

# Three Things that Last Forever

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## CHAPTER FOUR: Mother Prague is not holy!

Prague is not Florida, nor is it like any other part of the United States. When the Petersons first arrived in Prague in *Three Things You Can't Do in Prague*, to begin their ministry, the differences sometimes seemed overwhelming. Yet Knut and Gudrun decided they would use the gifts that God has placed within them to treat others the way they wanted to be treated themselves, in spite of the cultural differences.

They developed a habit of using uplifting, positive words and helping those around them the best way they could, to become whole in spirit, soul and body. Knut and Gudrun enjoyed an inner peace and serenity which even the great adversity around them could not disturb – the peace of Christ. And they frequently displayed a spiritual power that even their own physical weaknesses could not destroy—the power of the Holy Spirit. They had a kind of hidden vitality that even the process of dying and death cannot squelch; it was the life of Christ in them.

### Living in Prague is Not Always Easy

Yet they had to face some challenges that today's Prague offers to anyone who lives there. The city is very old, having been founded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by Duke Borivoj, who first erected a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and later (perhaps around 885) began to build a new castle called Hradcany. The most ancient parts of the city (the most beautiful parts!) are crowded with buildings, small winding streets and people from all over the world.



*St. Vitus Cathedral: begun in the 10th century and completed in the 20th century, this cathedral holds precious ornaments and relics from 1000 years of Bohemian culture. Photo, L. Blanco*



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Chapter 4 1-9

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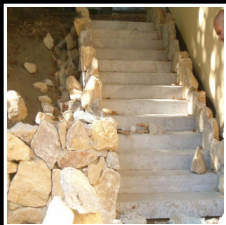
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*The Vltava River flows through Prague.*

Prague is a walking city, and the streets are never empty. Other “culprits” for pollutions are the inevitable by-products of Prague’s adorable dogs and cats, both on the streets of Prague and inside apartment houses’ public space. The untrammeled economic

growth that the Czech Republic experienced from 1989 through the present has also contributed to the air pollution and congested roads that plague any large city (Prague has over a million people living in and around it).

Then there is the famous red tape, which combines the accomplishments of several hundred years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s meticulous bureaucracy, good old communist red tape and the natural Czech proclivity toward and love of bureaucratic procedures; these three sources of red tape are significantly enhanced by the bureaucratic prowess of the European Union. Dealing with the Czech banks, those phenomenally inefficient state-like enterprises, took an especially high toll on Knut and Gudrun’s time and patience whenever they needed to do any kind of banking. All in all, the types of daily tasks and routines that are relatively smooth in the U. S. are more complex and potentially problematical in Prague. The famous eye-roll and shrug used by Prague’s inhabitants in response to the slowness of what should be simple chores helped Knut and Gudrun understand that giving in their own impatience wouldn’t help them get things done more quickly in Prague.



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*“Christianity is so unscientific . . .”*

However, perhaps the most difficult challenge for the two servants of Christ was the typical attitude of their Czech friends and colleagues toward God and the Bible. In a nation with more than 1200 years of Christian traditions and heritage, it seemed surprising to the Petersons that so many people find it hard to believe the basic, simple facts of Christianity: that a Jew who lived in an obscure corner of the Middle East under the Roman rule more than 2000 years ago and who suffered a death on a cross as a convicted criminal inspired a movement that spread throughout the whole world, transformed the lives of countless individuals and, to this day, significantly influences the culture of Czech Republic.

“Christianity is so unscientific, so corny, so Catholic,” their Czech friends would say and then add the comment that in the Czech Republic it’s understood that any religion is a private matter for each individual and never should be discussed in public.

Regarding the Bible, a common perception the Petersons encountered was that, at best, the Bible is impossible to understand—it is boring, untrue, redundant, unscientific and irrelevant. At worst, the Bible is the cause of all that is wrong with the world, because the people who take it literally have been using it to justify any crime they want to throughout history (and still today). Some of the more notorious of these crimes by the Church include the infamous Church-sponsored witch hunts of the Middle Ages, the murderous Crusades in the Middle East (as well as those against Christian Constantinople and against the Christian Czech nation), the torture and executions of Christians by their own Christian brethren, the burning of both true believers (many of them so-called heretics) and actual heretics, the extraction of money for the Church, and the unnumbered rapes, thefts and murders committed by clergy with the full power of the Church.



