

**Church Law
Society**



CHURCH REPORTER

1/2021

Newsletter for the English speaking members and friends of the Church Law Society
Prague – Brno – Olomouc – Stříbro

10th January 2021 | Volume 6



Prague, Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert: Christmas Eve Midnight Mass, 24th December 2020.
Photo by Roman Albrecht, source Man and Faith.

Christmas Celebrations in the Czech Republic

More Modestly, but Spiritually

Due to the emergency measures caused by the pandemic, the Christmas celebrations in the Czech Republic took place more modestly than in previous years. Nevertheless, they had strong spiritual dimension. Families gather for a Christmas celebration after sunset on Christmas Eve. In that time, there is a festive dinner consisting of fish soup, fish, and other courses. Then the Christmas tree is lit, under which gifts are prepared for children and adults. Many inhabitants of the Czech Republic who do not attend church normally come to church during Christmas, which is made possible by the fact that according to the Czech law the public holidays take three days from 24th to 26th December.¹

This Christmas, the Czech government placed the whole country into tier 5 lockdown due to increasing spread of infection and banned going out from 9 pm to 5 am. Nevertheless, an exception was made on 24th December as many people attend the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass. The exception was valid for journeys to services of all churches and back from 24th December 11 pm to 25th December 1.59 am. As a precaution, however, in many places the “Midnight” Mass was celebrated late in the afternoon, after sunset.

In the Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert in Prague, the Archbishop of Prague, and the Primate of Bohemia, Dominik Cardinal Duka, celebrated Holy Mass only in the presence of 300 believers. They had to book seats in advance. The service was broadcast by the private TV channel *Prima*. The cathedral is located in premises of the Prague Castle, the seat of the President of the Republic, which is otherwise closed to the public due to the pandemic. The Office of the President of the Republic set an exception for worshipers from 24th to 26th December.

In accordance with a governmental statutory instrument of 23rd December 2020, churches in the Czech Republic have limited the number of those who can attend services from 24th to 26th December to 20% of seats and from 27th December 2020 to 10th January 2021 only to 10% of seats.



Some Catholic bishops banned the Midnight Mass at all in their dioceses due to the pandemic. In Stříbro in western Bohemia, where the new local group of the Church Law Society is located, parish priest emeritus Archdean Jiří Hájek celebrated the Mass on 24th December at 4 pm. The church was open for prayer from 9 pm. Musical accompaniment was provided by the local Elementary Art School under the leadership of its director Bc. František Kratochvíl, a member of the parish council and chairman of the local group of the Church Law Society in Stříbro. A pupil of the school, twelve-year-old Ondřej Tolar (see photo), played trumpet with piano accompaniment by Mgr. Hana Bezděková, sang the Christmas carol *Silent Night*

¹ 24th December was declared public holiday after the Velvet Revolution by Act No. 167/1990 Sb.

(*Stille Nacht*) and the Czech Christmas hymn *The Lord Christ Was Born*. Anna Pospíšilová, a former pupil of the Stříbro and Plzeň Elementary Art Schools, played the compositions of old masters on the organ. The event was organized by the parish priest Miroslav Martiš and members of the parish council. The church was open until 10.30 pm so that people could get home in time.

Traditional New Year's Eve services were also celebrated this year, although there was no exception to night curfew. The Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Duka, celebrated Holy Mass on New Year's Eve at an important pilgrimage site in Stará Boleslav, where national pilgrimages to the patron saint of the Czech lands St. Wenceslas take place every September.² Holy Mass was celebrated in the local Basilica of the Virgin Mary without the presence of the faithful and was transmitted online.



Dominik Cardinal Duka in the Basilica of the Virgin Mary in Stará Boleslav in front of the Palladium of the Czech Lands.

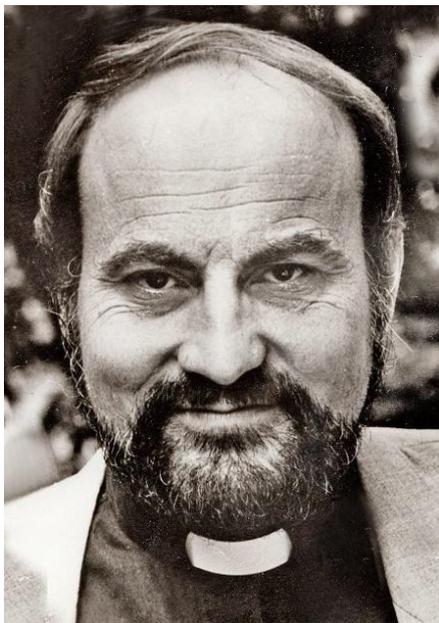
Photo by Tomáš Ježek, Man and Faith

On New Year's Day, 1st January 2021, the traditional New Year's Ecumenical Celebration was organized by the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic. This year it was hosted by the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and took place in Návší near Jablunkov (Czech Silesia). It was broadcast live by the public television broadcaster *Czech Television*. Daniel Ženatý, Synod Senior of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and Chairman of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, Bishop Martin David,

