

The Crisis of the Middle Ages and the Hussites¹⁾

*[Translated by James J. Heaney]**

For many years František Graus was Professor of Medieval History at the Charles University in Prague and a member of the Czechoslovakian Academy of the Sciences. In the fall of 1970 he accepted a chair in the Justus Liebig University in Giessen. Graus has written extensively on the social and economic history of the late Middle Ages. In addition to studies of the hagiography of the Merovingian period, his best known work is a two-volume study of Bohemia in pre-Hussite times (Prague, 1949, 1957).

More recently, Graus, keenly aware of contemporary crises in European society, has turned his attention, philosophically as well as in a historical sense, to the problem of "crisis" in the late Middle Ages. "The Crisis of the Middle Ages and the Hussites" is his most recent work, first presented in a lecture before the Czechoslovakian Academy of the Sciences in September, 1969. This study was preceded by an extensive and often critical investigation of the vast body of secondary literature on "crisis" in the pre-Reformation period. Its purpose is to analyze anew the phenomenon of historical crisis, especially as manifested in the Hussite movement of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

In Graus's view the historical phenomenon of crisis is not adequately dealt with by the sociological approaches, recently so popular, which assign a secondary role to religious and quasi-religious factors. The very root of historical crisis is a people's perception of a grave threat to their most basic values and symbols of security. Social division and tension, economic difficulties and the loss of faith in institutions are not the root of the matter. Rather they aggravate

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1) This paper was also a report given at the colloquium organized by the Historical Institute of the Czechoslovakian Academy of the Sciences at Smolenice from September 2–6, 1969. The colloquium was devoted to the problems of the epoch just previous to that of the Hussite movement, and to the place which the movement occupies in European history. I have omitted references; the general scope of the paper makes specific documentation implausible, largely because it could not be realistically useful in a paper of this length. I am, however, publishing in German (as a "supplementum" in the new journal *Mediaevalia Bohemica* [=Vol. 1 (1969) – ED.]) a catalog of literature on the topic up to the present time, and of opinions concerning this so-called crisis of the Middle Ages. There one can easily find verification for the points of view ascribed to different historians, as well as the more specialized literature dealing with different aspects of the crisis.

the sense of menace and force the creation of new values and symbols, even radically new ones, which can restore the lost, sense of security and meaning.

For Graus, the Hussite movement is the most telling example of genuine crisis in the late Middle Ages. In Bohemia the old religious forms and rites, which for so long had given solace to so many, were suddenly simply ineffectual. This cannot, in Graus's estimation, be satisfactorily explained in terms of social and economic grievances – a judgment already implied when one considers the immediate answer to the crisis which set the people on the march: the dogmatic tenets of John Huss, Huss, who was no more a social reformer than he was an original theologian, set forth religious concepts which became, intellectually and institutionally, a rallying-point for the people. The Hussite movement was, however, ineffectual in the long run; the return to the simpler doctrines and social structures of an ideal past was not a long-term answer to the crisis suffered by medieval man. A truly effective resolution of the crisis awaited bold new directions. It was, for Graus, forthcoming only with the more radical solutions of sixteenth century humanism and the Protestant Reformation.

Every age has its own way of seeing the past, its own precise and different point of view. One would think it unnecessary nowadays to insist that there are no eternally valid commentaries on the past, "accurate" in the most ideal sense, which both accurately sum up historical events and make all future commentaries superfluous. In point of fact, however, it is well known that this has so far not occurred, and that whether by accident or intention, knowingly or not, we still find that a great deal of the contemporary infiltrates our images of other periods. It seems almost ridiculous to repeat this, except that so often when we look into this age or that we discover that historians affirm this principle in theory, but decidedly deny it in practice because of the exigencies of a particular case. All the more reason, then, for me to seek exactitude at the very beginning of an endeavor in which I will consciously make use of a *contemporary* mode of interpretation to handle the close of the Middle Ages, with particular reference to the Hussite movement and the events connected with it.

Obviously we cannot permit ourselves to read our own opinions into the past, to bring it up to date, as it were, by smuggling into it today's ideas. Despite this, however, it remains true that *every* epoch is so variegated and heterogeneous that historians in each succeeding period must find in it – often for the first time – aspects which contradict previous research simply because of the differences in purpose discernible in each undertaking. Precisely on this account I wish to make it clear that I am going to pay a great deal more attention to the traits of "crisis" in the late Middle Ages than to its more obvious traditional and conservative features, in the hope that aspects of the period will be brought to light which have hitherto escaped attention.

Probably the most significant thing about current historiography is the downfall of the old evolutionist interpretation of the past. We no longer view the past as a necessarily and conveniently linked chain of epochs. Instead we have begun to consider periods of devel-

opment, if not as mere collections of fortuitous occurrences, outrages, and absurdities, then at least as a series of unfinished events, sudden and unlooked-for eruptions, with some necessary consequences and some completely chance happenings. In short, history is to be seen as a tangled skein of phenomena and events. Because we sense that things are changing all around us with no discernible direction toward a better and happier world, we see a certain crisis in those values which had seemed to guarantee our efforts and desires in earlier times. We discover afresh that abiding irrationality which the Middle Ages schematized in strata of Good and Evil, and which still seems to us senseless, absurd, or simply incomprehensible. Without a doubt, it is because of the decline of our own certainties and most cherished notions that we read the equally important events of the past carefully enough to discover "periods of crisis" of different kinds, and eventually to have the past reveal to us the unending panorama of crises through which mankind has had to pass. We lose faith in the ineluctable course of evolution, in the ability of men to survive periods in history wherein "progress" no longer plays the primary role, though it may later do so thanks to "the cunning of history". It is at such times that we seem to rediscover the concept of destiny and its traces in history.

If we consider the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which are more often labeled the "late Middle Ages" or simply "the end of the Middle Ages", from such a point of view, we will find it very difficult to see this period as the "decline of the Middle Ages" (or, to go even further, its "autumn"), or to look down on it from the vantage point of today, which has put an end to the supposed "obscurantism of the Middle Ages". Rather we must strive to grasp this period as directly as possible, and in such a way that we discover therein what is most familiar to us from our own day.

Apparently, "signs of crisis" can be read with equal validity into every separate age and segment of the populace. Nevertheless, it is also fair to characterize "crisis" as a groundswell facet of experience which is truly manifest both in the thought of a great many persons and in the feeling of the whole period. As such its effects can be seemingly ambiguous, since crisis gives rise to a general feeling of uncertainty as well as to the most strained attempts to grasp security of any kind or some abstract certitude: Not every period has these "signs". Where they do exist, they merit consideration as motivating forces only when they have brought about some plainly novel and reasonably lengthy movement.

