

## INTRODUCTION

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The first articles in this issue of *AUC Theologica* had their origins in a conference held as part of the University Centre of Excellence programme, Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective.<sup>1</sup> This conference, which took place in May 2023 in Prague, was entitled ‘Anthropology of Hope’, and was the final conference of the six-year project.

2024 will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the first publication of Jürgen Moltmann’s ground-breaking book *Theology of Hope*, and since that time eschatological hope has come to occupy an important place in the theological lexicon. Faced with so many intractable and violent events around the world, there is certainly a need to continue to search for a hope that is life-giving and engaged. But most fundamentally, hope is an integral part of what it is to be human. To lose hope is in an important way to lose the heart of one’s humanity, the motivation to keep going even in the darkest of times.

For this reason, it is an anthropological reality, and as an anthropological reality, a part of what it is to be human, it demands theological reflection. This was the task that the conference set itself and a selection of responses to this task can be found in this issue of the journal. We begin with a contribution on hope and truth-telling from Professor

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<sup>1</sup> Charles University Research Centre program No. 204052. This introduction and the subsequent articles on the theme form part of this project. For more on this project and the previous conferences held under its auspices, see Tim Noble, A Conference Report: ‘The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human: An Interdisciplinary Perspective’ (19–22 May 2022, Fortna monastery, Prague), *AUC Theologica* 12, no. 1 (2022): 131–134, doi: <https://doi.org/10.14712/25363398.2023.10>.

Aristotle Papanikolaou, who is one of the leading theologians in the USA today, chair of Orthodox theology at Fordham University in New York.

Normally, it is not the policy of *AUC Theologica* to publish more or less unchanged conference presentations, since the demands and stylistic qualities of a conference paper and of an academic article differ considerably. However, on this occasion, we have decided to publish Professor Papanikolaou's paper more or less as it was delivered. This exception is being made for several reasons. It acknowledges, first, the quality and insightfulness of the reflection. It is also a way of thanking Professor Papanikolaou for his long-standing support of the project, including being willing to take the trip to Prague to deliver the paper in the midst of other pressing engagements. Third, it also serves as the basis for the subsequent two articles, which respond and develop the ideas expressed in the paper.

The first response to the paper comes from Dr Greg Ryan, a British Roman Catholic theologian from the University of Durham and an important contributor to the Receptive Ecumenism movement. Dr Ryan focuses on three areas where the combination of hope and truth-telling as complementary rather than at the expense of each other have a key role. First, he looks at the ongoing revelations of sexual abuse in the church, and the need to search for some kind of structural virtue to react against the all too frequent manifestations of structural sin in the church that has permitted so much abuse for so long. The second area is that of ecumenical relations, learning to listen to each other and the truths that we tell, including the less pleasant truths about our traditions. Third, he focuses on the synodal movement in the Roman Catholic Church, that led to the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2024.

The second response to Professor Papanikolaou's paper comes from Dr Pavol Bargár, lecturer in Religious Studies at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, who has worked on narrative and embodied theologies. Bargár's paper focuses on ways in which truth and truth-telling can be embodied, seeing truth as an embodied reality, and demonstrating this with reference to an episode from a television series.

The final article from the conference in this issue is from Dr Petr Jandejsek, director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and a lecturer at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University and at Jabok Institute of Social Pedagogy and Theology in Prague. In his paper, he

looks at the contribution of Johann Baptist Metz in making the move from dangerous memory to dangerous hope. Focusing on the transformational possibilities for humankind found in Metz's work, Jandjsek analyses the contribution of the German political theologian, showing how his writings remain deeply relevant for our world today.

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