

Coming of Jesuits to Czech Lands and the Present

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In 2006 we celebrated the 450 years from coming of Jesuits to Czech lands. On February 12, 1556, twelve members of this Order started their journey from Rome to Czech lands. They arrived to Prague on April 21, 1556 and settled on the home of their future residence, the today's National Library of Klementinum. The Catholic Theological Faculty of the Charles University and Czech Province Jesuits (*Societas Jesu*) organised an international conference to commemorate the anniversary. Over 100 lectures in four parallel sections were presented at the conference.

The Jesuits had significant impact on the history of the Charles University and they influenced many disciplines. The history section of the conference included one session with three lectures on the topic of medicine. The first lecturer mgr. Jiří Havlík presented an interesting lecture on the “Theory and Practice of Jesuits’ Service in the Czech Province to Plague Patients”. He mentioned the topic of the so called Plague Orders, i.e. regulations set by the cities during epidemics in 1680, 1710 and 1713. The Jesuits developed remarkable measures in the Orders for their priests coming into contact with plague patients during the clerical service. The procedures found in archives (special instructions for celebrating mass, confessions and sacraments) show high understanding of the plague spreading and the ability to undertake comprehensible measures for health protection long before the infectious aetiology of plague was recognized.

The second lecturer mgr. Karel Černý from the Department of Medical History and Languages, the First Faculty of Medicine, read a lecture on the topic of “The Century of Jesuit Miracles – Miller’s List of Miracles from 1622 to 1722”. The list contains over one thousand of items found in the registers of Czech and Moravian Jesuit Colleges. Miracles related to the health belong to the most frequent ones. Diagrams based on the List were summarised the theme of the miracles and the Saints responsible for the miracles. Among the frequent topics belonged the delivery and serious diseases. Fewer miracles were related to the property, crops



Figure 1 – During the air attack on February 14, 1945 the central part of the building of the Former Jesuit College was highly damaged.

or weather. It is worthy of note that miracles mirror the issues of their time. Mgr. Černý showed how Saints whom the prayers were addressed to and the themes of miracles changed over decades. It is fascinating how prayers to Virgin Mary respected to the delivery suddenly changed to prayers exclusively to St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The third lecture was focused at the “Building of Former Jesuit College at the New Town with the Chapel of St. Francis Xavier”, i.e. the current seat of the Third Clinic of Internal Medicine of the General Teaching Hospital, the First Faculty of Medicine of the Charles University. The foundation of the College was decided in 1622, the construction started only in 1659 according to early Baroque concept of Carlo Lurago or Martin Reiner. The first building was finished in 1660, it was the Chapel of St. Francis, i.e. the building where we can find today the joint admission office of clinics of internal medicine in the General Teaching Hospital and the “Clinics Club” decorated with stucco and renovated after 1990 – the premises were created by building a floor in the chapel in 1908 and are used mainly for studies and in the smaller extent also for important events of the Faculty or Clinics. The Church of St. Ignatius was built between 1665 and 1678. The facade of the College was finished in 1759. The projected paradise courtyard near the Church of St. Ignatius was never built. The building conserves unique baroque frame of the roof. After the Order was disestablished in 1773, the building was converted for a short period of time into military barracks and in 1776 it was decided change it into the principal military hospital. After numerous conversions the hospital functioned there since 1796 to 1939. Further on, the building was the seat of the Neurological Clinic of professor Henner, later it become the First Surgery Clinic of professor Jirásek. During the air attack on February 14, 1945 the central part of the building was highly damaged. On the conference, we showed also photographs obtained recently from the personal archive of doc. Šváb (see an



Figure 2 – The central part of main building with the Church of St. Ignatius, where is now situated the Third Clinic of Internal Medicine of the General Teaching Hospital and the First Faculty of Medicine of the Charles University in Prague.

example on Figure 1). Since 1945, the Third Clinic of the Internal Medicine, founded by Professor Josef Charvát, has its seat in the building. In his recently published memoirs [1] professor Charvát described the partial adaptations of the building. In the 80s and 90s the external part of the building came gradually to emergency condition. The building was first fitted with a new roof and later the collapse of a statute head from above the entrance at the Charles Square in 2004 speeded up the renovation of the façade. The building could thus celebrate the anniversary of the coming of Jesuits to Czech lands in its august glory (Figure 2).

Many other interesting lectures on at different topics were presented at the conference – especially lectures on theology and history. Summaries of all lectures were published in Czech and in German at the Conference Proceedings [2].

References

1. CHARVÁT J.: Můj labirint světa., Vzpomínky, zápisky z deníků. (Charvát's Memoirs) Galén 2005.
2. Bohemia Jesuitica 1556–2006. International Conference Jesuits in the Czech lands ed. Petronila Cemus. Catholic Theological Faculty of the Charles University, Czech Province Jesuits, Prague 2006, 120 pp.