



Martyrdom of Adalbert,  
Gniezno Doors of the  
Cathedral of St. Mary

## Adalbert of Prague (956 - 997): A European Saint and Focal Figure of European Identity\*

by Prof. Dr. phil. h. c. Hans Hermann Henrix

### Introduction

Europe is looking for its identity. This applies from religious and political aspects. Politically: After the enlargement of the European Union to include the south-eastern European states and with the ongoing debate on a possible accession of Turkey to the Union, the continent, which is growing together, is faced with the question of accepting general, fundamental cultural and spiritual challenges. The continent is in a profound transformation process, which is discussed here under the thesis of the Islamisation of Europe and which is characterized there with the counter-argument, that Muslim migrants are in a stronger orientation towards European standards than generally perceived or that social problems of transformation are reinterpreted into religious problems. Religiously: At the end of the millennium of the Christian

era the continent was witness of an important pontificate in the Catholic Church, whose Pope implemented a process of purification of memory at the turn of the millennium, and he did so not in a gesture of merely looking backwards, but with the intention of entering into the new millennium with a conscious awareness of responsibility.<sup>1</sup> In this twofold context of looking for identity, it is asked whether a monk, a missionary, a bishop of the Early Middle Ages can be a pivotal figure representing European identity.

\*The pictures are taken from the volume: Tomáš Sekyrka/Stanislav Boloňský/ Petr Janžura, Sv. Vojtěch život a smrt mučedníka. Karmelitánské nakladatelství, Kostelní Vydří 1997. We thank Peter Janžura as photographer and author sincerely for his kind permission to reproduce his photographs. The picture is verified with the note © and the page of the volume.

<sup>1</sup> Compare: Hans Hermann Henrix, Europe: A Continent of Dialogue. Thinkers and Ideas in Judaism and Christianity, Krefeld 2009, 53-68.

A millennium ago, within a few years after his death and beatification, the veneration of St Adalbert of Prague spread to include an increasing circle of admirers. This 'success' forms a strange contrast to the experience of failure which is an inadmissible part of Adalbert's life. That life came to a violent end. His family was almost exclusively extinguished by an other family clan competing for political power in Bohemia. As the Bishop of Prague he twice broke off relations with the local church community. And the missionary work to the heathen Prussians he undertook foundered after only the a few days. And yet, a millennium later millions of people in Europe know and cherish him. During his lifetime Adalbert may have been a 'loser', but by the impact he made he became a preparer, a trailblazer of European integration, appearing to us today as a sort of symbol for a Europe which hopefully is able to learn from its bitter defeats, to learn in particular how to pluck up courage to venture new beginnings.

Saint Adalbert of Prague is the Patron of Poland and of the city of Prague. He is particularly venerated by the Polish, Czech, Slovak as well as Hungarian peoples. He is the common saint of these four nations. And this exceptional plurality is reflected or mirrored in the four names of this saint: Adalbert – Vojtech – Wojciech – Béla. He is a personality of European standing, having been born into a period of time when Europe just had arrived at an important mile stone. In the course of the 10th century Christian Europe in the West and South alike had internally become stabilized. It was in a position now to influence more strongly than before the heathen populations in the East and North of Europe. Evangelization received a new boost, though not as systematically effective as in the reign of Charlemagne. This new missionary drive was mainly carried by princes who wished to guide their peoples towards a new level of cultural, social and political achievement. This was not done in the first instance for religious reasons, but because their initiative was aimed at benefiting from the e-

ducative drive and the structural strength inherent in the institutions of Church and Christianity. By being accepted into the wider family of Christian rulers, the sovereigns could thus confirm their power over their own people. Vast areas of the Slavonic East in this way were opened up to Christianity. They thus merged into the general panoply of the European cultural community of the Latin West, respectively the Byzantine Slavonic East. Adalbert of Prague in this context was a dominant figure during this time of change. Turning at first towards prayer and contemplation, he later on entered the fields of political conflict, being active at a time when his country was lay under the shadow of a power struggle aiming at the unification of the eastern lands. The veneration that followed his martyrdom proved to be decisive in particular for Poland's orientation towards the West. To the degree to which this veneration spread through the eastern countries Adalbert became a 'political' Saint of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

### **The veneration of Saints – a Gateway to the History of Faith and the Church**

In the thousand years following his death he has become effective in a way which embodies and confirms an ancient Christian experience: for Christians the lives of the saints provide access to the history of their Faith and their Church. In times of undisputed veneration of saints the effectiveness of this access proves as tradition and courage to "pray to the saints". Such prayer is not adoration due to God alone. The believers ask rather the saints for their intercession. They do this by faith in the power of interceding towards God.

