4 Kingdom of Heretics, or, Against All

On July 6, 1415, the Council of Constance paused in its deliberations while sentence was carried out on a condemned heretic, Master Jan Hus of Bohemia. The pyre that ended Hus's life ignited a flame that would spread through the Bohemian crownlands and transform the course of their history, remaining one of the most disputed themes in the Czechs' evaluation of their own past. Was it only one among many medieval heretical or reform movements, or was it something uniquely Czech? Was it primarily a religious protest against an overworldly church, with strong chiliastic overtones, or was it a social revolutionary movement proclaiming freedom of conscience? Was it the Czechs' greatest moment, or one of the darkest pages in their history?[1] Today's Czechs may not venerate the Hussite period the way the nineteenth-century nationalists did, but those nationalist images of the Hussites, expressed in Alois Jirásek's historical novel *Proti všem* (Against All), for example, remain part of the historical consciousness of the present.[2]

THE BOHEMIAN REFORM MOVEMENT

The reform movement in Bohemia developed from stimuli similar to those that resulted in heretical movements in the towns and

cities of Europe from the twelfth century onward. Some heretics may have joined the wave of colonists entering Bohemia, especially the Waldensians, followers of a merchant from Lyons named Waldo or Valdes. Charles IV established the inquisition in Prague, and heresy was vigorously pursued.[3] The *devotio moderna* (new devotion), emphasizing the significance of religious experience at the individual, inward level provided another influence. This trend found supporters at the Cistercian monastery of Zbraslav and the newly founded house of Augustinian canons at Roudnice (Raudnitz).

In contrast to this deepening of the individual Christian's religious experience, the church as an institution had become increasingly worldly. Church offices paid the salaries of Charles IV's officials, which led to abuses, neglect of religious duties, and the use of inadequate replacements for genuine pastoral work. In addition, the pope's fiscal demands, already significant during the "Babylonian captivity," were only doubled after the schism of 1378. Simony (the sale of church offices), the sale of indulgences, and constant demands for tithes or special contributions burdened both the ordinary faithful and the church as an institution in the Bohemian crownlands. Though wealthy in terms of land—it owned approximately one-third of all the land in the kingdom—the church sometimes found it hard to meet the demands of the curia.[4]

The Court, the University, and Reform Teaching

Charles IV supported the bishop's invitation to a reforming preacher, the Austrian Augustinian Konrad Waldhauser, to come to Prague in 1363. Waldhauser, who denounced simony and other failings, inspired a Czech reformer, Jan Milíč of Kroměříž, to give up his position in the king's chancellery to devote himself entirely to preaching. Matěj of Janov emphasized the importance of the Bible as the source of true Christian practice. Tomáš Štítný, a lesser noble from southern Moravia, devoted himself to explaining the basic elements of Christian faith in Czech. These reform preachers and writers found eager listeners among the citizens of Prague. In 1391 some of them founded the Bethlehem chapel, devoted to preaching in the vernacular and large enough to hold three thousand listeners. Through the Bethlehem chapel this reform tendency joined with another based at the Prague university.

The university's four nations, the Bohemian, Bavarian, Saxon, and

Polish, were divided by overlapping rivalries. The Bohemian nation's masters were mostly Czechs, while the three other nations were almost all Germans, yet each had one vote in deciding university matters. The nations also quarreled over the nature of general concepts. The "nominalists" (mostly the foreign masters) asserted that general concepts are merely names grouping similar specific phenomena; the "realists" (mostly the Czechs) insisted that general concepts, or "universals," did have genuine reality. Finally, the masters divided over the need for reform. The English Franciscan John Wyclif's works, especially his realism and the criticism of the church he based upon it, acted as a catalyst. The masters of the three foreign nations used their majority in 1403 to have the university condemn forty-five theses taken from Wyclif's texts as errors.[5]

When the university refused (again by a vote of the three foreign nations against the one Czech nation) to support Václav IV's call for a church council at Pisa, the conflict peaked. Václav IV hoped to use the council of Pisa to regain recognition of his claim to the Roman throne, so he issued a decree in 1409 that gave three votes to the domestic, Czech nation and one collective vote to the three foreign nations. The Decree of Kutná Hora transformed the university of Prague into a powerful reform center, but the foreign masters, bachelors, and students departed for other universities (especially the newly founded one in Leipzig) where they denounced their Czech rivals as heretics.

