

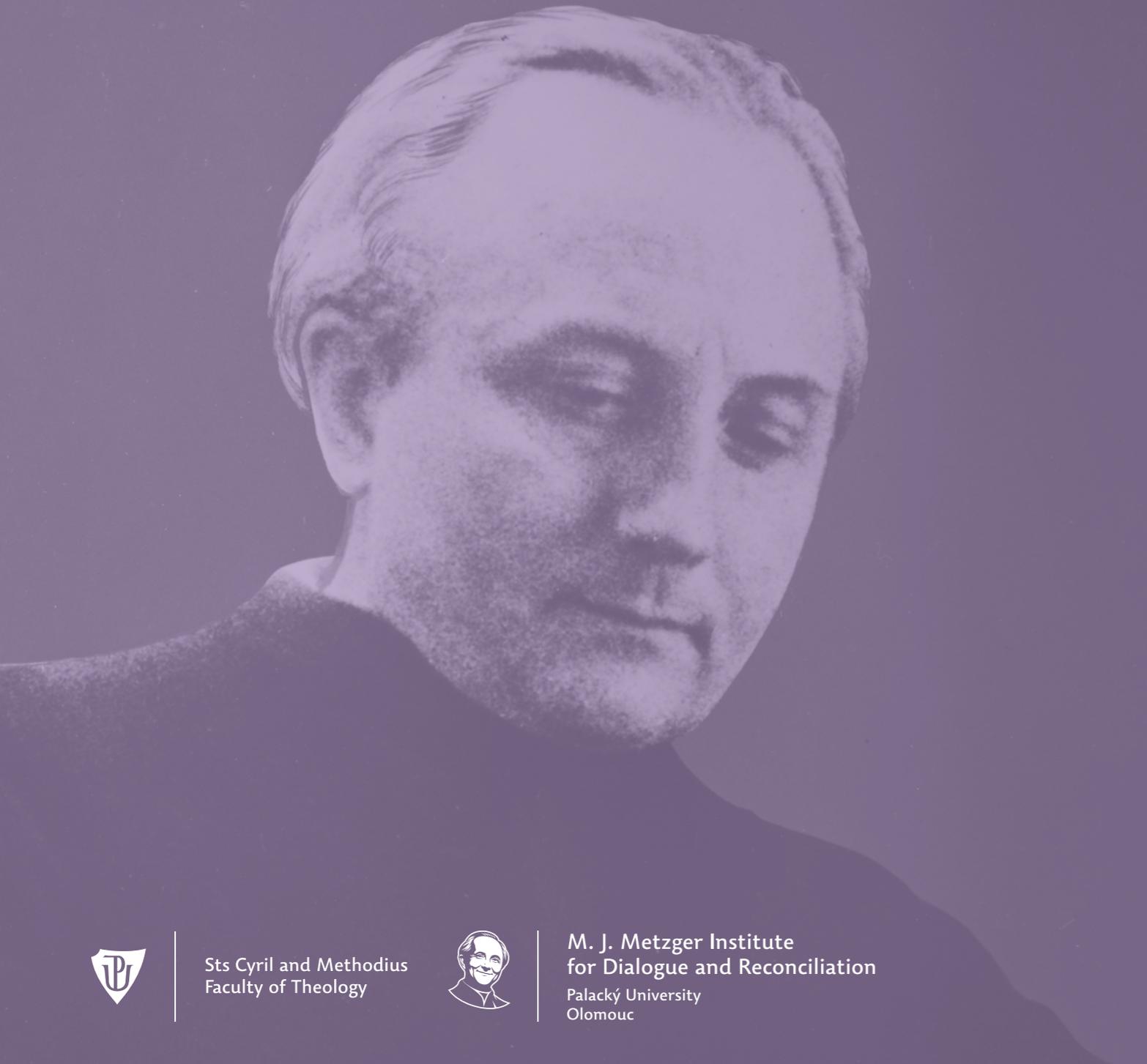


Sts Cyril and Methodius
Faculty of Theology



**M. J. Metzger
Institute for Dialogue
and Reconciliation**

STS CYRIL AND METHODIUS FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC



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M. J. Metzger Institute
for Dialogue and Reconciliation
Palacký University
Olomouc

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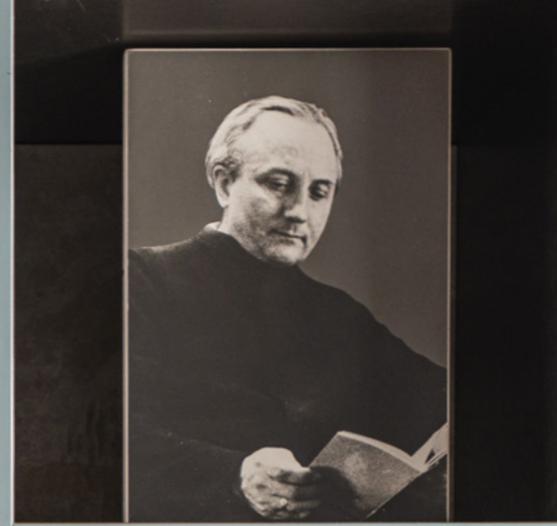
“Peace stands or falls with the intellectual and moral renewal of human society. If the shape of society is to change, the mindset of nations and individuals must change first. Here lies the crucial point of the entire question of peace. Peace is a problem of education!”