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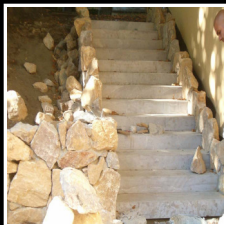
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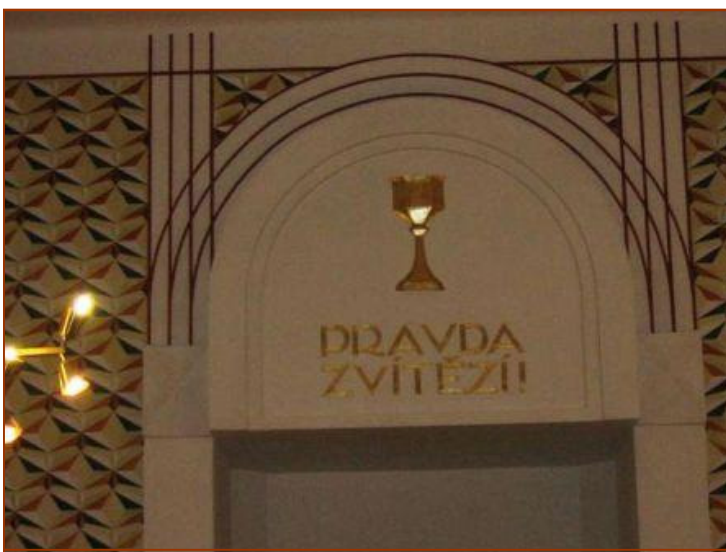
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Periodic pogroms against the Jewish inhabitants by so-called Christians add a special irony to this catalog of crimes: Christianity is based on belief in the person of Jesus, a first-century Jew Who never renounced his Jewish heritage; indeed, He proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of ancient Judaism, and provided a living link between the Hebrew God and present-day man.

If most of the Czechs Knut and Gudrun met did not exactly claim to read the Bible daily, the Petersons thought it was perhaps because, in general, most Czechs think that the message of the Bible has to do with getting people into heaven (just another kind of an utopia) or getting the reader right with God to save his or her eternal soul.

Knut and Gudrun were convinced they were sent to Prague to explain to the Czechs that the Bible is above all concerned with daily living, in robust sanity, on this earth. Reading it can help anyone to get to know the Creator of the Universe, for the Bible is focusing on things “on-earth-as-it-is-in heaven.” While it definitely addresses, in no uncertain terms, how one can get right with God and similar topics, it is especially helpful as a kind of driving manual for those who want to enjoy living wisely with purpose, and who are devoted to focusing on serving others, while living a godly, righteous and sober life with meaning and purpose.



*“The Truth Prevails”—motto of the followers of 15th century Bohemian religious reformer Jan Hus*



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### The “New Games” in town: secular humanism, atheism and paganism

One afternoon in their flat, Knut was troubled. He had spent the past few days doing some informal social research, talking with a variety of Prague citizens about their opinions of Christianity. The results of his research were not pretty.

Knut mulled over in his mind the impressions he received during these conversations with atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, neo-Nazis and communists. Their unexpectedly negative responses to a mild inquiry about their beliefs and faith indicated, to Knut, a surge of atheistic belligerence as well as a trend of being angry with religion.

What seemed to make these types of people particularly angry was what they perceived as an increasing danger: the revival and growth of a renewed, revised, strengthened, invigorated and strangely persistent Christian faith, which has been clearly resurfacing, particularly through various independent churches and congregations, in Prague.

Why be angry at something so old, “non-scientific and irrelevant” as faith? It’s because (in the eyes of all those most ardent opponents of Christian faith) the renewal of interest in Christianity is not only bitterly disappointing, but also slowly chips away at the reputation of the admired intellectuals of the times and their theories as to the origins and purpose of life.

The disappointment and anger of these opponents of faith made their attacks on God (who, ironically, as they claim, does not even exist) increasingly strident. What had undoubtedly given an unintended boost to the criticism of religion coming from these unchurched people was the destructive impact of ethnic religious fundamentalism and its aftermath, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on America.



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Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the persistent growth of Christian faith (to those who oppose it) is what they perceive as the tragic development of Christian influence worldwide, especially in Africa, Asia and South America. This trend is most disturbing news for enemies of the Christian faith, who up to recently could be comforted by the idea that as the world is becoming more affluent, more tolerant of diversity, and better educated, it would also become more secular; religion would gradually wither away. In fact the trend is clearly in the other direction. In the most rapidly-developing countries, including Russia, China, and India, religion is booming and the growth of the Christian faith is apparent. Hence this new anger with God and religion could be seen as a backlash against the unimagined and unwelcome spread of the Christian faith worldwide.

These newly belligerent atheists and their “fellow travelers” realize that the world is not going their way and that followers of Jesus Christ are not going to disappear, Knut reasoned. Therefore they are attempting to take over the minds of the next generation and brainwash them to adopt their secular propaganda, moral relativism, and bigoted fascist or communist views. They promote their ideological

agenda while pretending to be broad-minded, open and intellectually diverse. It’s one of the new games in town.

Knut was keenly aware of the consequences of atheism as a system of belief, and of the impact of atheist ideologies (including Fascism and Communism) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular. The destruction and death wrought by these ideologies was firmly implanted in his mind. Yet somehow the Christian faith, values and culture of the ages are refusing to completely disappear.



