
“More Glory than Blood”: Murder and Martyrdom in the Hussite Crusades

Thomas A. Fudge

(*Christchurch, New Zealand*)

In 1418 Pope Martin V urged the ecclesiastical hierarchy in east-central Europe to proceed against the Hussite heretics in all possible manner to bring their dissent to an end.¹ Two years later a formal bull of crusade was proclaimed and the cross was preached against the recalcitrant Czechs.² The story of the crusades which convulsed Bohemia for a dozen years is well known.³ Five times the cross was preached, crusade banners hoisted and tens of thousands of crusaders poured across the Czech frontier with one pre-eminent goal: to eradicate the scourge of heresy. At Prague in 1420, peasant armies commanded by Jan Žižka won an improbable victory and the crusaders, under the personal command of Emperor Sigismund, retreated in disarray and defeat. At Žatec the following year, Hussites once again saw a vastly superior army withdraw disorganized and crushed. In 1422 the crusaders were unable to overcome their internal squabbles long enough to mount any real offensive and once more had little option other than to retreat in dishonour. For five years the crusading cause rested. Then in 1427 the crusaders struck again, first at Stříbro and then at Tachov in western Bohemia. Prokop Holý's forces scattered them ignominiously. Once more, in 1431, the armies of the church and empire were mustered and with great force marched through the Šumava [Bohemian Forest] to confront the enemies of God. The odds favoured the crusaders. They out-numbered the heretics by a four to one margin, were militarily superior to the flail-touting peasants and were under the command of Friedrich of Brandenburg, veteran warrior in charge of his third crusade, and the spiritual direction of the president of the ecumenical Council of Basel, Cardinal Guiliano Cesarini. The fifth crusade ended before it was ever fought when the forces of the crusade fled in panicked flight at the sound of the approaching Hussites. Driven by fear, they abandoned their war wagons and supplies and ran headlong through the Šumava for the safety of the Upper Palatinate inside German territory. The defeat

¹The relevant portions of the bull *Inter Cunctus* appear in Thomas A. Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia, 1418–1437: Sources and Documents for the Hussite Crusade* (Aldershot, 2002) 45–9.

²The crusading bull *Omnium plasmatoris domini*, dated 1 March 1420, was proclaimed in Wrocław on 17 March by the papal legate Ferdinand, bishop of Lucena. Latin text in UB 1: 17–19.

³Major or specific sources on the crusades against the heretics in the English language include František M. Bartoš, “An English Cardinal and the Hussite Revolution,” CV 6 (1963) 47–54; Bartoš, *The Hussite Revolution 1424–1437*, ed. John Klassen (New York, 1986); Frederick G. Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* (New York, 1969); Heymann, “The Crusades against the Hussites”, in Harry W. Hazard, ed., *A History of the Crusades*, volume 3 (Madison, 1975) 586–646; G.A. Holmes, “Cardinal Beaufort and the Crusade against the Hussites,” *English Historical Review* 88 (1973) 721–50; John Klassen, *Warring Maidens, Captive Wives and Hussite Queens: Women and Men at War and at Peace in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia* (Boulder, 1999); Franz Lützow, *The Hussite Wars* (London, 1914); and Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia*.

was as crushing for the crusaders as it was absolute for the heretics. There would be no sixth crusade. That however, did not bring to an end military action either inside or outside the Czech lands. Between the fourth and fifth crusades, Prokop Holý modified Hussite policy concerning warfare. Departing from the defensive strategy of his predecessor Žižka, Prokop undertook forays into neighbouring lands in an effort to secure Czech borders. These expeditions lasted from 1428 until 1433 and in those years Germany, Austria, Moravia, Hungary, Slovakia, Great Poland, Prussia, Silesia and Lusatia felt the wrath of the aroused and indignant Hussites. Virtually unstoppable they pressed onwards until they were forced to halt on the shores of the Baltic Sea.⁴ Hussite commentators wrote that the resistance and war effort had been undertaken “in order that all errors of Antichrist might be destroyed. . . .”⁵ Therefore, the counter-crusades must remain linked to the general crusade period. By the time the crusaders retired and Hussite armies vanished into oblivion, nearly two decades had passed, skeletons of thousands murdered and martyred lay strewn throughout the countryside and the Czech lands were baptized in the blood of crusaders and Hussites. These were days of intolerance; days of murder and martyrdom; days in which men both killed and died for God.⁶

The peculiarity of Christians killing other Christians all in the name of God, was a clear departure from the objectives of the earlier crusade period when efforts in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries to regain the former Christian territories in the ancient Near East were undertaken.⁷ In those days, Christians were pitted against infidels, the children of light confronted the children of darkness. The Hussites were not infidels. They were Christians, in doctrine, in practice and in outlook. Still, this idea of crusading fervour against other Christians was nothing new. In 1208 Pope Innocent III ordered measures undertaken in Languedoc to put down the heretical nuisance of the Cathars. The Albigensian crusades over the next twenty years did just that and the pockets of resistance those crusaders failed to eradicate, the inquisitorial efforts of Bernard Gui, Jacques Fournier and their colleagues completed.⁸ Like their Cathar predecessors, the Hussites were regarded

⁴The only thorough study of the Prussian-Polish campaign is in Czech. Josef Macek, *Husité na Baltu a ve Velkopolsku* (Prague, 1952). For Austria, see Silvia Petrin, *Der österreichische Hussitenkrieg 1420–1434* (Vienna, 1982) and for parts of Germany the best source is Gerhard Schlesinger, *Die Hussiten in Franken: Der Hussiteneinfall unter Prokop dem Großen im Winter 1429/30, seine Auswirkungen sowie sein Niederschlag in der Geschichtschreibung* (Kulmbach, 1974).

⁵Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, “Chronicon causam sacerdotum Taboriensium continens,” in Konstantin von Höfler, ed., *Geschichtschreiber der Hussitischen Bewegung* (Vienna, 1865) 2: 481.

⁶See the recent study by Shmuel Shepkaru, “To Die for God: Martyrs’ Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives,” *Speculum* 77 (2002) 311–41.

⁷On the roots of this development see Norman Housley, “Crusades against Christians: Their Origins and early Development, c.1000–1216,” in Peter W. Edbury, ed., *Crusade and Settlement* (Cardiff, 1985) 17–36. However, it is important to point out that crusaders did commit atrocities against other Christians many times during campaigns in the Outremer. The fourth crusade at Constantinople in 1204 is a particularly vivid example.

⁸There are numerous sources. Among primary source editions see Georgene W. Davis, *The Inquisition at Albi: 1299–1300* (New York, 1948); Célestin Douais, ed., *Documents pour servir à l’histoire de l’Inquisition dans le Languedoc*, 2 vv. (Paris, 1900); Jean Duvernoy, ed., *Le Registre d’Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)* 3 vv. (Toulouse, 1965); Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l’Inquisiteur*, ed. Guillaume Mollat, 2 vv. (Paris, 1964); Peter of les-Vaux-de-Cernay, *Historia Albigensis*, eds. W.A. and M.D. Sibley (Woodbridge, 1998); Janet Shirley, trans., *The Song of the Cathar Wars* (Aldershot, 1996); Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, eds., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York, 1991); and *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens: The Albigensian Crusade*

by the official church as heretics. When Jan Hus failed to recant at the Council of Constance he was summarily burned. When his followers insisted on following the path of reformed religious practice and paid no heed to the injunctions of the church to cease and desist, they too became the object of a crusading mentality. For Hussites, this repressive measure was born of malice and hatred for the truth of the gospel. Preaching in the Church of our Lady of the Snows in the New Town of Prague on 23 July 1419, the radical priest Jan Želivský made clear that killing motivated by malice was simple homicide. It was murder and this was Želivský's verdict for what had transpired in Constance four years earlier. Everyone at the synod who consented to the death of Hus was as guilty as the executioner and each one guilty of murder. Želivský thundered on and made the same claim for the death of Jerome of Prague in May 1416. He reached back even further and applied his principle to the laymen – Martin, Jan and Stašek – who were beheaded in the Old Town in 1412 for protesting the sale of indulgences. Želivský did not stop there but raised to consciousness once again the executions of an anonymous Hussite and Jan of Olomouc who were burned alive for their “heretical” faith in Moravia in June 1415.⁹ By extension and implication, the crusade itself was nothing but militarism based on malice and was therefore murder on an unimaginable and unconscionable scale.

