CHAPTER 3

National and Linguistic Disputes in the Bohemian Vicariate of the Observant Franciscans

Petr Hlaváček

While the strongest and most successful efforts at Catholic reform and Counter-Reformation in Bohemia began in the seventeenth century, Catholic reform dates back to the fifteenth century. However, most of these early efforts have never been at the forefront of Czech historical scholarship because of the dominant influence of Protestantism and the Hussite Revolution in the national historical narrative that developed the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The lack of attention to Catholic reform was also exacerbated by the general low level of interest in religion, and especially the taboo about exploring Catholicism during the communist period. Reflecting a new post-Velvet Revolution interest in exploring the rich religious history of Bohemia, this essay examines the Observant Franciscan Order in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Hlaváček explains that since its foundation in 1452, the Bohemian Observant Franciscan vicariate, which embraced all of the Bohemian Crown Lands, Austria, Styria, and later Poland, was characterized by a great ethnic and linguistic diversity. He shows that controversies arose as soon as the convent was founded in Vienna. And when new foundations in Poland, Silesia, and Bohemia proper were established, new nationalities (e.g. Germans and Hungarians) took leading positions alongside Italians who had previously held them, which precipitated new disputes. Hlaváček argues that these disputes within the Franciscan order reflected a general national awareness in the post-Hussite period, but the problem of nationality was tied to language, not the state.

Petr Hlaváček (1974–) is an historian of the cultural and religious history of the medieval and early modern period. He studied history and philosophy at the Charles University in Prague and in 2000, received his doctorate at that same institution. He served in 2006–2007 as Associate Dean and Chair of the Department of History and Culture of the Hussite Theological Faculty. In 2006–2012 he taught medieval history at the Southern Bohemian University in České Budějovice. In 2008, he became the coordinator of the Collegium Europaeum, a research group for the history of European thought, affiliated
The Beginnings of National Problems

From its foundation in 1452, the Bohemian vicariate of the Observant Franciscans incorporated a wide variety of national and linguistic groups, with its members speaking a wide variety of languages. The vicariate was established by John of Capistrano and his Italian disciples. In addition to the Czech lands, it also incorporated Austria, Styria and later the entire Kingdom of Poland.1 The oldest monastery in the new vicariate, founded by Capistrano in