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

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English version



7th December 2023, the Holy Mass marking the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Church Law Society celebrated in St. Francis Church in Prague.

Photo Antonín Krč



Local group in Prague

We have celebrated 30 years of the Church Law Society

On 8th December 2023, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., the 87th *Church Law Society Evening* took place in Charles University's Faculty of Law, continuing the series of lectures and discussions on the subject of the Functioning of Law in Society and the Church. It was devoted to memories of the virtual founding of the Society during the presentation of Jiří Rajmund Tretera's "orange" book *Church Law* at an evening event in the Centre for Christian Culture in the reading room on the first floor of the Dominican Priory of St. Giles. On that occasion in December 1993 the idea was suddenly and unexpectedly heard from the floor and all 80 participants agreed spontaneously.



Our current celebrations in the Milada Horáková Hall were attended by 31 members and supporters of the Society. Its President read some passages from his *Czech Memoirs* describing the history of the Society from 1993 to 2022, accompanied by further details that he recalled. As is traditional, the Society's Vice-President accompanied the reading on the ukulele. He played and sang about ten songs from all around the world, which in their content complemented the narrative. Both received thunderous applause. The usual refreshments during the second half of the celebration were prepared – as has been the rule for the last two years – by Society's secretary Tomáš Grundza and two of his colleagues.



All photos: Antonín Krč



Pastoral Care of Lawyers in Prague

Prof. Jiří Rajmund Tretera OP's homily delivered on 7th December 2023

*A reading from the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God,
conceived without the stain of original sin*



Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters!
From Genesis 3, the first chapter of Moses, we read the account of original sin that weighs down all mankind. The first humans, created out of God's love, as a community of male and female creatures, succumbed to the whisperings of a fallen angel, the devil, who, in his free will but in his pride, rebelled against his Creator with the words: *I will not serve!* Perhaps his pride, which he had cultivated contrary to God's will, was wounded by the knowledge that such a low creature as man, albeit with an immortal soul but with a mortal body would be raised by God's will above the eternal incorporeal beings, the angels. The mother of the Saviour of the world, the God-man Jesus Christ, a mere person, will be raised above the angels, she

will be the Queen of Heaven next to her son.

The shameful work of the fallen angel in the form of a snake succeeded, even though it did not have to. The first humans showed themselves to be weak. They believed the devil's populist lies. Supposedly, a man who disobeys God, that is, one who eats the fruit from a forbidden tree, will become equal to God. He will judge what is good and what is bad, as he deems fit, without God's interference. This was pleasing to their vanity. Their subsequent act, swallowing the fruit of rebellion against God, even appealed to such thinkers as Kant, Schiller and Hegel. But this did not please God and it does not please the Church of God or us either.

It was not godliness that the first people acquired by their rebellion. It was the knowledge that without God they were wretched and naked, such defenceless creatures even weaker than the animals that are adapted to defend themselves. Who told you, says God to Adam, that you are naked? It is not shame that is supposed to protect against the natural sex life and make it mysterious and beautiful in marriage. It is about knowing the wretchedness of man “without God on earth”. Original sin was in the world. It did not cease to weigh heavily on the first people or their descendants. That is why in the Church it is also called hereditary sin.

Man does not live his life here on earth alone as a solitary and isolated individual, but in a community. One person influences another. We are collective creatures. It is already evident in a newborn child that once it gains reason, it will sin. That is why the messianic work of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross is so important to us. Thus, baptism, whether it is administered in adulthood or in childhood becomes the erasing of original sin. But we continue to bear its consequences, namely the general tendency to sin. That is why the Sacrament of Penance, i.e. absolution after Holy Confession, saves us.

God’s wrath condemned the first and most grievous sin here on earth. Nor could it have been otherwise. But that is one of God’s qualities: he is just and at the same time infinitely good. And so he brings hope. He chooses a woman, the weaker of the human pair, so that through her salvation comes to the world. God establishes enmity between the seed of the devil and the seed of the first woman. The devil will continue to harm us, he will crush the heel of the woman’s seed but the woman’s seed will prevail: she will crush the devil’s head. It makes no difference whether we translate this as the traditional *ipsa conteret*, that is, she, as Saint Jerome did when he wrote the Vulgate, or *ipse conteret* according to later translations. Either she or it will destroy the devil. As early as in the year 200 the Church Father Saint Irenaeus called this promise of the God the *protoevangelium* of the victory of Christ over the Antichrist.