Clearly, the official church took another view. This was a struggle for truth and truthfulness, for right and righteousness with theological implications and eternal consequences. Therefore, political rulers and magistrates were urged to support the crusade effort. Plenary indulgences were offered to the crusaders – remission of all their sins and the temporal punishments thereof in exchange for killing heretics. These “heretic killers” were not murderers or criminals in the ordinary sense. Indeed, they were regarded by the pope, no less, as the “athletes of Christ.”¹⁰ In plain language this was holy war in defence of God and Holy Mother Church. The town scribe of Gdańsk, Conrad Bitschin, who witnessed first-hand the counter-crusade of the Orphan armies in 1433 sums up admirably the opposing argument to the charge of murder. To fall in battle against the enemies of God was to suffer the glorious death of the martyr. The scribe Bitschin puts it thus: “stand up. . . . arise with confidence . . . do not be afraid to expose your bodies for Christ who delivered himself voluntarily to death for us. Do not be fearful of the beatings and wounding, but be aware that more glory than blood flows from these wounds. Do not be frightened also to undergo glorious death for Christ. . . . For in truth [you] have been promised life in death as well as the glory which comes after death.”¹¹

A perusal through the sources from the Hussite side during these tumultuous years reveals the same kind of rhetoric used to inspire the Hussite cause. It was

and its Aftermath, eds. W.A. and M.D. Sibley (Woodbridge, 2003). Among secondary sources I have found the following especially helpful: James B. Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society* (Ithaca, 1997); Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, 1998); Christine Thouzellier, *Catharisme et valdésisme en Languedoc* (Louvain, 1969); Walter L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France 1100–1250* (London, 1974); and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1978).

⁹This sermon remains in manuscript: Prague, National Library MS V G 3 with the cited passage on f. 19^b.

¹⁰The crusade bull of Martin V, 1 March 1420, in UB 1:17.

¹¹Conrad Bitschin, *Epistola Ecclesiae deplanctoria*, in Theodor Hirsch, et al., edd., *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, 6 vv. (Leipzig, 1861–74) 3:512–18 at 517–18.

reported that radical priests “preached to the people and promised that whoever might be killed in this struggle, may be confident that he or she shall be raised to the kingdom of God.”¹² The counter-crusading anthem of the heretics *Ktož jsou boží bojovníci* [You who are the warriors of God] identified death at the hands of the wicked crusaders as martyrdom.

You who are the warriors of God. . . .
Christ will reward you for all that is lost. . .
Whoever gives their life for him
Shall gain life eternal.¹³

The idea about Christ making good the losses of warriors fighting for God’s truth can be found replicated throughout Hussite sources.¹⁴ Examples could be multiplied respectively for crusaders and heretics. Both sides accused the other of murder and both claimed their fallen as martyrs. Apparently, this explanatory matrix solved the dilemma of how one could in fact be a Christian martyr in a Christian society. The consciousness of the crusader was shaped by the cross and the Hussite with that of Christ and the law of God. Heretic versus crusader, their deeds were an odd mixture of murder and martyrdom. In the case of the latter, it seems clear that martyrdom was both suffering on account of the truth but perhaps more significantly a witness or testimony to the truth. On the battle fields of Bohemia, the slaughter of men and women was less important than the teachings they taught, heard and held to. Their sufferings, horrific as they certainly were in many instances, were less important than the testimony of their blood to the truth which could not be silenced by swords, stakes or gallows for the heretics were convinced that truth would triumph.¹⁵ Tertullian’s dictum remained valid: “the blood of the martyr is seed.”¹⁶

The Problem of Warriors as Martyrs

As an illegal sect in the Roman Empire, Christianity had its roster of those who died for their faith. According to Origen, a martyr was one who chose to die for the sake of his or her faith rather than renounce those beliefs and live.¹⁷ The deaths of the apostles Peter and Paul and that of Stephen the protomartyr are regarded as early Christian martyrdoms and there are vivid stories of the martyrdoms of Polycarp, Perpetua and the numerous Christians who gave their lives in Lyons and Vienne in Gaul, during the Decian and Diocletian persecutions of the later third and early fourth centuries.¹⁸ One might likewise regard Jan Hus as a martyr since he declined to recant his beliefs and was on that basis executed. A helpless man tied to

¹²Jan Příbram, “The Lives of the Táborite Priests.” I cite from the edition of Jaroslav Boubín, *Jan z Příbramě: Život kněží Tábořských* [Podbrdsko, Fontes 1] (Příbram, 2000) 44.

¹³Jistebnice kancional, Prague, National Museum Library MS II C 7 p. 88. Text in Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu za válek husitských* (Prague, 1913) 910–11.

¹⁴For example, Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, “Exposition on the Apocalypse,” Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 4520 f. 19^b.

¹⁵“Truth will triumph” was a slogan among Hussites and can be found on banners, in song, in verse, in sermons, in propaganda and in the literature of the movement with considerable regularity. For example, the Jena Codex, Prague National Museum Library MS IV B 24 f. 56^a.

¹⁶“Plures efficimur, quoties metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum.” Tertullian, *Apology*, c. 50,13 in PL 1:535.

¹⁷“Exhortation to Martyrdom,” 5 in PG 11:563–638 at cols. 568–9.

¹⁸The classic study is W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Garden City, NY, 1967).

a stake and burned alive for his faith surely counts as a martyr, even if that faith is misguided. Christians thrown to lions in arenas throughout the Roman Empire or beheaded on blood-drenched scaffolds likewise merit inclusion among those who died for their religion. But what about the Hussite “warriors of God” who died swords in hand? Or, what about the crusaders themselves who, in defence of the Christian faith, died trying to kill heretics? Can these people rightly be numbered among the martyrs of the faith?

The question was first raised in the context of the First Crusade at the end of the eleventh century.¹⁹ The plenary indulgences announced do not specifically deal with the status of martyrs nor does the preaching of the crusade at Clermont in 1095 by Pope Urban II shed any convincing light on the question but the promises of remission of sins and immediate elevation to heaven can be read to infer that those dying as crusaders may be considered martyrs. It is possible to find a few examples of classifications of martyrdoms in the context of military action prior to the crusades. Oswald of Northumbria died fighting pagans in 642, Edmund was killed by heathen Danes around 870 and the Bavarian duke Gerold suffered a similar fate in 799. All were regarded, as least locally, as martyrs.²⁰ Several mediaeval popes, including John VIII and Leo IV in the ninth century, came very close to pronouncing that those who died in battle defending the faith ought to be perceived as true martyrs.²¹ Pope Leo drew the conclusion that those who died in holy battle would surely find eternal reward.²² Pope John said much the same thing but also promised general absolution to those killed.²³ In the eleventh century, Popes Leo IX, Alexander II and Gregory VII likewise drew similar conclusions concerning the forgiveness of sins of those who died in righteous battle.²⁴ There are other mediaeval testimonies to the notion that those who died in battle were elevated to the status of martyrs.²⁵ It is, however, in the specific context of the First Crusade, where we find clear association between crusaders and martyrs. One of the songs used to recruit prospective crusaders, *Jerusalem mirabilis* notes that all those who march to the scene of conflict and die there will gain the treasures of heaven and live with the saints.²⁶ As Colin Morris points out, it is in the eleventh century where the true beginnings of the martyr language to describe the crusader can be found and where the crusades themselves appear to establish new routes to gaining martyr status.²⁷ Other scholars

¹⁹Colin Morris, “Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed., Diana Wood (Oxford, 1993) 93–104; H.E.J. Cowdrey, “Martyrdom and the First Crusade,” in Edbury, ed. *Crusade and Settlement* 45–65; Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Death on the First Crusade,” in *The End of Strife*, ed. David Loades (Edinburgh, 1984) 14–31; and Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1995) 114–19.

²⁰I am indebted to Morris, “Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade,” 93–4 for these examples.

²¹I have only undertaken a superficial search on this query but useful references can be found in Morris, “Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade,” 95 and in James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* (Madison, 1969) 22–28.

²²PL 115:655–7.

²³PL 126:816.

²⁴References to the primary sources can be found in James A. Brundage, *The Crusades, Holy War and Canon Law* (Aldershot, 1991) x, 104–5.

²⁵The eleventh-century monastic chronicler Raoul Glaber writes of one example. *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum Libri Quinti*, ed. John France (Oxford, 1989) 84–5.

