

REV. PRZEMYSŁAW KANTYKA

JAN HUS AND VATICAN II

Abstract. The article develops the thesis of Professor Stefan Swieżawski that Jan Hus, the Czech Reformer sentenced as a heretic by the Council of Constance and in consequence burnt at the stake, can be considered as a precursor of the Second Vatican Council. After a short historical introduction there is an analysis of those ideas of Hus that were reflected in the Vatican II documents *Dei verbum*, *Lumen gentium* and *Dignitatis humanae*. The arguments are completed by a description of the present Catholic approach to Hus and by indicating a possible re-interpretation of his person thanks to the great *metanoia* launched in the Catholic Church by Vatican II.

Summarised by Rev. Przemysław Kantyka

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1. INTRODUCTION

When on the day of 6th July 1415 the flames devoured the stake on which Jan Hus, one of the greatest Czech reformers, was burnt alive, the surrounding onlookers could hear the Catholic *Creed* recited aloud by Master Jan.¹ In his conscience he died a Catholic, not a heretic as stated by the

REV. PRZEMYSŁAW KANTYKA — Roman Catholic priest, PhD, habilitation in theology, professor extraordinary, holder of the Chair of Protestant Theology of the Ecumenical Institute of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, member of many national and international learned societies; specializes in post-reformation theology in the English language area and in issues of ecumenical dialogue and its reception; address for correspondence — e-mail: kantyka@kul.pl

Ks. dr hab. PRZEMYSŁAW KANTYKA, prof. KUL — kierownik Katedry Teologii Protestantckiej w Instytucie Ekumenicznym KUL, członek wielu krajowych i zagranicznych towarzystw naukowych; specjalizuje się w teologii poreformacyjnej obszaru języka angielskiego oraz w problematyce dialogów ekumenicznych i recepcji ich wyników; adres do korespondencji – e-mail: kantyka@kul.pl

¹ Stefan SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica* (Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi”, 1995), 155. Other authors quote the text of the prayer which Hus recited aloud again and again in the moment of death: “Iesu Christe, filii Dei vivi, miserere mei!” Cf. Grzegorz RYŚ, *Jan Hus wobec kryzysu Kościoła doby wielkiej schizmy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, 2000), 256.

sentence of the Council of Constance. This year 2015 will mark the six hundredth anniversary of his tragic death and the beginning of the movement which took his name.

His troubled relationship with the Church authorities began in 1410 when Hus protested against the burning of the writings of John Wycliffe. In 1412 Hus opposed the indulgence bull of antipope John XXIII, which was the cause of his excommunication by the same pope in 1413. The next year, 1414, a synod in Prague condemned Master Hus, who then appealed to the council held in Constance to resolve the so-called three-popes controversy. Hus went to Constance equipped with a safe conduct from Sigismund, King of the Romans. 30 theses taken from his main treatise about the Church, *De ecclesia*,² were intended to prove that Hus was a heretic. The theses were taken out of context and Hus could not recognize in them his own opinions.³ He then refused to retract what he never taught. This refusal was the direct cause of condemning him as a heretic, who dogmatized, defended and preached the heresies of Wycliffe.⁴ Hus was then handed over to the civil authorities and executed the same day.⁵

² One of the original copies of this treatise was burnt together with Master Hus. A hundred years later, in 1520, *De ecclesia* was published by Martin Luther in collaboration with the Czech Utraquists in Hagenau in Alsace. The first Czech translation was published in Prague in 1904, and the first critical edition in Latin was published in 1956 in Cambridge and in 1958 in Prague. The first critical translation into Polish was published by Krzysztof Moskal: Jan Hus. *O Kościele*. Przekład i komentarz Krzysztof Moskal [trans. and commented by Krzysztof Moskal] (Lublin: TN KUL, 2007).