The sin of the first Eve was corrected by the last Eve, the Virgin Mary. For at the angel’s Annunciation she did not refuse to conceive the Saviour of mankind, and that by the Holy Spirit, without the contribution of man, thus allowing such a strange, risky and dangerous thing. She demanded an explanation and when she was given it, she said “*Be It unto Me according to Thy Word*”. This humble *fiat* of hers is the most essential thing for our existence. The Son of God became incarnate. Disobedience was replaced by obedience. The power of original sin over everyone has lost its strength, even though it persists to the end of this age.

We celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus from the Virgin Mary by the wise decision of Pope Sylvester I on 25th December. The supernatural conception of the Lord Jesus then exactly nine months before, on 25th March. We read a little while ago about how this came about in the account of St. Luke in the first chapter of His Gospel.

Christians, annually overjoyed by both events and their celebrations, began to consider how they would also celebrate the coming of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, into the world, her birth and conception. We celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on 8th September. If we count back nine months from that date, then the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin Mary is fixed on 8th December.

In the Christian East, the idea was already born that the conception of the Virgin Mary was also something special. The Lord Jesus is not associated with sin at all. After all, He is God incarnate and God cannot sin. He is truth and goodness itself. However, as a man Jesus was subjected to temptations. But he conquered them. The Virgin Mary, however, is not God

incarnate; unlike her son she is just a person. Could the God-man, Jesus Christ, be born of a woman who has not been subjected to original sin like all other women and men in the world? That made no sense. The realisation was born that the Virgin Mary was conceived without the burden of original sin. Unlike Jesus, she was conceived in the biologically normal way, that is, from the conjugal union of her parents, to whom the Church, based on ancient tradition, gave the names of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. But yet, in her conception, a miracle happened with God's grace, not a spiritual and biological one as in the case of Jesus, but only a spiritual one. She was delivered from the power of original sin by God's direct intervention. She could have sinned with a personal sin, but even that did not happen. Which is to her credit. But for the merits of her Son she was spared that compulsive original sin. Why this extraordinary grace of God towards Mary of the house of David, daughter of Joachim and Anne? For God is omniscient and present in all points in time simultaneously. So, he knew at the conception of the Virgin Mary that of her own free will she would obey and say at the angel's annunciation: "*Be It unto Me according to Thy Word*". And therefore He delivered her from the power of original sin.

We have to marvel at the foresight of the Catholic Church in having perfected over the centuries, in the spirit of Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition, the idea of the conception of the Virgin Mary without the stain of original sin. The eighth of December is celebrated not only as the ordinary conception of Mary, but also as a conception with that supernatural element. And it is very useful for our soul, this knowledge. In the uncertainties of today's world, as we flounder in the midst of all kinds of confused ideologies, we are strengthened by the certainty of the sacred teachings of our Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

And finally, some historical facts about how the grace of God progressed in the Church and how the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary increased in the minds of the faithful and the shepherds. In the early Middle Ages, this belief spread from the Eastern Church to all the Italian lands and in around the year 1000 took root in England. The great proclaimer of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was Saint Anselm of Canterbury. It came to Bohemia in around 1200. In 1476, Pope Sixtus IV extended the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception to the whole Church. After the intellectual decline into which humanity had fallen after the many excesses of the so-called Enlightenment and its culmination in the police regimes of the first half of the 19th century, the Church came to the help of humanity by bringing this important article of faith even closer. On 8th December 1854, Pope Pius IX gave a binding definition of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and declared it an article of Catholic faith. Let us rejoice that our home in the Catholic Church is so beautifully secured. Let us always contemplate the life of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Amen.

7th December 2023, the Holy Mass marking the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Church Law Society celebrated in St. Francis Church in Prague.



Local group in Stříbro

Velvet Concert in Prostiboř

On Wednesday, 15th November 2023, two days before the anniversary of 17th November 1989, which is commemorated as the Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy, Stříbro Primary Art School marked this important national holiday with a *Velvet Concert* in St. Nicholas Church in Prostiboř (Western Bohemia).

This is the church that was renovated in 1985–87 through the joint efforts of Rev. Hugo Pitel OPraem and Jiří Rajmund Tretera and is depicted on the title page of the publication *A Tribute to Jiří Rajmund Tretera*, Leges, Prague, 2020.