²⁶Clemens Blume and Guido Maria Dreves, ed., *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi* 45:78.

²⁷Morris, “Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade,” 93, 97.

place the origin of these new pathways, much earlier, in the ninth century.²⁸ It is therefore possible to conclude that the earlier crusades served to cement the idea of martyrdom on the battlefield as a component in the consciousness of the crusader. Within the pages of the chronicles of the crusades are frequent references to crusaders who die for God as martyrs: Guibert of Nogent, Robert the Monk, Albert of Aix, the anonymous of Montecassino, Raymond of Aguilers, Fulcher of Chartres, Richard the Pilgrim, Tudebod and the *Gesta Francorum* fall in this category.²⁹ Guibert of Nogent sums up what seems to be an emerging crusader motif: “fight battles which have the glorious reward of martyrdom through which you achieve the title of eternal honour now.”³⁰ This idea did not go unchallenged. Early enthusiasm for the crusader as martyr in the eleventh century came under critical scrutiny by canon lawyers and theologians in the twelfth century but by the thirteenth century the concept seems to have stabilized as an acceptable category of Christian martyrdom. This heritage would play a crucial role in the crusades against heretics in fifteenth-century Bohemia.

The Mentality of Martyrs and Murderers

The idea of martyrdom in the Hussite crusades can be demonstrated on both sides. Crusaders were assured by the provisions of the plenary indulgences offered to them that if they died in battle against the Hussites their sins would be forgiven, their souls would be saved, and by extension, the status of martyrdom was entirely justified. This sentiment is not new in the fifteenth century. It can be traced back to the first crusade in 1095. Guibert of Nogent commented that if the knights of Christ were under penalty of personal sin, “the shedding of their blood alone was a most effective means of remitting all transgressions.”³¹ To be killed in the act of killing one of the faithless was to simultaneously lie on the ground in death and be glorified in heaven.³² In almost prosaic expression the German poet and war reporter from Nürnberg, Hans Rosenblüt ended his pained and plaintive report about the collapse of the crusaders at Domažlice in 1431 with a pious prayer for grace to endure the sufferings of death and mercy to enter the hallowed abode of the saints and martyrs:

May you enable us here below, exalted Lord
To die in the right faith
May you cause us to lose life and goods
If only the soul might delight [in salvation]. . . .
May you grant us to enjoy your innocent death
And the bloodshed of all the martyrs.³³

²⁸Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* 22 and Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* 27.

²⁹See for example the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. Rosalind M.T. Hill (London, 1962) *passim*. For the other references, Cowdrey, “Martyrdom and the First Crusade,” 50.

³⁰“Nunc vobis bella proponimus quae in se habent gloriosum martyrii munus, quibus restat praesentis et aeternae laudis titulus.” Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quar dicitur Gesta dei per Francos*, in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux*, ed. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (Paris, 1879) 4:138.

³¹“Quibus, si quas necesse fuerit peccatorum luere poenas, sola sanguinis effusio omnem fuit potissima purgare reatum.” Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quar dicitur Gesta dei per Francos* 179.

³²“Adhuc positus in terris, jam gloriabatur in coelis.” Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana* II, xxvii, 12 in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux* 3:409.

³³Rochus von Liliencron, ed., *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim, 1966) 1:339.

Hussites were no less confident that should they fall defending their faith, they likewise would be numbered among the noble army of heavenly martyrs. In framing an answer to the query about the legitimacy of defending the faith with force the university masters in Prague included among their reply the notion that all Christians defending the faith and killed thereby “always win and obtain the crown of victory” for indeed Christ, the apostles and all of the martyrs attained the Kingdom of God and the masters urged upon the Hussites that the safest way to reach this kingdom was through these worthy examples.³⁴ There can be little doubt that heretics and crusaders alike followed the Augustinian counsel that whoever was unwilling to imitate the holy martyrs could not enter into their fellowship.³⁵ Martyrs are witnesses of Christ and they bear testimony to the truth.³⁶ The examples could be multiplied exponentially from the extant sources of the crusade period.

There can be no doubt that crusaders and heretics alike were prepared to lay down their lives for their respective cause. Each side regarded the other as the real threat, the true heretic, the brazen enemy of God.³⁷ During the fifth crusade at Domažlice, Johann II, Bishop of Würzburg enjoined the crusaders to give God thanks because, should they spill their blood, they would certainly come immediately to heaven. To such warriors, heaven has never been out of reach.³⁸ By comparison, the Hussites regarded death in the cause of the faith among the noblest of duties. Threatened with the fire of the stake by the crusaders on the first expedition into Bohemia, the priest in the village of Arnoštovice declined to recant his faith saying, “far be it from us to do what you suggest. We do not wish to die a single death, but if it were possible we would die a hundred of these deaths, before we would deny the clear truth of the gospel.”³⁹ The priest along with seven others, including four children, were then burned alive.

Both crusaders and heretics embraced the prospect of martyrdom and some on both sides did in fact lay down their lives for their understanding of religious truth, doctrinal purity and allegiance to God. Both sides were also prepared to kill the others on the grounds of heresy. Indeed, there cannot be martyrs without the willingness to kill. Crusaders relished the thought of consecrating their hands in the blood of slaughtered heretics.⁴⁰ Friedrich, the margrave of Meißen, declared on the fifth crusade that he specifically wished to soak his spurs in Hussite blood and would complain to God if such opportunity did not present itself.⁴¹ Such evident blood-thirstiness cannot be ascribed solely to the crusaders for the Hussites were no less eager to dispatch the soldiers of the cross. Abbot Ludolf of Žagan claimed that Jan Žižka actually offered rewards to anyone who captured priests and brought them to him. Evidently, Žižka requested that priests faithful to the official church renounce

³⁴František Bartoš, “Do čtyř pražských articulů,” in *Sborník příspěvků k dějinám hlavního města Prahy* 5 (1932) 577–80.

³⁵Sermon 286.5 in PL 38:1297–1301.

³⁶Sermon 78 in PL 38:490–3.

³⁷Jews took the same view of the crusaders. See Skepkaru, “To Die for God: Martyrs Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives” and Shmuel Shepkaru, “From After Death to Afterlife: Martyrdom and its Recompense,” *AJS Review* 24 (1999) 1–44.

³⁸Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder* 1: 334–9.

³⁹Vavřinec of Březová, “Historia Hussitica,” in FRB 5:386.

⁴⁰Ludolf of Žagan, “Tractatus de longevo schismate,” ed., Johann Loserth in *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* (Vienna, 1880) 60,2, c. 62, 534.

⁴¹Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder* 1:335.

their beliefs and embrace the Hussite faith. If this attempt at conversion failed the priest was killed.⁴² On both sides of the crusading initiative, men and women were prepared to die, as well as to kill others, out of religious conviction. Murder and martyrdom functioned as essential elements in preaching the crusade, in undertaking the campaign against the heretics, as well as in mounting resistance to the crusaders who rode by the cross.

There can be no good reason for not taking crusaders and Hussites on their own terms as reflected in the surviving records of the fifteenth century. Put simply, they believed fervently that what they stood for, promoted and defended were matters of ultimate concern possessing eternal significance. For crusader and Hussite alike, there was a literal, eternal heaven to gain and a literal, eternal hell to avoid. Theological truth was absolute, doctrinal purity had soteriological significance and nothing, not even life itself, mattered more than the redemption of the soul. Both heretics and crusaders lived and moved in a world saturated with eschatological anticipation. Truly, these men and women did fervently and literally believe that human history was coming to a close, that a literal Antichrist would emerge and that the world would experience apocalyptic climax. It is not feasible to argue that these people appropriated eschatological imagery merely to explain their life context, or their desire to effect religious reform or, in the case of the Hussites, to advance a nascent nationalist consciousness. Neither is it helpful to argue that the eschatological emphases were simply a reflection of the language of later mediaeval Europe and that the rhetoric meant one thing while the reality was something quite different. Historical method and historical interpretation are not well served by a programme of post-modern relativizing of the late Middle Ages. To insist that these crusaders and heretics were mistaken in their views, or that such views are simply cultural constructs which must be pressed through post-structuralist theory and traditional epistemological skepticism, is an exercise in futility if one wishes to understand crusaders and heretics. Hussites and crusaders alike staunchly believed that Antichrist was already in the world, that the end of time was upon humankind and that the *Dies irae* was about to unfold. This they believed literally, with all gravity and piety. Heaven, hell, salvation and damnation cannot and must not be treated as symbolic. In fifteenth-century Bohemia these matters were real and of primary concern. In other words, the religious aspirations, convictions and practices of these later mediaeval crusaders and heretics must be taken seriously on their own terms. It makes no sense whatsoever to accuse the crusaders of sheer fanaticism any less than it does to quantify the Hussitism simply as a socio-economic grievance.⁴³ The historical project should not require fifteenth-century crusaders and heretics to explain their beliefs and motives in categories of anachronistic arrogance. To adopt their beliefs or world views is not incumbent on the historian or theologian, but understanding them on their own terms is essential.

