Understanding Hussite Iconoclasm

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The iconoclasm of the Bohemian Hussites forms one of the most intriguing aspects of their specific contribution to European history: It was the first case of an event which subsequently found its followers, and will undoubtedly find more in the future: a revolutionary gesture of crowds of people that destroy public images. Hussite iconoclasm is set apart from the Byzantine (and the early Christian) ones precisely by its social profile – the earlier occasions of destruction and banishment of images were not carried out by common people, who have, on the contrary, rather acted the parts of the protectors facing and fighting the iconoclastic programme devised and enacted by the elites. On the other hand, the followers of Hussite iconoclasm include not only the sixteenth-century Reformation, but also the French Revolution and the Taliban in Afghanistan. All these revolutionary gestures share the need to denounce conventional social values through a radical visual demonstration, and to clear the terrain for the building of a new, ideal society.

Iconoclasm is being studied from two access points – as an historical event, and as a topic in art history (as far as the objective of the latter is conceived as the field of visual images, which comprises not only pictures, sculptures and spaces, but also their creators, donors and users, their mutual relationships and activities involved[1]). In historical research written inside the country, in Czech or in German, the interpretation of Hussite iconoclasm has not transcended the frame formulated by the fifteenth century reports. From the historical point of view, iconoclasm has remained the brand-mark impressed on Hussites by their opponents, and embraced positively by those segments of the later sixteenth century Utraquists who employed at least parts of the earlier radical rhetoric (a rhetoric sometimes difficult to distinguish from actual activities) as a means of their own identification.[2] Hussite iconoclasm acquired the character of a topos which soon covered a much wider area of meaning than can be fathomed by keeping close to the period reports. In the common knowledge, both an auto-stereotype of the Czechs and a hetero-stereotype of their neighbours, Hussite iconoclasm is credited with the loss of medieval artworks – without any regard to the fact that much more was destroyed by later campaigns which range from Re-catholicisation of the country to secularization and sub-

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1   I find extremely useful the concept of "field" as devised by Pierre Bourdieu.
2   For more detail and bibliography, see my argument in Milena Bartlová. *Poctivé obrazy. Deskové malířství v Čechách a na Moravě 1400-1460*. [Devotional images. Board painting in Bohemia and Moravia 1400-60] (Prague, 2001) 44-50.

sequent waves of aesthetic modernisations during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and that some of these problems were shared by other countries. Truly, the conservative Hussites' opponents can count the result as their complete victory over the revolution and first reformation movements, because most of the modern historians have taken their interpretations as a reliable account of past events.

The sole example of a more insightful approach is the historical analysis written "outside", i.e. by a German historian of the middle generation, namely, the dissertation by Norbert Schnitzler published in 1996 which deals with Hussite iconoclasm in the context of later Reformation events of banishment of sacred images.[3] Schnitzler set up the necessary distinctions which make a more balanced and effective framing of the Hussite iconoclasm possible: he distinguishes between religious and military iconoclastic actions, as well as between theory and actual events themselves. In this respect, he took up the important work done already in the 1960s-70s by Czech philologist and church historian Jana Nechutová in her studies with which she accompanied the important editions of fourteenth- and fifteenth- century theological texts composed in Bohemia. She suggested the term "iconophobia" to denote the theoretical phase of Hussite iconoclasm and to distinguish it from the physical destruction of images. Notably, also the term "iconoclasm" is not a period one: neither the Hussites nor their opponents conceived of the acts of destruction as subsumed under a singular concept.[4]

The key question of research on Hussite iconoclasm is to understand correctly the mutual relationship between theory and practice: How did the common people understand the preaching, and how did the preaching relate to the scholastic disputes? The question has been introduced only by Schnitzler but he did not deal with it in detail himself. In distinction from most previous research, Schnitzler has argued that the majority of the reported Hussite destructions of artwork is to be included in the category of damage caused by the civil war and guided rather by the logic of military operations than by the logic of iconoclasm. The same solution has been suggested independently by

