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## (Review) Finding the Middle Way: The Utraquists' Liberal Challenge to Rome and Luther

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# (Review) Finding the Middle Way: The Utraquists' Liberal Challenge to Rome and Luther

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**Comments**

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the scholarship on early and high medieval family consciousness that he invoked at the beginning. I would have liked to know how Rogge would connect his story to the ongoing discussions of primogeniture and patrilineage among the European aristocracies of the tenth through twelfth centuries. A nod in the direction of earlier periods would also have helped me understand what was new and different about Wettin behavior. The problem of maintaining the power and prestige of a ruling family in the face of demands for an equal share in income and lordship rights among male heirs was hardly unique to the late Middle Ages; the Carolingians, for example, had faced, and ultimately failed to master, the same problem.

It is easy, however, to sit back in a reviewer's chair and ask these questions, less easy to put in the time, imagination, thought, and careful scholarship that Rogge has put into this work. His book is rich and thought-provoking; it will reward the effort put in to read it.

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*Finding the Middle Way: The Utraquists' Liberal Challenge to Rome and Luther.* By Zdenek V. David. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2003. Pp. xxii + 579. \$65.00. ISBN 0-8018-7382-7.

Zdenek V. David's study seeks to correct a number of misconceptions about the nature and development of Czech Utraquism between the Protestant Reformation and the Thirty Years' War. The Utraquist Church came into being in Bohemia in the fifteenth century in the wake of Johan Hus' heretical movement and the successful armed resistance of the Czechs against efforts by the emperors and the Church to reimpose Catholic orthodoxy. The Utraquist Church in the Czech-speaking parts of Bohemia developed established institutions and was characterized by the giving of communion in both kinds (*sub utraque specie*) and a maintenance of most of the traditional Catholic liturgy, the cult of the saints, and a strong Marian piety. Utraquist ecclesiology combined a rejection of papal authority with a strong belief in the apostolic succession, which meant that Utraquist priests needed to be consecrated by bishops tied to Rome. David calls this path the religious *via media* of the sixteenth century, the middle path between Protestantism and Catholicism. He further equates the Utraquist Church with the Church of England, another Church that sought out the middle ground.

David has a number of bones to pick with the mostly Czech historiography on Utraquism. On the one hand, he attacks those historians who have characterized Utraquism as "an atrophied community no longer possessed of moral or creative vitality" (p. 43). He counters this critique, which is apparently widespread in the world of Utraquist studies, by pointing to the lively engagement of Utraquist theologians with Lutheranism in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, David asserts that Utraquist leaders "continued to uphold the ideal of liberal ecclesiology, highlighted by Hus' sacrifice, and its stance vis-à-vis the Roman Curia was one of salutary critique and not one of abject sycophancy" (p. 43). The Utraquist Church, David argues, was engaged in a lively debate with both the Protestants and the Catholics.

David's second central argument is that the Utraquist Church both maintained its distinctive institutions and structures (a Consistory, ties to the University of Prague, and a parish clergy committed to Utraquism), and kept the loyalty of the vast majority of the Czech-speaking population of Bohemia up until the Thirty Years' War. Here he challenges scholars who claim that Utraquism lost adherents first to the advance of Lutheranism and then to Tridentine Catholicism. Furthermore, many scholars claim that after the 1560s, the revived Catholic Church, supported by the Habsburgs, gradually reabsorbed the Utraquist establishment. Drawing primarily on the writings of members of the Utraquist Consistory and leading theologians, David argues that the Utraquists worked hard to defend and maintain their *via media*, even as Lutheran preachers and Jesuit fathers inflamed the passions of confessional conflict.

David provides convincing evidence that Utraquist leaders actively defended their distinct theological and institutional position; however, there is less evidence here of religious vitality at the parish level. We learn little about popular loyalty to communion in both kinds, or about the popular reception of either Lutheranism or reformed Catholicism. David does posit a new "social cleavage" after about 1560, as the nobility abandoned Utraquism for Lutheranism and the middle class took leadership of mainstream Utraquism. Indeed, he views this shift "as symptomatic of a more fundamental watershed in Czech history, namely the passing of intellectual leadership from the nobility to the middle classes" (p. 195). This assertion, however, is not strongly supported by the evidence and seems to contradict the cultural domination of the nobility in the Habsburg lands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

David argues that his effort to resurrect the Utraquist Church is necessary because Protestant, Catholic, and nationalist scholars have all produced one-sided interpretations of Utraquism as old-fashioned, equivocating, and anti-modern. At times, his points are refreshing and valuable. He points out that the Utraquist encounter with Lutheranism, especially in the early sixteenth century, was characterized by "curiosity, broad-mindedness, and politeness" (p. 61), an attitude that rings true. David also correctly points out that this attitude is sim-

ilar to the initial view of many humanists, including Erasmus, toward Luther. As is often the case with studies of this kind, however, David goes overboard in his defense of his subject. "Lapsing into Hegelian terminology, it could be said that staying within the Roman Church (and serving as its Socratic gadfly) endowed Utraquism with a world-historical role, which would be lost if it had remained an isolated provincial movement, or if it had simply merged with the Protestant mainstream" (p. 291). Unfortunately, David engages this issue exclusively from the perspective of Utraquism, and the reader learns very little about how or if Catholics and Protestants responded to the "world historical" role of Utraquism.

David's book is also marred by an almost stereotypical treatment of both Lutheranism and Catholicism. David states, for example, that "the Utraquists were . . . fully aware of Luther's reductionist propositions" (p. 56) and that they exhibited a "readiness to resist the allure of Luther's allegedly novel theological propositions" (p. 57). In a strong statement of his central theme, David states: "The Utraquist Church, in fact, continued to maintain its steady course, the *via media*, vis-à-vis Roman authoritarianism on the right, and with respect to Lutheran biblical reductionism on the left" (p. 166). Furthermore, "Utraquism possessed neither the pride of the Roman Church, nor the submissiveness of Lutheranism" (p. 178). Finally (at risk of providing too many examples), "the Utraquists under the Consistory maintained their adherence to a liberal ecclesiology, while the Roman Church in the Tridentine settlement reaffirmed and fortified its adherence to the authoritarian ecclesiastical *Befehlsstaat* that emerged from the late Middle Ages" (p. 241).

This breathtakingly anachronistic language undermines David's arguments. After all, his goal is to convince historians to reject the confessionalized history of the past, which marginalized and even effaced the history of Utraquism. *Finding the Middle Way* asks historians to understand the complexities of Utraquism, yet fails to see the complexity and variety in Protestantism and Catholicism. Rather than transcend older interpretations of Utraquism, this book remains far too deeply embedded in an old-fashioned confessional historiography.

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