
HOLY YEAR 1925 AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT

The Holy Year of 1925, proclaimed by Pope Pius XI, was a milestone in 20th-century church history, influencing not only Italy but also Central Europe, including Czechoslovakia. It sought to inspire spiritual renewal and reconciliation in a post-war world struggling with economic crises and political instability. This study examines the impact of the Holy Year on the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, focusing on its role in religious discourse and its relationship with political power. Using Czech and Vatican sources, contemporary newspapers, and ecclesiastical documents, it explores the impact of this event on Catholic identity in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Despite political and economic challenges, the Holy Year saw peaceful expressions of faith, with 582 000 pilgrims travelling to Rome. Although Czechoslovak participation was limited, it still demonstrated the commitment of local Catholics to their faith. The event also underscored the Church's broader international role, as Pope Pius XI strengthened Catholicism's global presence in both religious and social spheres. For Czechoslovakia, the Holy Year provided an opportunity to strengthen Catholic influence nationally while fostering solidarity with the wider Catholic world.

Keywords

Holy Year; 1925; Pius XI; Catholic church; Czechoslovakia; Vatican

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The Holy Year of 1925, proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in the bull *Infinita Dei Misericordia* on 29 May 1924, marked a significant milestone in the history of the Catholic Church in the 20th century. Its influence extended beyond Italy, leaving a profound impact on the

ecclesiastical, political, social, and cultural spheres of Central European countries, including Czechoslovakia. The Holy Year was intended to foster spiritual renewal and mutual reconciliation. This objective was particularly pertinent in the context of post-war Europe, which was still grappling with the trauma of World War I, economic reconstruction, and political instability, rendering the Holy Year's message both timely and comprehensible to contemporaries.

The Holy Year of 1925 found Catholicism in Czechoslovakia during a period when the Church faced challenges due to the new political and social conditions brought about by the founding of the republic in 1918. After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Church had to adapt to a new political reality, transitioning to a democratic and pluralistic society, which was vastly different from the monarchy. The Czechoslovak state had secular tendencies, leading to some tension between the Church and the state. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church remained a significant force in the lives of the faithful.

The Church's relationship with the national question, particularly in the Czech and Slovak regions, was also strong during this period. Catholics were deeply connected to the national movement, which manifested not only in politics but also in religious life. In 1925, significant Catholic national movements were in full swing, as evidenced by participation in pilgrimages and religious events. The Church was also working on internal reforms aimed at strengthening its influence among the faithful, especially in light of the economic challenges of the early 1920s.

Thus, the Holy Year of 1925 provided an opportunity for Catholics to experience spiritual renewal and reinforce their religious identity. Despite the challenging political and economic conditions, the Church was able to mobilize the faithful and offer them space to deepen their faith, thereby strengthening its role in society.

It is also important to note that the Holy Year of 1925 marked a key moment with a significant impact on the relationship between the State and the Church. The study further examines the impact of these events on the development of Catholicism and its position within Czechoslovak or Czech society. The research is based on an analysis of Czech and Vatican sources, contemporary newspaper articles, important Church documents, and literature, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that was of considerable significance to the spiritual identity of Czechoslovakia during the interwar period.

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of the Holy Year of 1925 on the Czechoslovak ecclesiastical environment. Special attention will be given to the role of the Catholic Church in religious discourse and its relationship with political power, both in the context of domestic politics and within the broader European framework.

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As early as December 1922, in his first encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei*, at a time when Europe was still grappling with the consequences of World War I, Pope Pius XI emphasized the need for spiritual renewal and unity among nations, which became one of the key ideological pillars of the Holy Year of 1925. This Holy Year, the first in a quarter of a century, was marked by an emphasis on the Church's missionary activity, understood as a living expression of faith and charity. At the same time, Pius XI linked the Jubilee Year to a call for prayer for peace and unity, and, for the first time, for the just ordering of affairs in the Holy Land. In this context, he urged all the bishops of the world to actively participate in the Jubilee Year and its spiritual mission.¹

One of the highlights of the Holy Year was the Great Missionary Exhibition, carefully coordinated by Pope Pius XI. Officially opened on 21 December 1924, it was not accessible to the general public until the following year, as part of the Jubilee celebrations. It took place in various parts of the Vatican, including the gardens, courtyards, and select museums. This exhibition aimed to showcase the extensive missionary activity of the Catholic Church across continents. Visitors were able to view a rich collection of ethnographic, cultural, and religious artifacts that documented the interaction between the Catholic Church and local cultures in mission areas. The exhibition was designed to deepen the faithful's interest in the Church's universal mission and encourage them to support missionary work both spiritually and materially.²

¹ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (Abingdon – New York: Routledge, 2008), 93–94; John Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 134–135.

² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter referred to as AMZV), fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 12. 1924; Marek Šmíd, Eva Hajdinová and Daniel Atanáz Mandzák (eds.), *Svatý stolec a Československo II. Edice dokumentů z let 1923–1925* [The Holy See and Czechoslovakia II. Edition of documents from 1923–1925] (Prague: Karolinum, 2023), 283 (summary policy report no. 25); Josef

The promotion of the Holy Year of 1925 introduced unprecedented innovations. Colour posters were produced in six languages, a novelty in the promotion of the Jubilee Year, and the Italian Post Office issued a series of commemorative stamps for the Vatican City State. This visual and promotional element significantly contributed to the international character of the Holy Year and helped forge closer links between the Holy See and the general faithful. A symbolic gesture confirming the return to traditional Catholic values was the re-erection of the cross on the Roman Capitol, which had been removed during the secularisation processes in Italy.⁵

The Holy Year of 1925 not only emphasized the importance of the Church's missionary work but also stimulated an international debate on peace, spiritual unity, and the moral renewal of society. Pius XI used this Jubilee Year to reaffirm the universal mission of the Church in an increasingly complex political and cultural environment, while also reinforcing the perception of the Catholic Church as a unifying element in a divided and politically unstable Europe. In the *Bull Infinita Dei Misericordia*, the Pope further emphasized his commitment to seeking the reunification of separated Christian communities with the Roman Catholic Church.⁴

On the eve of the Holy Year of 1925, Pope Pius XI emphasized the close connection between this Jubilee period and the missionary activity of the Church as an authentic expression of faith and Christian charity. During a meeting with the members of the Preparatory Committee on 1 March 1924, the Pope reiterated that the Church's spiritual mission should not be limited to her own faithful but must be directed towards spreading the Gospel to all peoples. This emphasis on missionary activity was all the more urgent because of the difficult challenges the Church faced, particularly in regions where it was subjected to severe persecution. In the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik regime systematically suppressed religious life, and in the Middle East, political and

Gelmi, *Papežové: Od svatého Petra po Jana Pavla II.* [Popes: From St. Peter to John Paul II] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1994), 271.

⁵ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 5. 1924; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 225 (summary policy report no. 17); Jaroslav V. Polc, *Svaté roky: 1300–1983* [Holy Years: 1300–1983] (Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 2000), 94.

⁴ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 5. 1924; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 226 (summary policy report no. 17).

social conflicts were escalating, threatening the stability of Christian communities.⁵

To obtain indulgences during the Holy Year, pilgrims were advised to pray not only for their own spiritual renewal but also for peace among nations, for the unity of Christians, and, in light of the events of the time, for the stabilization of the situation in Palestine. This last intention added a new dimension to the Holy Year, as it reflected the political situation in the region, particularly the growing tensions in Mandatory Palestine under British administration. It also highlighted the Church's broader involvement in international dialogue, particularly in efforts to protect Christian holy sites and secure the rights of Catholic communities.⁶

By adding a specific intention concerning Palestine to the traditional prayers, the Pope urged the faithful to view the Church's missionary work as a response to the current challenges of their time. In doing so, Pius XI demonstrated that the Church could adapt flexibly to the changing times and reflect geopolitical shifts. At the same time, this step reinforced the Church's image as a moral arbiter of peace and reconciliation. Linking the missionary focus with contemporary world events gave the Holy Year a new dynamic and underscored the universal character of the Church, which transcends geographical and cultural boundaries while striving for harmony in the world.⁷

On the morning of 25 December 1924, Pope Pius XI inaugurated the Holy Year by opening the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica, symbolically beginning the entire Jubilee period. Although significant, the ceremony was adapted to the specific circumstances of the time. Due to ongoing tensions between the Holy See and the Italian State, the Pope, confined to Vatican City, was unable to participate in the solemn procession to the square. His absence from the public square not only