(1918)

“I am looking for Christians who will stand up to the madness of villains who, with cold calculation, are preparing the coming war. I am looking for Christians who will calmly allow themselves to be called fools, even if they remain a minority among those who believe in violence and mislead the poor people. I am looking for Christians who know why they are Christians and therefore place what is eternal above what is temporal: God above the state, truth above the fatherland, justice above advantage. I am looking for Christians who believe in love, in Christ’s peace in Christ’s Kingdom, and in God’s victory in the world – and who are willing to give everything for this, even their lives.”

(1925)

M. J. Metzger



INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the **M. J. Metzger Institute for Dialogue and Reconciliation** is a response by the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology at Palacký University Olomouc to the fundamental challenges of our time. It expresses the way in which we wish to reflect on pressing problems of Czech and European society related to growing global tensions between nations and increasing polarization of opinions within societies.

The Institute can be compared to an observation tower from which one can examine the past, view the present, and at the same time identify what is essential for the life of the individual and the functioning of society: respect for human dignity founded on mutual respect, tolerance, and solidarity. The foundational pillars of this tower are the ideas of Max Josef Metzger, a Christian intellectual and visionary. In the first half of the twentieth century, he called for vigilance against the threats of fanatical nationalism, the growing militarization of Germany and other European states, the spread of hatred toward other nations, and the arrogance of political elites. His prophetic vision of the world, which he eventually paid for with his life, perceives society as a network which links all people into a single organic whole. If and when this network is woven from threads of reconciliation, dialogue, mutual understanding, and altruism, it can secure a peaceful future for all.

I would like our institute to attract colleagues from both the domestic and international academic environments to become part of joint projects. I would also like to appeal to young people who are searching for precisely this kind of intellectual foundation. I also believe it will receive support from all those who are concerned about the common good and about responsibility for the world in which we live.

Prof. Lubomír J. Žák, Director of the Institute





The Impulse to Begin

A new academic institute, inspired by the life and legacy of Max Josef Metzger, was established in the heart of Olomouc in 2024. This extraordinary man, executed shortly before the end of the Second World War, has gained increasing recognition recently not only in Europe but worldwide. This is due both to repeated acknowledgements of his legacy by public and cultural authorities in Germany and other European countries, and due to the recognition of his martyrdom by Pope Francis and the Catholic Church.