To Christians the veneration of the saints opens up the way to the history of their faith. This is not an immediate and direct approach to the history of the entire or world Church. The individual saint did not in principle possess a universal area of life and effectiveness. Rather more he/she lived and was effective in a restricted circle,

---

<sup>2</sup> Compare Jan Royt, *Hl. Adalbert (Reihe Hagiographie/Ikonographie/Volkskunde)* (Regensburg: Schnell Steiner 1997), p. 2.

in a narrower radius of life only and played his or her part in an individual local or regional church setting. Veneration began to be effective in this narrower radius of the life of the saint. It clings to the burial place, annually commemorates the day of his or her death and/or interment, and only later begins to include the wider perimeter of his/her life. “The veneration of saints arises in the radius of the family and the local Church, where the feasts of the saints have their origin and focal point.”<sup>3</sup>

In the case of St Adalbert this was remarkably different. Within a few years only the circle of his veneration spread to an extent which is quite surprising

for that early period around the change of millennium. The immediate and far-reaching extension of his veneration reflects the generality of his biography and soon ‘makes’ Adalbert a European saint. His ‘success story’ - as noted initially - is in remarkable contrast to the experience of failure and loss which so unmistakably belongs to Adalbert’s life story.

### Who was Adalbert of Prague?

Who was this man whose life has been overshadowed by so many defeats and who after his death in witness has experienced such a deep and lasting veneration?

*Picture: Place of Birth Libice (©, p. 97)*



<sup>3</sup> Hans Hermann Henrix, Die Xantener Martyrermemoria. Eine theologische Erwägung zum historischen Befund, in: idem and Horst Dieter Rauh, eds., Der Christ und die Geschichte seiner Kirche (Aachen: Einhard 1978), pp. 225-256, pp. 225f.; see also: Philipp Harnoncourt, Gesamtkirchliche und teilkirchliche Liturgie (Freiburg: Herder 1974), pp. 63-245; idem., article „Heiligenverehrung. IV. Liturgisch“, in: Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche Volume 4 (Freiburg: Herder 19953), pp. 1299f.

“Adalbert’s place of birth is not known precisely. Tradition names the Slavnikid castle wall in the town of Libice as the birthplace. ... According to the chronicler Dalimil his father would have been Prince Slavnik ... His mother Strezislava (or Adilpurc, following Polish legendary tradition) may have derived from the Premyslide dynasty.”

<sup>4</sup>His parents gave the boy the name Vojtech. In most instances the year of birth given was 956.<sup>5</sup> Together with his six brothers, Vojtech grew up in Libice in the care of the priest Radla. The gifted

son was sent by his father to attend the ‘Domschule’ (cathedral school) of Magdeburg where Vojtech in the course of nine years of education and formation acquired an extensive knowledge in philosophy and theology.

*Picture: Itineraries of Adalbert*  
(©, p. 98)

Here he became familiar with the structures of German church life and also with the ascetic aspects of monastic life. During his years in Magdeburg Vojtech was confirmed by Archbishop Adalbert of Magdeburg whose name he assumed. Young Vojtech/

Adalbert was a gifted pupil and student. His kind attitude gained him the sympathies of many people. The two biographies which were written only a few years after Adalbert’s death describe the years of his school and higher formation in different ways.



