

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications - Modern Languages and Literatures Modern Languages and Literatures, Department of Literatures

2021

Concerning a Manuscript from a Moravian Immigrant's Trunk: Postil by Johann Spangenberg (1557)

Hana Waisserova

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlangfacpub>



Part of the [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Modern Languages Commons](#), [Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Modern Languages and Literatures by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

KOSMAS

CZECHOSLOVAK
AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN
JOURNAL

New Series, Volume 2, number 2

KOSMAS ISSN 1056-005X

©2021 by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU)

Kosmas: Czechoslovak and Central European Journal

(Formerly *Kosmas: Journal of Czechoslovak and Central European Studies*, Vols. 1-7, 1982-1988, and *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal*, Vols. 8-11, (1989-1993).

Kosmas is a peer reviewed, multidisciplinary journal that focuses on Czech, Slovak and Central European Studies. It publishes scholarly articles, memoirs, research materials, and *belles-lettres* (including translations and original works), dealing with the region and its inhabitants, including their communities abroad. It is published twice a year by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU).

Editor: Hugh L. Agnew (The George Washington University)

Associate Editors: Mary Hrabík Šámal (Oakland University)

Thomas A. Fudge (University of New England, Australia)

Editorial Board Members: Daniel Miller (University of West Florida)

Hana Waisserová (University of Nebraska, Lincoln)

Kateřina Králová (Univerzita Karlova)

The editors assume no responsibility for statements of fact or opinion made by contributors.

Send manuscript submissions and correspondence concerning editorial matters to the editor, Hugh L. Agnew. The email address is agnew@gwu.edu. *Please ensure that you reference "Kosmas" in the subject line of your email.* If postal correspondence proves necessary, the postal address of the editor is Hugh L. Agnew, History Department, The George Washington University, 801 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC, 20052 USA.

Please send books for review, book reviews, and all correspondence relating to book reviews to the associate editor responsible for book reviews, Mary Hrabík Šámal, at the email address maruska48@gmail.com. If postal correspondence proves necessary, send communications to her at 2130 Babcock, Troy, MI, 48084 USA.

For information about ordering current and future issues of *Kosmas*, please consult the SVU website at: <https://kosmas.svu2000.org>.

Concerning a Manuscript from a Moravian Immigrant's Trunk: Postil by Johann Spangenberg (1557)¹

Hana Waisserová

Prologue

Upon a visit to the Czech and Slovak National Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, dedicated to Czech and Slovak immigrants, my imagination was triggered by an artifact: a trunk that a Czech migrant had brought on the transatlantic passage, which later found a home in the Great Plains. The trunk serves as a physical memento reminding visitors of the physical aspects of the immigrants' overseas journey. The trunk would limit the number of possessions that an individual or a family could take on their long journey into the unknown. What were the bare essentials which late nineteenth or early twentieth century Old Country immigrants brought with them? If we were in their place, what would we pack? We need to remember that the trunk was rather limiting compared to today's travelling luggage, whereas voluminous clothing and bedding occupied more space. The museum curator assists the imagination and reconstructs what such a suitcase would contain—dresses, shirts, a shawl, bedding, perhaps a piece of soap, a comb, a family photograph (if any existed at the time), paper and pen or pencil to write letters... Last but not least, there would always be space for a book or a Bible written in the immigrant's native language to serve as a symbolic link to keep alive the wisdom and memories of ancestors in the old homeland. Books were the precious links that families would keep and pass on in order to maintain the family religion and preserve their cultural identity. Can such an item as this volume narrate a family history? Can it reveal facts about a family's past, their religion, their practices, their ethical and moral codes, or any political and religious pressures that the family might have faced prior the journey? In other words, can the history of a book be the history of a family or a community?

The particular volume, which is of concern in this article, can certainly do that. In Nebraska, a family of Czech ancestry possesses a precious and unusual family artifact—an antique early-modern book, which was passed down in the family from generation to generation as their most precious treasure, a book that is much older than most carefully investigated family genealogies. The book has neat calligraphy and prints, leather binding, and comprises more than a thousand pages, though the first batch of pages is missing. The inside of the cover bears a pencil-written date: 1542. There are no title pages, no forewords, and no introductory chapter(s). The

¹ This research would not have been possible without the professional expertise of Dr. Stephen Lahey, to whom I need to express my gratitude. I am also grateful for the research funding from Classic and Religious Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Last but not least, I also need to express my gratitude for help to determine the exact edition to Mgr. David Mach from National Library, and to Reformation historian Dr. Louis Reith for his professional advice and assistance in polishing this manuscript.

family lore tells that they kept it hidden in order to avoid purges of Protestant literature; they believe it was placed in dough, then baked and kept in a huge loaf of bread, hidden in an old chimney and buried underground to prevent its destruction. Finally, having saved the book, the family brought it with them on their long passage over the Atlantic Ocean, and so it ended up in Nebraska in their possession. The family is aware of their ancestors having come from a Moravian Protestant community, yet they wonder who the author could be?

The family chronicle, drafted in 1959 by Rose Štěpán Herink and Dorothy M. Štěpán, reconstructs the family history: the Štěpán family lived around Kuklík, near Nové Město na Moravě, and was a proud Evangelical family. Those who took the Bible along for the passage journey were Joseph Štěpán, and Antonie Vašíková, who married in 1874. In the Old Country, they made their living by weaving, carpentry, and farming. Since life was hard, they were seeking freedom of religion and freedom from military conscription as they sailed across the Atlantic in the spring of 1893 with seven children (ranging from 16 years to 18 months). They took along a trunk (which is still kept in the family possession), which contained bedding and clothes, and the family Štěpán Bible: bound in leather, twelve inches long, nine inches wide, and four inches thick. They sailed from Bremen, Germany, and after six weeks they arrived at New York (often seasick, fed on watery soup, and entertained by an accordion played by Luis, 12), took a train to Chicago (where they bargained their restaurant bill down from \$12 to \$7, and could not find a place to sleep because, since the world fair was taking place at that time, all available accommodation was taken). From Chicago they travelled to DuBois, Nebraska to join their father's brother, who had sailed two years earlier. They arrived there on June 26, 1893, with the trunk and a debt of \$300. Father Joseph started to work as a trackwalker for one dollar a day, eventually obtaining a farm to feed his large family. They retained their Protestant faith, and proudly embraced John Hus's legacy.

