Introduction
A tale of two windows: framing the history of early modern Bohemia

Surveying the religious landscape of seventeenth-century Europe, the perceptive observer would find few regions where events unfolded as dramatically as Bohemia. After the pivotal battle of White Mountain in 1620, a revitalized Catholic church led an aggressive program of reconversion that completely transformed the kingdom's confessional identity. This book examines that transformation. The religious strife of the seventeenth century, however, had a long history. Over 200 years of confessional conflict had a profound effect in shaping the Catholic response of the seventeenth century. White Mountain and its aftermath were in many respects the final act of a drama that had begun two centuries earlier.

On 30 July 1419 many of the Prague faithful rose early and gathered at the church of St. Mary of the Snows to hear the popular but increasingly radical Hussite priest, Jan Želivský. Though little is known of Želivský's past, this charismatic figure evidently arrived in Prague in the heady years following the 1415 execution of the great progenitor of Bohemia's first Reformation, Jan Hus.[1] Želivský initially served the parish of St. Stephen's in New Town, but a royal decree intended to suppress the new heretical movement deprived him of this post. Allying himself with Prague's urban poor, Želivský moved to the nearby church of St. Mary's and solidified his reputation with this constituency through his inflammatory rhetoric aimed at the city's secular and spiritual authorities. That Sunday, word had circulated among Želivský's followers that they should attend services well armed and ready for action. His incendiary oratory reached new heights that morning. Preaching from a series of bloodcurdling Old Testament texts, he drew from the prophet Ezekiel who had icily intoned:

[1] A. Molnár, "Želivský, prédicateur de la révolution," *Communio viatorum* 2 (1959), 324–34; A. Molnár, ed., *Jan Želivský. Dochovaná kázání z roku 1419* (Prague: NČAV, 1953).

Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars.[2]

The words evidently achieved their intended effect, for after the sermon Želivský's passionate partisans left the church following the priest, monstrance in hand, to his old parish of St. Stephen's. The Hussites broke through the locked doors, drove out the priest who had been celebrating mass and held their own service. But Želivský and his frenzied worshipers were not finished. The swelling throng now turned its fury towards the city's secular authorities. The New Town Hall was a short, ten-minute walk from the church. There, four of the city's magistrates were consulting with a number of burghers when the mob arrived. Želivský's followers demanded the immediate release of Hussite prisoners who had been jailed for their missionary activity. The magistrates tried to stall as they waited for reinforcements from across the river, but playing for time did not work with this angry crowd. Želivský, still holding his monstrance with the Host exposed, exhorted the faithful to action. As the Catholic chronicler later related, they stormed the well-fortified but undermanned tower, assaulted those who sought to defend themselves and most significantly hurled thirteen of their Catholic opponents from the upper story of the town hall to the cobblestones below. Prague, the great city of spires, had witnessed its first defenestration.

Nearly 200 years later another angry mob reenacted this same ritual on the other side of the Moldau. This time it was the Habsburg emperor Matthias who had stirred up popular passion. Matthias had sided with Bohemia's Catholics in a dispute that challenged the interpretation of the 1609 Letter of Majesty, the kingdom's most recent religious ceasefire between feuding confessional factions. In May 1618 the escalating tensions resulted in a coup staged at the Bohemian Chancellery in the Prague Castle. Two royal officials along with a secretary were seized and then thrown from a high window of the building, an event that helped trigger the most devastating war central Europe experienced before the twentieth century. These two defenestrations, then, serve as convenient benchmarks framing an unprecedented period of religious violence in the Czech lands.

[2] Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 292–4.

Confessional conflict during the Reformation era has been perhaps most closely studied in the French or Dutch context. The wars of religion between Huguenot and Catholic, the excesses of the Duke of Alba and the uprising in the Low Countries are all part of the standard story of religion and violence in the Age of Reform. It is the Bohemian kingdom, however, that offers the most protracted setting of such activity in the late medieval and early modern periods. Here religious conflict lasted more than two centuries. A full-scale revolt began in Bohemia after Hus's execution at the Council of Constance. Pope and emperor launched five crusades to crush the rebellion, but under the leadership of the legendary blind general, Jan Žižka, Hussite armies were able to drive off the numerically superior forces of the crusaders. The period of fiercest conflict came to an end in the 1430s. The Council of Basel recognized the basic tenets of Hussitism in 1433, an agreement known as the *Compactata*. The following year the revolution imploded when the movement's radical wing was defeated by a coalition of Catholics and more moderate Hussites at the battle of Lipany. The cease-fire, however, lasted only a few decades. In 1458 Bohemia elected King George of Poděbrady as its first and only Hussite king. In 1462 Pope Pius II formally repudiated the *Compactata*, and shortly thereafter the armies returned when the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus renewed the crusades against the heretic kingdom. Though formal hostilities drew to a close with the accession of the Catholic Jagiellonians, confessional tensions still ran high even during the relatively calm periods of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and on occasion led to open conflict such as the Prague uprising of 1483 and a series of urban disturbances in the early sixteenth century.[3]