The first hurdle in trying to apply any of this to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is the continuing influence of the traditional point of view, or, more accurately these days, points of view about the Middle Ages. Of course, when one thought of the Middle Ages as a period of darkness in which ignorance and a grim Church held soul and Body relentlessly captive, it was easy to regard the end of that age in a more favorable light. It was, one could say, a period in which the first traces of the dawn of the new age were showing, harbingers of the light of progress. The demise of this way of looking at things has produced a counter-tendency to idealize the Middle Ages as the tranquil harbor from which mankind has perilously ventured onto the stormy modern seas. This view, of course, is no

more true and dependable than the former one; it simply idealizes it a bit differently. Deriding the Middle Ages as a period of general obscurity is another way of glorifying our own day, of singing the praises of the "European Spirit". On the other hand, glorifying so-called medieval quietism is merely a way of suggesting that immobility and tranquillity are the solutions to contemporary unrest, and attempting to document this claim by reference to a false image of the Middle Ages.

Let us, however, leave aside for the moment such general considerations about the evolution of the medieval world and try to focus more clearly upon those two centuries which are generally referred to as the close of the period. When we call them an era of transition, we usually do so in a twofold manner: it was an age in which the old was coming apart and disappearing, or an age in which the foundations of later times were being laid. Both these characterizations are accurate and well substantiated, even though it *is* true that *any* epoch could be described as one of transition in which the old was disappearing and giving rise to the new. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that the events in question constitute a movement and change which is unique in character, and in which particular individuals gave substance in their own lives and troubles to these relatively abstract ideas. It is from this standpoint that the Middle Ages really does seem to be a period of social crisis, from which people tried to extricate themselves by every possible means. I think, therefore, that at this point I should explain more carefully what I mean by the word "crisis", seeing that it is the leitmotif of the period, as indicated by the title of this article.

The sense of "crisis" which I wish to communicate here has nothing to do with "decadence", "cessation of growth", "stagnation", or any analogous connotation which may attach to the word outside the sphere of historical terminology. Any such connotation would obviously be false because it tends inevitably to superimpose a "transitory" character on the period. It is only right to object to such a tendency: while the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did see the decline of certain forms of life and society, they also provided the opportunity for the birth of newer and more viable forms, many of which were to have a decisive formative influence. We can, therefore, say of these centuries something which always remains true in history: at any given time in the past something was coming to birth and something else was dying; which process was the more intense in any one age, considering the fact that history is always different, is purely a debater's point. This is especially true of the so-called late Middle Ages. However, I think we really must take a little more space to understand the term "crisis", if it is to have any real content.

Clearly we can use the word differently in different sorts of discussions, depending upon whether the data with which we are working are more or less precise. That, for instance, is the method of those historians who have introduced and tried to give concrete meaning to general expressions such as "monetary crisis" and "agrarian crisis", or who have tried to use it in more specific cases such as "political crisis", "crisis of the Papacy", and so on. Using such notions on a small scale is not objectionable; extending their use until they become overall descriptions for the entire period is. Even vaguer meanings at-

tach to expressions such as “crisis of the aristocracy”, “crisis of structure”, or “crisis of feudalism”, and it becomes obvious that they are practically useless for any sort of real historical endeavor. This is not so much because historians have not thought about these terms before using them; rather it seems that most of them have gone to great pains, occasionally to an embarrassing extent, to employ the word precisely and to document as clearly as possible all the events which are connected with and cause the “crisis”. Such a desire for exactitude is the real source of the problem simply because such a use of terms presupposes, without justification, a connection between the interpretive scheme and the facts, with the whole business disguised as an elucidating commentary. We must still keep in mind, however, that any attempt to interpret what evidently *is* a real crisis is going to shape our commentary in a certain way²⁾.

Actually, I neither wish to give, nor do I believe myself capable of giving, a precise definition of the word “crisis”. Furthermore, I consider such definitions to be of no value at all to the social sciences. Most frequently they serve merely to sidetrack us, and can be about as useful as the old sophistic and scholastic debates about how many trees justify the use of the term “forest”, or how many grains of sand one must have for a “cupful”.

All I can do here, then, is to give a description of social crisis as a resumé of what I understand by the word. In such a description I wish to include any and all phenomena which result in the breaking up of a way of life in a society. Most important among them is the general feeling that values which have hitherto been held in high esteem as unquestioned “basics” seem to be either menaced or perhaps already in the process of disintegration and disappearance. Such values are, of course, seen in an entirely different light by contemporaries and by later observers, who feel and appreciate them in a quite different way. (For instance, everything usually associated with “religion” had a meaning for men in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries entirely different from its meaning for men in the twentieth century.) What is really important is that *the people of those times* held these values to be vital and nevertheless menaced. What importance such values would have for their descendants is quite another question.

Naturally, not everyone in a society will feel that certain values are being challenged, and the feeling that they are penetrates only gradually, with very different effects upon different groups. When it does happen, the manner of penetration is always unique because of the nature of the values themselves, the available means of communication, and what values the society in question holds most dear. The “rhythm” of life in every society has a certain momentum and adaptability, which takes generations in stride as well as changes in living conditions (here taken in the broadest possible sense). This makes it possible for the rhythm to adjust its pace accordingly. However, if the values in question

2) I have given up old attempts to explain the crisis of the late Middle Ages as a “crisis of feudalism”, and to consider the changeover to monetary forms of rent as a decisive and definitive cause. The patterns which led me to make this decision can be found in more detail in the article mentioned in n. 1.

really are the basics of the society, and the whole social system is crumbling, those who live in it feel as if life itself – as it was up to their time – is passing out of existence.

Those most aware of the loss or menace to values are usually the intellectuals. For most other people there is a vague feeling of unhappiness, that things aren't really going as they should, an awareness, or simply a feeling of uncertainty. What is common to all parts of the population, however, is that when the moment of crisis reaches its peak no one alive can remain a spectator or preserve his neutrality. Each and every one must take a stand; verbal declarations of neutrality are impossible. When a crisis situation reaches its climax, when it has, as it were, "ripened", the reaction to it always divides with due formality into two camps, depending greatly on how such things are seen in that epoch. (In such cases we should take great care to divorce the *manifestations* of controversy from their *substance*. To later ages it always seems that the controversies which caused such violent clashes between contemporaries were not substantial. The reason for this is that men of a later age find the opinions of *both* disputing parties distasteful, and are thus at a decided disadvantage in trying to feel the crisis as deeply as did contemporaries³.)