³ In the light of analysis done by Howard Kaminsky in *A history of the Hussite Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), the true doctrine of Hus, as derived from his treatises, contradicts the theses ascribed to him in Constance. Cf. RYŚ. *Jan Hus wobec kryzysu Kościoła doby wielkiej schizmy*, 27.

⁴ “Christi nomine invocato haec sacrosancta synodus Constantiensis, solum Deum prae oculis habens, per hanc definitivam sententiam, quam profert in his scriptis, pronunciat, decernit et declarat, dictum Ioannem Hus fuisse et esse verum et manifestum haereticum, ipsumque errores et heareses ab ecclesia Dei dudum damnatos et damnatas, ac plurima scandalosa, piarum aurium offensiva, temeraria et seditiosa dogmatizasse, et publice predicasse, in non modicam offensam divinae Maiestatis, ac universalis ecclesiae scandalum, et fidei catholicae detrimentum, claves etiam ecclesiae et censuras ecclesiasticas vilipendisse [...]” *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych. Tekst łaciński, grecki, arabski, ormiański, polski*. Vol. 3: (1414-1445) (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2003), 132. Grzegorz Ryś quotes the opinion of Matthew Spinka – *John Hus and the Czech Reform* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), 9 – that to the end Hus was only a moderate supporter of John Wycliffe. Cf. RYŚ. *Jan Hus wobec kryzysu Kościoła doby wielkiej schizmy*, 26.

⁵ Cf. Ryszard PALACZ. “Hus Jan,” in *Encyklopedia katolicka*. Vol. 6 (Lublin: TN KUL, 1993) col. 1339. In sentencing Hus the council decided to hand him over to civil jurisdiction for civil judgement: “Haec sancta synodus constantiensis Ioannem Hus, attento, quod ecclesia Dei non

Jan Hus died five and a half centuries before the Second Vatican Council. Nowhere in Vatican II documents can we find any direct reference to the person of the most famous of all rectors of Charles University in Prague. However it seems that without any misrepresentation we can draw a direct link between some ideas of Hus and the last great council, Vatican II.

2. HUS'S PRINCIPLES IMPLEMENTED BY VATICAN II?

In the modest framework of this paper we will not present the whole theology either of Vatican II, or of Jan Hus. We will not examine in Hus's writings all the controversies with the teaching of the Church of his time. Even the question of receiving Holy Communion under both kinds, which was one of the key slogans of the Hussite movement—up to the point of picturing a chalice on the troops' banners—will not be described here. This is because this question was not specific for Hus alone, but was a common feature for the whole range of reformers of his time. In the proceedings of the Council of Constance this issue is not included among the charges against Hus, but there is a separate “Condemnation of communion under both kinds reintroduced amongst the Czechs by Jakubek of Střibro.”⁶

What then is the subject of our interest here? It will be those ideas of Hus which have something in common with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council formulated five and a half centuries later. We will look into those ideas that were formulated or re-formulated by the last council in relation to prior Roman Catholic theology, and which were substantially or partially present long before in the theological intuitions of Master Hus. Three great documents of Vatican II seem to have the most to tell us on this matter: the two dogmatic constitutions *Dei verbum* and *Lumen gentium*, and the declaration *Dignitatis humanae*.⁷

habeat ultra quod agere valeat, iudicio saeculari relinquit, et ipsum curiae saeculari relinquendum for decernit”. “*Sententia contra Ioannem Hus,*” in *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, 134.

⁶ “*Condemnatio communionis sub utraque, a Iacobo de Misa nuper inter Bohemos resuscitata,*” in *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, 108–111.