Master Jan Hus

Master Jan Hus, since 1402 preacher at the Bethlehem chapel, emerged as the leader of the Czech reformers. Through the Bethlehem chapel, the university masters' reform program spread among the laity, leading to a running conflict between Hus and the recently appointed archbishop of Prague. The archbishop banned preaching in "private" places (such as the Bethlehem chapel), sided with the Roman pope, Gregory XII, against the king, and burned Wyclif's works at his court. Hus responded by defending Wyclif and attacking book-burning, and appealed to the pope. The archbishop excommunicated Hus, but many of the higher nobility and even the king and queen defended the Bohemian kingdom and the reform party.

Nevertheless, Hus and the reformers parted company with Václav IV in 1412, when the king consented to the sale of indulgences in Prague

by representatives of the Council of Pisa's pope, John XXIII. Hus denounced the sale of indulgences as simony. In October 1412 the Pisan pope pronounced a renewed excommunication on Hus, and threatened to place Prague under interdict. An interdict would have meant no religious sacraments for the entire population of Prague, so Hus left the city, appealing to the judgment of Christ.

Already the reform movement had won noble supporters, including several highly placed figures, so Hus found refuge with noble friends in the south and southeast of Bohemia. There he wrote a tract against simony and his treatise *De ecclesia*, and preached his message among the common people. The nobility had asserted a right to defend the common good under both Přemyslids and Luxemburgs, and of course the prospect of taking over church lands attracted them. Many lords also genuinely accepted the precepts of Hus and other preachers as God's word. Lesser nobles also joined the reform movement. In Bohemian towns where the Czech-speaking element competed with the original, often German-speaking patriciate, the Hussite message (with its connection to the Czech vernacular) found ready hearers. In Moravian towns Hussite preaching evoked little echo, though it spread through parts of the countryside. The Hussite movement gained few supporters in the other lands of the Bohemian crown.

The Council of Pisa's failure to end the schism gave impetus to the conciliar movement, which asserted that the pope was not absolute ruler of the church but was subordinate to the whole body represented by the church in council.[6] As secular head of Christendom, Sigismund called for a council to meet at the imperial city of Constance in 1414. Sigismund wanted to resolve the schism, and also to calm the situation in the Bohemian crownlands, to which he was heir. Early in 1414, noblemen in Sigismund's service brought Hus an invitation to attend the council for a public hearing, promising him an imperial safe-conduct pass.

Hus accepted the invitation to attend the Council of Constance knowing the risks, but hoping that a hearing would vindicate him and Bohemia against the charge of heresy. Shortly after his arrival, however, he was imprisoned and examined (safe-conduct or no safe-conduct), and his public hearing resembled a show trial.[7] Stubbornly, Hus refused to recant errors that he had never taught, declaring that to go against his conscience, even at the behest of a church council, would be a mortal sin. An eyewitness account of his death on July 6, 1415, records Hus's final statement: "God is my witness that I have never taught nor

preached those things of which I have been falsely accused and which have been ascribed to me through false testimony, but the foremost aim of my preaching and all my other actions and writings has been only to preserve the people from sin. In the true Gospel that I have written, taught, and preached from the words and teachings of the holy doctors, I am willing to die gladly today."[8]

THE HUSSITE REVOLUTION

News of Hus's death provoked a powerful reaction among his friends and supporters in Bohemia. Members of the nobility sent a strongly worded protest letter to the council, sealed by 452 of their number, representing roughly one third of the 90 or so families of lords. Hus's noble supporters found allies among the masters at the Prague university, where Jakoubek of Stříbro (Mies), Hus's friend and student, took a leading role. Jakoubek introduced the requirement of regular, frequent Holy Communion in the forms of both bread and wine. Before his death Hus approved this development. The insistence on communion in both kinds (*sub utraque specie*) made the chalice the Hussite emblem and gave them one of their common designations, Utraquists. When the Council of Constance formally condemned giving the chalice to the laity, the Prague university replied with a decree asserting its orthodoxy in 1417.