Such "crises" do not, of course, occur in a vacuum, and they need not be regarded as the result of some mysterious contagion. Quite the opposite: historical research can generally identify the factors leading to the crisis. But, for those who must live through it, there is the overall feeling that *everything* is in decline, and hence an effort must be made to restore the *whole*. In a given case, those factors which bring the crisis to fruition can be of many kinds (some of which will be discussed later). For a larger grasp of the matter, however, and really to see its significance, analysis is of value only insofar as those involved have felt themselves affected by such forces.

The feeling of crisis varies directly with the degree to which people feel their values menaced, and with the extent and importance of such values. Such a feeling can peak in complete despair and anarchy, manifested in the spheres of religion, politics, or the social structure. As the groups affected by these feelings become more numerous, the effects of crisis on the heart of a society become greater. And if the crisis appears to give direction and ideological emphasis to some one group, it can give rise to a revolutionary movement or produce a revolution.

It is because of this that the differences between the geographical and social segments of the population are so clear in periods of crisis. These differences are more pronounced in a revolutionary period than in a supposedly "normal" one, since they are, in the former, clearly evidenced by opposing actions and attitudes. Of course, the notion of "crisis" does not *necessarily* entail an actual revolution, or any clear and definite goal or "explosion" which *must* occur.

3) Karel Havlíček Borovský, in truly classic fashion, puts this ahistorical, noncomprehending attitude into an epigram: "Why did the Hussite troubles occur? They really wanted to know whether the divine body should be eaten with or without sauce."

Usually in such crisis situations, the return to the old and trusted values seems to people to be a rather simple matter. Because such values have proved themselves in the past, they easily give the impression that they are “good”, would “work” in any period, and that the sole error was their abandonment. Despite this, however, there is still the feeling among the people that it is necessary “to do something” about things, a feeling which usually results in a frenzied search for a symbol around which they can unite. Historically, such symbols are indeed different and take different forms, but they do have one common problem: they merely focus on a certain issue without providing any real solution to it.

I should like to make it clear here, in order to avoid misunderstanding when I link the Hussites with the crisis in society in the late Middle Ages, that I do not think that the Hussite movement resulted from any historical necessity, nor did the form in which it occurred. In my opinion, the real connection between the Hussites and the “crisis” is that the feeling of loss and of menace to values, linked with the instability of the situation, made it absolutely necessary for all those involved, in the most diverse parts of Europe, to make *some* decision. This decision took different forms, depending on each country and its conditions. It could lead as easily to efforts to restore the old system of values as to efforts to create a new one. Popular feelings of being threatened and the consequent decision to do something about it gave the Hussite movement a special impetus, a grass-roots foundation which lent importance to its actions. It was the intensity and shock of earlier feelings of insecurity which gave the movement its power. Only taken in this sense, not in a causal sequence, can it be said that the Hussite movement is directly connected with the larger crisis of the late Middle Ages.

But before proceeding further let us take a brief general look at the *spectrum of events which indicate a crisis in the late Middle Ages*. (It should be understood that the length of this article allows only limited reference to a group of events with which one would suppose historians generally to be familiar.) If we now ask ourselves what it meant for the people in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to feel a “crisis” of society, we must first note that values, particularly the feeling of security, have quite different structures in different historical periods. Not only is there no overall system of such values, but they change constantly as do the connections between them. Thus, the way in which a crisis of values was perceived by a man in the Middle Ages differs completely from what we would understand it to be.

Compared to the modern European, the medieval man was *always* menaced, and that embraces areas which we today would no longer include in our understanding of crisis. Famine, crop failure and armed conflict were almost daily dangers in the Middle Ages, and, given the low productivity of medieval farming and the continual disruption, these dangers were all too real during most of the period. The average age of the people was fairly low, the infant mortality rate very high. Men had to face these difficulties continually in daily life, and in general were not afraid of them. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away – in this particular sense, we could call the Middle Ages more fatalistic than later

ones. Catastrophes had to be of extraordinary magnitude before anyone thought of them as truly menacing or outside the normal course of miseries which, by God's decision, oppressed the men of this earth. If a famine grew intense, or an epidemic became the Black Death depopulating whole villages and families, men did feel a sense of catastrophe, the scourge of God or divine chastisement. Never, however, was this the same as crisis, abandonment or loss of security. Their reactions to such distressing situations were strong, vibrant, even exalted in some ways, but always *within* the confines of their given social structure. The terror which such events aroused in them found an outlet in the usual sacrificial lambs of society – the Jews, whom they accused of having poisoned the wells. Or they took to prayer and pious processions to appease the wrath of God. Of a somewhat different character were the processions of the flagellants, who exceeded the "limits" of contemporary society. Seeking to find a direct way to allay the wrath of God, without recourse to Church or clergy, they naturally found themselves in conflict with both Church and nobility.

The pillage and burning commonly resulting from military combat were nothing extraordinary for the Middle Ages. This was simply the way war was waged. Both enemies and friends lived by pillaging neighboring villages. But to those villagers who were reduced to total misery (as was the case in Bohemia), it was scant consolation to know that the military units which had just passed through were not the enemy but the soldiers of their own country. Combat had to attain an extraordinary intensity, as it did in France around the middle of the fourteenth century, before anyone considered it unusual, or before the peasants combined forces to save themselves or even thought such an unusual form of redress to be justified.

True crises, however, which affect the entire society, do not often arise solely from direct or immediate causes. Neither are they a reaction against a single event. Instead, they are usually directed against a whole chain of causes manifest in clearly defined moods, changes, problems, and the loss of certainty in the most varied domains. Furthermore, the question here covers not one but many sectors of life. The crises ripen, and in attaining their full effect become an overall tendency, a general impression, springing from experiences of life and from the most various dispositions and situations.

I would claim that the Middle Ages did not know the relative economic stability with which we moderns are familiar. This statement is surely justified, but needs some qualification in that the Middle Ages did indeed know periods of development and prosperity just as it knew periods of famine and depression. If a famine resulted from crop failure, bad times or military incursions, it was a misfortune which those with a stiff upper lip could handle, simply because the causes were obvious. It was different, however, if the peasant had a good harvest, and then suddenly found he could not sell it for a high enough price to meet his debts, or if the value of money continued to decrease, or if his lord decided that he could buy much less than in past years. Causes such as these were not at all clear, and so people began to think about them and to look for the guilty parties. It

is noteworthy how impassioned and expressive the voices of men in the latter half of the fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth century became when they were seeking answers to these questions. Some accused sovereigns and their financial directors of devaluing the money and thereby causing a general scarcity. Others suspected plots on the part of usurers who bought up goods, particularly wheat, to sell at higher prices in times of famine, just as they suspected merchants of getting together to rig prices on merchandise. A third group were up in arms against companies, accusing them of being enormous traps, endeavoring to fix prices and enrich themselves at the expense of others. There were as many guilty parties as one could wish, but no one knew anything precisely. Mutual suspicion grew, and the value of money continued to decline, deeply affecting the majority of the population, nobility as well as peasants.

