

Original text:

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**“The Democratic Castle as Sacred Space:  
Religion and Ideals in the Renovation of Prague Castle”**  
published in Czech translation in:  
***Souvislosti: Revue pro literaturu a kulturu* [Prague]**  
**September 2007: 208-221**

Jože Plečnik's work at Prague Castle has been subject of much attention in the last 17 years, in the studies of architectural historians, exhibitions, even in documentary film and a musical composition. These views of the Slovene architect have typically cast the project at Hradčany as an effort to transform a neglected relic of the Habsburg monarchy into the seat of authority for independent republic, a "democratic castle." Often cited is Tomáš Masaryk's charge that Prague Castle must become "a symbol of our national democratic ideals."<sup>1</sup> However, in addressing how Plečnik the architect translated the vision of his patron, one must clarify that the national democratic ideals which Masaryk claimed as "ours", as belonging to the Czechs, were distinctly *his*. Upon becoming the first president of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, Masaryk announced a far-reaching vision of political and moral renewal, the components of which he had already forwarded in previous decades as professor, politician, and cultural critic. Fundamental to this political and moral program was Masaryk's religious philosophy. As he explained to Karel Čapek (in a conversation that was not included in the published volumes), Masaryk viewed his work as parliamentarian and president in a religious light: "I saw in politics an instrument. The aim for me was religious and moral. Still today I do not say that the state will be the fulfillment of a cultural mission. Instead, we must work toward the building of the City of God."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TGM, Address to the National Assembly, 28 October 1923, in *Cesta demokracie I: Projevy, články, rozhovory, 1918-1920*, eds. Vojtěch Feljsek a Richard Vašek, vol. 33, *Spisy T.G. Masaryka* (Praha: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2003), 483.

<sup>2</sup> Karel Čapek, unpublished manuscript, appendix to *Hovory s T.G. Masarykem*, vol. XX, *Spisy Karla Čapka* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1990) 517.

Twenty years later, a year after Masaryk's passing, his grand vision of a moral republic, of the City of God on earth, came to ruin. The failure of the First Czechoslovak Republic is most often cast as a drama of external and internal politics. Masaryk's republic did not have the 50 years of peace he had hoped for. Noble as his political philosophy was, with its call for a humanitarian democracy, a politics of truth, it was unable to withstand the extreme forces of 1930s Europe. The political analyses of Czechoslovakia's failure do not address, however, the more fundamental element of the president's program: his religious and moral philosophy. Here as well we must recognize failure. The religious and moral revolution that Masaryk proclaimed did not take place, at least not in the Czech Lands. Even Masaryk recognized by the early 1930s that the Czechs had not fulfilled the calling he had set before them.

In assessing the possible reasons for the failure of Masaryk's religious philosophy, we can look to the physical interpretation of these ideas: Prague Castle. In serving as the liaison between the president and the Castle architect, Alice Masaryková translated her father's vision into a conception of the Castle as a "sacred acropolis" for the republic. She insisted to Plečnik that the Castle must embody the principles of her father, creating a link between the world and the

- p. 209 -

eternal. This charge corresponded to Plečnik's own vision of architecture. A devout Catholic, Plečnik held firmly to a belief in architecture as a sacral art and to his work as a vocation.

Plečnik's originality and genius as a designer are well established. But, in viewing his work at the Castle, we cannot limit our perspective to its success in creating the seat of a democracy. We also must be attentive to the religious foundations of Masaryk's vision of democracy, his daughter Alice's vision of the Castle, and Plečnik's vision of architecture. This essay approaches the Castle renovation as an attempt to create a sacred space. I argue that Plečnik's architecture does succeed in that attempt: commentators in the 1920s-30s, like visitors today, recognized Prague Castle as a place like no other, where the past and the present—and the timeless—are woven together. At the same time,

however, Prague Castle is a place of silences, of enigmas. We might ask then if Plečnik, in creating this silence and mystery, truly did succeed in expressing the religious philosophy of his patron.