⁷ Texts of the documents of Vatican II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis humanae* are taken from: *The documents of Vatican II: in a new and definitive translation, with commentaries and notes by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox authorities*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

a. *Dei verbum*

The decrees of the Council of Trent were aimed at defending the Catholic faith against the Reformation. That is why the conciliar decrees underlined the authority of Tradition, making it virtually independent of the scriptural source of God's revelation.⁸ The balance has been restored in the Vatican II constitution *Dei verbum*. Scripture and Tradition are considered in the conciliar constitution as complementary in transmitting God's revelation, because both come from the same divine source.⁹ Both also constitute the highest rule of faith.¹⁰

Contrary to his English predecessor, John Wycliffe, Hus accepted Tradition together with the Holy Scripture. While Wycliffe rejected any kind of authority except the Bible, Hus never adopted the principle of *sola Scriptura*.¹¹ Of course Hus accepted more easily that part of tradition (here with a small "t", understood not as the transmitter of divine revelation, but as a part of the human way of understanding it) which did not support the

⁸ "The sacred and holy, ecumenical, and general Synod of Trent, — lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding therein, — keeping this always in view, that, errors being removed, the purity itself of the Gospel be preserved in the Church; which (Gospel), before promised through the prophets in the holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded to be preached by His Apostles to every creature, as the fountain of all, both saving truth, and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety, and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament — seeing that one God is the author of both — as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession." COUNCIL OF TRENT. SESSION IV. "Decree concerning the canonical Scriptures," accessed 22 January 2015. <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>.

⁹ "Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. [...] Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church." *Dei verbum*, 9–10.

¹⁰ "[The Church] has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture." *Dei verbum*, 21.

¹¹ This — among other things — proves that Hus was not an uncritical imitator of Wycliffe. Cf. Alfons SKOWRONEK, "Ku rehabilitacji Jana Husa?" *Jednota* 8–9 (1986): 13.

institution of the papacy, condemned by him as the most corrupt of all the earthly emanations of the Church. According to him Tradition—as prior to the Scripture—must be accepted and venerated together with the Bible.¹²

Hus also accepted Church canon law as being indispensable for the functioning of the ecclesial institution and even compared it to the law of the Gospel. In such thinking he also accepted the dogmatic definitions of the councils and synods as long as they are consonant with the law of God.¹³ Nevertheless, when an ecclesial authority, even the pope, presented a wrong judgement, Hus did not hesitate to appeal directly to Christ.¹⁴

The Master of Prague University also attempted to bring the Bible closer to individual believers by having the Scripture translated into the language comprehensible to ordinary people.¹⁵ Hus himself preached in Czech, often led the singing of hymns in this language and even himself wrote the words of Church hymns¹⁶. The principle of announcing the word of God to the people in their own tongue did not have to wait until Vatican II. Already with Guttenberg's invention of printing, translations of the Bible—both Protestant and Catholic—spread all around the world. The constitution *Dei verbum* lays considerable stress on the availability of the sacred Scripture to the whole people of God and emphasises the need for an adequate translation, which should be made from the original languages.¹⁷

Even if we cannot state that Hus put forward any principles concerning the authority of the Bible that would later be implemented by Vatican II, we can acknowledge that the Rector of Prague University would not have been opposed to the formulations of *Dei verbum* if he had been familiar with it in his times.

¹² Cf. Ondřej LUKOŠ, “Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa,” *Studia Oecumenica* 6 (2006): 52–54.

¹³ “Veneror etiam omnia concilia et specialia, decreta et decretales et omnes leges, nanones et constitutiones, de quanto consonant explicite vel implicite legi dei”. Quoted from Vlastimil KYBAL. *Mistr Jan Hus. Život a učeni*. Vol. 1. Part 2 (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1926), 71.

¹⁴ Cf. Michał LUBAŃSKI, “Jan Hus,” *Jednota* 8–9 (1986): 8.

¹⁵ Cf. LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 54.

¹⁶ Cf. LUBAŃSKI, “Jan Hus,” 6.

¹⁷ “Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. [...] But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books.” *Dei verbum* 22.

b. *Lumen gentium*

It is beyond all doubt that ecclesiology occupied the most important place in the teaching of Jan Hus. His main writing, the treatise about the Church (*De ecclesia*), to some extent similar to Wycliffe's work with the same title,¹⁸ was aimed at the corruption detected by Hus in the institution of the Church of his time and, above all, in the institution of the papacy.

