

**Some more supposed Historical Errors in the Great Controversy.
A few remarks by pastor Jan Voerman, Netherlands.
Part II**

1. Some critics assert that Ellen White erroneously presented the Bethlehem chapel, where Hus preached, as the center of the reform movement, rather than the University of Prague.

It seems that the critics base this allegation on Ellen White's words: *"He was also made professor and afterward rector of the university where he had received his education... But it was in another field that Huss began the work of reform. Several years after taking priest's orders he was appointed preacher of the chapel of Bethlehem."* GC p. 99.

For the common people the Bethlehem chapel was the place where they could hear the preaching of Hus. Here the message was delivered in clear tones and thousands flocked together at this place to listen to the great Reformer. *"The true believers did not throng to the large churches but to the Bethlehem Chapel in their thousands."*¹

*"While just in the last time people from all parts of the city thronged to the preaching of Hus with the result that many churches were empty and lost their members, the thereby injured priests grudged more and more at the over-crowded Bethlehem chapel and the pulpit arator Hus."*²

*"Frantisek Palacky has asserted that Hus's sermons in the Bethlehem Chapel were the most important events of the time. More recently another scholar of the period has suggested that during his years as rector in Bethlehem Chapel, Jan Hus controlled Prague from his pulpit."*³

*"Meanwhile, Zbynek continued to strengthen his own case by collecting complaints against Hus from Priests in Prague who resented the efforts at ecclesiastical reform represented by the preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel."*⁴

*"The doctrine of the Church was outlined in terms of the community of the predestined which was for all intents and purposes a repetition of Hus's teaching in 'De ecclesia.' This treatise was read aloud to a group of people in the Bethlehem Chapel in the spring of 1413. The doctrinal outline in the song is radical in its denial of saints and images and represents a sectarian strain. The spread of Hussite doctrine reached epidemic proportions in Bohemia..."*⁵

*"Popular songs as propaganda in Hussite Bohemia appeared during the first years of the movement for reform. Even before the songs took on a popular and propagandist flavouring, the singing of songs in the Czech vernacular began to pave the way... During the first decade of the fifteenth century Hus wrote or translated into Czech a number of hymns for use in the Bethlehem Chapel."*⁶

"Thus the popular song, 'If you want to know the bible you must go to Bethlehem and learn it on the walls as Master Jan of Husinec preached it', and this remark by Hus refers to the same idea, the visual texts and paintings in the chapel. This reference to learning from the illustrations on the wall strengthens the idea that Hus had begun to see reform in a thoroughgoing manner... Bethlehem Chapel became a centre of popular rebellion against the abuses and institutionalism of the Roman Church. When Hus implored his followers 'to learn it on the wall at Bethlehem' he did not have in mind only the errors of the mass. Instead, he included those other texts also inscribed on those same walls, the Credo and the Decalogue, both written in Czech... the repertoire of radical representations was further expanded... thus completing the unusual decor of what should rightly be seen as the mother church of the first

reformation in Bohemia. A doubtful, but interesting comment is the one allegedly made by one of Hus's enemies concerning the chapel: 'Its pulpit is [Jan] Hus's triumphal chariot, and the paintings upon the walls are the blazonry of his armour... These ideas became popular with the poor people and also among the gentry and burghers both in Bohemia and abroad.'"⁷

*"The Bethlehem Chapel had become a Power in the city."*⁸

*"Hus was in the final stage condemned because of his preaching for the people. The Clergyman of the Bethlehem chapel was the Archheretic, his academic works only a relative insignificant prelude..."*⁹ *"He [Zelivsky] was preacher of the 'Neustadt-Kirche Maria im Schnee', that like before the Bethlehem chapel of Hus became the centre of his movement."*¹⁰

*"The spacious Bethlehem chapel in the inner town of Prague, being intended exclusively for the preaching in the Czech language, developed in the time of Hus's activities into the most important tribune of the Reformpostulate."*¹¹

*"Hus, who had aimed at the clerical career ever since he began his school studies, was ordained in June 1400. On March 14, 1402, he was appointed preacher at the center of the Czech reform movement, the Bethlehem Chapel, founded in 1391."*¹²

