

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE



Protestant and Catholic Theological Faculties of Charles University

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The project complements the focus on the search for the face of God in a previous UNCE “Transcendence and its interpretation in theology and art” with the search for the face of the human being, turned to God, the other and created beings. Conceived ecumenically and interdisciplinarily (Biblical Studies, Fundamental and Ecumenical Theology, Spirituality, Ethics, Liturgical Studies) the project uses a new methodology to investigate classic themes of theological anthropology: the creation of humanity in God’s image, The project’s relevance and originality lie in its rooted methodology and in its relational understanding of the human person (God–Human–Nature/World), with which theology engages in interreligious and intercultural dialogue about basic values of human life, such as freedom, beauty, creativity, solidarity and responsibility. Of added value is the construction of a dynamic inter-faculty team which will jointly participate in organising joint colloquia and international conferences, books, collective monographs and other specialist studies.

The research team from the Protestant and the Catholic Faculties of Charles University will examine an ecumenical concept of theological anthropology, so far unstudied. It builds on develops ideas that came out of a previous UNCE on transcendence and its interpretation in theology, philosophy and art that looked, from various standpoints (theological, philosophical, art historical and literary), at ways of interpreting transcendence in the past and present, that is, in the period when the horizon of the transcendent was being lost. This resulted in the recognition that the horizon of the transcendent is discernible today, in unexpected places, such as contemporary culture, as much as it was in the past, despite its denial and (justified) criticism of its false interpretations. The new UNCE works with these results mainly from a theological-philosophical standpoint and in ecumenical perspective (something that was not

considered in the previous project), and it also wants to approach the theme from the other (anthropological) side.

The focus, then, is on the person who seeks and experiences transcendence. Theological anthropology differs from other forms of anthropological discourse in placing the relationship with God as the starting point and basis of anthropological research. The human in relation to God, to the other and to nature / the world form the basic theological-anthropological perspective. Of course within this framework there are significant differences. Partly these are due to varied confessional approaches. Put very simply, for example, there are differences as to whether the person is understood primarily as creature within the order of creation (Catholicism), or as God's image and likeness maturing through crisis to fullness of unity with God and with creation (Orthodoxy) or as sinner finding through faith and grace her or his authentic humanity in Jesus Christ (Protestantism). The project aims to show why these emphases do not create antitheses, being found in all main streams of Christianity, but that they are given slightly different places in each. Detailed research on classic themes of theological anthropology will aim to show how concretely a dynamic new existence develops or can develop, giving a new approach to the world, nature, other religions and the shared human religious search.

For theological anthropology the transcendent horizon of human existence is one of its constitutive dimensions and the basis for a relational understanding of the human person. The research team will reflect, from different theological disciplines, on what this dimension means in practice in terms of human existence and how it is possible to understand and work with it in a postmodern or post-fact world. Answers from the different disciplines can serve as a corrective to contemporary discussions on the place of the human in the world, on human freedom and responsibility, on the alleged crisis of western society and its possibilities, faced with numerous threats and challenges.

The project has three stages.

I. Ecumenical and Interdisciplinary Methodology

The concept of non-synthetic dialectics will be used, rejecting simplistic syntheses of different positions in favour of a symphony, maintaining the different parts, whilst allowing for family resemblances and converging paths. The team will work with *Societas Oecumenica*, the European society for ecumenical theology (the project director is a former president). In its interdisciplinary methodology the project builds on the previous UNCE's work on the depths of religious engagement and experience on the borders between philosophy, theology and art history. This project analyses more systematically the plurality found within theological discourse.

II. Classic themes of theological anthropology in ecumenical and interdisciplinary interpretation

From within Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Spirituality and Liturgical Studies the team will analyse interpretations of the creation of humankind in the image of God, the concept of the Fall, sin, judgement, salvation, justification, sanctification/deification within and across confessions. The project will show the part confessional specificities still play in narrative, symbolic and ritual conceptions of the human being within the search for Christian identity in a secular society and its new religious questioning. Detailed research in mystical theology, liberation theology, and youth theology will help to formulate more concretely the

relational concept of person as the deepest ground of moral, cultural and religious values. Contacts with the KU Leuven Anthropolos project, investigating current theological anthropology, will continue. One junior in the proposed team (Gábor Ambrus) is part of this group. We will also work with Institut Catholique, Protestant Faculty and St Serge Orthodox Institute in Paris, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, St Andrew's Institute in Moscow and the Orthodox Theological Academy in Volos.

III. Relational Concept of the Human Person in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

The relational concept of the person as a creature with historical consciousness and eschatological hope, both religious and political, free, creative, having a sense of beauty, and struggling with evil within self and the world, whose starting point and ground is the triple relationship God–Human–World, will be considered here within the broader intercultural and interreligious context. The team will attend to the relation between religion and violence, the results of religious radicalisation on the person and their relationships, the influence of new media on the shaping of the human narrative. It will also look at new forms of searching for human calling and on symbolic and ritual communication of the desire for good, sense and wholeness in a partly secular and partly post-secular society and culture. We will collaborate here with the Colloquium on Religion and Violence (COV&R) and with the European Academy of Religion.

Proposed Outcomes:

Over the whole period of the project work on the different themes will be presented at conferences at home and abroad. Each team member will contribute at least one article a year, and those who will participate for the whole period will also contribute to joint monographs and each will produce at least one individual book. Many of these will be in foreign languages. The results of the research will be used in teaching in both faculties, in Master's courses, in teaching international students and in doctoral seminars.

2018-19

The study of contemporary ecumenical and inner theological interdisciplinary methodology. Each member of the team will work on specific themes. Two colloquia with international participation on the topic of the contributions of phenomenology and hermeneutics to theological anthropological methodology. Two international doctoral and postdoctoral conferences (2019, in collaboration with colleagues from Societas Oecumenica). Publication of first monographs on methodology – ecumenical (I Noble) biblical studies (Ryšková), missiology (T Noble), hermeneutics (Z Širka); publication of thematic issue of peer-reviewed journal on WoS database, *Communio Viatorum*. Further presentations at conferences, articles in Czech and foreign peer-reviewed journals and peer-reviewed collections. The results of the research will be used in teaching in both faculties, in Master's Studies, teaching foreign students and in doctoral seminars.

2020-21

Study of specific themes. Continuing of heuristic work: accessing and study of relevant literature, research trips and consultation with specialists in the field. Individual researchers will present their work at conferences at home and abroad.

Two colloquia with international participation on the specific themes in theological anthropology. Two international doctoral and postdoctoral conferences (in cooperation with KU Leuven, and Institut Catholique, Protestant Faculty and St Serge Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris).

Publication of a joint monograph, further foreign language and Czech books working on the basic themes in individual areas (according to specialisations) and articles in peer-reviewed journals.

2022-23

Study of theological anthropology in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, study of the relation between religion and violence, the influence of new media on the relational self-understanding of person. Organising two specialist colloquia, one international doctoral and post-doctoral conference summarising the results of the research. A second collective monograph, further individual books in Czech and foreign languages and articles in peer-reviewed journals. The presentation of the results at international and Czech conferences, public lectures, presentation of the project results in various media.