In addition, a political and social crisis began to manifest itself. Obviously, we cannot in this regard judge the state of things in the late Middle Ages accurately, accustomed as we are to an ordered and functioning public administration. Even the periods of greatest "stability" in the Middle Ages were by our standards rife with anarchy, but it must be remembered that such a state of affairs was then considered to be clear, natural and perfectly in order. Attention was given only to deviation from the usual, which was interpreted as a menace to the organization of the kingdom. In this connection, we must remember the political impetus of a large number of cities throughout Europe, which turned against their sovereigns. Usually this resulted in alliances among the cities, the captivity or deposition of the king, or simply open resistance to him. Resistance to the king, inasmuch as it had fixed and precise forms and kept to certain rules, was then considered perfectly legal (some modern historians would even like to see therein the foundation of the juridical basis of medieval society). Revolt could occur if certain limits were passed, if what was considered the "basis of society" was challenged. Quite typically, then, the old question of the legality of assassinating tyrants came to the fore at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

"The basis of society" is a rather indefinite notion, and hardly clear to those who do not live in the society in question. For those who do, however, such a "basis" is so evident that it needs no more concrete definition. Such persons react almost allergically if the values of a society which has a set social structure and clear caste boundaries are challenged.

Compared to society in the nineteenth century, medieval society from the thirteenth century onward was fixed, though far from immobile. On the contrary, the fact that the limits of caste were fairly well set, together with a marked slowdown in social evolution, gave rise to a certain amount of social unrest, of gradually growing animosity. This most frequently took overt form in social tension, but sometimes grew into the hatred which erupted in the peasant disturbances and urban uprisings of the late Middle Ages.

Social and economic change did not, however, affect all segments of society in the same way. Perhaps the most menaced of all in regard to their social status were the lower aristocracy, and they were forced to take account of it simply because it posed a daily and im-

mediate challenge. A small part of this group managed to rise a little from a social and caste standpoint, primarily by means of service to the king. The majority, however, found the whole basis of their existence threatened. Their possessions were appropriated by more powerful lords or by cities, and sometimes even rich peasants represented a threat. Their sons no longer had much opportunity to make something of themselves, and the lower aristocracy itself became an object of mockery. All over Europe poets and writers made fun of the little aristocrat who had to do his own plowing with his little cattle, while still priding himself on his nobility. It was not by chance that this aristocracy formed the basis of the military companies which played such an important role in the history of Europe at the time⁴).

On the other hand, cities were now becoming powerful economic and military forces throughout the various countries of Europe, as well as the heart of its social structure. (Especially noteworthy in this regard is Flanders, which was in some ways the equal of the Empire. Also quite special and different was the situation of Italian cities, but that is another matter.) Politically, however, the cities remained of somewhat less importance. They retained their original social structure, which was quite different from the rest of society. Movement in society (remembering that such movement is absolutely impossible to compare with that of, say, the nineteenth century) was, relatively speaking, one of the most important issues in the medieval city. Cities were most often the scene of riots and disturbances, which everywhere seemed to be indications of social struggle. City life was dominated by tension between different groups in the population, by mutual suspicion and insecurity which often grew into open hatred. If one were to say that the stature of authority decreased in lay society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or that there was doubt about the justice and necessity of the existing organization of society, then it is in the cities, the greatest centers of population, primed to revolt and often in the process of revolt, that we find the unique developments which played an important part in the wars and disturbances of the late Middle Ages.

Of equal importance in some areas, however, we find another force at work, a force which had only begun to make itself felt in the Middle Ages, but would find full scope in modern times: national feeling. Antagonism toward and distrust of foreigners, expressed sometimes as simple distaste, are old phenomena. Even before the fourteenth century defensive reactions occurred, and in some areas, by the close of the Middle Ages, these cor-

4) Wherever I speak of "Europe" in this article, I am thinking specifically of the Catholic part of it, leaving out for the moment eastern and southern Italy. For many reasons the Italian situation in the Middle Ages was unique, and the criteria applicable to other countries apply there in only a *very* conditional way. Further, what is in question here, if we are to make use of this notion at all, is a set of very general limitations. In reality regions differ greatly among themselves, and in diverse countries even distant resemblances are not in the least like the cultural unity of modern times. There *are* some general characteristics of the Middle Ages, however, and to handle them I should like to make use of the incorrect term "European" in an effort to avoid getting bogged down and involved in useless repetition.

responded reasonably well to what we call nationalism. One need only think of the Anglo-Saxon reaction to the Norman conquest or the Provençal reaction to the crusades of northern France. Such movements, however, had relatively minor effects, and were not the source of any later national movements. The national movements of the late Middle Ages are rather different. Equally diverse, unequal in their force, expressions, and capabilities, they can scarcely be likened to contemporary national movements, but they still constitute the source of the ground swell which would continue down to modern times. It is enough to remember the cultural developments in Italy or the vitality of the movements in France and Bohemia in the fifteenth century.

These factors were, of course, never equal in effect in every country in Europe, nor in every segment of society; in some they had hardly any effect. But something had indeed happened to the Church, and the reverberations were felt throughout all of Catholic Europe, though with different power and intensity. But *no part* of Europe escaped the shock of the so-called Papal Schism in 1378.

In order fully to understand this event, it is necessary once more to recall the differences between the consciousness of medieval man and that of man in the twentieth century. There is a profound difference, which the notion of "religion" almost conceals rather than clarifies. Medieval man was continually threatened by the cares of this world, by famine, disease, and war, but he was also threatened in the realm of ideas by demons, the devil himself, and snares of every kind. His temporal life was menaced by bodily ills and his eternal life by the powers of darkness, whether in the shape of the devil familiar to Catholic theology, or in one of the forms surviving from pagan times so prevalent among the country folk. The sacraments of the Church constituted a bulwark and a guarantee against such evils. This was no abstract Church symbolized by clergy in union with the Pope. Such a Church was often the target of criticism even more virulent than some expressed in modern times. The Church did not constitute a secure refuge on the basis of its faith and doctrine, but because of the security guaranteed by its sacraments. Everyone had need of the latter, even an obstinate usurer, a highwayman or a criminal fearful of dying without the last rites, who therefore hesitated to cut himself off from the Church.

