Introduction: A Companion to Jan Hus

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On 6 July 2015, six hundred years will have passed since the death of Master Jan Hus, the Czech preacher, heretic, and reformer. History grants few people two lives, but Hus is one such figure we can claim lived twice. Hus's first life ended on 6 July 1415, when he was burnt at the stake in Constance. His second life – which is a reflection of the first through the interpretations of his followers and opponents, theologians and historians – began to unfold shortly thereafter, and with certain divergences has survived to this day. For the Bohemian Calixtines of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Hus remained a martyr to the new faith, and in the Protestant parts of Europe, he and Wyclif were perceived as forerunners of the Reformation; in the Czech lands under the Habsburg rule, however, a heretic's cap was again placed on his head. Hus was then returned to his pedestal during the Czech national revival, but this time as a warrior for the freedom of belief. The nineteenth century in turn predominantly saw Hus as the bearer of the national idea, and after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in October 1918, he was claimed by the ‘Away from Rome’ movement, which resulted in the foundation of the National Czechoslovak Church. When in February 1948 the Communists, with the support of the Soviet Union, seized power over the entire republic, they too claimed to be a contemporary historical tradition of the Hussite revolution. While the priest Jan Hus was not a revolutionary himself, the reform movement and an entire stage of Czech history bore his name, so that even his teaching was mercifully accepted, though with proper criticism. Nevertheless, though the greater part of the Czech public honestly claimed Hus and Hussitism during the Communist era, contemporary traditions have led to the exact opposite. Thus, after another revolution at the end of 1989, when the return to a democratic regime brought full freedom of speech, postmodern and Catholic-oriented journalism began to suppress the spiritual legacy of Hussitism, describing Hus's followers as brutes, highwaymen, and destroyers of ecclesiastical monuments.

It is no wonder that in a country with such an unsettled history and so many violent revolutions Hus's fate and his second life have influenced – and to a certain extent still influence – not only historical awareness but also specialized research. However, in this book Jan Hus consistently appears as a figure of the distant past. Researchers from six different countries have participated in writing this volume, which attests to the wider European significance of this
contentious figure. There could have been more contributors, however a number of first-class experts and editors of Hus's work have passed away or gone into seclusion in the past two decades. This has partially influenced the structure and the content of this volume of Companions, an outline of which is provided in the introductory chapter by Ota Pavlíček, *The Chronology of the Life and Work of Jan Hus*. Besides discussing Hus's life in general, Pavlíček also focuses on Hus's university career and explains the broader political background and circumstances of Hus's public activities, because Hus's work came to the center of events of land-wide importance at the latest in 1409, which was when the reform movement gained a dramatic dynamism after the departure of foreign professors and students from Prague.

After Pavlíček's introductory sketch of Hus's biography, the book returns to his earliest beginnings. František Palacký, the founder of Czech modern historiography, had identified the reform preachers and theologians from the period of the reign of Emperor Charles IV as being the predecessors of Hus and Hussitism. This continuity is emphasized even more with the nationally thinking Czech historians' tendencies to weaken the result of the superficial comparative analysis of the Austrian researcher Johann Loserth, according to whom Jan Hus was a mere plagiarizer of John Wyclif. Although it has been shown in time that in his treatises Hus did not directly refer to the works of his predecessors, other Bohemian reformers drew information from them, especially the theologian of the lay chalice Jacobellus of Stříbro (Jakoubek ze Stříbra). An outstanding expert on this issue is the recently departed historian of philosophy Vilém Herold († 2012), who has enriched the book with his chapter *The Spiritual Background of the Czech Reformation: Precursors of Jan Hus*. Here, three distinctive and in many ways different personalities emerge before the reader: the Austrian moralizer Conrad Waldhauser, the Moravian visionary John Milič of Kroměříž, and the Bohemian theologian Matthias of Janov, who was educated in Paris. Herold understood Wyclif's philosophy like few others in his field, and for that reason he has also supplemented the chapter with a lesson on the beginning of the Prague dispute about *universalia realia*.

Besides the university, Hus's main workplace was the extensive Bethlehem Chapel, built slightly beforehand for the purpose of preaching in the Czech language. In 1402, Master Jan Hus became its administrator. His success at the pulpit would hardly have been possible without the achievements of preachers in the decades prior to his appointment. Hus's preaching can therefore represent a culmination of these earlier developments, as is justifiably argued by Pavel Soukup in the following chapter, *Jan Hus as a Preacher*. Here, the author follows in detail Hus's career at Bethlehem Chapel and his preaching in exile in South Bohemia, and he further deals with Hus's postils, presenting as a case