⁴²Ludolf of Žagan, "Tractatus de longevo schismate," pt. 2, c. 3, 494–5.

⁴³Only having read his book after I undertook this study, I am deeply indebted to the thesis expressed in convincing fashion in Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) 8–15 and *passim*. I find it impossible to resist the force of his argument and the obvious merits of his major conclusions.

Heresy as the basis for murder and martyrdom

Among the battles and struggles with which the later mediaeval church had to contend none was more serious than the threat of contumacious heresy. Accusations of mediaeval heresy often ranged well beyond official canonical and theological definitions but the fact remains that in its mediaeval context, heresy had a fairly narrow, clear and consistent meaning, that being a wilful and persistent denial of some element of the Christian faith.⁴⁴ Inquisitors and churchmen in the Middle Ages carefully discriminated amongst different heresies, degrees of culpability and the commensurate implications of the constituent heresy. There were differences between heresy as intellectual deviance and heresy as revolution. In the Hussite context, heresy did lead to overt sedition. More than this, heresy perverted the truth of God and the everlasting gospel without which no one could see God and enter heaven. According to popular beliefs in late mediaeval Europe, since the beginning of the great schism not one single soul had entered paradise.⁴⁵ The chief culprit was heresy. Therefore, the attitude of the church, exemplified in the crusade, increasingly was that heresy was not the sort of problem one entered into discussions over, nor allowed for negotiation and certainly admitted no possibility of compromise. Decisive and direct action was called for in order to halt the increasing damage. Whatever else heresy might be, it was seduction from the faith, from the true path to salvation, from the hope of heaven. Heretics could not be permitted to simply go to hell in their own way (as Theodore Beza put it a century-and-a-half later), the danger of many others being seduced from the faith was too great and the longer the heretics went unchecked the greater the damnation they incurred against themselves; a debt they could only render in hell.⁴⁶ The murderer destroyed bodies but the heretic extinguished the light of life in the soul. The true servants of the Lord had a grim responsibility to defend the faithful against the wiles of the enemy. To encourage this duty, the third and fourth Lateran councils granted indulgences specifically to those who crusaded against heretics and the guaranteed privileges were practically identical as those offered to crusaders to fight the infidel in the Latin east.⁴⁷ The paradox in Hussite Bohemia lay in the fact that both crusaders and radical heretics perceived themselves as the chosen of God, the elect, the avenging angels of God for the last days. Here we see the interplay of eschatology and apocalypticism, the idea that the present world order was passing away. Radical Hussites perceived a new age dawning, the age of the Kingdom of God, when all things present would pass away and a divine order would descend. The experiment at Tábor is a fine example of these ideas coming together. The priests in radical

⁴⁴Concisely speaking, the definition presented by Robert Grossteste which became part of mediaeval canon law is adequate for our purposes here in terms of understanding the canonical assessment of heresy: views held according to human perception, contrary to Scripture, publicly avowed and stubbornly defended. *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Emil Friedberg (Leipzig, 1879) 1:997–8.

⁴⁵Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996) 34–5.

⁴⁶Beza regarded religious liberty as “a most diabolical dogma, because it means that everyone should be left to go to hell in his own way.” Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (New York, 1951) 114.

⁴⁷Lateran III (1179) 27 and Lateran IV (1215) 3 in Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London and Washington, 1990) 1:224–5 and 233–5. Lateran IV puts it best: “Catholics who take the cross and gird up themselves for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence, and be strengthened by the same holy privilege, as is granted to those who go to the aid of the holy Land.”

communities taught that the sword had to be applied to root up the tares in order for the good grain to be harvested. After 1420 the Tábórites combined a positive theory of coercive force with a negative attitude towards secular rulers. The priests Koranda, Želivský, Čapek and many others took literally the idea expressed in the New Testament that the sword had been ordained by God to protect the good but also to punish the evil. In other words, the sword was the method chosen by God to deal with Antichrist. The sword should also obliterate all things which might detract from the salvation of souls. Hence, the Hussite leaders of this persuasion encouraged the counter-crusade measures on these grounds; the sword extended to civil as well as spiritual matters. There were of course variations on this theme but the sword in Hussite hands played two roles: one, which controlled internal discipline and the other which wielded holy war against the invaders; the betrayers of God. Among the Hussites, the sword pointed inwards as well as outwards.

For those pouring into Bohemia under banners emblazoned with the sign of the cross, it was heresy which lay at the root of the crusade itself. Stubborn, unrepentant heresy was the *raison d'être* for the expedition. The faithful in Bohemia were under siege but not from the crusader but rather from their neighbours, the heretics. Emperor Sigismund urged civil authorities to join him with all force to exterminate the Hussites in order to avoid their heretical poison.⁴⁸ The crusade bull of 1420 asserted that the pope was unwilling to allow the faithful flock any longer to “graze in infected pastures filled with the pitfalls of reprobates.”⁴⁹ Therefore the heresy had to be eliminated. Two years later, Pope Martin continued to fulminate against the Hussites in terms of a “mad disease”.⁵⁰ Papal legates for the crusades labelled the heretics as “sons of perdition” who wore “lethal thorns”.⁵¹ This view of the Hussite faith only grew more bleak as the years passed and by the time of the fifth crusade they were still characterized as an heretical movement which threatened to “devastate and conquer the lands of the faithful” bringing “terror and despair” to true Christians.⁵² Hussites dismissed such allegations as specious saying that the “blood-stained cross. . . was never justified in the Christian order . . .” and was being used perniciously “under the pretext of defending the Roman Church.”⁵³ More than a dozen years later Prokop Holý addressed the envoys of the Council of Basel and used the same approach in denouncing the “bloody cross” which had been raised unjustly against Bohemia.⁵⁴ It was the bishop of the radical Tábórites who summed up Hussite opposition to the crusade: “the battle for the Czech truth which originated from the grace of God and the faithful preaching of Jan Hus of sacred memory as well as that of other masters and simple priests, became essential in order to defend the truth when it was vigorously resisted by enemies.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸Letter to the town of Budyšin, 1420, in UB 1:28–9.

⁴⁹UB 1:17.

⁵⁰Letter to Sigismund, spring 1422, in DR 8:119–21.

⁵¹Giordano Orsini, letter to Sigismund, 13 June 1426, in DR 8:491–2.

⁵²The sentiment is that of Cardinal Guiliano Cesarini but expressed by Jan Stojković of Dubrovnik (John of Ragusio) to the conciliar fathers convened at Basel in 1431. Text in MC 1:73–5.

⁵³The repudiation comes in the manifesto published by Hussites after the battle at Vyšehrad and is dated 5 November 1420. AČ 3:217–18.

⁵⁴MC 1:419–20.

⁵⁵Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, cited in Josef Pekař, *Žižka a jeho doba* (Prague, 1927) 1:132.