4 Jan Royt, Hl. Adalbert, p. 2.

5 The year of birth is one of the controversial points in the historical research of the dates of Adalbert’s biography. This insecurity becomes obvious when comparing the various biographical reconstructions, see only: Karl Bosl, Adalbert von Prag - Heiliger an einer europäischen Zeitwende, in: Ackermann-Gemeinde, ed., Tausend Jahre Bistum Prag 973 - 1973. Beiträge zum Millennium (München: Ackermann-Gemeinde 1974), pp. 93-105; Franz Machilek, article „Adalbert von Prag (um 956-997)“, in: Theologische Realenzyklopädie, Volume 1 (1977), pp. 410-414; Ernst Nittner, Adalbert, der zweite Bischof von Prag - Brückenbauer zwischen Ost und West, in: Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken (ed.), Dein Reich komme. 89. Deutscher Katholikentag vom 10. bis 14. September 1986 in Aachen. Dokumentation Teil II (Paderborn: Bonifatius 1987), pp. 1419-1430; Aleksander Gieysztor, article „Adalbert von Prag“, in: Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche Volume 1 (Freiburg: Herder 1993), pp. 129f. On the question of the year of birth see only: Emanuel Vlcek, Der Vergleich der dem hl. Adalbert/Vojtech zugeschriebenen Skelettüberreste von Prag und Aachen, in: Hans Hermann Henrix, ed., Adalbert von Prag (956 – 997) – Brücke zwischen dem Westen und dem Osten Europas (Baden-Baden: Nomos 1997), pp. pp. 127-140, who as a consequence of the facts of his medical research on the head of Prague, proposes 950 as the year of Adalbert’s birth. This is the most far-reaching proposal in identifying the year of birth.

The slightly older *vita* composed in Rome by John Canaparius, abbot of the Roman monastery of St. Boniface and Alexius,<sup>6</sup> traces the life of the student in the manner of the life of a saint who tended to withdraw from life as much as possible in order to pray and also describes him as one caring a lot for the poor. The second and more sober biography was written by Bruno of Querfurt and pays particular attention to the playful character of the boy, a characteristic feature he retains even after returning to Prague in 982. But soon the young Prague canon is deeply shaken by the confession on his deathbed of Thietmar, the first Bishop of Prague. A fundamental change takes place within Adalbert, a change from which he emerges as a deeply religious and pious person.

At the assembly of the Estates (*Landtag*) in Levý Hradec on January 19th, 982<sup>7</sup> Adalbert was elected Thietmar's successor to the Prague see. According to the law at the time the elected bishop needed the approval of the emperor. But emperor Otto II in those days resided in Northern Italy. So Adalbert set off for Italy. In Verona he first was invested by Otto II, probably on the Feast of St. Peter's and Paul's (June 29th) of 983, then was consecrated by Archbishop Willigis of Mainz. Prague in those days was a suffragan bishopric with regard to Mainz. Adalbert proved to be a true diocesan pastor. He led a modest life and showed particular concern for the sick and the prisoners. On the feast days he provided for a great number of alms receivers and day after day he fed a group of paupers. He fasted a lot and kept frequent night vigils. One episode from the first-mentioned *vita* above all characterizes Adalbert: "A pauper who was robbed and left nothing but his life, asks for help at night and is given a silk cushion cover by the bishop. When he is caught the other day and accused to be a thief, Adal-

bert calms the chamberlain by saying that this man is not a rogue but a needy pauper."<sup>8</sup> In his sermons he impresses upon the faithful the necessity to follow the will of God, but at the same he notices a lack of success of his work. His work is influenced by the ideals and reform ideas he had picked up in Magdeburg. The continued practicing of pagan rites is yet another hard fact he has to face. Quite apart from his fight against "polygyny", priests' marriages, trading of slaves, and neglecting the feast days of the Church, he also loses the trust and backing of Boleslav II, the Premyslide Duke of Bohemia. Consequently Adalbert finds it necessary to resign in 988/9. Together with his half-brother Radim and Willigo, the Provost of Prague Cathedral, he goes to Rome. In Rome the Pope agrees to Adalbert resigning from his Prague see and entering the Monastery of St. Boniface and Alexius on Aventine Hill.

6 According to Johannes Fried this *Vita* has its possible offspring in Liège: Johannes Fried, Gnesen – Aachen – Rom. Otto III. und der Kult des hl. Adalbert. Beobachtungen zum älteren Adalbertsleben, in: Michael Borgolte, ed., Polen und Deutschland vor 1000 Jahren. Europa im Mittelalter, Volume 5 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 2002), pp. 263-272 and Jürgen Hoffmann, *Vita Adalberti. Früheste Textüberlieferungen der Lebensgeschichte Adalberts von Prag* (Essen: Klartext 2005), p. 12.

7 According to Jan Royt, *Hl. Adalbert*, p. 3; as date of the *Landtag* the date of February 19, 982 is often named.

8 This reconstruction follows the outstanding analysis and interpretation of the two *Vitae* by Friedrich Lotter, *Das Bild des hl. Adalbert in der römischen und der sächsischen Vita*, in: Hans Hermann Henrix (Hrsg.), *Adalbert von Prag*, op. cit., pp. 77-107, p. 89.