*"When the twenty-nine-year-old Hus was appointed, on March 14, 1402, preacher of the already famous center of the Czech reform movement, the Bethlehem Chapel, he entered upon the most important phase of his life. He became the leader of the Czech populace supporting the reform... The preaching was to be exclusively in the vernacular, so that the chapel would provide a center for the Czech reform movement. It quickly fulfilled this purpose: the Czech population of Prague - a city of some 50.000 inhabitants - thronged to its services regularly... During his ten-year ministry at Bethlehem, he would have preached more than two thousand five hundred sermons... Thus it may be confidently asserted that Hus became the leader of the popular reform movement and gained an eminence in this respect that no other preacher could equal."*¹³

*"Under him [Hus] the Bethlehem chapel became the centre of the popular movement, as it had not been under his two predecessors, who had been distracted by other duties."*¹⁴

Several sources confirm clearly that the Bethlehem Chapel was the center of the reform movement. The University of Prague turned even against Hus and prepared in the year 1412 a complaint to be presented to the king while Hus in his beloved Chapel preached with widespread results his messages openly without opposition of his congregation.

There is clearly no erroneous presentation in the Great Controversy as far as this point is concerned.

2. Ellen White presents Hus preaching with zeal and courage, when, in fact, he was in exile, visiting his parish only in secret.

Ellen White writes: *"When after a time the excitement in Prague subsided, Huss returned to his chapel of Bethlehem, to continue with greater zeal and courage the*

preaching of the word of God. His enemies were active and powerful, but the queen and many of the nobles were his friends, and the people in great numbers sided with him.” GC p. 102.

At this moment, Hus was not yet in exile. Hus went in exile after the city of Prague was **again** placed under interdict and Ellen White refers to that interdict two pages further down: *“Again the city of Prague seemed on the verge of a bloody conflict. As in former ages, God’s servant was accused as ‘he that troubleth Israel.’ 1 Kings 18:17. The city was again placed under interdict, and Hus withdrew to his native village. The testimony so faithfully borne from his loved chapel of Bethlehem was ended. He was to speak from a wider stage, to all Christendom, before laying down his life as a witness for the truth.” GC p. 104.*

This was the moment that Hus went in exile; after the city was placed again under interdict and while the king and several friends were no longer on his side and saw him as the obstacle and source of all trouble. After the issuance of the previous interdict, the king forbade its observance; protected Hus and intervened his case with the pope. But this time the king had turned against him and Hus left Prague in exile.

Before Hus went in exile he preached as usual with zeal and courage the word of God, while, being in exile, he was not afraid to offer up his life for the truth of God’s holy Word and he embraced every opportunity to continue preaching, seemingly with even more zeal and courage so that the imputation that the critics try to make just does not hold.

As can be expected there is no source that presents all details in the life of Hus without leaving anything out. Such a source would necessarily comprise a pile of books since the life of Hus was very busy and energetic and filled with many turbulent scenes. And so it is understandable that some sources mention something while others leave it out. Now there is clear evidence that Hus left Prague sometimes before he was in exile. We read for instance of such an absence that took place in July 1412:

“Furthermore, being in this extremely irritated mood, the king yielded to the request of the theological faculty that the Zebrak decisions be announced to the clergy and the university. He called a meeting at the Old Town Hal (July 16, 1412), to which both the clergy and the university masters were summoned by the royal Council. Hus, however, was absent, having left the day before; he returned three weeks later.”¹⁵

In this meeting it was agreed that anyone daring to defend any of the 45 articles of Wyclif and denied or attacked the indulgences, was to be exiled from the country. Upon his return, Hus undertook, in three sessions, a public defense. We are informed in a footnote on page 121 in Spinka’s book: *“Others do not mention this long absence of Hus’ from Prague, and therefore date his defense of Wyclif toward the end of July.”*

Now this is a very interesting note for the critics of Ellen White. Because others do not mention the absence of Hus; they are evidently not aware of the fact that Hus had left Prague, they come, as a result of that, to a wrong conclusion in dating his defense erroneously some weeks too early. We should be very careful not to make rash conclusions and declare Ellen White’s description inaccurate because we find some source that presents the facts a little differently.