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3   Norbert Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus – Bildersturm. Theologischer Bilderstreit und ikonoklastisches Handlen wäherend des 15. a und 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1996) on Hussites see esp. 51-60. See also *idem*, "Faules Holz – Toter Stein. Thesen zum Bilderkult des Mittelater aus ikonoklastischer Perspektive," in: *Picture quasi fictura: die Rolle des Bildes in der Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelaters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna, 1996) 175-190. František Šmahel provided a careful, but extremely brief survey of the topic in his *Husitské Čechy. Struktury – procesy – ideje.* [Hussite Bohemia. Structures – processes – ideas] (Prague, 2001) 349-350.

4   N. Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus* 34, cites Thomas Netter / Waldensis (ca 1420) using the words "*iconoclastes, id est imaginifragi*". The absence concerns the Czech-written texts, as the relevant Old-Czech words are not to be found in *Staročeský slovník* 9 (Prague, 1977). Josef Jungmann, *Slovník česko-německý* 2, (reprint Prague, 1990) 793-795, knows the Old-Czech words "*obrazoborce, obrazotepec, obrazorušec*" but his examples do not antedate the seventeenth century.

Karel Stejskal in his latest publications on the topic.[5] While this approach clearly is correct as far as most of the reported cases are concerned, namely the destructions of monasteries including their decorations, the case on which Schnitzler has based his evaluation does not, in my opinion, fit the category at all. The Hussite radicals are reported by Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová to have taken the figure of Christ riding the donkey, which was used for Palm Sunday performances, put it high on the as yet unfinished cathedral tower and demanded, "if you are the Christ, then bless Meissen". When the sculpture did nothing, they derided it as only a piece of dead wood and threw it down to be smashed on the ground.[6] Schnitzler follows Vavřinec's explanation: the clearly irrational movement was a symbolic expression addressed towards the Bishop of Meissen who was an important ally of King Sigismund. I am convinced, conversely, that asking a sculpture to perform an act was not framed by a political context, but by a context of sacred images in late medieval society. The involvement of this specific iconographic type may reflect the fact that *the ritual of destruction was conceived as a symbolic inversion of existing popular devotional rituals*," as Sergiusz Michalski has noted in his inspiring book.[7]

It remained the task of art historians to relate reports of destructions to the material testimony of extant artworks. In their approach they have, however, left aside the specific topics related to the field of medieval visual culture, or to role and status of sacred images, and dealt with Hussite iconoclasm on the terrain demarcated by the historical approach instead. The topic of iconoclasm has long been understood as a strange one for art history – demolition and renouncement of artworks can hardly be a legitimate subject of the field which is devoted to *beaux-arts*. Czech art history can be said to have been rather forced to deal with iconoclasm because of the key importance attributed to the Hussite revolution in the prevailing concept of Czech national history, as it was construed in the first half of the nineteenth century and enlivened again by the instrumentalisation of the Hussites by the Communist regime since the 1950s. Because Byzantine art history has also long been left out of the scope of the field, and because the fact of a massive destruction of Antique artworks in the early centuries of the Christian era was intentionally suppressed and overlooked, Czech art historians dealing with iconoclasm were left with little methodological support and inspiration. It is remarkable that the miscellany

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5   Karel Stejskal, "Ikonoklasmus českého středověku a jeho limity," [Iconoclasm of the Bohemian middle ages and its limits] *Umění* 48 (2000) 206-217; *idem*, Karel Stejskal, "Ikonoklasmus a náš památkový fond," [Iconoclasm and our patrimony] *Husitský Tábor* 13 (2002) 71-110 (Schnitzler's book is not cited by Stejskal). Unlike N. Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus*, Stejskal's argument is rather diffuse and is not anchored in an analyses of the documented events.
6   Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, *Chronicon* in: FRB 5, 329-534, here 484.
7   Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts. The Protestant Image Question in Eastern and Western Europe* (London – New York, 1993) c. 3, esp. 91-92.