*Picture: Monastery of St. Boniface and Alexius in Rome today (©, p. 36)*

On a high level of his saintly life he now shares in the everyday monastic routines, protesting violently when his fellow monks attempt to appoint the former bishop to some or other official function, such as the consecration of churches. On Aventine Hill he consciously devotes himself to the lowly life of a monk. He carries out humble duties and spends a lot of time in prayer, meditation and contemplation.



*Picture: Praying Adalbert (©, p. 23)*

But again Adalbert is dragged out of his contemplative monastic life. Five years after he retired from the Prague see, the Archbishop of Mainz appeals to the Pope that Adalbert should return and take up the see once more. A Bohemian delegation led by Radla, the priest who guided him through his early childhood, visits him. Radla requests him to return to Prague, as religious circumstances have been worsening in Bohemia. The Pope sees fit to agree to the request of Willigis and the Bohemian delegation, although this decision apparently does not come easy to the

Pope and Rome. Contrary to his own wishes, Adalbert obeys the Pope and in 992 returns to Prague. His episcopal work at first is looked upon kindly by the Prague faithful who have promised to mend their ways. With the help of the duke and assisted by 12 monks brought along from the Roman Alexius Monastery Adalbert establishes the Benedictine Monastery of Brevnov.



*Picture: The monastery Brevnov in Prague today (©, Adalbert-foundation)*

The foundation of the Brevnov monastery had been agreed with the duke, though yet more tensions erupted between the bishop and the duke and their respective family clans, the Slavnikides and the Premyslides. Possibly a severe violation of church asylum occasions Adalbert's renewed departure from Prague. He is unable to prevent this serious incident which results in the dramatic killing of a woman. In the older aforementioned biography the drama is related as follows: "A lady of noble birth committed adultery with a priest. According to heathen custom the relatives of the man ask for the death penalty being carried out. The woman flees to the bishop seeking asylum which he grants her with the nuns of St George's Convent. Adalbert is prepared to take the guilt upon him and either save the life of the woman or suffer martyrdom as a result, but is talked out of it by Wiliko. Meanwhile a raging crowd of people enters the cathedral precincts and is faced by Adalbert. He refuses to hand over the woman and is countered by the leader of the group who threatens to attack the bishop's brethren and relatives. Soon the hooligans get access to the fugitive through betrayal, she is torn from the altar and when her husband refuses (to kill his wife) himself she is decapitated by a miserable servant."<sup>9</sup> This event deeply shakes and horrifies Adalbert. Yet another reason for his second resignation from the see in 994/5 may have been the insoluble conflict over the political predominance in Bohemia. This conflict meanwhile leads to the murder of Albert's brothers in Libice Castle by the Premyslides, though the exact moment in time of this terrible event happening is controversial among the scholars of history.

On his way to Rome for a second stay Adalbert may have stopped off in Hungary which later on began to venerate him as an apostle. Adalbert's second stay in Rome is characterized by an even greater degree of seclusion than before. He totally retires into praying, fasting and monastic labour. On the other hand, though, Adalbert's second stay in Rome is rich in events and encounters. He for instance meets with Pope Gregory V,

the young emperor Otto III, and also with Willigis, the Archbishop of Mainz who keeps pressing him to return to Prague once more. Under the prerequisite that his return to Prague is no longer possible, Adalbert gets permission from the Pope to preach the Gospel to the heathen populations. After having received the papal assent, Adalbert sets about his missionary journey which leads him first to Germany via France. In Mainz he once more meets Otto III. He then continues his journey to Poland where the Polish Duke Boleslaw the Brave, residing in Gniezno, entrusts him with converting the Prussians. Together with his brother Radim who had accepted the monastic name Gaudentius and accompanied by just one servant, Adalbert relies on the strength Gospel he wants to spread, when after a short sea voyage from Gdansk he encounters the Prussians. The first meeting already is conflict-laden, with the missionaries being ordered harshly to leave the dry land. Despite their initial retreat, Adalbert and his companions are attacked and overpowered sometime during the next day.



*Picture: Martyrdom of Adalbert (©, p. 74)*

<sup>9</sup> After Lotter, in: Henrix, Adalbert von Prag, p. 94.