A constant theme throughout Tomáš Masaryk's career as intellectual and then as president was his stress of the continued relevance—indeed the necessity—of religion. Czech philosopher Jan Patočka observed that this conviction was “the central axis” of Masaryk's thought. “It sets the mood of his entire life. From the earliest, religious feeling plays the role of the moving spirit of his entire life.”<sup>3</sup> Masaryk was fascinated with contemporary study of religion: history of religions, literary and historical criticism of scripture, sociology of religion, even theology. At the same time, Masaryk's thinking was shaped on these and all issues by a sustained religious sentiment: the conviction, as he insisted on calling it, that God existed, that people could relate personally to God, and that this relationship then compelled people to act in kindness and cooperation toward others. From his years as a post-graduate student in Vienna through his tenure as president, Masaryk insisted that the modern individual needed the moral foundation that only religion could provide. People would be encouraged to live lives of moral action, to fulfill Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbor, only with the realization that their actions were conducted *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Masaryk interwove these ideas about religion into his political and ethical philosophies, his interpretation of Czech history, and his program for the Czechoslovak Republic. As president, Masaryk saw the republic as an arena in which morally responsible citizens actively participated in the betterment of their communities, cooperating with each other, with their government, and with God. Masaryk's memoirs, published in 1925, offered in full his vision for the Czechoslovak Republic. The founding of the republic and the advance of democracy in Europe, he declared, “required new people, a new man, a new

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Patočka, “Spiritual Crises of European Humanity in Husserl and Masaryk,” in *On Masaryk*, ed. Josef Novák (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) 109.

Adam.”<sup>4</sup> Democratic Czechoslovakia was a moral—even a spiritual—association, as well as a political one.

Although he stressed the importance of religion in modern life and saw the republic as the political manifestation of the City of God, Masaryk insisted that citizens would adhere to a new religion, a modern religion, freed from the authority of churches. The rule of hierarchs could not withstand the democratic ethic, which emphasized science and philosophy, education and enlightenment,

- p. 210 -

and which loosed humanity’s creative energy. The authority of churches, priests and theologians was to be swept away. Masaryk declared in his memoirs:

A correct democratic politics will be [conducted] . . . *sub specie aeternitatis*: Spiritual absolutism, the various forms of caesaropapism and worldly absolutism, exploiting religion, will be overcome by a higher, more humane morality and a higher religion, freely directing all of public life—Jesus, not Caesar. I say this, in that our aim is to realize the religion and ethic of Jesus, his pure and spotless humanitarian religion. In love to God and to others, Jesus understood the whole law and the prophets, the essence of religion and morality. Everything else is incidental.<sup>5</sup>

With his vision of a religion freed from the church, Masaryk the *thinker on religion* anticipated the direction of European Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We see here an argument for the "believing without belonging" described by British sociologist Grace Davie. But, as a *religious thinker* who saw awareness of God as necessary for individual morality and an active citizenry, Masaryk's antipathy to churches put him in something of a bind. We see evidence of this bind in the final chapter of his memoirs, in which he turned to the situation of the churches in the Czechoslovak Republic. Presenting census data that showed the rise in membership of the various Protestant denominations ("almost a million," he pointed out), the president insisted that the numbers were proof of the continued

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<sup>4</sup> TGM, *Světová revoluce: Za války a ve válce, 1914-1918*, vol. 15, *Spisy T.G. Masaryka* (Praha: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2005), 364.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

importance of religion in Czech life. “Those who do not believe that the religious question is very important to our nation must change their opinion,” he declared.<sup>6</sup> Masaryk did not mention the Roman Catholic Church, which was still, by far, the largest church in Czechoslovakia, despite a loss of several hundred thousand members in the first years of the republic. Nor did Masaryk offer any proposal on how the Christian churches, Protestant or Catholic, might contribute to the building of the moral republic. Church membership numbers, as reported to census takers, were forwarded as evidence of religious sentiment; but there was no suggestion as to what role the people behind those numbers could play in fulfilling the religious and political principles Masaryk had set. On the one hand, Masaryk wanted the churches to have some meaning, but, on the other hand, he could not articulate what that meaning was. Nevertheless, he did reiterate his ideal in the final line of the chapter: “Jesus, not Caesar—I repeat, this is the meaning of our history and democracy.”<sup>7</sup>

There was one citizen of the new republic, at least, who unreservedly embraced the president's charge to shake off the remnants of Austrian rule, turn away from political liberalism and nominal Catholicism, and join fellow citizens—and God—in the building of a wholly new political association, founded upon the principle of love for one's neighbor. This most loyal disciple was the president's own daughter: Alice Garrigue Masaryková.