That Hus left Prague and returned a number of times to continue his fervent way of preaching is clearly corroborated:

“Hardly had he left Prague than it seemed to him that he had taken a false step and he returned there and continued to preach. Once again, however, his position was

impossible. The agreement the king desired seemed to be in sight if only he would comply, and so he once more turned his back on Prague. Hardly had the talks broken down, however, before he was there again. It was a constant coming and going that betrayed the torments of the hunted. He did not fear death. Whenever he was in Prague he preached in the Bethlehem Chapel. But all his sermons betrayed his fear as to whether he was doing right when he left again. Ever afresh he asked his congregation whether they approved his conduct, whether they advised him to avoid Prague. His congregation, full of fear for the life of their beloved Master, one moment wanted to have him with them to protect him, and the next would have him go to secure for him the more powerful protection of the king.”¹⁶

“Exile lasted less than two years and was repeatedly interrupted by visits to Prague. His experiences and teachings, his intensions and thoughts had in the last years been crystallising within him and his exile thus represented only a saving opportunity of at last saying all that he had to say... He still preached and taught whenever occasion offered.”¹⁷

There is no reason to doubt Ellen White’s description. There is clear evidence that Hus left Prague and returned to his Bethlehem chapel to continue his preaching, even when he was in exile.

3. The friendship of Hus with Jerome is misdated by Ellen White by more than a decade.

This assertion seems to be based on Ellen White’s statement: *“Hitherto Huss had stood alone in his labors; but now Jerome, who while in England had accepted the teachings of Wycliffe, joined in the work of reform. The two were hereafter united in their lives, and in death they were not to be divided.”* GC pp. 102, 103.

This passage is placed after the city of Prague was declared to be under interdict (p. 100), usually dated mid 1411, and before Prague was again placed under interdict, usually dated in the end of the following year 1412 (p. 104). Thus, according to the context of Ellen White’s statement we may therefore conclude that Jerome returned to Prague and joined in the work of reform somewhere near the end of 1411 or during the first part of 1412.

Jerome, on returning from England in 1401, brought with him some of Wycliffe’s works to Prague.¹⁸ Ellen White writes: *“A citizen of Prague, Jerome, who afterward became so closely associated with Hus, had, on returning from England, brought with him the writings of Wycliffe.”* (GC p. 99) In 1406 Jerome brought, after several years of study and teaching abroad, some more copies to Prague.¹⁹ Jerome studied and traveled a lot. He took his master’s degree in Paris, Cologne and Heidelberg, while he also took this same degree in Prague in 1407. He returned to Oxford, but was compelled to flee. In 1408 and 1409 he was in Prague but soon he went again abroad. He defended Wycliffe’s writings and was in 1410 imprisoned in Vienna, but, after some time, managed to escape into Moravia. He was, for this, excommunicated by the bishop of Cracow. Then, after these experiences, he came back to Prague again and we read: *“Returned to Prague, he appeared publicly as the advocate of Hus.”*²⁰ That Jerome publicly appeared as the advocate of Hus confirms that at this time there was a close relationship between Hus and Jerome.

Jerome came to join Hus after being set at liberty from his imprisonment at Vienna: *“He was thrown into prison at Vienna, as a favorer of Wickliff; and, being set at*

liberty at the request of the University of Prague, he came to join John Huss in this city.”²¹

Now we are also informed that Hus round this time was in danger: *“The situation was growing increasingly threatening for Hus. Potentially, the most serious aggravation of the development was Pope John’s ‘crusading’ bull, which he issued on September 9, 1411. In fact, it was the conflict over this bull of indulgences which proved fatal to Hus: during it he was deserted by most of his former friends, with the exception of a few brave souls such as Jerome of Prague and Jakoubek of Stribro, and abandoned to his fate by the king.”²²*

Jerome, returning to Prague when Hus was clearly isolated, joined in the work of reform and when Hus criticised the papal bull, he stood firmly on his side. *“One by one his friends fell away from him until he found himself isolated, almost as if he were a voice crying in the wilderness.”²³*

“This daring critique of the papal ‘crusading bull’ was eloquently and emphatically supported by Jerome of Prague.”²⁴

From another source we may gather that Jerome returned to Prague some time after Zbynek, the Archbishop, had died on September 28, 1411 while Albik was already appointed in his place: *“At this moment, however, Jerome returned to Prague. He was the man who for good or ill knew no weariness and no second thoughts. He had escaped from custody in Vienna... Shortly afterwards Jerome arrived in Prague. Here he soon had a chance of intervening, aflame himself and kindling fire in others. For the opposition between Hus and the Church was too deep to be removed by petty politics. It did not arise from political differences but from an inward faith. In actual fact the very essence of the Church was the issue, and a new manifestation of it soon inspired Hus and Jerome to conduct this their most bitter fight.”²⁵*

How truly are Ellen White’s words! She indicates the right time when Jerome returned to Prague. She writes that Hus had stood alone, and indeed at that moment Hus found himself isolated, but now Jerome came and joined in the work of reform. Ellen White continues that the two were hereafter united in their lives, and in death they were not to be divided.