from a conference devoted to the topic in 1985, where the most important Czech studies concerning Hussite iconoclasm have been published, represents the first (and, for some decades to come, also the last) case of citing such proponents of critical theory as Keith Moxey or Craig Harbison – who were among the generation which started to be interested in the Netherlandish Reformation iconoclasm in their early research in the 1970s.[8] A book by a German representative of the same generation, Horst Bredekamp, devoted to early Christian and Byzantine iconoclasm and dealing with the Hussite one in its third chapter, had, however, already existed for ten years at that time.[9] It has remained, until today, the key analysis of Hussite iconoclasm written by an art historian, but it has never been used or reviewed by Czech researchers, because they were, and most of them remain until today, deeply suspicious and disapproving of Bredekamp's distinctive Marxist methodology. The book can be said to have fallen through between the paradoxes of intellectual discourse of the later Cold War years: While in Communist-ruled Czechoslovakia, a Western author was not to be read or cited, the actualized Marxist solution for the question of iconoclasm (namely, that the Hussites demolished artworks because they identified them as embodiments of social conflicts with which they dealt by the way of a revolution) relegated Bredekamp's book to a distinct strain of left-wing scholarship, marginalized by subsequent European mainstream art history.

Recent scholarship often deals with Hussite iconoclasm as with a topic well known and promising few new insights. The last large art historical publication on European medieval and early modern iconoclasm – namely the catalogue of the exhibitions in Bern and Strassbourg in the year 2000 – has left it out.[10] The representative contribution to the catalogues of the exhibitions devoted to the art of the Luxembourg era in Bohemia summarizes the previous research and adds nothing new (but repeats some blunders).[11] In 2002, a historical monograph on the "question of saints in Bohemian Reformation" promised to deal also with the "question of images", but missed the promise due to

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8   HT 8 (1985); namely Jarmila Vacková, "Ikonoklasmus evropské reformace – Nizozemí 1566," [Iconoclasm of the European Reformation – Germany 1566] 19-28.

9   Horst Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution* (Frankfurt on Main, 1975) (Doctoral dissertation from the University of Marburg am Lahn.)

10   *Bildersturm: Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille?* (Zurich, 2000).

11   Jan Royt, "Kirchenreform und Hussiten," in: Jiří Fajt ed., *Karl IV. Kaiser vom Gottes Gnaden*. Exhibition catalogue. (Prague, 2006) 554-561 (with a good bibliography). For example, the sculpture of the Madonna from Kamenný Újezd illustrated here – following Bredekamp – as an example of a work of art mutilated by Hussites, must in fact be dated only to the 1430s. Besides, the use of a separately carved, and thus separable, face was a habitual workshop practice in the late Middle Ages, see Robert Suckale – Stefan Roller, "Mittelalterliche Veränderungen älterer Marienstatuen und ihre Erklärung: Reparatur? Verschönerung? Umdeutung?" in: *Unter der Luppe. Festschrift für Hans Westhoff zum 60. Geburtstag.* (Ulm – Stuttgart, 2000) 39-50.

an inadequate methodological basis, and remains valuable as a collection of excerpts from period sources.[12] In my own research in the recent decade I have concentrated mainly on the later developments of Hussitism in the 1430s and 1440s, which soon left, as I have tried to show, the radical iconoclasm behind in favour of using church images to demonstrate the social stabilization of Bohemian society, and also to represent some specific theological intentions of the Utraquist church. I have also briefly investigated the moment in which the "iconophoby" yielded to active desecrations and demolitions, and suggested that the "hard-core" iconoclastic phase began immediately after 1415 – testified both by individual actions and by reluctance to order new public artworks (richly illuminated manuscripts, on the other hand, may have been ordered as means of investing the financial means of monasteries which they were, rightly, afraid to lose to the royal treasury).[13]