⁵ Jolanta Babiuchová and Jonathan Luxmoore, *Vatikán a rudý prapor: Zápas o duši východní Evropy: Studie o vztahu římskokatolické církve a komunistických států* [The Vatican and the Red Banner: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe: A Study of the Relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Communist States] (Prague: Volvox Globator, 2003), 29–30; Rita Tolomeo, 'Le Iniziative di Pio XI per difendere la Chiesa in URSS (1922–1939)', in *La Chiesa cattolica in Unione Sovietica. Dalla Rivoluzione del 1917 alla Perestrojka*, ed. Jan Mikrut (Verona: Gabrielli Editori, 2017), 113.

⁶ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 5. 1924; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 226–227 (summary policy report no. 17).

⁷ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 5. 1924; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 226–227 (summary policy report no. 17).

reflected the dispute between the Vatican and the Kingdom of Italy but also underscored the broader political and social tensions affecting the position of the Catholic Church in Europe and the world at the time.⁸

In the other three papal basilicas, the Holy Gates were opened by cardinal-legates, who performed the ceremony according to the traditional ritual. This ritual, last performed in full in 1825 during the pontificate of Pope Leo XII, held profound symbolic meaning. It not only represented a renewal of the Church's mission but also a spiritual connection with the past. The opening of the Holy Gates was traditionally seen as an act of grace, allowing the faithful to obtain indulgences and strengthening their spiritual life.⁹

The cardinal-legates entrusted with the ceremony of opening the Holy Gates not only renewed this historic ritual but also created an important link between the Church's past and present. Through this act, the Church demonstrated its resilience and unity in the face of challenges, particularly the tensions between the State and the Vatican, the pressures of modernization, and the political upheavals across Europe. Emphasizing tradition, connecting with historical events, and continuing the spiritual guidance of the faithful strengthened the Church's authority and prestige in a world confronted with major political and social challenges.

During the Holy Year of 1925, Pius XI beatified several individuals who were of fundamental importance to the Catholic faith and its missionary activity. Among them was Bernadette Soubirous, known as the visionary of Lourdes, whose 1858 apparition of the Virgin Mary had a profound impact on Catholicism and led to the establishment of a pilgrimage site that continues to attract millions of believers worldwide. Her beatification, proclaimed just in 1925, was not only a recognition of her holiness but also a celebration of her life, which inspired countless people to spiritual renewal and a deeper search for faith.¹⁰

Other notable figures who were declared saints included the Jesuit theologian Peter Canisius, recognized as a teacher of the Church, and

⁸ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier 31. 12. 1924; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 283–284 (summary policy report no. 25); Polc, *Svaté roky*, 94.

⁹ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 94.

¹⁰ On the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes in more detail: Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Penguin, 1999); Henri Lasserre, *Our Lady of Lourdes* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1906).

the parish priest John Maria Vianney, known for his tireless pastoral work and devotion to the spiritual care of the faithful. Often called the Priest of Ars, Vianney became a symbol of deep faith and missionary zeal, which was evident not only in his personal life but also in his service to the local Church. The importance of these figures remained relevant in 1925.¹¹

These declarations of blessedness and holiness during the Holy Year underscored Pius XI's efforts to encourage the faithful to actively engage in missionary work and spiritual renewal. The eminent saints and blessed were presented as models to inspire the faithful to follow their example in daily life and to strengthen the Church's mission, which was particularly crucial at the time.

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The Archbishop of Prague and Primate of Bohemia František Kordač issued his pastoral letter on the Year of Grace 1925 on 12 April of the same year. He urged the faithful to take advantage of this Year of Grace to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal punishment through the Sacrament of Penance, as well as to gain indulgences for temporal punishment. He also viewed the Pope's actions as a political effort aimed at reconciling peoples divided by schism and heresy, as well as those divided by nationalism, and at bringing them back to the single source of their revival and reconciliation – the one Church of Christ.¹²

During the Holy Year of 1925, thousands of faithful from all over Europe and other parts of the world, including numerous delegations from Czechoslovakia, came to Rome, where the words of the Pope and the Archbishop also resonated. This fact testified to the strong desire of Czech, Moravian, Slovak, as well as German, Polish, Hungarian, and Ruthenian Catholics to live this jubilee moment intensely and to strengthen their faith. The bishops in Czechoslovakia actively encouraged their parishioners to participate in the pilgrimage to Rome, which led to the formation of a special committee responsible for organizing the pilgrimage and ensuring the comfort of the pilgrims.¹³

¹¹ Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1925, annus XVII, volumen XVII, no. 6, 169, resp. no. 7, 209, resp. no. 10, 349; Pollard, *The Papacy*, 189.

