

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CZECH AND GERMAN PRAYERS OF MILIČ Z KROMĚŘÍŽE

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At the heart of the reform movement that gripped Bohemia in the late 14th century there stands a handful of figures in whom history sees the precursors of Jan Hus. The three most important of them form a clear line of antecedence, each influencing his successor and contributing to the popular mood of discontent which erupted finally in revolt against the established church. These forerunners of Hussitism are: Konrad Waldhauser, Jan Milič z Kroměříže (Johann Militsch von Kremsier) and Matěj z Janova (most widely known as Matthias de Janov). The second of them undoubtedly had the greatest personal influence; one patriotic biographer of the early years of this century actually gave to his work on Milič the sub-title „Otec české reformace“ (Father of the Czech reformation)¹. Of the others, Waldhauser was an Austrian who enjoyed imperial and archiepiscopal patronage in Prague². He preached in German and Latin, so that most Czechs heard his message only indirectly, and though he was much respected and revered (enough indeed to make him enemies) he seems never to have inspired the degree of popular fervour which followed every word and deed of Milič, the Moravian zealot. Matthias on the other hand was a scholar and theorist, an intellectual of undoubted influence on the leaders of the subsequent movement, but altogether without impact on the masses, and in himself something of a waverer. For all his keen condemnation of corruption in the church, he hankered, lifelong but in vain, for the prestige and luxury of a secure benefice³.

The career of Milič presents almost the reverse of Matthias'. He resigned a position in the royal and imperial chancery, abandoning a fat living to assume apostolic poverty. He railed at ecclesiastical materialism and greed with all the uncompromising ardour of a convert. His vigour in seeking the cure of souls, and above all in preaching, earned him a following that was without equal at least until the time of the Bethlehem Chapel. If we may believe the eulogistic claim of an anonymous contemporary biographer he preached up to five times a day in

¹ Loskot, F.: Milič z Kroměříže: otec české reformace. 1911 (Velicí mužové české reformace 2).

² Loskot, F.: Konrad Waldhauser, řeholní kanovník sv. Augustina, předchůdce Mistra Jana Husa. 1909 (Velicí mužové české reformace 1).

³ Kybal, V.: Matěj z Janova, jeho spisy a učení. 1905. The three names are associated in all the more recent literature, cf. especially Kaminsky, H.: A history of the Hussite revolution. 1967, p. 8—23. — Baumann, W.: Die Literatur des Mittelalters in Böhmen. 1978, p. 206 ff. — The standard Czech reference work Dějiny české literatury. Ed. by J. Hrabák. Vol. 1, p. 147 ff. — A thorough survey of the recent literature is given by Baumann.

any of three languages, according to the audience⁴. He also laboured hard at the reform of prostitutes, and established a communal home for the converted in houses supplied to him for this purpose by the Emperor himself among others. Here, in his „Jerusalem“, he provided for the physical and spiritual needs of up to eighty persons (the figure is that of the early biographer)⁵, and still, with charity his only resource, he commanded a surplus sufficient to extend the place, both by building and further purchases⁶.

No less a writer than the moralist Tomáš ze Štítného admits to being influenced by Milíč, and such was no doubt the case for some other prominent and important men. However, one may be sure his greatest effect grew among the simpler people who heard his impassioned sermons. The acclaim that resounded from his attacks on the flagrant luxuriousness of the church, especially of the Orders, aroused the hostility of the ecclesiastical establishment. The inevitable attempts to hereticate him followed but, predictably enough, they came to nothing; there was no case to answer, for it can never have occurred to Milíč to doubt the doctrinal authority of Rome in anything. Earlier much the same fate had befallen Waldhauser, while under the Emperor's protection, and he had as easily eluded his enemies. Matthias de Janov was significantly spared such persecution, although his extensive writings would have provided much more promising ground for inquisitorial fossicking. His speculations were presumed safe under the lock of the Latin tongue, to which only reliable beneficiaries or aspiring beneficiaries of clerical privilege had the key. Such a presumption was ill-founded, as events were to show in a generation or two, and as the case of Milíč might have warned: not all the educated were proof against ideas of radical reform and even revolution. Certainly the unceasing accusations against Milíč, who died in 1374 in the course of a visit to Avignon in order to clear his name, are plain testimony of a *popular influence* in which his accusers perceived a threat.

Milíč's surviving works are therefore of interest not merely for what they tell of the man, his eloquence and his conviction. They reveal also something of the sentiments which so much moved the masses in Prague and prepared well the ground for a social and religious upheaval which at its extremity quite rejected the authority of Rome.

The prayers are his only surviving works in the vernacular. The extant homiletic works are recorded in Latin, this being the common practice of the time whatever the language of the original oral delivery⁷. The spontaneous and affecting appeal

⁴ Vita venerabilis presbyteri Milicii, praelati ecclesiae Pragensis. Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum. Vol. 1, p. 406, 413.

⁵ *Ibidem* 420.

⁶ Apart from the early but most thorough work of Loskot, biographical details of Milíč are given by Bartoš, F. M.: O rodiště a počátky otce české reformace. Jihočeský sborník historický 17 (1948) 93 ff. and: Milíč a jeho škola v boji proti sociální metle velkoměsta. *Ibidem* 21 (1952) 121 ff., as well as K a ň á k, M.: Milíč z Kroměříže. 1975. — The earlier writers in particular use the contemporary biography rather uncritically.