The Hussite cause spread even prior to the Council of Constance among the lesser royal towns and also, thanks in part to Hus's sojourn in southern Bohemia, among the peasants in the countryside. Having suffered through the years of plague, economic decline, and moral crisis, many people were ready to act on God's command to reform the secularized church. Hussite noblemen began to staff the parish churches on their land with supporters of the chalice, and some even began to secularize other church properties. Hussite supporters called for the authority of the Bible and the example of the Christian life to be honored in practice. Thus even before the outbreak of the coming revolutionary events, the Hussites included representatives of all political estates and social levels, who generally pursued a common goal.

The Council of Constance ended its deliberations in 1418, having removed all three competing popes and elected their successor, Martin V. Only the scandalous state of affairs in the Bohemian crownlands re-

mained unresolved. Sigismund threatened his brother Václav with a crusade if he did not take decisive action against the Hussites, but the king only gave in partially. He restored all but three of Prague's churches to the Roman priests, and named several opponents of reform to the town council of Prague's New Town. In the countryside, too, the Hussites lost many churches to the Catholics. In an atmosphere of tension and apocalyptic expectation, Hussite priests held services outside, especially on hilltops, to which they gave biblical names (Tábor, Horeb). These services gathered the more radical elements in an expression of popular piety laced with expectation of the Last Judgment. At the summit called Tábor, Hussite radicals from all over Bohemia and Moravia gathered in July 1419.

On July 30, 1419, the electric atmosphere broke into thunder. A radical preacher in Prague's New Town, Jan Želivský, led an attack on the town hall, the mob threw the anti-Hussite town councillors out the window (the first Defenestration of Prague), and Hussites replaced them. The king accepted this change, but the events so affected him that on August 16, 1419, he died, according to the chronicler, "roaring like a lion."[9] With the attack on the New Town Hall and the king's death, the Hussite movement entered a revolutionary phase.

In Defense of the True Faith

For the next seventeen years, until the agreement between the Hussites and the Council of Basel, the Hussites in the Bohemian lands were formally at war with the rest of Western Christendom.[10] The anti-Hussite crusades were supported by the papal curia, Sigismund, and the conciliar movement. Internal conflicts, not only with those towns and nobles who remained loyal to Rome and Sigismund, but among the various Hussite tendencies, also marked this period. It was not long before several distinct groupings emerged among Hus's followers. The moderates included almost all the great Hussite noblemen, a part of the lower nobility, and some patricians of Prague's Old Town. This tendency considered Hus's prerevolutionary teachings sufficient, and when it became clear that the rest of Europe would not heed them, sought an agreement to allow an autonomous, Hussite church within the Roman Catholic communion.

Prague (except for the university masters and moderates among the Old Town burghers) occupied a place somewhere between the moder-

ates and the radicals. As capital city it enjoyed a certain prestige that it could hope to translate into influence. Continual quarreling between Old Town and New Town weakened its position, however, with the New Town burghers tending to more radical views, while Old Town generally followed Jakoubek of Stříbro and Jan Rokycana.

Hussite radicals, strong in certain towns and in the countryside, never formed a single stream, but shared a common aim of reorganizing life as quickly and thoroughly as possible to conform with the law of God. Already at the beginning of the revolution, three general branches of radicals emerged. In eastern Bohemia, they went by the name of Orebites, from the name they gave their place of assembly. Their religious teaching resembled Prague's, but politically they were less willing to compromise. Another powerful radical force was the Táborites, so called from the fortified camp they had built on a hilltop named after the biblical Mount Tábor. Originally, Tábor was founded as a community of brothers and sisters, where most property would be held in common, as the earliest Christians in the Bible did. Within a year of its establishment, however, Tábor was collecting contributions from the surrounding villages, and during the next year the most radical sectarians were forced to leave. Eventually Tábor developed into a military and artisan center, leading a group of southern and southwestern Bohemian cities in a powerful military league. Tábor alone created its own religious organization, electing Mikuláš of Pelhřimov (known as Biskupec) as elder. A final radical center in the northern Bohemian towns of Žatec (Saatz) and Louny (Laun) usually cooperated with the Táborites.