Jakoubek of Stříbro drew the pointed and inflammatory conclusion that it was demons who made war on the faithful.⁵⁶

Hussite protests notwithstanding, the crusaders were committed to ending the reign of heresy in the Czech lands. The papal legate Henry Beaufort called for the Hussites to repent and return to the open arms of the church if not from love than on account of “the spilling of human blood which is certainly going to happen.”⁵⁷ Bloodshed did occur many times in Bohemia at the hands of crusaders and precisely because the soldiers of the cross were convinced that heretics should be shown no mercy, were deadly to the salvation of souls and inimical to Christ. To butcher contumacious heretics was no sin, in fact it gave glory to God. Thus when the crusaders marched into Bohemia, they rode as avenging angels. At the time of the first crusade, the German and Hungarian warriors under Emperor Sigismund “soiled their hands in the blood of virgins, infants, pregnant women and men”... while hundreds of others were mutilated and thrown into ditches.⁵⁸ Heresy justified murder with impunity and that without mercy or reason. As crusaders prepared to enter Bohemia on their second campaign, a code of conduct was drawn up and communicated by the authorities in Nürnberg to their counterparts in Ulm.“.. [E]veryone must be killed in the land of Bohemia, with the exception of children..”⁵⁹ That protocol was not a dead letter. Twelve days later the same authorities made the report that when the crusaders arrived at Maštov the inhabitants were killed, some by burning, eighty-four by hanging, and even the priests were put to death.⁶⁰ Such slaughter was not uncommon. Canon law justified the destruction of entire cities if heretics resided in them.⁶¹

During the time of the third crusade the crusaders rampaged throughout eastern Bohemia “multiplying evil by evil.” According to chronicle accounts the behaviour of the soldiers of the cross was atrocious.

[They] raped girls and women until they died or they killed them. They cut off the hands and feet of children and threw them in front of their mothers. They stripped the mothers, together with other women, and drove them like cattle before hanging them up on fences by their breasts. . . . Such sinful and sacrilegious people could be moved neither to mercy by the moans of the women nor by the great streaming tears and cries of the children . . . all this blasphemous evil they did with pleasure believing that the sins of the Czechs demanded it. All the while they believed . . . they were demonstrating their obedience to God and in so doing would gain an indulgence for their sins.⁶²

⁵⁶Jakoubek, Commentary on the Apocalypse, c. 1420–1. Prague Castle Archive MS A 37 fols. 1^a–470^b. I cite from the edition in František Šimek, ed., *Jakoubek ze Stříbra: Výklad na zjevení sv. Jana*, 2 vv. (Prague, 1932–3) 1:363.

⁵⁷The letter was addressed to the people of Prague and dated 18 July 1427. Prague Castle Archive MS A 59.3 ff. 208^b–209^b.

⁵⁸UB 1:39–43.

⁵⁹UB 1:144.

⁶⁰UB 2:145–6.

⁶¹Glossa ordinaria to C.23 q.5 c.32. “si argo aliqui heretici sunt in una ciuitate, tota ciuitas potest exuri: et sic ecclesia uel ciuitas punitur pro delicto personarum.”

⁶²Vavřinec of Březová, “Historia Hussitica,” 531–32.

The question of sin in the process of exterminating heretics is a legitimate one but the possibility of sin or transgression of the law of God was no deterrent when it came to eliminating God's enemies. Should the crusaders somehow commit sin in killing, such transgression had immediate remedy. Czech chroniclers certainly perceived the provisions of the crusade in this light. "Indulgences were given to anyone who murdered a Czech or killed him one way or the other and promised forgiveness for all sins to that individual."⁶³ From the Hussite perspective, the plenary indulgences offered to prospective crusaders amounted to a license to kill. In 1431 a manifesto published under the name of the entire Czech land made this point. "The pope reveals himself as an evident heretic . . . and the highest antichrist. . . through his false indulgences. . . The false envoys . . . travelling all over the world with indulgences . . . teach people to have contempt for the truth of the gospel . . . they help Antichrist and his supporters kill people unjustly. . ."⁶⁴ The atrocities associated with the third crusade were not unusual. The pre-emptory strike by the vanguard of the crusade in the spring of 1421 had already set the tone. In northeast Bohemia forty children had either their right hand and left foot, or left hand and right foot cut off, along with their noses.⁶⁵

As they fell before the onslaught of the crusade, the heretics of Bohemia died as martyrs to the cause of Christ. Indeed, their deaths were for no other reason than on account of their faithfulness to Christ. Ironically, the crusaders slew the Hussites in defence of God's truth creating a theological Gordian knot of massive proportions. The murderers created martyrs and martyrdom in Bohemia produced a generation of pious murderers and clerical killers. Reservations about priests bearing arms and killing has deep roots in the tradition of canon law. Žižka agreed and explicitly forbade clerics to participate in combat. The Hussites eventually overcame Žižka's reservations and by the fifteenth century canonical strictures seemed somewhat more relaxed.⁶⁶

It would be without merit to suggest that the converse of pious murderers was not also true when applied to the counter-crusade activities of the heretics both within and beyond the borders of Bohemia. Those loyal to the official church were incensed at the corruption of Christianity within the borders of Bohemia which some characterised as "persistent contempt of the glory and honour of the holy Catholic faith" brought about by continual "outrages, violence, spilling of blood, murder, injury and scandal."⁶⁷ Meeting in Frankfurt in the spring of 1427 the imperial Reichstag endorsed that view in an extended formal written statement. "In times past and even now you have been aware of the significant injury and desecration which Hussites and Czech heretics have with great malice caused . . . through the shedding of the blood of Christians. . ."⁶⁸ Emperor Sigismund concurred claiming that considerable "misery, nuisance and inhumanity" had been perpetrated by the

⁶³ "Kronika velmi pěkná o Janu Žižkovi, čeledínu krále Václava," in František M. Bartoš, ed. *Listy bratra Jana a Kronika velmi pěkná o Janu Žižkovi* (Prague, 1949) 38.

⁶⁴MC 1:153–70.

⁶⁵Vavřinec of Březová, "Historia Hussitica," 491–2.

⁶⁶PL 140: 661, 664 (Burchard of Worms) and PL 161: 505, 701–2, 508 (Ivo of Chartres). Detail and references in Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* 28–9.

⁶⁷Manifesto prepared by Franconian knights dated 15 January 1427. UB 1:478–9.

⁶⁸DR 9:41–4.

“wild heretics” principally through murder, bloodshed and physical destruction.⁶⁹ A coalition of German bishops in 1421 expressed their concern that if effective measures were not implemented immediately the scourge of heresy would spread to other lands.⁷⁰ Pope Martin V, urged Sigismund to regard the Hussite concern a matter of priority. Their offence against God and the church merited nothing other than the “extermination” of the “disgusting heresy”.⁷¹ The heretics could protest all they wished but the evidence was unimpeachable, especially at Německý Brod where the walls were splattered with the blood of faithful Christians butchered by the “wild heretics” at the end of swords, lances and pikes. Years later chroniclers claimed the bloodstains were still visible.⁷² Hussites may have called it self-defence but the officials of the church regarded it as murder.

Cut to pieces on the edges of a hundred heretical swords, the soldiers of the cross died for the convictions of the crusades and for the theological beliefs of the later mediaeval church. Thrown into mine shafts by the “bloody hands” of the crusade, denounced as heretics “through corrupted mouth[s] and venomous lips”, the Hussites sacrificed themselves for their beliefs and the practice of their religious faith.⁷³ If by the fourteenth century the hope and quest for martyrdom had effectively dissipated into a pious dream, then by the fifteenth century that quest (if it may be called such) was revived with endless possibilities in the theatre of war as crusaders and heretics collided.⁷⁴

Can Murderers be Martyrs?

By the late twelfth century it is possible to find references to a new kind of martyr. That is, martyrs who wish to kill others.⁷⁵ It seems inconceivable that both sides in this struggle could truly understand themselves as martyrs. Both crusader and Hussite claimed allegiance to the one true holy, catholic and apostolic church. Both insisted that their theology and doctrinal system was correct and both evidently were prepared to die for it as the butchered bodies and decaying corpses stacked up in Bohemia gave witness. Roman Catholic crusader and Hussite heretic alike recognized their own noble company of apostles and martyrs and even saints. For all of his obvious faults and foibles, Sigismund was a defender of the faith. Contemporary scholars may wish to dismiss Jan Žižka as a brute whose mind was too coarse to appreciate the values of Hussite religion, but the claim is as misguided as it is unsubstantiated.⁷⁶ Both men were willing to die for their faith because they held that their convictions were of God and therefore truthful in a theological sense. In 1429 it was reported that Sigismund intended once more to march against the recalcitrant heretics and “does not intend to stop until he exterminates the evil completely or [until] he sheds his own blood even unto death.”⁷⁷ An examination of

⁶⁹Letter to Friedrich of Brandenburg and colleagues, 16 April 1429, in UB 2:30–3.

⁷⁰DR 8:30.

⁷¹Martin’s letter must be dated sometime prior to July 1422 in DR 8:119–21.

⁷²František Palacký, ed., “Old Czech Annalists,” in SRB 3:48–50.