An important juncture was reached, however, in 1526 when the Habsburgs came to the throne. Unlike the weaker Jagiellonians, they sought to centralize power and laid the foundation of future Catholic success. Ferdinand I invited the Jesuits to begin work in the Czech lands, and after a vacancy of 140 years, he appointed an archbishop to fill the Bohemian see. His actions helped trigger yet another revolt. In 1547 the Czech estates sided with the German Lutherans who had turned against Ferdinand's brother, Emperor Charles V. Though the rebellion was suppressed and a type of confessional détente was reached with Ferdinand's immediate successors, even during the kingdom's "golden age" under Rudolf II (1576–1612), Prague and other Bohemian towns

[3] F. Šmahel, "Epilog husitské revoluce. Pražské povstání 1483," in A. Molnár, ed., *Acta reformationem bohemicam illustrantia* (Prague: Kalich, 1978), pp. 45–127; Winfried Eberhard, *Konfessionsbildung und Stände in Böhmen (1478–1530)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1981), pp. 125–7.

continued to experience periodic outbreaks of religious violence. In 1605 a Corpus Christi Day procession in the imperial capital turned into a bloody brawl, and some six years later all civic order gave way when an army under the bishop of Passau invaded the city while mobs of townspeople murdered monks and looted churches.[4]

The resolution of this protracted crisis was equally dramatic. The cycle of violence reached its crescendo in the years 1618–20. The coup of the Bohemian estates, the defenestration at Prague Castle, the decision to depose the kingdom's legally elected sovereign, Ferdinand of Habsburg, and replace him with the Calvinist Elector Palatine, Frederick V, all inexorably led to the 1620 clash at White Mountain. On this small hill outside Prague, in a confrontation that hardly merits the word battle, an imperial army skirmished with troops loyal to the Bohemian estates, a force primarily composed of poorly paid mercenaries supported by a thin line of Hungarian cavalry. In a two-hour struggle the Habsburg coalition eventually broke the flanks of its opponents and then marched into the Bohemian capital virtually unopposed. Though White Mountain may not have been a military struggle of epic proportions, it was a critical turning point in the kingdom's long confessional struggle. For nearly two centuries Bohemia's Catholics had been an embattled minority struggling to stay afloat in a Hussite sea. Now they were at last masters of the situation and acted accordingly. They implemented an aggressive campaign of recatholicization. The religious pluralism that had characterized the Bohemian kingdom for generations was replaced by a more uniform set of beliefs, practices and rituals. The cults of older but neglected saints were revived while newer ones were established. Missionaries and musicians, poets and preachers, created a new Catholic literature. A veritable army of artists and architects fashioned a confessional landscape of baroque churches and chapels, pilgrimage complexes and renovated monasteries. Nearly every town had a Marian column in its central square while Loreto shrines quickly covered the countryside.

That confessional transformation is the focus of this study. Before the Thirty Years War nearly 90 percent of Bohemia's population lay outside the Catholic fold, yet by the beginning of the eighteenth century the kingdom was clearly under Rome's sway. The Czechs themselves developed a great reputation for their piety which was often criticized by outside observers for its credulity and devotional excess. In 1730 a German chronicler wryly

[4] Joseph Fischer, "Blutige Excesse bei einer Prager Frohnleichnamsprocession im Jahre 1605," *MVGDB* 38 (1900), 413–16; James Palmitessa, "The Prague uprising of 1611: property, politics and Catholic renewal in the early years of Habsburg rule," *Central European History* 31 (1998), 299–328.

observed, "The inhabitants of this country … are very superstitious and great connoisseurs of religious fables and tales."[5] Later in the century an Englishman visiting Prague noted concerning the famous Charles Bridge and its celebrated statuary:

> In every part of the city people are seen kneeling before statues, but especially on the big bridge across the Moldau where there is the greatest crowd of passersby. This bridge is richly decorated by statues of saints, so that the walker must pass them on both sides like two rows of musketeers. Travelers, especially those coming straight from Berlin, will marvel at the piety of the people here, specifically at the burning passion they display before the saints of the bridge.[6]

