

Tomášek, M., Kotous, J. (eds.): *Evropská unie a Svatý stolec.*  
*The European Union and the Holy See.* Praha: Leges, 2025, 204 p.

This book is a collection of papers presented at an international conference entitled “The European Union and the Holy See.” These are two specific subjects of international law. The conference was devoted to their relationship. It took place on May 6, 2025, and was organized in cooperation with the Faculty of Law of Charles University, the Archdiocese of Prague, and the Apostolic Nunciature in the Czech Republic. According to feedback on the event, most participants felt that it was the first event of its kind in Europe.

Let us briefly introduce the position of the Holy See and the European Union. The Holy See is not a member of the EU, and neither entity under international law intends to become a member. Mutual relations are governed by international treaties, within the framework of which the Vatican City State often acts on behalf of the Holy See. This concerns, for example, monetary or economic issues. The relationship between the two entities has not only legal, political, or social dimensions. One of the specific features of the Holy See’s position lies in its position at the top of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

The editors of the publication “The European Union and the Holy See” are renowned academic lawyers Prof. JUDr. PhDr. (mult.) Michal Tomášek, DrSc. and JUDr. Jan Kotous. Let us briefly introduce these two prominent figures in Czech and international legal scholarship.

Professor Tomášek is a renowned expert not only in the field of legal science, but also a well-known sinologist. He has been dealing with Far Eastern issues for several decades, while not neglecting to emphasize legal aspects – for example, in his extensive monograph “Legal Systems of the Far East” or “Law on the Silk Road.” Dr. Kotous has devoted a significant part of his professional life to legal research in the field of labor law and social security law. Both lawyers and editors of the book “The European Union and the Holy See,” they focus their professional interest not only on European and international labor law and social security law, but also on the legal status of the Catholic Church.

This peer-reviewed publication is a dignified, representative, and interesting follow-up to the international conference “The European Union and the Holy See.” In terms of form, the publication is given added dignity by its hardcover binding, which provides the reader with a pleasant physical support, and the book sits comfortably in the hands. The rich photographic material also gives it a lavish feel – the images complement the text well and give the reader an idea of how the event unfolded.

Let us now take a closer look at the content of the publication. As already mentioned above, the book is based on the international conference “The European Union and the Holy See.” I attended the conference as a passive listener, so I believe I am in a good position to assess how the event itself affected me and to compare this impression with the impression I got from reading the book. Simply put, I can compare the conference “live” with its “book” reflection, or, if you will, with the book’s “look back” at a successful event, and one that is most likely one of the few, if not the only one of its kind to date.

To place the conference in the broader context of events that took place at the Holy See during the conference, I would like to add that the conference was interrupted by the sad news of Pope Francis’ departure. The successor to the popular Argentine pontiff emerged from the conclave for the election of a new pope, which took place two days after the end of the conference, in the form of American Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, who took the name Leo XIV.

Participation in an event and reading a book always begins with a first step. I would like to guide the readers of this review through a comparison of my personal participation in the conference with an evaluation of the book based on it. The event took place in the premises of the venerable

Karolinum, and my first steps led me to the beautiful surroundings of the Patriotic Hall. The “book” form of the conference corresponds to opening the book and turning to the first few pages. After taking my seat, whether in the Patriotic Hall in the case of personal participation or in my armchair at home in the case of reading the book, I was struck by the dignified atmosphere and attention to detail with which both forms of the conference “The European Union and the Holy See” were prepared by the organizers and editors.

The opening of the event corresponds to the foreword by both editors. Both reflect the care and precision with which the event itself and the publication were prepared. For the sake of completeness, I would like to add that in both cases, thanks were given to the organizers, all the speakers, and partners - Charles University, the Archdiocese of Prague, the Apostolic Nunciature in Prague, and the Institute for Christian Democratic Politics.

The book graphically shows that the conference marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Schuman Declaration was held under the auspices of the European Union and the Holy See, the then Rector of Charles University, Her Magnificence Prof. MUDr. Milena Králíčková, Ph.D., His Excellency Monsignor Jan Graubner, Archbishop of Prague and Primate of Bohemia, and His Excellency Monsignor Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech Republic.

The complete conference program appears on the following pages. The conference was opened with a welcome address by Her Magnificence Prof. Milena Králíčková, Rector of Charles University. In her introduction, she mentioned the long-term attention that Charles University has devoted to the study of issues concerning the position of the Church and the Holy See. Her opening address also serves as a fitting introduction to the publication itself.

