

THE STATEWIDE CATHOLIC CONGRESS,
PRAGUE, 1935: AN ALMOST UNNOTICED JUBILEE

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Seventy-five years after the Catholic associations of Germany and Austria sponsored a supranational Catholic Congress in Prague (1860), a statewide Catholic Congress took place in the same city, in 1935, but in entirely different circumstances. This event was overshadowed by other preoccupations of the day. Attention in 1935 was focused above all on the escalation of the situation in Spain, Italy's designs on Abyssinia, and the impact of developments in Hitler's National Socialist state on the national problems of the ČSR.

In terms of church policy the Catholic Congress was a turning point. The ČSR had been born in the struggle against the Hapsburgs — and thus on anti-Catholic premises. Foreign Minister Beneš and the papal legate, Cardinal Verdier of Paris, now succeeded in defusing the strained relationship between State and Church.

The central problem of the national conflicts could not be solved, however. The some 50,000 Sudeten Germans who came to Prague had a self-contained program of their own. Only two of the church services during the Congress were held jointly for all six nations of the state. The Germans enjoyed a fully equal status and there were no incidents, but there also were no constructive encounters and discussions that served to promote understanding and reconciliation between Czechs and Germans.