The audience comprising dozens of people listened to pieces mainly by Baroque composers, performed by young artists on violin, guitar, flute, clarinet, electric piano as well as solo singing.



The celebration in St. Nicholas Church in Prostiboř near Tachov.

Text and photo František Kratochvíl



Mons. Tomáš Halík's speech at the Requiem Mass for Karel Schwarzenberg

On Saturday, 9th December 2023, in the Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert in Prague, Mons. Tomáš Halík, an honorary member of the Church Law Society, celebrated a Requiem Mass for the late Karel Schwarzenberg († 12. 11. 2023), whose death we reported in the November Church Reporter of 15th November 2023. At this point we take the liberty of reprinting Mons. Halík's sermon, which he delivered at the Requiem for Karel Schwarzenberg:

Dear Mr. President, Madam President, Father Archbishop, family of the deceased, distinguished guests – here in the Cathedral, in the grounds in front of the Cathedral and at home in front of your television screens – brothers and sisters. It was the wish of the deceased that his farewell should take place in Prague in the academic parish where he found his spiritual home. This wish will also be granted next week but it is fitting and just, *dignum et iustum*, that the main celebration of thanksgiving for his life be here, above the graves of our saints and kings, near the Schwarzenberg Chapel and the tomb of Cardinal Schwarzenberg, Archbishop of Prague and an important figure in the world Church during the time of the First Vatican Council.

Outstanding personalities in our history are given their permanent attributes, *epithets constantes*. For example, František Palacký *the Father of the Nation*, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk *the President Liberator*, and so on. I think that Karel Schwarzenberg should enter our historical memory as an educator of contemporary Czech society, an educator of noble-mindedness. This nobleman was a cultivator of our public life.

One of the great gifts that noblemen have received in life, even more precious than castles and land, has been their education. The education to be responsible for everything inherited and entrusted, the education to be loyal to the spiritual and moral values of the family tradition.

Karel Schwarzenberg was brought up to be patriotic primarily by his father, an historian and the main author of the document by which the Czech nobility bravely declared their loyalty to the Czech nation and Czechoslovak statehood during the Nazi threat, who actively participated in the Anti-Nazi resistance. His family, subjected to persecution and injustice by the Nazi regime, and then by the Czechoslovak state and the Communist regime, had to leave their beloved homeland soon after the war. When Karel Schwarzenberg was able to return home soon after the fall of the Communist regime and was called to serve his country, he would often introduce himself by saying: "I am a forester and an innkeeper." A forester is somebody who cares for the beauty and health of the natural environment, and an innkeeper cares for an environment where people are comfortable together. He took both of these roles very seriously throughout his life. But he soon found himself with a new, informal, but nevertheless important task. Karel Schwarzenberg became a leader of the new generation of democratic administrators of public life. Many of them from the subculture of dissent on the fringes of society at the time found themselves with unexpected speed in a completely new life situation, in a new social and cultural environment. They stood in the spotlight of social interest. And some of them had to represent the state on the international stage, meeting with experienced politicians of the

democratic world, diplomats, heads of state, kings and queens, with figures such as the Pope and the Dalai Lama. They were suddenly meant to become the face and calling card of the Czech nation and of the restored Czechoslovak, and later Czech, democracy to the world, from which we had been excluded for half a century by Nazism and Communism. At that time, the bravery that they had shown in the fight against Communism was no longer enough. What was needed was experience, wisdom, prudence, foresight, social acumen and also refinement, magnanimity and nobility – with all that that word implies. Not only in their outward appearance, but also in their thoughts and actions, in their attitude towards people.

Everyone could see in Karel Schwarzenberg what the word *gentleman* means. He was not an arrogant mentor, but a discreet inspirer, educating above all by his personal example. Karel Schwarzenberg represented what is often an underestimated condition for the healthy development of society: virtue. The virtue of nobility. The well-known Böckenförde paradox still applies: democracy, political and economic freedom are the best form of government but they in themselves do not have the ability to reproduce and defend themselves. The guarantee for the maintenance and development of freedom and democracy is not the invisible hand of the market, but responsible and morally and spiritually grounded people, capable of resisting the danger of anomie and the breakdown of society with critical and prudent thinking. This danger is ever more threatening. We see it in the world and in Europe too, in our near neighbourhood and here at home, how populists, demagogues and chauvinists now crawl out of the dark like the newts in Karel Čapek's prophetic novel and raise their heads. Karel Schwarzenberg spent his whole life confronting those who wanted to tear our nation from the family of a unifying Europe and thus cause the moral, political, cultural and economic suicide of our country. He saw earlier than others that our membership of the European Union and NATO was an absolutely vital necessity and major national interest for us. He was a man who held together great values that were often opposed to each other. He showed us all how incredibly important it is to combine Czechism and Europeanism, patriotism and globalism. He showed us pure patriotism without any odorous trace of nationalism or poisonous national selfishness, without any parochialism or narrow-mindedness. He showed what the difference is between proud allegiance to Czech customs and aspirations and rancid, narrow-minded Czech philistinism. He combined in an absolutely integral way what many thought was incompatible. The natural nobility of an aristocrat with a deep democratic spirit and true humanity.