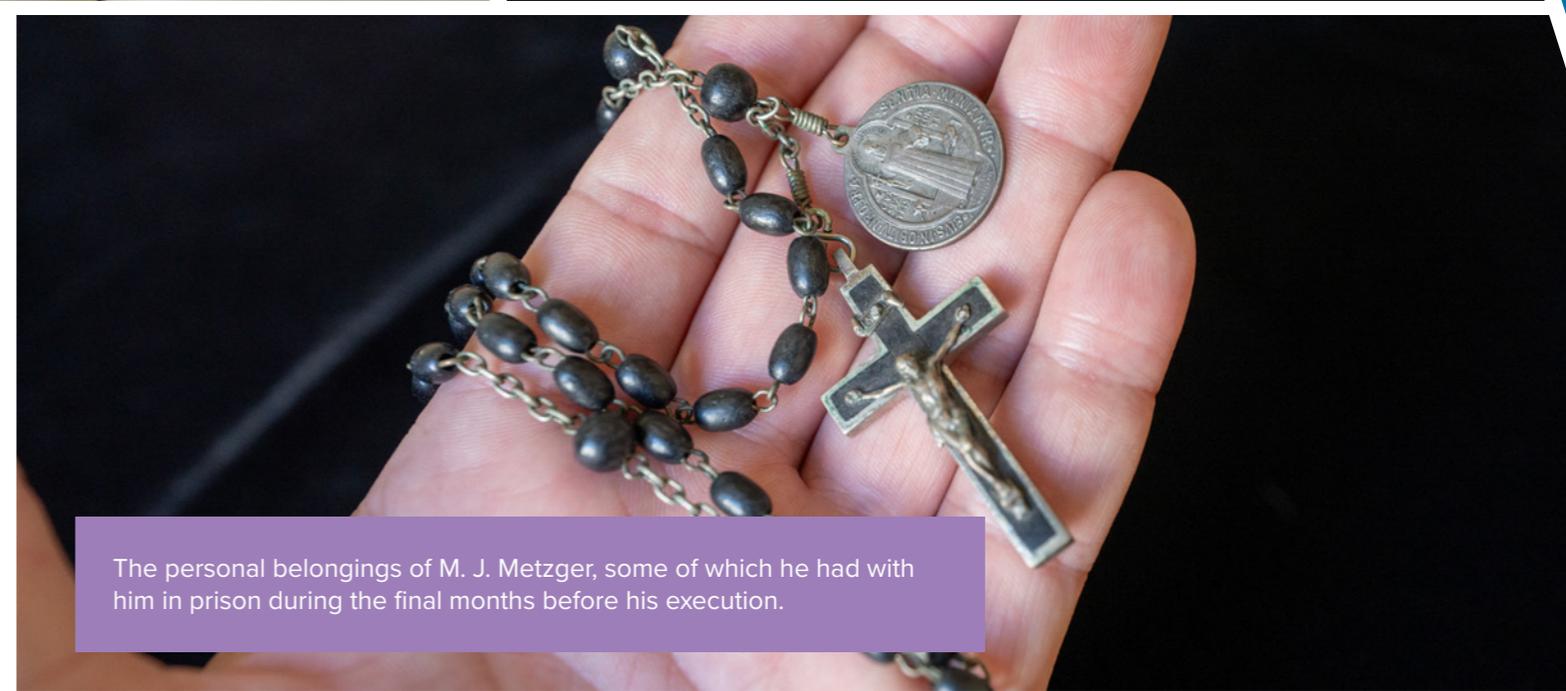
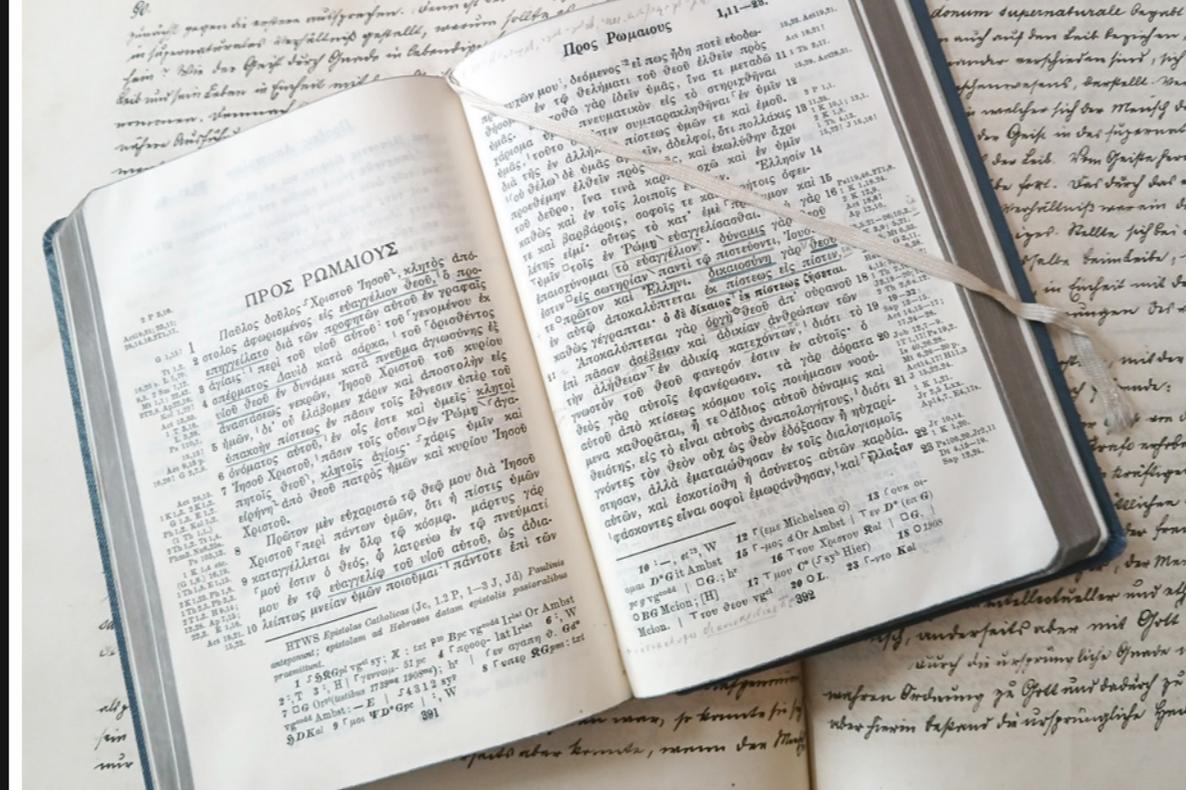
The immediate impulse behind the founding of the Institute was the generous initiative of the Metzger community (Christkönigs-Institut) based in Meitingen, which lent a valuable collection of archival documents, manuscripts, and books to the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology of Palacký University in 2023. This unique collection makes possible in-depth scholarly research into Metzger's pioneering work and its dissemination within contemporary academic and social contexts.



Metzger's Life Story

Max Josef Metzger (1887–1944) was a Catholic theologian, journalist, and visionary. He welcomed the outbreak of the First World War as a German patriot and went to the front as a military chaplain. The horrors of war deeply shook him and transformed him into a man who sought peace and reconciliation among the nations of Europe in every word he spoke. He was persecuted by the Nazi regime for his views and, by order of Adolf Hitler, executed in 1944.