Alice Masaryková understood her life as one of devotion and sacrifice, to God and to others. Her letters to her father and mother show that, already as a young woman studying in Leipzig and later teaching in České Budějovice, she was moved by deep religious faith and a call to service. Writing to her mother, Charlotte Masaryková, from an Austrian prison during World War I, Alice

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 406.

pledged, “My life, as it is given to me, shall become an active prayer.”<sup>8</sup> Although she could not have imagined the direction her life would take after her release and the war's conclusion, Alice Masaryková did expect, while in prison, that the end of the war would open the door for dramatic social change in Europe. “Ah, how beautiful is a land of justice!” she wrote in prison. “Heaven—everything. After the war, this will be life! Full of vitality! The new age will bring something new.”<sup>9</sup> Three years after she wrote those words, Masaryková undertook this mission of creating a just, beautiful society as the founding director of the Czechoslovak Red Cross. She received the appointment from her father, who spoke often of the physical health of the citizens, along with their moral health, as necessary to the building of the republic. In her leadership of the Red Cross, Alice Masaryková steered the organization toward these ideals. Her statements to volunteers and administrators reiterated the president's ethical and political principles. She saw the Czechoslovak Red Cross as vital in the work of building a democratic society, its ranks of volunteers (some 300,000 in its first two years) serving as models of active citizens contributing to the building of a harmonious, just society.

The sweeping plans that Alice Masaryková shared with her father were visionary: a new democratic state in which citizens worked, in cooperation with government, toward the creation of a just society; a new current of ethical and political thought; and a view of the world as an arena of opportunity for conscious, responsible individuals—aware of the measure of eternity—to act together with God. This was the vision Tomáš Masaryk held at the founding of the republic, the vision that guided Alice Masaryková in her leadership of the Red Cross, and it was this vision that shaped the perspective, held by daughter and father, of the central symbol of the republic: Prague Castle.

Masaryk had a vague sense of what a democratic castle should look like. He had ventured in his study *Rusko a Evropa* [Russia and Europe, 1913] that

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<sup>8</sup> AGM to CGM, 24 March 1916, letter no. 109, in *Drahá mama/Dear Alice: Korespondence Alice a Charlotty Masarykových 1915-1916*, eds. Dagmara Hájková and Jaroslav Soukup (Praha: Ústav T.G. Masaryka, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> AGM to CGM, 1 February 1916, letter no. 58 in *Drahá mama/Dear Alice*.

there was a democratic aesthetics, although he admitted that it was undefined. And, as president, he did reserve for himself final say over designs for the renovated Castle. But he granted to his daughter Alice the authority as overseer

- p. 212 -

of the project. Masaryk's archivist, Anna Gašparíková, wrote in her diary that Alice's part in the Castle project was vital. "People do not appreciate how great was the anonymous work of Alice Masaryková."<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the Castle renovation have seconded this appraisal and acknowledged Masaryková's influence as patron, muse, and advocate to architect Jože Plečnik. As her father's liaison to Plečnik during his tenure at Prague Castle (1921-1935), Masaryková wrote over 200 letters to the architect, ranging in subject matter from the disposition of the bathroom in the presidential apartment to lofty pronouncements on art and religion. Masaryková often drew parallels between her responsibility for the Castle and her leadership of the Red Cross. Her efforts in the areas of social welfare and public health had the potential to improve people's physical and moral health. Likewise, the Castle would have transformative power, breaking people from their "small-spirited" condition.<sup>11</sup> She saw Plečnik's work at the Castle as vital to the reshaping of the Czechs. The citadel had to demonstrate a unifying ideal, a harmonious order that modeled the organization of the state and society. The unifying ideal was, of course, Masaryk's vision of democracy, of a citizenry united in reciprocal love and awareness of the eternal. The president's daughter saw the Castle as a physical representation of those principles. It was necessary, she wrote to Plečnik, that Masaryk's spirit would "speak in stone."<sup>12</sup>

Just as Tomáš Masaryk's charge for democratic Czechoslovakia emphasized awareness of the eternal, so did Masaryková's letters to Jože

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<sup>10</sup> Anna Gašparíková-Horáková, diary entry of 21 November 1931, Lány, in *U Masarykovcov: Spomienky osobnej archivárky T.G. Masaryka* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1995) 130-31.

<sup>11</sup> AGM to Plečnik, May 1921 and May 1922, Plečnikova zbirka, Arhitekturni muzej Ljubljana [hereafter AML].

<sup>12</sup> AGM to Plečnik, May 1922, AML

Plečnik insist upon the sacredness of the Castle and the architect's work as a duty unto God. From the start of their correspondence, Masaryková described the Castle as a project of sacral architecture. The Castle was, she insisted in different letters, "sacred Acropolis" and "Fortress of the Mighty God."<sup>13</sup> Like the temple precincts of the ancient world, the Castle was a site of communication between the earthly realm—of politics, art, social work—and the eternal realm. In part, the aesthetic accomplishment of Plečnik's architecture would offer a link to the divine, but, beyond the work of the artist, Masaryková believed that the very materials, the stone, had spiritual quality. In this, she shared with Plečnik a belief in the invisible connected to the invisible, the eternal and spiritual present in the immediate and material. Both humanity and the matter of the earth existed in God, she claimed. Even the stones of the Castle would "praise God with us people."<sup>14</sup>