The fundamental Hussite program, accepted by all as a minimum, was worked out during meetings in May 1420 in Prague. Summarized into the four Articles of Prague, this program demanded: (1) complete freedom to preach the word of God (that is, as the Hussites understood it), (2) the granting of communion in both kinds to clergy and laity, (3) the renunciation of worldly property and secular power by the church, and (4) the punishment of mortal sins and other transgressions by the secular authority. The first three articles expressed the basic criticisms of the reform movement; the fourth was added at the insistence of the Táborites and other radicals.

With Václav's death in 1419, Sigismund, Charles IV's second surviving son, claimed the Czech throne. The moderate Old Town burghers and some Hussite lords opened negotiations with him in December 1419, but Sigismund refused to discuss anything before his coronation.

Meanwhile, most of the Moravian nobility swore their oath of loyalty to him as margrave. At the imperial diet in Breslau in March 1420 Sigismund also published the papal proclamation of a crusade against the Hussite heretics. The noble lords in Bohemia responded by denying Sigismund's claim to the throne, but a leading Hussite nobleman, Čeněk of Vartenberk, opened the gates of the Prague castle to Sigismund's soldiers in May 1420. Prague's Hussite-dominated towns appealed to the Táborite and Orebite radicals for assistance, and they responded by sending forces to the aid of the capital. Sigismund besieged the city, but could not dislodge the Hussites from the height of Vítkov (now Žižkov), overlooking Prague from the east. Táborite forces commanded by Jan Žižka of Trocnov turned back all attacks with the help of reinforcements from Prague. Žižka, a lesser nobleman from Southern Bohemia, nearly sixty and blind in one eye from years as a soldier-of-fortune, quickly became the most feared Hussite military leader.

The failure to close the blockade around Prague meant the collapse of the first Hussite crusade. Sigismund hurriedly had himself crowned in St. Vitus's cathedral, but shortly thereafter the crusading armies began to disperse. The citizens of Prague's two towns formed an alliance, created an elected joint council, and proceeded with far-reaching secularization of church property. Similar seizures of church estates were carried out in the Hussite countryside, and even in the Catholic areas church property ended up in secular hands, since Sigismund used it as collateral to gain desperately needed funds for his military operations.

The Hussite armies, fighting in the conviction that they were defending God's truth as well as their homeland, turned back successive crusades launched against them from the Empire. In 1421 an imperial army invaded Bohemia and besieged Žatec, but withdrew when reinforcements under the would-be king Sigismund failed to arrive. Sigismund's army occupied Kutná Hora, but the united Hussite armies under Žižka (now blind in both eyes) forced it to withdraw and defeated it utterly near Německý Brod (Deutsch Brod, today Havlíčkův Brod) in January 1422. After Žižka's death at Přibyslav in Moravia on October 11, 1424, his followers (now calling themselves Orphans) cooperated with Táborite forces to crush a Saxon invasion at Ustí nad Labem (Aussig) in June 1426.

By 1427, a Hussite bloc of Táborites, Orphans, and Praguers dominated the main lines of Czech politics. In each camp, the leading figure was a priest. Prokop Holý (the Bald), also known as Prokop the Great,

led the Táborites, while the Orphans' leader was another Prokop, called Malý (the Small) or Prokůpek. Jan Rokycana was the most influential figure in the Prague league, though he did not take a direct military role. Prokop Holý argued strongly that after years of defending their homeland, the Hussites should go on the offensive. First they had to meet another crusading army that besieged Stříbro (Mies) in western Bohemia, but ran away before offering resistance to a united Hussite army. By August 1427, the Hussites were ready to take the struggle to their opponents' territory. Already the connections to Moravia had facilitated Hussite invasions into northern Hungary (today's Slovakia). Other campaigns into Silesia, Upper and Lower Lusatia, and Austria were followed in December 1429 by a combined invasion through Meissen into Franconia by no fewer than five Hussite columns.