This anecdotal evidence that suggests a solid Catholic identity had developed in the Bohemian lands by the end of the early modern period is supported statistically as well. In 1781 when Joseph II issued the Edict of Toleration, a mere 1–3 percent of the population joined either the Lutheran or Calvinist church. As late as 1913, 96.5 percent of the Czech population reported themselves as Roman Catholic.[7]

Any understanding of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Bohemia must begin with religion. The confessional transformation of the kingdom was nothing short of breathtaking. A *longue durée* of active dissent that stretched back to the fourteenth century was effectively mastered and replaced in a span of two generations with an outward allegiance to Rome. The kingdom's Counter-Reformation was not, however, a simple confrontation between Protestant and Catholic. Bohemian society at the eve of White Mountain was religiously complex. The Czech lands comprised an intriguing patchwork of religious communities. There were scattered groups of Protestants: a Calvinist faction centered around the new king from the Palatinate, a circle of influential Lutheran nobility and a small group of Moravian Anabaptists. There were also the Catholics and the tight-knit communities of the *Unitas Fratrum* or Bohemian Brethren, a fifteenth-century offshoot of the Hussite Reformation. The majority of the population, however, were descendants of the original Hussites and known as the Utraquists for their insistence on receiving the Eucharist in both the bread and the wine (*sub utraque specie*).

[5] J. B. Küchelbecker, *Allerneueste Nachricht vom Römisch-Käyserl. Hofe* (Hanover: Förster, 1730), p. 83.
[6] Cited in Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky i zapomníky* (Prague: Paseka, 1996), p. 24.
[7] M. E. Ducreux, "La reconquête catholique de l'espace bohémien," *Revue des Études Slaves* 60 (1988), 685; Cynthia Paces, "'The Czech nation must be Catholic!' An alternative version of Czech nationalism during the First Republic," *Nationalities Papers* 27 (1999), 425.

The story of the Utraquist church is critical for a proper understanding of Bohemia's Counter-Reformation. Its ultimate demise in the seventeenth century marks the only large-scale disappearance of an entire church in European history! Despite the revolutionary nature of Hussitism's early years, mature Utraquism was a relatively conservative movement theologically. The adoration of the Host, the veneration of images and relics, and the belief in the intercessory power of the saints were all retained. The church hierarchy continued to affirm apostolic succession. Even after the split with Rome, Utraquist leaders sought out sympathetic bishops to ordain their priests.[8] The impact of the Reformation on the Utraquist church is difficult to gauge. An earlier generation of historians maintained that the church had become moribund by the early sixteenth century and was slowly but inexorably drawn towards Lutheranism. More recent research has suggested that after 1517 Utraquism was far more vibrant than most scholars have assumed.[9] Though the dust has yet to settle from this debate, it is clear that sixteenth-century Utraquism was far from monolithic. Without an archbishop from the last third of the fifteenth century, the Utraquists became a decentralized community and represented a significant range of theological views in the sixteenth century. On the eve of White Mountain, Bohemia was not a thoroughgoing Protestant land. German Lutherans who traveled through the region were not infrequently astonished and scandalized by the "papist" rituals they found in the Utraquist churches. On the other hand, Catholics such as the devout Vilém Slavata, a victim of the 1618 defenestration, could cynically observe, "Each man thought and believed whatever suited him best, so that those who were known in the Bohemian kingdom as Utraquists could really have been called by any name you please."[10]

By recognizing Bohemia's religious pluralism, we can better appreciate the confessional changes that were implemented after 1620. It has often been assumed that White Mountain was a confrontation between two distinct cultures and religious systems. Even the most recent assessments of this period have essentially recycled old stereotypes that emphasize stark contrasts. The

[8] Enrico Molnar, "The Catholicity of the Utraquist church of Bohemia," *Anglican Theological Review* 41 (1959), 260–70; Barry F. H. Graham, "The evolution of the Utraquist mass 1420–1620," *Catholic Historical Review* 92 (2006), 553–73.

[9] An older view of Utraquism is best represented by Ferdinand Hrejsa, *Česká konfesse: její vznik, podstata a dějiny* (Prague: Nákl. České akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1912). For a revisionist position see Zdeněk David, *Finding the Middle Way* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[10] Jaroslav Pánek, "Čechy, Morava a Lužice v německém cestopisu ze sklonku 16. století," *FHB* 13 (1990), 221; cited in R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 33.