In encouraging Plečnik toward this task, the building of a sacred acropolis, Alice Masaryková enclosed with her letters a variety of inspirational materials: devotional poems, her mother's letters, postcard photographs of the classical ruins of the Mediterranean and the wooden churches of Slovakia, pages of Augustine's *Confessions*, and passages of scripture. Enclosed with one letter, posted in February 1923, were several pages torn from a Czech-language pocket Bible: Psalms 120-134, the Psalms of Ascents. The verses that Masaryková underlined indicate her understanding of the Castle project as a work of spiritual meaning, even associating the Prague citadel with Jerusalem. Her red pencil pointed to the ultimate goal of the architect: "Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).<sup>15</sup> The renovation of Prague Castle as the

- p. 213 -

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<sup>13</sup> AGM to Plečnik, 22 August 1922, 28 September 1924, and 12 December 1925, AML. See the discussion of Masaryková's religious beliefs as an influence on her views of the Castle, in Irena Žantovská Murray, "Our Slav Acropolis': Language and Architecture in the Prague Castle under Masaryk" (McGill University: PhD dissertation, 2002) 179.

<sup>14</sup> AGM to Plečnik, 9 April 1923, AML.

<sup>15</sup> Enclosure with AGM to Plečnik, 11 February 1923, AML.



home of the president and as symbol of the new republic was a task dedicated to God, a task, just like Masaryková's work with the Czechoslovak Red Cross, done with attention to the eternal. Only with this awareness, Masaryková maintained, would the president's house, the city below, and the republic be brought into order. The state of the Castle and the republic were linked. "Our house will be in such order, just as you wish for the whole republic," she reassured her father.<sup>16</sup>

Plečnik's letters to Alice Masaryková have been lost; it is clear, though, from her letters that he replied to her often. We know as well from her letters and from other sources that Plečnik shared with her a sense of the transformative power of architecture. In lectures to his students in Ljubljana, Plečnik expressed his belief that architecture was a means of social rejuvenation, a way of helping people, housing families, fostering communities. But architecture must also aspire greater heights, he taught his students; in this, Plečnik also agreed with Alice Masaryková that the eternal and the invisible are present in the immediate and the material. Architecture, he told his students in Ljubljana, was like a "rainbow that connects this side of life to the hereafter." Therefore, he added, "architecture will always be sacral, whether it is a church or the home of an aristocrat."<sup>17</sup>

But the question arises: why did Tomáš Masaryk, an inveterate critic of the Roman Catholic Church who had few active Catholics in his close circle, rely upon this devout, if not mystical, Catholic architect to complete the renovations of Prague Castle? Plečnik's religiosity certainly was not a secret. His profound spirituality certainly drew Alice Masaryková. Already in her first letters of spring 1921 (which she was still mistakenly addressing to Jan Plečnik), Masaryková plotted out a relationship based upon a shared faith, writing out favorite passages of Scripture and assuring him of her prayers. Masaryková's father expressed no such sentiments to Plečnik, yet he was also convinced, like Alice, that the architect was a unique talent and the only person able to direct the Castle renovations. The president's faith in the architect was demonstrated in his

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<sup>16</sup> AGM to TGM, 8 October 1925, Masarykův ústav Archiv AV ČR, TGM Collection, Republika, Box 371, folder 11.

<sup>17</sup> Dušan Gabrijan, *Plečnik in njegova šola* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1968) 80-81.

repeated efforts, in following years, to keep Plečnik at the Castle and prevent him from leaving for good to his home in Ljubljana. In 1921 Plečnik had taken a professorship at the new University of Ljubljana, and he returned to Prague only during holidays. Some of these visits ended with Plečnik's abrupt and unexplained departure. On more than one occasion Masaryk called upon his office to lure the temperamental architect back to Prague. "The entire project must be yours, all of it yours!" declared the president's chancellor, Přemysl Šámal, in one letter to Plečnik.<sup>18</sup> Masaryk himself offered generous honoraria and even pressed the Academy of Arts in Prague to offer the Slovene a full professorship. During that campaign, Masaryk instructed his chancellor, Šámal, to personally visit the Academy and tell "those stupid babblers" that Plečnik "is a master and the usual bureaucratic formulas . . . do not apply" in their efforts to secure his appointment.<sup>19</sup>

Plečnik did not accept the professorship or the money. Still, he returned to Prague year after year, for a few weeks in the fall and winter, a month or so in summer. He devoted himself to his work, sleeping in a simple room at the Castle with his worktable alongside the bed. He refused the requests of Czech architects and government officials for guided tours of the Castle site; he avoided