¹² Jakub Formánek and Marek Šmíd (eds.), *Pastýřské listy 1918–1945* [Pastoral letters 1918–1945] (Prague: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2017), 186–189.

¹³ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 95.

The first organized group, led by Archdeacon Antonín Havelka, set out from Pilsen and arrived in Rome in March. In April, the Marian retreats followed, bringing with them an atmosphere of joy and spiritual renewal. A month later, Bishop Karel Kašpar of Hradec Králové arrived in the Eternal City. In July, German Catholics from the Diocese of Litoměřice, led by Emil Bobek, Senator of the German Christian Social People's Party, Bishop Ján Vojtaššák of Spiš, and the Lourdes Pilgrimage Society, led by the military bishop Josef Bombera, gathered believers seeking spiritual healing and renewal.¹⁴

In August, a Slovak pilgrimage arrived in Rome, attended by 1200 Catholics. In September, the international youth pilgrimage was joined by Catholic youth from Bohemia and Moravia, led by Benedictine Karel Methodius Klement, highlighting the role of the young generation in the Church community. Notably, Czech and German Catholic youth travelled to the Eternal City together.¹⁵ The participation of this group was seen as a symbol of the hope and dynamism of the young generation in the life of the Church.

At the end of September, a Moravian pilgrimage arrived in Rome, once again emphasizing the diversity and unity of Czechoslovak Catholics. In October, Czech Catholics from Vienna, organized through expatriate associations, also joined the pilgrimage. This series of pilgrimages testified to the importance of faith in Czechoslovak society and reflected the Church's efforts to strengthen cohesion among different ethnic groups. During the autumn, pilgrimage expeditions led by Bishop Josef Gross of Litoměřice, Archbishop Leopold Prečan of Olomouc, Archbishop František Kordač of Prague, Bishop Šimon Bárta of České Budějovice, Bishop Norbert Klein of Brno, and University Professor Alois Kolísek arrived in the Eternal City. The participation of pilgrims from Europe and overseas was exceptionally high, exceeding the expectations of the Holy See representatives.¹⁶

¹⁴ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Pallier 1. 4. 1925, resp. Pallier 24. 4. 1925, resp. Jelen 3. 8. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 311–312 (summary policy report no. 28), resp. 317 (summary policy report no. 29), resp. 348 (summary policy report no. 32); Polc, *Svaté roky*, 95; *Lidové listy*, 23. 5. 1925.

¹⁵ *Osservatore Romano*, 21. 9. 1925; Jaroslav Šebek, *Mezi křížem a národem: Politické prostředí sudetoněmeckého katolicismu v meziválečném Československu* [Between the Cross and the Nation: The Political Context of Sudeten German Catholicism in Inter-war Czechoslovakia] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2006), 65.

¹⁶ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Pallier 1. 4. 1925, resp. Pallier 2. 5. 1925, resp. Jelen 3. 10. 1925, resp. Jelen 7. 11. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý*

The total number of Czechoslovak pilgrims was estimated at approximately 4000. Although this number was lower than in some other countries, it testified to the strong interest and determination of the Czechoslovak faithful to participate in the spiritual life of the Church at an international level. Participation in the Holy Year not only provided the pilgrims with profound spiritual experiences but also contributed to the consolidation of their religious identity within the global Catholic community.¹⁷

Official publications issued in Rome after the Holy Year 1925 listed the main reasons for the participation of Czechoslovak pilgrims. One of the key factors was the economic difficulties of the first half of the 1920s, which negatively affected both the standard of living and the overall economic situation of the population. This unfavorable situation led to an increase in travel costs, which, according to the Holy See's assessment, made it impossible for many families to participate in the pilgrimage to Rome.¹⁸

Another significant factor was the ongoing parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia in November 1925, which required citizens to actively participate in political events, diverting their attention and energy from spiritual activities such as pilgrimages. The political tension and the effort to ensure stability in the country thus diminished the focus on these spiritual events. However, the elections did bring electoral success to Christian parties in Czechoslovakia – the Czech and Slovak People's Parties won nearly 1 200 000 votes, securing 54 mandates, or 18%, in the three-hundred-member Chamber of Deputies.¹⁹

In addition, in 1925, a gathering of the Catholic sports organization Orel was held in Brno, which became a significant event in the cultural and sports movement in Czechoslovakia. The event had strong religious

stolec a Československo, 317 (summary policy report no. 29), resp. 384 (summary policy report no. 34), resp. 399 (summary policy report no. 35).