² See CÍRUS, Vojtěch, *National Pilgrimage to St. Wenceslas in Stará Boleslav*, in: Church Reporter No 10/2020, p. 2, <<http://spcp.prf.cuni.cz/CHURCH%20REPORTER%202020.10.pdf>>.

Apostolic Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Ostrava-Opava, Tomáš Butta, Patriarch of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and Petr Jan Vinš, Old Catholic Priest, Secretary General of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and a member of the Church Law Society, participated in the celebration.

In all churches, transmission online and on TV is becoming an important means of spreading God's word. Many Catholic parishes and evangelical local congregations organize broadcasts of services at Christmas and other liturgical periods. Daily services are broadcast by Catholic TV channel *Noe* based in Ostrava (northern Moravia) and the Christian radio station *Proglas* with its main studio in Brno (southern Moravia), which has regional studios in all Bohemian and Moravian dioceses. The public television broadcaster *Czech Television* broadcasts religious services of all main denominations regularly. Services are often broadcast by some non-church private television stations.



Current measures lead to reflection on the experience of faith.

Many Catholic priests such as Mons. Professor Tomáš Halík, Professor at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, President of the Czech Christian Academy, parish priest of the Academic Parish in Prague, Templeton Prize laureate, Doctor Honoris Causa of Oxford University and Honorary Member of the Church Law Society (pictured left), understand the current pandemic and the restrictions on attending services as a call for a deeper experience of faith, the opportunity to go deep.

Another influential religious thinker, Catholic priest and biologist Dr Marek Orko Vácha (pictured below), head of the Institute of Ethics and Humanities at the Third Faculty of



Medicine, Charles University in Prague, sees that the present time is leading to greater interest from the non-church public. In an interview for Czech newspaper *Lidové noviny* on 23rd December 2020 he said: “The church is not a marketing product to be sold. It is not even a political product and its mission is not to find subscribers. True, we could open the windows a little. If, thirty years after the Velvet Revolution, most citizens have no idea what the Catholic Church believes and what it preaches, then it is probably not entirely the fault of the majority of citizens. Rather, I now have the exact opposite impression that society is growing into churches. That the hunger for something spiritual leads us to examine what the churches really are. [...] Some

time ago I was asked how to build bridges to those so-called unbelievers, let's say more precisely to people who do not live in a religious context. I answer that there is no need to build bridges. People wade from all sides, and yes, if we do not accept them and do not call them, the very stones will be crying out. And the stones are already crying. They are not only sects, but also the most bizarre types of long-buried sagas. From the mysticism of Celtic stones³ to the wisdom of ancient druids, the menu is rich, choose. The hunger for spirituality is enormous. In 1990, almost five thousand registered pilgrims went on a pilgrimage to Santiago. In 2019, there were over three hundred and forty-seven thousands of them on the Camino. Whatever Europe is today, it is certainly not atheistic.”

Jiří Rajmund Tretera, Zábaj Horák

Person of the Year 2020

The end of the year is often an opportunity in Czech and foreign periodicals to announce personalities who have made a special contribution to the promotion of values and have achieved something very important last year.

The administration of the Church Reporter has decided to proclaim Mr. Jan Wolf, Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Exhibitions, Tourism and Foreign Relations of the Prague City Council, Church Law Society member (pictured below and on the front page of this issue in the middle of the Midnight Mass on 24th December 2020) *the Person of the Year 2020*.



Jan Wolf at the meeting of the Prague City Assembly on 23rd January 2020, which decided to rebuild the Marian Column.

Photo by Martina Řehořová, Man and Faith

³ These influences can also be observed in the Czech Republic, as the oldest population was the Celtic Boii, hence *Bohemia*. This is associated with the distinctive music of the Czechs, similar to Welsh, Scottish (bagpipe) and Irish. (Editor's note).

