University of Prague was handed over to the Jesuits. We know that the scandalous order was issued that all Protestant married ministers who consented to join the Church of Rome might keep their wives by passing them off as cooks. We know that villages were sacked; that Kralitz Bibles, Hymn-books, Confessions, Catechisms, and historical works of priceless value—among others Blahoslav’s “History of the Brethren”¹³²—were burned in thousands; and that almost nearly every trace of the Brethren was swept out of the land.

We know that some of the Brethren were hacked in pieces, that some were tortured, that some were burned alive, that some swung on gibbets at the city gates and at the country cross-roads among the carrion crows. For six years Bohemia was a field of blood, and Spanish soldiers, drunk and raging, slashed and pillaged on every hand. “Oh, to what torments,” said a clergyman of that day, “were the promoters of the Gospel exposed! How they were tortured and massacred! How many virgins were violated to death! How many respectable women abused! How many children torn from their mothers’ breasts and cut in pieces in their presence! How many dragged from their beds and thrown naked from the windows! Good God! What cries of woe we were forced to hear from those who lay upon the rack, and what groans and terrible outcries from those who besought the robbers to spare them for God’s sake.”

It was thus that the Brethren, at the point of the sword, were driven from hearth and home: thus that they fled before the blast

¹³² Blahoslav wrote a large history of the Unitas Fratrum, but no copies have been found since this destruction.

and took refuge in foreign lands; thus, amid bloodshed, and crime, and cruelty, and nameless torture, that the Big Group of the Bohemian Brethren bade a sad farewell to the land of its birth, and practically disappeared from the eyes of mankind.

Behold What Change!

Let us review the story of the Unitas Fratrum. What a marvelous change had come upon it! It began in the quiet little valley of Kunvald: it ended in the noisy streets of Prague. It began in peace and brotherly love: it ended amid the tramp of horses, the clank of armor, the swish of swords, the growl of artillery, the whistle of bullets, the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums, and the moans of the wounded and the dying. It began in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount: it ended amid the ghastly horrors of war.

Word was sent to the Pope at Rome that the Unity of Brothers was no more.

Part VI The Hidden Seed

Comenius and the Hidden Seed

John Amos Comenius, the pioneer of modern education and the last bishop of the old Bohemian Brethren, was born on March 18th, 1592, at Trivnitz, a little market town in Moravia. He was only six years old when he lost his parents through the plague. John did more at school than play games and socialize with the young people. He studied the Scriptures earnestly and discovered, to his dismay, how far his church had strayed from what it originally believed. He also made friends with the Anabaptists in surrounding communities and admired them for their inner order and discipline “by which they surpassed all other denominations.” Then, after his ordination, he found his way to the old Waldensian refugee settlement at Fulnek in Moravia.

Living in a room alongside the meetinghouse at Fulnek, John learned to know the descendants of these German believers—plain, industrious, minding their own business on little farms hidden in the valleys of Novy Jicin, Suchdol nad Odrou, and Sehlen. The Kuhlandl—little land of the cows—the Germans called it, and in its quiet seclusion John discovered a remnant of the faith he believed his church had lost. He worked among the German members of the Unity, at Fulnek, with great enthusiasm—until disaster struck.

John’s happiness was speedily turned to misery. The Thirty Years’ War broke out. What part he took in the Bohemian Revolution we have no means of knowing. He certainly favored the election of Frederick, and helped his cause in some way. “I contributed a nail or two,” he wrote, “to strengthen the new throne.” What sort of nail he means, we do not know. The new throne did not stand very long. The troops of Ferdinand appeared at Fulnek. The village was sacked.

Comenius reeled with horror. He saw the weapons for stabbing, for chopping, for cutting, for pricking, for hacking, for tearing and for burning. He saw the savage hacking of limbs, the spurting of blood, the flash of fire.



Fulnek Castle in Moravia, where John Comenius spent some time. Persecution forced him to flee to Bohemia, then later to Poland—never to return “home” again. He asked God to leave a “hidden seed” in his homeland, which indeed came to pass in the form of the Nitschman, Zeisberger, and other Unity families in the Fulnek area who became central figures in the later Renewed Moravian Church at Herrnhut, Germany, with Zinzendorf.