Betlemska Kaple, Zizkov, courtesy “Markus”



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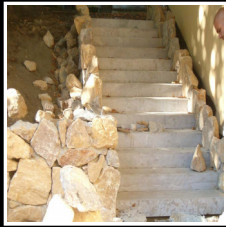
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And perhaps the most surprising “new game” was paganism. In an interview with Radio Prague (28-09-2009), Rosie Johnston spoke to Petr Wagner about the “new paganism.” Here are excerpts from that interview, which can be found at <http://www.radio.cz/en/print/article/120678>. Mr. Wagner is the front man of Czech Christian punk group Goro, a presenter on Český rozhlas station Radio Wave, and a Hussite preacher based in Čerčany, near Prague.

**Interviewer: This country is very often referred to as the most atheist country in Europe, but I know you think that is a bit of a misrepresentation. I know you are an active preacher as well, so I wanted to ask you about the sort of people who come to hear you preach – would you say that there are more actively religious Czechs than you might first think?**

Mr. Wagner: “I think that our nation is not atheistic at all. It is closer to the pagan times that were in the old days, it just isn’t said. It is just lived, this kind of thing. We still have strong tendencies towards pagan kinds of thinking and beliefs; people turn towards astrology and massively towards different kinds of witchcraft, white witchcraft and such things. We even have television programmes on big television stations that deal with astrology and stuff. So, people tend to believe in something, it is just that Christianity has a really bad place in their views. Because under Communism it was compromising a lot, and then again afterwards.”

**Interviewer: Do you feel like you, as a Christian, as a Hussite Christian in this country, are part of a network of people who believe in the same things as you? And do you feel like there are people representing your beliefs, either at a political level, or indeed, at a senior church level here?**



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Mr. Wagner: “Some of them, they do represent my points of view. But, you know, I’ve been through different denominations in my life, and so I think I try to take the best from different sides of Christianity, of Western Christianity. I have some friends also in the Orthodox Church, which is a big inspiration for me.

“But, it is interesting that the people that I really admire and look up to are not important in a political way. So, my own church authorities are not all important for me, because I just need to see them as a personal example of faith. That means that I have many, many heroes in the Catholic Church, and in the traditional Protestant Churches.

“When we are closer to the Gospel, we can be sure that the Church’s role is to be a servant, and that doesn’t mean that we will try to get as much money from the state as possible. So, we still have to have the heart of a servant, we must serve society, and serve those who don’t know Christ, and don’t know the Gospel. And the best way is by personal example, which means that we mustn’t be greedy, and that’s the thing.”

No, Prague was not one of those holy places where people go typically in search of a spiritual retreat but it was the place where the Lord, at least for now, put Knut and Gudrun. And because they put God first in their lives, heaven’s blessings were overtaking them (Psalm 69:6; Matthew 6:33). The Petersons had to learn to serve in the environment which not only is seemingly hostile to the Christian way of life but where too many individuals are used to using up the wealth, happiness and virtue of the community to please self without much concern for others.



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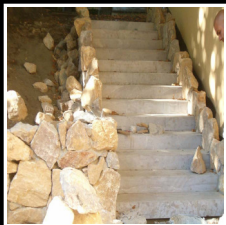
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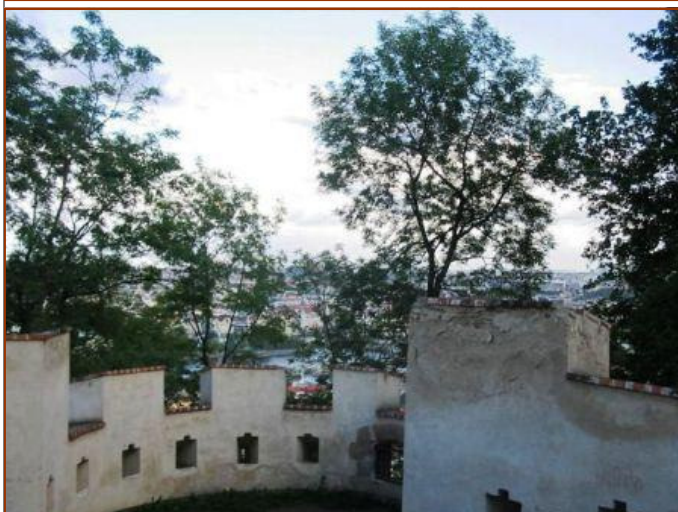
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But for Knut and Gudrun, it was precisely "others" who constituted the starting point for all their endeavors. Their heart's desire was to give to others the precious gift of meaning and purpose for life that can only be found through complete surrender to God and saving faith in Jesus Christ. They wanted to impart into others the flame of hope that God had given them.

As he thought and prayed about his conversations with these fairly typical Prague non-Christians, Knut realized there is no reason to be on the defensive. From his experience in competitive power volleyball, he knew the best defense is a good offense, anyway, even if taking the defensive posture was merited.

*Ruins of the castle at Vysehrad, 9th century Bohemian citadel*



Knut knew that following Christ makes so much more sense of the world than the doctrines of unbelief (lacking hope, charity and compassion), including the new games in Prague.



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