The problem of communication brings to the fore the point of view which I am to pursue in this contribution.[14] It follows the path of medieval visual studies – i.e., it shifts its attention from "art" (which is, of course, a thoroughly unmedieval concept in relation to pictures and statues[15]) to "image" and to its social status in specific historical situations. The background of my investigation is formed by the recent approach to sacred images as very special participants in the field of visual images. Psychological impact of images was more intense in case of those venerated as cult images in a distinctive sense, but even in cases of the rest of the visual environment in sacred spaces, the modes of perception must have differed from those of a modern, not to say a post-modern, viewer. If we were able to assess the habitual practices concerning the perception of and responses to sacred images, we could then search for the motivations of a radical break with the hitherto valid norm. My current aim is to understand Hussite iconoclasm precisely as a radical break in the normal practices of using images in sacred environments.[16] In the Late Middle Ages, the main function of images in the public domain still was to operate as a visual

12 Ota Halama, *Otázka svatých v české reformaci* [The question of the saints in the Bohemian reformation] (Brno, 2002); cf. also Milena Bartlová, Review of Ota Halama, *Otázka svatých v české reformaci*. *Umění* 51 (2003) 341-343.

13 Milena Bartlová, *Poctivé obrazy*.

14 For more on the topic of art as a communication medium in the Reformation era, see: Milena Bartlová – Michal Šroněk eds., *Public Communication in European Reformation: Artistic and other Media in Central Europe* (Prague 2007).

15 In the Czech context: Milada Nedvědová *et al*, "Sémantická analýza staročeského slova obraz," *Listy filologické* 99 (1976) 75-85; Josef Macek, "Vnímání přírodních krás v českých zemích pozdního středověku," ČČH 95 (1997) 289-314.

16 The question is suggested by David Freedberg, "Holy Images and Other Images," in: *The Art of Interpreting* (University Park PA, 1995) 69-87, and briefly dealt with by Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Normen für die Produktion und Verwendung von Bildern in Mittelater," in: Doris Ruhe – Karl-Heinz Spieß eds., *Prozesse der Normbildung und Normveränderung im mittelalterlichen Europa* (Stuttgart, 2000) 5-26.

communication medium. Although private spaces were progressively opening to visual arts in the late fourteenth century – a process which moved private religious art from exclusive monastic settings and culminated in the fifteenth century when private religious images reached a wide strata of town inhabitants – sacred images remained in Hussite times the sole medium which was capable of delivering an ongoing message to mostly-illiterate churchgoers. The "public – private" dichotomy is reflected in another necessary differentiation, mentioned so far only by Schnitzler: it seems to be useful to distinguish rigorously between individual acts of iconoclasm, all of which represent public gestures of university intellectuals, and the actions of groups.

Studying Hussite iconoclasm from written documents is a process heavily laden with the necessity to discriminate between specific information and general topoi. The label of "destroyers of images" was applied to the Hussites early and holds until today. As Norbert Schnitzler has shown convincingly, its main message was to equate Hussites with heretics.[17] Rejection of religious images on the grounds of the Second Commandment is listed as the last one of the programme of the Taborite radicals.[18] If we would, however, concentrate on such reports that would relate destruction of individual works of art or church decorations – and not more general acts like burning a church a or destroying a monastery – and if we would include only such events that were executed by a crowd or at least by a group, the list would quickly become more clear and motivations more discernable. Repeated attacks on St. Michael's church opposite the Old Town Hall which served the town council can be interpreted, above all, as delivering a strong message to the political enemy of the radicals as well as demolishing the ostentatious display of the rich.[19] The same holds true about smashing of the sculpted tomb prepared in advance for the Archbishop of Prague Albicus of Uničov in the small church of Our Lady *in Lacu* in Prague's Old Town.[2] This case carries another message – an attack on tombstones, burials or epitaphs threatens, above all, the continuation of the ritual memory of the deceased, an asset of prime value in late medieval Christianity. Destruction of royal tombstones, reported in the Zbraslav monastery (but not in St. Vitus's cathedral, although likely to be expected there) fits the same category. Indeed, the complete lack of any sculpted tombstones in Bohemia and Moravia which would predate Charles IV (only some tombstones with engraved figural drawings are extant, together with some unidentifiable figural fragments from the

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17   N. Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus* 22.
18   Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, *Chronicon* 398, 405.
19   Ibid 348, 389. More on the church: Ludmila Wratislavová – Vilém Lorenc, "Kostel sv. Michala na Starém Městě Pražském," [The church of St. Michael in the Old Town of Prague] ZPP 10 (1950) 225–237.
20   Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, *Chronicon* 347.