- p. 214 -

meetings, fled confrontations with engineers and foremen, and disregarded deadlines. On occasion, he even refused the invitations of the president and his daughter for meetings. Still, Tomáš Masaryk found in Plečnik someone he could trust unconditionally. The president intervened to clear all bureaucratic obstacles from his path. "I insist that no one, for any reason, will disrupt Prof. Plečnik in his work during his stay here," he instructed his office.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, both the president and his daughter sought to expand the scope of Plečnik's responsibilities. In 1925 Masaryk stated in his political testament that Plečnik was

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<sup>18</sup> Šámal to Plečnik [copy], 21 January 1923, Archiv Kanceláře Prezidenta Republiky, složka Tajné [hereafter AKPR-T] 49/23.

<sup>19</sup> Confidential note, written by Kučera, on memorandum of Šámal to TGM, 9 June 1923, AKPR-T 49/23.

<sup>20</sup> Šámal, record of meeting with TGM, 14 February 1925, AKPR-T 49/23.

not only to complete the Castle renovations, he was also expected to design the rearrangement of the surrounding areas of the city. Thus, the Castle would not simply be the seat of the president or a symbol of the republic's democratic principles, it was also to become the crowning, indeed the dominant, feature on the capital city's landscape. In her letters to Plečnik at this time, Alice Masaryková wrote with excitement of the transformation of Prague. The Castle, connected to its surroundings, which she described as "sacred precinct", would be linked in a bold, new way to the rest of the city and then to the rest of the republic. Although she wrote of the practical necessities of urban planning, Masaryková's vision was of a fortress, a district, a city that would touch the heavens. "You see Prague, so beautiful " she wrote to Plečnik on a bright December day, "so deep, so true—Please just listen silently to her song, listen to her voice!—I believe that her fate is in the hands of God—and you, Plečnik, are His Instrument."<sup>21</sup>

- p. 215 -

For all his threats to leave, Jože Plečnik was drawn to the challenge and scale of the Castle project. He spoke often to his students in Ljubljana of the work in Prague, and he regarded Masaryk as a true noble, a man on a plane closer to God. The autonomy that the president granted was ideal for a man of Plečnik's conviction and temperament. He was, on the one hand, certain of the rightness his own artistic vision. Yet, on the other hand, Plečnik brought to his work a patience and humility that surprised his contemporaries. We gain a view of this humility in Plečnik's response to the director of the Castle's construction office, who in April 1923 asked the architect for his estimate of the following year's budget. In previous years, the construction office had budgeted five million crowns for the work at the Castle. The director wondered, though, if they should request more, maybe seven or even 10 million crowns. No, Plečnik replied, five million was enough.

The Castle is not an American skyscraper, or a tenement house, or the villa of some industrialist. Therefore, the architect must very cautiously and after due consideration decide on the execution of

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<sup>21</sup> AGM to Plečnik, 31 December 1927, AML.

individual adaptations, not to mention the artistic details. Certainly, we could use 10 million crowns, if necessary, but how? The matter would not be thought through, it would not be appreciated, it would not be refined. We would not commit our work to the Castle, and so, not only would we not benefit the Castle, we would outright ruin it. We cannot forget that at the Castle we are not building things for the needs of perhaps the next two or five years. Here we are building for the distant future, in a place that is uniquely prominent and historically and architecturally dear to everyone. If I can advise you then, please, do not rush these renovations. Please, leave me and the others enough time. Only then will it be possible to accomplish a good work.<sup>22</sup>

Still, we can ask if the question did arise for Plečnik, how does one re-design a castle so that it is, at once, democratic and sacred, faithful to its history and modern? One of the remarks that have been made of Plečnik, by his contemporaries and by scholars of recent years, was his ability to draw from and employ a variety of sources, yet turn them in ways that were entirely new. This was a comment often made, when journalists and critics in the 1920s and 30s wrote approvingly of the Castle renovations. "In his work," wrote the artist Max Svabinsky, "is a profound emotion and nobility in the use of new ideas, which goes along with, in complete esteem, his sense for the architectural structure, the trees, and the sight lines of the old Castle. No one could have done this better than him."<sup>23</sup>

In looking at his drawings for Prague Castle in comparison to the realized construction, we perhaps gain a glimpse of Plečnik's painstaking deliberation and his vision of a space both democratic and sacred. For example, Plečnik's initial design for the stairway leading from the Third Courtyard to the gardens below clearly follows in the classical tradition of a monumental gate, with its Roman Doric columns, dentils and statuary decorating the entablature (image 1). We know one reason this design was not realized is that the structure of the Castle wing would not allow for such a major intervention. Yet, scale aside, the Bull Staircase leading from the courtyard to the garden is much different from

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<sup>22</sup> Record, 20 April 1923, of Blažek's conversation with Plečnik, AKPR–T 23/21, Part II, Box 19.