⁷ Cf. Vilikovský, J.: Kazatelství a počátky české prózy. In: Písemnictví českého středověku. 1948, p. 112.

of Milíč's words to the common people is thus lost. Other Latin works include the *Libellus de Antichristo* (an idiosyncratic endeavour to convince Pope Urban V of the imminent appearance of Antichrist and the consequent urgent need for moral reform in the church), a further missive directed at the Pope on the subject of reform, two „postillae“, one of which was written expressly for the students of the university in Prague, and a *Quadragesimalis*⁸. If the prayers alone are recorded in the vernacular, this was presumably in order that they might be used privately by his followers.

They can in point of fact be said to be doubly in the vernacular, for all save one of them survive in both Czech and German versions. Milíč appears to be the first writer to have left surviving texts in both languages, indeed this very point supplied the criterion by which Jan Vilikovský was first able to identify the prayers as his⁹. Needless to say, though it is a reliable criterion in the circumstances, it is not an exhaustive one; even though nothing more has been identified, the survival of further prayers by Milíč seems very probable. The rich Ms XVII F 30 (A) of the University Library in Prague contains 198 prayers of the period, none carrying any ascription at all, but including all five of Milíč's prayers of which a German version is extant; many more of them may also be his, the German texts either lost or having never existed¹⁰.

The correspondence of the Czech and German texts varies from a close translation to a loose paraphrase, and the omission of material in either text is frequent. We may assume that by and large the Czech versions preceded the German ones, for Czech (or more strictly Moravian) was Milíč's mother-tongue. However, the claim that he learnt German only at a fairly advanced age is surely something of an exaggeration, born perhaps of constant reiteration of the point in the scholarly literature¹¹. The historical source for this particular matter is a passage from Milíč's contemporary biographer, where it is stated that he „nunquam in juventute teutonicum profecerat“, but „volens ergo majorem populum domino suo acquirere, coepit jam in senectute studiose idioma teutonicale inquirere a suo scholari et ab aliis, quibus notum erat, et multoties totum sermonem quem praedicare debebat, in teutonico conscripsit, et sic incepit in teutonico praedicare . . .“¹². It would seem simply that Milíč considered his German insufficient to his purpose; he could not use it with the same suasive appeal he employed in his Czech sermons. So he set out to improve his command of the language, the better to reach all the people. Such industry is typical of him. At the same time it is scarcely credible

⁸ Bibliographical details are supplied by Baumann 208 f. and by Tříška, J.: *Literární činnost předhusitské university*, p. 63.

⁹ Vilikovský, J.: *České modlitby Milíčovy*. In: *Písemnictví 120 ff. Vilikovský* gives only one of the German texts but the others are edited by Klapper, J.: *Die Schriften Johans von Neumarkt. Bd. 4: Gebete des Hofkanzlers und des Prager Kulturkreises*. 1935, p. 120—123, 190—200, 220—223.

¹⁰ Cf. Flajšhans, V.: *Nejstarší rukopis staročeských „Modliteb“*. *České museum filologické* 4 (1898) 42—60, 176—198; 5 (1899) 108—123, 313—350.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Girke-Schreiber, J.: *Die böhmische Devotio Moderna*. In: *Bohemia Sacra*. Ed. by F. Seibt. 1974, p. 85.

¹² Vita 408.

that one who functioned in a high office at the imperial chancery and was „singulariter famatus et delictus“¹³ at the court of Charles IV can have known no German at all.

For Milíč prayer was paramount. The biographer tells how he not only gave much time to his personal devotions but also habitually concluded his sermons by leading the listeners in communal prayer¹⁴. The six identified texts may not be fully representative of all the prayers he wrote, especially if a factor in their survival was their suitability for private use. However, the preoccupation with the Eucharist apparent in most of them is certainly typical, both of Milíč himself and of the developing movement of lay piety in which his role was so significant. Indeed, this enthusiasm for the Sacrament that characterises the early reformers has been adduced by historians as one major contributor to the emergence of Hussite Utraquism. It would therefore seem well-advised to review this question briefly, before proceeding to the texts of the prayers themselves.

Despite all that has been said in clarification of the Hussites' obsession with the lay chalice, the right of the laity to the Sacrament *sub utraque specie*, it remains a curious phenomenon¹⁵. The general custom of proffering only the Bread of the Eucharist to the laity, and of reserving the Wine for the priesthood, had only obtained since the 12th century and had no basis in dogma or doctrine. Theologically the issue is thus hollow, and is certainly not such as might be expected to ignite the first major conflict between Rome and a nascent protestant Reformation. According to doctrine the sacramental presence of Christ was complete in either species alone. Yet Utraquism became the banner of their movement, a point they refused to yield even at the very last when they were compelled to abandon so many other seemingly more important claims. And the established church, which had unwisely condemned Utraquism at Constance more for the sake of a show of unity than for any intrinsic reason, was eventually willing enough to grant it to the insistent Bohemians. The compromise cost the church nothing, though it served little more than to paper over the yawning cracks in her edifice.