In 2014, the Štěpán family, immensely proud of this historical treasure, approached Dr. Stephen Lahey, a specialist on early modern and Hussite theology, in order to determine the manuscript's authorship and learn more about the family history through the manuscript. The whole manuscript was digitized by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln libraries. As an instructor of Czech, with some experience in similar projects,² I was fortunate to join Dr. Lahey on a fascinating detective journey of examining the precious publication. Through close reading and transcribing, by the elimination of various other postils, and finally by closely examining the actual print and markers, with final help and the expertise of archivist David Mach from the Czech National Library in Prague we were able to determine the authorship, and the exact edition. It was two years of an exciting research

² The research project concerned a bibliography of Vergil manuscripts published prior to 1850, and the current holdings in Central and Eastern European libraries. It was led by Professor Craig Kallendorf at Texas A&M University, and it was published in 1998.

journey. The early modern volume, written in early Brethren Czech, was identified as a Czech translation of a postil by Johann Spangenberg, published in 1557.³

Introduction

In historical perspective, the text was created and published a half century after Christopher Columbus had landed in the New World (1492), during the Golden Age of Bohemian Literature, making the text nearly as old as the New World's known history. Such a text was published and distributed at times when the intellectually lively and polemical Bohemian Kingdom was recovering from the loss of the flourishing prosperity and stability of Charles IV's reign; when the Bohemian lands were also recovering from the losses and isolation caused by the Hussite wars; at a time when the Renaissance and Humanism ignited a Reformation which changed Europe. In 1526 the Habsburgs took the Bohemian throne from the weak Louis the Jagiellonian, who could not follow King George of Poděbrady's efforts to unify the internally divided country. The ruling royal family of the Catholic Habsburgs was dealing with the legacies of the Hussite Reformation and the more recent influence of Martin Luther gradually introducing Catholicization and Germanization, while the nobility and clergy fought for the recognition of their religious confessions. Spangenberg's Postil was published at a time marked by ardent polemics among Catholics, Utraquists⁴ and other religious fractions. Unlike Martin Luther, the Postil's author Johann Spangenberg is hardly mentioned in major Czech literary histories, though his works were much translated and widely available throughout early modern Central and Southeast Europe, and were very popular with Czech readers until the nineteenth century.⁵ Spangenberg's Postil was so popular and relevant, that the Štěpán family brought the book with them to the New World when they sailed in the spring of 1893.

Nevertheless, even though he was much overshadowed by Martin Luther, Johann Spangenberg seems to have received a sudden wave of interest recently. This lesser known German Lutheran writer is being published again after centuries of silence, inasmuch as a few of Spangenberg's works have recently been translated into English, such as the Postil entitled *The Christian Year of Grace: The Chief Parts of Scripture Explained in Questions and Answers* (2015), or the Postil's attachment *Booklet of Comfort for the Sick, And About the Christian Knight* (2007); excerpts from his Postil were published online (2011).⁶

³ Brethren Czech was the orthography used in publications from the mid sixteenth century, and for this particular volume.

⁴ The Utraquists were a Hussite denomination, who believed that believers should receive Holy Communion in both forms (*sub utraque specie*) as bread and wine.

⁵ This is true of the earliest histories of Czech literature such as that by Josef Jungmann, or more recent standard treatments by Jaroslav Vlček or Jan Mukařovský.

⁶ T.G. Mayes. Trinity 7: From Johannes Spangenberg Postil. Translated from Johannes Spangenberg, *Postilla. Das ist: Gründliche und deutliche Auslegung Derer Evangelien und Episteln/ so in den evangelischen Kirchen auf alle Sonn- und fürnehmste Festtage durchs ganze Jahr/ Pflügen Öffentlich Abgelesen zu Werden* (Nürnberg: Johann Andreae Endters

What qualities of Spangenberg's work made it so popular among his contemporaries—popular with religiously divided Bohemians, popular with families who kept his work for centuries, popular with the Štěpán family who took the postil on a transatlantic journey to Nebraska, or popular in contemporary Anglophone religious discourse? It is clear that Spangenberg's Postil and his other works attracted much contemporary interest, and are appealing even to a twenty-first century audience.

Postil Publishing in Europe and in Bohemia

Lutherans receive much credit for developing sixteenth century postilography: they were known to have used these texts to spread popular piety among the public, even among those who had little education. Nevertheless, sixteenth-century Catholics and Lutherans alike produced a great numbers of postils—it was the Golden Age of postilography. Unlike pamphlets, limited by region and chronology, postils became widely popular across Europe in the course of several centuries. Postils were handed down from generation to generation, representing “the most influential literature in circulation in early modern Germany.”⁷

Postils simplified and reformulated the biblical message so that it could be widely understood by all at a time when older forms of Christianity were fading away, to be replaced by new perceptions and concepts of God and his relations with the world. Popular religion and piety aimed to strengthen the faith—and the Reformation was on its way. In Luther's day, postils became one of the major tools of the Reformation. They were widely spread due to the invention of the printing press. Postils integrated the old faith and Scriptural messages in schools, villages and communities during the time of “biblical humanism”.

The term postil comes from Latin *post illa*, serving as a traditional term for collections of sermons on biblical texts and Bible commentaries for Sundays and religious festivals in the church year; the texts followed the annual cycle of sermons, either as homilies or as formal sermons. Postils as a genre were known since the eighth century, but due to their function and nature, they became very popular after the invention of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press around 1450.⁸ Postils were meant either for silent home reading or for public readings, or as church sermons. In general, postils were used as a great source for general education about cultural

seel. Söhne, 1683), 522–528. Translated by Benjamin T. G. Mayes. Published online at <http://www.historiclectionary.com/2011/08/trinity-7-from-johannes-spangenbergs-postil/>. Accessed on May 11, 2016.

⁷ John M. Frymire. *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 156.

