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International Conference of Theological Faculties in Erfurt, Prague, and Opole

Paths of Reconciliation Between People and Nations Opole, May 29–31, 2025 Report

From May 29th to 31st, 2025, an international academic conference of the theological faculties of Erfurt, Prague, and Opole was held. This gathering took place within the framework of ongoing cooperation among European academic centers, which includes regularly held conferences. The previous meeting, held in Erfurt in May 2023, focused on the war in Ukraine and the Church's response. At the conclusion of that event, it was decided that the next conference would address the topic of reconciliation – a key component of building lasting peace and overcoming conflict and the consequences of war. Although the war in Ukraine is still ongoing, the theme of this conference remained unchanged, and the discussions confirmed the validity of that decision.

The conference brought together primarily scholars from the three cooperating theological faculties, but also included representatives from other academic institutions. The meeting had both an academic and practical character, aiming to present the Christian message of reconciliation and to deepen personal relationships among professors and doctoral students from participating institutions.

The main academic part of the event took place at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole. The conference's focus on paths of reconciliation between people and nations began with discussions of a practical nature. The intro-

ductory remarks were delivered by Rev. Dr. Manfred Deselaers, who has led the “Centre for Dialogue and Prayer” in Oświęcim for many years. He offered reflections on reconciliation during wartime, presenting the context, key content, and reception of the *Letter to Russia*, which he initiated. The second speaker introducing the theme of reconciliation was Maria Biedrawa from France, a member of the foundation “Die Schwelle” and participant in peacebuilding projects in African countries. A trained social pedagogue and logotherapist, she shared her practical experiences of working for peace and justice gained over many years in various African nations. These two presentations, reflecting on reconciliation in different contexts, sparked lively discussion and provided a practical introduction to the theoretical part of the academic conference.

During the theoretical portion of the conference, professors and lecturers from the cooperating universities delivered papers. The first lecture, on the necessary conditions for reconciliation between Ukraine and Russia, was delivered by Rev. Dr. Yuriy Shchurko, Dean of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. In the same session, as part of a dual presentation, Rev. Dr. habil. Rajmund Porada, professor at the University of Opole, spoke on the hope for reconciliation between victims and perpetrators from the perspective of Paschal theology.

The next session included two presentations: the first, by Rev. Dr. habil. David Voprada from the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Charles University in Prague, explored inspiration for penance and reconciliation in the writings of St. Ambrose and their relevance to the contemporary Church. Then, Rev. Prof. Dr. habil. Konrad Glombik from the University of Opole delivered a paper on reconciliation as a moral imperative, discussing its foundations, justifications, and limitations.

The following two presentations addressed practical aspects of reconciliation. Dr. Norbert Schmidt, architect and editor of the journal *Salve* in Prague, presented the Way of the Cross in Krickerhau as an example of the difficult Church heritage from the Nazi era in Slovakia and a potential starting point for reconciliation. Rev. Prof. Dr. habil. Andrzej Anderwald from the University of Opole presented on the work of the Church organization *Caritas* in promoting peace and reconciliation, focusing on its credibility within the Christian faith.

The final two academic papers were delivered by liturgical scholars. Prof. Dr. habil. Benedikt Kranemann from the University of Erfurt which discussed liturgical perspectives on peace and reconciliation. Rev. Prof. Dr. habil. Marcin Worbs from the University of Opole gave a presentation about Hermann Hoffmann (1878–1972), a pioneer of Polish-German reconciliation.

After each lecture, discussions were held, allowing all participants to clarify and deepen the topics addressed. To conclude the academic portion of the confer-

ence, a special session was held during which doctoral students from the theological faculties in Erfurt and Opole presented their research projects. The Erfurt doctoral candidates who presented were: Johanna Birkefeld, Patrick Krüger, Sebastian Schmidt, Ludwig Motz and Johannes Tomberg. From Opole's Faculty of Theology, presentations were given by Bartłomiej Kempe, Michał Petka, Fr. Michał Dragan, Maciej Frankiewicz, and Fr. Mateusz Demeniuk.

The final day of the reconciliation conference, May 31st, 2025, had a practical focus and involved visiting significant sites related to reconciliation in Lower Silesia. Participants first visited the Church of Peace in Świdnica, the largest wooden Baroque church in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built as a result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War. After touring the cathedral and other historic sites in Świdnica, the group traveled to Krzyżowa to visit the local memorial and education center, run by the "Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe". For conference participants, this was an opportunity to learn about the so-called *Mass of Reconciliation*, celebrated there on November 12, 1989. The visit also allowed them to explore the history of the *Kreisau Circle*, which met at Krzyżowa during World War II to discuss plans for restoring peace and establishing a new democratic order in postwar Germany and Europe.

The international conference *Paths of Reconciliation Between People and Nations*, held under the patronage of the Committee on Theological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and supported financially by *Renovabis*, is one of many initiatives aimed at promoting and implementing ways of overcoming current conflicts and bringing people and nations closer together. On the academic level, the Opole conference contributed to deepening cooperation and represents a meaningful step in fulfilling the mission of European academic institutions.



Some participants in the front of the “House on the Hill” in Krzyżowa