Attempts to find a distinct foreign source for Bohemian Utraquism have not been successful. Neither the 15th century explanation that it was owed to the German influence of Peter of Dresden, nor the more modern one of F. M. Bartoš, who suggested that Jerome of Prague acquired the idea while travelling in Byelorussia and Lithuania, finds acceptance today¹⁶. The influence of Wyclif's speculations on the matter of transubstantiation may not be so readily dismissed. It does seem likely that they played some part in molding the ideas of the movement's leaders. Yet the character and size of the popular wave cannot be sufficiently ex-

¹³ Ibidem 434. — Cf. also the second contemporary biographical source, „Narratio de Milicii“, probably by a pupil of Milíč but incorporated by Matěj z Janov into his: *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti*. Ed. by V. K y b a l. 1908—13, Vol. 3, p. 358 ff.

¹⁴ Vita 416. — Cf. N e j e d l ý, Z.: *Dějiny husitského zpěvu*. Vol. 2. 1954, p. 101.

¹⁵ On all this matter I am particularly indebted to K a m i n s k y 98 ff. — Cf. also Cook, W. R.: *The Eucharist in Hussite theology*. *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 66 (1975) 23—35.

¹⁶ Bartoš, F. M.: *Husitství a cizina*. 1931, p. 71 ff.

plained by a full account (even if such a thing were possible) of the intellectual influences working on the few personalities who seem to stir it into motion. It was above all Kaminsky who pointed emphatically to the cult of frequent lay communion among the 14th century reformers and saw in it the forerunner of Utraquism. He shows clear and valid evidence connecting the writings of Matthias de Janov on this subject with the memorable action of Jakoubek ze Stříbra in introducing the lay chalice into Bohemia in 1414. This too is an argument that touches the intellectual development of the initiators of Utraquism, and it does not explain the huge popular response they met with. But Kaminsky's backward glance at lay communion in the decades before 1414 deserves a wider scope, for it may do more than simply explain Jakoubek's personal convictions¹⁷. Utraquism plainly inherited all the passion and ardour that had been invested in the cause of frequency, or rather it built on that passion, for there is no reason to suppose the latter was diminished. In such a light the one may readily be portrayed as the natural extension of the other. In fact frequency of lay communion was only one important, contentious, and therefore much publicised question in a period when lay piety was placing an ever-increasing stress on the Eucharist in general. It was therefore only natural perhaps that the other major popular issue of the time, the mounting grudge against clerical privilege and authority, should with the passage of time find a further outlet in asserting the „equality“ of lay rights in regard to the Sacrament.

Such considerations provide a *prima facie* justification for examining Milíč's prayers with an eye to what they conveyed to his adherents of the nature and function of the Eucharist. In what follows some more general observations are also included, for these texts have never before been fully discussed or described in English or German¹⁸.

Three of the prayers are to first appearances not primarily eucharistic in character. One of them (*Ó přěšasná Matko Božie* — here subsequently referred to as Prayer I) is addressed to the Virgin¹⁹. The Czech text in particular exhibits the linguistic richness and beauty which its subject-matter commonly inspired in the 14th century, and if the German does so less, this may reflect no more than its author's relative lack of ease in this language.

Principally it is a prayer for intercession rather than one of praise. There are five short sections, each commencing with an apostrophe (*Ó Maria . . .*). In the periphrasis and abbreviation of translation the German has lost something of this tight structure, though its content is never remote from that of the Czech. Through-

¹⁷ These convictions are far from clear and simple in themselves, cf. Borecký, F.: *Mistr Jakoubek ze Stříbra*. 1945. — Seibt, F.: *Die revelatio des Jacobellus von Mies über die Kelchkommunion*. *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 22 (1966) 618—624. — The origins of Utraquism among the reform movements of Germany have recently been demonstrated by Cegna, R.: *Poczatki utrakwizmu w Czechach w latach 1412—1415*. *Przegląd Historyczny* 69 (1978) 103—114.

¹⁸ The most thorough discussion remains that of Vilikovský, preceding his edition (op. cit.), but his only real concern is to establish Milíč's authorship of the prayers.

¹⁹ Vilikovský 136 f.; German text in Klapper 196; the texts are so short that further page references are not generally given when quoting from them.

out most of the text Mary is conceived as an extraterrestrial, translated being, her proximity to God enabling her to mediate for man and shield him from evil. Man, in contrast, is estranged from the divinity: the sinner may not look on the face of Christ, before whom Mary must represent him; she must protect him from temptation, correct the erring, receive the outcast, illuminate the blind, avert the just anger of God from weak and wicked man, and so on. Only in the third section is mention made of the Virgin's physical, human role as mother of the incarnate Christ: the section concludes with the words:

Ó živote náš, podaj nám plodu požehnaného, jenž z tvého svatého života vyrostl, abychom ožili přijímajíce důstojně jeho svaté tělo i jeho svatú krev.

... gib vns di gesegente frucht deyns gebenedeiten leibis, das wir entphon das ewigen lebin von seyme heiligen leichnam vnd von seyme tewren blute.