Everyone, including men today, recognizes the need for security in some form. Feelings of insecurity arise when a threat impinges upon several different spheres of life, or upon the center of one's emotional life. But in the Middle Ages the center of life consisted of the sacraments of the Church, the sign of the Cross with its power to chase demons away. The sacraments, the cult of the saints, and many other rites were transformed in the minds of the people into magical means of protection. Preachers tried unceasingly to alter this notion, which they considered an "abuse", but they had little success in changing the popular conception of the Church. Popular baroque piety, in this regard, is quite different from that of the medieval period.

Obviously, the intellectuals for whom theology was of primary, although not always exclusive, interest, held a different view. In the intellectual centers of Europe at the close of the

Middle Ages a gradual emancipation had already begun. It did not take the form of a denial of the Church (this particular phenomenon found its traditional expression only among heretics, who generally in the Middle Ages were even more isolated from things than were the Jews, and often even more persecuted). Instead, from the twelfth century onward, other systems of values began to arise outside the Church (beginning with the introduction of Aristotelianism), setting forth the values of antiquity – ever old and ever new – to which men could direct some of their needs for security and sustenance.

However, this was a help only to the “eminent” intellectuals. For the majority of the people, the Church itself continued to be the powerful administrator of the sacraments and the ultimate guide; it could guarantee a death safe from an infernal host of demons, or, at least, it could fend off the probability of eternal damnation. If faith, as the need for security, is so well established, scarcely any attack in this area will be seen as particularly fatal or even as having extensive consequences. I certainly do not believe it accidental that large numbers of people were greatly alarmed to hear that the sacraments were being misused or perhaps worthless, that the Church was corrupt, that it was not the true Church of Christ, or that the sacraments were vitiated.

The Schism was the external manifestation of internal stress, and shook the Church to its foundations. All the Catholic countries were touched by the Schism as well as by its practical consequences, but not all of them reacted in the same way. The situation was influenced by a number of things – the degree to which eminent intellectuals dedicated themselves to the Church and a great many other factors – all of which united in a single great current capable of giving varied impetus, intensity, points of view and policies to the most diverse movements.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw many movements which, using rather loose terminology, we could call riots, rebellions, uprisings, or revolutionary movements. We cannot enumerate every type of movement involved, nor is it necessary, since a great deal of attention has lately been paid to them and they are fairly well known. Therefore I should like to confine myself to a short sketch of the basic types.

One type was the urban mutiny, in which the inhabitants of a city gave substance to their economic or political demands within the city by the use of force. Another was the revolt of the country people, brought on by suffering and misery considerably above their usual level of tolerance. More often, however, and clearly distinguishable from the purely urban or rural cases (e.g. the French *Jacquerie* or *Wat Tyler's* uprising), these two types of revolutionary movement mingled somewhat confusedly, the better to serve the interests and progress of both sides. I am not ready to discuss in full a “typology” of late medieval uprisings; that would require a separate article. I merely wish to call attention to the fact that, while rancor and social discontent gave rise to different effects, these effects united to prove that they all sprang from discontent and irritation.

The Hussite movement belonged to quite another type, which will be discussed in the latter part of this essay. Of a somewhat similar nature, though with individual differences,

are those events in France which we associate with the name of Joan of Arc. The distinguishing feature of these movements is that they exhibit what we moderns would call "ideological" characteristics. Both were directed not only toward providing a remedy for a given situation, i.e. a short-term solution, but also at indicating guidelines specifically tailored for the particular epoch. Obviously the two movements are very different. One need only recall the stern letter Joan wrote against the Hussites to realize what an abyss this French fighter for the rights of legitimate royalty believed to exist between herself and the mutinous Czech heretics. Actually, the two movements are not the same; they only exhibit certain analogies. One cannot ignore the fact that a certain "national movement" was taking shape in each of them (more so in Bohemia than in France), in which not only partial and immediate solutions were at stake, but also general policies.

Because of this aspect, these two movements were as different from the riots and revolts preceding them as were the later developments which we normally associate with the beginning of the modern era. As for the earlier revolts, they were generally isolated events, which never achieved any clear concept of their purpose, and usually remained local. The uprising of 1381 is an example. Cases of this sort achieved neither the creation of a unifying symbol nor even the distillation of any special doctrine. There is, however, one other parallel with the Hussites which is a bit more complex: the movement of "heretics" in southern France in the first half of the thirteenth century, which spread resistance far beyond the local level, and involved a definite doctrine. I should like, however, to leave the discussion of this for another occasion.

The reform movements of the fourteenth century, the late Middle Ages, are distinguished by the fact that they usually had clearly defined limits within a given country, and did not expand to embrace the whole Christian world. Much later they were to give birth to a new era, at least in the spiritual domain. Nevertheless, the effects of the two great earlier national movements (the Hussites being the more important) were particularly striking because they were of a *new* type. This novelty lay not only in their ability to encompass an entire country, but also in the fact that they had achieved an adequate organizational form. Above all, they did not pass into oblivion without having shown their true colors for a considerable length of time, which had not previously been the case. It is for this reason that I consider the Hussites to represent the first phase of the medieval crisis, serving as both a transition and a catalyst throughout the length and breadth of the Empire.

Because of its well-knit character, extent, and the amount of attention it provoked, the Hussite movement was subjected to analysis even by its contemporaries. They were well aware of the necessity to explain its origins. Indeed, the commentaries and explanations with which historians continue to describe this period were, with appropriate differences, actually formulated at the time. For those partial to the Protestant Reformation, the Hussite movement was substantially the product of Biblicism or a new revelation of divine truth. Insofar as the people were acquainted with sacred Scripture, they could see that the

Church had moved far from the ideals and prescriptions of Christ, and they demanded reform in both the head of the Church and its members. It was enough for enthusiastic preachers to sow the word of God; the seed would then take root of itself, since the seed was good, and the truth of God could not be stifled.

Catholic pamphleteers had a somewhat different feeling about the origins of the Hussite movement (though one particular group of theologians maintained their own special point of view). As set forth in the teaching of the Church fathers, Satan had threatened the Church from the beginning, and had chosen to oppose it with the most powerful of weapons, the very seed of schism – heresy. Thus the Church will always be menaced by heresy (a necessary evil, but one which must be ceaselessly opposed), by deviations from the true faith fathered by the devil himself. The most recent spawn of the devil were Wyclif and Huss, his disciple. Seen in this way, the Hussite movement was not a renaissance at all, but a dangerous contagion which must be snuffed out. Furthermore, at this time a certain connection between medieval religious and national motifs had begun to appear. The Catholics suspected every Czech of being a heretic, no matter how passionately Czech Catholics defended themselves against such a suspicion. For the majority of Hussites, the Czechs had become the chosen people, successor to the chosen people of the Old Testament, Israel, heralds and protectors of truth, warriors of God.