Although the Hussite armies carried out propaganda, economic considerations also drove this tactical change. By the later 1420s, the two main radical Hussite leagues, the Táborites and the Orphans, had established permanent field armies. The Bohemian economy could not supply such a large community (as many as 12,000 men), so the field armies had to live from the countryside or booty. Even before the emergence of the field armies, Hussite tactics had proved remarkably successful. In addition to the tricks of the brigand's trade, familiar to many Hussite captains, the major Hussite methods of warfare were creative adaptations to circumstances (such as the famous war wagons), mostly credited to Žižka. He guarded the movements of his infantry forces with columns of war wagons, which could form into wagon forts if threatened by the enemy. The Hussites also rapidly adopted the gunpowder weapons that were beginning to enter European military arsenals via the Turks.

Catholic Europe proclaimed yet one more anti-Hussite crusade in 1431. Two armies invaded the kingdom. The one coming from the west met up with the Hussites at Domažlice on August 14, 1431, and there the crusaders took to headlong flight supposedly just from hearing the strains of the Hussite war hymn, *Ktož sú boží bojovníci* (All ye warriors of God). So complete was their rout that Cardinal Cesarini, who organized the crusade for the pope, abandoned all his baggage, including his cardinal's hat and the pope's proclamation of the crusade.

Repeated crusading invasions usually created a united Hussite front, but otherwise the various parties frequently quarreled among each other, especially after a major victory removed the need for unity. A Hussite diet in June 1421 proclaimed the four articles of Prague a fundamental

law of the land, and declared Sigismund's coronation in Prague invalid. The diet also elected a commission made up of five great lords, seven members of the lesser nobility, and eight burghers of the Hussite towns to administer the kingdom. No agreement could be reached about the vacant throne. Some radical Táborites suggested the Hussites dispense with a king altogether. Žižka and the mainstream of the radicals joined with Prague and the eastern Bohemian Hussites in favoring a member of the Polish-Lithuanian Jagiellonian dynasty. Jakoubek of Stříbro alone dared to suggest selecting a worthy Hussite nobleman, arguing that only such a ruler could guarantee the Hussite achievements.

In Prague the defeat of the second crusade led to open conflict between conservative Utraquist burghers from Old Town and New Town radicals. Jan Želivský and his followers took over the city government and united the two towns under a dictatorship supported by the radicals. By February 1422 Želivský had lost the support of the other Hussite leagues, and the conservatives in Prague struck back. They invited him to the Old Town city hall, arrested him, and in March had him executed. Until 1427, the conservative Prague burghers in alliance with the Utraquist nobility once more controlled the capital. The attempt to settle the succession failed, however, when the Polish-Lithuanian prince Sigismund Korybut, after a brief and turbulent period of residence in Bohemia, was summoned back to Poland in 1423.

Internal strife in Tábor forced Žižka to leave at the end of 1422 and establish himself in eastern Bohemia. Most towns of eastern Bohemia and local Hussite noblemen supported Žižka. His main pillar of strength, however, remained the field army, which had developed into a permanent organization with its own administration. Žižka's new brotherhood defeated a coalition of moderate Hussites, the conservatives in Prague, and members of the Catholic nobility at Malešov in June 1424, and seemed set to advance on Prague. Negotiations led by Jan Rokycana convinced Žižka to refrain, and instead both sides agreed on the military expedition to help the Hussites in Moravia on which Žižka met his death.

After the victory at Ústí in 1426, once more internal tensions flared up, this time within Prague. Korybut (who had returned to head the Prague-led league of Hussite towns) provoked suspicion among the Hussite burghers by his rapprochement with the Catholic side. An uprising of both Prague towns in 1427 forced many of the less radical masters to leave the university and held Korybut hostage in the countryside.

Eventually he was released, but never returned to Prague, finding scope for his ambitions in Silesia until called back into the family struggles of the Jagiellonians in Poland-Lithuania, where he died in 1435.