“Almighty God,” he wrote in one of his books, “what is happening? Must the whole world perish?”

His house was pillaged and gutted; his books and his manuscripts were burned; and he himself, with his wife and children, had now to flee in hot haste from Fulnek and to take refuge for a while on the estate of Baron Charles von Zerotin at Brandys nad Orlicí. To the Brethren, Brandys had long been a sacred spot. There Gregory had breathed his last, and there his bones lay buried; there many an historic Brethren’s Synod had been held; and there Comenius took up his abode in a little wood cottage outside the town, which tradition said had been built by Gregory himself. He had lost his wife and one of his children on the way from Fulnek; he had lost his post as teacher and minister; and now, for the

sake of his suffering Brethren, he wrote his beautiful classical allegory, "*The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart.*"

As Comenius fled from Fulnek to Brandeis, he saw sights that harrowed his soul, and now in his cottage at the foot of the hills he described what he had seen. The whole land, said Comenius, was now in a state of disorder. The reign of justice had ended. The reign of pillage had begun. The plot of the book is simple. From scene to scene the pilgrim goes, and everything fills him with disgust.

Comenius gave them fine sarcastic names. He called the judges Nogod, Lovestrife, Hearsay, Partial, Loveself, Lovegold, Takegift, Ignorant, Knowlitttle, Hasty and Slovenly; he called the witnesses Calumny, Lie and Suspicion; he named the statute-book "*The Rapacious Defraudment of the Land*". He saw the lords oppressing the poor, sitting long at table, and discussing lewd and obscene matters. He saw the rich idlers with bloated faces, with bleary eyes, with swollen limbs, with bodies covered with sores. He saw the moral world turned upside down.

No longer, said Comenius, did men in Bohemia call things by their right names. They called drunkenness, merriment; greed, economy; usury, interest; lust, love; pride, dignity; cruelty, severity; and laziness, good nature.

He saw his Brethren maltreated in the vilest fashion. Some were cast into the fire; some were hanged, beheaded, crucified; some were pierced, chopped, tortured with pincers, and roasted to death on grid-irons. He studied the lives of professing Christians, and found that those who claimed the greatest piety were the sorriest scoundrels in the land. "They drink and vomit," he said, "quarrel and fight, rob and pillage one another by cunning and by violence, neigh and skip from wantonness, shout and whistle, and commit fornication and adultery worse than any of the others." He watched the priests, and found them no better than the people. Some snored, wallowing in feather beds; some feasted till they became speechless; some performed dances and leaps; some passed their time in love-making and wantonness.

For these evils, Comenius saw one remedy only: Christ in the heart.

As we linger over the closing sections of his book, we can see that he then regarded the Brethren as almost ideal Christians. Among them he found no priests in gaudy attire, no flaunting wealth, no grinding poverty; and passing their time in peace and quietness, they cherished Christ in their hearts. "All," he says, "were in simple attire, and their ways were gentle and kind. I approached one of their preachers, wishing to speak to him. When, as is the custom, I wished to address him according to his rank, he permitted it not, calling such things worldly fooling." To them ceremonies were matters of little importance. "Your religion," said the Master to the Pilgrim—i.e., to the Brethren's Church—"shall be to serve me in quiet, and not to bind thyself to any ceremonies, for I do not bind thee by them."

But Comenius did not stay long at Brandys nad Orlice.¹³³ As Count Zerotin had sided with the House of Hapsburg, he had been allowed, for a few years, to give shelter to about forty Brethren ministers; but now commissioners appeared at his Castle, and ordered him to send these ministers away.

The last band of exiles now set out for Poland. John married again, and mounting danger forced him to flee with his father-in-law (a bishop of the Big Group) and a few others across the border, through Silesia, to Poland.

