

## Summary

A Joust of Faith: Polemics on the Chalice at the Council of Basel,  
1431–1433

This book details over seven extensive chapters the early phase of the negotiations of the Council of Basel with the Hussites over the Four Articles of Prague and the subsequent agreement. The narrative of the Basel disputations begins here, in the broadest sense, at the end of the Winter of 1431, when the first synodals appeared in Basel, and ends in early September 1433, when both sides had at their disposal the written conditions of unification. It was only then that the representatives of both sides temporarily set aside the “sword of God’s word”, brandished in the disputations and the numerous tractates, and instead prioritized negotiations on formulations in documents.

Already from the time of the Council of Constance, a war of faith (*bellum fidei, certamen fidei*) was waged over the doctrinal matter of the lay chalice, and this quickly became the focus of discussion and a catalyst of events in Basel as well. For this reason, attention to the remaining three, non-eucharistic Articles is limited to the moments when they influenced the development of negotiations as a whole, and their full intellectual analysis is left aside for other studies.

Even though the basic facts, supported by the pragmatic and historiographic sources or diaries, are well-known, the broad range of tractate literature has until now remained peripheral to historical attention. This includes not only literature emerging directly from the disputations, but also the expert testimonials for the needs of the Council, as well as the so-called collations (*collationes*) — positions on Biblical themes used to begin the open sessions of both sides.

It is only with the combination of pragmatic sources and contemporary historiographic records with the tractate literature that the struggles at Basel become a layered and dynamic history with a comprehensible purpose. Only then may we convincingly respond to the questions: how many competing sides were there really, what were their goals, and what practical means and theoretical constructs did they employ toward these ends?

If we begin to observe the negotiations first from the perspective of the Council of Basel and the Roman Church, we find that the accelerator of events was the invitation of the Hussites to Basel in October, 1431. With this, the *causa Bohemica* became a matter of central importance to the

clash between the powers of the Council and the Pope. Just as the 1415 decretal of the Council of Constance, *Haec sancta*, helped in its struggle with John XXIII to lead Jan Hus to the stake, so the same decretal helped the Council of Basel in its struggle with Eugene IV to get his Bohemian followers to Basel. How this occurred is discussed in the first chapter „The hostage of the power-struggle“. This describes not only the complex beginnings of the Council of Basel, but also the means used by Giuliano Cesarini and his followers to legitimize an invitation of the Hussites to Basel. A compulsory and minimal objective was to intellectually humble and shame their opponents in order to strengthen the Catholic faith.

In order for the Council to realize its proclaimed authority in matters of faith in practice and properly instruct the erring Hussites, however, it first had to get them to Basel and give them sufficient guarantees of safety. The development of debate on these serious points is discussed in the second chapter “The rules of the contest”, which also introduces new findings regarding the cooperation of the Hussites with the Polish king in relation to the Council.

The third chapter – “Training exercises” – observes the intellectual preparations of both sides. For the Council, two aspects dominated. Giuliano Cesarini’s search for methods to humble the Bohemians evolved into an almost personal rivalry which he tried to maintain apart from the structure of the Council itself. In his preparation for the decisive confrontation on the matter of the chalice, John of Ragusa again attempted the defamation of Jakoubek of Stříbro, Hussite ecclesiology, and to challenge Hussite works by reference to the sources. As is shown from unstudied materials, he used the services of collaborating authors in the study of older Chruč tradition, as well as of contemporary anti-Hussite and Hussite literature.

The heart of the book is found in the fourth chapter “Head-on collisions”, which deals with the open disputations. John of Ragusa fulfilled his role in confrontation with Jan Rokycana, displaying firm determination in the footsteps of his Constance predecessors. With this, he established in practice what Giuliano Cesarini and the Cistercian Jean Picart already presented to the Hussites before, namely that disputation without an institutional judge is reduced to a mere war of words. Moreover, the Basel strategists were prepared to negate the purpose of the disputations, as tools of truth-seeking in matters of faith, by other means. In the reminiscence of Hussite radicals on John Wyclif and Jan Hus, they found an opportunity to distract the discussion with various other topics, thus delaying the final decision of the Council on the Four Articles for which the Hussites came to Basel.

Cesarini also weakened the purpose of the disputations in advance, by giving the Council speakers the status of private individuals who held their own particular, non-binding positions. The Council later enacted its right to correct or supplement its four main speakers, and it needed the opinions of other specialists, especially regarding the most controversial case of the chalice as argued by John of Ragusa who, in his polemics with Rokycana, focused on the defense of Church custom and thus on the defense of the Church and its authority.

As is shown by the fifth chapter “Dissent from the flanks”, numerous masters could be found in Basel who had professional desires and ambitions to expand, supplement, or even challenge the exposition of John Stojković. Among them were the top theologians and thinkers of the age, including Heymericus de Campo, Nicholas of Cusa, Heinrich Toke, the specialist of eastern lands and cultures Jan Jerome of Prague, and the ambitious youths Nicholas Jacquier and an unknown disciple of John of Ragusa from the University of Paris. One anonymous Council member even expressed sympathy to Jan Rokycana and his position.