Hus understanding of the Church can be characterised as “mysterical” and “predestinational.” In his early thought the Church was described as the congregation of all the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*), but later he moved to the position of understanding the Church as a community of the elected ones, the predestined (*universitas praedestinationum*).¹⁹ We cannot however simply classify Hus among the protagonists of predestination.²⁰ The second part of his understanding of the Church was St. Paul's teaching of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (*corpus Christi mysticum*). So we could say that Hus understood the Church as “the number of all the predestined and Christ's Mystical Body, with Christ as its head.”²¹ It is therefore not surprising that Hus rejected the convictions proclaimed by his contemporaries such as Stanislaus of Znojmo and Stephanus Palecz, for whom the Church was an institution where the pope was the head and the cardinals were the members.²²

The Roman Catholic Church needed the Second Vatican Council and its cornerstone constitution *Lumen gentium* to reformulate its self-understand-

¹⁸ In many places in *De ecclesia* Hus refers to Wycliffe's ideas. The view that he was a follower of Wycliffe was already expressed in the decree of the Council of Constance and is still maintained by scholars like Buddensieg, Döringer, Helfert and Loserth. However many scholars nowadays — like August Neander and others — show that by adopting Wycliffe's ideas in many points, Hus retained his independence of judgment and in many ways differed from his English predecessor. The same applies to his magnum opus *De ecclesia*. Hus knew Wycliffe's treatise with the same title, referred to it and even quoted it, but still maintained independence in his own formulations. Cf. LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 50–51.

¹⁹ Cf. Afons SKOWRONEK, “Husytyzm. IV. Doktryna,” in *Encyklopedia katolicka*. Vol. 6 (Lublin: TN KUL, 1993), col. 1349; Stefan SWIEŻAWSKI, *Eklezjologia późnośredniowieczna na rozdrożu* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1990), 16; LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 57–58.

²⁰ Hus presents a specific understanding of predestination. For him predestination is a timeless and ahistorical metaphysical idea which is transformed through a dynamic and historical process into the Mystical Body of Christ. Cf. LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 58–59.62.

²¹ Cf. LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 58.

²² Cf. SWIEŻAWSKI, *Eklezjologia późnośredniowieczna na rozdrożu*, 112.

ing from the notion of a pyramidally structured perfect society (*societas perfecta*) towards the “community of faith, hope and love” and “visible organism” which Christ continues to sustain,²³ the Mystical Body of Christ.²⁴ This last notion, in particular, is close to Hus’ theological intuitions.

Secondly, Vatican II brought the understanding of the Church as the People of God²⁵ and underlined the common priesthood of all the baptized.²⁶ Pointing out the distinction between this common priesthood and the ordained ministry, the Second Vatican Council clearly explained that the ordained ministry of deacons, presbyters and bishops is in the service of the whole People of God and not above it.²⁷ In such an understanding the hierarchy, including the institution of the papacy, remains in the service of the whole community of believers — of the *koinonia*.

Without running any risk we can formulate the thesis that Master Jan Hus would not have opposed such an understanding of the Church. We have to consider also that his criticism was directed at the corrupt institution of the Church of his time, exercising too much earthly power, not at the existence of the institutional Church as such.²⁸

c. *Dignitatis humanae*

We now come to the last – but not the least – of our remarks about the resemblances between Hus’s ideas and the spirit and letter of Vatican II.

²³ “Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all.” *Lumen gentium*, 8.

²⁴ “But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.” *Lumen gentium*, 8.

²⁵ “Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, in His Blood, calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God.” *Lumen gentium*, 9.

²⁶ “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.” *Lumen gentium*, 10.

²⁷ “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” *Lumen gentium*, 10.

²⁸ Cf. LUKOŠ, *Współczesna ocena nauczania Jana Husa*, 75.