On April 23rd Adalbert is led to the hill of execution where the heathen priest pierces him with a spear. According to legend the dying Adalbert implores God to save his own soul and that of his murderers. The murderers, however, vent their rage on his body. They sever the head and impale it. Several places are mentioned as likely venues of the martyr's death. The most likely of these seems to be Heiligenwalde near Elblag in between the rivers Nogat and Wisla. When news of the martyr's death together with his severed head reaches the Duke of Poland, Boleslaw ransoms the body from the Prussians and has it buried in St. Mary's Church in Gniezno.



*Picture: The tomb of St. Adalbert in Gniezno (©, p. 87)*

### **Reverberations of Adalbert's Death throughout the Entire Occidental Christianity**

Adalbert's death finds an incredible echo throughout occidental Christianity. Pope Sylvester II who before his election had got acquainted with Adalbert in Rome already canonizes him in the year 999.



*Picture: Otto III. – Friend of Adalbert (©, p. 70)*

In the following year, Emperor Otto III goes on a pilgrimage to Gniezno which proves to be of great consequence. In the first instance, it was meant to visit the grave of St Adalbert. But Otto of course also meets Duke Boleslaw the Brave. Historians gather that whatever ceremonial accessories accompanied the so-called 'Act of Gniezno' or 'Congress of Gniezno', the ceremony may have been intended to be "the baptismal act



meant for the lands and people” of Poland. “The Emperor took off his own crown and crowned Duke Boleslaw the Brave as a sign of friendship ... Unworthy it must be considered to address such a man as a mere Duke or Count. By thus crowning him he was meant to be raised to the rank of King.”<sup>10</sup> Thus the foundation of the Realm of Poland is closely connected with both St Adalbert and the city of Gniezno. This is further elucidated by Otto III vesting St Mary’s Church with abundant gifts. The request of the Emperor, however, to let him have the relics of the Saint, is not complied with by Boleslaw, apparently for political reasons. Still, Otto is able to take with him part of the relics which he takes to Rome and to Aachen, where he distinguishes by his gift his own earlier donation, the St Adalbert Chapter.

Both Adalbert’s biographies - the first having been composed in 998/9 in Rome, the second 1004 in Quedlinburg - help to stimulate and spread the veneration of Adalbert. Veneration of the Saint seizes Poland as well as Bohemia. When the Bohemians under Duke Bretislav I invade Poland in 1038/9 they abduct the relics from Gniezno to Prague and keep them in the St Veit’s

Church. Since that time the cities of Gniezno and Prague have been competing over retaining the true remains of the Saint. From the 15th century onwards this struggle is joined by Aachen upholding the tradition of possessing the head of Adalbert. In the course of the Middle Ages Adalbert becomes the patron saint of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, while Aachen worships him as a Saint of the Realm.

### **Adalbert, a European Saint who is Beyond the National Grasp**

As far as Polish history is concerned, Adalbert who in his lifetime was intent on prayer and contemplation and even so again and again got into the maelstrom of politics is of fundamental significance to many: his martyrdom and grave lie at the foundation of the Gniezno metropolis and thus of Polish independence and the Polish state.<sup>11</sup> Yet this is only one side to the effect he had after his death. The other side to the matter in the course of history and in many ways has been covered over by numerous individual and national interests,<sup>12</sup> though eventually it cannot be suppressed: the figure of Adalbert “due to his spirituality, religiosity, understanding of the ways of the Church, and cultural appeal” embodies “a truly Occidental and European universalism.”<sup>13</sup> The centre of this European universalism, as far as Adalbert was concerned, lies in Rome. In the same way as Adalbert spent important parts of his life in that city, Rome also is an important harbour to his remembrance and veneration.

*Picture: Church S. Bartolomeo on the isle of Tiber in Rome (©, p. 84)*



<sup>10</sup> Johannes Fried, *Der heilige Adalbert und Gnesen* Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte 50 (1998), pp. 41-70, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Compare the groundbreaking contribution of Johannes Fried, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Where such a national and particular enslavement happened, very often the different names of Adalbert were instrumentalized: Vojtech as the son's name of the family of Bohemian Slavnikiden, Adalbert as name of the confirmand of Archbishop Adalbert of Magdeburg, Wojciech as name of the missionary bishop and patron of Poland, Béla as name of apostle of Hungary.

<sup>13</sup> So with Ernst Nittner, *op. cit.*, p. 1427.