It will be necessary to make further reference to this section later, but it suffices for the present to note the prominent allusion to the Eucharist. Most significant of all here is a textual circumstance which went unnoticed by Vilikovský: one of the two manuscript copies of the Czech text omits this third section altogether, though otherwise the two vary scarcely at all²⁰. The shorter of the two constitutes a perfectly self-contained and fairly commonplace prayer for the Virgin's intercession in Heaven. It is reasonable to suppose that the eucharistic passage, rather than being an omission from the shorter text, is an insertion in the longer, where it is not fully in character. Such an insertion may well have been made to render the prayer more suitable for the occasion of the Eucharist, or at least it is clear that the addition was made by one to whom the Sacrament was important. The German text translates the longer version and the manuscript ascribes it expressly to Milíč. It remains possible that in the Czech text only the insertion is his work, that he translated the whole into German, and that the translation was accordingly ascribed to him in its entirety. Evidence on such matters is lacking. But it is at least clear that the full version, with the central eucharistic allusion, was the one he used, since this was the text of his translation. The absence of an attribution in the Czech manuscript is of no significance, for there are none in the whole volume.

Whatever the facts of the case, whether Milíč inserted this eucharistic passage into his own earlier mariolatrous work or into that of another, its very insertion is evidence enough that it was important to him.

The prayer to the Holy Spirit (*Ó svatý Duše* — Prayer II) is loosely glossed on the popular Latin sequence *Veni, sancte spiritus*; Klapper, who edited the German version, prints it parallel with the Latin to demonstrate the relationship²¹. Amplification of the sequence on the scale found here was possible only by the addition of new material, and it is this which deserves attention. The term *consolator* is used to introduce an expansion of the theme *útěcha/trost*, with much emphasis on man's sin and weakness. It leads to a direct plea that the Holy Spirit may inspire men with true repentance, so that they may reject temporal pleasures in favour of those of eternity; this is without precedent in the Latin. With the

²⁰ Cf. Flajšhans, no. CLXXIII, p. 340 f. (the full text), and no. CLXXXIII, p. 344.

²¹ Vilikovský 138. — Klapper 220 ff.

lines „*lava, quod est sordidum*, etc.“ the two vernacular texts part company, and while the German continues to amplify the sequence in the established manner, the Czech gives only a single sentence with the loosest possible affinity to the original. Unless we are to assume that the German was taken directly from the Latin, and in this case therefore preceded the Czech, we must conclude the latter text is corrupted. Following this, however, the vernacular texts unite in an invocation of the Holy Spirit which introduces the subject of the Eucharist:

Ó svatý Duše, poněvadž si ty způsobil svaté tělo našeho milého Jezu Krista z těla a z čisté krve naše milé matky Marie, čisté panny, když jeho ot tebe počala, proto prosíme tvé svaté milosti, aby ráčil naše srdce tak způsobiti, abychom my to jisté svaté tělo i svatú krev našeho milého Jezu Krista tak důstojně přijímali, abychom my v téj tichosti a míru s tohoto světa bezpečni šli do královstva nebeského. Amen.

O herre aller guti, du heiliger geist, syd dem mal das du den lichnam vnsers herren Ihesu Christi vsz der reynen junkfrowen Marian gebildet hast, do sy in von dir enpfing, darvmb bitten wir, gib vns die gnade, das wir den selben heiligen lichnam vnsers herren Ihesu Christi vnd sin tures blut also wirdiklichen entphahen, das wir in der suszikeit sin gebruchen all hie in den gnaden vnd dort in den ewigen froden seliglichen. Amen.

The similarity here to the sentiments expressed in Prayer I, especially regarding the role of the Virgin, will again receive further attention below. Of more immediate concern is the manner in which the Latin text has simply been exploited to provide a quite different vernacular prayer, whose climax betrays its purpose: — once again the occasion of the Eucharist. The only matter in the Latin giving any hint of this theme is the verses: „*Da tuis fidelibus / in te confidentibus / sacrum septenarium*“, while the remaining three verses „*Da virtutis meritum / da salutis exitum / da perenne gaudium*“ bear but the slightest resemblance to the ending of the vernacular texts. There can be no doubt that the latter were made to serve as a preparation for the Communion.

The prayer to the Holy Trinity (*Ó svatá Trojice* — Prayer III) is not known in a German version and is moreover the only one not found in the large Prague manuscript printed by Flajšhans²². It falls into five sections, the outer two of which address the Trinity as a whole, while the others concern each of the three Persons, arranged in the usual order. While the prayer in its entirety is certainly not first and foremost eucharistic, it may be noted nevertheless that the middle part, addressed to Christ the Son, is primarily sacramental in character:

... poněvadžs ty svú duši dal nám na vykúpenie a své svaté tělo na věčné nakrmenie a svú svatú krev na věčné napojenie ... proto prosíme tvé svaté milosti aby ráčil nám tu milost dáti, abychom my tvé svaté tělo i tvú svatú krev důstojně přijímali abychom věčným hladem a věčnú žienzní nikdy nezahynuli, ale viděním tvého svatého líčě věčne své srdce krmili ve všiej rozkoši.

²² Výbor z české literatury doby husitské. Ed. by B. Havránek et al. 1963, Vol. 1, p. 54 f.