Canadian sociologist, Derek Sayer, in what is an otherwise insightful overview of Czech culture, describes this era as "something little short of cultural genocide." Michael Mullett in his survey of the Catholic Reformation avers, "Above all, in the Czech lands of Bohemia, Catholicisation was the religious accompaniment to political enslavement to Austria." Andrew Rossos is even stronger with his claim that after 1620 the Habsburgs and the Catholic church "set about obliterating the memory of its [the Czech] past."[11] On one level it is certainly true that the recatholicization of Bohemia was carried out by brute force. A new constitution revoked the kingdom's elective status and passed the throne as a hereditary right to the Habsburg family. A fifth to a quarter of the nobility and burgher class were sent into exile while the estates of non-Catholics were confiscated. The religious and cultural confrontation of this period, however, was significantly more complex, but all too frequently historians have reduced this complicated situation to a simplified set of binary oppositions: Czech against German, nation against empire, tradition against innovation and Protestant against Catholic. Before White Mountain, Bohemia's confessional identity was neither unified nor coherent. Afterwards, its new Catholic masters creatively drew much from the past in their quest to reconfigure the confessional contours of the kingdom. Indeed, traditional ecclesiastical beliefs and practices preserved by Utraquism help explain the relative ease many found in converting back to Catholicism.

With these observations in mind, we can better understand the two central goals of this study. Most importantly, Bohemia offers a unique window for examining the problem of Counter-Reformation. How Europeans were won over to Protestantism is a well-told story. For generations scholars have investigated the reasons why people became Protestant. Far less attention has been given to the question of turning Catholic. Bohemia offers an ideal setting for this subject, for there are few regions on the continent that can match the broad-scale confessional changes that occurred here during the course of the seventeenth century. As such, it is essential to remove the Bohemian kingdom from what at times seems like a hermetically sealed historiography and examine it in the wider world of early modern Catholicism. The study of the Catholic side of the Reformation is one of the most dynamic areas in the field of early modern religion. In recent years a number of surveys and important monographs have grappled with the

[11] Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 50; Michael Mullett, *The Catholic Reformation* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 214; Andrew Rossos, "Czech historiography – Part I," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 24 (1982), 253.

nature of the Catholic experience during these tumultuous centuries.[12] New methodological approaches, new chronological schemes and a broader understanding of religion itself have expanded our view of the Catholic Reformation. Despite the assertions of nationalist historians, Bohemia's confessional transformation was actually quite complex and offers historians a marvelous opportunity to put the new tools to work.

Here a critical qualification must be added. Our focus will not be on interior patterns of belief but on public modes of representation. Whether or not the heretical Bohemians truly became good and faithful Catholics is frankly beyond the historian's grasp. Gerald Strauss, in what may be the most influential study of religious indoctrination in the Reformation era, concluded that the catechetical and pedagogical efforts of Lutheran reformers had limited impact on the actual lives of their parishioners.[13] There seems to be good reason to be skeptical regarding the Bohemian situation as well. In a region of mass conversions there was significant room for deception and dissimulation. There is the story of a priest who in 1628 was caught selling non-Catholics "confessional certificates," a document that authenticated an individual's conversion to the secular authorities.[14] Visitation records are likewise problematic. Bishops, in an effort to reform their diocese, often deputized commissioners to investigate the various parishes of their territory to determine whether confessional standards were being met and enforced in the countryside. In the case of the Upper Palatinate, a small German territory immediately to the west of Bohemia where Catholicism was also forcibly reimposed, these visitations were not always effective, and their reports were not consistently reliable.[15] Our focus, in contrast, will be on outward modes of confessional representation, the signs and markers of a new religious identity. For the great majority of the Bohemian populace, the Catholicism they were expected to observe demanded right actions and appearances. It was orthopraxy, rather than orthodoxy, that was paramount, and it is these forms of social behavior and cultural representation that will stand at the center of this study.

[12] John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn 2005); Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1999).

[13] Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[14] R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 118; Trevor Johnson, "The recatholicisation of the Upper Palatinate (1621–circa 1700)," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University (1991), p. 56.

[15] Johnson, "Recatholicisation," pp. 76–8, 92.