This perhaps cannot be as easily deduced from his writings as was possible for the ecclesiological question. It is the question of the freedom of individual conscience and, in consequence, the freedom of judgement. While acknowledging both the authority of the Bible and the authority of conscience, he rejected blind submission to human authority, even to that of the Church and of civil rulers. According to Hus a person's conscience must be obedient first of all to the truth, and then a person must obey their conscience. One of the most significant sayings of Hus in this matter is often quoted: "Seek the truth, hear the truth, learn the truth, love the truth, speak the truth, hold fast to the truth, and defend the truth until death."²⁹ It is probably from this sentence that the motto "Truth prevails" (in Czech: *Pravda vítězí*) was taken, which is inscribed on the banner of the Czech presidents.

The Conciliar Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*, speaks about both truth and freedom of individual conscience, as being inseparable one from another. Truth imposes itself on the conscience only by its proper force, and each man and woman is obliged to search, accept and keep the truth about God and his Church.³⁰ Master Jan Hus would have been glad to hear that no one can be forced to act against their own conscience³¹ and that the foundation of religious freedom is human nature.³² When then a man or a woman — following their conscience — recognizes the imperatives of the divine law, they must follow them without being forced to do so or to abandon them³³. The same rules of religious freedom were applied by

²⁹ Ladislav HOLÝ, *The little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: national identity and the post-communist transformation of society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.

³⁰ "On their part, all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and His Church, and to embrace the truth they come to know, and to hold fast to it. This Vatican Council likewise professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power." *Dignitatis humanae*, 1.

³¹ "This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits." *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

³² "Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature." *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

³³ "On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious." *Dignitatis humanae*, 3.

the Second Vatican Council to the relationship between individuals and civil authorities: no government has the competence to impose profession or repudiation of any religion.³⁴

We are quite entitled to say that if this had been the state of mind of the Church and the civil authorities in the late Middle Ages, neither the trial of Jan Hus nor the tragic Hussite wars would ever have happened. We can and should pray to God that all people professing all kinds of religions might today adopt this attitude, which the Roman Catholic Church fortunately formulated once for all at the Second Vatican Council.

3. *ECCLESIA ROMANA* VERSUS JAN HUS — OLD AND NEW APPROACH

During the Council of Constance it was the Polish delegation, headed by the prominent theologian Paweł Włodkovic,³⁵ who defended Hus during his trial against unjust accusations.³⁶ In spite of their objections, the Polish delegates were forced to sign the council sentence under the threat of death. The only person who refused — Hieronymus of Prague — joined the fate of Hus and was burnt at the stake. All this meant an incredible violation of conscience.³⁷

In the 1980s, it was a Polish historian and philosopher, Professor Stefan Swieżawski, who officially formulated the premise of the rehabilitation of the Czech Reformer. “I am not a theologian, but I am deeply convinced that Jan Hus was not a heretic — and that one should deal with his person as it was done with Joan of Arc.”³⁸ These words were pronounced to his holiness Pope John Paul II. The pope’s answer was: “It is the task of scholars from various disciplines to make proposals to the pope on these sorts of problems”³⁹. The result of this encounter was an article in a Polish weekly,

³⁴ “It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or fear or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders men from joining or leaving a religious community.” *Dignitatis humanae*, 6.

³⁵ Włodkovic is known for his definition of war just and unjust presented at the Council of Constance in the context of the war between the Realm of Poland and the Teutonic Order. Cf. Paweł JANOWSKI, “Włodkovic Paweł,” in *Encyklopedia katolicka*. Vol. 20 (Lublin: TN KUL, 2014), col. 805–806.

³⁶ Cf. PALACZ, “Hus Jan,” 1339.

