

Radical Religious Communities in Premodern Societies

A conference on the occasion of the 600th anniversary
of the foundation of Tábor

Tábor, Czech Republic, 16–18 September 2020

The emergence of dissenting and radical religious groups was a logical consequence of the pursuit of renewal in premodern Christianity. The separation of such groups from the mainstream can be in turn seen as resulting from the diversity of answers to the problem of balancing between religious idealism and the demands of social and political stability. The relatively intensive research of late medieval and early modern religious separatism has operated in a field demarcated by concepts such as heresy, reform and reformation, revolution, religious movements, apocalypticism, and others. By building upon this research tradition, but not limited by the restraints of any single terminology, this conference has a twofold aim: to facilitate a more comparative approach by bringing together scholars of various religious communities of premodern Europe, and to situate the study of dissident religion within its local social, political, and communal context.

Founded in February 1420, Tábor is just one—albeit in many respects an exceptional—example of a radical religious community. Born from millenarian expectations, Tábor underwent swift development, from a sectarian revolutionary commune to a military-political power within Hussitism and a properly established medieval town. In other cases like Florence, Zürich, Münster, Prague, and many more, religious radicalism settled into the pre-existing social and political structures of municipal communities, while other radical groups pursued a clandestine or secluded existence. This conference will deal with the religiously motivated group formation from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, focusing on movements and ideologies such as (but not limited to) Waldensianism, Wycliffism, Hussitism, spiritual Franciscanism, the radical Reformation, and various other utopic and religiously-inspired visions.

Speakers are invited to explore the social dimension of radical religion in the medieval and early modern periods. Instead of social-economical determinism, we would like to focus on local networks, interpersonal bonds, and communal dynamisms. As a counterpart to the study of intellectual influences and ideological pedigrees, we propose to examine how emerging religious groups strove to propagate their message. While investigating the reactions of the of society, we hope to look beyond the mere reproduction of the ‘image of the other’ to more practical deliberations about possible solutions to religious separatism, as well as to proposals for reintegration of radical groups.

The conference programme will be structured by the following themes:

- *The social background of radical ideologies:* group identity and goals; means of recruitment; media of mobilisation; signs and conditions of success and failure; norms and authority
- *Religious leadership in urban communities:* old and new elites; theocratic tendencies and the extent of clerical influence; longevity of religious enthusiasm; the ‘stabilisation’ of the situation
- *Reactions to religious separatism:* strategies of dealing with dissident religious groups; the limits of inclusion; the aim of persecution (extermination, or reintegration); redefining the semantics of difference



Carl Friedrich Lessing. Hussitenpredigt (1836)

The conference is organized jointly by the Centre for Medieval Studies (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences) and the Hussite Museum in Tábor. Papers will be allotted 20-25 minutes. The conference language is English, with simultaneous translation into Czech. Speakers will be offered accommodation in Tábor. Limited funding to cover travel expenses (economy train or air tickets) is available. A collection of the contributions is planned for publication.

Organizing committee: Pavlína Cermanová, Robert Novotný, Martin Pjecha, Jakub Smrčka, Pavel Soukup, Zdeněk Vybíral

Please indicate your interest in participation along with a provisional title to the organizers before 1 February 2020.

Contact: cms@flu.cas.cz, subject: ‘Tabor conference’