

STEPAN CARDINAL TROCHTA: EDUCATOR, CHURCHMAN AND ECUMENIST

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On 6 April 1974, Czechoslovakia's only cardinal, Bishop Stepan Trochta, died at his residence in Litomerice in Bohemia, ending a life that had been full of sorrow and self-sacrifice. Trochta was born in 1905, the son of a poor peasant. At an early age he joined the Salesian Order in Turin, Italy, where he then studied philosophy and theology. Shortly after receiving a doctorate in theology, he was ordained a priest, on 29 Juli 1932.

A period of dedicated work in the Prague youth movement followed, in which Trochta was a recognized leader of the boy scouts. In the Second World War his patriotic attitude, of which he made no secret, brought him internment in the concentration camps of Theresienstadt (1942), Mauthausen (1943) and Dachau (1944—45). After his release he went on to become bishop of Litomerice in 1947. After the Communist seizure of power in 1948, he conducted the negotiations for the Church in its confrontation with the Communist state; the result was his being sentenced in 1954 to 25 years in prison. He was pardoned by President Novotny in 1960. Shortly after his full rehabilitation in 1968, he took charge of his old diocese again, which he led until his death. The Pope announced his elevation to cardinal on 5 March 1973.