⁷³Hussites were killed en masse by being thrown into the mine shafts of Kutná Hora. These events are noted in Vavřinec of Březová, “Historia Hussitica,” 351–2. The language comes from a Prague manifesto published on 3 April 1420. AČ 3:212–13.

⁷⁴The comment about martyrdom and the fourteenth century is from Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984) 67.

⁷⁵Example the anonymous *Liber de poenitentia et tentationibus religiosorum*, PL 213:893.

⁷⁶Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley, 1967) 420.

⁷⁷UB 2:35.

Žižka's letters and related documents suggests his own resolute commitment to the Hussite cause.

It should also be noted that theoretically the Hussites did not permit just anyone to join their fighting ranks. These "warriors of God" had particular selection criteria.

Take care to ensure that our warriors are not actually fighting against the lamb [of God]. Those who wish to fight for the truth of the gospel must examine themselves to determine if they are humble and patient in the same way as the lamb . . . determine if they receive communion under both kinds properly for this is what they are fighting for. See to it that they have the right motivation, that they willingly listen to the word of God, that they hate all vices both in themselves as well as in others. Also that they do no harm to any righteous and innocent member of the lamb's family and that each of them avoids greed and instead loves the humble life of Jesus Christ.⁷⁸

An examination of the Hussite war code reveals that these principles were codified and did not tolerate "any faithless person, disobedient one, liar, thief, gambler, robber, plunderer, drunkard, blasphemer, lecher, adulterer, prostitute, fornicator, or other definite sinners, either men or women."⁷⁹ Other texts make clear that the soldiers who fight for the cause of God must have a pure faith and must commune frequently in the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in order to be truly worthy to shed their own blood for Christ.⁸⁰

According to St. Augustine, "martyres veros non facit poena, sed causa", that is, it is not the punishment but the cause which makes one a martyr.⁸¹ Upon this Augustinian pronouncement, crusaders and heretics found a place to stand. Those who rode by the cross to die saw themselves connected in a very real fashion to the past army of apostles and martyrs. The peasants who lined up alongside Žižka, Prokop Holý and Jan Roháč of Dubá for more than eighteen years did imagine that they should kill in the name of God or be killed in order to attain the martyr's crown. Both crusaders and heretics perceived their task as unfolding in the present eschatological moment when the ultimate struggle for truth reached cosmic proportions, when life became subordinated to truth, and fidelity to Christ took on absolute meaning. The stakes were incredibly high, it was literally life and death, heaven and hell, salvation and damnation and the outcomes were permeated with eternal value against the setting sun of the "night of antichrist" beyond which lay an

⁷⁸Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, "Exposition on the Apocalypse," Vienna, ÖNB MS 4520. I refer to the passages in František M. Bartoš, "Táborské bratrstvo na soudě svého biskupa," *Časopis přátel starožitností českých* 29 (1921) 102–22.

⁷⁹The military ordinance of Jan Žižka, 1423, in Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia* 167–71 at 170.

⁸⁰For example the Hussite rhymed tract *Otázka nyní taková běží* in František Svejkský, ed., *Veršované skladby doby husitské* (Prague, 1963) 90–6.

⁸¹The sentiment appears with some regularity in Augustine as the following references indicate. *Exposition of Psalm* 34, 2, 1, in PL 36:333. *Exposition of Psalm* 34, 2, 13, in PL 36:340, *Exposition of Psalm* 68, 1, 9, in PL 36:848, *Letter* 89 to Festus, 2, in PL 33:310, *Letter* 108, to Macrobius, 5, 14, in PL 33:413, *Letter* 204, To Dulcitius, 4, in PL 33:940 and *The Correction of the Donatists*, 2, 9, in PL 33:796.

apocalyptic future wherein only the righteous would rule and reign.⁸² The crusades were perceived by Hussites as “the time of great suffering” prophesied by Christ, the apostles and especially in the Apocalypse of St. John.⁸³ Those who remained committed to the official church characterised the Hussite age as a “secret wickedness” which led to murder and other “strange and awful things” all fuelled by the “darkness of error”.⁸⁴ Hence, the cause for which one dies is eternally paramount, the punishment to the body inflicted by the enemy is of no eternal consequence.

Augustine wrote that it was quite improper for any one to take up the sword without specific permission or command from a legitimate authority.⁸⁵ Both sides invoked the argument that theirs was the legitimate authority. Crusaders appealed to the decrees of general councils and popes while Hussites clung to their idea of the “Law of God”. Based upon the proclamations of the Council of Constance the German priest in Kutná Hora, Hermann, offered rewards for the capture of all Czechs who partook of the forbidden chalice. Laypeople fetched one groschen each while priests were worth five groschen apiece to the bounty hunter. The slaughter in the mine shafts testifies to the effectiveness of the system. It is reported that the Hussites implemented a similar policy with a particular focus on priests faithful to the official church and these were reportedly worth sixty-two groschen each as a reward.⁸⁶ King Sigismund likewise offered a sliding scale of monetary rewards to those who attacked Hussites.⁸⁷ Each side disputed the basis of authority claimed by the other and vilified their supporting arguments. The killing continued unabated. Sigismund was denounced as an “heretical king” who violates girls and women, commits murder and engages in arson.⁸⁸ In northern Bohemia, Hussites killed so many invaders that their bodies lay “dead in the fields like sheafs in the time of harvest” while the stream flowing nearby “turned red on account of the great slaughter” and for a long time thereafter “stacks of bones” remained from the “many thousands” who were killed.⁸⁹

The argument must be raised concerning whether or not those who die with the sword can rightly be placed among the ranks of the martyrs. As noted earlier, the question is not new. Are heretics those who follow Christ and the word of God, or those who oppose them? Both sides answered that they alone remained faithful to God and God’s word and therefore the other was heretical. This conundrum produced protracted conflict. St. Cyprian once asserted “Esse martyr non potest qui in Ecclesia non est”, that is, no one could possibly be a martyr who was not in the church.⁹⁰ But this again proved to be a contentious point for the crusaders were certain they represented the living church of God militant on earth while the Hussites were equally as confident that the Roman Church had committed apostasy on the day when poison was poured into the church through the Constantinian funnel. So

⁸²The term “night of antichrist” comes from a sermon (19 April 1419) preached by Jan Želivský. Amedeo Molnár, ed. *Dochovaná kázání Jana Želivského z roku 1419* (Prague, 1953) 37.

⁸³AČ 6:43–4.

⁸⁴*Chronicon universitatis Pragensis*, in FRB, 5:579–82.

⁸⁵“Contra Faustum Manichaeum,” L. 22, c. 74 in PL 42:447–8.

⁸⁶Ludolf of Žagan, “Tractatus de longo schismate,” pt. 2, c. 3, 494–5.

⁸⁷Prague manifesto to Venice, in UB 1:39–43 at 41.

⁸⁸Letter of Jan Žižka and Chval of Machovice to the Plzeň Landfríd, February 1421, in Bartoš 10–11.

⁸⁹“Old Czech Annalists,” in SRB 3:66–9.

⁹⁰“De ecclesiae catholicae unitate,” 14, PL 4:526.

both were Christian, both members of the one true church, both implacably opposed to the other, prepared to murder in defence of God, both assured of salvation should they fall in that effort and both equally confident that death for them meant martyrdom inasmuch as “more glory than blood” would flow from their wounds.

Fighting the Good Fight

At the battle in 1426 near the northern Czech town of Ústí nad Labem, the invaders captured the town “intending to murder Czechs” and “they reduced the land by fire and bloodshed.” Prokop Holý and Roháč of Dubá rode to the rescue. The Táborites began to wage war and wherever the Orphans went “streams of blood flowed”.⁹¹ This was fighting the good fight according to the Hussite. Supporters of the crusaders alleged that the heretics went about publicly killing whomever they wished. This was not the good fight.⁹² Labelled a “villainous bunch of people”, the heretics were accused of killing great numbers of Christian people indiscriminately as their fury continued unabated.⁹³ Not even the religious were spared. After seizing the fortress of Přebenice from the Rožmberks in 1420, the priest Václav Koranda presided over the drowning of the priest Hermann. “As he was carried away by the river, confessing the truth of God, and willing to do anything, they did not care but allowed stones to be thrown at him, and watched, and while they could stop it by giving the order, they did not do it as they did not wish to.”⁹⁴ Hermann fought the good fight against the heretics and for his sacrifice received the crown of martyrdom.

