

BOOK REVIEW

## Mazalová, Lucie. *Eschatology in the Work of Jan Hus*

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A common trope involving medieval preaching is the employment of “pulpit terrorism” to terrify listeners to repentance with threats of judgment, the Devil, or the Antichrist marauding across the world with the impending second coming. Although those themes are certainly common, medieval sermons can also contain significant nuance in their understanding of the end of the world. Eschatology, the technical and anachronistic (to the Middle Ages) term for thought concerning the end times or the events leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ, is common throughout the corpus of medieval homiletics as the broad term covers a range of topics from the climactic terror of Antichrist’s machinations to modest concerns about funeral arrangements. Lucie Mazalová provides us with a narrow and focused analysis of a complex and broad idea. In this monograph, she uses academic texts, sermons, and letters of the prolific 15th-century preacher and scholar Jan Hus to explore his consideration and use of the end times during the early years of the Bohemian reform movement. She contextualises Hus’s ideas through comparisons with a wide number of comparisons of fellow preachers in Prague and the writings of John Wyclif (16). To appreciate the comparisons requires a significant amount of context and definition due to the relatively technical and specific nature of the topic, and Mazalová provides enough to guide the reader who is either new to eschatology or the Bohemian Reformation to find their footing. The monograph then follows a systematic analysis of a sampling of Hus’s text. Mazalová states clearly that she does not attempt to include every one of Hus’s surviving texts in this examination and limits herself to a few key examples that exemplify different areas of Hus’s corpus.

One of the book’s most significant points is Mazalová’s work to differentiate Hus’s eschatology in a way when compared to the more radical interpretations of his rough contemporaries that both predate and follow Hus’s career. In particular, Hus’s understanding of antichrist is significantly different from the earlier concerns of his predecessors Milič of Kroměříž or Matěj Jánov both of whom busied themselves with the imminent threat of a present and singular supreme Antichrist, currently active in the Roman Church. Milič’s concern grew to the point that he journeyed to Rome with the purpose of convincing the Papacy to take action against this threat (157). Mazalová points out how Hus’s interpretation differed significantly. Hus viewed the actions of antichrist (emphasis small *a*) as a broader issue throughout the church, released through the sinful actions of the clergy throughout Christendom and, most pressing to Hus, locally in Bohemia. Hus does not draw attention to a singular Antichrist, a level of nuance that sadly is lost in Hus’s successors. Hus’s betrayal and execution at the Council of Constance in 1415 drew attention to the emperor Sigismund as the supreme Antichrist for his complicit relationship to Hus’s execution (162). Pointing out how Hus was distinct from many of his contemporaries also helps separate to him also the violent rhetoric of the succeeding Hussite Wars and serves as a valuable reminder that we should avoid overarching generalisations that obscure the source material’s nuance.

While an excellent work, a few minor issues limit the audience of this monograph. First, sources originally written in Czech are translated to English, but a sizable portion of the book draws from Hus’s Latin writings, of which none are translated. For scholars adept at reading and translating Latin on the fly, perhaps this is not a major impediment, but for many other potential readers this

greatly reduces the value of the book. Mazalová's adept analysis requires the readers to do their own translation, as she provides little in context clues to assist a reader and her assertions are ungrounded if the Latin remains enigmatic to the reader. Another issue with the text is the limited number of Hus's sources Mazalová uses. She focuses on major primary texts and letters, but only scratches the surface of Hus's sermon collections and other writings. The historiography of European scholars concerns on the topic is fairly extensive but lacks the kind of exhaustive source coverage that one might want to make definitive statements. In this respect, this monograph still reflects its origins as a dissertation, but the original Czech version of this book published in 2015 by Muni Press includes nearly 100 further pages with several further chapters examining other sources. Why these cuts were made from the English version are not addressed, but room remains for a more thorough examination of Hus's eschatology.

Overall, this work marks a significant contribution to the rapidly expanding corpus of refined and targeted scholarship on Jan Hus. Mazalová's work should be required reading for scholars of late medieval religion and not just specialists on Bohemia.