Toward a Compromise

The victory at Domažlice and the convocation of an ecumenical council at Basel in the same year helped finally to bring about talks between the Hussites and the Catholic church. The conciliar movement had established a requirement that church councils meet regularly, but Martin V and his successors did not accept the doctrine of papal subordination to the church in council. The council for its part sought a major issue—such as a reconciliation with the Hussites—to enhance its prestige and position against the pope. Cardinal Cesarini, who knew the futility of using force, chaired the council's sessions. Sigismund, still hoping to occupy the Czech throne before his death, also strongly supported the overture to the Hussites, which was extended in October 1431. A Bohemian diet in February 1432 accepted the invitation and from January to April 1433 a delegation led by Prokop Holý debated with the council in Basel. They did not overcome their differences, but agreed to continue negotiating in Prague.

To force greater flexibility on the Catholic side, a force of Táborites and Orphans laid siege to Plzeň in the summer of 1433. Amid increasingly open disputes among the military leaders (Prokop Holý was dismissed, but his replacements proved less competent), the radical armies suffered a disastrous defeat on an expedition into Bavaria for supplies. The Utraquist and Catholic nobility, together with Prague under Jan Rokycana, now formed an alliance of convenience and gained control of the whole city. In response the radicals lifted the siege of Plzeň, restored Prokop Holý to his place at the head of the Táborite armies, and turned back to secure their rear. On May 30, 1434, the two sides met in battle at Lipany. The result was an overwhelming defeat for the radical brotherhoods, the death of Prokop Holý, and the end of the field armies. Subject, like so much connected with the Hussite movement, to conflicting interpretations, the battle of Lipany certainly marked the end of the revolutionary phase of Hussitism.[11]

The Hussites in the land diet now represented the moderate strains of Utraquism, and since the diet was the negotiating partner for the would-be king and the council, their significance increased. Jan Rokyca-

na's election as archbishop of Prague in 1435 solidified their position. The theologians at Basel were loath to accept the Articles of Prague, but the aging Sigismund wanted general recognition as king before his death. Finally, in 1436 a compromise known as the *Compactata* or Compacts of Basel was reached. It guaranteed communion in both kinds to the Hussite laity in Bohemia and Moravia (not the other Bohemian crownlands), while accepting the Utraquist communion as part of the one, apostolic, Catholic church. The council accepted the remaining three articles only in a watered-down form or still resisted them. In spite of these qualifications, however, the *Compactata* were the first recognition of a separate confessional group within Western Christendom.

The changes in property relations wrought during the Hussite wars could not be undone. Too many nobles, both Hussite and Catholic, had seized church estates, and the royal domain had also suffered greatly. Overall the church in Bohemia lost four-fifths of its property, though in Moravia its position was rather better. Some towns, especially Prague's Old Town and Louny, increased their landholdings, and Sigismund made Tábor a royal free town with moderate estates in the surrounding area. The greatest beneficiaries, however, were the nobles. Even many of the lesser nobility emerged from the conflicts enriched, which increased their weight at the diets. In contrast the clergy as an estate disappeared altogether. The resulting shifts in political power meant that the traditional counterweights to the nobles, the church and the king, were much weaker, while the towns (in which the Czech-speaking element had largely replaced the German) had increased in influence and to some extent in wealth. Although the common interests of those who benefited from the Hussite revolution prevented a wholesale restoration of the prewar situation, religious differences continued to divide every social level.

BOHEMIA UNDER THE HUSSITE KING, JIŘÍ OF PODĚBRADY

On August 14, 1436, Sigismund of Luxemburg was festively proclaimed King of Bohemia and the lands of the Crown of St. Václav on the square at Jihlava in southern Moravia.[12] The remnants of radical resistance were overcome by the agreement with Tábor and the capture

and execution of the last great radical captain, Jan Roháč of Dubá (September 1437). The Land Court once more began regular sessions, but clashes between Sigismund and Jan Rokycana, the Utraquist archbishop of Prague, ended with the latter seeking the safety of his eastern Bohemian estates. Increasing conflict with the Hussite nobles and burghers convinced Sigismund (also concerned with the political situation in his Hungarian realm) to leave for Hungary. Whether his departure was the prelude to renewed conflict with the Hussites remains unknown, since Sigismund died at Znojmo in Moravia on December 9, 1437.