Modern historiography accepted this notion quite literally for a long time, with differences only in accent. Some investigators concentrated on the religious aspects of the problem, others on the national, and the interpretation naturally varied according to the religious and national allegiance of the historian. Still, some form, of the old scheme managed to shine through, and even to dominate the historiography of the period until today. The Hussite movement was taken to be both a national and a religious phenomenon, and this was undoubtedly true.

But this is not the heart of the matter. The real problem for the modern observer is the fact that a religious reform movement, a theological doctrine, could bring about such a tremendous and explosive effect in Bohemia. Contemporaries, of course, did not see this as a problem at all. Catholics thought it the work of a band of heretics, or, going even further, of the Prince of Darkness himself. The Hussites, on the other hand, thought of it as the victory of truth, the word of God and evangelical teaching. We cannot know, of course, the ultimate reasons for the occurrence of this movement at this time and in Bohemia. An observer with confessional commitments can adopt the confessional answer, and that is why modern historiography has chosen to replace the confessional point of view with the more general category of the “religious”. In the eyes of modern historians, the people of the Middle Ages were truly “believers”, and “religious questions” were of immeasurable importance. They were able to become excited about them and to decide them in a manner no longer comprehensible to us. This is not really an answer, however; such a general formula, even in modified form, is valid neither for Bohemia nor for the fifteenth century in general.

On the contrary, it is precisely here that the puzzle comes home to us. The medieval sources of information in Bohemia, and indeed in all of Catholic Europe, agree that the rural population, the very heart of the future Hussite movement, was, by our standards, more or less *indifferent* to religion. True, it was a believing population – there were no “atheists” – but their faith was a bizarre mixture of common and Catholic notions with venerable “superstitions”, and most of their interest was centered on rites guaranteeing some sort of protection. Ideas, dogma, and doctrine, with very few and very diverse exceptions, were quite out of their realm. The preachers’ handbooks, the official protocols, sermons, and formal histories present a remarkably unified picture: the lay people, particularly those of the countryside, were not at all interested in dogmatic theses, and were acquainted only with the most fundamental “truths” of the faith. Furthermore, the majority demonstrated very little interest or concern for most ecclesiastical regulations. Then, suddenly, these same masses were gripped by substantive dogmatic questions, and abandoned those rites which, despite the work of their preachers, had been the real heart of their religion.

From this point of view the Hussite movement was not a unique event, though it did have unusual extent and importance. Similar situations, in which the people were apathetic until they suddenly burst into frenzied activity, can be found from time to time in other periods. Examples could be cited from the era of the people’s crusades, which began in areas where dogma had previously been of little concern, and suddenly spread like wildfire. There is the first crusade, the children’s crusade, and the shepherds’ movement, in which shepherds who had previously been content to tend their flocks suddenly organized a crusade to the Holy Land to liberate their king (St. Louis), held prisoner by the Saracens. Incidents such as this, in previous centuries manifested only on the periphery of society⁵⁾, became in the Hussite movement a central and all-important phenomenon.

This is the heart of the problem: why, suddenly, did a movement like this become a national movement in Bohemia? And why did Huss and his doctrine enjoy a renown greater than that of Wyclif, his precursor and source, who was definitely more original and more important in many ways?

Historians who approach this question by considering the nature of the particular society have tried to meet the problem head-on. We may characterize their version as sociological. Without denying the importance of the national movement involved, these historians have tried to determine exactly why reform doctrine had such a strong impact on Bohemia in the fifteenth century. If they do not wish to settle for an explanation adducing “the exalted and ardent Czech soul”, they are forced to turn to the economic, social, and

5) I am obviously dealing here with something that is worth considering not only in regard to the Middle Ages. Similar mass movements have also occurred in recent times. I have tried to set forth some general ideas about the connection of these events in an article entitled “La Crise actuelle de notre conscience historique”, *Československý časopis historický* 16 (1968), 485–504.

political situation in the country at the beginning of the fifteenth century, when all sorts of small factors *could* have given substance and strength to the Hussite movement. Eventually they find themselves forced to consider all these material aspects of the movement, none of which can properly be called a passionate “outburst” or “explosion”.

In the flurry of excitement provoked by the new sociological analysis, and in reaction against traditional explanations, accounts such as these were often given a lofty status, and the influence of the so-called religious causes assigned a secondary role. Gradually, however, it has become clear that analysis of social factors cannot give a true, independent, and adequate explanation of the Hussite phenomenon. Undoubtedly, a large number of such ordinary facts made the movement potentially a national one. Furthermore, it was no accident that people chanted in the streets of Prague, as early as the time of Master John, that the *Germans* were going to march on Bethlehem. Here the self-consciousness of the national reform movement is manifest. No matter how carefully we examine all these factors, however, it is clear that none of them can be the *primum movens*.

It is just as necessary, therefore, to search for causes in the spiritual life of the period in question as it is to examine everyday events in its society. Furthermore, we must endeavor to understand how the people of the time construed their situation, what motivated them to oppose the two greatest authorities of the world, the Pope and the king of Rome. It seems to me that one possible route to an answer to this question is the definition we have already given of crisis in the Middle Ages – that collection of events and causes creating a situation which demanded a solution and forced the people to act.

Undoubtedly the factors we have discussed in relation to medieval economics did have a strong and deleterious influence in Bohemia, especially since the economic structure was such that change affected it tremendously. The so-called agrarian crisis, i.e. the stagnation of prices for wheat, had an enormous effect on Czech agriculture, directed as it was toward the cultivation of grain crops. No city connected with Prague, the greatest city of central Europe, had an organized production of manufactured goods even at the end of the Middle Ages, nor, indeed, were there any others situated on the important commercial routes. The stagnant Czech balance of trade, compensated for occasionally by the exportation of native silver, gradually began to crush the rural population, the local aristocracy, and the poor of the cities. It is no wonder that there were so many anguished cries and moving laments about the cost of living, the depreciation and debasement of money, although the financial situation in Prague remained stable and prosperous. Despite the wealth of the Czech mines, the king, the archbishop, and the aristocracy were forced to use the most primitive means of acquiring silver during these troubled times; often they had to pledge property and revenues of all sorts to obtain precious metals. The situation in Prague grew worse because of the dangers of travel, which often tended to paralyze commerce, and the city was menaced by the impoverishment of great segments of the population, a situation not at all improved by the so-called eternal revenues accruing to Church institutions.

None of the foregoing, however, would justify the claim that these facts alone had created a "revolutionary situation" which forced the poor into an uprising against the more powerful elements of society. (Actually, no one has ever said this; it is merely a polemical tool.) The telltale signs of "crisis" in the economic and social spheres are only to be seen over long stretches of time; they do not suffice as direct and immediate explanations of events. Instead, such signs explain how a particular difficulty in economic and social areas can have a genuinely intense effect and can make the people far more sensitive to change than they would otherwise be. Conditions which under different circumstances would not be noticed can, in the course of extraordinary events, cause an excitement, an increment of rancor, hatred and animosity that may suddenly and furiously explode.