<sup>23</sup> Max Švabinský to KPR, 31 October 1928, no. 1853/28, Archiv Pražského Hradu, Stavební věci–1919-1947, inv. č. 516, karton 35, H 3141/47.

Plečnik's early conception. The classical inspiration is still apparent; we see Doric capitals replaced by Ionic volutes (image 2). But the rank of columns is no

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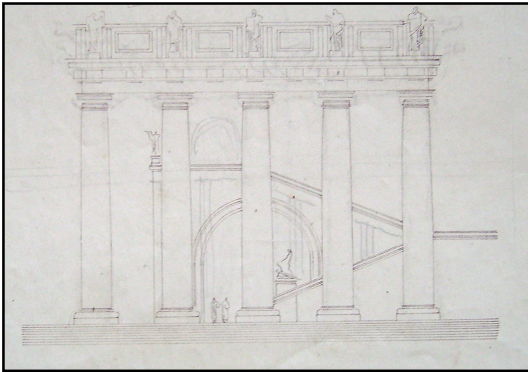
longer the dominant feature; instead, the simple, geometric shafts and capitals, standing one atop another, form the spine of the staircase. And there are wholly original elements, such as the horizontal ribs surrounding the staircase.

We see a similar movement from the recognizable and concrete to the abstract and enigmatic in looking at Plečnik's designs for the Monolith. The architect had planned for a 30-meter monolith that would stand on the steps of the gardens below the Castle. Plečnik's original plans for the stone included a massive sculpture of the Czech lion and Slovak cross or an inscription honoring those who fell in the First World War (image 3). He also had the idea to bore a hole into the monolith and place inside an eternal flame. Imagine the scene: a giant stone rising before the Castle walls, burning with an eternal flame that could be seen across Prague. Alice Masaryková loved the idea, especially because of its religious symbolism, and she reproached Plečnik for abandoning the idea when he recognized it was impractical. Also abandoned as impractical was the placement of the monolith on the garden steps. After the changes in plans and the breaking of the first two stone, the finished monolith, measuring 16m, was placed in the Third Courtyard in 1928. According to drawings in Plečnik's archive, there was a plan to place the monolith at the center of the courtyard. Instead, it stands aside, not taking attention away from the statue of St. George and from the portal to St. Vitus Cathedral. In addition, the monolith has none of the embellishment described in the early plans: no sculpture, no fluting, no inscription. Masaryková considered this austere stone unfinished. After World War II she wrote to Plečnik with suggestions for its completion, and the architect even made drawings of a more decorated monolith (image 4). But these plans were not realized. Perhaps the simplicity of the monolith better fulfills Plečnik's aim of an eternal architecture as well as Masaryková's aim of the Castle as sacred acropolis. An inscription honoring the dead of World War I would have bound the stone to a specific event; the lion and cross would have made the

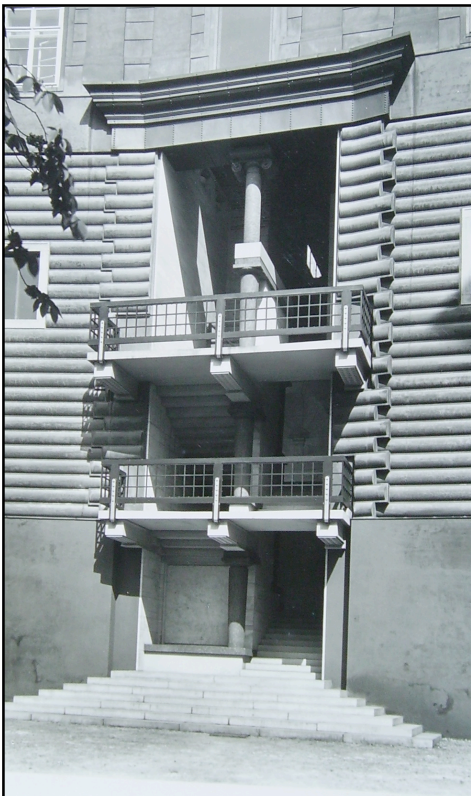
stone a national monument; further decorative embellishment would have drawn attention to the skill of an artist or to some a particular style. Instead, the stone remains bare, mysterious, silent.