⁸ Petr Voit. *Encyklopedie knihy. Starší knihtisk a příbuzné obory mezi polovinou 15. a 19. století*. (Praha: Libri, 2006), 710. The early printers in late fifteenth-century in Europe were busy re-editing and printing postils. By the end of the century, *Postilla super epistolae et evangelia* (1472) by a Dominican cleric, Guillelmus from Paris, was apparently re-edited about a hundred times in various European printer shops; or *Sermones Discipuli* (1474) by Johann Herlot from Köln was re-edited about fifty times.

history; they provided geographical and cartographical education; they provided guidance on issues of ethical and moral conduct for families and communities, and in general gave advice on how to be a good Christian. This particular postil was written in a light and simple tone, which indicates that it was meant for general audiences, perhaps even for youth, which happens to be the case. Its uncomplicated language and question-answer format was one of the reasons for this postil's popularity. Nevertheless, even though the Štěpán family was most likely a Protestant Evangelical family, we know that some of the Lutheran postils were popular even among Roman Catholics, and vice versa. However, Spangenberg's Postil stresses in particular how to be a good Protestant, and how to avoid the delusions of the Papacy. Since postils were understandable to common men and to young people, not only to the learned, many families would probably have had a copy—since Spangenberg's Postil was published in no fewer than seven Czech editions in Nuremberg and Prostějov in 1546, 1557 and 1566. Due to the nature of the book, it is highly understandable that families would keep such a book among their prized possessions, inasmuch as it served as a general textbook that would also comply with family religious affiliation. Lastly, when postils became popular in German lands and throughout Europe, the Czech Lands were not left behind.

Among Czech postils, the most important one was composed by John Hus. It was finished in 1413, but appeared in print much later. It was published in Nuremberg in 1558 (one year after our particular edition of Spangenberg's Postil, and by the same publishers, using the same fonts, edited by Mathias Flaccius Illyricus, who had published Hus's Latin works earlier, see Appendix 2 below).⁹ Interestingly, in his introduction to the first edition, Flaccius Illyricus wondered at how little attention the Czech nation had paid to the works of the divine man [Hus] and how neglected were his works concerning the practices of the godless clergy.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this particular edition is of great interest to our postil project—Spangenberg's edition uses the same fonts, designed and made by the German Master known as MS (standing for Melchior Schwanzenberg),¹¹ that were used in Hus's Postil prepared for publication by Flaccius Illyricus.¹²

Other popular non-Catholic Czech postils were written by Petr Chelčický (1522),¹³ Jakoubek ze Stříbra, and Jan Rokycana.¹⁴ We quickly dismissed Catholic

⁹ Hus's Postil's was entitled *Postila na evangelia, kteráž se čtou přes celý rok* (Nuremberg 1563). The second edition, published ten years later, and it included *Epistolas* by Jakoubek ze Stříbra.

¹⁰ Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy*, 710.

¹¹ Even though MS is not recognized in other sources, *Knihopis* (1963) by Ed. Horák recognizes Schwanzenberg as the MS designer. (*Knihopis* 1963, p. 116)

¹² Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy*, 710.

¹³ Petr Chelčický. *Kniha výkladuov spasitedlných na čtení nedělní celého roku* (Praha: 1522). It became the oldest Postil published in the Czech lands. Chelčický was largely inspired by these Czech reformers: John Hus, Tomáš Štítý and Matěj of Janov.

¹⁴ Francis Dvornik. *The Slavs between East and West*. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University, Slavic Institute, 1964), pp. 287-8. Rokycana was the main representative of

postils by Tomáš Bavorský, Tomáš Rešel, Sebastian Berlička (1618), and Václav Steyer (1691); though considered Brethren postils by Ondřej Štefan (Ivančice 1575), and by Jan Kapita (Kralice 1586).

The fate of the Czech Lutheran postil by Martin Zámrský (Jestkovice? 1592), illustrates the impact of printing bans on Reformist Lutheran texts. The book was being published in secret in three locations in Moravia, and it was sought after and destroyed by the censors, until it was finally published and preserved abroad (Dresden 1602, and Leipzig 1602). Following a similar fate, the Czech Lutheran postil by Bohuslav Bepťák Vysokomýtský unfortunately did not survive at all. Nevertheless, there were some evangelical postils printed before 1620 (the Battle of White Mountain) such as postils by Jiří Dikastus (Praha 1612), Jakub Petrozelinus (Praha 1613), Václav Slovacijský (Praha 1613), Blažej Borovský z Borovna (Hradec Králové 1617), and Matouš Konečný (Hradec Králové 1618).

Regarding Lutheran postils and Reformation literature in translation, besides Spangenberg (first edition in Prostějov 1546), there were postils in Czech by Anton Corvinus (Strasbourg 1536, Prague 1539), Christopher Fischer (1577,¹⁵ and Prague 1589), Lukas Osiander (Prague 1589), Aegidius Hunnius (Dresden 1628), and the much delayed translation of Johan Arndt (Frankfurt 1643, Bratislava 1776). Needless to say, Catholic postils were translated as well, without encountering the restrictions and censorship. After 1620, there were also numerous Jesuit postils by local and foreign authors alike.

Nevertheless, at times pro-reformist texts, including Lutheran postils, had to be published in secret (mostly in Moravia), since they were sought out and destroyed by the Emperor Ferdinand's censorship from 1524, which also forced Bohemian Neo-Utraquists to go into exile or to suffer house arrests. From 1547, censorship applied to imported books, and in 1567 Ferdinand's successor, Maximilian (1564-1576), imposed a ban on Nuremberg publishers, forbidding them to publish in Czech. It was also forbidden to import Lutheran books published in Czech into the Czech kingdom.¹⁶ These bans brought Utraquists and Bohemian Brethren together, and both showed great approval for Lutheran postils. When pro-Lutherans were exiled, a few editions of Evangelical postils in Czech were published in Dresden or Leipzig. When the Brethren were forced into exile, they continued publication in similarly inclined publishing houses abroad, such as in Dresden or Zittau in Germany.¹⁷

conservative Utraquists. His Postil reflected much of John Hus's teaching, and it was pro-Reformation and patriotic in spirit.

¹⁵ Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy*, p. 710. No copies of this edition have been preserved.

¹⁶ For publishing bans, see Josef Jakub Jungmann. *Josefa Jungmanna Historie Literatury České, Aneb, Saustavný Přehled Spisu Českých: S Krátkau Historií Národu, Oswícení a Jazyka*. 2. vyd ed. (Praha: Kommisní kněhkupectví F. Řivnáče, 1849).

¹⁷ Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy*, p. 710.

