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Theologians About the War in Ukraine
A Report on the International Conference
War in Ukraine and the Church/
Krieg in der Ukraine und die Kirche,
Erfurt 18–21 May 2023

The cooperation between the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Erfurt in Germany and the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole in Poland already has its history. Basically an international conference takes place every second year, alternately in Erfurt and in Opole. The last conference took place at the Faculty of Theology in Opole in March 2018 on the theme *Theology in the public arena* and the lectures were published in the bi-annual “Theological-Historical Studies of Opole Silesia” (no 2 from 2018). In 2019 further bilateral academic cooperation took place between the Faculty of Theology of the Charles University in Prague and an international conference was organized on *Sacraments in Context. The theological Disciplines toward new Questions in XXI Century / Sakramente im Kontext. Die theologischen Disziplinen vor neuen Fragestellungen im 21. Jahrhundert* (Prague 21–24 III 2019).

The following conference planned for spring 2020 on the problem of populism in European societies was hindered due to the coronavirus pandemic and the date for the next meeting was postponed several times. The spring of 2023 brought a real possibility of organizing the conference at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Erfurt. The new political and social context in the world and especially in Eastern Europe created an opportunity for a new theme for this conference,

namely, *War in Ukraine and the Church / Krieg in der Ukraine und die Kirche*. Professors participated in the conference from the faculties of Theology of Erfurt, Opole and Prague, also a Professor of the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Louvain participated by invitation, as well as German PhD students. The language of the conference was primarily German, and the meeting took place in the hall *Coelicum* in the building of the faculty in Erfurt.

The first and main theme discussed during this international conference was the question of the ethics of the war from the perspective of the existing war in Ukraine. Walter Lesch, a representative of social ethics and professor of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium spoke on the general question of ethics and war. Konrad Glombik, a representative of theological ethics and professor of the Faculty of Theology of the University Opole presented questions on the principles of the Christian ethics of war and of peace which arise in the context of the current war in Ukraine. The right to necessary defense according to Janusz Nagórny (1950–2006) was the matter of the lecture of Janusz Podzielny, a representative of theological ethics and professor of moral theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole. All three lectures followed interesting discussions and a lot of specific questions being asked. For the participants of the conference it was evident that in the existing context of the war in Ukraine the tendencies of pacifism in the Catholic war and peace ethics are unreal and unacceptable and there are inevitable actions over a lot of subjects which are not only effective in the defense of Russian aggression, but juristic and ethically justified too.

Other topics of the conference focused on the question of the perception of the war in Ukraine and the activities of the Church during the war. Marek Lis, professor of theology of communication at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole presented the existing war in Ukraine from the perspective of some selected movies about war. Jerzy Kostorz, professor of catechetics at the Faculty of Opole spoke about religious education lessons at schools in Poland for children of Ukrainian refugees and the ecumenical formation of teachers in this regard. Andrzej Anderwald, professor of fundamental theology at the faculty of Opole presented the activities of Caritas in the Diocese of Opole for refugees from Ukraine and justified on this basis the problem of the credibility of the Church. Marcin Worbs, professor of liturgy at the faculty of Opole presented a topic on pastoral care in the Polish language in Lviv, Ukraine, as an example of the contribution of the Catholic Church for the reconciliation between the nations. Piotr Górecki, professor of the history of the Church at the faculty of Opole touched on the problem of the engagement of the clergy in politics through the use of the example of the participation

of clergy men in plebiscite propaganda in Silesia between the years 1919–1921. All lectures had follow-up questions and interesting discussions about specific problems connected to the existing war in Ukraine, the problem with the statement of the Catholic Church and European societies towards it and the possibility of how to respond and contribute towards resolving the crisis. The German perspective was present in questions asked by the theologians of Erfurt. It may be that the participation of Ukrainian theologians would enrich the discussion and show a wider perspective.

One other topic of the conference was a discussion about further cooperation between German, Polish, and Czech faculties in the future. The majority of participants decided that the next conference will be organized on the question of reconciliation and will take place at the Faculty of Theology in Opole in spring 2025. In the afternoon of 20th May 2023 all theologians visited the family home of Jan Sebastian Bach in Eisenach and Wartburg near Eisenach, a very important place in German history and religious life, connected with St. Elisabeth of Thuringia and Martin Luther. The conference finished on Sunday morning with the celebration of the Eucharist in the Well-Church (*Brunnenkirche*), which is the center for the pastoral of students and academics in Erfurt. The international conference on *War in Ukraine and the Church* was not only a good occasion for reflection on an existing problem, and for change of contextually different theological perspectives, but also a good possibility for the renewal of personal contacts which had been interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. It was also an opportunity to make concrete plans for cooperation in the future.