Prague Castle excavations) suggests that these were attacked massively. The sole information we have about an organised – and successful – armed opposition to the destructive Hussite crowds fits this context. It is the report about the Prague butchers who defended the Minorite church of St. James in order to keep intact the memorial places, and supposedly also related images, of their ancestors.[21] If a generalisation from this episode be appropriate, it would reveal another motive: the revolutionary crowd aims to deprive those who could afford to keep the religious memory of their families alive in a public space, of the means of such commemoration, namely of church images of any kind and form.[22] In a wider anthropological context, we can diagnose an attack on an enemy's loci of symbolic power and sources of his "communitas."[23] I am convinced that these motivations are related to the religious rejection of sacred images only secondarily – that is, realisation of these destructive acts was facilitated and perhaps conditioned by the introduction of an anti-image discourse, but it was not directly caused by it and does not partake in religious iconoclasm proper.

Reported cases of "true" iconoclasm by crowds or groups during the Bohemian Wars of Religion thus shrink to fewer examples. We are informed in rather general terms about the radicals' throwing out of the church books, liturgical devices and textiles used to celebrate the mass.[24] This was, again, caused not by aversion to sacred images, but by the rejection of the rite of the Roman mass together with its paraphernalia. With another rather general text we arrive, however, closer to what we have been looking for: the Taborite radicals are accused of destroying the images of the saints, because they should not be venerated instead of the Lord himself, and they break the altarpieces together with the altars, which they consider to be consecrated not to the Lord, but rather to the devil, to Mammon, and to other idols.[25] Art historical evidence may add the existence of extant mutilated images, some of them repaired carefully already during the fifteenth century,[26] although in individual cases it may prove impossible to state whether the damage was done intentionally or whether it resulted from general confusion and upheaval. The most important report, however, is the one on breaking the carved Christ riding a donkey, or "*Palmesel,*" that was already discussed. Here, finally, we hear directly how a spe-

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21 *Enea Silvio, 'Historia Bohemica'.* Dana Martínková – Alena Hadravová – Jiří Matl eds., (Prague, 1998) c. IV, 52, p. 169.

22 For more detail, cf. Milena Bartlová, "In Memoriam Defunctorum: Visual Arts as Devices of Memory", in: Lucie Doležalová ed., *Medieval Memories. Papers from the ESF-CTS Prague Workshop* (Leiden, forthcoming).

23 Victor and Edith B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York, 1978) esp. 145.

24 Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, *Chronicon* 408-409.

25 Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, Letter to Václav Koranda in: *Documenta* 633-636.

26 Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium* 297-301.

cific image is challenged to keep up its promise – i.e., to represent Christ in person; and when he proves unable to do so, it is punished by being broken. In a more general sense, the same is reported about the radical period in Prague in 1420.[27] In these instances we encounter the crucial topics of the "iconophobic" theory and the long standing tradition of the *"precarious history of Christian images between iconoclasm and idolatry"*.[28]