The Religious Landscape at the Time of Spangenberg's Postil

Fourteenth and fifteenth century Bohemia and Moravia did not escape the religious battles of the Hussite period. The Czech lands' geographic proximity to the Western world eased the spread of the Humanist and Renaissance changes affecting religious life, so the Reformation was certain to influence Bohemia with its ongoing religious struggles, even though Bohemia was rather isolated from the centers of the Humanist movement. The significance of Lutheranism in Bohemia was also foreshadowed by the efforts of King George of Poděbrady (1458-1471). As the leader of the Utraquists, he diminished the influence of radical Hussites, brought the country out of its isolation, and worked hard to repair the religious havoc. Eventually, he gained Catholic and papal support, and re-opened a sphere for Humanistic and Reformation ideas, which recognized the Hussite reformist past. With such complexities in the Bohemian past and European present, the Czechs and Moravians favored Luther's messages in the early sixteenth century. Most sympathetic were the Utraquists, who were not given a fair share of power or papal recognition as Catholics despite the 1485 Compacts (religious freedom decree), renewed in 1512. The Utraquists became demoralized, unlike the Brethren (the third largest religious group), who restructured and democratized their church organization in response, and energized their community, while the Utraquists split, leaning either toward the Catholics or toward the Brethren, while the radicals favored Lutheranism for its progressive humanism and its attack on the Papacy.

Luther also recognized Hus's legacy and publicly accepted his teaching.¹⁸ This relation can be illustrated by a popular anecdote: Wycliffe brought the sparks, Hus lit the candle, and Luther lit the torch, which caught the fire from the candle. With the flaming torch of Lutheranism in proximity, Bohemian Utraquists entered into disputes with conservative Utraquists, who were still in majority. Naturally, the conservatives were seeking to ally with Catholic Roman Church. Luther, in response, sent a letter in 1531 to the Bohemian nobles, urging them to remain faithful to their Hussite legacy, and not to befriend Rome.¹⁹ Luther's message also attracted Brethren, who shared similar stances towards Roman Catholics; nevertheless, the Brethren were not to be identified as Luther's followers. The Utraquist fraction most in agreement with Luther's reforms labeled themselves as Neo-Utraquists. Eventually, they were exiled from Prague in 1524, while the conservatives and the Brethren were respected because of the still-valid Compacts.

In the following years, Ferdinand I (1526-1564), who strongly opposed the Reformation, had to face the growing union of radical Utraquists with the Brethren, who developed relations with German reformists. Forming the opposition, they were supported by the Bohemian Estates. In response to this situation, Ferdinand executed four opposition leaders, confiscated their properties, and persecuted the Bohemian Brethren (many of them left for Poland). The Utraquists, however, did

¹⁸ Luther initiated publication of Hus's *De ecclesia* in 1520.

¹⁹ Jaroslav Vlček. *Dějiny české literatury*. 2. doplněné vydání. (Praha: L. Mazáč, 1931): 373-5.

not submit to Rome. In 1555, Emperor Charles V of Germany issued the Peace of Augsburg (seen as a loss by Ferdinand and the Papacy), dividing the country between Protestants and Catholics.²⁰ One year later, after the abdication of Charles V, Ferdinand eased his restrictive measures against the Brethren and Protestants in general, and they became more active in both Bohemia and Moravia. Nevertheless, to promote Catholic and Jesuit education, Ferdinand established the Jesuit College of Prague, as a rival to Charles University, a Neo-Utraquist stronghold. Ferdinand's successor, Maximilian II (1564-1567), though known for his sympathies for Lutheranism, stood firmly by his father's policies regarding religious freedom. Upon request, he refused to grant the Bohemian Estates similar religious freedoms as those granted by the Peace of Augsburg; eventually, he disregarded the Compacts, granting no recognition of any other religion except Roman Catholics and Utraquists—like the Brethren and the Lutherans. In 1558, the Brethren and the Lutherans were forced to close their churches in Bohemia (but not in Moravia).

In response, the Neo-Utraquists proposed a new union with the Brethren – to form a Czech Protestant Church, though some Brethren leaders, like Jan Blahoslav, would oppose the union. In 1575, the Neo-Utraquists proposed a *Confessio Bohemica* to Maximilian, in which they made concessions to some beliefs of the Brethren. The confession was largely shaped by Lutheranism and was based on the Augsburg Confession of 1555. Maximilian had to agree, although he negotiated certain compromises and appointed regional superintendents. The Utraquists thus divided into pro-Catholics and anti-Catholics, while the Brethren were left out entirely and were not recognized as a distinct denomination. In following years, Maximilian's successor, Rudolf II (1576-1612), in religious matters relied heavily upon the Jesuits, and Catholic nobles, who still constituted a religious minority in Bohemia. The Utraquists, divided among themselves, joined the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, or the Czech Protestant Church. The Brethren, still unrecognized, did not join—they were largely split between Lutheranism and Calvinism. Meanwhile, the Counter-Reformation was gathering force, aiming at the Brethren and the Neo-Utraquists. The Spangenberg Postil would have to be hidden.

Czech Humanism and the Golden Era of Czech Literature

During the era when Spangenberg's Postil was printed in seven editions within a few years, Humanism and Renaissance had a major impact on Europe in fundamental ways, also finding their way to Bohemia. Czech Humanism and its fast-developing print culture signified the Golden Era of Bohemian Literature (in the second half of the sixteenth century). Czechs scholars learned of the Italian Renaissance and the Reformation, and opened up channels of communication and exposure to European arts and sciences—and the book culture. Soon the printing press arrived in Bohemia from Nuremberg. The first printing press appeared in Pilsen, closely followed by presses in Prague, Litomyšl, Mladá Boleslav, Kutná

²⁰ The regional Estates and Lords could dictate the religion to their subjects.

Hora and the Moravian towns of Náměšť, Ivančice and Kralice. Nevertheless, some of the earliest presses in Brno, Olomouc, Náměšť, and Prostějov did not print any books in Czech until later (if still in existence), printing Italian, German and Latin works in translation while books in Czech were also printed in Nuremberg and in Venice.

Czech printed production of the early sixteenth century included translations, as well as original works of law, science, and philology, books of psalms and hymns, historiography, travelogues and belles lettres. The most prominent publishing press was operated by Jiří Melantrich and his son-in-law Daniel Adam of Veleslavín.²¹ Melantrich learned of printing in Nuremberg, Basil, and Prostějov (with Günther, who published the first Czech edition of Spangenberg *Postil*). Newly established printers soon published exquisite copies in Czech, Latin, German and Greek, competing against the printers of Wittenberg, Nuremberg, Köln and Venice. Most famously, learned Adam Veleslavín of Prague produced leading editions, becoming the iconic representative of the Golden Age of Czech literature. The scope of Veleslavín's publishing interests extended for beyond religion. As a true humanist, he published chronicles,²² religious and geographical books, translations, works on Czech lexicography, and other texts appealing to a contemporary Bohemian audience. Veleslavín was also an ardent Utraquist, and a secret supporter of Luther and the Brethren. As a professor at Charles University, he inevitably was closely linked with the growing popularity of Luther's popular piety and radicalism. The University and publishing presses absorbed and reacted to the new energy in polemics, philosophizing and moralizing which is reflected in contemporary writing. Pamphlets and various religious texts were concerned with defending various dogmas, while reflecting on new ideas of Humanism and the Reformation (yet many of them disappeared and were not kept as family treasures, unlike postils).

