

## INTRODUCTION

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The 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea is being celebrated across the Christian world, renewing theological debate on controversies and ecclesiastical issues that affect the entire oikoumene. This context naturally brings the theme of theological interconfessional dialogue into focus.

The present thematic issue of *AUC Theologica*, devoted to Eastern Christian theology, is published in cooperation with the Portuguese theological journal *Ephata*. It follows the earlier *AUC Theologica* issue dedicated to Iberian theology (vol. 14, no. 2), which mirrored *Ephata*'s issue *Teologia na Europa Centro-Oriental no século XXI* (vol. 6, no. 2).

Both the current *AUC Theologica* issue and the previous *Ephata* issue include thematic sections comprising selected contributions from the conference *Eastern Catholic Theology on the Way of Unification*<sup>1</sup>, held at Charles University in Prague on 21–22 September. The Hussite and Catholic faculties jointly organised the event, which concentrated on theological dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

The conference and its context carried a distinctly interconfessional and international character, not only through its topics (cultural sections on Coptic, Armenian, Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Indian, and Balkan traditions, and thematic sections on dogmatic and practical theology),

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<sup>1</sup> Rac, Ondrej. 'Eastern Catholic Theology on the Way of Unification Motto: "People All over the World Are Talking about Your Faith."' (Rom 1, 8).' *Ephata* 6, no. 2 (2024): 193–198. DOI: 10.34632/ephata.2024.17761.

but also through its collaborative framework between the Hussite and Catholic faculties and, of course, the Portuguese partners too.

The opportunity to publish conference contributions as articles in thematic issues of reputable journals has strengthened cooperation and enhanced the academic impact and scholarly value of the results—an approach we consider promising.

Three papers were selected to be included in the thematic section.

The first, ‘The Mekhitarist Congregation of San Lazzaro as Guardians and Propagators of the Legacies of SS. Gregory of Narek and Nersēs of Klay: An Outline’ by Haig Utidjian, employs methods from primary-source research, musicology, theology, cultural anthropology, and Armenian studies. It examines the Mekhitarist Congregation and prominent figures such as Malachia Ormanian, Mekhitar of Sebaste, Gregory of Narek – proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by the Catholic Church – and Nersēs of Klay, whose work exemplifies medieval theological dialogue among Eastern and Oriental Orthodox and the Catholic communion. The article highlights the Armenian cultural and theological heritage, which is often inaccessible to scholars due to linguistic barriers. Utidjian’s contribution is valuable not only for religious studies and theology but also for Armenian philology and musicology, enriching the ongoing theological dialogue between the Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches.

The second article, ‘Orthodox Spiritual Resistance Through the Eucharist in Romanian Communist Prisons’ by Mihail Khalid Qaramah, draws on primary sources, Balkan casuistic studies, Eastern Orthodox theology, and liturgical scholarship. It offers essential testimonies and theological reflections on Eucharistic celebrations among prisoners under the Romanian communist regime. By presenting methods of dissent and practical inspiration for contexts in which Christianity remains oppressed, the article discusses the limits and possibilities of Byzantine-rite liturgical practice under extreme conditions. It illustrates principles of liturgical *oikonomia* and provides source material for both theoretical liturgical theology and practical pastoral application in environments where improvisation is essential.

The third article, ‘The 1848 Encyclical of Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs as a Still Relevant Position on Catholic Theology’ by Ondrej Rác, utilises primary sources of Eastern Orthodox theology and approaches from theological dialogue, incorporating suggestions from digital humanities. It addresses a key issue in contemporary dialogue: the

fragmentation of positions within the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The unified voice expressed by the Eastern Patriarchs in the 1848 Encyclical stands as a historical testimony of 19th-century theological dialogue with lasting significance. The article analyses persistent theological divergences and suggests possible ways for future reflection on dogmatic questions without claiming definitive conclusions. It also considers whether a consistent, pan-Orthodox perspective can be articulated despite practical fragmentation and enduring schism.

The first and third articles were presented at the conference and subsequently discussed; their thematic overlaps include political and theological dimensions that remain highly relevant.

We express our thanks to the conference organisers, especially the colleagues responsible for coordinating the event, and to the editorial staff of *Ephata* and B. Šmejdová for facilitating cooperation between the journals and enabling publication of these thematic issues.

The results presented here will be of interest not only to theologians but also to musicologists, cultural anthropologists, and scholars of religious studies with a focus on the Caucasus and the Balkans, given the rich intersections of musicology, Armenian philology, and theology.

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