- **1887** – Born in Schopfheim (Germany) into the family of a teacher.
- **1905–1911** – Studied philosophy and theology in Freiburg im Breisgau and Fribourg (Switzerland), where he obtained a doctorate and formed friendships with students from various European countries.
- **1911** – Ordained as a priest and began pastoral ministry.
- **1915** – Served as a military chaplain during the First World War; its horrors led him to a deep conviction of the fundamental importance of pacifism.
- **1919** – Founded a community in Graz dedicated to serving the poor, promoting a pacifist vision of Europe, and combating alcoholism; wrote newspaper articles and educational pamphlets.
- **1921** – Became the first German, after the war, invited to speak publicly on French soil; spoke about the brotherhood of European nations.
- **1924** – While Adolf Hitler was writing *Mein Kampf*, Metzger published the article *Ich suche...* (“I Am Looking For...”), calling on his contemporaries to abandon hatred toward other nations.
- **1927** – Participated, as the first Catholic, in the Ecumenical conference in Lausanne.
- **1928** – Founded a publishing house to disseminate a vision of the world based on Christian values and the rejection of militarism and nationalism.
- **1932** – Wrote to Pope Pius XI, warning of the consequences of the armament of European nations and calling for intervention.
- **1934** – Censorship by the Nazi regime led to three days of imprisonment and a ban on distributing his journals and books.
- **1938** – Founded the interdenominational ecumenical movement *Una Sancta*, intended to unite Christians who were open to dialogue and reconciliation.
- **1939** – Imprisoned for one month in Augsburg without charges; remained under constant Gestapo surveillance.
- **1943** – Arrested and sentenced to death for high treason for drafting a secret manifesto on the future unity of European nations after the defeat of Hitler’s Germany.
- **1944** – Executed by guillotine in Brandenburg-Görden prison (Berlin).
- **2024** – Declared a martyr and beatified by the Catholic Church.



The personal belongings of M. J. Metzger, some of which he had with him in prison during the final months before his execution.

Metzger and Moravia

During the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Metzger repeatedly visited the country, especially the Moravian region. He met with friends, who shared his vision of spiritual and social renewal, in Brno, Ostrava, and Dolní Dunajovice. Members of his community (German and Austrian women, primarily of Bohemian, Moravian, and Austrian background) had settled in these cities. They dedicated themselves to single mothers, orphans, children from poor families, and the sick. They organized Bible readings, supported the spiritual growth of parishes, and introduced Metzger's ideals to local communities: dialogue between churches and nations, reconciliation, and the shared building of a better world. The Protectorate regime violently ended their activities.





Inspiration for Today

Metzger warned against nationalism and the abuse of power as early as the 1920s. He understood that lasting peace requires new forms of international cooperation: the creation of European structures and institutions capable of protecting the rights of all nations based on shared moral principles. He believed that Christianity could make a significant contribution – provided it did not become a closed elite club but remained a living voice of solidarity.

As a publicist and editor-in-chief, he addressed young readers, guiding them toward ideals of mutual understanding, reconciliation, and respect. He encouraged them to build relationships with peers from other countries, to correspond, to get to know one another, and to learn tolerance. He was able to combine deep spirituality with concrete thinking about the renewal of society, politics, economics, and Christianity itself.

Today, at a time of cultural conflicts and wars in Europe and elsewhere in the world, when trust in international institutions is weakening, his message resonates with renewed urgency. The Institute would like to reopen these questions, with respect for the sources, but with eyes fixed on the future.

- **Transformation of society:** Metzger called for social and moral renewal that begins in the human heart and consequently spreads into interpersonal relationships, moving toward greater solidarity and a wholly non-violent culture of coexistence.
- **Fidelity to conscience:** He called for the determination to confront dehumanizing processes in society through fidelity to one's own conscience, without compromise, even under the threat of violence or death.

