

## INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a term that belongs to the traditional triad (goodness, truth, and beauty) and is also discussed in modern theology – just think of the work *Herrlichkeit* by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, which, however, has remained on the fringes of the theological mainstream. More often, it is dealt with in disciplines such as art history, historiography, or aesthetics, emphasising the historical and changing aspect of beauty, the notion of beauty and ugliness in modernity, changes in the understanding of beauty and the nature of art, the basis of which lies not in craftsmanship but in originality, provocation, and the breaking of various stereotypes and taboos.

The multidisciplinary aspects of the concept of beauty was the focus of an international doctoral and postdoctoral conference held in Prague from 19 to 22 May, organised by two institutions: The University Centre of Excellence: Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective (UK, UNCE No. 204052) and Masaryk University (MU). The event was held under the title ‘The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human’, by which the organisers wanted to emphasise the anthropological dimension of the topic.

In this journal section, we present three papers from this conference.

The first article of this block is the work of two authors, Dávid Cielontko and Jan Zámečník, who thematise the important question of the relationship between beauty and ugliness, or the search for a possible harmony and reconciliation between the two phenomena. At first sight, it would seem that this is a question that is only posed by modernity, in literature, for example, in Charles Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*. In Christian theology, however, this theme is already present

in Old Testament texts, especially in the prophet Isaiah, who writes of a divine servant who has ‘neither form nor beauty’, who is ‘ugly’ in that he bears little resemblance to a human being. In this prefiguration, Christian theology sees a martyred, scourged, and scorned Christ, who suffered for our sins.

In the second text, written in essayistic form, three areas in which the ‘dying of beauty’ is manifested today are thematised. These are the current area of the destruction of nature, the area of possible destruction (or perhaps the emptiness of form and the abandonment of craftsmanship) in modern art, and the area of the destruction of language. The author Jiří Hanuš gives concrete examples from all three areas (the dying of forests, the pursuit of originality and the breaking of taboos in art, and the destruction of language by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes) and reflects on how interdisciplinary thinking can contribute to a remedy in these directions.

The third of the articles, a text by Pavol Bargár, addresses the essential question of transformation (change of mind) from a Christian perspective, using the example of one of the successful films of American cinema, *The Power of the Dog*. This 2021 film by writer-director Jane Campion, starring actor Benedict Cumberbatch, is an intimate drama that is not merely a Western set piece – it is really about interpersonal relationships and the possibility of human change. It shows that art films are capable of an actualisation that invites reflection on essential questions, including philosophical and theological ones.

These three articles are only a taste and a small part of what was said at the spring conference in Prague. Events of this type include not only the presentation of papers but also and above all, the discussions and ‘behind the scenes’ debates that complete the atmosphere of the whole enterprise. And the conference on beauty, whose main initiator was Professor Ivana Noble from the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, was one of such events with an inspiring atmosphere.

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