

Summary

The History of the Christian Academy 1875 – 1952

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The Christian Academy was established in 1875 as an association of Catholic intelligentsia. The association's chief initiator was the Vyšehrad canon Mikuláš Karlach, who sought support from the Vyšehrad chapter and the St Wenceslas savings society. The activities of the association were divided into four branches: academic, musical, artistic and archaeological (the last two were soon incorporated into a single branch). The association's first president was former Minister of Culture and Education Dr Josef Jireček.

The academic department dealt with the publication of theological treatises, the organisation of lectures and the administration of the specialist library. It published the *Catholic Clergy Journal* and, for its German members, the *Christliche Akademie*. The first chairman of the academic department was Dr Klement Borový. The music department endeavoured for the reform of liturgical instrumental and vocal music, it promoted the Gregorian chant and polyphony, it organised concerts and organ courses and brought out the magazine *Cecilie*, later re-named *Cyrril*. The first chairman of the music department was Ferdinand Lehner. The art department published assessments on the construction and restoration of churches and their interiors, it designed the templates for liturgical objects and paraments, it held exhibitions on Christian art and established a workshop employing seamstresses and embroideresses known as the Parament Institute, which produced chasubles, copes, purificators and palls, antependia and other church textiles, and the proceeds from its work went towards supporting the Christian Academy. The art department brought out the magazine *Method* and its first chairman was the artist Josef A. Hellich.

The membership base extended into all Czech and Moravian dioceses, and was initially stronger in Bohemia than in Moravia. The association affiliated members of both Czech and German nationalities. From 1877 onwards it sought to publish a Catholic encyclopaedia, however, the changes constantly being made to its conception and also lack of sufficient funding meant that work on the encyclopaedia was continually postponed. Progress was finally made with the arrival of a new academic generation headed by Dr Antonín Podlaha and Dr Josef Tumpach, in whose hands the Catholic encyclopaedia was broadly conceived and acquired the title *Czech Dictionary of Theology*. Its publication was hindered by the collapse of the St Wenceslas savings society, which was to have financed the publication.

Thus the first volume did not appear until 1909; 1930 saw the completion of the fourth volume (with the entry Holbecke). At this point the project came to a standstill; it was never resumed and the encyclopaedia remained as a monumental fragment.

During its first few decades, the Christian Academy enjoyed greatest prosperity in its musical pursuits, where it built up a network of diocesan and parish Cyrillian fellowships which incorporated their own church choirs. It continued to flourish until the First World War. The art department, in addition to its regular activities, received recognition for a particularly successful exhibition of art works on display at the Provincial Jubilee Exhibition held in Prague in 1891. The German-language magazine *Christliche Akademie* presented a series of important articles on theology, philosophy and history; it was dependent on the contributions and editorial work of P. Edmund Langer and, after he went into retirement in 1901, the magazine was closed down.

At the beginning of the 20th century Ferdinand Lehner became more involved in the art department and his role in the Cyrillian movement was successively assumed by Dobroslav Orel, Antonín Wunsch, Romuald Perlík and Jan Nepomuk Boháč. The Cyrillian movement suffered serious setbacks during the First World War and afterwards, when the numbers of male choristers were greatly reduced and a series of organists crossed over to the Czechoslovak church or left the Church altogether. The music department focused on organising organ courses and the publication of high-quality sheet music and related literature. It also fostered relations with Slovak Catholics.

During the First World War the academic department was renamed the Society of SS. Cyril and Methodius. It was involved only marginally in the clerical reform movement and focused on endeavours to unify the Catholic intelligentsia movement and on the support of scholarly writings and also works of fiction. Attempts to unify the Catholic intelligentsia movement were unsuccessful and the Christian Academy was not able to secure a dominant position in this movement. New secular and religious intellectual centres were established, which brought positive results, namely in the publication of a series of theological, spiritual and literary periodicals. The most enterprising members of the Christian Academy moved away from Prague to the Olomouc archdiocese and the diocese of Hradec Králové. The publication of works by the clergy was supported by the presentation of literary awards.

The First World War and the post-war economic crisis had a negative impact on the art department, there were far fewer commissions and it took a long time for the Christian art world to recover. The post-war period saw a move away from historical styles towards modern artistic expression, reflected in particular in the architecture of new churches in

Prague and Hradec Králové. The St Wenceslas millennium in 1929 prompted a surge of activity in the art world, but the subsequent financial crisis was again detrimental to the endeavours of Christian artists.

The Christian Academy suffered worsening conditions during the occupation, and only the Parament Institute continued to function more or less as it had done before. The activities of the Christian Academy were revived after the war and a new, young generation of theologians joined its ranks, such as Jan Merell, Josef Kubalík, Josef Zvěřina and Otto Mádr, among others. After February 1948 increasing pressure was placed on the Christian Academy to restrict, and ultimately to halt, its activities. In April 1948 the Central National Committee of the City of Prague called upon the Christian Academy to institute an action committee and to purge the association of reactionary individuals; in September 1949, the Ministry of Interior set up a national administration in the Christian Academy. The association was put into liquidation in the years 1950 – 1952, a process involving the Ministry of Interior, the State Office for Religious Affairs and the Central National Committee of the City of Prague. The greater part of the Christian Academy was incorporated into the Czech Catholic Charity. The general Cyrillian fellowship was liquidated into the Prague consistory and the parish fellowships were absorbed into the local national committees. The art department and the Parament Institute were liquidated into the Church Cooperative in Pelhřimov. The assets of the academic department passed to the Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty. The property of the head office went to the Prague consistory. The academic department's library was transferred to the Museum of National Culture in Strahov. Thus the closure of the Christian Academy was now complete.