

5th Annual International
Summer School and Conference

Beyond Secular Faith

POLITICS AS THEOLOGY

25th June - 1st July, 2017
Granada- Spain



Conversion and Coercion. The Political Theology of John Paul II

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DESCRIPTION

In 1953, during the height of the Catholic Church persecutions by the Polish Communists, young Karol Wojtyła confided to a friend (who as a secret collaborator forwarded these words to the secret police), “The screw is turned as the struggle enters into an even more serious phase. However, it is clear what the result is going to be. Victory can only belong to us”. Twenty five years later he became John Paul II, the 264th Pope.

Karol Wojtyła was not a politician, but a witness. And yet his bearing witness transformed the XXth century and renewed the face of the earth. He bore witness to humanity, to God, and to God who became human. The ancient Greek word for witness was mártur – the root of the modern word ‘martyr’. Bearing witness signified a readiness to accept suffering, a capacity for sacrifice. Such was the true political theology of John Paul II.

Karol Wojtyła wanted to be understood “from within”. Still, to understand him from within means eventually to understand everything he has given witness to, it means also to understand the XXth century and to come back to the sources of European culture. In our course, we want to follow into Wojtyła’s footsteps. Our basic premise is that it is the path we should take in the new millennium.

First, we will set out to fathom how Karol Wojtyła has turned his life into a work of art (cf. Letter to Artists, 2). Living through two totalitarianisms and watching the advent of the third, “thinly disguised” (Centesimus Annus, 46), he found out that the only viable answer is conversion. Second, we will focus on philosophical roots of his thinking. Third, we will juxtapose his perspective against the medieval political theology (Kantorowicz) as well as modern one (Schmitt). Fourth, as we find out that his theology of the body is more and more relevant for the contemporary challenges, we will take into consideration its revolutionary potential. Eventually, we will finish our course with practical consideration. What shall we do?

How should we react to the encroachments on the religious liberty and the right to life? In the final instance John Paul II was not only a person, he was the acting person.

“I happened to be in Rome in August 1980. I was having dinner with the Pope when Italian television broadcast pictures from Gdańsk; the gates of the striking shipyard workers; crowds of people; bouquets stuffed between the railings of the shipyard fence. The camera zoomed in on the gate and there, amidst the flowers, was a portrait of John Paul II... and this Pope was sitting next to me. He seemed withdrawn, and did not speak. We all fell silent too. There was a widespread conviction that it was his fault. On the other hand, there was also a widespread hope that, since his picture was there, a picture of the Pope, people wouldn't start killing each other.” This was the moment of the outbreak of Solidarity, one man sitting in front of the television at Castel Gandolfo, watching as his idea became reality.

CONTENTS

- Seminar 1 Political life and praxis (Shakespeare, Dante, *Love and Responsibility*, *Thinking my Country*, *Stanislas*, *Evangelium vitae*).
- Seminar 2 Political philosophy (Thomas, Scheler, *The Acting Person*)
- Seminar 3 Political theology (Schmitt, Kantorowicz, *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dives in Misericordia*)
- Seminar 4 Political theology of the body (Taubes, *Sources of Renewal*, *Man and Woman he Created Them*, *Familiaris consortio*, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, *Laborem Exercens*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Ecclesia in Europa*)

METHODOLOGY

Seminar discussion; commentary of texts

EVALUATION

Participation in discussion