Such place of remembrance is above all Santo Bartolomeo Church on the Tiber Isle. The most ancient depiction of Adalbert is found in Santo Bartolomeo. It is a stone relief decorating the edging of the baptismal font.



*Picture: Oldest representation of Adalbert: baptistry of S. Bartolomeo (©, p. 83)*

Here Adalbert is depicted standing endowed with the insignia of a bishop. The only item missing is the episcopal mitre which only later became the major symbol of a bishop. His right hand holds the crozier, the bishop's crook, while the left holds a gospel book. He also wears a bishop's stole. There are further relics preserved in S. Bartolomeo, in a reliquary under the altar.

It contains the relics which Otto III received from Boleslaw the Brave on the occasion of his visit to Gniezno in the year 1000. In other respects as well Rome is a centre of veneration of Adalbert, as Rome surely displays many important aspects of the life of Adalbert. With regard to



*Picture: Relics of Adalbert under the altar of S. Bartolomeo (©, p. 84)*

the life and activities of Adalbert Rome represents the overall European aspect of his testimony. This general essence of his life, faith, and achievement remains a lasting and important factor which withholds the man and his work from any particularist and national bindings, be they of a religious or political nature. That Adalbert in an ecclesial sense does not exclusively represent the western Church was also the conviction of Pope John Paul II. In a message to the European Heads of State on the occasion of the millennium ceremonies honouring the martyrdom of St Adalbert on the 3rd of June 1997, the Pope said in Gniezno: "Born in Bohemia at a time still close to when Cyril and Methodius had begun to evangelize the Slavs, Adalbert, after the example of those illustrious predecessors, was able to combine the spiritual traditions of East and West."<sup>14</sup>

14 John Paul II, Message to Heads of State – Tuesday, 3 June 1997: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_03061997\\_presidents\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_03061997_presidents_en.html).

But in a political sense as well Adalbert rather stands for European than national aspects. He could even be called a 'political' saint, in as much as throughout his life he got entangled in political machinations. In the history of his veneration he also suffered something like an 'instrumentalization' from diverse political sides. This may be noticed in the depiction in the form of a panel which Charles IV ordered to be painted in the workshop of Master Theodoric in the Holy Cross Chapel for the impressive Karlstein Castle in the heart of Bohemia:<sup>15</sup>



*Picture: Representation of Adalbert in Karlstejn near Prague (©, cover)*

In this depiction one would take the saint to be an imperial figure, if the insignia displayed would not identify him as a bishop. In a historical sense the veneration of

Adalbert showed aspects of an early political consolidation of the relationship among the peoples of Eastern Central Europe. Adalbert in a way became the trailblazer of their integration into the West. After the Slavonic countries had become autonomous members of the Western Roman Church, they in turn now began to enrich western culture. They counted themselves among the peoples of Europe and shared their cultural understanding. Their declared committal to this culture was "a vital statement of their own self-understanding, ... of their European cultural consciousness. The Czech Vojtech, i.e. Adalbert, Bishop of Prague and missionary of the Prussians, has to be counted among the patriarchs of this consciousness ... Adalbert of Prague, the émigré and martyr is representative (for Europe)."<sup>16</sup>

Adalbert is a European Saint and a symbol of European fellowship. This was the guiding idea of the dual-purpose pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Prague and Gniezno in 1997, the millennium year of the death of Adalbert. Quite intentionally bishops and Christian men and women from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and other European countries were invited to share in the big celebration of the Eucharist in Prague on Sunday, April 27, 1997. Together with the Czech Church and the Pope they were to celebrate the millennium of St Adalbert. In his welcoming address the Pope (on the 25th of April) had called Adalbert "the first Czech to occupy the See of Prague, the first Czech of truly European importance . . . Saint Adalbert, along with the Patrons of Europe, Benedict and Cyril and Methodius, belongs among the founders of Christian culture in Europe, especially in Central Europe".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Compare Jan Royt, op. cit., p. 18 and the cover there.

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Nittner, op. cit., p. 1428.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, Address during the Welcoming Ceremony at the Prague International Airport – Friday, 25 April, 1997: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_25041997\\_czechrep-arrival\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_25041997_czechrep-arrival_en.html); German version: L'Osservatore Romano. Wochenausgabe in deutscher Sprache, No. 19, May 9, 1997, p. 7.