(= because you gave us your soul for our redemption and your Holy Body as eternal food and your Holy Blood as eternal drink . . . therefore we beg of your Grace that you grant us such Grace that we may worthily receive your Holy Body and your Holy Blood, in order that we may never perish through eternal hunger or eternal thirst but eternally nourish our hearts in all bliss, beholding your Holy Countenance.)

The remaining three prayers all appear to have been eucharistic in their original conception, and despite the distinctive character of each they are similar in their approach to the matter. All three are addressed to the Saviour, and the theology is correspondingly christological in its emphasis. (Indeed, within limits this last assertion holds good for the first three prayers as well, or at least it is only when they come to speak of Christ that one may find any full theological statement.) In point of fact the emphasis may be said to be narrower still: it is as though for Milíč the entire efficacy of God's Incarnation — and to this extent its purpose too — inheres in the Sacrament of Communion. Through the Eucharist, seemingly, Christ redeems men.

Accordingly, each of these three last prayers sets out first to treat the problem of human sinfulness, and concludes with eucharistic statements to the effect that this sin is overcome or remitted by the Sacrament. In this structure they may be said to resemble broadly Prayer II.

The three vary most markedly in the view they adopt of sinfulness. Prayer IV (*Ó milý Jezu Kriste, jediná náděje . . .*) assumes a more or less social stance, and so reveals something of the other sides of Milíč's activities — his moral zeal and his preaching²³. There is a fervent plea to Christ to right the wrongs of humanity, many of which, personal and inter-personal, are listed. There is even a hint of that acerbic criticism of the Church's corruption which so roused the ire of Milíč's contemporaries: „rač zbořiti i zrušiti lakomstvo všech lichevníkův i svatokupcův“ / „geruche czustoren di geiczikit allir wuchirer vnd symonier“. Yet it is a mistake to isolate this: the same treatment is wished on wicked lords, dishonest merchants, hypocrites, heretics, nigromancers, gamblers, dancers, swearers and drunkards. In a further passage, absent from the Czech text and introducing the eucharistic climax, Milíč prays:

O hirre, gib vns di fursten vnd prelaten noch dem willin deyns herczen, di do werbin vm vnsir gemeyn selikit, vnd vortilge in en di bossheit vnd vordir di worheit an der predige vnd an dem gerichte, das di warheit gepredigit werde in der ganczin werlde an hindernisse . . .

calling into prominence the role of the preacher, his own role. In general the German text is fuller, and the two vary in detail and order of material despite their common tenor and obvious common origin.

About the middle of this prayer there is a brief mention of the Sacrament which suggests a preparation for imminent Communion: „rač zbořiti hněv těch hněvníkův, jenž pro nepřienzeň odpovídají sě tvého svatého těla i tvé svaté nevinné

²³ Vilikovský 137. — Klapper 198 ff.

krve“ / „geruche czu uordruckin den czorn allir der, di durch czornis wille sich vorczeien deyns heiligen lichnams, vnd vorsvne sie mit dyner fruntschaft.“ The climax, confirming this suggestion, runs:

... rač nás všech polepšiti, abychom dóstojně přijímajíc tvé svaté tělo se všemi dušemi křest'anskými došli ku poživání tvého svatého líče na vcky vekóv. Amen.

... das wir in deyner gnaden also lebin, das wir alle heilit vnd besserunge von deym heiligen leichnam vnd deym tewren blute so wirdiclich entphoen, das wir in vnsirn sundin nicht sterbin, sundir mit der hulffe vnsir trosterynne Marie vnd allir heiligen vnd allir engil kommen mit allen cristinlichen zelin czu dem angesichte deyns gotlichin antlicz seliclichen. Amen.

The preceding exposition of mankind's sins seems designed to bring the sinners to this Communion in a contrite and therefore worthy state, in order that the Eucharist may have its proper effect of procuring salvation for them. The earlier statement of how anger renders one unworthy of the Sacrament supports such an interpretation.

The logic implicit in Prayer IV is also found in *Milý Jezu Kriste, králi nade všemi králi* (Prayer V), though where Prayer IV was ethical in its view, this one exhibits more the character of a theological devotion²⁴. The protestations of human sinfulness are generalised and the text proceeds more naturally to its goal, a preparation for receiving the Sacrament worthily. It commences with wonder at the Godhead's becoming flesh for the salvation of men, then launches into an examination of the sin which necessitated this, stressing the crucial role of Christ in defeating the evil: the Saviour punishes our transgressions, draws us back from the portals of Hell and extends yet further compassion when we delay repentance.

Only after this does the first allusion to the Eucharist appear, supported by expressions of thanks for past forgiveness and the request that the Sacrament may bring further release from sin and protection from temptation:

Nad to dals nám ku pokrmu i k vykúpení své svaté tělo i svú svatú krev. A proto u pravěj zpovědi děkujíce z těch hřiechov, ež si nám otpustil, i také z těch, jichžtos nás ostřiehl, prosímy tvé svaté milosti, aby tvé svaté tělo s tvú svatú krví bylo polepšenie mravóv, otvrácenie ot hřiechóv, ...