Introductory remarks were also given by Monsignor Jan Graubner, Archbishop of Prague and Primate of Bohemia, and Monsignor Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech Republic. The morning session began with a presentation entitled “The Holy See and the Process of European Integration” by His Excellency Monsignor Stanislav Příbyl, CSsR, Bishop of Litoměřice. He represented His Magnificence Professor Vincenzo Buonomo, Emeritus Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, who was ultimately unable to attend the event as originally planned. Monsignor Příbyl was followed by His Excellency Doc. Dr. Pavel Svoboda, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the Holy See, the Sovereign Order of Malta, and the Republic of San Remo (Vatican City), who spoke on the topic “Points of Contact between the European Union and the Holy See.” Doc. Svoboda offered an interesting perspective consisting of a discussion of the legal basis of the EU-Holy See relationship, presented the common denominators of both entities, outlined the values and goals of the EU, and concluded by discussing the possibilities for cooperation between the European Union and the Holy See.

The publication also includes a contribution entitled “Diplomatic Relations between the European Union and the Holy See: Legal Basis, Historical Development, and Current Challenges” by H.E. Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr, Ambassador of the European Union to the Holy See, the Sovereign Order of Malta, the United Nations organizations in Rome, and the Republic of San Marino (Rome). Prof. Selmayr was unable to attend in person due to preparations for the conclave, so he delivered his speech online.

Dr. José Luis Bazán, Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (Brussels), presented a contribution on “Religious Freedom and More: The Catholic Church and Conscience Diplomacy in the Service of the Common Good.” The book also includes a contribution by H.E. Eduard Hulici, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The Deputy Minister entitled his essay “A Brief Overview of the Development of Relations between the Czech Republic and the Holy See.” This concluded the morning session of the conference.

The book also includes an introductory word for the afternoon session, delivered by Prof. Dr. Jiří Rajmund Tretera, OP. He spoke about the legal relationship between the Holy See and the Vatican

City State. Prof. Tretera was followed by Dr. Milan Lipovský, a member of the Department of International Law at the Faculty of Law of Charles University, with his contribution “The International Subjectivity of the Holy See and the Vatican City State.” The interpretation of the historical development leading to the parallel international subjectivity of the Holy See and Vatican City State was particularly interesting.

Prof. Dr. Harald Christian Scheu from the Department of European Law at Charles University’s Faculty of Law then took the floor. He gave a presentation on “Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Minority rights in the light of secular logic.” Prof. Scheu’s contribution provides readers with many interesting insights, e.g., it discusses religious freedom and the rule of law and outlines the legal framework for the relationship between the state and religion under Article 9 of the ECHR.

Prof. Dr. Martin Štefko from the Department of Labor Law and Social Security Law gave a presentation entitled “The Right to Rest in Labor Law Inspired by Christianity.” Among other things, the presentation engagingly discusses the penetration of Christian values into law.

Prof. Štefko’s presentation is followed by a discussion “Economic Relations between the European Union and the Holy See (Vatican City State)” by Prof. Dr. Michal Tomášek, Vice-Dean and Head of the Department of European Law at the Faculty of Law of Charles University and main organizer of the conference “The European Union and the Holy See.” His contribution includes an interesting pictorial supplement in the form of several issues of Vatican euro coins.

The closing remarks were delivered by His Eminence Cardinal Dominik Duka, Archbishop Emeritus of Prague and Primate of Bohemia. In his speech, he said that the contributions and rich discussion had answered many questions about the relationship between the Holy See and the European Union, but had also opened up many new ones. I also find it interesting that he quoted Pope John Paul II: “A Church without law is not a Church of love, but a Church of injustice.”

The publication also contains extensive photographic documentation from the evening reception held at the Archbishop’s Palace, and the book concludes with an English summary of the conference.

This publication is not just an “ordinary” conference proceedings. It is a collection of interesting ideas and reflections on a topic that has not yet been subjected to detailed scientific research, at least not to the depth with which it was discussed at the conference “The European Union and the Holy See.” Most conference participants, whether active or passive, agreed that this was the first event of its kind on a European scale. The exclusivity of the event is therefore matched by the exclusivity of the publication based on it. The individual contributions deal with a wide range of issues in various aspects related to the mutual relationship between two important subjects of international law – the European Union and the Holy See.

The greatest merit of the publication lies in its contribution to legal science, as it deals with topics that have not yet been subjected to more thorough scientific research. Moreover, the legal relations between the European Union and the Holy See are such a specific matter that they certainly deserved to be examined through a scientific prism.

Generally speaking, the book “The European Union and the Holy See” presents a collection of interesting reflections and ideas that have been given sufficient space in the airwaves and on the pages of the publication to encourage the wider professional public to conduct further legal research on the issue.

Michal Štang\*

---

\* JUDr. Michal Štang, Ph.D., Department of Private Law, Faculty of Security Management at the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic, Institute of State and Law of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic. ORCID: 0000-0003-0935-4377.