As mentioned, Humanism and Lutheranism grew in popularity at Prague, especially at Charles University, whose faculty studied in Wittenberg—the nexus of Luther's teaching, sought out by the Utraquists and the Brethren alike. It is not surprising that pro-Lutheran authors like Spangenberg were widely translated, and popularly read. The growing interest in German universities and their debates encouraged lively polemics among all fractions of Bohemian society—the Utraquists (who represented the majority), Roman Catholics, the Brethren and the Lutherans (often associated with Utraquists). Luther's message was echoed in print culture. Priests, educators, pastors and other groups took advantage of the new print culture.

²¹ Melantrich (publishing 1551-80) is a family name associated with book-publishing till today.

²² Vlček, *Dějiny*, 502-6. Most importantly, the *Chronicle of Václav Hájek z Libočan* became the most popular historical text. Nevertheless, the Chronicle was criticized for its belletristic nature that which overshadowed and changed the historical narrative, and failed to recognize and appreciate the legacies of the Czech reformers, John Hus and Jerome of Prague, as crucial Reformation figures.

About Spangenberg and his Postil

The Nebraska copy of the Štěpán's Postil²³ edition should have included forewords by Martin Luther, by Johann Spangenberg,²⁴ and by the translator Jan Stráněnský.²⁵ The particular 1557 Nuremberg edition also includes Fifteen Sermons on the Dead. The book is written in the form of basic and frequently simple questions, followed by simple answers, aiming to cultivate piety in daily lives and beyond. Since German postils grew in numbers, it is generally assumed that Lutherans "invented" the postils. Before Luther's time, postils were known as *plenaria*, and the actual term "postil" became widely used with Luther's Postil, though Luther's Postil was not translated into Czech (other texts were). Instead, postils by Johann Spangenberg, Anton Corvinus, Christopher Fisher, Lukas Osiander and, later Aegidius Hunnius, were translated and published in Czech. Luther and his Wittenberg circle took great advantage of the new print culture, and circulated their popular ideas via texts, publishing a wide variety of them, though postils proved timeless. Postils would reiterate ancient biblical knowledge and help to relate it to everyday life by means of explicatory answers: "Without the printing press, the awakening and integrating of an evangelical piety, based upon the central idea of the Reformation, would not have been possible."²⁶

Johann Spangenberg (1484-1550), known as a Protestant preacher and "the reformer of Nordhausen,"²⁷ was a contemporary of Martin Luther; in fact, they were born five months apart. Spangenberg was one of the most popular postil authors published in Lutheran era,²⁸ though the postil was of great length, inasmuch as some editions included advice to the sick on how to prepare for death and the afterlife (over 1000 pages) and it must have been expensive to purchase over cheaper shorter

²³ *Postylla Česká. Anebo Waykladové na Epistoly a Euangelia, Nedělnij y také Swatečnij přes celý Rok Z Latinského a Neměckého Jazyku w Český přeložená: Nynij pak w dobrý Pořádek a w gednu Knijhu vvedená Tak yakž tayž Pořádek Cýrkw Křestianská Od Prwnij Neděle Adwentnij až do Poslednij Neděle po Swaté Trogicy zachowáwá / K vžitku Mládeži Křestianské W způsob Otázek složená a Sepsaná: Od Jana Sspangenbergského: Někdy Slawného Kazatele w Cýsařském Městě Northauzu. K nijžto přidáno gest Patnáctero Kázanj o Mrtvých Těljch y také LX. Příkladuow z Pijse m Swatých wybranych: Zě se Těla Mrtvá magij pochowáwati Wsse od téhož Jana Sspangenbergského Sepsáno.*

²⁴ Spangenberg's foreword is dated March 10, 1542. This date explains the handwritten date in pencil on the inside of the book cover.

²⁵ Jan Stráněnský translated the Postil by Johann Spangenberg (first published 1546) and Postil by Johann Hoffmaistr (1551).

²⁶ Robert Kolb. "Introduction". In *Spangenberg, Johann. The Christian Year of Grace: The Chief Parts of Scripture Explained in Questions and Answers*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 11.

²⁷ Kolb, "Introduction", 12-15.

²⁸ Spangenberg was popular along with Caspar Huberinus, and Anton Corvinus. Corvinus's Postil was short, and became popular even among Roman Catholics. Spangenberg's Postil was very popular with Austrian Crypto-Protestants. (See Frymire, John M. *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*. Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2010.)

volumes. Spangenberg attended schools in Göttingen and Einbeck, and earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Erfurt in 1511. In Erfurt, he must have met with Luther, since Luther was teaching there at the time. He also joined a group of Humanists promoting "Biblical humanism."²⁹ Later, Spangenberg worked at various schools as rector, pastor and preacher, most notably at Nordhausen, which attracted pro-Lutheran clergymen. He is also known to have been active in local schools, which gave him the incentive to compose a postil for the youth as an educational text. He was known as an energetic proponent of the Reformation in his writing, pedagogy and service, and kept on corresponding with other pro-Lutheran clergy and scholars of Luther's Wittenberg circle.³⁰ A number of his works were translated into Czech,³¹ and his writings were widely popular. In his introduction he explains:

I was not of the opinion that I could improve on Doctor Luther's hard work, but I want to motivate young Christians to practice [reading] the Holy Scripture, the Holy Gospel, which is the power of God that saves all who believe. Therefore, I admonish all whom God has appointed to be the heads of households to give their children and servants practice by using these questions and answers every day at the table.³²

Spangenberg is known to have been a personal friend of Martin Luther, who also wrote a foreword for the Postil. Further in his introduction, Spangenberg refers to his "beloved" Martin Luther, as well as to other contemporary postil authors Johann Brenz and Anton Corvinus. Besides the Postil, he also produced a series of various educational and popular texts promoting Lutheranism in Germany.