¹⁷ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1926, Jelen 11. 1. 1926; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 439 (summary policy report no. 37).

¹⁸ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 96.

¹⁹ Marek Šmíd, 'Obtížné zakotvení lidovců v politickém systému první ČSR: Parlamentní volby v roce 1925 a Československá strana lidová' [The Difficult Position of the People's Party in the Political System of Early Czechoslovakia: The 1925 Parliamentary Elections and the Czechoslovak People's Party], *Soudobé dějiny* 20, no. 4 (2013): 570; Miloš Kouřil, 'Katoličtí kněží v politice Československa v meziválečném období' [Catholic Priests in Czechoslovak Politics During the Interwar Period], in *Jan Šrámek a jeho doba*, eds. Pavel Marek et al. (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2011), 315–317.

and cultural overtones, promoting a healthy lifestyle and the values of Catholic morality. Beyond its focus on physical education, it attracted the attention of believers and organizers interested in physical culture within the Catholic community. This gathering had a significant impact on the cultural and social life of the Church and required considerable effort and resources. In a broader political context, it represented an expression of resistance to socialist ideologies and supported Christian values in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Last but not least, an event that disrupted relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See during the Holy Year played a significant role. On 6 July, lavish celebrations were held in memory of Master Jan Hus, with President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Prime Minister Antonín Švehla serving as honorary chairmen. Although not an extraordinary jubilee, these celebrations caused tension due to the controversial connotations of Jan Hus's legacy for the Catholic Church. As prominent representatives of the Czechoslovak state, Masaryk and Švehla emphasized freedom of religion and national identity, contributing to a cooling of relations with the Vatican. The Holy See viewed this as a provocative gesture signaling anti-Catholic tendencies, which sparked opposition among some segments of the Catholic public. In response, Apostolic Nuncio Francesco Marmaggi filled a formal protest, which was sent to Rome and later recalled to the Vatican. This action underscored the Holy See's disagreement with Czechoslovakia's stance on religious issues, particularly regarding the legacy of Jan Hus in Catholic tradition.²⁰

The Czechoslovak government responded to this development by recalling its envoy to the Holy See, further cooling mutual relations. This diplomatic rift, known as the Marmaggi affair,²¹ was reflected in the public debate, where parts of the Czechoslovak press sharply

²⁰ Historical Archives of Secretariat of State (hereafter referred to as AA. EE. SS.), fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 57, f. 11, Gasparri to Marmaggi 4. 7. 1925; National Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection – Clippings Archive, box 1596; Marek Šmíd, 'Postava Jana Husa jako předmět sporu mezi Československem a Svatým stolicem v období první republiky' [The figure of Jan Hus as a subject of dispute between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See during the First Republic], in *Hus a Masaryk: Hledání národní tradice a identity: Sborník projevů pronesených na slavnostním setkání u příležitosti 163. výročí narození Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka v budově Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu České republiky a dalších příspěvků*, eds. Tomáš Butta et al. (Prague: Církev československá husitská, 2015), 32–43.

²¹ For more details on the Marmaggi affair see for example Marek Šmíd, 'The Marmaggi Affair: The most important diplomatic conflict between Czechoslovakia and the Holy

criticized the Vatican. The anti-clerical tone of the campaign, primarily led by left-wing and nationalist media, mirrored the broader secularization tendencies of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Some newspaper articles depicted the Holy See as an institution hostile to Czechoslovak statehood and cultural identity, deepening the mutual tensions.²²

On the other hand, the Italian press, including newspapers such as *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Messaggero*, emphasized that although Master Jan Hus contributed to the formation of Czech national identity, he had been condemned by the Catholic Church as a heretic. The glorification of Hus in a country with deep Catholic traditions raised questions in Italy about the ideological direction of Czechoslovak politics and its relationship with the Church's heritage. This situation reflected broader European tensions between secular states like Czechoslovakia and France, and the Catholic Church, where issues of national identity, faith, and political order were in conflict.²⁵

The mentioned conflict illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the formation of Czechoslovak national identity and church institutions in post-war Europe. The celebrations of Master Jan Hus were thus not only an internal political matter but also significantly influenced the relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See. At the same time, they revealed the tension between the modern concept of national identity and traditional church values.