For many years, Mr. Wolf was one of the main fighters for the rebuilding of the Marian Column on Old Town Square in Prague, culminating on 23rd January 2020 at a meeting of the Prague City Assembly, which decided in favour of rebuilding by a narrow majority.⁴ Footage from the dramatic meeting was captured by photographer Martina Řehořová from the association of photographers Člověk a víra (Man and Faith),⁵ which focuses on the development of Christian photography.

We thank Mr. Jan Wolf for his efforts and wish him health, happiness, and success in his activities for the benefit of the capital city of Prague, the nation, and the homeland.

From Jan Wolf's Speech During Blessing of Marian Column on 15th August 2020

Your Eminence, Your Excellency, dear members of clergy, dear representatives of the Capital City of Prague, dear guests, pilgrims, sisters and brothers, allow me to welcome you and the viewers of the TV *Noe* to Old Town Square, one of the oldest squares in our country, at the celebration of the blessing of the restored Marian column. If we look at the history of our nation, it is clear to us that since the baptism of Princess St. Ludmila and her husband, Prince Bořivoj I, the Virgin Mary has been worshiped and praised in our country as our national protector and patron. Saint Wenceslas, as well as the father of the nation, the Roman emperor and the King of Bohemia Charles IV., the Czech, Moravian and Silesian people, and of course the people of Prague, prayed for centuries and turned with pleas to the one who was to hear them.

This also happened in 1648, when, after signing of the Peace of Westphalia, the Old and New Towns of Prague were to be looted by Swedish troops. The painting of the Virgin Mary of the Square was carried at the head of the defenders of Prague composed of Prague citizens, among them a large number of Jesuits, students and Jews, who thanked Virgin Mary for the miraculous rescue of Prague. As an expression of gratitude, it was decided in 1650 to erect a Marian column on this square, and on 13th July 1652, in the presence of the Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia Ferdinand III. Habsburg, the column was solemnly blessed by the Archbishop of Prague Arnošt of Harrach. The column stood here until 3rd November 1918, when in the revolutionary days of the establishment of the new Czechoslovak state, it was unculturally and even barbarically demolished. [...]

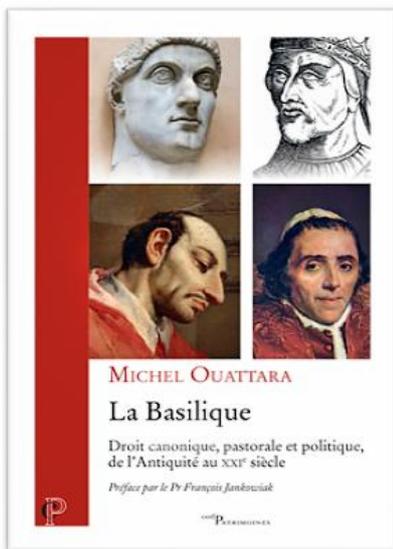
And then a miracle happens. At a time when statues are being torn down in the world and paintings are being destroyed, [...] the Prague City Assembly decides on the return of the Marian Column to the Old Town Square. We may not yet fully appreciate the restoration of the Marian Column today, but the return of the Virgin Mary to the main square in the country, I believe, heralds good future times in our state, now affected by the viral disease pandemic and its consequences. [...]

⁴ We dealt with the topic on the pages of this periodical in its issue 6/2020 <http://spcp.prf.cuni.cz/NEWSLETTER-2020.06.pdf> and 8/2020 <http://spcp.prf.cuni.cz/CHURCH%20REPORTER%202020.08.pdf>

⁵ See <https://www.clovekavira.cz/detail-galerie/9006cf0e-1cbc-4506-95cc-1b92381fea33>