In his preface to Spangenberg's Postil, Luther urges friends, brothers, priests and pastors to read, but to make sure to obtain a proper understanding (so as not to be like repetitious parrots) with help from those who could understand (he gave credit to Spangenberg). Luther also urged all to be vigilant in difficult times, and he warned against the Papacy³³ for distorting messages of the Scripture, encouraging the exercise of personal responsibility to learn and carry on the truth: "*Protož milí přátelé, bratří, faráři a kazatelé, modlete se, čtěte, učte se a buďte pilní. V pravdě vám pravím, že nemá dáno býti místo lenosti, dřímotě a spaní,*" [Therefore, beloved

²⁹ Kolb, "Introduction," 12.

³⁰ Kolb, "Introduction," 12. Kolb also mentions that there was no biography of Spangenberg available for 300 years.

³¹ Václav Pumprla. *Knihopisný slovník*. (Praha: Filosofický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, 2010), 1032. For example: *Funffzehen Leichtpredigt, so man bey dem begrenbis der verstorbenen, in Christlicher Gemein thun mag; Neu Trostbüchlein für die Kranken und wie sich ein Mensch zum Sterben bereien soll; Postille in vier Theilen für junge und einfältige Christen*, and others.

³² In Kolb, "Introduction," 15f From Spangenberg's expansion of the *Small Catechism* of Luther: *Des kleinem Catechism kurtzer begriefft und der Haustafel*. Halle, 1542.

³³ Throughout his Postil Spangenberg uses judgemental expressions such as "*pokrytečí papeženci*", pointing at "distorted and hypocritical" papacy, as mentioned in Luther's introduction.

lords and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study and be diligent. Truly I say to you; there is no time for loafing, snoring, or sleeping.]³⁴ He also uses powerful animal metaphors, comparing the ignorant and lazy priests and educators to parrots and cows.³⁵

However, although he came out of Luther's circle, but did not use such vivid language and flowery metaphors, Spangenberg became one of the most popular postil authors. The question-answer format became an easy dialogue that was popular with pastors and other audiences alike. In this way, Spangenberg helped his contemporaries to comprehend the biblical messages, while writing in an informative and skillful format that incorporated necessary educational information. In this sense, Spangenberg is also remembered for his involvement with primary and secondary schools as a writer of textbooks.

The printed form would spread the texts out, to be read easily in various school and public gatherings. His postils were widely translated and read across southeastern Europe, even being reprinted until the nineteenth century. His Postil appeared fifty-six times in print in German, seven times in Latin, seven times in Czech, and three times in Dutch.³⁶

Nuremberg Publishers and the Translator Stráněnský

It is general knowledge that printing was introduced into Bohemia from Nuremberg. The first printing presses were established in Pilsen (1468), and soon after in Prague. At first the local press production could not match up with more experienced master editions from abroad, nevertheless, soon well-trained printing apprentices would establish similar craftsmanship in Bohemia and Moravia. The Štěpán's Postil edition was published by Ulrich Neuber and Johann vom Berg in Nuremberg. Both were master printers who were known to be working closely at the time of the postils' publication (between 1542-1563), and were recognized for publishing over 300 non-Catholic texts, and for issuing a great number of Czech translations, including publication of Hus's Postil in 1563. Berg was known as an ardent Lutheran who received his printing training in Ghent and Paris. Neuber and Berg also published Hus's collected works, together with texts by Jerome of Prague and numerous pamphlets in Czech.³⁷

Taking a closer look at the life and activities of the translator of the Postil, Jan Stráněnský (1517-1585), helps us to comprehend the book culture at the time when Spangenberg's Postil was printed. Stráněnský himself was an Utraquist (inclined to Lutheranism). He was also a translator, a publisher, and a town administrator. Although he was known as an Utraquist writer, Stráněnský also translated a

³⁴ From the "Foreword by Dr. Martin Luther". *Postil 1575*. (Olomouc copy) Adapted into modern Czech by Hana Waisserová.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Kolb, "Introduction", 17.

³⁷ Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy, 710*. Edited by Matthias Flaccius Illyricus. Jerome of Prague was Hus's friend, who was executed in 1416.

Catholic text by Fridrich Nausea.³⁸ In his lifetime, he must have been a practicing Catholic as well, prior to his Utraquist period. Stráněnský was in conversation with numerous intellectuals, printers and writers of his time, including the famous Prague publisher Jiří Melantrich.³⁹

Stráněnský is known to have lived in Počátky, and he worked for the Estates of Jindřichův Hradec since 1545. At Hradec, the Catholic clergy recognized Utraquists, and started to serve “*podobojí*,” since 1564, carrying out the Compacts. Even though Czech Utraquism was recognized until 1620 (The), it ceased to be recognized and practiced by the local Estates in 1605, when Catholicism was reintroduced by them. Regarding Stráněnský literary works, he published 12 original works and 8 translations from German, of which two were postils (Spangenberg and Hofmeister). Stráněnský’s books must have been popular at his time, and they were published and read even into the seventeenth century.⁴⁰

Notes on the Czech Edition, and its Orthography

While trying to determine the authorship, we were working with the following facts: Postils were becoming a popular genre with the early book printers, but since few Czech postils were published in the sixteenth Century, we ruled out the best known Czech postils and considered this book to be a possible postil in translation, inasmuch as the most popular sixteenth Century postils in Czech were German Reformation postils in translation. Clearly, we also ruled out a well-known postil by Martin Luther, as Luther was not translated into Czech.⁴¹ We also ruled out the numerous Catholic postils in translation.⁴²

Since Johann Spangenberg was a contemporary of Martin Luther, and a very popular author of a postil for youth, our suspicions were confirmed—the Štěpán family owns a postil by Johann Spangenberg: *Postylla Česká. Anebó Waykladové na Epistoly a Evangelia. Nedělní y také Swáteční přes celý Rok z Latinského a Německého Jazyku v Český Přeložená*.⁴³ This particular edition was published in Nuremberg in 1557.⁴⁴ The interesting fact is that four different editions of

³⁸ *Kázání křesťanská s krátkými vejklady na všecka evangelia* (Leipzig: 1539; in Czech Praha: 1561).

³⁹ Jan Muk. “Tomáš Rešl z Jindřichova Hradce a Jan Stráněnský z Počátek, spisovatelé staročestí”. *Časopis společnosti přátel starožitností československých v Praze*. Ročník XXXV. Řídí Josef Pelikán. (Praha: Státní tiskárna, 1927), 123-133.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The most popular postils were not by Martin Luther. Instead, popular Czech postils of the sixteenth century were by Johann Spangenberg.