Vber das alles hast du vns gegeben zu ainer narung vnd zu ainer ewigen speis deinen heiligen leichnam vnd dein tewres pluet. Vnd darumb dancken wir deiner gruntlosen parmhertzigkait vnd aller der genadenreichen guette, mit den du vns so reichlich vnd so vberflussigklich hast begabet, ... vnd pitten dein genad, das vns dein heiliger leichnam werde ain ablas der sundt ...²⁵

The Czech term *otvrácenie* does not entirely correspond to Milíč's German rendering *ablas*, and might better be translated with *Abwenden*, *Abwehr*, yet the accent placed on the might of the Sacrament to overcome sin and its dire consequences is unmistakable even in the Czech, and is decidedly more explicit than in

²⁴ Vilikovský 139 f. — Klapper 120 ff.; the prayer printed by Klapper on p. 194 is simply a shortened version of the same text.

²⁵ Klapper 121 f.

the previous prayer. Accordingly the text proceeds with thanks to God for the power of the Host to cure man's poverty of spirit. It is couched in general metaphorical terms: the Eucharist is an „obrana ve všiej nůzi i mír ve všelikém smutku i světlost ve všech skutciech i moc ve všech sloviech i pravda ve všech súdiech i útěcha ve našem skončení“ / „ain beschirmunge in allen notten vnd ain frid in allem truebsal vnd ain liecht in allen werken vnd ain kraft in allen wortten vnd ain trost in unsern lesten zeitten“²⁶. Finally the forgiveness of Christ's blood is compared with man's sins and found the greater:

Rač vážiti naše hřiechy svú svatú krví a uzříš, ež věčšie i dražšie jest tvá svatá krev i milost než naši hřieši.

... geruech zu legen auff die wag das lon deines tewren pluets gegen vnser grosse sunde. Vnd geruech zu sehen, wie vnmassiglichenn grossir ist die parmhertzgkait vnser erlosung dann die menigen vnser sunden.

Through this, the prayer concludes, man may hope to know the joys of Heaven.

It is possible to view Prayers IV and V as complementary, in that whereas the one seeks to induce in the communicant the proper mood of repentance, the other is uttered with the voice of the fully contrite sinner, absorbed in wonder and gratitude that God's love manifest in the Sacrament may redeem him, despite the gravity of his sins.

The last prayer, *Milý Jezu Kriste, milovníče našich duší* (Prayer VI), was apparently the most valued by his contemporaries, for the German version survives in as many as eight manuscripts; one of them specifies the author as „sant milicius“²⁷. In content and intellectual development it most resembles the preceding one and its stress on the power of the Sacrament to overcome and remit sin is arguably greater. There is the same initial marvelling at the depth of divine love which brought about the Incarnation. Among the more speculative statements on the nature of the Sacrament Milíč advances the unusual idea that the Bread is one with that divine Bread which sustains the heavenly angels — the expression *jednostajné / ainerlai* is repeated a number of times. At first it is no more than another wondrous indication of God's loving generosity that divine angels and repentant sinners should share the same heavenly gift. But Milíč feels obliged to explain his point further: that Bread which feeds the angels with eternal bliss also serves man for the remission of sins, the healing of his spiritual infirmities, and as nourishment so that he need not perish of eternal hunger. This time „ablas der sünden“ faithfully renders the Czech „otpuštění hřiechóv“. Here we have his clearest statement in both languages that the Eucharist remits sin.

Nowhere in all six prayers does Milíč directly state that the Eucharist was the primary or sole purpose of the Incarnation, or that it is essential to salvation. The latter proposition was to await the controversies of Hussitism proper, when it was defended most strongly in Prague by the English Lollard, Peter Payne. Yet his prayers abound in statements which make the simple step from wonder at God's love, expressed in the Incarnation, to appreciation of the Eucharist as a benefit to

²⁶ Ibidem 122.

²⁷ Vilikovský 132 ff. — Klapper 190 ff. — Cf. ibidem xxxv.

man arising from the Incarnation; and the step is always taken with every suggestion of causal logic. In a further example Prayer VI asks:

... která milost tě k tomu přinutila, aby naše dušě tak nečisté miloval, aby je očistil a tak túžil po našich dušech, ež jsi z ny miloščemi umřel na svatém kříži? Ó srdečný milovníče, kterak silné milování bylo v tvém srdci, když si nám ráčil dáti své svaté tělo a svú svatú krev na pamět tvé svaté smrti!

... wellich lieb hat dich darczu betwungen, das du unser sel, die so snöd und so unrain an ir selben ist, woltest lieb habenn? ... süsser liebhaber unsers hertzen, wie stark is dein lieb, die dich also überwant, das du für uns starbst an dem heyligen kreucz und uns deinen heyligen leichnam gabst vor unmässiger lieb, di du zu uns hetzt?

Such statements, orthodox as they are, show the emphasis of a man not concerned to give a full picture of orthodox teaching on this matter. Just how narrow is the focus of his interest becomes more evident when one considers how many prominent aspects of christological and redemptive theology he passes over: Christ as the exemplar of caritative neighbourly love; Christ as a model of humility; Christ's foundation through Peter of a church militant on earth by whose mediation the souls of men are saved from sin. It is likewise worth noting the scant consideration given by Milíč to the Passion itself, the event by which the incarnate deity shares the consequences of human sin and conquers them through resurrection, and which is generally seen as the essence of the redemptive process. Milíč comes closest to an expression of this view in the passage from Prayer VI quoted immediately above, yet it is brief and isolated. In the introduction to IV the instruments of the Passion are conventionally invoked as a protection against sin, but the Passion itself is not clearly portrayed as that which retrieves man from his sinful state. Prayers III and V contain further references to the Passion of even less consequence.