The communist regime discredited the notion of the people and peoplehood in our language; it called state capitalism *the people's property*, the Army of the Communist Party *the people's militia*, it called itself *a people's democracy* – and this pleonasm was as hypocritical as Putin's and Orban's *controlled* or *illiberal democracy* today, in truth an authoritarian, unfree regime. Prince Schwarzenberg restored dignity to peoplehood, he was truly a man of the people, close to the people, who did not elevate himself above anyone else. And at the same time, this peoplehood and humanity was free from any populism, vulgarity or boorishness. When it was necessary, he did not hesitate to reach for a sharp word, but there was never any meanness in it. It was remarkable how, late into his life, he was able to be close to young people and to have their full trust and affection.

He was a man of wonderful humour, which of all his charms I recall here because I am convinced that humour, like little else, is the hallmark of healthy spirituality, healthy faith and healthy piety. Fanatics and bitter sceptics are incapable of humour. Faith gives us perspective,

the chance to look at least for a while at the world through God's eyes, to enter that laughter of God, of which the Bible speaks. That roaring laugh at prideful ungodly people who take themselves too seriously. At this point I would like to recall the famous bon mot that Karel Schwarzenberg said of himself: "I'm probably a good Catholic, but a bad Christian." What he was saying was: I believe everything that the Church teaches and everything that generations of my ancestors believed; I like to take part in church ceremonies, but I know that being a Christian is something more. It means keeping the oil in the lamp of life until the very end, as we heard in today's Gospel. Following Christ is a challenging journey, about which no one can say that they have done enough, that they are already a good enough Christian. We repeatedly stumble on this journey and have to get up again, we get lost and have to find our way again. We repeatedly come up against our own weaknesses. None of us is a perfect Christian. But paradoxically, with this humble confession Karel Schwarzenberg showed that he was a good Christian. With that sentence he was saying the same as is often repeated by Pope Francis: I am a sinner, we are all sinners and we are allowed to be sinners. Jesus came for sinners, not for the righteous. And he was called the friend of sinners.

After all, Václav Havel in his famous speech beginning with the words "I do not know if I know what a miracle is" welcomed the pope *among us sinners*. We are allowed to be sinners, says Pope Francis, but we are not allowed to be people with hard and corrupt hearts; we are not allowed to be prideful, merciless and hard-hearted. Nobody who knew Karel Schwarzenberg could say of him that he was prideful. And anyone who knew him well and intimately knows that he was actually very humble. He kept the oil of faith until the last moment, he kept the good wine to the end. Our mutual friend Svát'a Karásek, the bard of Christian dissent, said in one of his songs: "God will give you excellent wine at the end of your day. Excellent wine for the last time. In your life today, every joy of yours anticipates your full joy. With your death you only cross the bridge, God will call: Another guest! A new guest has come to the feast."

Today, Karel Schwarzenberg is a guest at the heavenly banquet, he is a new guest – at the cosy and spacious heavenly banquet, where there is enough room for everyone. Once upon a time, in this place, at the coffin of Václav Havel, in a clear reference to the promise made at the coffin of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk by his successor, Karel Schwarzenberg promised on our behalf that we would remain faithful to those later much-mocked values that Havel wrote on the banner of the Velvet Revolution, *truth and love*.

Allow me to renew this pledge at the coffin of Karel Schwarzenberg on behalf of all of you who wish to freely join me. Dear Karel Schwarzenberg, Karel, prince, our prince, we will not allow the values that you served to perish. We will remain faithful. May God help us to do so!

Amen.



23rd September 2023: Koli National Park (eastern Finland), the venue of this year's conference of the European Consortium for Church and State Research.

Photo Záboj Horák

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