⁴² Catholic postils were numerous due to the political developments. Beside Czech authors such as Tomáš Bavorský, most Catholic postils were published after the Battle of White Mountain. The translations were mostly from German and Polish.

⁴³ In the National Library online catalogue at <http://aleph.nkp.cz>. Accessed on June 30, 2015.

⁴⁴ The Spangenberg Postil was a truly popular read in its time. The Czech reeditions were: 1543, 1546, 1553, 1557- 3 reeditions. For detailed description see *Knihopis*, ed. Horák, 1963, p. 111-117. Even though the Štěpán’s copy is miraculously well-preserved (bearing in mind the damage it suffered in the rough hiding conditions), it was missing its title page, all three

Spangenberg's postil are also dated 1557. That year, three editions were printed outside of the Czech Lands in Nuremberg and one in the homeland in Prostějov.⁴⁵

In order to read the Postil, one needs an understanding of contemporary orthography, and book printing. The manuscript is an example of an early version of so-called Brethren orthography, nevertheless it retains numerous features from the earlier Hus diacritics. Since this era embraced the Golden Age of Bohemian Literature, the literary boom signifies a parallel in linguistic and literary developments in style, lexicology, syntax, morphology and orthography. The manuscripts display inconsistent orthographies, especially from the end of the fifteenth century, to the end of the sixteenth century, although the press of Adam Veleislavín along with Bible of Kralice, is considered a linguistic standard of texts. Formal Czech used in Prague educated circles became the codified language norm after the time of Hus, and was adopted over local dialects.

The Brethren orthography derives from earlier diagraphic orthography (a well-developed systemic orthography),⁴⁶ while largely accepting the principles of diacritical orthography as employed by John Hus.⁴⁷ Hus's diacritics introduced acute marks for long vowels (the *virgule* later called *čárka*), marks for soft consonants (*punctus rotundus*—a dot above a letter,⁴⁸ later replaced by *háček* ˇ). Hus's diacritical reform was introduced as an effective system for replacing the earlier digraphs. Nevertheless, Hus's proposal took time to find its way into the language, since it was not favored by conservative scribes, who were often geographically isolated. Another fact to consider is that, thanks to the Hussite period texts in Czech were slowly replacing the previous Latin or German texts, and many scribes were accustomed to writing only in Latin or German.

Nevertheless, with the invention and spread of printing presses, and exposure to wider audiences, the language became modernized, lost its archaisms, and was

forewords, dedications, and various other pages, including the final pages. The quest to determine the exact edition was a bit of a detective work after all. The inner page of the hardcover copy includes handwritten dating 1542, which most probably refers to the dating of Spangenberg's Foreword, and it was written down prior to the loss of the front pages and later mistaken for the date of publication. This particular edition exists probably in 9 copies including the Štěpán's copy. The best-preserved copy is in the Olomouc Scientific Library (*Vědecká knihovna*)—its front pages are attached as appendices.

⁴⁵ See *Knihopis* 15577, 15578, 15578a and 15575. (p.111-17). This fact illustrates that the projects were carried out by particular printers and publishers, and by their apprentices. Kašpar Aorg, who was in charge of the Prostějov publication, was himself an apprentice with Jan Günther, who published the 1546 Prostějov edition.

⁴⁶ This orthography was an alternation of Czech orthography that used various diagraphs for non-Latin sounds, and did not distinguish between long and short vowels, resembling Polish orthography using ligatures (e.g. *cz* for *č*, *ss* for *š*). It followed the early modern Latin alphabet, as it did not distinguish *j* or *g*, *v* and *w*.

⁴⁷ Jan Hus, *De Orthographia Bohemica*, 1406. Hus's codification also suggested using the Prague dialect as the standard for modern written Czech

⁴⁸ Some of Hus's revolutionary diacritics gave inspiration to other Slavic orthographies, e.g. the *punctus rotundus* is retained in contemporary Polish (*ś*).

simplified in order to be understood by wider audiences. Printed texts were also known to resemble sermons and speeches. Printing presses spread quickly, and replaced isolated scripting centers and schools, centralizing these diverse textual sources. While a scribe could write one text like the Spangenberg Postil in two years, a printing press produced a large number of copies. Gradually, toward the end of sixteenth century, printing presses settled on the Brethren orthography. An exemplary text from this period is the Bible of Kralice (1593), which was a Bible translation by the Czech Brethren, though there were various codified versions of it by Jan Blahoslav, Jan Roh, and others. Here the *punctus rotundus* was replaced by the *caron* (háček), vowel digraphs changed, *v* replaced *u* (at the beginning of the words), *g* is used instead *og*: *j*, *y* is used after *c*, and the conjunction *i* (and) was written as *y*. This orthography was in use until the end of eighteenth century and beginning of nineteenth century when Josef Dobrovský codified modern orthography.

As was already mentioned, Spangenberg's Postil represented a popular style which captured the orthographic transition between Brethren orthography (or so-called Bible Kralická style) and earlier Hus diacritic orthography. Through the text, there are many differences and inconsistencies, as if the printers oscillated between either or. Even though our particular edition was printed in a press operated by Germans, one must remember that the press specialized in Czech texts. This fact might explain numerous inconsistencies, since the text is over a thousand pages long, printers might have been using earlier typesetting plates. For example, the spelling of frequently used words alternates greatly: the word God is spelled *Buoh*, *Búh* or *Bůh*; *punctus rotundus* is sometimes kept, sometimes it is replaced with *caron* (háček ˇ), to mention but some examples (see appendix 4, below).⁴⁹

Summary

The Spangenberg Postil was widely distributed, written in a popular catechetical question-answer form, while taking full advantage of the print culture. Its author, Johann Spangenberg, who belonged to Martin Luther's circle, reached a general audience, and his work revealed him to be a good pastor and teacher at the same time, providing not only timely needed messages of biblical humanism and popular piety, but also providing general education via the incorporated information. He was able to explain biblical concepts, while resonating with timely advice in persuasive tones.