As they bade farewell to their native land, they did so in the firm conviction that they themselves should see the day when the Unity of the Brethren should stand once more in her ancient home; and as they stood on a spur of the Giant Mountains, and saw the old loved hills and dales, the towns and hamlets, the nestling churches, Comenius raised his eyes to heaven and uttered that historic prayer which was to have so marvelous an answer. He prayed that in the old home God would preserve a "Hidden Seed," which would one day grow to a tree; and then the whole group struck up a hymn and set out for Poland. Pathetic was the marching song they sang:

¹³³ In 1628

*Nought have we taken with us,
All to destruction is hurled,
We have only our Kralitz Bibles,
And our Labyrinth of the World.*

What became of the “Hidden Seed” is another story for another book.¹³⁴ For the present, they buried their Bibles in their gardens, held midnight meetings in garrets and stables, preserved their records in dovecotes and in the thatched roofs of their cottages, and, feasting on the glorious promises of the Book of Revelation—a book which many of them knew by heart—awaited the time when their troubles should blow by and the call to arise should sound.

Comenius would spend many years in the cause of education of children, becoming known as “the father of modern education”. But in his heart there still burned the vision of the hidden seed bursting forth into new life. For the benefit of those still worshipping in secret in Bohemia and Moravia, he prepared a Catechism, entitled “*The Old Catholic Christian Religion in Short Questions and Answers*”; and by this catholic Religion he meant the simple faith of the Bohemian Brethren.

“Perish sects,” said Comenius; “perish the founders of sects. I have consecrated myself to Christ alone.” But the purpose of the Catechism had to be kept a secret. “It is meant,” said Comenius, in the preface, “for all the pious and scattered sheep of Christ, especially those at F., G., G., K., K., S., S. and Z.” These letters can be easily explained. They stood for the villages of Fulnek, Gersdorf, Gestersdorf, Kunewalde, Klandorf, Stechwalde, Seidentorf and Zauchtenthal.¹³⁵

It is probably no accident that from these very villages came the first members of the Renewed Church of the Moravian Brethren—at Herrnhut, with Zinzendorf—who would indeed burst into life a few decades after Comenius was laid to rest in the grave.

¹³⁴ I refer the reader to Peter Hoover’s book “Behold the Lamb” for the continuing story. In short, about 100 years later the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut picked up where the Unity of Brothers had left off. Eventually they would take the gospel to many parts of the globe.

¹³⁵ I leave the German names here, as obviously he referred to these Moravian villages in that tongue.

Part VII Lessons from the Bohemians

If all we get from our look into the history of the Bohemian revival is head knowledge, satisfaction for our curiosity, or a way to burn time, then we best quit reading. The following lessons have been drawn from this story. There are many more, these are just to help us contemplate.

Lesson 1-Drift

Every movement, even though God begins it, suffers decline and corruption with time, because of the enemy's wickedness. That is happening now to the Unity of Brothers. Those looking on can see, by comparing the Unity to what it used to be, that what began in the Spirit is ending in the flesh. This is happening because the brothers wanted to avoid persecution and win large numbers of people into the church who were unwilling to make the sacrifices formerly demanded for entry into the brotherhood.

Remember these words from the story? Do you remember them enough to fear them, and take heed to your present condition?

Thomas, Peter, Gregory, Matthias, Rokycana, Luke, and every other character in this story were real people, just like you and I are real people.

And, there are Thomases, Peters, Gregorys, Matthiases, and Rokycanas, and Lucases right now. Some are growing in grace, some are trying to "take the middle road", and some are compromising their values a quarter of an inch at a time—drifting along, having picked up a form of godliness that satisfies their deadened conscience, but unable to warn them of their apostacy.

The conscience is a good tool, but certainly not fool-proof. Just because our conscience is not screaming does not mean we are walking in the Spirit. We shall not be judged by our conscience in that last, great day: The Word of God shall be our judge.

Each generation of the Unity of Brothers slipped just a little from the proceeding one. *Poco a poco* we say in Spanish—little

by little. The Unity did not become war-mongers and owners of 25-miles-square estates in one week. Each generation of the Big Group only decided to open the door a bit more than the one before it, only to lament and whine when the next generation gave the flesh another couple of inches.

