Summary

THE IMAGE OF LIGHT IN ATTIRE IN JAN HUS’ POSTIL

The symbolic image of “light in attire” (světlo v obleči), found in Jan Hus’ medieval collection of Czech homiletic commentaries on scriptural passages known as Postil, is examined in the present study against the general background of Alexander Stich’s penetrating analysis of the symbolism of light and attire in Jaroslav Seifert’s Světlem oděná (“Attired in Light”, a collection of poems published in 1940). Compared with Seifert’s multi-faceted poetic image of the city of Prague “attired in light”, Jan Hus’ use of světlo v obleči does not seem, at first sight, to be much more than a translation of a metaphor used by Saint Gregory the Great. At closer look, however, Hus’ choice of obleč – arguably a rather uncommon and semantically somewhat vague word at the time – appears to be a well-considered creative act generating a variety of connotations of the concepts of “light” and “attire”. It is argued that by employing an uncommon word – yet a word easily identifiable with common Czech expressions derived from the same root – Jan Hus was able to masterly parallel the symbolic use of the Latin word testa –“(earthen) container (protecting the light inside)” – in the sense of “the human outside covering/protecting the godly inside” with the Czech word obleč – “a (cloth or leather) cover/attire (protecting the light inside)” – to express the same metaphor.

Keywords: Hus; postil; metaphor; translation; symbolism of light; symbolism of attire

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