The other most important result of the Hussite movement was its great impact on the rural population and the lower aristocracy, a segment of the population fairly important on the military scene in Bohemia, although not, until this time, on the political. It is well known, and I have already mentioned it, what sorts of tension this situation created throughout all Europe during this period. In Bohemia, a small and enclosed country, this particular tension erupted in an especially fierce manner at a time when the military potential could not be focused and utilized (as it was in England). Even so, some of the lower aristocracy were able to better themselves socially and politically, although the position of the majority of this group obviously worsened.

The lower aristocracy, however, were not alone in facing a crisis; the power structure in the kingdom was also having a prolonged crisis. As was usually the case in the medieval world, the balance of power in society was basically determined by the relationship between the king and the aristocracy (though later there would be in some cases a third force, the cities). The equilibrium thus established was frail, at the mercy of many forces and changes in circumstances. After the thirteenth century, rulers in the most developed regions of Europe began to gather up those threads of power which had persisted during the reigns of weak kings, and even during periods when there had been practically no rule. In Bohemia we perhaps find such efforts on the part of Břemysl Otokar II, although he failed in the end because of resistance by a higher aristocracy unwilling to renounce any of its privileges. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, the higher aristocracy almost completely dominated the scene, but Charles IV forced them to retrench a bit. His reign, nevertheless, because of its internal structure, was a re-creation of the old type of rule. Charles set up no actual administrative offices (in Bohemia there was not even a financial office, which in the west was often the beginning of a small administration), no institutions which governed the country and gave assurance of some sort of continuity. The king himself reigned, an authentic sovereign, and thus the Czech pattern of governmental organization was determined by the fact that its most stable element, that with the greatest duration and tradition, became those regional institutions which expressly promoted aristocratic rights.

In a kingdom so organized, if the sovereign is either incapable or uninterested in the exercise of power, disorders of unusual magnitude are bound to occur. Václav IV (Wenceslaus IV) ceded his power for all practical purposes to his council; in the council, as was the custom at most royal courts, the lower aristocracy, the educated clergy, and the bourgeoisie assumed power – the nucleus of a future bureaucracy. This manner of governing – reasonable where the institutions to which power was entrusted were stable – could lead to nothing but disorder in a situation like that in Bohemia. Charles IV was able to reduce the power of the higher aristocracy slightly and for a short time. But he was completely unable to break its supremacy, or to stabilize royal authority in any form other than the Person of the sovereign.

During the reign of Václav (Wenceslaus), disorders erupted which had long been brewing in the intrigues and interference in the affairs of the kingdom by Václav's brothers and his parents. It is well known that these disorders culminated, after the stage was set by small clashes throughout the country, in the captivity of Václav (in 1394 and in 1402). These two periods of captivity indicated the weakness of the royal power, but they also demonstrated that the aristocracy itself was not in full control. For in both instances Václav was able to reassume power, albeit without actually governing except for some sporadic interference in particular affairs. The late Middle Ages had no knowledge of the kind of organized power or administrative apparatus familiar to us. At the time in question, however, anarchy in Bohemia reached a level high even for the Middle Ages, and surpassed only by conditions in the same period in France⁶.

The king did not rule in Bohemia; his council wished to, but lacked the power. The sphere of influence of the higher aristocracy continued to spread, as did the power of the cities; moreover, the lower aristocracy and the people of the countryside, the largest part of the population, began to reassume importance. To these people the country seemed to be without rule, and they began to doubt the authority of king and crown. The tendency to renounce the king altogether in Bohemia clearly indicates just how acute the crisis of royal authority had become; indeed by the end of the fourteenth century it was almost impossible to govern in the ancient manner. The new governmental organization was too tentative and uncertain to gain real administrative control, and the structure of power in the whole country was threatened. This crisis of "temporal power", however, was slight in comparison with the situation of the Church, the primary spiritual authority. Contemporary conceptions of temporal power and ecclesiastical power were entirely different. The curial theory of the two swords managed occasionally to conceal the fact that the Middle Ages was quite capable of justifying and measuring power of both kinds.

6) The French kingdom, unlike Bohemia, not only created continuously functioning institutions, but also raised the kingdom itself to a sort of semisacralized state of which the Renaissance was later to make use. (One need only think of the importance of the royal anointing and crowning of Charles VII at Rheims in 1429.)

I have already drawn attention to the central position of the Church in the life of medieval men, and it is quite clear that both the faith and the piety of these men were markedly different from those of men in ecclesiastical orders in the baroque age. (The later period is often projected backward toward the Middle Ages. But this is not to deny that the so-called Reformation and Counter-Reformation were important turning-points in popular piety.) The Middle Ages was primarily concerned with the guarantee of security the Church offered to believers, and only secondarily with doctrine. Even in the fourteenth century the Church remained the exclusive administrator of the sacraments, the body to which one could have recourse in the moment of supreme danger, when face to face with death. The sign of the cross dispelled demons, and the power of the devil stopped abruptly at the doors of holy places. This belief was so general, and indeed so dominant, that all resistance to the Church was heresy – once men had become at all ideologically conscious. Resistance could never take the form of paganism, atheism, or Judaism, though one could at times make choices leading to parallel phenomena. No resistance of any kind whatever could retain substantially the same premises as Catholicism; it was of necessity heterodox.

If the security guaranteed by the sacraments was the dominant idea in the minds of the common people, a security often of a purely magical sort, the doctrine of the Church was the matter of greatest concern to Bohemian theologians. Therefore we might say that the reform tendencies of the Church were not clearly based on either human or economic and social principles. To be sure these concerns were strongly manifested from time to time in the tracts or the preaching of some reformers, not so vibrantly in those of others. Never, however, were such ideas at the heart of their doctrines or their efforts. Unshaken and certain, the Church of Christ always appeared at the core of their doctrines, simply because the reformers still regarded it as the true foundation and center of everything.

The reform movement was thus based on the Augustinian tradition, the “unsubdued heritage” of medieval theology⁷⁾ in which, in contrast to the policy of the contemporary Church, no decision could be made as to being the church of the militant or the church of the elect. The problems of the Church necessarily came to the fore in the fourteenth century, including its difficulties in regard to temporal power and the reform movement. These were the problems of the Czech reformation as well, and if it is true that Huss displayed more social consciousness than his predecessor Wyclif, his main effort was still not to reform his society, but to reform his Church. Social ideas and compassion for the poor were secondary in his program, and this particular segment of society did not occupy the center of his thought. The center was, as it had been for Wyclif, the Church. In this sphere the battle was joined, rather than in that of social doctrine, morality (which was employed as a critique of clerical behavior), or nationalist thinking.