Fighting the good fight found prominent expression for the crusaders in their military efforts to subdue Bohemia. There were other, more covert, plans as well. An anonymous, undated letter which appeared in Prague around the beginning of April 1420 alleged that Sigismund had ordered that all Hussites were to be killed either by open attack, deception or by manifest and deliberate falsehood in several Czech cities.⁹⁵ There were plots uncovered to assassinate Hussite leaders.⁹⁶ These measures likewise may be considered fighting the good fight. When some of the leaders of the heretics fell in the heat of battle in 1434, supporters of the crusade expressed their delight in the deaths of the “most harmful and heinous monsters” of the “army of criminal Táborites and Orphans”.⁹⁷ The crusaders echoed that view but the Hussites did not. Instead, the fallen were lauded as brave heroes, worthy to be

⁹¹Such is the description of the battle as reflected in the epic poem devoted to the 1426 conflict. Nejedlý, *Dějiny husitského zpěvu za válek husitských* 912–5.

⁹²Letter of Oldřich Rožmberk to Sigismund, 12 October 1425 in AČ 3:7–8.

⁹³*Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, 3:503.

⁹⁴SRB 3: 42–3 reports the incident while the quotation comes from Jan Příbram, “The Lives of the Táborite Priests,” 60. Elsewhere there are further details: “Outside the castle they [the Hussites from Tábor] drowned in the river the priest monk Hermann, titular bishop of Nikopolis, who had been captured He kept begging them to spare his life and kept saying that he wished to ordain whoever they wanted, and that he would be faithful to all the rules they would teach him. And when the bishop, swimming for a long time, did not drown, and landed on the bank to rest, the bloodthirsty Táborites came running, and pushed him away from the bank, and struck him repeatedly on the head with stones and thus finished him off. And so, giving up the ghost, he sank to the river bottom leaving the Táborites with countless sins. Vavřinec of Březová, “*Historia Hussitica*,” 447.

⁹⁵UB 1:24–5.

⁹⁶Details of a plot to kill Žižka were communicated in a letter to him from the priest Ambrož on 24 November 1423. AČ 3:302–3.

⁹⁷Aeneas Sylvius, *Historia Bohemica*, edd. Dana Martínková, Alena Hadravová and Jiří Matl (Prague, 1998) c. 51, 161.

remembered always as soldiers who did not waver but remained steadfast even unto death.⁹⁸ This sentiment prompted the contemporary lament, “O dear God, what a terrible loss, these Czechs and brave contenders for your holy law!”⁹⁹ Jakoubek considered many of those who fell under the withering condemnation of the official church and anti-Hussite secular authorities as “blessed martyrs” who were killed by “inhumane and cruel enemies of the gospel and the cross of Christ.”¹⁰⁰ Writers critical of both sides saw neither as fighting the good fight. The sword was never good. Instead, crusaders and heretics alike had plunged the world into blood. In so doing, Jan Hus as well as all the others did “imbibe long drinks of human blood” and such action was to be deplored. The critics of the crusades were appalled and outraged. “After having exterminated lots of people, the killers hurry to the altar, with their pikes all bloodied, to receive the holy sacrament.”¹⁰¹ This was no good fight, those who raised the sword, whether crusader or Hussite, were killers and murderers and those who died sword in hand were in no sense the holy martyrs of Christ. Arriving at Tábor in 1451, Aeneas Sylvius commented on the picture of Žižka hanging on the entrance to the fortress. “. . . [H]is followers were incited by him frequently to shed the blood of Christians. . . . [and] it is significant that the Táborites followed . . . a blind man.”¹⁰² Fighting the good fight for Christ and thereby presenting oneself as a candidate for martyrdom had its origin and conclusion in different interpretations of the Christian faith.

Christians of the later Middle Ages, were in agreement that the Eucharist constituted a sacrament, a receiving of divine grace. Disagreements existed and persisted over the manner in which the Christian received those sacramental benefits. This cannot be reduced to irrelevant quarrels. Hussites contended that faithful Christians, regardless of age, gender, social or ecclesiastical status, should receive communion *sub utraque specie*, that is in both forms of bread and wine. The official church disagreed maintaining that the complete body and blood of Christ was received by the Christian *sub una specie* and the Council of Constance had formally ruled against the lay chalice. This disagreement had significant implications inasmuch as the theologians on both sides were arguing about the proper, most efficacious, most biblically and theologically sound means of receiving the benefits of the crucified Christ. The issue was not simply theology, but salvation. It was not merely rhetoric, but the summation of the Christian faith. It was not a matter of winning a debate for the outcome was either heaven or hell. Similar arguments might be advanced for most of the contested points which separated crusaders from Hussite heretics. Doctrines were a summary of that which God desired for humankind. On the other hand, Utraquism could not be doctrinally true and false, in terms of salvation, at the same time. The accumulation of church property and wealth could not be sinful and salutary simultaneously. The freedom to preach was

⁹⁸Zacharias Theobald, *Hussitenkrieg* (Hildesheim, 1981) 308.

⁹⁹František Šimek, ed., *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu novočeským pravopisem* (Prague, 1937) 67.

¹⁰⁰A sermon devoted to the subject of the “new martyrs”, preached in the Bethlehem Chapel either in 1417 or 1418, in which Jakoubek names no fewer than seven new martyrs. There is an edition of the sermon in FRB 8:231–43.

¹⁰¹Petr Chelčický, “Reply against Master Rokycana,” in Karel Černý, “Klasobrání po rukopisích,” LF 25 (1898) 391–5.

¹⁰²Letter to Juan Carvajal, 21 August 1451, in Rudolf Wolkan, ed. *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*, in FRA II (Vienna, 1918) 68:23–4.

either mandated by the gospel alone, as the Hussites argued, or required proper ecclesiastical sanction, as the mediaeval church insisted. It is impossible to reconcile theological differences among Christians of the later Middle Ages for the simple reason that the basic incompatibility revolves on logic and conviction. Scholars of the Hussite period, the crusades and the early Bohemian Reformation who wish to minimize or set aside doctrine while engaging in a social history of the confrontation between crusaders and heretics do in fact miss the essential point of late mediaeval Christianity.¹⁰³ The basic thrust of the crusades and the counter-crusades was religion; not mere beliefs, but beliefs which were practised as absolute non-negotiable values.

Certainly there were bandwagon riders who joined up with the cause of the crusaders and others with the Hussite cause. The “warriors of God” under Žižka’s command were quite different a decade later. Mercenaries had infiltrated the ranks attracted by the huge military success and promise of rich plunder. Hussite preachers deplored the situation accusing some of the armies as having no regard for the Law of God or the truth but interested only in profit. Some professed allegiance to the Hussite faith but in fact operated “under false pretensions having other motivations contrary to the purpose and desire of the faithful who steadfastly contended for what was right”¹⁰⁴ Preaching in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, Jakoubek of Stříbro denounced destruction, greed, robbery and murder associated with the war.¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere, Jakoubek deplored the crusade for the resistance effort had started in a salutary fashion but later ended up in “greed, savagery, murder, hatred and plunder.”¹⁰⁶ At Tábor, Mikuláš Biskupec lamented the fact that even among the soldiers of the chalice were “disorders so disgusting that they cannot even be found among the enemy.”¹⁰⁷ The good fight produced killers and ungodly behaviour rather than knights of Christ and holy martyrs. Some of the greedy mercenary types became very rich in the process.¹⁰⁸ Czech chroniclers reported that the counter-crusade activity degenerated into robbery, looting, general lawlessness and a lust for personal gain.¹⁰⁹ This was not defending the faith, being true to Christ and fighting the good fight.

Despite these less than honourable elements among the warriors on both sides, the soldiers in the Lord’s armies – both Hussite and crusading forces – were

¹⁰³I am indebted for the structure of this paragraph to the very fine summation in Gregory, *Salvation at Stake* 344.

¹⁰⁴Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, “Chronicon causam sacerdotum Taboriensium continens,” 481.

¹⁰⁵Sermon on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, c. 1426. The text of the sermon is in Jan Rokycana, *De septem culpis Taboritarum*, Prague Castle Archive MS D 88 ff. 196^a–198^b.