The argument that it is, in fact, dangerous for true Christians to use images in their churches according to the established tradition approved by the Church, has been developed by the theologians of the Bohemian proto-reformation movement: Jakoubek of Stříbro, Nicholas of Dresden, and Peter Payne. All of them are, however, indebted for most of their arguments to the *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti* written before early 1380s by the "guru" of the Reform movement, Matthias of Janov (although a detailed investigation of the motives which Nicholas and Payne could have brought in from the Wycliffite ambiance could eventually shed more precise light on the question of the originality of the Bohemian movement). Their texts concerning sacred images, most of them written in the framework of university literary genres, are relatively well known, published and commented.[29] The idea that their thoughts could have been disseminated by preaching has been based on the consequences of church "cleansing" as result of preaching by the radicals Václav Koranda or of Jan Želivský in 1419. The second occasion marked, at the same time, the start of the "open" phase of the revolution in Prague, triggered by Želivský's sermon. We do not know what and how Jan preached, only that it was based on one of the Old Testament attacks on the idolaters (Ezek 6: 3-6), which, however, never figured in theological treatises.[30] Another Old Testament argument, namely the representation of the Lord's army in the Books of the Maccabees seems to have formed an important symbolic (if not theological) context for the whole radical movement: the text of the Hussite troops' anthem "Ye who are the warriors of God" has been traced to the same source. Likewise, the burning of the looted precious goods as a burnt offering by Žižka's troops at Rabí, could be interpreted in a similar way.[31] A solution to the already

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27 Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová, *Chronicon* 411.

28 Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus*, 51.

29 Numerous commented editions by Jana Nechutová; O. Halama (n. 11 above); Kristína Sedláčková, *De imaginibus* (diploma thesis, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University Brno, 2003).

30 Bredekamp *Kunst als Medium* 260. Other authors, however, claim that Želivský had preached on the feeding of the multitude (Mark 8: 1-9) on that Sunday, see. Marie Bláhová, Commentary on the Czech translation of Vavřinec (Laurence) of Březová's *Chronicon. Husitská kronika Vavřince z Březové* (Prague, 1979) 330.

31 František Holeček, "Makkabäische Interpretation des hussitischen Chorals 'Ktož jsú boží bojovníci.' in: *In memoriam Josefa Macka 1922-1991* eds. M. Polívka a F. Šmahel (Prague, 1996) 111-115; Milena Bartlová, "The Utraquist Church and the Visual Arts before Luther," BRRP 4 (2002) 215-224.

mentioned key problem of levels and means of communication between the theologians and the crowds remains to be investigated and, as of now, it would be precarious to hypothesise any direct and efficient link and to deduce the motivations for iconoclastic actions directly from the theoretical treatises. On the other hand, social motivations (discussed above) did not seem to have had the psychological strength needed for a radical breach with hitherto functioning and generally accepted normative responses. In my opinion, the key to understanding Hussite iconoclasm lies in the assessment of the religious status of visual images.

The argument — that the use of images was unsuitable for the true Christian — is drawn by the reformers from the long-standing tradition of the theology of both East and West, and never goes beyond it. This tradition was woven, by the late fourteenth century, from three strands. The first strand was composed of texts from Eastern theologians written between the fourth and ninth centuries during the difficult and conflict-laden emergence of a symbiosis between the Antique tradition of visual images and Christianity. While this symbiosis may seem self-evident today, it was accompanied by fundamental difficulties that are now difficult to appreciate. The second part of the theological discourse on images was the Western scholastic reception and adaptation of the Eastern theology with which we can associate the names of Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure. The third part was comprised of Bernard of Clairvaux's objections, and oriented both socially (the true image of God is man, and it is immoral to give money to decorate the church while the true church, i.e. a Christian, goes poor, naked and hungry), and pragmatically (too costly images may detract the attention of monks from their prayers).

The relationship between such theological argument and the actual motivations of actors of social events is susceptibly vague, even if we would set the problem of communication practices and possibilities aside. Art history's attempts to relate the information gleaned from written sources to specific images are often frustrated by the inability to establish a reliable connection between reports and individual extant pictures and sculptures. We can proceed only by way of analogy and to provide typical iconographies as illustrations.[32] A case in point is, for example, the Marian image in Kłodzko [Glatz] which performed a miraculous vision for the ten-year old Arnošt of Pardubice, the future Archbishop of Prague, sometime in the 1320s – the sculpture which successfully impersonates the missing original dates only from the third quar-

