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It is likely that you are already knowledgeable about the history of the Czech Reformation; thus, you may decide that this BRIDGES is an unnecessary rehearsal of established facts. Nevertheless, in the process of preparing the presentation that I will be making at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion on November 22, my appreciation of the powerful perspective which informs the Protestant community in the Czech Republic has been rekindled. Thus, I want to offer you a sampling of some of the citations that have come to have particular meaning for me in recent weeks. Perhaps, you will also hear a stirring call to authentic faith in some of them.

1) The enduring significance of the precedent set by Hus’ authorization of ‘communion in both kinds’ is well-expressed by the exiled twentieth century Czech theologian, Jan Milič Lochman, who reminds us that “[f]or the Hussites, the Lord’s Supper was much more than a mere ceremony.... The blood of Christ is the bond of salvation for all the people of God.... In the presence of the Lord, all distinctions dissolve; all the children of God join in their common heritage.” (1988)

2) Every time a Czech pastor stands below a replica of the chalice to deliver the morning message, indirect confirmation is provided of the fervent analysis that Martin Luther ventured when he asked: “How could...Jan Hus ever have reached the point in [his] lifetime where [he] could be in all places? But now that [he is] dead, [he is] made to appear everywhere. In every pulpit, one must cope with him....” (1562)

3) The reform movements that preceded and followed Hus’ activity were quite diverse in emphasis and method. However, one of the most fascinating and perseverant of these groups is represented by the Unity of Brethren who are well-portrayed by this assessment: When that group of believers “...settled at Kunwald...in a remote part of northeastern Bohemia, their retreat was not driven primarily by doctrinal differences with Utraquism, but rather [by] a zeal for moral perfection and spiritual intensity.” However, the Unity were also impelled by “... an emphatic insistence that a true and serious reform of the church must have social-ethical and social-critical dimensions.” (Thomas Fudge, 1999)

4) When the Unity of Brethren were forced into exile or into hiding following the defeat of the Protestant Estates at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, the renowned pedagogue, John Amos Comenius, was serving as their bishop. Thus, a number of his writings wrestle with theological issues in complex and provocative ways. For instance, Comenius’ rejection of “a preliminary negative view of the world and the human being” gives his social-ethical perspective a exceptionally positive bent, which functions in a social-critical manner, to challenge understandings of human nature that disparage human capabilities and disavow human goodness. Thus, we may be both encouraged and challenged hear Comenius declare that “...it is a sign of a...human lack of gratitude that we...acknowledge in ourselves the power of the old Adam, but do not use the power of the new Adam. May we restrain from putting limits on the grace of God, which he distributes so widely.” (Josef Smolik, 1998)

5) In keeping with the heritage of the Czech Reformation, Božena Komárková similarly stresses that “...it is necessary to regain human values..., and to put them into action in the systems of a world that is as incongruous as ours.... We [must be] servants of an appeal that lies beyond us!” (1982) So we must – and so we may, in the graceful way that the Czech pastor and composer anticipates when he writes: “Open eyes which do not see you..., [and a]waken trust in us like children often have....” (Miloš Rejchrt)