

...BRIDGES... Number 7, 2007: "A Birthday Tribute"

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In late April, Professor Jakub Trojan invited me to come to the Protestant Theological Faculty to discuss ways that my translation of his most recent book could be made available to scholars and church people in the United States. As always, I felt honored to be able to enter into a pleasant and productive conversation with this remarkable man. Near the end of our meeting, he reminded me that he would be retiring from his post as professor of ethics in October. "Yes, I just translated an article about you for *Czech Mission Network News*," I responded with a smile, before asking a few questions about that detailed tribute to Professor Trojan's service. My request for clarification felt rather presumptuous, given the intensity of his schedule those days. However, as I asked practical questions regarding the specific years that he had engaged in various activities, Professor Trojan's demeanor changed, and a thoughtful reverie of remembrance began. I suddenly realized that I was hearing a very personal elaboration on the article that I had translated. For a moment, I wished that I could share that version of Professor Trojan's story with the readers of *Czech Mission Network News*; yet, I simultaneously knew that I was being entrusted with a private glimpse into a life that has evinced a rare degree of conviction, perseverance, and faith, which should, perhaps, remain unwritten – except in my memory's transitory register. However, this evening, one portion of that recollection appears to be clamoring for expression.

After working as a common laborer for a time after his license to be a pastor was revoked by communist authorities, Professor Trojan was given a job in the field of economics prior to his retirement at the age of 62. However, when the Velvet Revolution occurred a few months later, he was invited to teach at the Protestant Theological Faculty, where he was also elected to the post of dean. "It was as if a new beginning had arrived," he declared, before reporting that he was putting the finishing touches on a lecture that he would be delivering on May 15th at a convocation marking his 80th birthday and upcoming retirement. "My topic is the joy that the study of theology brings. I would like you to be there," he added. "What a wonderful theme! I most certainly will come," I exclaimed.

I was delighted when an elegant invitation to that event arrived by post and as John and I entered PTF's large lecture hall. That room was filled with people who had come to share that landmark day, and my sense of anticipation grew as Dean Martin Prudký gave a thoughtful summary of Professor Trojan's life and work. Dr. Jiří Halama – who is likely to succeed Dr. Trojan as the chair of the Faculty's department of ethics – served as the master of ceremonies; Professor Martin Balabán – who recently joined Professor Trojan in publishing a book of poetry – gave a witty response to the lecture; and several people ventured thoughtful questions.

From a remote corner in the lecture hall, I found myself straining to hear what was being said, and I must confess that the content of the

proceedings – and of the lecture itself – was largely lost to a crowded room and rather poor acoustics. I have a sense that Professor Trojan contrasted philosophy's dogged focus on the weighty questions raised by the harsh realities of existence with theology's distinctive orientation toward the possibility of hope. I have a sense that he stressed that theology is a discipline which is always unfolding. I have a sense that he declared that theology is a source of joy because it is an inherently dialogical endeavor, a communicative process. Yet, I cannot tell you exactly what Professor Trojan said on May 15th. Thus, you may be wondering where I got these ideas, and why I am trying to write about an event that I did not understand completely.

In response, I would suggest that one of the musical selections which members of Professor Trojan's family performed as a "prelude" to the lecture plunged me into the harsh realities with which Professor Trojan struggled throughout the communist years, even as it mediated the sustaining joy that theology has given him. The music was a dialogue between a poignantly melodic violin part and a discordantly disruptive piano part. How representative of a regime that forcefully violated human dignity at regular intervals, and how affirming of the deep substratum of faith whose resolving tones cannot be silenced by any discordant interlude! I could not hear all of Professor Trojan's spoken words, but I do know that his very life has exemplified his open-minded and true-hearted approach to the joy of theology. We may be grateful indeed!