That the Eucharist was instituted to remit sin is orthodox doctrine; the Prayer of Consecration says no less. But the practice of the 14th century church stressed other means of forgiveness, in particular priestly absolution after confession and due atonement. It is noticeable that Milíč's prayers make no mention of atonement for sins committed. To illustrate the contrast it is useful to make comparison with another text treating the subject, one more conformist in character but from the same time and place. Vojtěch Rankův (Adalbertus Rankonis) was a prominent 14th century theologian at the University of Prague whose extant works have been recently published. They include a letter written to a priest in response to his request for advice²⁸. It appears that the priest, together with some colleagues, was troubled by persistent requests from the laity for frequent communion, and at a loss as to the proper course. No doubt this was a growing problem, and Vojtěch's response reveals something of the vexation of the authorities at such unwelcome zeal. He first tells of his reluctance to treat the question, due to its contentious nature, and is even inclined to see it as a waste of time. On the question of daily lay

²⁸ Kadlec, J.: *Leben und Schriften des Prager Magisters Adalbert Rankonis de Ericino*. 1971 (Beiträge zur Genschiede der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters NF 4), p. 199 ff. (De frequenti communione ad plebanum Martinum).

communion he is decidedly cool. Alluding to the argument much espoused by the reformers that daily communion for all was the practice in the Early Church, he defends the current habit of annual lay communion with the increased wickedness of humanity in his time. However the essence of Vojtěch's view is that a worthy communicant should possess such a degree of spiritual purity as a layman cannot achieve frequently. He urges compromise: a layman who persistently requests daily communion should not be denied it for more than a week. His practical advice to the priest in fact reveals most: he suggests that every effort be made to discover the identity of the layman's confessor, and to ascertain from him the worthiness of the would-be communicant²⁹. That is to say, the absolution of the penitent by a confessor is seen in large degree as a condition of his receiving the Sacrament. The Eucharist is defined by Vojtěch as a „sacramentum unionis et amoris“³⁰ and any reader of his letter is plainly invited to view it as a kind of reward for a spiritual purity attained otherwise. Only once does he mention its power to remit sin, when citing verses of the „doctors“ listing the twelve fruits of the Tree of Life (*Rev.* 22, 2), which are exegetically described as benefits of the Sacrament. The word „purgat“ appears in the quotation, but Vojtěch merely glosses: „purgat veniale peccatum et quandoque etiam mortale“³¹.

The view of the Eucharist in Milíč's prayers, the view conveyed to his numerous followers, is a much simpler one. Provided only that the communicant is truly penitent, the Sacrament will bring him God's forgiveness and lead him to salvation. The mediatory role of the church is plainly circumscribed by such an attitude. This surely explains the exasperation of the authorities at the new eucharistic zeal and is a likely factor in the personal enmity shown to Milíč. The church's power to pardon, delegated to the priest from the throne of St. Peter, holder of the heavenly keys, is rendered superfluous; in its place is a proximity of the pious layman to God himself, a divine immediacy that smacks of the Reformation. The role of the priest implicitly becomes an impersonally sacerdotal one. By the sanctity of his office he consecrates the elements as the redeeming Flesh and Blood of Christ and proffers them to the faithful. But he may not intervene as a human in the process of remission, listening to the confessed transgressions, pronouncing human judgments on their gravity and even haggling over atonement in the lucrative business of selling indulgence.

It is true that corrupt practices in the church regarding absolution earn Milíč's explicit abhorrence and an indignant condemnation as „simony“. Yet all we know of his personality, as well as a close reading of the prayers, should warn against seeing in his eucharistic thought merely a rebellion against the institutions of an impure church. The picture of Milíč drawn by his contemporaries is of a man driven by a puritanical conscience such as we would readily call fanatical today. But it is a conscience directed at the self: in his horror at his own sinfulness he mortifies his own flesh in every conceivable way; he spends endless hours prostrating himself in prayer; he forces wakefulness on his followers, summoning them to

²⁹ *Ibidem* 209 f.

³⁰ *Ibidem* 205.

³¹ *Ibidem* 222 f.

join him at all hours of the night in his orisons; he renounces all property, shuns physical contact with women and adopts a diet of severest abstemiousness³². And when he pursues public moral reform through his preaching he exhorts all people, though especially the simple, the artisans and the prostitutes, to look within themselves and perceive the sin with the eyes of conscience. When in Prayer VI Milíč describes the Sacrament filling a man with the fire of the Holy Spirit, so that he burns with zeal for the truth, he plainly speaks of himself, a man aflame with a vision of divine moral truth found within the self³³.