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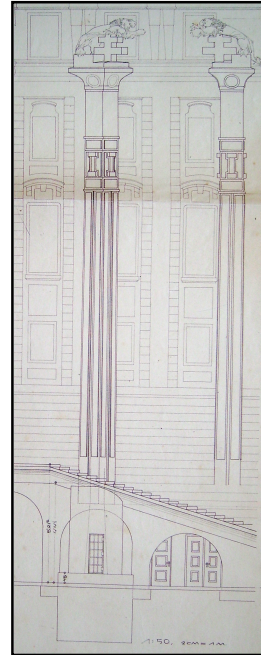
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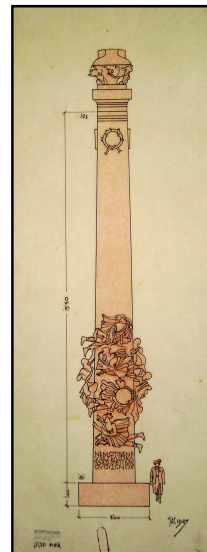
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In December 1931 Tomáš Masaryk went to church. He recorded his thoughts in a letter to a longtime collaborator and friend of the household. The long letter reveals the thoughts of a man, then approaching his 83rd birthday, who was still struggling with the Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, their legacies for Europe, for the Czechs, and for himself.

The question and problems of churches has long held my attention: how does a church's form and interior arrangement convey the main idea of religion? . . . In our republic we have two main churches, the Catholic and Protestant. Catholicism is essentially mystical and mysterious, sacramental, therefore the ritual, especially the mass, necessitates above all an altar. The sermon is secondary. Therefore, the placement of the pulpit is a difficult task, especially in Gothic cathedrals, but also in the Romanesque. Protestants put emphasis on the sermon. Again they have the problem, how and where to place the pulpit? Because a majority are second-hand Catholic cathedrals, they have not reached a general solution. And new churches conform to old, accepted models.

I envision Christianity according to Jesus and thus I would have the cathedral mimic the Sermon on the Mount: in a spacious (not Gothic!) place an elevated pulpit would be the Mount and the preacher would speak from there. And he would have to be seen and heard from the sides . . . .

Your church is spacious; I like that; the only thing I do not understand is why you have two pulpits, as I was informed by the priest. Did you think about the relationship between pulpit and altar? Of course you did, maybe without much deliberation.

I am only speaking about the inside of the church; the outside is a purposeful, interesting experiment.

I would like to add that I prefer Romanesque buildings; the cupola reflects the sphere of heaven, as we see it. The Gothic (architecture, not sculpture) is an expression of medieval scholasticism. It oppresses me, I do not feel well in it. This may be a personal view and up to a point unsubstantiated. . . .

I do not wish to wear out the problem: there are still so many questions (there are more altars in Catholic churches—how to arrange

them? etc.), of decoration in particular—we could discuss this for a long time. And there is literature on the subject anyway.

I hope all is well. Stay healthy!<sup>24</sup>

Tomáš Masaryk may or may not have been aware that the architect to whom he sent his thoughts, Jože Plečnik, had tied subtle links between the

- p. 219 -

church he designed for Prague's Vinohrady district and his other project in the capital. The first link was visual: inside the massive clock tower that rises above the church's nave, one can look out from the clear clock face and see, framed perfectly within the circular window, the Castle above Prague. The other link is material: a stone, taken from the gardens along the Castle's battlements, lies in the sanctuary, behind the altar. The symbolic connection underscored Plečnik's understanding of architecture: whether a place of worship or a seat of political power, all architecture had the same aim: communication to the eternal. As this understanding of architecture paralleled Masaryk's understanding of politics, it is likely that the president, if he knew, would have been pleased with the link between the church and the Castle. In defining his own motives in politics, his platform for the republic, and his theory of democracy, Masaryk insisted on the interconnection of the political and the spiritual. The practical was subject to the measure of the true, the immediate to the measure of the eternal. Such an understanding of politics, Masaryk acknowledged, brought him close to the bishops whom he had worked to dethrone. In a conversation that remained unpublished, Karel Čapek recorded Masaryk's admission of his political aims: "I conceive of the state and politics, just as I do all of life, *sub specie aeterni*. In this sense, I am a theocrat. Consistent humanitarianism, metaphysically speaking, is nothing other than theocracy (*bohováda*)."<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, however, it is likely that Masaryk would have taken offence at the symbolic connection between the Castle and the church in

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<sup>24</sup> TGM to Plečnik, 23 January 1932, opis v AKPR, inv. č. 675, složka D 3917/32.

<sup>25</sup> Čapek, "Politik a filosof," appendix to *Hovory s T.G. Masarykem*, 517.