On 1 August 1925, the Czechoslovak bishops issued a collective pastoral letter in which they commented on the celebrations of Master

See in the interwar period,' *Studia Humanitatis Journal* 5, no. 1 (2025), 83–99. DOI: 10.53701/shj.v5i1.148.

²² For more detailed analyses of the Czech and Slovak press see Pavel Večeřa, 'Marmaggiho aféra. Úloha katolicismu optikou dobových tištěných médií levice' [The Marmaggi Affair: The Role of Catholicism Through the Lens of Contemporary Left-Wing Printed Media], in *Teorie v praxe politického katolicismu 1870–2007*, ed. Pavel Marek (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008), 205–225; Peter Zmátlo, 'Ohlas Marmaggiho aféry na stránkách dvoch slovenských stranických denníkov' [Coverage of the Marmaggi Affair in the pages of two Slovak party newspapers], in *Církev 19. a 20. století v slovenské a české historiografii*, eds. Pavol Mačala, Pavel Marek and Jiří Hanuš (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2010), 493–521; Peter Zmátlo, 'Marmaggiho aféra v dobovej straníckej tlači na Slovensku' [The Marmaggi Affair in the Contemporary Party Press of Slovakia], in *Ružomberský historický zborník vydaný pri príležitosti životného jubilea prof. PaedDr. PhDr. Pavla Marka, Dr.*, eds. Jaroslav Nemeš and David Papajík (Ružomberok: Filozofická fakulta, 2009), 173–204.

²⁵ AA. EE. SS., fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 59; AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Jelen 3. 8. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 344 (summary policy reports no. 32).

Jan Hus and critically reflected on some aspects that could be perceived as directed against the Catholic Church. In the letter, the bishops expressed loyalty to the Czechoslovak state but simultaneously emphasized that the Catholic Church plays an important role in the spiritual life of society and that its traditions should not be weakened. This document reflected the position of the Catholic hierarchy, which sought to protect religious values while responding to the political and social changes of the First Czechoslovak Republic.²⁴

It was therefore primarily a combination of economic, political, and cultural factors that led to lower participation of Czechoslovak believers in the Holy Year than originally expected. Nevertheless, this important spiritual undertaking demonstrated the devotion and desire of Czechoslovak Catholics for spiritual renewal, which was a key element of their faith and identity within the international Catholic community.

In the context of these events, Pope Pius XI met with Czech pilgrims in Rome, to whom he expressed his concern about the deteriorating relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See. This meeting was not only an expression of pastoral concern but also a call to strengthen fidelity to the Catholic Church and its unity during a period of increasing secularization. The Pope's words reflected his efforts to consolidate the position of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia and respond to the political pressures it faced. The Apostolic Nuncio Francesco Marmaggi, who was then in Rome, also participated in some of these meetings.²⁵

Pius XI strongly warned against the danger that Catholic identity and religious convictions could become subject to political pressures and instrumentalization, which could lead to further weakening of the unity of the Catholic community. His speech reflected the concern that growing nationalism in interwar Europe could undermine religious values and the authority of Church teaching. The Pope appealed to the faithful to unite in defense of the faith and to persevere in their beliefs even in the face of political pressures.²⁶

²⁴ AA. EE. SS., fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 59, f. 50, Arata to Gasparri 6. 8. 1925; *Čech*, 19. 8. 1925, resp. *České slovo*, 18. 8. 1925, resp. *Národní listy*, 19. 8. 1925; Formánek and Šmíd, *Pastýřské listy 1918–1945*, 190–195.

²⁵ AA. EE. SS., fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 67, ff. 3–6; AMZV, fond Politické zprávy – Vatikán, 1925, Pallier 20. 7. 1925, resp. Jelen 3. 8. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 348 (summary policy report no. 32).

²⁶ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Jelen 3. 8. 1925.