The succession question exposed the cleavages within the Bohemian political classes. Sigismund's son-in-law and sometime Margrave of Moravia, Albrecht of Habsburg (reigned as Bohemian king, 1437–1439), was the traditional choice. The eastern Bohemian Hussites, supported by Tábor and Rokycana's representatives, urged the estates to choose the Polish prince Kazimir. Military conflict between the Habsburg and Polish supporters ended when Albrecht died in October 1439, leaving behind him a pregnant wife. For the next decade the kingdom was maintained by each district's *landfrýd*. Jiří of Poděbrady's eastern Bohemian *landfrýd* supported strict adherence to the *Compactata* as a fundamental law of the land. Fearing that the Prague Utraquists were too accommodating to the Catholics, Jiří's forces seized the town in a coup in September 1448 and established Rokycana's followers in control. In 1452, Jiří of Poděbrady was elected governor of the land with the support even of many Catholic lords.

As land governor, Jiří subdued Tábor, dissolving the separate Táborite church organization. This move united all the Hussite streams in one group with Jan Rokycana as its spiritual head. The Catholic league of Strakonice (Strakonitz) and the Plzeň *landfrýd* also accepted Jiří's authority. When Albrecht's son Ladislav (called Posthumous since he was born after his father's death) formally assumed rule in 1453 over the Kingdom of Bohemia, Austria, and Hungary, Jiří became Bohemian regent for the thirteen-year-old king.

During Ladislav Posthumous's minority, Jiří partly rebuilt the king's own domains and maintained law and order on the trade routes. When Ladislav died in 1457, shortly before his age of majority, the Czech estates gave up Charles IV's succession arrangements and on March 2, 1458, elected Jiří of Poděbrady king. "All true Czechs rejoiced therefrom," wrote a chronicler, "many shed tears of joy, that their dear Lord God had finally liberated them from the power of the German kings,

who always bore ill will to the Czechs, especially those who held to the Holy Writ [the Hussites].''[13] Jakoubek of Stříbro's advice, that to preserve the Hussite achievements the Czechs would have to elect a Hussite king, was finally followed.

The nobles' election of a member of their own order to the vacant throne was a previously unheard of step, though the Hungarian lords had shortly before elected Mátyás Korvin (Matthias Corvinus) king. Jiří of Poděbrady was not only an upstart, he was a ''Czech heretic'' whose family had close personal ties with Hus and Žižka. In addition, his election was at first accepted only by Bohemia; the other lands of the Crown of St. Václav refused to acknowledge him. Adroit diplomacy and marriage contracts between his daughters and neighboring potentates (including Korvin) gained Jiří both domestic and international acceptance.

This promising start quickly ran into difficulties in Rome. The popes had never formally accepted the Council of Basel's decision regarding the Hussites, and when a Czech embassy went to Rome in 1462 to urge Pius II to accept the *Compactata*, he declared them invalid, and the Czech Hussites heretics. When the pope excommunicated Jiří and declared him deposed in 1466, Jiří's son-in-law Mátyás Korvin placed himself at the head of a renewed anti-Hussite crusade. In 1468 he overran much of Moravia. Fortunes of war fluctuated, but politically Mátyás Korvin scored a great coup when some Moravian Catholic lords elected him king at Olomouc in May 1469. Both Lusatias and Silesia quickly recognized his claim to the Crown of St. Václav, in effect limiting Jiří's authority only to the Utraquist regions of Bohemia proper. Now in the kingdom of two religions there were two kings. War continued off and on until March 1471, when Jiří of Poděbrady died.

Before his death, Jiří urged the estates to offer the crown to a Jagiellonian prince. The diet at Kutná Hora in 1471 duly elected Vladislav (Władysław) king of Bohemia. Immediately Vladislav II (1471–1516) had to fight Mátyás Korvin for his new crown. When it became clear that neither side could win a decisive victory, a negotiated agreement in 1479 accepted that Vladislav would rule in Bohemia, while Mátyás would continue to rule in Moravia and the other lands of the Crown of St. Václav, and both would call themselves King of Bohemia.