³⁷ Cf. SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica*, 162–163.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 145.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

in which Professor Swieżawski stated the same thesis publicly⁴⁰. The Professor also formulated questions for the Ecumenical Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference to explore. Among other points, he raised a very important question: "To what extent can the definitions of the Councils be declared as non-valid, when they were formulated under clear political pressure from institutions outside the Church (for example, in Constance under pressure and threats from Emperor Sigismund)?"⁴¹

A deeper study of Hus's theology should enable us to discern more precisely what really was Hus's teaching from the theses unjustly ascribed to him before and after his death.⁴² This should facilitate an understanding of his thoughts in the context of his age. We have to be aware that the rehabilitation of Hus and a deeper study of his teaching are in some ways made more difficult by the emergence of the so-called "Hussite movement"⁴³ in the 15th century and the subsequent "Hussite wars", resulting in numerous anti-Hussite crusades led by the Emperor Sigismund with the backing of Pope Martin V. Some tendencies within the Hussite movement—such as the Taborites—made a name for themselves through their brutality in the fight for their cause. In the understanding of the Catholic generation this added to the name "Hussite" the notion of cruelty, heresy and schism joined together.

The second factor influencing any elucidation of Hus's life and deeds is the tendency to link the Hussite movement of the 15th century with the Czech national movement aimed against the German imperial reign.⁴⁴ In the early 1920s the same notion of linking the Hussite legacy with nationalism was exploited politically up to the point of adopting Hus's saying "Truth prevails" by the presidents of the Czech Republic.

⁴⁰ Stefan SWIEŻAWSKI, "Jan Hus – heretyk czy prekursor Vaticanum II," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 6 (1986), 9 February 1986, 1–2. This article has been translated into English, Czech, French and Italian. In Czech it has been published in *Studie* 5 (1986) and in *Informace o Chartie* 77 9 (1986).

⁴¹ SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica*, 151.

⁴² Cf. Walerian BUGEL, "Od heretyka do reformatora Kościoła. Wspólna relekтура postaci Jana Husa jako fundament pojednania Kościołów czeskich i uzdrawiania pamięci historycznej narodu," in *O ekumenizmie w roku wiary. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji jubileuszu 30-lecia Instytutu Ekumenicznego KUL*, ed. Przemysław Kantyka, Piotr Kopiec, and Marcin Składanowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 389.

⁴³ The so-called Hussite movement was not uniform. Its biggest factions were known under the names of the "Taborites", the "Utraquists" and the "Orphans". Cf. Jan WALKUSZ, "Husytyzm. II. Dzieje," in *Encyklopedia katolicka*. Vol. 6 (Lublin: TN KUL, 1993), col. 1346-1347. See also Jarold Knox ZEMAN, *Hussite Movement & Reformation in Bohemia, Moravia & Slovakia (1350-1650): a bibliographical study guide (with particular reference to resources in North America)* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1977).

⁴⁴ Cf. SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica*, 158.

In fact, without risking being far from the truth, we can formulate the thesis that the conflict surrounding the person and teaching of Jan Hus was essentially a clash between political power and splendour (represented by the emperor and the papacy) and the concept of a Church that was poor and humble, as imagined by St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Brigid of Sweden or St. Catherine of Siena.⁴⁵ Taking into account this context, the Polish scholar Professor Swieżawski prompted the Holy See: “It seems to be a requirement of justice that the Holy Father should want to initiate a revision of the trial condemning Hus at the Council of Constance—and cleanse this great martyr figure from the charges unfairly incriminating him.”⁴⁶ An honest revision of the trial would have to answer the question whether Jan Hus can still be regarded as a heretic. Perhaps it could be proved that the differences in his understanding of the nature of the Church and of the institution of the papacy with its claim to universal power can be numbered among the *theologumena*—different theological opinions. Still today, Hus’s understanding of the Church as *universitas praedestinationum*, in particular, would have to be carefully clarified.

