

INTRODUCTION

The sacraments represent not only one of the fundamental themes and one of the traditional treatises of Catholic dogmatic theology, but also a theme which, apart from dogmatics, is highly relevant also for other theological disciplines, e.g. liturgical studies, pastoral theology, or theological ethics. It was this interdisciplinary theological view of the sacraments that formed the principal focus of the international conference ‘The Sacraments in Context: Theological Disciplines Facing the Questions of the 21st Century’, which took place on March 21 and 22, 2019 in the Dominican Monastery in Prague. Selected papers from this conference, which was attended by theologians, doctoral students, and pastoral workers from Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland, form the basis of the thematic part of this issue of AUC Theologica. When designing the conference organised jointly by the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague and the Theologisches Forschungskolleg in Erfurt, it was clear that an interdisciplinary and international approach could not be the only specific perspective on the theme of ‘sacraments’. The context of a strongly secularised society, such as the societies in the Czech Republic and East Germany, poses not only new challenges to the pastoral activity of the Church but also to theological thinking in these countries and raises urgent questions. These new challenges are reflected in the six articles of the thematic section written by Czech and foreign authors.

The articles can be divided into three groups:

The first group includes the papers investigating the general frame of the theme. In his article, *Benedikt Tomáš Mohelník OP* asks about the challenges for sacramental theology at the beginning of the 21st century

and thinks about the options for sacramental action of the church facing new challenges. One of the reference points to which he pays attention in this context is the theological reflection of pre-New Testament sacraments. *Julia Knop and Benedikt Kranemann* – within the conversation between dogmatic theology and liturgical studies – focus on ecclesiological questions. Based on the experiences with diaconal rituals that arose in recent years in East Germany and on their theological analysis, they ask what kind of self-understanding of the church becomes visible in these new ritual forms (especially in blessing ceremonies).

The second group of texts focuses on two concrete sacraments. *Roman Globokar* deals with the sacrament of reconciliation. He argues for the renewal of the practice of this sacrament through the emphasis on its communal, liturgical, and celebrative dimensions and supports the inclusion of the communal dimension in the process of reconciliation as well as into the form of celebrations of the sacrament. *Zuzana MatISOVSKÁ* deals with the sacrament of confirmation. She analyses the link between the comprehension of believers of their common priesthood and the authentic place of confirmation within Christian initiation and asks how to renew the place of confirmation in order to enable Christians to grasp their participation in Christ's threefold office in a better way.

The last group of the articles presents the topics which we find in the current theological debates concerning the sacraments and liturgy. *Bruce T. Morrill SJ* examines the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and ethics and argues for the poverty of spirit as the key virtue for practically bonding liturgy and ethics. *Konrad Glombik* introduces the theological debate in Poland concerning the theological implications of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* by Pope Francis focusing on the indissolubility of marriage. His article presents 'doubts' of some Polish moral theologians and deals critically with these positions.

The articles present a diverse mix of views on the sacraments and their theological reflection from the perspective of current challenges and show that pastoral practice and theological reflection need each other. They also demonstrate that theological work has to ask questions that are urgent at a given time and context and that theologians are obliged to conduct an intensive dialogue between the various theological disciplines when seeking answers to these questions.

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