¹⁰⁶Jakoubek, Commentary on the Apocalypse, Šimek, ed. *Jakoubek ze Stříbra: Výklad na zjevení sv. Jana*, 1:133.

¹⁰⁷Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, “Exposition on the Apocalypse,” Bartoš, “Táborské bratrstvo na soudě svého,” 102–22. For numerous references to this valuable source see Howard Kaminsky, “Nicholas of Pelhřimov’s Tábor: An Adventure into the Eschaton,” in *Eschatologie und Hussitismus*, edd. Alexander Patschovsky and František Šmahel (Prague, 1996) 139–67.

¹⁰⁸Mikuláš Trčka of Lípa is a good example. Lenka Dvořáková, “Trčlové z Lípy na přelomu 15. a 16. století,” *Acta universitatis carolinae – Studia historia* 14 (1976) 113–35. A map showing the extent of his land holdings is in František Šmahel, *La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique* (Paris, 1985) 116. For several other examples see Thomas A. Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot, 1998) 280–1 and Fudge, “Crime, Punishment and Pacifism in the Thought of Bishop Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, 1420–1452,” in *BRRP* 3 (2000) 80–1.

¹⁰⁹“Old Czech Annalists,” in *SRB* 3:88.

engaged against heresy and in defending a pure faith. A pre-crusade source caricatures the radical Hussite view of fighting the good fight in the following manner:

Let us all stand in a battle line with our captains the Master Goose [Jan Hus] and Master Jerome of Prague. And whoever will be a Christian should stand by us. Let everyone gird on his sword, brother spare not brother, father spare not son, son spare not father, neighbour spare not neighbour so that the German heretics collect themselves and be eliminated from this world in the manner of the usurers and the avaricious priesthood. Then we shall fulfil the seventh commandment of God, according to the words of St. Paul: covetousness is idolatry, and the idol and the worshippers of idolatry shall be killed, in order that our hands may be sanctified in the blood of the cursed . . .

¹¹⁰

This idea of washing one's hands in the blood of the enemy in order to be cleansed and sanctified can be found several times in the literature of the period. Among the articles of the Táborite community in 1420 there is the injunction that both "secular and clerical people are obliged to sanctify their hands in the blood of the wicked."¹¹¹ Elsewhere the faithful are instructed to oppose the enemies of the law of Christ by washing their hands in their blood thereby sanctifying themselves.¹¹² Late in 1421 Hussite detractors noted that the faithful crusaders "consecrated their hands in the blood of the slaughtered heretics."¹¹³ Elsewhere, there is evidence suggesting that by washing one's hands in the blood of God's enemies, the Hussites did perform "great service to the law of God".¹¹⁴ Even Hussites wrote concerning their comrades that the radical preachers "proclaimed that everyone should sanctify themselves while murdering sinners by washing their hands in their blood, by which he or she shall be blessed."¹¹⁵ On both sides of this tremendous conflict in fifteenth-century Central Europe, it was possible to attain sanctification by means of murder by washing one's hands in the blood of heretics, whether those heretics be Hussite or Roman Catholic. Conversely, if the fallen were of the true faith then "more glory than blood" poured from their wounds and those who sacrificed their lives for God and divine truth received the remission of all their sins, bypassed purgatory altogether, went straight to heaven and were regarded as martyrs. As Bernard of Clairvaux said, while preaching the second crusade in 1147, whoever worthily takes the sign of the cross will doubtlessly gain the kingdom of God.¹¹⁶

The Union of Martyrs

It is bereft of scholarly benefit to adjudicate the righteousness or wickedness of either the crusaders or the heretics based upon confessional predispositions. That posture reveals more about the scholar than it does about men and women in and around Bohemia in the fifteenth century who facilitated or resisted the crusade. More

¹¹⁰There is an edition of the manuscript in František M. Bartoš, "Hus a jeho strana v osvětlení nepřátelského pamfletu z. r 1412," *Reformační sborník* 4 (1931) 3–8.

¹¹¹AČ, 3: 218–25 contains a full list of the articles, citation on 219.

¹¹²Vavřinec of Březová, "Historia Hussitica," 414.

¹¹³Ludolf of Žagan, "Tractatus de longevo schismate," pt. 2, c. 62, 534.

¹¹⁴"Václav, Havel and Tábor," in Svejkovský, *Veršované skladby doby husitské* 118.

¹¹⁵Jan Příbram, "The Lives of the Táborite Priests," 44.

¹¹⁶*Letter* 363 in PL 182:567.

serious, is the urge to impose modern constructs on the same men and women for in this enterprise while the results may seem innovative and suggestive on the surface, they more often serve to obfuscate rather than illuminate the meanings and mentalities of crusaders and heretics. For all their differences and hostilities to each other, the common and shared experience of crusaders and heretics was that of martyrdom. Ideologically, the two opposing forces could not be united. Theologically, they marched against each other as implacable foes. Doctrinally, both were avowed Christian by religion, yet they could not agree on the fundamentals of the faith. So they went to war precisely because their differences were germane to the faith, the interpretation of God's revelation to humankind and the appropriate human response was a matter of eternal life or eternal damnation. The issues were too serious, the implications too wide-ranging to agree to compromise. On this point, crusaders and heretics were in agreement. Death was preferred to denial, bloodshed to the blasphemy of recantation, and martyrdom to religious malfeasance. It is true enough that crusaders frequently ran in terror rather than confront the heretics. In one sense, this does suggest a lack of commitment to the cause but even as courageous a warrior as Jan Žižka was shrewd enough to avoid open battle when the odds were stacked against him and frequently his posture was defensive. More to the point, the Hussites had more to lose and nothing to gain by fleeing from the battlefield when the crusades were launched principally by foreign powers into Bohemia. The stakes were indeed higher in social, political and economic terms for the heretics than for the crusaders. Both murdered each other at every turn, each suffered various forms of martyrdom in unholy ways while engaged in holy war.

From a temporal, worldly, point of view, the soldiers of the cross and the "warriors of God" were united only in death, in the common experience of choosing to give up their lives for their religious faith rather than live under the dictates of another. Obviously they prayed, "may God in heaven be merciful" but if the wise judgment of God was otherwise, than murder by the enemy became martyrdom for the faithful.¹¹⁷ The idea of toleration does not seem to have been much of an option for either side. The notion of permitting, even tolerating, heresy, whether the heresy of popes and councils or the heresy of peasant preachers seemed too high a price to pay when the issues were so monumental; issues of salvation and damnation which formed the heart of the violence between crusaders and heretics; violence that was theologically driven.¹¹⁸ In a sense, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius II in 1458, summed up the horror held by crusaders and Hussites alike when he visited Tábor in the summer of 1451. Aeneas wrote that the town was a "refuge of heretics . . . [wherein] are all the monsters of impiety and blasphemy among Christians. They escaped here to find protection. In order to find out how many heretics are in this place, it is sufficient to count heads. Freedom here consists in everyone believing whatever they wish . . . and . . . this human scum contaminates the name of all the people in Bohemia."¹¹⁹ The idea was unthinkable. Heaven and hell could not exist together, salvation could not possibly be salvation if

¹¹⁷Eberhart Windecke, *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigmunds*, ed. Wilhelm Altmann (Berlin, 1893) 198.

¹¹⁸Shepkaru, "To Die for God: Martyrs' Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives," 335.

¹¹⁹Aeneas Sylvius, letter to Cardinal Juan Carvajal, 21 August 1451, in Wolkan, ed. *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini* 22–57.

wickedness and iniquity pressed in on every side. The truth demanded pious allegiance. Fidelity to God's truth meant exterminating everything which was ungodly. Concord with God's enemies implied that God's truth was less important than human life. Consciously or otherwise, crusaders and heretics responded to the call of Augustine: "the one who is unwilling to imitate the holy martyrs cannot enter into their fellowship." Men and women in fifteenth-century Bohemia wished with all of their lives, to enter into the fellowship of God, and God's apostles and God's martyrs. So they went on crusade against heretics, they undertook counter-crusades, they waged war, they murdered the wicked, they suffered martyrdom gladly and they fought effectively to the last man in order that they too, whether crusader or heretic, might enter into the fellowship of the blessed for it was not the punishment but the cause which made one a martyr. In fighting the good fight, the faithful washed his or her hands in the blood of heretics thereby becoming sanctified in the service of the cross as "more glory than blood" flowed from pious wounds.