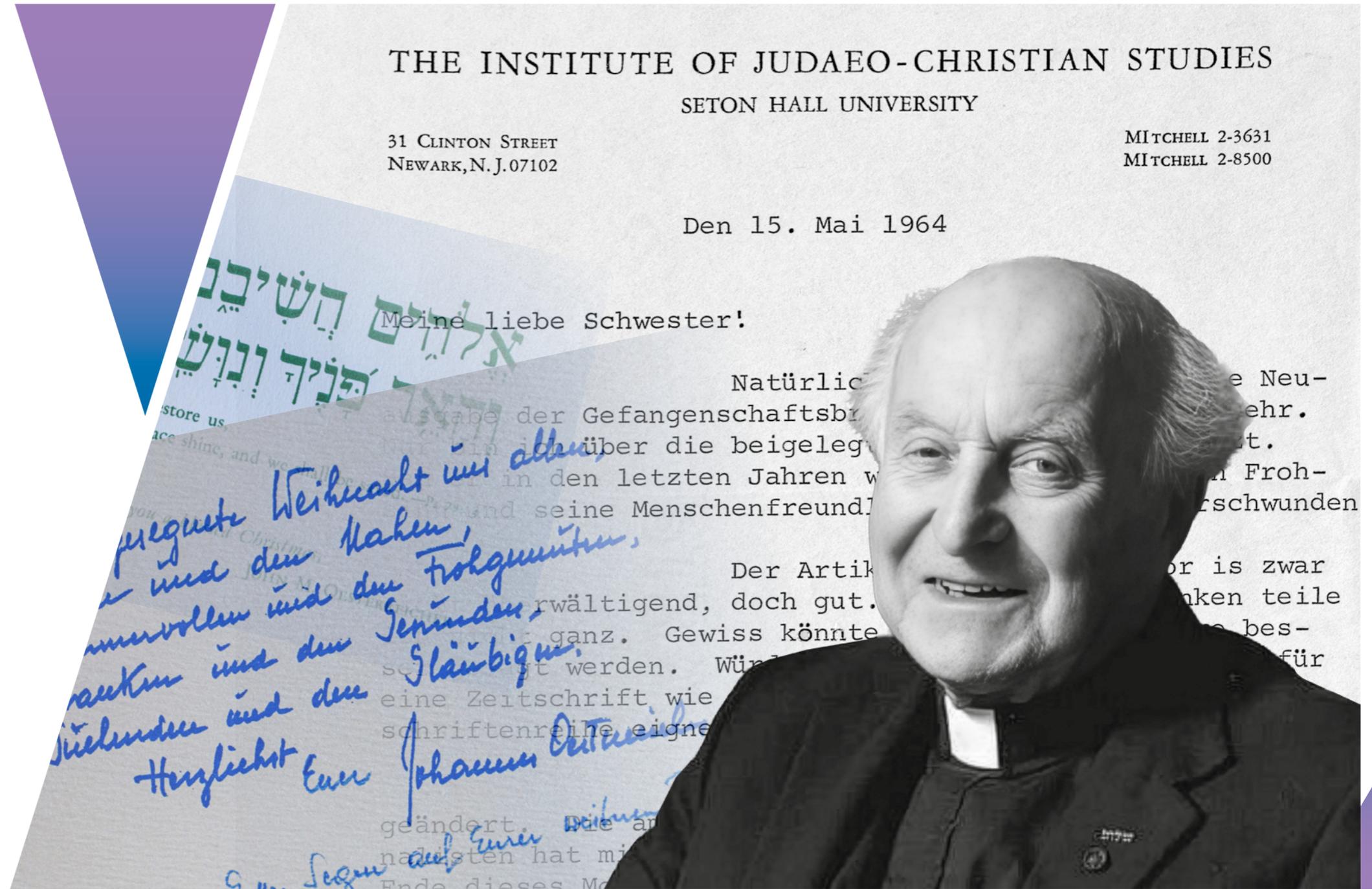
- **A just order for Europe:** In his *Peace Program*, he anticipated later ideas of European integration based on mutual reconciliation, equality, and justice among nations, and on respect for the language, territory, culture, and faith of all minorities.
- **A common language:** He pointed to the problem of widespread language illiteracy which hindered communication among the nations of Europe. He therefore called for the study of Esperanto as a tool for mutual understanding.
- **A Christianity open to the world:** He emphasized that Christians should not be passive witnesses of events, but active builders of peace. The key to transforming the world is a willingness to share responsibility for the fate of humanity.
- **An intellectual foundation:** Fraternal love rooted in the Gospel was a firm foundation of his vision. He saw this as the path to overcoming injustice, hatred, and war.
- **Ecumenism and unity:** He strove for the unity of Christians and for open dialogue between churches. He believed that only a united Church can fully realize its mission.

Johannes Oesterreicher: A Bridge Between Faiths

The Institute's collection also includes texts, correspondence, and publications related to Johannes (John) Oesterreicher (1904–1993), a Moravian native and later American theologian who became one of the most significant figures in modern Jewish–Christian dialogue.

Born in Libavá and educated in Olomouc, he developed a close relationship with Metzger in the 1920s and became a member of his community. They shared a belief in a future founded on dialogue, reconciliation, and the overcoming of hostility between nations as well as between religions. Oesterreicher strongly opposed anti-semitism, founding the journal *Die Erfüllung* in Vienna, in which he defended Jews against Nazi persecution. After immigrating to the United States in 1938, he established the *Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies* at Seton Hall University in New Jersey in 1953, the first academic centre of its kind in North America. He contributed significantly to the Second Vatican Council Declaration *Nostra aetate* (1965), a milestone in Jewish–Christian relations.

The study of Oesterreicher's life and work is therefore a natural part of the Institute's research activities.