A second and more general objective of this text concerns the place of early modern Bohemia in the wider European context. Though the issues raised in the following chapters will certainly be of interest to Slavic specialists, this book was written with a broader audience in mind as it seeks to integrate the Czech lands into territory more familiar to Reformation and early modern scholars. The crisis of war and religion that gripped Bohemia in the first half of the seventeenth century loomed over the entire continent. From England to Poland, issues of authority and confessional identity were pressing matters of state. If the crisis had common roots, its resolution often followed recognizable patterns. The religious reconfiguration of Bohemia after 1620, though in certain ways extreme, unfolded in a manner similar to many areas of Catholic Europe. From baroque art and architecture to an emerging pantheon of Counter-Reformation saints, Bohemia was an integral part of a vibrant international Catholic society.

The book begins during the great crisis of 1618–20 when the Habsburgs nearly lost Bohemia and their dominant position in central Europe. The first third of the study examines the agents of reform who laid the foundation of a new Catholic state. It was the crown, church and nobility who were the prime architects of this society. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Europe's leading princes struggled to master the destabilizing effect of religious passion in their respective kingdoms. In France both Henry III († 1589) and Henry IV († 1610) were cut down by religious fanatics. William of Orange was assassinated by a zealous Catholic. Religion played a role in the execution of England's Charles I. In central Europe the moderate or at times vacillating religious policies of Maximilian II (1564–76) and his son Rudolf also contributed to political instability. Unlike his peers who were victims of religious violence, however, Emperor Ferdinand II (1619–37) was a tenacious survivor and able to initiate confessional changes that indelibly marked the Habsburg lands. The aristocracy, too, went through its own period of crisis. From the Parisian Fronde to the English Civil War, the seventeenth century was an age of noble rebellions. In Bohemia very few of the great families had not been swept up in the 1618 revolt. Nearly all had members who were tainted either by treason or heresy. In creative fashion these families exorcized their Protestant ghosts and then refashioned their image along more orthodox lines. The nobility was also instrumental in reviving lay piety. Their leadership in confraternities or promotion of other forms of corporate devotion was critical in the formation of a communal Catholic identity. Finally, there was the church, an institution that struggled mightily during the first decades of the seventeenth century only to reemerge as a vital force in Bohemian society after White Mountain. A young cardinal gave new life to the archbishopric

and overhauled its administration. Religious orders such as the Franciscans and Piarists established cloisters and dispatched missionaries. It was the efforts of the Jesuits, however, that were most critical to the church's ultimate success. Over the past decade there has been a new surge of interest in the Society of Jesus. From studies of Jesuit theater in the Amazon basin to their pedagogical activities in the Philippines, scholars from a variety of disciplines and geographic fields are reevaluating the order's role and impact in the early modern world. The Jesuits devoted substantial resources to Bohemia, a front-line region in the struggle to recover central Europe for Rome. An assessment of their efforts to reshape the cultural and intellectual life of the kingdom, particularly in the area of education, sheds new light on the reconversion process.[16]

After considering the agents of reform, we shift our attention to focus more closely on the confessional culture these individuals and institutions were constructing. It has long been recognized that across the Catholic world a cultural revival was occurring in art and architecture, music and literature. In Bohemia, however, such developments have often been misinterpreted or passed over altogether. One of the enduring stereotypes of the post-White Mountain era is that of the dramatic decline of Czech letters or as an early pioneer of Slavic studies put it "the complete absence of anything that can be described as literature at all."[17] This generalization, however, hardly does justice to the tremendous body of confessional material that was busily being produced in Czech, German and Latin. Thick antiquarian treatises examining the Catholic roots of the kingdom, an engaging assortment of devotional and catechetical material, a Catholic vernacular Bible and piles of homiletic collections that have been neglected for generations are all part of a Catholic literature that was produced for a remarkably broad range of audiences. Music, too, experienced its own renaissance and was instrumental in the process of confessional formation. A new series of Catholic hymnals creatively incorporated elements of Bohemia's rich musical tradition as song became an effective tool of religious instruction. It was the kingdom's art and architecture, however, which were the most obvious signs of a new religious identity. Bohemia was one of the great showplaces of the European baroque. Few regions on the continent could match it. But

[16] John O'Malley, ed., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). For Bohemia the standard source remains Alois Kroess, *Geschichte der böhmischen Provinz der Gesellschaft Jesu*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Opitz, 1910–38). More recent is the overview of I. Čornejová, *Tovaryštvo Ježíšovo: Jezuité v Čechách* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1995). For the Jesuits in the eighteenth century see Paul Shore, *The Eagle and the Cross* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2002).

[17] R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (Hamden: Archon, 1965), p. 131.