Vinohrady. The Church of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus was, after all, a Catholic sanctuary. Although he granted a kind opinion to a few Catholics, Masaryk remained to the end of his life an opponent of the Roman Church. He found great significance in the fact that the first president of Czechoslovakia was a Protestant. Yet, even though he identified himself as Protestant, Masaryk did not hold a strong opinion of Protestant churches. "I am constantly disappointed by a certain deadness in Czech Protestantism today, an insufficiency of initiative, resoluteness," he complained to Alice.<sup>26</sup> Masaryk praised Protestantism for advancing the individualization of Christianity, but he granted no role for the churches, whether Protestant or Catholic, in advancing the religious consciences of Czechoslovakia's citizens. Masaryk insisted that religion, like politics, the arts and sciences, would also undergo the process of *odcírkevnování* [the removal of the church's influence]. The result, he had predicted, would be individuals moved by convinced belief and bound in mutual love, rather than belonging to an institution.

In his final years, however, in conversation with his family and staff, Masaryk questioned why this prediction had not been realized in the republic, why had the Czechs not acted to fulfill their religious legacy. "I sometimes wonder," he confided to his archivist, "how it is possible that our deep religious tradition has been so completely lost."<sup>27</sup> In 1918 he had set down the vision of a citizenry united in shared awareness of the eternal and love for others. Masaryk believed that his prescriptions offered a remedy for the social and political maladies of the modern age. But his ideas on religion met with misunderstanding, willful neglect, or criticism. In the president's closest circle one found, on the one hand, agnostic pragmatists such as Karel Čapek, Ferdinand Peroutka, and Edvard Beneš, who did not share Masaryk's religious faith, and, on the other hand, Protestant Christians such as Josef Lukl Hromádka and Emanuel Rádl, who judged Masaryk's religious ideas to be essentially, and erroneously, modern. Balancing between traditional and modern understandings

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<sup>26</sup> Gašparíková-Horáková, diary entry for 15 March 1934, in *U Masarykovcov*.

<sup>27</sup> Gašparíková-Horáková, diary entry for 17 April 1931, in *U Masarykovcov*.

of the human and divine, Masaryk's religious ideas gained few adherents or effective apostles. Without either, they were unable to make a lasting mark on the Czech religious environment of interwar period or the rest of the 20th century.

This is not to say that such a balance of the traditional and the modern is not possible. But Tomáš Masaryk had neither the inclination nor the patience—and perhaps not the capacity—to accomplish it. “I think that you want to come to some kind of world view,” wrote a young Alice Masaryková to her father, “but perhaps it is not yet clear to you.”<sup>28</sup> Masaryk may have found that world view, but, as one of his most perceptive interpreters points out, “His philosophy is not his world view.”<sup>29</sup> As a critic, rather than a systematic thinker, Masaryk needed a Plato to express his ideas methodically and coherently, to put them into an order useable for others.<sup>30</sup> He did not have a Plato in his Castle. Instead, he had a daughter who sought to act immediately and enthusiastically on his ideas. And he had an architect, charged with putting those ideas into stone.

If there is a systematic explication of Masaryk's world view, his notion of the political and the eternal, then perhaps we find it in the courtyards and gardens of Prague Castle. As with Plečnik's church in Vinohrady, the various elements of Prague Castle are collected together, along with the existing historical frame, into a richly woven epic. As those who praised the castle in the 1920s and 1930s wrote, there was a sense of the old and the new, the strange, or the mystical. The words of Vasil Škrach, Masaryk's librarian, offer the highest praise Plečnik would have sought for his work: “When we walk through the courtyards of the Castle, it is as if we sense another world.”<sup>31</sup> We still sense that other world, walking amidst the obelisks and porticos, pyramids and spheres of stone, the sculptures of giants and bulls. A few of these elements have clear meaning, such as the statue of the Good Shepherd in the garden. But most are

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<sup>28</sup> AGM to TGM, 6 December 1906, Masarykův ústav Archiv AV ČR, TGM Collection, Korespondence III, karton 54, sign. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Milan Machovec, *Tomáš G. Masaryk* (Prague: Melantrich, 1968) 77.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> *České slovo*, 23 January 1932.

unexplainable. Tourists wander through this "sacred Acropolis," this "Fortress of the Mighty God," and stop out of curiosity and puzzlement beside the towering monolith and the great granite bowl. They are symbols of some kind, but what do they symbolize? They are reference points, but which direction are they pointing toward? We can only say that they point to something.

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<sup>32</sup> TGM Plečnikovi, 23 January 1932, opis v AKPR, inv. č. 675, složka D 3917/32.