His text found great response in Bohemia, where Roman Catholics, Utraquists and Brethren alike were inspired by revolutionary Lutheranism. The German printing press in Nuremberg, promoting Hus's legacy, produced attractive and well-

⁴⁹ *š* goes back to *ff*—most probably it was difficult to place *háček* ˇ over taller letters for the printers; *ll* stands for so called hard *l*, *l* stands for so called soft *l*; inconsistent system of accents for vocals, *í* – as *ij* (it was more visible and distinguishable from *i*), *û* appears for the first time (replaces *ó*—e.g. *kón* – *kůň*, earlier *kuoň*), *ou* stands for *au*, *g* stands for *j* if mostly in the beginning of the word, *y* stands for *j* if at the beginning or the end of the word (eg. *gey* – transcribed as *jej*), after *c*, *s*, *z*, not *i*, but always *y*, double *ss* retained before *t*, etc.

crafted editions of Spangenberg in Czech, and it found its audience, despite censorship. Postil publishing in Bohemia was largely influenced by contemporary ordinances. As the Spangenberg Postil was printed during the reign of Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand I (1526-1564), contemporary events influenced its release, distribution and reception. Since Prague University displayed many pro-Lutheran sentiments, the Catholic emperor founded a Catholic University in 1556, and invited the Jesuits of Rome to reinforce re-Catholicization. He also introduced book censorship, which forced publishers to publish non-Catholic texts in secret. Since translations were published abroad, especially in Germany, in 1547 he also introduced censorship and the banning of Lutheran books published outside the country. Local publishing houses were allowed to publish only Latin works, cosmographies, and legal codes but no religious texts except Catholic ones. Even though the Postil could have been distributed when written, in the later era of the Jesuit influence it must have faced intense censorship and had to be kept in hiding as heretical literature. It was Spangenberg's Postil that introduced the genre of the postil into Bohemian literature, and served as one of the most important religious outreach texts despite silence in Czech literary history. Nevertheless, this case study seems to demonstrate the immense importance of the text for individuals and families who were considerate of observing their religious and daily practices, and it reveals the general historical circumstances of the Štěpán family's religious history.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Title page of 1557 edition of Spangenberg's Postil



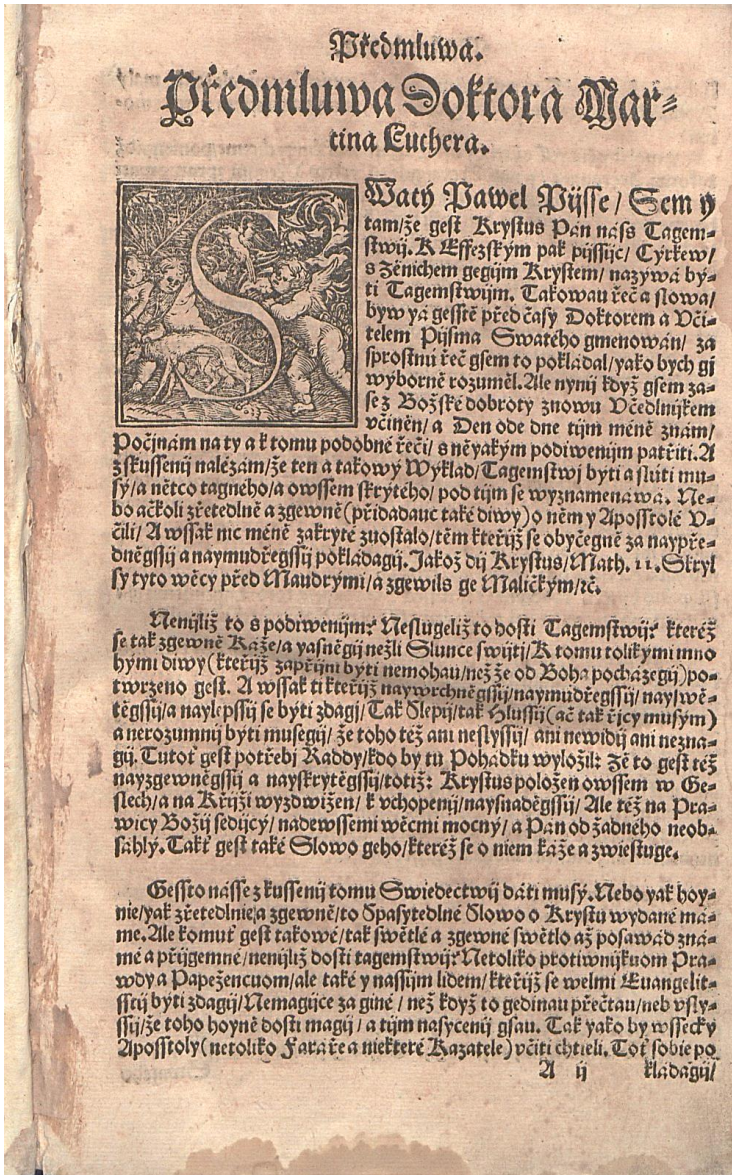
The missing title page from the Štěpán family Postil. This image is from the best-preserved copy of the same edition held in *Vědecká knihovna Olomouc* (Scientific Library Olomouc).

Appendix 2: Title page of 1564 edition of John Hus's Postil



Title page of Hus's Postil, prepared for publication by Flacius Illyricus using the same fonts, designed by the German master known as MS (for Melchior Schwanzenberg) as our Spangenberg edition. (National Library, Prague)

Appendix 3: Foreword to the Postil by Martin Luther



The foreword by Martin Luther, missing from the Štěpán family's copy of the Spangenberg Postil. (National Library, Prague).

Appendix 4: Transliteration/Transcription table for the Štěpán Postil⁵⁰

Litera in the text	Stands for sound
Ij (j)	í
au	ou
ſſ	š
w	v
v	u
g	j
g with dot or háček, and more often g	g
Ay, ey, oy	Aj, ej, oj
t with punctus	k
cz	c
cž	č
rž	ř
uo	ú
tc	c
ou	au
y	j
zi	ž
d with punctus rotundus	ch
Ch with punctus rotundus	Ch (plain ch stands for ch as well)
ee	é
◦ (at the end of the word)	ho
ie	ě

⁵⁰ Table adapted from Porák, Jaroslav. *Humanistická čeština: Hláskosloví a Pravopis*. Vyd. 1 ed. (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 1983). Transcribing the Postil posed serious challenges: there are numerous inconsistencies, spelling variations (e.g. *Buoh, Bůh*), word divisions at the end of the lines, capitalization, vowel accents, endings (*skutkuow* as well as *skutků*). Initial capitals were hard to decipher, there were unclear letters, missing letters and missing patches.