And the Pope paid tribute to the Saint as a “many-faceted witness” who represented the yet undivided Christian tradition of the first millennium. He “is a sign of that harmony and cooperation which ought to exist between the Church and society.”<sup>18</sup> The fact that Adalbert forged links between the peoples of central Europe is attested to by the fact that he is known under four names altogether: *Vojtech* was the name he carried with him from the line of the Bohemian Slavníkides, the name *Adalbert* he received when he was confirmed by Archbishop Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Wojciech* he called himself as a missionary bishop and patron saint of Poland, and *Béla* as the apostle of Hungary.<sup>19</sup> His person serves as a common archetype and a saint for all of them.

John Paul II had invited the Presidents of Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, the Slovak Republic, the Ukraine, and of Hungary to share in celebrating the millennium of St Adalbert’s martyrdom. In this way he adequately expressed the European dimension of remembering Adalbert. Whoever involves himself in the hagiography of the Saint and the stations of his life and work and whoever sees the unusual veneration of this Saint continued to this day, he or she cannot avoid noticing the important European dimension of the figure of St Adalbert. The stations of his life alone establish a map of Europe. His charisma links up and integrates the countries of Central Europe and lays the foundations to European togetherness and unity. He is one of the founder figures of this continent, displaying a definitely European identity. Above all in Gniezno, but also in Prague, Aachen and Rome with regard to Adalbert as a European saint a relationship should be cultivated which encompasses the entirety of his biography and of the effect he has on the world around him.



*Picture: The Gniezno Doors of the Cathedral of St. Mary with scenes of the life of Adalbert of Prague (©, p. 81)*

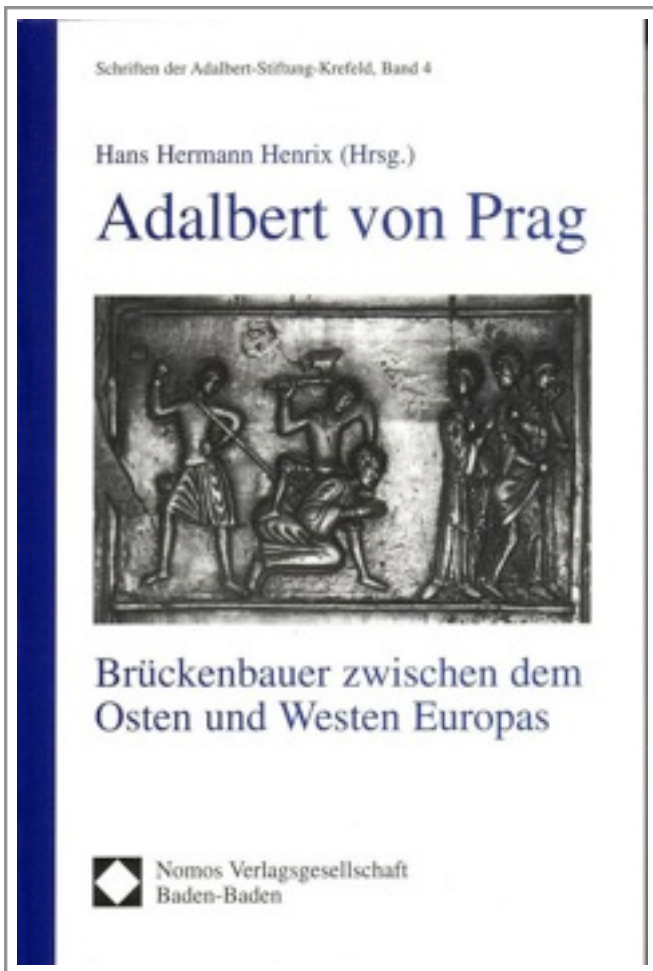
<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, John Paul II, Homily on the Occasion of the Millennium of the Birth into Eternal Life of Saint Adalbert:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_27041997\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_27041997_en.html); German: Papst Johannes Paul II., Predigt bei der Eucharistiefeier am Sonntag, 27. April 1997, auf dem Letná-Platz in Prag, in: L'Osservatore Romano. Wochenausgabe in deutscher Sprache, No. 19, May 9, 1997, p. 11f.

<sup>19</sup> Ádám Somorjai, St. Adalbert (Vojtech-Wojciech-Béla), gemeinsamer Heiliger der Völker Ostmitteleuropas, in: Henrix, Adalbert von Prag, pp. 209-213, p. 213.