The purpose of the Council strategy of persistently undermining the importance of disputations was obvious. Though Cesarini and his supporters vowed to show the Hussites their faults in open debate, and did everything possible toward this end, this in itself would not solve the problem of the Hussite heresy. Only a successful “return” of the Hussites to the Church, a *reductio Bohemorum*, would represent true victory and a historical turning-point. In addition, only this would tangibly strengthen the authority claimed by the Council in its struggle against the curia, ensure the coveted peace for the German neighbours of the Hussites, and open a path for Sigismund of Luxembourg into Prague. The means of reaching these goals are discussed by the sixth chapter, “In the shadow of diplomacy”.

Cesarini closely linked the fulfilment of this epochal goal with the incorporation of the Hussites into the Council, which would judge all controversial matters with conclusive validity as one body. While the persistence upon the positions of Constance (only) legalized disputation with heretics, their membership in the Council, or even unification, would also legitimize a deal with them.

It was here, however, that the intransigence of Constance had to understandably be put aside, and it was much more necessary to think tactically and, eventually even offer the Bohemians a compromise. Once the initial attempts to incorporate the Hussites had failed, the strategists of the Coun-

cil opted for various subtler tactics. As the secular protector of the Council, Wilhelm of Bavaria had a mandate from king Sigismund to deal with political matters, along with his representative Nicholas of Cusa assumed the role of mediator, presenting a particular agreement to the Hussites. In essence, it agreed that in return for permission to practice the chalice, the Bohemians would either surrender the other Articles, or agree to deal with them as a part of the Council.

It was only at the continued negotiations in Prague, where the Basel discussions had been transferred, that the Hussites began to incline toward this path of unification. When Hussite representatives later visited Basel a second time in August, their plan to achieve a deal was merely a modification of Cusanus's suggested concession of the chalice, although the Bohemians maintained that the "judge of Cheb" would remain decisive in matters even after unification.

Although Cesarini's men could celebrate the fact that their pragmatic strategy was adopted, they still required its authorization by the Council as a whole in order to step into the next phase. Thus, in August 1433, a new intra-Conciliar front was opened in the Basel battle of faith, as the cost of the concessions was not palatable to all. This is covered in detail by the final and seventh chapter, "To allow or deny the chalice?"

The Basel opponents of "Church unification in a variety of rites" concentrated around the delegate of the University of Vienna, Thomas Ebendorfer of Haselbach. His alma mater provided them with numerous arguments as to why the concession of the chalice represented a fundamental doctrinal and societal problem, and he himself enriched them with new proofs of alleged Hussite perversion and obstinacy after he returned from Bohemia as a legate of the Council. Insofar as these opponents offered an alternative approach to solve the Hussite case, it consisted of an idealistic and lengthy strategy of Church reform in its head and members which would calm God's anger and pave the way for much-needed divine assistance, all so that the Hussite heresy did not have to be removed by means of humiliating compromises.

If it was the masters of Vienna who particularly opposed a multitude of rites as the most problematic solution, it was those who were not long affected by the conflict with the Wycliffites and Hussites, whether at Prague University, the Council of Constance, or in service of lords, who opted for Cesarini's compromising path to lead adherents of the chalice into the Roman Church. As noted, Giuliano Cesarini stood at their head, who in his struggles against both Rome and the Hussites built upon Conciliar ecclesiology, which drew its authority from the belief of the assistance of the Holy

Spirit and its conviction from the testimony of history. It is notable that, although one of his closest colleagues, John of Ragusa, carried the brunt of the burden of the disputations of faith, it was another, John Palomar, who was assigned the task of promoting the deal in Prague and Basel. Once Nicholas of Cusa's profound knowledge of Church history and patristics, and Heymericus de Campo's philosophical-theological acumen were added to this team, it became a powerhouse of intellect and personnel which asserted itself not only against the Hussites, but also the scepticism of Vienna and Rome.

If we observe the given events from the Czech perspective, the behaviour of the Hussite leaders was much more divisive. Although they were still able to dictate conditions in Cheb, this was the last time they could impose themselves upon their opponents, who were simultaneously burdened by their quarrel with Pope and his own Hussite policies. Once they met their rivals and were expected to present a unified tactic to convince the Council of the Four Articles of Prague as the means of reforming Christianity, they began to lose their momentum. Insofar as the Hussites imagined their victory as guaranteed by the veracity and convincingness of their arguments in the disputations, it is striking that their speakers did not consult with each other on their defences of the Prague Articles. Perhaps some of them were seduced into frivolity by the military prowess of their defenders, and others by the vision of an alternative agreement on the Articles with the Polish king, which meant that what they sought in Basel was nothing more than a unique opportunity to demonstrate their determination in front of an attractive public. At any rate, Nicholas Biskupec, Peter Payne, and Oldřich of Znojmo did not spare the collected prelates their share of guilt, and openly declared their allegiance to John Wyclif, Jan Hus, and their intellectual legacy.

