

Introductory Report

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a professor of church law at the Faculty of Law of Charles University, as the President of the Church Law Society and as a priest at the head of the Pastoral Care of Lawyers in Prague, I would like to welcome you on behalf of all three of these organisations, which are the organisers of the international conference entitled Prague Dialogues on Church and State Relations. We are delighted to be able to welcome you to this year's Prague Dialogues, now in their fifth season.

In choosing the name of this regular scholarly meeting we were inspired by the name of a much larger gathering in Germany, which Associate Professor Záboj Horák and I have been attending regularly for a quarter of a century. This is the *Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche*, which is organised every year by the Bishopric of Essen in the Wolfsburg Catholic Academy in Mülheim an der Ruhr. However, the Prague Dialogues differ from the Essener Gespräche in that our gatherings are less frequent and the number of participants is smaller. In contrast, our sessions are longer and lectures are given by a greater number of participants. We hope that the attendees at the Prague Dialogues have more opportunity to enjoy the beautiful city of Prague, which is one of Europe's and indeed the world's major tourist destinations!

The first session of Prague Dialogues was devoted to *Church Financing in Europe and the USA*, the second to *Religion and Concordat Law of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic*, and the third to *Religion Law in Germany and the USA*.

The topic of the fourth conference in 2019 was *Spiritual Care in Public Institutions*. Representatives from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and three representatives from the Czech Republic spoke about spiritual care in their own countries. This year, in addition, there are representatives from Italy and Spain, three speakers from Austria and four from the Czech Republic. No representatives were able to come this time from Switzerland or Hungary, and none of the invited representatives from the USA could attend.

The results of the fourth conference were published in English in the book *Spiritual Care in Public Institutions in Europe*, which was published by Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag in 2019.

Our intention was to repeat the theme of the 2019 conference every second or third year. But alas! The Covid pandemic put a stop to that. And so, we decided to hold the 5th Prague Dialogues in 2024. Five years have at least passed since the last conference and those of us who gave talks in 2019 can focus in particular on changes in spiritual care in public institutions in our countries and their development in recent times.

This topic is of particular interest in the Czech Republic, especially since spiritual care in public institutions was restored after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. This spiritual care was rebuilt step by step.

Every year, the number of chaplains and other spiritual care workers in all sectors is growing in this country. Numerous publications are focused on the legal regulation of this care. Many articles have been published primarily by the Church Law Society in Prague in its *Church Law Review*.

For more than twenty-five years, a full-day conference on religion law has been held at the Faculty of Law of Masaryk University in Brno every September, organised by the Department of Constitutional Law and Political Science, in cooperation with the Church Law Society. The most recent conferences have dealt with individual sectors of spiritual care in public institutions.

The Czech Republic will be represented by several papers. Professor Damián Němec from the Saints Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology, Palacký University in Olomouc, will outline the issue of Spiritual Care in Health Care Facilities. This kind of care is still in its early days in the Czech Republic and its regulation has to overcome many difficulties. Therefore, it is appropriate to pay attention to it in a special paper.

Associate Professor Zábaj Horák from Prague will talk about other sectors. And Dr Adam Csukás, our close collaborator and main lawyer of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, the second largest Church in the Czech Republic, will focus on his church's participation in spiritual care in public institutions, particularly in the Evangelical Diaconia, which has expanded its activities considerably in recent years.

Other canon law and religion law teachers from Czech universities have been invited to this conference. We look forward to their participation in the discussion. We expect the same from representatives of public institutions, who have also accepted our invitation.

Eleven students of the Master and Doctoral degree programmes at the Faculty of Law of Charles University and members of the Church Law Society will be present as well, as will nine students from Vienna University in Austria.

At the present time, seven courses on canon and religion law are taught at the Faculty of Law in Prague to hundreds of students. Two scientific seminars are open, each for fifteen students, every semester. These subjects are currently taught at the Faculty of Law by four professors, who are also present at the conference.

We are looking forward to all the papers to be given by foreign and Czech participants and to the discussion to which all people present are invited.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.

Editorial remark: Ten speakers have promised that their contributions will be included in the collective monograph as a development of the ideas contained in their conference contributions. And so it happened, and we can happily state that the collective monograph can go to print. This book was written as part of Charles University's Cooperation research program, research field Law, research area Legal History and Roman Law.