Who killed the Unity of Brtohers?

The first official bishop, Matthias of Kunvald, is one of the culprits.

While it seems that he himself had no desire to live for material advancement or carry the title of Count or Knight, he decided, in his last days, that others could and still be citizens of Jesus' kingdom.

No, Matthias' decision to stand firm on Jesus' teaching would not have made everyone else take it to heart, but it would surely have sent the message to the flock that the wages of fleshly living is still expulsion from the kingdom of light. As it was, Matthias essentially told the Unity of Brothers: "It is better if you do not go to war, but in the end if you do, you shall not surely die."

Then came Luke. Then Augusta. Then Budowa, with his head sitting on top of a pole for ten years to remind people of the wages of rebellion.

Lesson 2-Applications to Principles

The Unity of Brothers had rules-applications to Kingdom principles. I do not know to what degree they were actually written down, but the bottom line is that there were bounds that one had to stay within if he wanted to be a part of the Unitas Fratrum. These were applications of the teachings of Jesus to their time and place in history.

For example: "No dice-making."

Was that legalism?

The answer could be yes or no.

If one starts with the rules and tries to live them apart from any principle, they are just so many rules that people will be looking left and right, and up and down, and backwards and forwards, and

inside and out, to get around. This is nothing more than old-fashioned, unadorned legalism: examining the law with a magnifying glass to find a loop-hole somewhere, in any shape or form.

Now, take the same rules, only this time look upon them as outward expressions of the principles of the kingdom that have been planted in the heart. The result will be a living expression of the kingdom of God.

Let's work these two different approaches out, concerning making dice.

First, we will start with the man who has not been born of the Spirit, but wants to be a part of the brotherhood. Since he has not the kingdom within, it irks him that he and his friends must give up dice-making.

“What's wrong with that?”

“We cannot go beyond what the Bible says, and the Bible does not say anything about dice-making.”

“Dice-making is a non-essential.”

“Dice are just wood blocks, what's wrong with wood blocks?”

Etc. and etc.

Now, take a group of men and women like the early Unity of Brothers at Kunvald. They are seeking to live by the teachings of Jesus, laying all of their actions up against the Word of God to see how they stack up. There is a fervent desire to do nothing except what pleases their Lord. Remember, they knew more about lordship than what we do: they were living in medieval Europe where lords were lords, and literally were the owners of the serfs in many cases. The lord was owner and decision-maker, not consultant.

So they come up against dice-making as a profession. How does that stack up against holiness and charity? What positive good do dice produce? If dice do produce good, how does that stack up to the evil that they are associated with?

Since dice were primarily used for betting,¹³⁶ the brothers' hearts were such that they desired to disassociate themselves from dice as far as they could. Dice may have had a good use or two, but why

¹³⁶ Dice are not so associated with betting in our day.

would they want to be the manufacturers of something that has a primary use for evil? The end result was a joyful agreement to not be partakers in dice-making.

From this decision, they moved on to see how better they could put into practice the teachings of Jesus in other areas.

The sum of all this about rules? Church rules in and of themselves are not the problem in hindering revivals. Today, many people are reacting against “rules”, when the rules are not to be blamed. The culprits are the people in the churches who have not the Holy Spirit working within them to live out the principles that the rule embodies.

All churches have rules. It is ridiculous to think of a church without any rules. If you think you or your church does not have any rules, then let a totally naked person preach from your pulpit. If you have no “rule” against that, then let him take all the young girls and openly abuse them in front of all the congregation. So do you have rules? Of course! All churches have rules. Some write them down, others do not.

The Unity of Brothers had some written rules. And they had revival. The lesson for us is that written rules and revival are not mutually exclusive. *How* the rules, whether written or unwritten, are handled and looked upon does make a difference. The legalistic heart—the heart that is trying to wiggle its way out of dying to self—will not have revival regardless of whether a church writes its rules down or not. The heart filled with God will have revival, whether its church writes its rules down or not. The lack of revival is not therefore to be laid upon church rules, rather the deadness of heart of the members is the culprit.