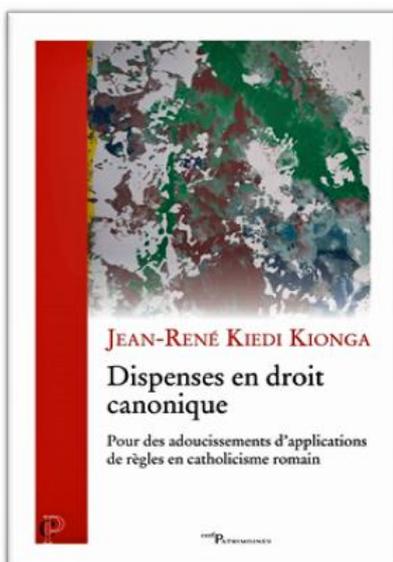
In conclusion, I would like to thank all those who contributed to the return of the Marian Column. Society for the Restoration of the Marian Column and all its members. To all those living and dead who have prayed even once for the renewal of the column in their lifetime. Likewise to those who do not believe in God, but their hearts told them that the Old Town Square without the Marian column is not complete. To all the representatives of the capital city of Prague, who voted for the renewal of the column on 23rd January this year, to all of you present at today's celebration, that you were not afraid even in this difficult time and decided to come to the celebration. And last but not least, I would like to thank its author, sculptor Petr Váňa and his brother Tomáš Váňa, sculptor Hynek Shejbal and all others who contributed to the creation of this wonderful masterpiece for 23 years of work [...].

From New Publications



OUATTARA, Michel, *La Basilique, Droit canonique, pastorale et politique, de l'Antiquité au XXI^e siècle*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2020, 593 p., e-ISBN 978-2-204-13891-8. Préface par le Pr François Jankowiak.

Michel Ouattara, Ivorian, diocesan priest in ministry in the Diocese of Nanterre (France), has drawn this great book about the institutional phenomenon of the basilica, from his doctorate in law from the University of Paris Sud / Paris Saclay (Jean Monnet Faculty of Law, Center for Law & Religious Societies) and from his doctorate in canon law (Faculty of Canon Law of the Catholic Institute of Paris).

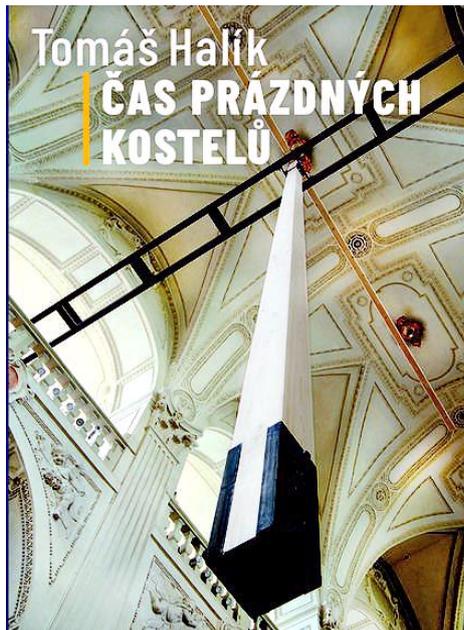


KIEDI KIONGA, Jean-René, *Dispenses en droit canonique, Pour des adoucissements d'applications de règles en catholicisme romain*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2020, 621 p., e-ISBN 978-2-204-13654-9. Préface par le Doyen honoraire Jean-Paul Durand op et par le Pr François Jankowiak, Postface de Son Excellence Monseigneur Jacques Benoît-Gonnin, Évêque de Beauvais.

Jean-René Kiedi Kionga, exercising his priestly ministry in France in the Diocese of Beauvais, drew this book of analytical history of the concept and procedure of canonical dispensations, from his thesis in Canon Law (Faculty of Canon Law of the Catholic Institute of Paris) and from his university

thesis in Legal Sciences (Jean Monnet Faculty of Law, Paris Sud – Paris Saclay University, Center for Law &

Religious Societies).



HALÍK, Tomáš, *Čas prázdných kostelů* [Time of Empty Churches], NLN, Prague, 2020, 179 p., ISBN 978-80-7422-761-5. Collection of sermons by Mons. Halík transmitted online in the empty student church of the Holy Saviour in Prague near Charles Bridge in spring of 2020 at the time of the first declaration of a state of emergency in the Czech Republic. Some quotes:

“Czech society is strongly un-ecclesiastical, but it is not atheistic.”

“The world of art and the world of religion belong fundamentally to each other. Art history is an integral part of the history of religion and vice versa.”

“The crisis of religion and the turmoil of religious institutions can be a star hour for faith, which will then find its own cultural and religious expression.”

Church Reporter – Newsletter for the English speaking members and friends of the Church Law Society, Prague – Brno – Olomouc – Stříbro, published by Church Law Society, Sudoměřská 25, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic.

Photo on the front page: Prague, Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert – Christmas Eve Midnight Mass, 24th December 2020. Photo by Roman Albrecht, source Man and Faith.

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Available online at: spcp.prf.cuni.cz/newsletter. Issues appear monthly. E-mail: spcp@prf.cuni.cz
ISSN 2695-012X