When Hus was offered armed protection on the way to Constance, Jerome was on his side and proved to be a close and true friend: *“At this juncture his close friend, Jerome of Prague, visited him at Krakovec and urged him to accept the offer. Jerome even promised to come to his aid, should the need arise.”²⁶* Jerome kept his promise at cost of his own life. He was apprehended and like Hus, also condemned. Both reformers were burned. Hus on July 6, 1415 and Jerome, some months later, was led through the same streets as Hus, while his last care was to bear witness to the purity of Hus; he subordinated his own death to the memory of his friend and was burned at exactly the same spot as Hus on May 30, 1416 and again just as with Hus, the earth with his ashes were gathered up and thrown into the Rhine. And so in death they were not to be divided! They shared exactly the same fate!²⁷

There is no need to assert that Ellen White misdated the friendship of Hus with Jerome by more than a decade. After Jerome escaped from Vienna: *“He came now back to Prague and united himself closely with Hus with whom he was on friendly terms already.”²⁸*

Ellen White presents the facts accurately. There is no question of misdating. Hus and Jerome were good comrades. Jerome knew Hus from his childhood (GC p. 113) and when he, after his escape from Vienna and stay in Moravia, returned again to Prague, they became very close friends, (*er schloss sich eng an Hus an*) or as Ellen White puts it: “*The two were thereafter united in their lives, and in death they were not to be divided.*”

How precisely do these words concur with the facts!

4. In the Great Controversy it is mistakenly assumed that Hus disagreed with basic Catholic doctrines, rather than merely attacking corrupt practices in the church.

We read in Ellen White’s description about Hus turning against the corruptions of the church and she also mentions the doctrines of Hus, being evidently out of harmony with the Catholic doctrines of the church: “*With daily increasing boldness Huss thundered against the abominations which were tolerated in the name of religion... On his journey, Huss everywhere beheld indications of the spread of his doctrines and the favor with which his cause was regarded... During his long trial he firmly maintained the truth, and in the presence of the assembled dignitaries of church and state he uttered a solemn and faithful protest against the corruptions of the hierarchy. When required to choose whether he would recant his doctrines or suffer death, he accepted the martyr’s fate.*” GC pp. 103, 106, 107.

It is true that Hus attacked corrupt practices in the church in clear tones, but he also condemned everything that was not in harmony with the word of God, touching thereby also basic doctrines. For instance: “*He denounced the sale of indulgences, asserted that only God could forgive sins and that no one had the right or authority to issue an indulgence or furthermore to charge fees for absolution. Declaration of war by the Church was unlawful since clerics were not to fight with the material sword but with the sword of the spirit... To those who admitted that the Pope cannot err, Hus remonstrated that such a statement constituted blasphemy.*”²⁹

Hus also taught “*that a sinner who is sincerely contrite and confesses his sins to God need not confess them orally to a priest, even though he has an opportunity to do so. When Hus averred that God alone forgives sins, and had it so inscribed on the walls of the Bethlehem Chapel, he contemned the authority of the Church.*”³⁰

And in his Czech writings he recognizes Christ as the only Head of the Church: “*The definition of the Church as the totally of the predestinate having Christ alone as the head is repeated frequently in these Czech writings*”³¹

“*The pope is not the head of the Church universal but at best of the particular church under his jurisdiction.*”³²

Hus even stuck up on the walls of the Bethlehem Chapel six errors of the Church: “*On June 21, 1413 Hus was once more in Prague. He brought with him a gift for his congregation. He stuck up on the walls of the Bethlehem Chapel the treatise ‘On the six errors,’ in which he tersely and clearly summarised the reproaches he made against the Church. The six errors of the Church were: that the priest in the Mass created the body of Christ: that the Virgin Mary, the Pope and all the saints were to be believed in, when only God was to be believed in: that priests could at their pleasure remit sins and absolve from punishment and guilt: that members of the Church must give unconditional obedience to all orders of their ecclesiastical overlords without*