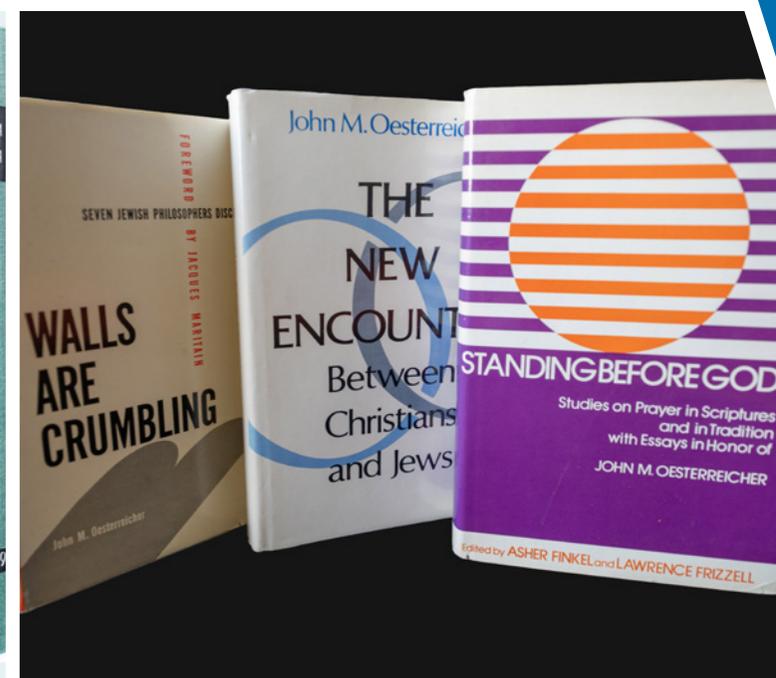
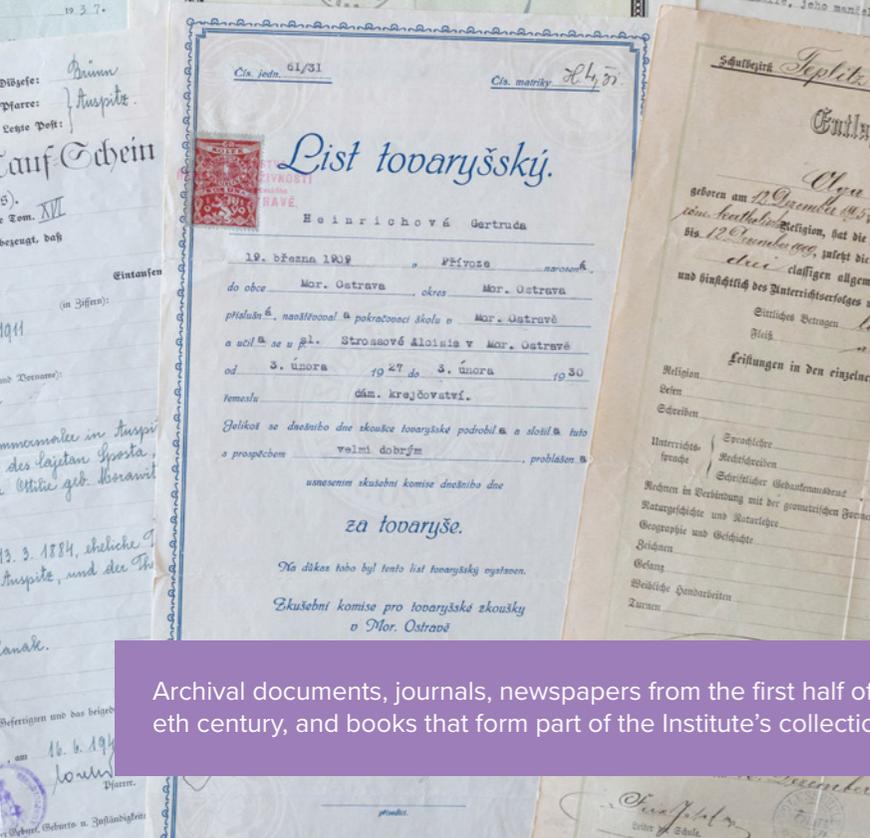
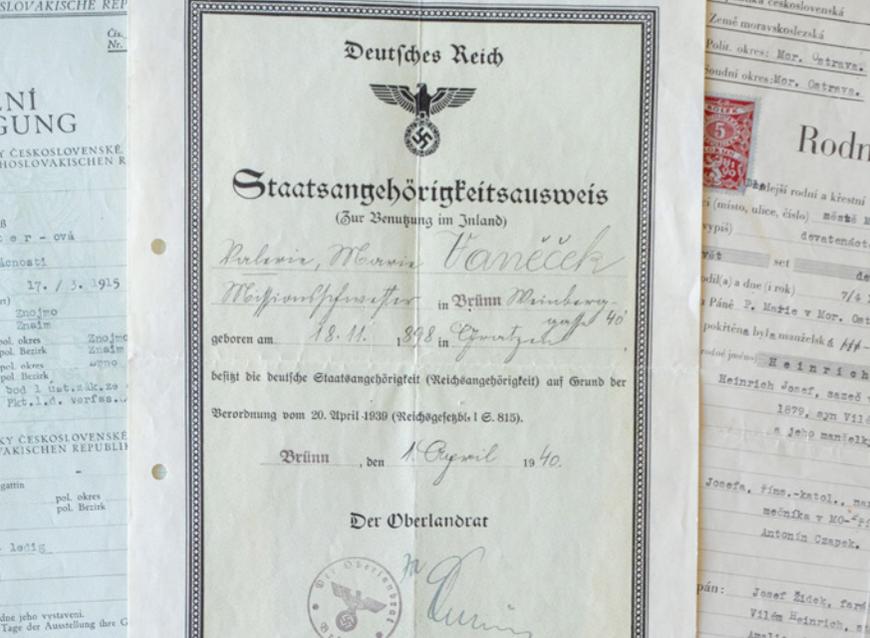


Thinking and a Culture of Dialogue

The Institute wants to be a space for creative interdisciplinary cooperation, joint research, and reflection on the growing dehumanization and fragmentation of Czech and European society. This entails not only the spread of hateful ideologies, but also certain inappropriate ways of using new technologies, including artificial intelligence and virtual reality. The primary aim within this space is the search for solutions.