This appeal was particularly significant in the context of the celebration of Master Jan Hus, which was perceived as a provocation by part of the Catholic hierarchy. Pius XI emphasized the role of the Church as a stable moral authority, whose task is to protect spiritual values and provide support to the faithful in times of crisis. His statement also aimed to show that the Church remains a support for Catholic believers even in times of political tension, and that believers should face challenges together, in a spirit of solidarity and Christian unity.²⁷

The Pope's speech was a pivotal moment that underscored the importance of church communion during times of national conflict, demonstrating how the Church can respond to political challenges by emphasizing faith and spiritual unity. The Pope's efforts to strengthen the Church's identity amidst political pressures reflected broader European trends and contributed to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between faith and politics in interwar Europe.²⁸

During this tense period, when anti-Catholic sentiments emerged in Czech public discourse, the stance of the bishops and Pope Pius XI played a key role in preserving Catholic identity in Czechoslovakia and strengthening the church community. The reflection on the mutual relationship between faith and state politics thus became a significant factor that influenced the further development of both Czechoslovak society and the Catholic Church as a whole.

It was heartening news for the Czechoslovak faithful that, during the Holy Year of 1925, Pope Pius XI decided to donate a significant amount of money toward the construction of a papal college in Rome (Nepomucenum), intended for the dioceses of Czechoslovakia. This project, the cornerstone of which was consecrated in May 1927, was completed in April 1929 with the participation of the Archbishop of Prague and Czech Primate František Kordač. The papal college was conceived, in accordance with the Primate's wishes, as a response to the growing need for theological education and spiritual formation in Czechoslovakia, especially in the context of political and social changes. Czech

²⁷ This message summarizes the report of the Czechoslovak diplomat to the Holy See Eduard Jelen, dated 8 September 1925. AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Jelen 8. 9. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 359–367 (summary polity report no. 33).

²⁸ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Jelen 5. 8. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 348–349 (summary polity report no. 32).

Catholics in the USA also contributed significantly to this project, supporting the initiative with a substantial financial donation.²⁹

The seminary in Rome aimed to become not only a center of Catholic culture and theological education but also a significant focal point for the cultural and spiritual development of the Czech nation. Its goal was to prepare a new generation of priests while also strengthening Catholic identity in Czechoslovakia, which at that time faced tensions between traditional church values and the rapidly evolving national and political environment, as mentioned earlier. While the bishops saw the Nepomucenum College as a key element in ensuring the continuity and vitality of church life in the young republic, the Pope viewed this initiative as a crucial step in strengthening the spiritual life and education of Catholic clergy in a country grappling with political and social challenges.

Pope Pius XI decided to set specific financial goals for the realization of this project. The bishops were tasked with securing the first million lire from benefactors in Czechoslovakia, the second million was to be raised through collections among the Czech diaspora in America, and the third million was promised by the Pope himself as a sign of paternal support. The Pope emphasized that the funds he was providing were not a loan but a gift.³⁰

Overall, it can be stated that Pope Pius XI's decision in this regard represented a significant milestone in the renewal and strengthening of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. This step proved crucial in establishing a quality educational structure that would prepare future priests to respond to the needs of their community and contribute to the spiritual development of the nation.

During the Holy Year of 1925, several congresses and assemblies were held in Rome to revive and strengthen the Catholic faith. A significant moment of these events was the celebration at the Colosseum, where, on 29 November of that year, the pedestal for a new cross was consecrated. This symbol was intended to replace the cross that had been removed in 1870 following the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy and the unification of the country. The cross itself was not erected

²⁹ Zlatuše Kukánová, 'Karel Kašpar a římské koleje' [Karel Kašpar and the Roman Colleges], in *Česká kolej v Římě: Od Bohemica k Nepomucenu: 130 let existence české kulturní a vzdělávací instituce*, ed. Tomáš Parma (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2014), 180–181.