Although the agreement of 1479 stabilized the position of Bohemia, at the price of loosening the ties between the crownlands, the reintegration of the Catholic lords into the land's institutions was not easy. In an effort to gain papal recognition, Vladislav tried to replace the Hussite

town councils, provoking an uprising of all three Prague towns in September 1483, in the course of which Vladislav's councillors were murdered and replaced by new ones loyal to the chalice. Support from other royal towns and leading figures of the Utraquist nobility ensured that the king (who did not risk reentering Prague for a year) accepted these dramatic changes.

The Prague uprising of 1483 demonstrated that a resolution to the problem of coexistence of Catholic and Utraquist by force was impossible. Thus it led directly to the conclusion, at a land diet at Kutná Hora in March 1485, of a formal agreement establishing religious toleration between the two confessions. The religious peace of Kutná Hora accepted the *Compactata* as a fundamental law of the land, ending the period of the Hussite revolution and resulting wars. The moderate, Utraquist version of Hussitism was established as the majority confession, but both Catholic and Utraquist were recognized as subjects of the monarch and members of the body politic. The succeeding years showed that the coalition supporting Prague in 1483 was to be the last of the great religious leagues that crossed social and political boundaries.

The majority of the kingdom's inhabitants (approximately 70 percent) followed the Utraquist church, headed by the elected bishop Jan Rokycana, with a seat at the church of the Virgin Mary before Týn, on Old Town Square. St. Vitus's cathedral remained in Catholic hands, but the Catholic church in Bohemia suffered great losses. Monasteries were destroyed, the bishopric of Litomyšl disappeared, and the archbishop's throne in Prague remained empty until 1561. The Catholic church was headed by an administrator in the Prague castle. During the quarrels between Jiří of Poděbrady and the papacy, the administrator moved to Plzeň. A dissident Hussite trend known as the Unity of Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum, Jednota bratrská*) was left out of the peace of Kutná Hora. Rooted in the teachings of Petr Chelčický, the Brethren arose out of dissatisfaction with developments after Lipany. Brethren rejected worldly wealth and power while advocating passive resistance to authority and voluntary poverty.[14] Though intermittently persecuted, they found protectors among some Bohemian noblemen because they were industrious and peaceful subjects. In Moravia, the situation was somewhat different, thanks to the survival of the bishopric of Olomouc and most of the monasteries, while the other lands of the Crown of St. Václav remained entirely Catholic until the Lutheran reformation.

The years of stabilization under Jiří of Poděbrady saw a cultural

quickening. The first printing press in the Bohemian crownlands was set up in Catholic Plzeň in 1468. Its usefulness as a polemical weapon was quickly recognized, and presses spread to Brno, Prague, Olomouc, Vimperk, and Kutná Hora. By the 1460s humanist thought once more began to enter intellectual circles in the Czech lands, more quickly among the Catholics than the Hussites. The Jagiellonian court began a major reconstruction of the Prague castle. Vladislav II took up residence there in 1485, leaving the royal court in Prague's Old Town. Even before his move, the Old Town burghers had erected the late Gothic tower known as the Powder Tower (Prašná Brana) nearby, the work of the self-taught Matěj Rejsek. Rejsek's skills were in high demand, both in Prague and in other places such as Kutná Hora, where he worked on the completion of St. Barbara's church and built the decorated town fountain.

Most secular architecture still reflected Gothic features, as can be seen in some of the castle reconstructions Benedikt Ried undertook for leading nobles. Early signs of the Renaissance include the windows Ried incorporated into his masterpiece, the late-Gothic Vladislav Hall of the Prague castle, and features of its Louis wing. Towns, too, increased their building activities with the return of more settled times and a slow economic recovery. In church architecture the Gothic remained dominant through the late fifteenth and the sixteenth century. In other areas of architecture and arts, Gothic was already giving way to Renaissance influences, just as religious issues began to give way after the religious peace of Kutná Hora in 1485 to political and social conflicts between the two estates that the revolution had most strengthened, the lords (both great nobles and gentry) and the towns. Under a new dynasty, the Renaissance would arrive in full force, yet religious issues and their political consequences would also remain vitally important to the culture of the Bohemian crownlands.