The crisis of the Church necessarily had powerful and even deadly effects in the spiritual realm, because Czech culture at that time had neither created other values and assur-

7) We could trace the continuation of this controversy even into modern times, most clearly in Jansenism.

ances outside the so-called religious sphere, nor begun to search for them. Even the earliest efforts of the new movement were blatantly religious, despite its somewhat humanistic underpinnings. This is clear if we compare the movement in Czechoslovakia with the contemporary situation in Italy and in France. Czech intellectual life still centered on religion, and the most intellectual segment of the population, the clerics who were the predecessors of modern intellectuals, had not discovered those values which their contemporaries in more developed regions had found in the arts or in the rediscovered ancient sciences. Czech intellectual life continued its monolithic way, and the shattering of its foundations was bound to produce violent effects.

The whole Czech Church was also a bit behind the times in comparison with others, and not only in the realm of ideas. It did not become involved in ecclesiastical upheaval, with all its financial, personal, and cultural consequences, until the time of Charles IV, but at that point the process of change agitated the entire Czech Church. The result was that large numbers of clergy and laity became involved in the question of the traffic in indulgences and the problem of simony. In the ecclesiastical centers of Europe this latter practice had been the target of satire for centuries, but remained a phenomenon easier to write about than to remedy. Bohemia, however, had not been conditioned to these practices; their arrival on the scene seems to have been relatively swift and sudden. All these things fit together. Security was nowhere to be found, or, at least, those certainties which man needed in order to live. The currents of discontent, fear, apprehension and excitement began to unite, and the temperature – one might even say the fever – at the heart of society rose to the point of explosion, an explosion of apparently unjustified proportions. The Hussite movement did not result from the death of its leader John Huss, the hero of its first stage. The real sign of the rebellion (although the people of Prague did not at first recognize it) came when the aldermen of the new city were thrown out of the windows of the town hall in 1419. It was a planned action, perhaps, but still anonymous, senseless, useless and only distantly connected with the reform movement. One basic facet of the revolutionary movement took shape at this time as an expression of security and certainty: the demand for the chalice. It fitted perfectly the pattern of what a new symbol should be. It guaranteed full security: only the Hussites, considered communally, were the real members of the Church. But the weakness of this approach was evident from the beginning: the symbol also contained latent sources of conflict. In some cases it even became apparent that it was quite meaningless.

The crisis of the late Middle Ages was clear and well developed in Bohemia, and as a result the Hussite movement spread over the whole country. It became, at least initially, a national movement. Its organizers came from the ranks of the priests, both those impoverished by contemporary developments and those with good livings. Most of them were good propagandists, since they were well disposed toward the new doctrine. Their activity was fruitful largely because social tensions and hatreds, economic difficulties, loss of faith, and the current organization of both society and Church transformed a sense of being

menaced into a call to action. Those who spread the Hussite message were themselves the product of the crisis, and they carried on their work in the midst of a society in crisis.

The Hussite movement swept the country like a grass fire, but it soon became apparent that it really had no solution to offer and would have no results. The doctrine of the reformers, as I have already mentioned, was centered on the Church in its original form, and served only to glorify the popular notion that the old times were the best. The real popular movement had a certain chiliastic nature, resurrecting the concept of an original (mythical) state of pure humanity. From the standpoint of ideology the ideas of the new society were not clear, and perhaps could not possibly become so. The whole movement, therefore, ended in a fruitless heroic outburst. Then it began to decay internally, held together only by the symbol it had created, unfortunately as formal a thing as other symbols, and by the necessity for solidarity against its enemies. With the neutralization of these enemies the imposed unity of the movement came to an end.

Thus the Hussite movement could not be the source of later developments, and the Reformation had no direct connection with it. It is true that the Hussites instilled fear into the Church, and set in motion the search for heretics. It did force the Church to some extent to deal with "heretics" on an official basis for the first time, and thereby to admit them, at least formally, to a certain standing. But this was not much of an advance. The Hussite movement was not the only possible response to the contemporary situation. It was in no sense the final result of the whole crisis. Later developments were to show that the basic approach of the Hussites, concentrating on the traditional doctrine of the Church and on renewal of the conservative organization of society by returning to idealized ancient forms, could not answer the thorny problems raised by the crisis. On the contrary, those efforts which were to open new paths for doctrine and society abandoned the ancients' point of view and sought a new basis on which to build. But we cannot blame the Hussites for this; the possibilities open to reformers in the sixteenth century were not open to them. Only later was the new solution to take shape.

On the intellectual scene, there was so-called humanism, building its system of values on man and nature, while in the religious realm the center of gravity moved from the Church to the concept of faith. "The religious life" of the laity became just as individualized in Catholicism, but the Protestants were no more able to resolve the problems of ecclesiastical and social organization. It is not my place to take account of these developments, but I should mention that they were the means by which the intellectual crisis of the late Middle Ages was overcome and a new system built upon its ruins. Socially, the sixteenth century saw the formation of new kinds of states, able to handle the problems that had toppled medieval sovereigns. The new style of society, however, did not achieve its definitive form at that time, but in later epochs.

If, as I see it, the actual crisis of late medieval society ends here – manifested as it was in the loss of traditional values and certainties in the social and cultural realms as well as in the search for new ones – only the new formation of value-systems in the sixteenth cen-

ture allowed the Hussite movement to be recognized as a turning-point of the greatest importance. This was not only because of its strength, clarity, and duration, but also because it really did bring the medieval period to a close, and demonstrated that the new problems were not to be solved by old methods. The attempt to form a new society on a primitive Christian model, to set the Church back by several centuries, could hardly meet with success. The new era demanded a new solution. Thus, perhaps, the most profound result of the movement was the reaction of Petr Chelčický, who saw with his own eyes the downfall of everything he had worked for, yet remained deeply convinced of the necessity of reforming the Church outside the sphere of Catholicism. Like the Union of Brethren (the *Unitas fratrum*) which followed in his footsteps, he had only an individual answer, and one different from that of the official [and more moderate Hussite sect of the] Calixtines, whose ideas were already passé in the sixteenth century. One cannot, unfortunately, find until then any better individual response than Chelčický's.

It seems to me that one cannot get a true picture of the Hussite movement unless it is closely bound to the crisis we have been discussing. It did not resolve that crisis, but because of its clearly defined character and the intense emotions it generated, the movement gives us perhaps the most suggestive picture of the depth and extent of the crisis of the so-called late Middle Ages.