Jan Rokycana was more ambitious, as he had already previously acknowledged the (albeit conditional) authority of the Council. In the defence of his Article, he first established that professional pragmatism was freed from historical reminiscences and personally-charged attacks, in an attempt to pave the way for the Council's revision of the Council of Constance's decree against the chalice, *Cum in nonnullis*. Since he considered the Council of Constance to be deceived in this matter, he saw this as the way forward. His ecclesiology of the true and false Church, shared with Matthew of Janov via Jakoubek of Střibro, played a role in this, by rejecting the inerrancy of post-Biblical Councils. However, once John of Ragusa aggressively attacked Rokycana and markedly declared his adherence to the Constance decree, even the Prague preacher had to gradually abandon his tactic and quickly adapt to the sharp tone of the contest.

The Hussites definitively lost control over events at the moment when it came to the first negotiations on a compromise. As noted, it was in Prague at the latest that they began to be convinced of Cusanus's proposal, the principle of which they eventually accepted. In return for the permission of the practice of *utraquism*, they were willing to agree to the Council's interpretation of the three non-eucharistic Articles, and the debate over Jakoubek's theology of the chalice was to be adjourned. Even though Rokycana attempted to compensate for this by transferring emphasis from the necessity of the chalice toward its spiritual effectiveness and salvific quality, this tactic was merely the swan song of the bold vision of the reform of all Christianity by means of the Prague Articles. Over the course of several months, this idea basically shrank to a struggle over the identity of the Bohemian kingdom and the Moravian margraviate as lands of the rite of the lay chalice.

Yet this does not change the fact that, within a short twenty years, the contest over the chalice had reached the position of primacy in Basel. In particular, new thought on the doctrine of concomitance, the necessity of the eucharist for salvation, and the matter of causal symbolism of sacramental kinds all enriched the horizon of Western theology in Basel. In other words, the intensity and breadth of the discussion between Rokycana and John of Ragusa, as well as the number of positions on the side of the Council, is further proof of the fact that the contest over the Hussite theology and practice of the chalice is still an underrated eucharistic controversy of the Latin Middle Ages. The international response of this controversy, its length, the political intrigues connected to it, and especially its intellectual depth – including its overlaps into ecclesiology and Biblical hermeneutics – places it alongside the great early medieval eucharistic controversies surrounding the doctrines of Paschasius Radbertus and Berengar of Tours.

This learned contest also speaks volumes about late medieval intellectual culture as such. The opposition of John of Ragusa and Jan Rokycana presents an entirely unique opportunity to observe both the utilitarian usage of the spoken and written word and the development of their official positions between written preparation, verbal presentation, and again written transcription. The criticism of work using the Bible, "secondary literature", and logic resonated with both sides, and was made possible by the procurement – especially on the side of the Council – of numerous texts and manuscripts from well-stocked libraries. Over the series of treatises from masters of various universities prepared for the Council, the plurality of opinions and even the animosity between late scholastic theological schools and methods also developed, as did the attempt to overcome them when faced with a com-

mon enemy. Moreover, the tractate literature helps document the formation of interest groups within the Council, as exemplified by the sharing of ideas and knowledge between Nicholas of Cusa and Heymericus de Campo, or between Thomas Ebendorfer and Heinrich Kalteisen.

The book also includes an appendix which contains the edition of seven as yet unpublished texts of a pragmatic and literary nature. These include an account of the Alsatian commander of the Teutonic Order to the grandmaster on the alliance of the Hussites with the Poles in the context of the negotiations of the Bohemians with the Council of Basel (no. 1); the answer of Hussite priests to the so-called second Prague proposition of John Palomar (no. 2); the speech of John Palomar at the Hussite assembly in Prague on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1433 (no. 3); a letter from the legates of the Council from Prague to Basel from the 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1433 (no. 4); two excerpts from an otherwise unknown tractate (or letter?) of John Palomar (no. 5); the reasons (*motiva*) given by the University of Vienna to the Council of Basel, arguing against the concession of the lay chalice to the Hussites (no. 6), and the third notandum on the rite of the lay chalice from the tractate of Heymericus de Campo, *An maior gracia conferatur comunicanti sub utraque quam sub una specie?* (no. 7). The purpose of the appendix is entirely utilitarian, and thus it includes a text not published in full, but rather only its relevant part (no. 7), and a text which has not exploited all known copies (no. 6).

The book freely follows the author's previous work written in Czech, *Polemics on the Chalice between Theology and Politics, 1414-1431* (Prague, 2012), which illuminates the preconditions for the negotiations of the Hussites with the Council of Basel.

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