³⁰ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 97.

until 24 October 1926, which was seen as a favorable sign for the renewal of Catholic identity in Italy.⁵¹

On Christmas Eve 1925, Pope Pius XI closed the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, a ceremonial gesture symbolizing the conclusion of the Holy Year. This event was accompanied by the publication of the encyclical *Quas primas*, in which the Pope established the feast of Jesus Christ the King as a permanent commemoration of this Holy Year. In this context, Christ was presented as the true leader of Christians, who is to guide the faithful toward a devoted and humble respect for the authority of the Church, while also forming them in a spirit of strict self-discipline and motivating them to influence the world around them. The feast of Christ the King was intended to serve as an expression of the Church's resistance to the growing departure of broad social classes from religion, while also representing a declaration of the Church's intention to act more actively within families, society, and its institutions.⁵²

At the end of 1925, on 31 December, Pius XI celebrated the new feast with a Holy Mass in which he consecrated the whole world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This act of devotion was an expression of gratitude for the blessings God had granted during the Holy Year. During the celebration, a powerful *Te Deum* was also sung, resounding throughout St. Peter's Basilica, expressing the joy and gratitude of the faithful for the spiritual renewal.⁵³

Despite all the uncertainties and fears that prevailed at the time, the manifestations of the Holy Year proceeded calmly and peacefully. They were a significant expression of faith, piety, and filial devotion to the See of Peter and its representative, Jesus Christ. It is estimated that 582 000 pilgrims from all over the world, including South America, Africa, and Australia, arrived in Rome during the Holy Year, many of whom

⁵¹ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 97.

⁵² AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1926, Jelen 11. 1. 1926; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 437 (summary political report no. 37); Emma Fattorini, *Pio XI, Hitler e Mussolini: La solitudine di un papa* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), 33; Gerhard Besier and Francesca Piombo, *Svatý stolec a Hitlerovo Německo* [The Holy See and Hitler's Germany] (Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2008), 144; Jaroslav Šebek, *Papežové moderního věku: Vatikán od Pia IX. po Františka a jeho vztah k českým zemím* [Popes of the Modern Age: The Vatican from Pius IX to Francis and Its Relationship with the Czech Lands] (Řitka: Čas, 2014), 55.

⁵³ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 97.

travelled privately.⁵⁴ Although the German airline Aeroloyd offered air transport, pilgrims preferred trains and buses, which reflects a strong tradition and desire for a personal pilgrimage experience.⁵⁵

The Holy Year of 1925 thus became not only an opportunity for spiritual renewal but also a platform for international solidarity and the strengthening of Catholic identity in a world undergoing turbulent changes at the time. It also had a concrete impact on religious and social life in interwar Czechoslovakia. For Catholics in Czechoslovakia, this Holy Year represented a significant spiritual event that strengthened their identity within the wider Catholic community. Despite lower participation than in other countries, it was clear that the faithful were willing to invest in their spiritual growth, as evidenced by the organization of pilgrimages and active participation in international church events.

However, it was economic and political factors, such as the economic crisis and parliamentary elections, that negatively affected the extent of participation of Czechoslovak pilgrims. This aspect highlights the strong connection between religious and political life and reminds us of how political tensions and economic problems can influence spiritual practice and collective church actions.

The significance of the Holy Year of 1925 for Czechoslovakia lay not only in its role as a call for spiritual renewal but also in its ability to reflect broader international church trends, such as missionary activity and the Church's engagement in global issues. Pope Pius XI used this event to confirm the position of the Catholic Church after World War I as a strong global actor, focused not only on religious life but also on political and social change in a broader context. For Czechoslovakia, a young state in Central Europe, the Holy Year represented an opportunity to strengthen Catholic influence at the national level while also expressing solidarity with the wider Catholic family.

Overall, the Holy Year of 1925 in Czechoslovakia can be interpreted as a significant moment when the Church sought to overcome the challenges of the post-war period, strengthen its presence in daily life, and present its rich heritage as a vital tool for both the spiritual and social renewal of the nation. In the aftermath of World War I, Czechoslovakia

⁵⁴ AMZV, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Pallier 1. 6. 1925; Šmíd, Hajdinová and Mandzák, *Svatý stolec a Československo*, 329 (summary policy report no. 30); Gelmi, *Papežové*, 270.

⁵⁵ Polc, *Svaté roky*, 94.

was still finding its footing as a young republic, facing political and economic uncertainties. The Holy Year served as an opportunity for the Church to reaffirm its role not only as a spiritual guide but also as a stabilizing force during a time of national reconstruction. By promoting a collective sense of faith and unity, the Church aimed to foster resilience and hope, aligning itself with broader social and political movements that sought to rebuild and rejuvenate post-war society.

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