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32 Valuable insights are presented by Marek Walczak, "Sędziwój of Czechle and Images. Art as a Medium of Religious Identity in Poland in the Second Half of the 15th Century," in: Milena Bartlová – Michal Šroněk eds., *Public Communication in European Reformation: Artistic and other Media in Central Europe. 1380–1620.* (Praha 2007) 69-88.

ter of the fifteenth century.[33] The habitual identification of letters of indulgence with whatever image can be found in – or related to – the church in question today, lacks convincing methodological pertinence. If Matthias of Janov be correct when he writes about *"the fallacy promulgated by some who believe that when Christ's or some other image reaches the age of thirty years, it starts to contain some magical powers or divine power in itself,"*[34] then it would hardly be possible to pronounce brand new artworks as miraculous.[35] Moreover, the letters of indulgence often contain no reference to any previous miraculous activities that would suggest a specific image as the proper place for prayers. On the contrary, issuing a letter of indulgence may have been a device to channel and control the devotion of the common people away from "miraculously behaving" and often miraculous efficaciousness of images, to those which were to be perceived in a more distanced, theologically proper, way.[36] For the reformers, however, even such corrective attempts were far from satisfying. Janov considers it a grave fallacy if people admire one image more than another. His idea that an image should be a kind of neutral sign denoting the represented holy person is clearly completely above and beyond any real context of artistic and devotional practice and can be maintained only in the framework of an abstract theological (or, for that matter, modern art historical) discourse.

In my opinion, however, a close reading of the texts of Nicholas, Jakoubek, Matthias and Jan Hus can provide us with an insight into another valuable subject: namely, the period modes of perception and uses of images in religious settings and responses to them. Although we lack any textual study that would specify the amount of *loci communes* included in these texts, a preliminary inspection seems to assure that we encounter here recordings of some factual personal experiences. We thus gain a glimpse of people entering the church and not paying attention to the Body of Christ (reserved in the tabernacle or aumbry), but instead running directly to preferred images of saints, especially those that are renowned for their beauty. They burn candles before the images,

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33 For more details and argumentation see Milena Bartlová, "Uměleckohistorické úvahy o vizi Arnošta z Pardubic," [Arnošt of Pardubice's vision in art history.] in: *Arnošt z Pardubic (1297-1364). Osobnost – okruh – dědictví* [Arnošt of Pardubice (1297-1364). Personality – ambiance – heritage] eds. Lenka Bobková – Ryszard Gładkiewicz – Petr Vorel. (Wrocław – Praha – Pardubice, 2005) 215-228.

34 Matthias de Janov, *Regulae Veteris et Novi Testamenti, Liber 5. Distinctio 6. De imaginibus in templis vel statuis.* Jana Nechutová ed. (Mucich,1993) 70.

35 See the well-known cases in Czech art history concerning the Beautiful Style Madonnas from Plzeň (indulgences 1384), Altenmarkt in Pongu (1393) and Český Krumlov (1400). For more details, see Fajt ed., *Karl IV. Kaiser vom Gottes Gnaden*, Cat. nn. 145 and 202.

36 For a more detailed argument, see Milena Bartlová, "Artistic Form as a Communication Medium: What is Beautiful about the Beautiful Style?" in: Milena Bartlová – Michal Šroněk eds., *Public Communication in European Reformation: Artistic and other Media in Central Europe. 1380–1620.* (Praha 2007) 17-28.

decorate them with flowers, kiss them and prostrate before them. If the image has proven to be successful in mediating a divine intervention into the matters of the world, people bring votive offerings and figurines (a kind of marionette is denoted by the Old-Czech word "*tatrmánci*") and place them around the image. During the mass and sermon, the images draw an undesirable attention of the churchgoers, and men can even be seduced by images of beautiful women. This concerns especially the images of female saints which are currently depicted as being much more beautiful than they had been when alive. Little wonder, however – painters paint according to the things and people they have personally met, and that means they often present in churches images of lovers, both male and female, or even a picture of a prostitute.[37] It might be better to do without such dangerous objects entirely, but pictures and sculptures in churches cannot be evaded, since sensually perceivable images are more accessible to the uneducated Christians; as sensual human beings, they understand them better than spiritual images. Sensuality here clearly comprises not only sight but all the other senses, including hearing which was the channel for learning the divine word. This statement should be understood in the context of the mystical tradition dealing with inner images. Interestingly, the resigned acceptance of image practices, caused by the necessity to give in to the sensual nature of ordinary humans, is well known from this tradition, too. However esoteric, the mystical discourse finally ranged from the complete renunciation of images (as devices on the mystical way) to their instrumental use.[38]