If one-sidedness, limitation, negation, or an inability to grasp the dynamism and complexity of human existence are characteristic features of a dehumanizing view of the reality of human beings and society, then our ambition is to work toward a different vision and a different mode of thinking. We seek out a perspective in which human existence and human society are understood as extraordinarily complex and continually evolving living realities, whose fundamental defining feature is relationality—that is, being-in-relation.

We want to draw inspiration not only from Metzger and Oesterreicher, but also from other thinkers from the Czech, European, and global contexts: in philosophy, sociology, theology, science, and culture, both past and present. Inspired by their work and legacy, in the light of today's social challenges, we aim to create a space for dialogue focused on the renewal of thought, scholarship, and culture. Our goal is to contribute to social transformation grounded in the values of tolerance, respect, solidarity, dialogue, and reconciliation.



Archival documents, journals, newspapers from the first half of the twentieth century, and books that form part of the Institute's collection.

Research Areas of the Institute

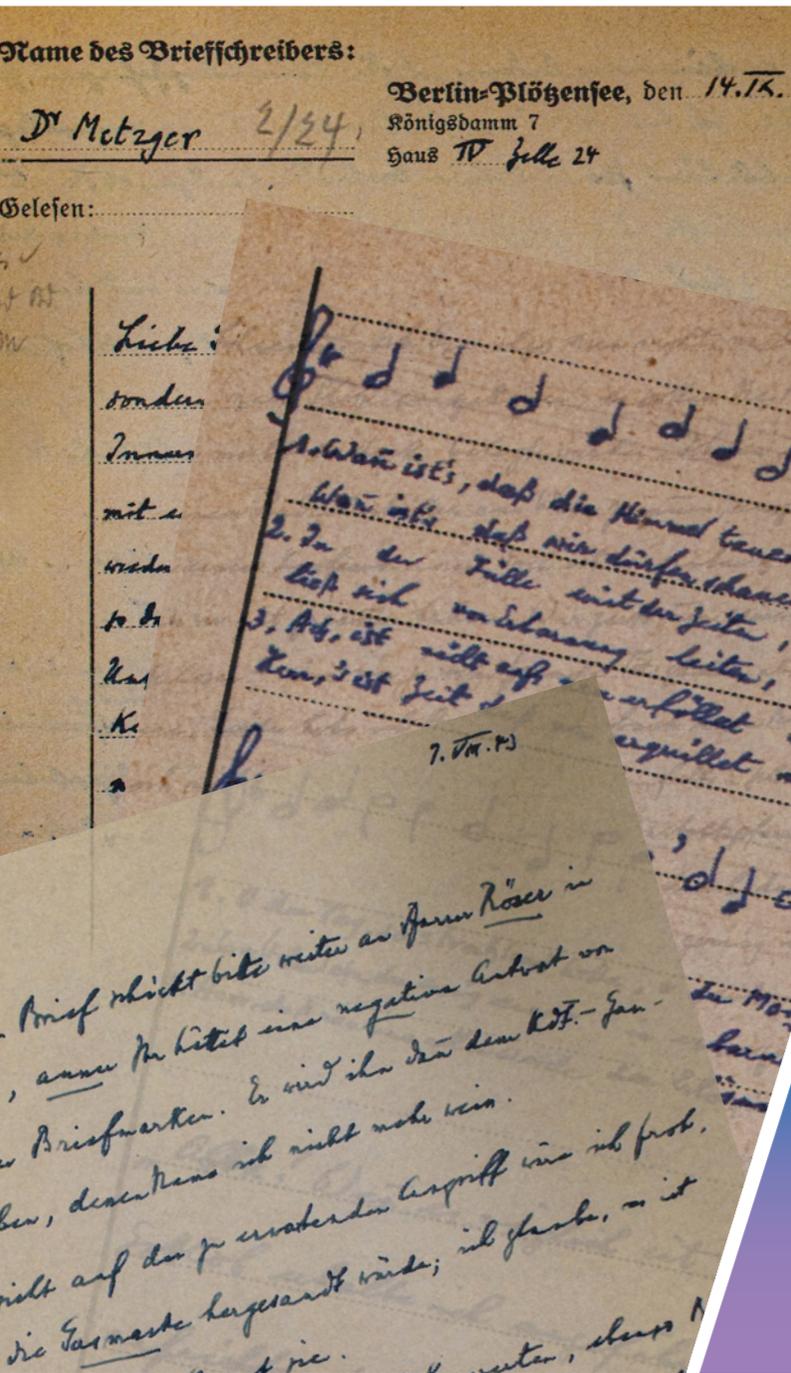
- **The life and legacy of Metzger** – The study of the theological, spiritual, ecumenical, sociological, and political aspects of his thought. Deepening Metzger's intuitions through dialogue with the ideas of other significant thinkers of the twentieth century (Romano Guardini, Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Franz Rosenzweig, Pavel A. Florensky, and others).
- **Metzger and Moravia** – Historical research into the presence and activities of Metzger's community among Moravian Germans and Czechs in the interwar period, with an emphasis on their significance for healing historical memory and for supporting Czech–German and Czech–Austrian reconciliation.
- **Johannes Oesterreicher** – Research into his theological work, correspondence, and intellectual legacy, with a particular focus on the themes of renewing dialogue and mutual respect between Christianity, Judaism, and other religions, as well as on the development of a culture of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among nations.
- **The beginnings of pacifism, ecumenism, and Catholic renewal movements** – The study of the emergence and development of these movements in the context of major historical events and transformations in Europe, in Christianity, and in the Catholic Church of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on contemporary approaches to addressing violence and armed conflicts, as well as the philosophy and culture of dialogue and ecumenism.
- **Dialogue and reconciliation as key categories of thought** – The exploration of these themes in the fields of philosophy (ethics), theology, sociology, and law, in the light of dialogical thinking as a tool for overcoming conflicts and strengthening social cohesion. This research builds on the theories of complexity developed by Pavel A. Florensky, Edgar Morin, Basarab Nicolescu, and other authors, focused on addressing the problem of human coexistence and on a holistic–ethical approach to the reality.
- **Management of the digital archive and library** – The cataloguing of Metzger-related literature, digitization, and the provision of access to scholarly texts and related archival documents.