Besides enthusiastic voices backing the rehabilitation of Master Jan of Prague—which is not unusual—other, quite different, positions are also expressed. It is not Jan Hus who needs rehabilitation, they say, but rather the whole Catholic Church needs it for what she has done to one of her Reformers.⁴⁷ A sincere reflection would also be appropriate in order to throw more light on the whole phenomenon of the Bohemian Reformation, including all the various tendencies within the Hussite movement, and especially the content and meaning of the “Four Prague Articles”: freedom to spread the Word of God; receiving communion under both kinds, bread and wine (*sub utraque specie*); a ban on secular power for priests; and the punishment of mortal sins.⁴⁸

On 21st April 1990, in an address to the world of culture in the cathedral of Prague during his pilgrimage to Czechoslovakia, Saint John Paul II said: “I remember that during the Second Vatican Council the Czech Archbishop, Cardinal Joseph Beran, intervened strongly in defence of the rules of religious freedom and tolerance, recalling in words full of regret the fate of the

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 157.

⁴⁶ SWIEŻAWSKI, “Jan Hus – heretyk czy prekursor Vaticanum II,” 2.

⁴⁷ Cf. SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica*, 147.

⁴⁸ Cf. J. M. LOCHMAN, “Magna Charta czeskiej Reformacji,” *Jednota* 8–9 (1986): 28–31; SWIEŻAWSKI, *Eklezjologia późnośredniowieczna na rozdrożu*, 21.

Czech priest, Jan Hus, and lamenting the great abuses that occurred in that age and later. I still have in mind those words of the Cardinal Archbishop of Prague about this priest, who played such a role in the religious and cultural history of the Czech nation. It is a task for the scholars—in particular for the Czech theologians—to define precisely the place which Jan Hus takes among the reformers of the Church, alongside other famous medieval reformers in Bohemia such as Thomas of Štítina and Jan Milič of Kroměříž. Notwithstanding his theological convictions, we cannot deny either the integrity of his personal life, or his efforts for moral education and uplifting the nation.”⁴⁹ We can surely consider these words of the pontiff not only as the moral rehabilitation of Jan Hus, but also the self-rehabilitation of the people of the Church for the errors the other people of the Church had committed in the past.

Three years later the Czech Bishops’ Conference created a special commission with the purpose of examining the person, life and works of Master Jan Hus. The commission at first comprised only Roman Catholic members, but they were soon joined by scholars from other Churches, from the Czech Academy of Science and some Czech universities.⁵⁰ On the eve of the jubilee year 2000, from 15th to 18th December a special conference about Hus took place in the Vatican.⁵¹ In the concluding audience to the participants Saint John Paul II described the Czech Reformer as someone who was worth recalling for many reasons, especially for his moral courage in the face of adversities and death. He also expressed regret for the cruel death of Jan Hus and for the subsequent conflict in the minds and hearts of the Czech nation.

⁴⁹ „Ricordo che, al Concilio Vaticano II, l’Arcivescovo ceco, Cardinale Giuseppe Beran, intervenne con forza per difendere i principi della libertà religiosa e della tolleranza, facendo riferimento con parole accorate alla vicenda del sacerdote boemo Giovanni Hus e deplorando gli eccessi a cui allora e dopo ci si abbandonò (cf. *Acta Sinodalia*, IV, pp. 393-394). Ho ancora nella mia mente quelle parole del Cardinale Arcivescovo di Praga nei riguardi di questo sacerdote, che tanta importanza ha avuto nella storia religiosa e culturale del popolo boemo. Sarà compito degli esperti - in primo luogo dei teologi cechi - definire più esattamente il posto che Giovanni Hus occupa tra i riformatori della Chiesa, accanto ad altre note figure riformatrici del Medio Evo boemo, come Tommaso da Stitné e Giovanni Milic da Kromeriz. Tuttavia, al di là delle convinzioni teologiche da lui propugnate, non si possono negare ad Hus integrità di vita personale e impegno per l’istruzione e l’educazione morale della Nazione.” “Incontro di Giovanni Paolo II con il mondo della cultura,” accessed 12 February 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1990/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19900421_cultura-praga.html.

⁵⁰ Cf. BUGEL, “Od heretyka do reformatora Kościoła,” 392.