The Adalbert millennium has given important impulses to historical research as well as the veneration he enjoys. Symposia of historians from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Germany have been held. The responsibility for one of these consultations has been with the Adalbert Stiftung in Krefeld.

um, a remarkable discovery was made in Aachen. Aachen is an ancient venue of Adalbert veneration. Still, it came as quite a surprise when Jürgen Hoffmann, a young historian, discovered a manuscript from the time around the year 1200 which hitherto had not been noticed. It contains the older vita of St Adalbert and by now has been academically edited, its publication having been made possible by the Adalbert Stiftung. The Aachen find proves that two centuries after Adalbert's martyrdom an active and living veneration of the saint already existed in Western Europe.<sup>20</sup>



Picture: Publication of the Adalbert-Foundation to the Adalbert-Millennium: Hans Hermann Henrix, ed., *Adalbert von Prag* (1956 – 1997) – *Brücke zwischen dem Westen und dem Osten Europas* (Baden-Baden: Nomos 1997)

Showing understanding of historical coherence and continuity the Adalbert-Foundation deals with political contexts in the spirit of the remembrance, the memoria of St Adalbert. In the course of historical research being stimulated and carried out during the Adalbert millenni-



Picture: The rediscovered Aachen-script of the Adalbert-vita: Initial E in a manuscript of the Vita of St. Adalbert, 1200 (© Mario Kramp, ed., *Krönungen. Könige in Aachen – Geschichte und Mythos. Katalog der Ausstellung in zwei Bänden*, Mainz 2000, p. 299)

20 Compare the first report of Jürgen Hoffmann, Otto III. und die Anfänge des Adalbertkultes in Aachen, in: Mario Kramp (Hg.), *Krönungen. Könige in Aachen – Geschichte und Mythos. Katalog der Ausstellung in 2 Bänden*, Mainz 2000, pp. 295-301, but also his critical edition: *Vita Adalberti*, op. cit.

Yet even today veneration of St Adalbert is still alive in Central Europe. In his message addressing the heads of state assembled in Gniezno, Pope John Paul II outlined briefly and concisely the overall importance of Adalbert's biography and his activities, when he said that "Adalbert's lasting influence is largely due to the harmony he achieved between the different cultures he assimilated"<sup>21</sup>. These days this looks like prophecy, for on the 29th of June of 2006 in the town of Esztergom and in the spirit of the memoria of St Adalbert a historical gesture of reconciliation between the Hungarian and Slovak bishops took place: the bishops signed a message of reconciliation. A historical load has been weighing down relations between the two peoples, emerging in a long-lasting conflict over the respective minorities which goes on right into the present. The bishops now want to set an example for mutually overcoming such historical quarrels and for encouraging reconciliation. The Hungarian bishops therefore conclude their letter of reconciliation addressed to the Slovak bishops with the words: "We ask for God's blessings upon the Slovak people, the Catholic Church in Slovakia, the Slovak Conference of Catholic Bishops and on Europe's people. We ask for the intercession of St Adalbert ... and of all of Slovakia's and Hungary's past and future saints for our people and Church, so that we may live according to their example."<sup>22</sup> Adalbert here is recalled as the great figure of encounter, of the harmony of spirits, and of eventual reconciliation.

The memoria of Adalbert is able to offer orientation to Europe. Acting on this conviction, the Adalbert Stiftung conducts its work of political enlightenment helping to encourage the integration of the European peoples. The fact that a German foundation is able to present a grant to a Polish student attending a European Studies course at the Collegium Europaeum Gnesnense by itself can be considered a concrete outcome of the memoria of St Adalbert of Prague.

---

21 John Paul II, Message to Heads of State – Tuesday, 3 June 1997:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_03061997\\_presidents\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_03061997_presidents_en.html).

Quotation after: L'Osservatore Romano. Wochenausgabe in deutscher Sprache, No. 24, June 13, 1997, p. 9.

22 See: [http://www.magyarokurir.hu/?&lang=de&sessid=KjI4NjM4NTQ5MTE1NzQ0NjY5NTE3MzgyODM0&m\\_op=view&id=11013&rovat=12&lang=en](http://www.magyarokurir.hu/?&lang=de&sessid=KjI4NjM4NTQ5MTE1NzQ0NjY5NTE3MzgyODM0&m_op=view&id=11013&rovat=12&lang=en) (September 5, 2006).