Thus the individual conscience and a keen response to it are all-important here; and though dissatisfaction with the church indubitably played its part in the evolution of such piety, the full catalogue of its causes is all the causes of the Reformation itself. For Milíč, however, a man of no intellectual aspirations, the intrinsic logic is not complex. If the battleground of good and evil is the *individual man*, however common and simple, in whom innate sinfulness and conscience are locked in conflict, then the redeeming force of God's compassion and forgiveness must likewise enter the *individual* in order to save him. This is attained through the Sacrament, of which each man receives his *individual* portion, to consume and absorb into himself. For Milíč there can be no question that the priest receives the Eucharist „pro aliis“, to use Vojtěch's telling phrase³⁴. Rather, each individual stands in a relationship of immediacy to his Redeemer by his consumption of the Host.

The constituent parts of this simple argument are found reiterated in the prayers: man will perceive his sinfulness if he but looks within himself; the Incarnation was an act of God's compassion, His forgiveness for that sin; each repentant individual may enjoy that compassionate forgiveness by receiving that incarnate Deity, in the form of the Eucharist. The common pattern by which Milíč moves to be subject of the Sacrament from a discussion of sinfulness has been noted for Prayers II, IV, V and VI. Both I and II proceed in one sentence and with implicit consecution from the Incarnation to the sacramental consumption of the flesh:

- I ... podaj nám plodu požehnaného ... abychem ožili přijímajíce důstojně jeho svaté tělo ... / ... gib vns di gesegenete frucht deyns gebenedeiten leibis das wir entphon das ewige lebin von seyme heiligen leichnam ...
- II ... poněvadž si ty spósobil svaté tělo našeho milého Jezu Krista z těla a z čisté krve naše milé matky Marie ... proto prosíme tvé milosti, ... abychem my to jisté svaté tělo i svatú krev našeho milého Jezu Krista tak důstojně přijímali ... / ... syd dem mal das du den lichnam vnsers herren Ihesu Christi vsz der reynen junkfrowen Marian gebildet hast, ... darymb bitten wir, ... das wir den selben heiligen lichnam vnsers herren Ihesu Christi vnd sin tures blut also wirdiklichen entphahen ...

The allusions to the Virgin, gratuitous in the second case, though in the first she is

³² The first part of the Vita gives many examples of his austerity, but cf. also: Narratio 358.

³³ Vilík o v s k ý 135.

³⁴ Leben und Schriften 206.

of course the addressee, are interesting in that they too are employed to stress the crucial fact of the Incarnation. It was through the flesh of the Virgin that God also became flesh, so that she is in this sense, too, the mediatrix between man and God. Only through her flesh does the flesh of God's compassion become available to the sinner. Prayer I actually addresses her as „matko milosrdenstvie“ / „mutir der barmherzigkeit“. It is possibly on account of this central role she plays in his eucharistic thought that Milíč chose to insert eucharistic matter into this particular prayer. He certainly held the Virgin in high veneration: the biographer tells us that his favourite personal prayer was a Latin text addressed to the Mother of God. This text has been identified and is printed by Klapper³⁵.

The theme of compassion, and of the Incarnation as its expression, also forms the opening matter of Prayers V and VI. The former marvels that the plight of man, which might have been redeemed by an angel or an archangel at God's command, actually inspired Christ himself in his love to share the human lot for man's salvation. The German text employ the expression „vnser leiplicher prueder werden“³⁶.

By way of conclusion some generalisations may be permitted. The harping on the incarnation in these prayers gives considerable prominence to the corporeality of the redeeming Christ, as though to accentuate and make real the claim that the Bread of the Sacrament actually incorporates Christ's redeeming power, as it is assimilated by the communicant. Such a stress, obviously not unrelated to the controversy of transsubstantiation, may perhaps also be related to the obsessive cult of Holy Relics in this age. These too are physical remnants of erstwhile living holiness, which are believed still to possess power over sin. Here corporeality is perceived as man's essential sinful and estranged condition, while any instance of concrete matter having true holiness can only be a miraculous gesture of God's kind Grace extended into the wicked human world. Certainly the physical nature of the Sacrament served at least as an excellent token of God's immediacy of the individual sinner, for it was portionable, and each man received his share in a form to be absorbed and to become part of himself.

The late 14th century saw an intensifying search for a closer relationship between the ordinary individual and God, a phenomenon apparent in many pious movements beside that of Milíč. The pressure for frequent lay communion is but one manifestation of this drive. But the church had developed institutions which inclined, not entirely wilfully, to frustrate the tendency, and by attempted suppression made inevitable the Reformation into which it grew. But until Luther's Bible and widespread literacy gave to the common man the opportunity of direct intellectual knowledge of God, the desire to experience Him immediately was compelled to find other fulfilment. One such fulfilment was the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist, consumed by the individual for his purification.

The theoretical and academic arguments of the intellectual proponents of frequent communion may have justified it to many of its adherents, and supplied a

³⁵ Klapper xxx f. — Cf. Vita 415.

³⁶ Klapper 121.

reassurance of respectability for others. But here the intellect is only the crest of a wave whose full causes are deep and many. Certainly resentment at privilege and corruption in the mediating church was among them. But for the common people, the great majority who in this sense include the unintellectual and unpretentious Milič, another cogent reason was surely the comforting awareness that when they consumed the Host they took into themselves God's very Self, His immediate forgiveness and His personal promise of salvation.