Lesson 3-Protestantism

Did the Protestant reformation help the Bohemian revival, or hinder it further?

The answer is pretty clear that the Protestants were more of a hindrance than a help. The Protestants are not to be blamed for the decline of Bohemian revival fires: the Bohemians themselves quenched the Spirit by turning from the teachings of Jesus little by

little. But instead of admonishing them for this, the Protestants actually pulled the Bohemians further from the gospel. “If you lived like we do” Luther told them in an admiring way, “then what is said of us would be said of you.” Yet in the end, what was said of the Lutherans was said of the Bohemians—and Lutherans, Reformed, and Big Group Bohemians share 27 memorial stones together in the plaza of Old Town Prague. Twenty-seven men died together on the scaffold for armed rebellion.

No one to speak of had ever believed in Luther's version of justification by faith alone—and I repeat no one, not even the Antenicene writers of the early church—before Luther came on the scene. “The Scriptures are against you,” Bishop Luke had written to Luther.

Yet, not too many years down the road the Big Group was signing a declaration of faith which contained Luther's doctrine. The only place where the words “faith” and “alone” are together is in James' letter to the church: “*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*” Somehow, 500 years later, people still say that a man is saved by faith alone.

And what was said of Luther's disciples then, is still being said today of his present disciples. Will we learn?

Lesson IV-Is there hope?

Can God still raise up a people to live like Jesus taught?

Is God still God?

Are we, the Petes, Matts, Gregs, Toms, and Mikes of today made of anything different than the Peters, Matthiases, Gregorys, Thomases, and Michaels of Bohemia?

Let us look at these questions one by one, from last to first.

No, we are no different than our forefathers. While our circumstances are certainly distinct from theirs, our inclinations and temptations are the same. If God could make a glorious thing out of a few run-of-the-mill Bohemians, then He has the same material to work with today that He had in yesteryear.

Yes, God is still God. His power has not diminished in one degree.

That leaves us with only the first question to answer.

Can God do it again?

Perhaps I should ask it this way. What is different now than then? We have the same God, and He has the same raw materials to work with.

Jesus has made the call: “Follow me.”

We now have a choice to make: Follow Him, or not follow Him. It is really that simple; black or white. Either we are following Jesus, obeying Him and aligning our life with His, or we are not.

We may believe all kinds of things about Him. We may believe that He was born in Bethlehem of Judea. We may believe that He was a good man. We may believe that He was the best of men. We may even believe that He was the Messiah. We may even believe that He died on the cross for us.

That is all to no avail if we do not follow Him.

Six hundred years ago some Peters, Johns, Gregorys, Thomases, and Matthiases decided to follow Jesus, not just believe some nice things about him.

The story you have just read is a record of the grace of God that these men and women found by believing on Jesus. Grace to lay down selfish ambitions; grace to share material goods even when there was very little to share, grace to turn the other cheek, grace to be pulled on the rack without denying God or brother, grace to be chased like a wild deer through the forest for not believing in transubstantiation, grace to lay down the sword when an army was marching toward them...

Grace, grace, marvelous grace! Freely given to those who will be foolish enough to lay their life on the teachings of Jesus: Foolish enough to conform their life to Him and His cross!

Yes, there is hope for us! Hope in the same Jesus that graced a bunch of what-not Bohemians with the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly; in this present world.¹³⁷

Will you follow Him? He has the same grace for you too!

¹³⁷ “Present” world, not “future” world!