While a cautious attitude to the uses of images in churches represented one of the "progressive" moves of reform theologians, they declared it, of course, as their fidelity to early church customs. The distance between the imagined pristine state and the corrupted present one is explained by two main arguments, both only remotely related to the theological discourse proper. First and foremost the negative role of greedy priests and monks is often credited with the corruption. "I am afraid that woe is to the priests and clerics who provide the uneducated people with the possibility of conducing such abominations in the Lord's temple, who preach to the people such things, accord to them special indulgences for kneeling before such images and give them the opportunity to conjure strange tales which cause the people to venerate one image more than another one. In this way, they give up the sheep entrusted to them in the hands of a false Antichrist, or devil."[39] Direct activity of the devil may cause the physical actions of images that speak, move, weep or bleed: an explanation men-

37 Nicolaus de Dresda, *De imaginibus*. Jana Nechutová (ed.), Sborník prací filosofické fakulty brněnské university ř. E, 15 (1970) 211-240, esp. 218; Matthias (note 34).
38 Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Visions and the Visionary*. New York 1998.
39 Matthias de Janov, *Regulae* 56.

tioned frequently in earlier texts on images, including Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Such activities are to be differentiated from miracles – that is from the capability of some images to mediate prayers and thus to help to fulfil biddings pronounced before them. This differentiation is neglected by modern researchers, but it is clear that the reform theologians considered physical actions of images to be the more suspect class of phenomena. To distinguish legitimately between devilish and divine acts of images is reserved solely to church officials and images should be venerated only in cases scrutinised by the diocesan court and found correct. This is the opinion of Matthias of Janov, and it is interesting that the official evaluation of similar occurrences has remained the same up to now in the Roman Catholic Church. Both radicals Nicholas and Jakoubek do not, however, make any concessions in this respect.

It is possible that Matthias' conciliatory opinion is not only his bowing to the pressures of church power embodied in the 1389 diocesan court's condemnation of Janov and some of his pupils to renounce their faulty ideas.[40] He has left to us also a very special report about the learned man's experience of a religious "*tremendum*" mediated through an image. "I am standing here as a witness that whenever I have seen this image in Lucca" [the "*Volto Santo*", considered to have been carved by Nicodemus and truly portraying Jesus Christ] "or, more precisely, the image of that image created on a large banner and elevated high in the air, I was always astonished, my skin and hair rose on my head, and then I have started to think intensely about the coming of Christ and about his judgment, how great and terrible it will be."[41] If the staging of a visual experience, involving a painted copy of an absent sacred image, could have created such a strong response in the learned and critical theologian, then we can safely assume that the power of images was felt extremely intensely by uneducated common people. I believe that we are witnessing here the active participation of images in a very primal experience, both from religious and psychological points of view, which connected religious awe with terror. We can hypothesise that what awakened and actualised the Hussites' group iconoclastic actions was this primal instinct, turned against the agents of power by the anti-image discourse. I believe that any search for a direct and convincing connection between theological debate and actual iconoclastic deeds will continue to be frustrated, because what was released here was the non-reflective force of hate against vehicles of power. Images were opposed and attacked also as symbols and as the embodiment of social and political power (class struggle in Bredekamp's Marxist terminology), but the main force may have been the power inherent in sacred images themselves.

40 Constantin Höfler, *Concilia Pragensia 1353-1413* (Prague, 1986²) 37-39.
41 Matthias de Janov, *Regulae* 32.