⁵¹ Most of the materials from the conference have been published in: *Jan Hus ve Vatikánu: mezinárodní rozprava o českém reformátoru 15. století a o jeho recepci na prahu třetího tisíciletí*, ed. Jaroslav Pánek and Miloslav Polívka (Praha: Historický Ústav, 2000).

4. CONCLUSION

We have to admit that the evaluation of the person and thought of Jan Hus through the centuries has been obscured by the tragic wars which occurred after his death and by the later forced re-catholicisation implemented in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia by the Habsburg empire. Thus the great Czech reformer has been judged in history not on the basis of what he taught, but also on the basis of the movement and wars that emerged after his death at the stake.

It is also true that Hus was radical and uncompromising in his teaching. Alfons Skowronek (another Polish theologian and ecumenist) even went so far as to say that “the theological ideal of Hus had in itself something of fanaticism”, but this often happens and “in the history of the Church many examples can be found of something holy, profoundly religious and inspired by the spirit of reform being accomplished in an anti-church fervour”⁵². Stefan Swieżawski does not hesitate to write about Hus’s trial: “The whole trial and process of Hus at the Council of Constance was an act basically suspicious in its moral aspect and in principle criminal”⁵³.

Professor Swieżawski – justly named the great protagonist of Hus in 20th-century Poland – also draws attention to the main concern of Hus’s theology. This was the desire to cleanse the Church from all the worldly splendour that had accumulated during the centuries since the time of the Emperor Constantine. This however would require an absolute and comprehensive change in the mentality of Christians, a great *metanoia*. A return to the simplicity of the first Christian communities and abandoning what is not necessary to proclaim the Gospel was one of Hus’s great ideas. We can say that the Second Vatican Council launched the process of this *metanoia*,⁵⁴ which has gradually continued through the efforts of subsequent popes, including Francis, the present Holy Father.

Taking this into account and looking carefully into Hus’s ecclesiology compared with the great documents of Vatican II we are entitled to draw a link between the 15th-century Czech Reformer and the great act of the Holy Spirit in the conciliar renewal of the Catholic Church in the 20th century. To

⁵² SKOWRONEK, “Ku rehabilitacji Jana Husa?” 14.

⁵³ SWIEŻAWSKI, *Eklezjologia późnośredniowieczna na rozdrożu*, 17. Cf. Paul DE VOOGHT, *L’Hérésie de Jean Hus* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1960), 474.

⁵⁴ Cf. SWIEŻAWSKI, *Dobro i tajemnica*, 165.

say that Hus – “in his style and in his age a genius of faith”⁵⁵—contributed to the understanding of the Church as described in the documents of Vatican II would possibly be going too far. But perhaps we may be permitted to formulate the thesis that if the late medieval Church had had the form and self-understanding of the present Catholic Church as expressed by the Second Vatican Council, Master Jan Hus would have been glad to be one of her great protagonists!

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⁵⁵ SKOWRONEK, “Ku rehabilitacji Jana Husa?” 13.

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JAN HUS A DRUGI SOBÓR WATYKAŃSKI

Streszczenie

W artykule rozwinięto tezę prof. Stefana Swieżawskiego, że Jan Hus, czeski reformator uznany za heretyka przez Sobór w Konstancji i w wyniku tego spalony na stosie, może być uznany za prekursora II Soboru Watykańskiego. Po krótkim wstępie historycznym następuje analiza tych poglądów Husa, które znalazły odzwierciedlenie w dokumentach Vaticanum II: *Dei verbum*, *Lumen gentium* i *Dignitatis humanae*. Wywody uzupełnia zwięzły opis współczesnego katolickiego podejścia do Husa, a także wskazanie, że nowe odczytanie jego postaci jest możliwe dzięki wielkiej *metanoi*, zapoczątkowanej w Kościele katolickim przez Vaticanum II.

Streścił ks. Przemysław Kantyka

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Hus, husytyzm, eklezjologia, II Sobór Watykański.