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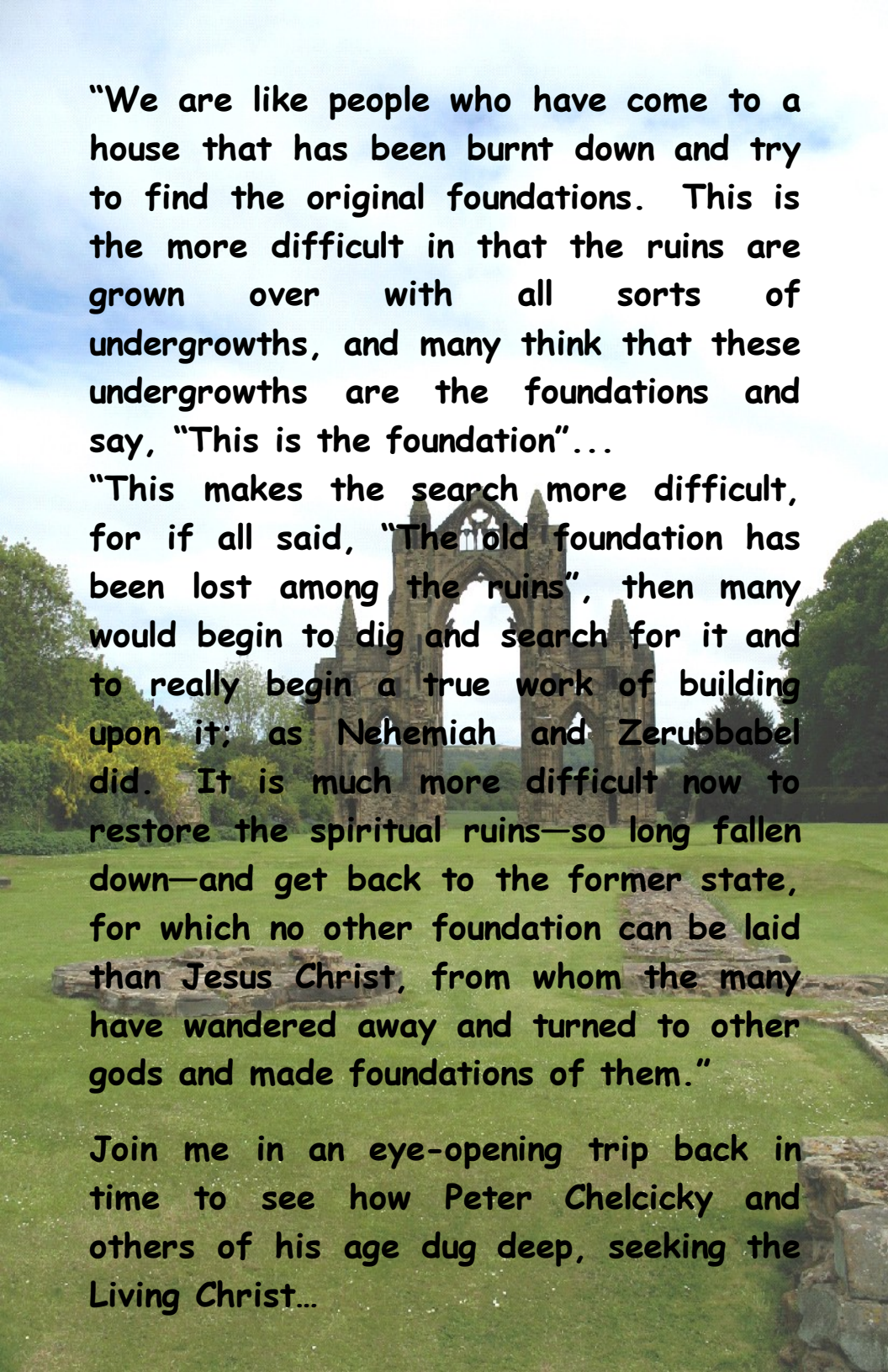
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"We are like people who have come to a house that has been burnt down and try to find the original foundations. This is the more difficult in that the ruins are grown over with all sorts of undergrowths, and many think that these undergrowths are the foundations and say, "This is the foundation"...

"This makes the search more difficult, for if all said, "The old foundation has been lost among the ruins", then many would begin to dig and search for it and to really begin a true work of building upon it; as Nehemiah and Zerubbabel did. It is much more difficult now to restore the spiritual ruins—so long fallen down—and get back to the former state, for which no other foundation can be laid than Jesus Christ, from whom the many have wandered away and turned to other gods and made foundations of them."

Join me in an eye-opening trip back in time to see how Peter Chelcicky and others of his age dug deep, seeking the Living Christ...