Institut sociálního zdraví
Olomouc University Social Health Institute

Centrum pro práci s patristickými,
středověkými a renesančními texty
Centre for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts

Institut M. J. Metzgera
pro dialog a smíření
M. J. Metzger Institute for Dialogue and Reconciliation



Archive and Library

The Institute maintains a specialized library and digitized archival materials accessible to the academic community and the professional public.

The Institute administers:

- Metzger's personal correspondence, diaries, unpublished manuscripts, articles, and books.
- Scholarly studies and popular publications concerning Metzger's life, thought, and work, as well as the historical context in which he lived and worked.
- Complete annual runs of selected Austrian and German Catholic newspapers and theological journals published in the 1920s–1940s.
- Books and pamphlets concerned with the economic and social situation in Germany and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.
- Literature on the beginnings of ecumenism and works by early ecumenists, both Catholic and non-Catholic.
- Books and pamphlets (from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) on the origins of Christian pacifism, and works by some of the first Christian pacifists.
- Literature on Hitler, the Third Reich, opposition anti-Hitler movements, and the martyrs of National Socialism.
- Books and personal correspondence of Oesterreicher.
- Rare archival materials related to the presence and activities of Metzger's community in Moravia (letters, personal documents, records of state and church authorities, photographs, etc.).

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Prof. ThDr. Ľubomír J. Žák

A theologian and university lecturer specializing in systematic and fundamental theology, ecumenism, and Orthodox theology. In 2003, he completed his habilitation at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology of Palacký University Olomouc, where he has been teaching dogmatic theology since 2018 and served as Director of the M. J. Metzger Institute for Dialogue and Reconciliation since 2024. In 2013, he was appointed Professor at the Pontifical Lateran University in the Vatican, where he also taught. He serves as a visiting professor at universities in Brazil and Italy.

He is a member of various boards, commissions, and international theological projects and journals in Europe and South America, particularly in the field of Catholic–Evangelical dialogue. His research focuses on the theology of M. Luther and M. J. Metzger, Trinitarian ontology, theological epistemology, and the relationship between theology, philosophy, and mysticism, especially in the work of Pavel A. Florensky.

EDUCATION:

- 1985–1990: Faculty of Theology (CMBF), Comenius University, Bratislava – Philosophy and Theology
- 1992: Accademia Alfonsiana – Pontifical Lateran University, Rome–Vatican City – Licentiate in Moral Theology
- 1998: Accademia Alfonsiana – Pontifical Lateran University, Rome–Vatican City – Doctorate in Moral Theology
- 2003: Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology, Palacký University Olomouc – Habilitation in Theology
- 2013: Pontifical Lateran University, Rome–Vatican City – appointed Professor of Theology

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS:

- 1996–1998: Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome – teaching Christian Eastern Theological Anthropology
- 1998–2022: Faculties of Law and Faculties of Theology, Pontifical Lateran University, Rome–Vatican City – assistant, associate professor, professor
- 2001–2003: Catholic Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague – teaching Introduction to Theology, Ecclesiology, and Ecumenism
- 2003–2012: Faculty of Theology of St. Bonaventure (Seraphicum), Rome – teaching Introduction to Theology and Fundamental Theology
- 2011–present: Permanent visiting professor at the School of Education and Humanities, Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUC-PR), Curitiba, Brazil
- 2018–present: Teaching theology at the Department of Systematic Theology, Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic



We Have Written

The Nazis sent a military chaplain to the guillotine: the documents of the priest and pacifist were acquired by the Faculty of Theology; his library will be established in Olomouc

<https://www.cmtf.upol.cz/nc/zprava/clanek/vojenskeho-kaplana-poslali-nacisti-pod-gilotinu-dokumenty-kneze-a-pacifisty-ziskala-teologicka-faku/>



The Olomouc Faculty of Theology acquired rare printed materials from Germany

<https://www.cmtf.upol.cz/nc/zprava/clanek/olomoucka-teologicka-fakulta-ziskala-vzacne-tiskoviny-z-nemecka/>



The documents of the executed priest and pacifist will be studied at the Faculty of Theology

<https://www.zurnal.upol.cz/nc/zprava/clanek/dokumenty-popraveneho-kneze-a-pacifisty-budou-zkoumat-na-teologicke-fakulte/>



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