*consideration as to whether these were in accordance with the commands of God: that any excommunication, just or unjust, injures the person against whom it is proclaimed: and finally simony, with which most of the clergy were tainted.”*³³

It is clear that Hus not only attacked corrupt practices in the church but he also touched fundamental doctrines. In a Roman Catholic source we are informed: “*Yet Hus was religiously not a clear head; he overlooked that he fought against fundamental doctrines of the Church and put himself outside of her.*”³⁴

Ellen White presented a well balanced picture of Hus. He not only spoke out against corrupt practices in the church but he also raised his pen and voice against fundamental teachings and doctrines. There is nothing mistakenly assumed about this.

Now there are two ways to read Ellen White’s books. Are we searching for faults and do we read her writings with a very critical mind or are we prepared to manifest faith and aim at receiving a blessing? What is our motivation when we read her historical descriptions and messages? If we are looking for mistakes, we will be able, as far as history is concerned, to find some sources that are out of harmony with what she writes. If we believe, however, that Ellen White was guided to present the right information, we will be able, in most cases, to find sources that underline what she wrote. As a matter of fact, there is no perfect harmony among historians and mostly no definite standard to judge by exists. Historians differ in their opinion and their presentation of the facts is not alike and sometimes they contradict and dispute each other.

If we pass sentence on Ellen White’s historical coverage, we may then equally pass sentence as well on all other historical presentations for none is perfect.

Let us be very careful not to take unqualified the law in own hands and judge Ellen White’s unique writings.

Endnotes:

¹ Paul Roubiczek and Joseph Kalmer, *Warrior of God, the Life and Death of John Hus*, London, 1947, p. 126.

² “*Weil gerade in der letzten Zeit Leute aus allen Stadtteilen sich zu Husens Predigten drängten, infolgedessen viele Kirchen leerstanden und ihre Pfarrkinder verloren, grollten die dadurch geschädigten Priester immer mehr der überfüllten Bethlehems-kapelle und dem Kanzelredner Hus.*” Melchior Vischer, *Jan Hus, sein Leben und seine Zeit*, Frankfurt a. M., 1940, Erster Band, s. 354.

(The translations from German and Dutch sources are my own.)

³ Thomas A. Fudge, *The magnificent Ride*, Ashgate Publ., Aldershot, England; Brookfield, Vermont, USA, [1998], p. 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸ Richard Friedenthal, *Ketzer und Rebell*, München, 1972, p. 158.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

¹¹ Ferdinand Seibt u.a. (Hrsg.) *Jan Hus, Zwischen Zeiten, Völkern, Konfessionen*, Oldenbourg, 1997, s. 204.

¹² Matthew Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, Princeton, 1966, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 43.

¹⁴ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, London, 1977, p. 284.

¹⁵ Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, p. 121.

¹⁶ Roubiczek and Kalmer, p. 146,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁸ Spinka, *John Hus, A Biography*, Princeton, 1968, p. 59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁰ *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, New York, London, 1909, Vol. 6, p. 129.

²¹ John Dowling, *The History of Romanism*, New York, 1847, p. 391.

²² Spinka, *John Hus, A Biography*, p. 132.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁵ Roubiczek and Kalmer, pp. 119, 120.

²⁶ Spinka, p. 222. Cf. Roubiczek and Kalmer, p. 211. Cf. GC p. 110.

²⁷ Roubiczek and Kalmer, p. 258. *Real-Encyklopädie, für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Stuttgart und Hamburg, 1856, Bd. 6, s. 82. Cf. GC p. 114, 115.

²⁸ “...er kam bis Wien, wurde hier auf Veranlassung der ungarischen Geistlichen gefangen genommen, doch auf Betrieb seiner Prager Freunde wieder befreit. Er kam nun nach Prag zurück und schloss sich eng an Hus an, mit dem er schon befreundet war...”

Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, Bd. 6, s. 81.

²⁹ Thomas A. Fudge, p. 78, 79.

³⁰ Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church*, pp. 231, 232.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

³³ Roubiczek and Kalmer, p. 159. Cf., Thomas A. Fudge, p. 229.

³⁴ “Doch war H. religiös kein klarer Kopf; er übersah, dass er grundlegende Lehren der Kirche bekämpfte u. sich ausserhalb von ihr stellte.”

Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche, Herder & Co, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1933, Bd. 5, s. 207.